

# American Studies Guidelines for Senior Presentation and Exercise

2017-2018

## Basic description

### **A: SENIOR PRESENTATION:**

Your senior presentation (and your senior exercise) in the American Studies Department should reflect the six-course curricular specialization you have worked with as a major. Your senior presentation should illustrate, show by example, the subject and question embedded in your course area of specialization. For example, a student who studied American history, politics, foreign policy and did an independent study of Japanese American Internment created a photographic essay on an unknown Internment camp, while another who studied in Cuba presented a dramatic reading of voices of dissent. A third, who worked in African-American history, culture, and the civil rights movement traveled in Alabama and photographed the sites of the Civil Rights struggle, and presented his work in a gallery talk. As you can see, we encourage you to work broadly in interdisciplinary inquiry and to ground your work in example. You will make this presentation to the Senior Seminar in American Studies during the second semester 2017. You will work closely with your assigned adviser and the American Studies Director, Ric Sheffield in this project.

Early in September, you should provide us with a prospectus status. Tell us your six courses of your focus in the major, what binds them together, and how your proposed senior presentation will demonstrate the unity of your course choices. Please provide this required information via the online link: <https://goo.gl/forms/hB4Z9cci2vekb6FI2>.

## Frequently Asked Questions

**What kind of presentation should I make?** You can elect to make a PowerPoint presentation, do a dramatic reading, do a dramatization enlisting other students, make a film with comments, or do an art/photographic presentation with a gallery talk. In short, the possibilities are wide open for creative expression. We strongly recommend, however that you use a medium that you are familiar with—and check with your faculty advisor before you get started. Be warned that interpretive museum exhibits are very time-consuming, a challenge to do well, and not recommended.

**How long should the presentation be?** Your presentation should not exceed **30 minutes**. Allow an additional 20 minutes for questions and discussion. Finally the senior seminar class audience will ask you questions.

**What kind of sources should I use?** We encourage you to examine all types of primary sources including newspapers, magazines, court records, government records, oral interviews, literary texts, photographs, art, music, or personal observation. The nature of your subject will dictate the thrust and nature of your presentation. Your grade on the Senior Presentation will comprise the largest component of the grade you receive for the Senior Seminar.

## **B: SENIOR EXERCISE:**

The senior exercise in American Studies has two components, a ten-page paper and a public oral defense of your senior presentation.

1. The paper. A day prior to your presentation, we will ask you to submit to your primary advisor, Peter Rutkoff, and secondary advisor, a **10-page paper that outlines:**

- a. How your senior presentation reflects and represents the culmination of your specialized focus in American Studies.
- b. How your subject also sheds light on the study of American society and culture.
- c. A discussion of how the subject evolved for you in the course of preparation.
- c. A bibliography of your sources.

Projects should utilize primary sources and demonstrate creativity. But most importantly we want you to share your course work, to synthesize it, with us and your peers. Show us how your presentation illustrates that synthesis and how you connect the specificity of your concentration with the larger issues of American studies. A question will always be, "How does this project fit into the larger study of America?"

2. Oral Defense. Following your senior presentation you will respond to questions from your faculty advisors and your senior seminar colleagues. This discussion will be free-ranging and open-ended. Questions may center on the use of evidence, the scope and content of your presentation, the alternatives available to you, and the ways in which your presentation sheds light on the major issues in American Studies.

Your Senior Exercise, then, consists of 1: your ten page written project description and 2: an oral discussion of your senior presentation with your advisors and the members of the Senior Seminar. The Senior Exercise will be evaluated by the director of American Studies in cooperation with your Project Advisor.

**How is the Senior Exercise evaluated?** We look at a number of factors in the evaluation process, including the following:

- Does the project successfully use interdisciplinary methods to illustrate an issue of topical importance to your study of American culture?
- How the questions raised and issues posed build upon and/or challenge the central ideas/concerns of American Studies as a field?
- How well does it reflect your specialization focus within American Studies?

**How does a project get distinction?** A passing project is one with a well-written, good synthesis of your major, a solid leading question, competent research, dedicated effort, a deep understanding of the topic and its context, and a compelling presentation. To pass the senior exercise represents a major accomplishment in its own right. To receive distinction, the Senior Exercise must exceed expectations; it must be original, intellectually sound, well researched, and impressively argued. In short, we will award distinction if we think the project shows sophistication at a very advanced level.

### **Examples of previous senior projects and senior exercises**

- An exploration of the impacts of The No Child Left Behind Act on different elementary schools near Washington, DC
- A photographic exhibit and essay of Birmingham and Montgomery, Alabama which examined the persistence of segregation
- An legal study of domestic violence legislation and its implication for women of color, focusing on the local community alternatives to the Violence Against Women Act
- A film which compared the means in which enemies faced by the U.S. after World War II were dehumanized
- A film of a choreographed interpretive dance and images depicting time passage in American history
- A Study of an early Irish-American community in Cleveland
- A examination of the evolution of the anti-hero in graphic novels
- An analysis of the social geography of the environmentally planned community of Columbia, Maryland
- An analysis of the evolution of the anti-hero in American graphic novels
- An environmental history of Lake George in the Adirondack Mountains
- A study of the changing meaning and symbolism of Tiger Stadium to the Detroit community