Hello and congratulations on being admitted to Honors! This seminar will serve as a regular space for CAS senior honors students to check in about their research and writing progress, share their work, and discuss and reflect upon the methodological and intellectual challenges of doing research in Comparative American studies. As each of you will be working with your honors advisors over the term, this seminar is not intended to be a substitute for the close individual mentoring you will receive through that relationship. Instead, think of the honors seminar as a place to get additional support, share woes with peers, and test out ideas. Because doing honors is a long and serious research enterprise, but also a potentially lonely and laborious one, the seminar aims above all to break some of the isolation of working on a year-long project by creating some structure and a sense of community.

I will periodically stay in touch with your advisors to ensure we are all on the same page with regard to your progress and the objectives of the seminar, but you should also feel free to let them know what we are doing and to share any writing you produce. For the later assignments, you will be required to share your work with them.

Please note in the schedule that our meetings will require advance preparation, usually some reading and writing to be uploaded to Blackboard. In all cases, writings must be uploaded by 5:00 PM the day before we meet.

**Required Reading**

There is one required reading for the course, the Turabian research manual, 8th edition. You can find it at Oberlin Bookstore. It is also available as a reference copy in the library. Other readings will be available on Blackboard or distributed in class.

Schedule

Sept. 4 Introductions

Before class, be sure to review your honors proposals and reflect upon work you have done over the summer. We will share project introductions and updates in class.

Sept. 11 The Stakes of American Studies/Making a Work Schedule
Reading: Jacobson, “U.S. Empire at the Street Level and in the Archives” (handout); Turabian, Ch. 1

Upload to Blackboard a proposed weekly work schedule for the rest of the semester. Think over and break up the remaining components of your research. Be realistic about what you will be able to accomplish during the semester and what you may have to put off until Winter term. This schedule need only reflect primary and secondary research, as I’ve set other deadlines on writing. These, as with all other assignments, must be uploaded by 5:00 pm the day before class.

Sept. 18 On Sources: The Importance of Secondary Literature
Reading: Turabian, Ch. 2-3

As a step toward assembling a literature review, upload to Blackboard an annotated bibliography containing the four or five most important secondary works informing your project so far. The annotations should be about two or three sentences in length. This list will change and grow as you continue your research, but it should represent what is, up to now, the scholarly conversation that you are entering.

Sept. 25 On Sources: Gathering and Using Primary Sources
Reading: Turabian, Ch. 4

Upload to Blackboard or share a sample primary source from your research. It should be short enough for the rest of us to be able to read closely the day before our meeting, so if you have to edit down or suggest which parts to pay attention to, do include those notes. In class we will talk about the source you shared and how you will eventually use it, and then have a broader discussion about strategies for finding and evaluating primary sources as you continue your research.

Oct. 2 What is your method?

What exactly is American Studies research? How does one do it? Upload to Blackboard a short statement of no more than a paragraph describing your research methodology and why you believe it is a sound one. What are your source materials and how are you analyzing them? What disciplinary or interdisciplinary fields most inform your project? If you’re having any concerns, questions, or doubts about this, share those as well.
Oct. 9 What is a Thesis?
Reading: Turabian, Chapter 5; skim American Quarterly articles, looking for their thesis statements

We will discuss two articles I’ve selected from recent American Quarterly issues, focusing on their thesis statements. At this stage, it is a good time to formulate a working thesis based on what you have found in your research. What do you think you’ll be able to argue? Make sure the statement is a supportable argument or opinion, something you can substantiate with evidence, but that it also reflects your critical point of view. Also, you don’t need to incorporate this into your thesis, but do think about how it represents a contribution to American studies, as we’ll discuss this in class. Upload a short paragraph to Blackboard.

Oct. 16 NO CLASS—*** KEEP WORKING! GOOD LUCK! **

Oct. 23 *****FALL BREAK*****

Oct. 30 Presentations

Now is a good time to step back and reflect upon the work you have accomplished and rethink your remaining tasks for next half of the semester. You will give a work in progress presentation, no more than 15-20 minutes, introducing your topic and its significance, presenting your thesis, and sharing a few snippets from your primary research. You should also feel free to offer your reflections on the process — what have you found most rewarding so far and what have been the greatest challenges? How do you plan to surmount those remaining challenges? After the presentations, we’ll open things up for q&a and discussion.

Nov. 6 NO CLASS—KEEP GOING!! GOOD JOB!!

Nov. 13 Outlining and starting the writing process
Reading: Turabian, Chapters 6-7

Upload a preliminary outline of your research paper. Although at this point I expect you are still not done with research, it is a good time to start envisioning the paper. Your outline should be as thorough as possible, indicating what and how many sections will comprise your paper and what these sections will consist of. Additionally, include a paragraph updating us on your research process and which section you feel you are closest to being able to write. How do you feel about transitioning to writing?
Nov. 20 Writing

Upload a 5-6 page piece of writing that showcases some of your primary research. This will eventually be part of your honors thesis and you will continue to work on this for the rest of the term. Don’t worry if it is drafty and preliminary. The goal here is to just start writing.

Nov. 27 ***THANKSGIVING***

Dec. 4 First substantial piece of writing

Building on the writing you shared for the Nov. 20 session, upload a 10-12 page piece of writing. It should include new content, demonstrate more refined analysis, integrate primary and secondary sources, and reflect other revisions from the earlier piece. We will discuss these in class, offering feedback and further suggestions for revision. You should share this with your advisors too.

Dec. 11 Revising and planning for Winter term

Upload your writing section with revisions. This piece should be substantially more polished than the earlier drafts and should also be shared with your advisors. In addition, upload your proposed work schedule for Winter term.