

Frequently Asked Questions

Do teachers have a hard time getting to know students? OR Do teachers have more opportunities to get to know kids?

We hear BOTH these questions. Although it is true that there are between 40-50 kids in the course, the course meets for a double period so teachers have more time with students on a daily basis. Most teachers agreed that it did take a bit longer to get to know students, but that the relationships forged over 85 minutes in American Studies are as close, if not closer, than in a stand alone class.

Is class participation an important part of American studies?

Class participation is an important part of this course. It can be challenging to make one's voice heard in such a large group and students who struggle with class participation may have a hard time with discussion. This is a course that is particularly suitable for students who enjoy class discussion and want to engage in discussion on a regular basis.

What does it mean that this course is "integrated" or "interdisciplinary?"

American Studies requires a high level of synthesis of two difficult subjects. Critical thinking and connections between subjects are key to success in the course. There is a high level of expectation for writing, reading, and participation. This is also a course which requires a great deal of self direction. American Studies emphasizes student-directed learning and the freedom of individual inquiry.

Are there a lot of projects and group work in this class?

There are numerous projects in this course but no more than in a stand alone history or English course. As a whole, courses at New Trier have begun to support many different kinds of assessment and American Studies certainly supports this mode.

What is the difference between 2 or 3 level Junior English and US history and 9 level American Studies?

American Studies is taught at the 9 level, a combination of levels 2, 3, and 4. It receives 3 level credit. This course is excellent for a strong 2 level student with good organizational skills.

Why should I take American Studies?

Students who have a meaningful American Studies experience typically:

- Enjoy the interplay between multiple disciplines.
- Enjoy using questions as a driving force in their learning.
- Are open to broad definitions of literacy (movies, advertisements, political cartoons, etc.).

- Are ready to draw connections between the content of the course and their world.

Why shouldn't I take American Studies?

Students who typically struggle in American Studies:

- Have a hard time with organization and self-direction.
- Are extremely reluctant to speak in class
- Want a linear, chronological approach to U.S. history and literature.

What is the difference between 4 level American Studies and AP English and AP US history?

Although there is significant content crossover, there are many differences between American Studies and the separate English and history courses, especially in approach. Throughout all aspects of the course, synthesis is valued over the individual content areas. While all students take the AP Exam for junior AP English and the AP US history exam at the end of AP US history, American Studies students have the option of taking the AP Exam in each content area. Each year many of our students take the English exam and do well because the course prepares them for the content on the English exam. Although American Studies students may choose to take the AP exam in U.S. History, this course does not prepare them as well for this assessment due to the test's emphasis on memorization of content and its tendency to value a detailed, chronological approach to U.S. history. However, if an American Studies student is willing to put in extra time preparing for the AP U.S. History exam, he or she should do well. Many students have been successful on the exam with added preparation.