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BA American and Canadian Modules Final Year

Listed below are the modules offered in American and Canadian Studies as part of its Final Year degree programme.

Dissertation

The dissertation differs from other modules and poses a greater challenge—and greater opportunity for personal development and originality. University taught courses provide a syllabus and bibliography, and the assessment generally explores a major theme of the course, sometimes by further recommended reading, or examines comprehensive understanding. The dissertation has quite different objectives. The final-year project is the pinnacle of undergraduate education and illustrates skills acquired through years of university study in research conceived and executed independently.

Value: 40 credits

Audio-Visual Dissertation (alternative to Dissertation)

Students taking the Audio-Visual Dissertation create a short documentary film on an American and Canadian Studies topic using our state-of-the-art Audio-Visual equipment and editing suite and with dedicated technical support. This project is submitted alongside a written defence.

Value: 40 credits

Optional modules

Please note: due to study leave etc not every module is available every year. Please check with the Department to see what is running in a given year.

Beat Writing and its Aftermath

This module explores the relationship of Beat writing and the Beat writers to their cultural and social contexts. The Beat writers principally regarded as Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs and Gregory Corso but also embracing writers associated with the Beat, such as Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and other writers who were part of the Beats but generally neglected (like Joyce Johnson and Diane DiPrima). The module then considers a selection of writers who followed on from the Beats and were inspired by their experimentation, such as Charles Bukowski, Richard Brautigan and Thomas Pynchon.

A recent series of revisionist studies of 1950s' and 1960s' writings have shifted the emphasis away from analysing such writing in terms of these writers' biographies and instead explored how the Beats and post-Beats interact with and critique not only their society and its cultures but also such concepts as authenticity and spontaneity, rather than seeing these last as unproblematically aspired to. Such re-estimates will be related to the turn against essentialist and exceptionalist readings of the Beats, and the implications of these direction changes will be assessed.
Value: 20 credits

The American renaissance: above, beneath and around

This course is designed to explore the outburst of writing activity that occurred in America in the decades leading up to the American Civil War (1861-65), during the war itself, and just afterwards. In particular, it will focus on the twenty-year period 1840 to 1860. This period is often designated the American Renaissance: that moment in American literary history when. American writing 'came of age' and found its distinctive 'American' voice. The classic critical study referred to when defining this period is F. O. Mathiessen's The American Renaissance, a text which will provide a constant reference-point during the teaching of this module, both for its strengths and its weaknesses.
Value: 20 credits

Anti-Americanism: an examination

Since 11 September 2001, substantial discussion as to the motivations for the attacks has ensued. Some of the discussion has focused on the resentment and hatred toward the United States by many nations and their citizens around the world. Employing interdisciplinary methods, this class will examine anti-Americanism. Topics will include the historical roots of anti-Americanism, the Internet and anti-Americanism, feelings toward the United States in literature and film, globalisation and anti-Americanism, ideology and anti-Americanism, anti-anti-Americanism, anti-Americanism and US foreign policy, and the impact of the attacks of 11 September on attitudes toward the United States. The course will assist students in understanding the concept of anti-Americanism and the place of the United States in the world, in developing the ability to critically analyze the motivating factors for anti-Americanism in its various forms in the past and present, in discussing in an academic environment ideas surrounding the United States, and in improving writing, research and Internet skills.
Value: 20 credits

Cold War Film

This module aims to examine American films of the Cold War era c. 1945-65. The module will examine the political and economic context of the production of film, looking at issues such as political control via McCarthyism and HUAC. Students will then examine a series of films, in order to assess the extent to which film reflected or engaged with social, cultural and political debates of the time. The aim of the course is to enable the student to develop skills in both film theory and film history.
Value: 20 credits

Contemporary American fiction

This course offers a survey of recent American fiction, representing a diverse range of literary voices and concerns. This module is designed to engage with some of the key themes and developments that have emerged in American writing within the last twenty years. The contemporary focus of the course allows students to explore topics such as the transnational/ postnational narrative, literary responses to 9/11, issues of representation, and autobiographical voices, as well as addressing stylistic and formal innovation. The student will be able to recognise and engage with the dominant ideas in the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries and discuss the relationship between literature and society during the period.
Value: 20 credits

Death and the moving image

This module investigates the representation of death, and its surrounding debates, across a range of cinemas, genres and aesthetic practices, to position it within both a socio-cultural and critical context. Through consideration of the various forms and functions of the spectre of death, or of cinematic death itself, it explores their relationship to narrative, ideology and spectatorship.
Value: 20 credits

US foreign policy since 1945

In light of current events (and recent thoughts about the nature of US foreign policy), this course is always "in development". The focus will be on the influences upon and implementation of US foreign policy since 1945; however, students will be able to bring in themes such as the Anglo-American relationship and pre-1945 antecedents to US foreign policy as well as other political, economic, military, cultural, social, and ideological dimensions.

Students should also note that, with the introduction of the Semester 2 course on US Foreign Policy from 1991 to the "War on Terror", this course formally ends with the

supposed close of the Cold War. This does not mean, however, that students cannot bring thoughts/issues about current US foreign policy into the historical examination of the development of that policy
Value: 20 credits

US foreign policy and terrorism

Since the attacks of 11 September 2001, the relationship between US Foreign Policy and terrorism has been a prime topic of worldwide debate. This discussion has centred not just on US Foreign Policy as a direct or indirect cause of terrorism, including acts against the United States itself, but also over the effectiveness and appropriateness of the US response to terrorism, both in the past and present. This module will provide a deeper understanding to this dialogue while supplying new insight into the current "War on Terror" through a thematic and historicized exploration of the subject. Topics to be covered will include: definitions of terrorism and its "root causes"; US foreign policy as a cause of terrorism; US responses to terrorism in different eras, including the 1970s and 1980s; cultural depictions of US foreign policy and terrorism; September 11 and the "War on Terror."
Value: 20 credits

Reading and popular culture: contemporary book cultures in North America and UK

Why do you read? What or who made you into a reader?

We live in an era and a region of the world where less people are reading more books; where more books are published now than 20 years ago, yet educators and librarians fret that young people only play video-games, while the US government would rather Americans read To Kill A Mockingbird than watch Desperate Housewives. Why, in a digital age, does the reading of printed books and the existence of a ‘bookish culture’ still matter? Why do some people, including government agencies, think that reading ‘good’ books makes you a more moral human being or a better citizen? How do literary prizes, publishers and bookshops affect what and how you read – and what have these got to do with globalization? Why do people come together in book clubs and reading events to share their reading? In order to explore and understand both the material and ideological aspects of contemporary book cultures, this module focuses on the social location and cultural function of book reading in the 21st century. Drawing upon contemporary case studies from North America and the UK, the module also considers how and why ‘ordinary’ people read books, how the contemporary mass media frame reading as a form of popular culture and why these practices matter – politically, socially and culturally.
Value: 20 credits

New York, New York

At the start of the 20th century New York City was becoming the city of modernity; the “cubist city” as Francis Picabia described it. Its metropolitan scale, cosmopolitan sidewalk cultures, sweeping skyline and packed rapid transit systems demanded new modes of expression from writers (and painters and photographers). Moving from Henry James to Grandmaster Flash, “New York, New York” is, like the City itself, expansive, and so, like the City, needs to be broken down into manageable neighbourhoods. Week-by-week this module explores New York through particular neighbourhoods (and the literature and culture they fostered) and particular forms of expression (and the versions of the City that gave rise to them).
Value: 20 credits

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