Long Assignment for

**Concepts in American Studies: Introduction to American Studies**
American Studies 210A

**Samuele Pardini**
World Languages and Cultures Department

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**Introduction for Faculty Colleagues**

I prepared this assignment for “Concepts in American Studies. Introduction to American Studies”. The course is a broad overview of the discipline with a focus on its historical development, its traditional interdisciplinary dimension and approach to the study of American culture and life, and on how the symbolic construction of “America” and “American” intersects the material construction of these two terms. This is the final and most demanding assignment of the semester. Ideally, it will show how the students metabolized some of the key concepts in American Studies and their ability to apply them to a topic of their choice. In short, they must prove the ability to produce informed and critical inquiry.

My aim is to prepare them to achieve this goal and make them understand and appreciate that a research paper/project cannot be written/made the night before it is due; that it needs to be conceived and executed, which in turn requires a certain amount of time and preparatory work. I’ve emphasized, however ironically and with a graphic dollar symbol that it is their responsibility to produce good work. In this respect, I find it useful for them to come up with their topic. At the same time, I stress the importance of clear writing, using an example of what I DO NOT want to read (=academic jargon). I also make clear what I WANT them to do and what is in a good research paper. At times I use paradoxes and a sport analogy because they help to clarify what is the main goal of the research paper/project and how to achieve it. Telling the students what they MUST NOT do is a very good tool for them to have.

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**The Assignment I Distribute to Students**

**AMS 210A –Concepts in American Studies: Introduction to American Studies**

**Final Research Project**

As the class description reads AMS210 introduces you to the interdisciplinary field of study called American Studies and the symbolic and narrative construction of
“America” and “American.” In other words, there is no single definition of what America is and who is an American, which, roughly speaking is what American Studies is all about. Your final research paper/project will address this issue, either head-on or indirectly and, perhaps, more subtly. You will also become familiar with the library and the official journal of the ASA, the American Studies Association.

**Learning objectives**
Or, why do you need to produce a final paper/project? Because you or your parents or the school spent a lot of money for you to take this class, and so I want you to show me and the potential rest of the world that you mastered the basic idea outlined above through a specific component (the final paper/project) of the class, a component that in turn is made of different interconnected parts (see below).

**Task and Format**
Discuss a topic of your interest that you selected consulting with the instructor in the writing conference on [DATE]. Additionally, prepare a 7-minute Power Point or Prezi presentation about your project to present to the class on the day of the final (I will not grade the presentation, which serves to share your final work with your peers after you spent a semester together working on the same material).

**Format and submission**
12-15 pp., double spaced, 12 point font, Times New Roman, to be delivered electronically in either word.docx or PDF format to spardini@elon.edu the last day of class. The file name will be your last name, AMS210Final.docx or PDF (PardiniAMS210Final.docx).

**Audience and Purpose**
This is a research paper/project. Its language reflects and informs academic intellectual work in the field. This DOES NOT imply the use of academic jargon such as the following, "Imagine models floating above each other in distinct dimensions: it is not their homologies that prove suggestive or fruitful, but rather the infinitesimal divergences, the imperceptible lack of fit between the levels..." (Frederic Jameson). The research, appropriately used, along with your skills, your intelligence (which, incidentally, you don’t need to prove to me, otherwise you would not be in my class), and the knowledge that you have gained during the semester will confer depth to your argument. Thus, the language’s main goal is to clarify your argument in order to make it available to a fellow researcher and a serious reader. Once I met a cashier at K-Mart in Burlington who, upon hearing that my child’s name was Dante, told me that she loved reading the other Dante, the Italian poet. I want you to write for me, an American Studies scholar and that cashier. In other words, write for everybody because everybody can appreciate good stuff.
The sequence
*At the beginning of the semester, start becoming familiar with the library and the librarians and the writing center located therein.

What I DO NOT WANT YOU TO DO:
Get to the library the night before the paper is due, write 12 pages and, with your head heading for the desk after you’ve gulped down the last sip of your last cup of coffee/can of coke send me those unworthy of tuition—pages.

WHAT I WANT YOU TO DO
Think of your final paper/project as the old saying about Rome: it wasn’t built in a day. This means that you will build your final project in a sequence of steps spammed over [NUMBER] classes, beginning with the first class after the fall break.

DATE/AT HOME ACTIVITY
Visit American Quarterly, the official journal of the American Studies Association (available through Belk [the library]) and select three published essays from three different decades. Bring four copies of the first two paragraphs of each paper to class. Distribute three copies to the members of your group. They will distribute their copies to you. In ten (10) minutes find and highlight the thesis of each of the essays.

DATE/AT HOME ACTIVITY
- Visit the review section of a recent issue of American Quarterly,
- Select a review
- Read it
- Bring four copies of the review to class
- Give a copy to each member of your group
- In a 5-minute activity write down one line that explains the purpose of the review and its stated thesis. Then report to your peers.
- In one line, explain the main difference between a research essay and a review

DATE/AT HOME ACTIVITY

DATE/Writing Conference with the Instructor
Discussion of your topic. Bring in the proposal along with one page which documents what you did thus far.
DATE/AT HOME ACTIVITY
Write a few research questions about the topic that you selected and compose a research statement (= a thesis) that proposes an answer to the question that you selected.

DATE/15-MINUTE IN CLASS ACTIVITY
Group discussion: Email your research statement to your group and the instructor the day before class. In class, identify and present others’ perspectives and positions.

DATE/AT HOME ACTIVITY
Evaluate resources and compile a bibliography.

1) Resources: The library; possible oral sources (interview friends, students, family members etc.); internet as a source, not the only source; the physical space; architecture (example: churches, museums, public parks).

2) Bibliography: prepare a bibliography with at least three critical sources that contain relevant discussions of your topic (primary sources). Write a two/three line summary of each primary source. Add as many secondary sources as you would like. You don’t need to write a summary for these entries. Email it to your group and to the instructor.

DATE/AT HOME ACTIVITY
Prepare a bulleted list of key points of your paper and use it for your Power Point or Prezi presentation.

DATE/AT HOME GROUP ELECTRONIC ACTIVITY
First draft due. Peer review. You will email each other’s papers. Peer review will consist of constructive criticism, both positive and negative, of your peers’ paper. Focus on thesis, organization of the paper and supportive evidence. Write your comments using the review tool of your software of choice (Word or PDF).

DATE: PAPER DUE THE LAST DAY OF CLASSES. NO EXCEPTION.

WHAT’S IN A RESEARCH PAPER (according to John C. Bean):
- An explicit thesis statement, usually in the introduction
- Clear forecasting of the structure to follow
- Unified and coherent paragraphs introduced by topic sentences
- Clear transitions and signposts throughout (in some cases facilitated by various levels of headings)
- Coherently linked sentences aimed at maximum clarity and readability
Grading Criteria

- General rule: your grade is an accumulation of your work. You don’t start from A. You start from zero and build your grade with the goal to get to an A. Think of your final grade as the final score of a football game, which is the result of all the component of a game (practice, strategy, touchdowns, interceptions, injuries, referees’ calls, etc.).
- What is graded: the final, emailed research paper/project.
- In any evaluation there is a degree of subjectivity in the evaluator’s opinions. This subjectivity does not mean unfairness. It is mostly the result of years of experience, both as a scholar and a teacher of AMS.

Your essay is supposed to provide a supported answer to a question that you posed as a result of a research process.

In order to do well on this paper/project, you need to do these things:
1. Have your own clear answer to your question.
2. Support your answer with strong arguments and textual details.
3. Make your essay clear enough for a reader to understand with one reading.

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<th>Criterion 1. Does your essay have a thesis statement at the end of the first paragraph that answers the question that you’ve posed?</th>
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<td>No thesis or unclear thesis</td>
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<th>Criterion 2. Is your thesis supported with strong argumentation and use of significant details taken from the texts that you are working on/with?</th>
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<td>Weak argument and/or Lack of details as support</td>
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<th>Criterion 3. Is your paper easy for a reader to follow?</th>
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<td>Paragraphing transitions</td>
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<td>Clear sentences</td>
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<td>Accurate mechanics: grammar; spelling, punctuation, neatness</td>
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