

AMERICAN CONVERSATIONS

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American Conversations is a learning community that introduces students in their first two years to the liberal arts through an integrated sequence of four courses. Over that time students pursue conversations that have shaped the history and culture of the United States and seek to live Thomas Jefferson's dream that free and educated citizens should learn to understand what is going on in the world and to keep their part of it going right.

Overview of the Program

Like the college's other conversations programs, American Conversations is open to students of all interests who like to read, discuss, write about ideas, and look at issues through the lenses of several disciplines at once. Each course combines the study of history, literature and other arts, race, ethnicity, and a variety of human and behavioral sciences to provide students with a starting point for gaining greater lifelong inquiry into American thought and values.

One faculty member who teaches American Conversations remains with students through four courses in the sequence and teams with a second professor from a different area of study each semester. Students live in the same residence hall during their first year, enjoy some meals and special events together, and create a support system and learning community prior to the time when most students select a major.

Intended Learning Outcomes for the Program

See <http://wp.stolaf.edu/curriculum-committee/american-conversations-program-ilos/>

Admission to the Program

Each year approximately 38 first-year students are admitted to American Conversations. Entering first-year students receive information about the program soon after their admission to St. Olaf College.

Course Equivalents for General Education Requirements

By successfully completing the four courses of American Conversations, a student fulfills the following general education requirements:

- First-Year Writing [FYW] (one course);
- Historical Studies in Western Culture [HWC] (one course);
- Multicultural Studies—Domestic [MCD] (one course);
- Artistic Studies [ALS-A] (one course);
- Literary Studies [ALS-L] (one course);
- Human and Behavioral Sciences [HBS] (one course);

- Courses with Writing [WRI] (two courses);
- Oral Communication [ORC] (one course)

Courses

AMCON 101 - AMCON 202 are offered only to first-year students and sophomores enrolled in the American Conversations program. American Conversations students must take these courses in sequence.

AMCON 101: *Declaring Independence, 1607-1865*

Spanning two centuries, from the founding of the colonies to the close of the Civil War, this course begins the discussion of questions central to the entire sequence: "What is an American?" "What does it mean to be free?" Students explore the institutions, images, and stories of Euro-Americans, African Americans, and Native Americans. Topics and texts range from the *Declaration of Independence* and Thomas Jefferson's architecture to the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* and the coming of the Civil War. Offered annually in the fall semester. Counts toward American studies major.

AMCON 102: *Democratic Vistas, 1800-1900*

In this century of institutional development, national expansion, and sectional conflict, Americans continued to define a national identity. Students probe the ways in which region, religion, race, ethnicity, and gender inform individual and group contributions to the conversation. They also analyze how geographical expansion and ideas of progress influenced different visions and versions of America. Topics and texts range from Transcendentalist writers, the Second Great Awakening, and *Black Elk Speaks* to landscape painting and Western photography. Offered annually in the spring semester. Counts toward American studies major.

Prerequisite: AMCON 101.

AMCON 201: *Remaking America, 1865-1945*

Burgeoning cities and industrialism, an emerging market economy, changing opportunities for women, an influx of immigrants, and the migration of African Americans to urban centers -- all opened questions of freedom of expression, distribution of resources, and American identity. Topics and texts range from the Statue of Liberty and the World's Columbian Exposition to the Model T Ford and the Harlem Renaissance. Offered annually in the fall semester. Counts toward American studies major.

Prerequisite: AMCON 101 and AMCON 102.

AMCON 202: *Pursuits of Happiness, 1920-Present*

Students in this course examine technology, the mass market and consumerism, and the increasingly complex relations between identity and material goods. They also explore the images, institutions, and stories of environmental, feminist, and Civil Rights activists in the context of Cold War America. Topics and texts range from Yosemite National Park and Japanese internment camps to Adrienne Rich's poetry and prose, Freedom Summer, Las Vegas, and the Mall of America. Offered annually in the spring semester. Counts toward American studies, race and ethnic studies, and women's and gender studies majors and management studies, race and ethnic studies, and women's and gender studies concentrations.

Prerequisite: AMCON 101, AMCON 102, and AMCON 201.

Faculty

Director, 2016-2017

L. DeAne Lagerquist

Professor of Religion

church history; American religion; Christianity in India; Lutheranism

David R. Castro

Associate Professor of Music

music theory; counterpoint; advanced analysis

Eric J. Fure-Slocum

Associate Professor of History

20th century US history; labor and urban history

Judy Kutulas

Professor of History

20th-century U.S. history; U.S. women's history; popular and material culture

Matthew Rohn

Associate Professor of Art and Art History and Environmental Studies

19th-and 20th-century art; American culture; gender and multi-cultural studies; social justice; visual ecocriticism

Colin Wells

Professor of English

early American literature; 18th-century literature