American Studies

Title of proposed cluster: American Studies

When could the introductory course (Sophomore Inquiry) first be offered? Fall, 1995

If multiple sections of Sophomore Inquiry, how many? 9 (with wage section funding and other resources, please see attached budget)

How many times a year could it be offered? 9

Statement of cluster theme (please do not exceed space below):

American Studies is an established interdisciplinary "field" both in the United States and in several other countries, including England and Japan. This cluster will use Americanist materials ranging from literature, through landscapes, to art, music and court cases, to explore both the tensions and the traditions of American culture and society.

Signatures of all faculty members participating in the cluster (list at least one faculty member for each course proposed):

Thomas Biolsi
Proposal coordinator

Carl Abbott
Faculty participant

Lisa Andrus
Faculty participant

Johanna Brenner
Faculty participant

Df (signature sheet in circulation) ate

2/15/95

Date

Phone

Dept. Chair or Dean

Date
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<td>Richard Brinkman</td>
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<td>Martha Works</td>
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**BUDGET FOR 1995-6**

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<th>Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Biolsi</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3¹ wage sections @ 1830.............$3660</td>
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<td>Danielson</td>
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<td>2 wage sections @ 1450.............$1900 + TAship for dept.</td>
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<td>Liebman</td>
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<td>Wattenberg</td>
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<td>1 wage section @ 1459.............$1450</td>
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**Total sections of Sophomore Inquiry to be offered:** 10

**Total funding requested**

$10576 + 1 graduate assistantship

¹Two sections for replacement while teaching Sophomore Inquiry, and one replacement section for preparation.
NARRATIVE, AMERICAN STUDIES CLUSTER

A. STATEMENT OF CLUSTER THEME  A group of faculty members in
American Studies has been meeting off and on in various fora
since the 1990-1 academic year. Members of this group have
already executed a year-long interdisciplinary, team-taught
course (American Values Conflicts), and members received an
Initiatives in Undergraduate Education grant from the OAA and
brought in a series of speakers during the 1992-3 academic year.
American Studies is clearly one area where faculty members at PSU
from various departments have research and teaching interests
that lend themselves well to an interdisciplinary framework. Our
cluster represents a selection of substantive courses that
explore American society from several dimensions--historically,
aesthetically, culturally, in terms of social forces, and others.
Our methodologies vary not only with our disciplines, but also
with our individual theoretical apparatuses. What we have in
common is a recognition that Americanist materials can be
fruitfully subjected to multiple interpretations (sometimes
conflicting and mutually exclusive, sometimes complementary) in
any classroom, and that student work at applying different
concepts to, and deriving multiple interpretations of, American
materials can contribute directly to the mission of General
Education.

B. GENERAL EDUCATION GOALS  Our Sophomore Inquiry ("Readings" in
American Studies) will be "generic," but will be based on a
common template that will be open enough to allow each instructor
to teach her particular interests and strengths.

The General Education Committee should be advised that our
upper division cluster courses are provisional at this point. It
is impossible to know precisely what courses will be offered in
1996-7, given present uncertainties about departmental curriculum
revisions and the University-wide conversion to a four credit
system. Furthermore, we anticipate that our plans for upper
division courses may evolve on the basis of the General Education
Committee's planned faculty development process for General
Education.

1. Inquiry and Critical Thinking. All the courses deal
with "contestable" materials subject to widely varying
interpretations: novels, historical documents, paintings,
arrestential structures, court cases, and so on. Not only will
students be confronted in these courses with the problem of
finding an appropriate (sometimes, even the appropriate)
interpretation, they will also be forced to confront the politics
of competing interpretations--certainly a real part of critical
thinking in the real world. The hope is to move students beyond
a naive assumption that "all" interpretations are equally
fictions to a mature critical insight into how to weigh
alternative interpretations in particular social contexts.

2. Communication. All the courses will place heavy
emphasis upon writing and oral presentation in the classroom. We
anticipate that many of the courses will use collaborative learning techniques to organize small-group preparation of oral and written presentations to the class at large. We also plan that, where appropriate, courses will use numerical and graphic approaches to the presentation of data.

3. Human Experience. All the courses ultimately deal with two inherently humanistic matters, culture and standpoint. The courses all make the point that experience is organized through cultural categories, which are themselves the product of human agency. The courses also all make the point that meaning and interpretation are strongly shaped by standpoint; that is, one's position in a larger social whole—as a gendered, raced, and classed person, for example—have a great deal to do with how the larger social whole appears and is experienced.

4. Ethics and Social Responsibility. Ultimately, to make differences in standpoint obvious in a course is to confront on some level the matter of how to humanely recognize or otherwise deal with difference. Some difference—for example, difference in access to political or economic power—may the product of colonial, racist, or sexist social structures, and any principled position must entertain possibilities for working against oppressive arrangements. Other kinds of difference—for example, what is commonly called "cultural" difference within American society—represents a form of autonomy that a principled stance on American society would probably want to celebrate and protect. These are never easy questions, but once they are introduced, it will be necessary to take them seriously even if we cannot answer them in any final or programmatic way.

C. CLUSTER COHERENCE The groundwork for the coherence of the American Studies Cluster comes out of collegial work together. As mentioned above, we have been meeting in various fora to discuss both our research and our teaching for several years. While this collegial chemistry does not in itself make for curricular coherence across the courses we will teach, we believe that it is an essential ingredient. We plan to continue to address each other as colleagues and to continue to meet in a regular faculty seminar (hopefully with outside speakers).

Beyond this, we anticipate that more specific work toward cluster coherence will grow out of the faculty development events planned by the General Education Committee over the next year. Even simple exercises such as group discussion of an individual's syllabus and classroom plans will go a long way toward finding point of common approach, points of dovetailing, and points of (positive) tension.

D. BRIEF DESCRIPTION FOR STUDENTS American Studies encompasses the study of American society in all its manifestations: its history, culture, political conflicts, literature, art and expression. This cluster provides students with a opportunity to select courses that examine particular "slices" of American society and culture, taught by faculty members who actively
conduct research on those slices. In addition, students in this cluster will examine broad concepts and theories for thinking about and analyzing American society and culture, concepts and theories that are not unique to any one academic discipline, but that are "transdisciplinary."

E. OUTLINE OF SOPHOMORE INQUIRY On the following pages are attached copies of our "generic" template for Sophomore Inquiry, and descriptions of individual sections.
"Readings" in American Studies will be taught by in multiple sections by six different instructors in 1995-6. Each instructor will use this generic description as a template, but will design her sections in conformity with her particular research and teaching interests and strengths. What all the sections will have in common is a pedagogical and interdisciplinary method. Each section will "read" five American "texts." "Text" is here broadly construed to refer to any object of study which may be critically interpreted, and "reading" here means a process of interpretation. Thus a "text" such as a landscape\(^1\) (say, a cross section of Multnomah County which may be traversed by a class on foot or by bus or MAX) may be subjected to various "readings":

-- a geographical reading (how is this space organized?)

-- an ecological/environmental reading (how does this landscape constitute an ecosystem, and how is it linked to larger ecosystems?)

-- an archeological reading (what is literally under this landscape?)

-- an historical reading (what is the sequence of historical events and processes--local, regional, national, and global--that resulted in this landscape?)

-- a sociological reading (what racial or class communities does the route transect, and how did these communities come to be here?)

-- an economic reading (how have market and other economic forces organized the use of space here?)

A more familiar "text" might be a novel which could also be subjected to multiple readings:

-- a methodological reading (does this text have a clear and determinate meaning, or is its meaning unstable and open to infinite interpretation, or is its meaning "constructed" but at the same time constrained by "interpretive communities"?)

-- an aesthetic reading

-- a political or sociological reading (what political interests--for example, class, racial, or gender interests--are expressed or suppressed?)

-- a rhetorical reading

-- a linguistic or cultural reading (are minority language communities--for example, Black Vernacular English--or cultures reflected or represented in the text?)

-- an authorial reading (how does the text reflect the body of an author's work?)

-- a psychological reading

-- an historical reading (how is the text a product of an

\(^1\) See, for example, The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes, D. W. Meinig, ed., 1979, New York: Oxford University Press.
"age," or how is its interpretation an historical product?)

The following examples will give some sense of American "texts" with interesting possibilities for interpretation:

> a landscape

> a piece of fiction (novel, play, short story, myth)

> a performance or ritual (play, concert, religious observance, fair, public ceremony)

> an institution (a court, corporation, government office, museum, church, school, organization, shopping mall)

> a court case (either published in a reporter in our library or copied/available from the Multnomah County Federal District Court; for example, a civil rights case)

> an historical document (either published or copied/available locally; for example, a Native American treaty)

> an object, or objects, of visual art (paintings, sculpture, photographs, structures, museum exhibit, map collections)

> a film or collection of video clips

> a piece of music or poetry

> an historical event or site

The intention in these ideas of "texts" to be "read" is to open up possibilities for instructors to bring knowledge of their most interesting disciplinary materials to bear in course development. Being experimental and looking for novelty should be encouraged in this regard. "Readings" should be disciplined and reasoned, but the "texts" read should be objects students (and scholars) would find unusual objects of critical interpretation. Objects should be chosen with the idea of a multiplicity of disciplinary and transdisciplinary readings in mind. It is hoped that "texts" will be drawn from the Portland metropolitan region, or the Northwest whenever possible, or will be directly relevant to our urban region even when not directly originating here. It is also hoped that instructors will do their best to find "texts" that afford students an opportunity to do ethnographic observation, make fieldtrips, conduct research with primary materials in libraries or other repositories, or have some other kind of "hands-on" experience. This is important in making the curriculum compelling both for students and instructors, and meeting the mission of UnSt Sophomore Inquiry courses.
This course is organized around five "texts." For our purposes, "text" refers not to a book students will buy in the PSU Bookstore, but rather to an object of study that we will "read" or interpret. The five "texts" we will read are: museum exhibits, a landscape, a minority community, an infectious disease, and a court case. Just as a book's meaning is deeper than its cover, so the "texts" that we will "read" have significant things to tell us if we dig deeply into them. And just as a book requires work on the part of the reader to decipher and make sense of the words, so the "texts" we will read will require critical insight and intellectual energy in order to see what they have to tell us.

Our first project will start with fieldtrips to two museums. The focus will be how Native American people and societies are "represented" (portrayed) in museum exhibits designed by professional art historians on the one hand, and in museum exhibits designed under the control of Native American communities on the other hand. Questions we will ask in reading these texts are:

1) How are Native American societies portrayed as "extinct" or living cultures in these exhibits?
2) Who owns and controls the use of Native American artifacts and human remains, and how does this influence the use to which these objects are put?

Our second project begins with a walking-and-bus tour across the City of Portland. Our route will transect neighborhoods frequented by very wealthy people, and by very poor people. These will be some of the themes we will use to organize our "reading" of the landscape:

1) How can wealth and poverty be mapped (we will work with census data and with mapping and other geographic and demographic display methods)?
2) How do economic forces shape neighborhoods and boundaries between neighborhoods?
3) What are the prevailing explanations for class and racial inequality?
4) What causes homelessness?
5) What are the dynamic changes in poverty in Metropolitan Portland (such as racial composition and "the feminization of poverty")?

Text 3: The Southeast Asian Community in Portland: Global Forces and the "New" Immigrants. In our third project we will examine one of the largest minority communities in the city. We will make a fieldtrip, and will also host guest speakers from the community. Some of the matters we will consider are:
1) Why did Southeast Asian immigrant come to the United States, and how did they get here?
2) How does global inequality shape migration patterns?
3) How do the "new" immigrants compare with the "old" immigrants?
4) In what ways is the Southeast Asian community in fact a "community" in the anthropological sense?
5) How do the experiences of men and women differ for immigrants.

Text 4: AIDS: Faces of an Epidemic in the Metropolitan Region. Our third project will focus on AIDS in Portland and vicinity. We will make a field trip and consult guest speakers. Some of the questions we will ask are:
1) How has AIDS impacted different groups in Portland; what is the epidemiology and demography of AIDS in Portland?
2) How is AIDS related to poverty?
3) How is AIDS related to homophobia?
4) What are the politics of public health policy surrounding AIDS?

Text 5: The Metzger Case: Racial Hatred in Portland. In our last project we will watch video tape of and read the court opinion for a case in which a white supremacist was sued in Portland by the mother of a man killed by a Portland skinhead gang influenced by the white supremacist's ideas. In this, our most difficult project, we will ask these questions:
1) What are the sources of white supremacist movements and beliefs?
2) What are hate speech and hate crimes, and what does the law allow us to do about them?
3) What is racism? Is it limited to white supremacist beliefs, or is it more deeply built into the American culture and social structure?
Sophomore Inquiry: American Literature and Culture
Susan Danielson

American Literature and Culture is organized around four moments in American social and cultural history and the representation of those moments in cultural texts, including museums, films, fiction, and art. These "moments" include the "contact" experience, the early national period, Reconstruction, and the Chicano Movement of the 1960s.

Goals:

a. Introduce students to the methods and scope of American Studies
b. Introduce students to electronic and network resources to deal with historical and cultural information
c. Develop students capacity to respond both orally and in writing to class material

In this course we will work to contextualize these texts, both within the academic discipline within which they have traditionally been housed, and within the socio-historical circumstances to which they refer. Framing our discussions will be a series of essays on the project and methodology of American Studies. In each segment students will be expected to respond in writing both formally and informally to the material, developing for themselves a way to bring meaning to the experiences that they encounter.

1. What is American Studies? A general introduction to the field of American Studies? During the course of the quarter we will read essays by Kucklick, Radway, Carson and Kowenhoven on the ways in which the idea and methods of American Studies allows for the reading of material culture. We will also be introduced to electronic literacies that aid in our studies including Word Crucher, Internet, and American Studies hypertext Tool

Our first project will involve field trips to two museums. The focus will be on how Native American people and societies are "represented" in museum exhibits designed by professional art historians on the one hand, and in museum exhibits designed under the control of Native American communities on the other hand. Questions we will ask include: In what ways are these exhibits similar: in what ways are they different? How do you account for these similarities and differences? In what ways are Native American societies portrayed as "extinct" or living cultures in these exhibits? What is the story told by this exhibition? Students will be asked to read and comment on short stories and poems by Native American peoples.

3: The Coquette and "Declaration of Independence"
Our second project will juxtapose a primary document of United States with one of the earliest novels of the Early National
period. The focus will be on the ways in which the rhetoric of the "Declaration of Independence" and the call for democracy are translated into and critiqued in a fictionalized account of a "true" story. Questions we will ask include: Why did Hannah Foster entitle her work *The Coquette*? What is the central crisis in the novel? How is the position of white women in the late 18th century represented?

4: "Daughters of the Dust": Representations of Slavery and Freedom
Our third project will involve viewing the film "Daughters of the Dust", a recent reinterpretation of the free slave community on the islands off the coast of South Carolina. The focus will be on the ways in which the technology of film facilitates or inhibits our awareness of unfamiliar experiences. Questions we will ask include: From whose point of view are we watching the unfolding of events? Who is the center of the community that we come to know and what are its sources of strength and its weaknesses? For context we will read *The Narrative of Frederick Douglass* and stories by Charles Chesnutt.

5. The Chicano Movement of the 1960s: The Farmworker’s Plight
Our fourth project will involve a study of a contemporary social movement, the farmworkers. Speakers from the local farmworker’s community will be invited to speak and we will read Tomas Rivera’s *...and the earth did not devour him*. Our focus will be on the intersection of literary texts and social and historical factors.
Sophomore Inquiry
American National Character (American Studies)
David Johnson/History
Winter or Spring, 1996

This section of Sophomore Inquiry aims at introducing students to the American Studies Cluster within General Education. It takes as its subject the question of American “national character,” as the question has been investigated, conjured, dismissed and affirmed since the creation of the United States in the eighteenth century. One premise of the course is that there is no “American Character” to be found in texts and accurately described in a term paper (or book). Rather, the course’s premise is that the idea of national character is both a persistent — and an ill-defined and contentious — feature of American life. This course does not intend to resolve these questions; rather it intends to illuminate them.

I hope to offer this course in the winter or spring terms of 1996. What I offer here is tentative. The actual makeup of the course will necessarily follow from conversations with colleagues, what turns out to be possible in the way of incorporating community projects into the course (weeks 7-10), a refining of the assigned readings, and so forth.

The readings I have proposed, I realize, are perhaps too demanding for sophomores, although this will depend in part on the overall organization of the course. In this regard, I hope to include a significant component of community study during Weeks 7-10. During these weeks students, working in groups, will be responsible for reading — and teaching — only one of the assigned texts.

Weeks 1-6 will focus on a series of “classic” texts that in different, often conflicting ways, address the question of the “character” of America and Americans. In the last four weeks of the course — with the models (and the questions) of Tocqueville, Whitman, DuBois, Gilman, et al., in mind — I want students to engage contemporary America, in part through reading (Kozol, Ehrenreich, Postman) but, more importantly, through activities in the community in which they “test” the analyses they have read and become modern-day “Tocquevilles” (Whitman-DuBois-Gilmans, et al.) through their own observation and study of the American scene.

The readings for the course encompass a variety of genres: travelers accounts (Tocqueville), autobiography (Franklin), literature (Whitman), the critical essay (DuBois), social theory (Gilman, Bellah, Geertz), and so forth.

I see the course sessions moving, as the term progresses, away from lecture and discussion to students working in groups. Weeks I–III deal with the very subject of the course, and thus require a plausible argument on my part for the purpose of studying “national character” as well as a coherent tour through contemporary debates over the issue. Writing Assignment for Weeks I–III: critical review of Bellah, which will include (among other things) consideration of the reviews and other commentary that followed the book’s publication.

Weeks IV–VI focus on a selection of writings from various figures, times, perspectives, that do not present a singular conception of American character, but, rather, display the ways in which
similar conceptions, presumptions, and, no less, dilemmas continue to resonate. Assignment for Weeks IV-VI: a comparative essay on one of the assigned readings and Bellah. (For example, on Tocqueville and Bellah’s America, or the implications of DuBois’s challenge to the idea of American character for Bellah’s analysis, and so forth).

Weeks VII–IX incorporate (1) readings about contemporary America and (2) community study in light of (3) the previous weeks’ readings, discussions, and writing. Assignment for Weeks VII-X: Group presentation related to a week assignment/topic.

I. Introduction
II. Is there such a thing?
   Octavio Paz, Labyrinth of Solitude, Ch. 1
   Clifford Geertz, Interpretation of Cultures, Ch. 14, 15.
III. A modern assessment
   Robert Bellah, Habits of the Heart
IV. The classic study
   Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, I: Introduction, Ch. 3-4, 8, 14-16; II: books 2 and 3.
V. “Representative” voices; standard suspects
   Benjamin Franklin, Autobiography (selection)
   Walt Whitman, (selections from the Portable Walt Whitman)
   Frederick Jackson Turner, “Significance of the Frontier in American History”
VI. Dilemmas of identity
   W.E.B. DuBois, Souls of Black Folk
   Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Women and Economics
VII. The way we live now: Class
   Barbara Ehrenreich, Fear of Falling
VIII. The way we live now: The Children
   Jonathan Kozol, Savage Inequalities
IX. The way we live now: Media
   Neil Postman, Amusing Ourselves to Death
X. Conclusion
Sophomore Inquiry: "Readings" In American Studies
Changing Perspectives of the American West: 1890-1995

Focussing primarily on "texts" treating the frontier drawn from two
periods (circa 1900 and circa 1995), this course will explore the
"myths" and "realities" that have governed and still govern our
understanding of the American West. To this end, the class will be
structured around the careful examination of five sets of "texts."

I. Historical Texts: Frederick Jackson Turner's "The Significance
of the Frontier in American History" (1893) and Patricia Nelson
These contrasting texts will provide the impetus for probing
the following questions:

1. Who settled the West? (Here we will need to
investigate the diverse ethnic populations that have
inhabited the "West." Discussions here will need to
address the demographics of the West--for which
population density maps may be important supplementary
texts.)

2. Has the West been "conquered"? (The study of the
contrast between the "presumption" of conquest and the
impact of recent settlement on the natural resources
would be in order here. Guest presenters from
Environmental Studies might add an important scientific
dimension to the class during these discussions.)

3. What is the relationship between the "old" and the
"new West," the rural and the urban Wests? (Guest
presenters from Urban Studies would be valuable here--in
place of which an essay by Carl Abbott would be an
important supplementary text.)

II. Literary Texts: Owen Wister's The Virginian (1902) and Molly
Gloss's The Jump-Off Creek (1989)

and/or

III. Dramatic Texts: William Vaughn Moody's The Great Divide
(1906) and Marsha Norman's The Holdup (1980-83)

and/or

IV. Movie Texts: "Stagecoach" (1939) or "Fort Apache" (1948) or
"Shane" (1953) and "Little Big Man" (1970) or "Dancing with Wolves"
or "The Unforgiven" or "The Ballad of Little Jo"

and/or
V. Fine Arts Texts: Selected paintings of Bierstadt, Remington, or Charlie Russell and contemporary American painters.

In the above four sections—of which only three will be included in any single quarter—the major focus would be the exploration of how the frontier myth can inform and/or be embodied in the artistic creation of selected fictional, dramatic, cinematic and/or painted "texts." Questions to be pursued here could be:

1. How is the West viewed in these texts?
2. How do the "narrative structures" of these texts relate to those underlying the history texts we have examined?
3. What "voice" or "gaze" dominates these texts?
4. What rhetorical devices are at work here? How and to what extent are the viewers' or readers' emotions manipulated and/or responses controlled by the art work?
5. How are gender and race presented or constructed in these texts?

VI. Museum and/or Public Exhibition Texts: The Oregon Historical Society Exhibition and the Warm Springs Museum.

Given the various historical analyses, narrative structures, and recurring cultural constructs investigated in the previously studied texts, students will probe the ways in which these public exhibitions present the frontier experience.

1. What are the highlighted artifacts?
2. How are the exhibited artifacts contextualized?
3. How is the Western past organized in this exhibition?
4. What is the story told by this exhibition?
5. Who are the protagonists of this story?
6. Are there any villains?
F. INTERDISCIPLINARY BREADTH OF CLUSTER The courses in this cluster self-consciously cross-cut several disciplinary and paradigmatic bases of knowledge. Both the individual cluster courses and the sections of Sophomore Inquiry include epistemological diversity on these bases among others: aesthetic ("textual") and social ("contextual") readings of Americanist expression; qualitative (ethnographic description) and quantitative (descriptive statistical) analyses of Portland neighborhoods; "consensus-theory" and "conflict-theory" approaches to American culture (Arthur Schlesinger vs. Ronald Takaki, as an example), and "canon" vs. "multicultural" approaches to American culture.
ANTICIPATED COURSE SCHEDULE

Please indicate your best estimate of the cluster schedule for each of the next three academic years. Next to each course, indicate who will be teaching the course, and whether the departmental and instructor commitment to offer the course in that term is firm (F) or tentative (T). Include the anticipated schedule for offering Sophomore Inquiry.

1995-6 Academic Year
Fall: Winter: Spring:

(schedule under consideration at this time)

1996-7 Academic Year
Fall: Winter: Spring:

1997-8 Academic Year
Fall: Winter: Spring:
UPPER DIVISION CLUSTER COURSES

Indian-White Relations (Tom Biolsi, Anthropology, Rose Hill, Ethnic Student Advisor)

Power and Knowledge (Johanna Brenner, Women's Studies)

American Technology and Engineering (Craig Wollner, Urban Studies and Planning)

American Medicine in the Twentieth Century (Craig Wollner, Urban Studies and Planning)

Foundations of American Medicine (Craig Wollner, Urban Studies and Planning)

The Immigrant Experience in American Literature and Film (Sue Danielson, English)

American Art and Architecture (Lisa Andrus, Art)

Women and Film (Jan Haaken, Psychology)

Cities in American Society (Carl Abbott, Urban Studies and Planning)

American Landscapes: The Southwest (Martha Works, Geography)

Cultural Economics and American International Competitiveness (Richard Brinkman, Economics)

Race, Ethnicity and Gender in the U. S. Economy (Mary King, Economics)

American Values Conflicts (Mike Philips, Philosophy)

Multi-Cultural American Drama (Rich Wattenberg, Theater Arts)

Envisioning the West: The West in the Arts (Rich Wattenberg, Theater Arts)