African Studies (AFST)

* AFST 002a / LITR 001a, Introduction to African Literature  Helen Yitah
This is a survey course meant to offer a formal introduction to African Literature in its broadest historical and cultural contexts. The aim is for each student to gain a close, personal familiarity with selected representative texts of major forms/genres and of the major writers of various periods, including the traditional raconteurs who daily regale communities with their oral arts; Chinua Achebe, considered the ‘father’ of modern African literature; Ama Ata Aidoo, groundbreaking African woman writer; Nawal El Saadawi, physician, activist, and feminist who writes about women in Islam; Keorapetse Kgotsitsile, award winning poet and South African Poet Laureate; Patricia Jabbeh Wesley whose poetry gives voice to the hundreds of Liberians who were killed during the country’s civil war. We begin with oral genres—the earliest and the predominant forms of African literature—including folktales, myths and legends, and oral poetry. We then look at selected writers and their works from around the continent. The texts are placed in the general socio-political and cultural contexts of their production. Enrollment limited to first-year students.   HU

* AFST 015a / AFAM 016a / ENGL 015a, South African Writing after Apartheid  Stephanie Newell
An introduction to creative writing published in South Africa from the end of Apartheid in 1994 to the present. Close readings of contemporary fiction with additional material drawn from popular culture, including films, magazines, and music. Enrollment limited to first-year students.  WR, HU

AFST 184a / AFAM 160a / AMST 160a / HIST 184a, History of Atlantic Slavery  Staff
The history of peoples of African descent throughout the Americas, from the first African American societies of the sixteenth century through the century-long process of emancipation.  HU 0 Course cr

AFST 335b / ER&M 325b / HIST 335b, A History of South Africa  Daniel Magaziner
An introduction to the history of southern Africa, especially South Africa. Indigenous communities; early colonial contact; the legacies of colonial rule; postcolonial mismanagement; the vagaries of the environment; the mineral revolution; segregationist regimes; persistent inequality and crime since the end of apartheid; the specter of AIDS; postcolonial challenges in Zimbabwe, Angola, and Mozambique.  HU 0 Course cr

AFST 340b / HIST 340b, Africa in the Era of the Slave Trade  Robert Harms
Examination of the tumultuous changes experienced by African societies during the era of the Atlantic slave trade, approximately 1450–1850. Focus on the complex interaction between the internal dynamics of African societies and the impact of outside forces.  HU 0 Course cr

* AFST 344a / HIST 344a, African Independence: A Cup of Plenty or a Poisoned Chalice?  Staff
In every African colony after World War Two there emerged nationalist movements which no longer called for civil rights as in the pre-war years but demanded self-
determination. While many of them got it easy, some had to fight long and bloody wars for it. By the 1960s the colonial edifice had crumbled except for the few settler colonies in southern Africa. But even here the winds of change could not be stopped. But what did decolonization and independence mean to Africa? Did Africans get what they wanted? Was independence a cup of plenty or a poisoned chalice? In addressing these questions, this course charts the economic, political, and cultural transformations of postcolonial Africa from the 1960s to the present. The argument is this: there can be no understanding of Africa’s challenges today without an inquiry into the nature of what the continent got from the departing colonial powers.

* AFST 352b / AKKD 350b / HIST 352Jb, Culture and Politics in Lusophone Africa, 1885-1992  Benedito Machava

The peculiar nature of Portugal as a colonial power produced a very distinct history in the five Portuguese-speaking African countries, namely Angola, Guiné-Bissau (Guinea-Bissau), Moçambique (Mozambique), and the Atlantic islands of Cabo-Verde (Cape Verde) and São Tomé e Príncipe. Lusophone Africa is a lose term that refers to the world created by Portugal’s colonialism in Africa. This course explores this distinct history through the lens of culture and politics. Focusing on the long twentieth-century, we consider Lusophone Africa as a study unit, dissecting its disparate societies, cultures, and political trajectories, while remaining anchored in the general context of Africa. Military conquest, colonial rule, race/lusotropicalism, nationalism, and liberation struggle are some of the core themes of the course. We begin with a brief assessment of Portugal’s efforts to retain its colonial enclaves amid the voracious expansion of British, French, Belgian, and German presence in Africa in the late 19th century. But our focus is on the twentieth-century, from the establishment of the colonial administration in the early 1900s to the fall of the Portuguese empire in 1974. We dedicate a good portion of the term to exploring the multiple ways (cultural and political) in which Africans responded to Portugal’s encroachment and how they navigated the color bar that came to dictate their social mobility under colonial rule. We end with the multifaceted longings for self-determination that led to the longest and bloodiest liberation wars in Africa. Our readings include scholarly essays (old and recent), primary sources, literary works (novels, poetry and short stories), photographs, music and films. We become acquainted with Portuguese-speaking African voices, faces, and places. Luís Bernardo Honwana’s collection of short stories in *We Killed Mangy Dog and Other Stories* (1964) and Zezé Gamboa’s film *The Great Kilapy* (2012) carry us through the important theme of race and race relations. While cautious in situating the discussion of race in its historical context, these and other materials challenge us to think about race relations and emancipation in our time.

* AFST 363a / AFAM 345a / ER&M 252a / SPAN 360a, Our Guinea: Locating Africa in Early Iberian Archives  Alexandra Cook

African coastlines were the first horizons of Iberian imperial expansion into the Atlantic, and eventually, the world. While the worlds made by Africans displaced by the slave trade and their descendants have received extensive attention in recent years, Africa itself rarely enters the frame. The histories that unfolded on the continent in many ways challenge our understandings of Spanish and Portuguese expansion and colonialism, shaped as they are by the “New World” paradigm of conquest and conversion. Were African societies part of the “New World” or the “Old World”?
In this course we study an often-overlooked domain of Spanish and Portuguese imperialism and commerce from an approach that includes but does not limit itself to the study of slavery and enslaved Africans in the Americas. We read a selection of primary texts from the early modern Ibero-African archive, with a focus on texts produced about the African continent and Africans (and when possible, by Africans) in Spanish, and to a lesser extent Portuguese, seeking (1) to challenge existing narratives and frameworks for the study of precolonial Africa, but also (2) to see what kinds of African worlds appear when we set aside our assumptions and generalizations.

* AFST 366a / EP&E 305a / HIST 367a / PLSC 364a, Bureaucracy in Africa: Revolution, Genocide, and Apartheid  
  Jonny Steinberg
A study of three major episodes in modern African history characterized by ambitious projects of bureaucratically driven change—apartheid and its aftermath, Rwanda’s genocide and post-genocide reconstruction, and Ethiopia’s revolution and its long aftermath. Examination of Weber’s theory bureaucracy, Scott’s thesis on high modernism, Bierschenk’s attempts to place African states in global bureaucratic history. Overarching theme is the place of bureaucratic ambitions and capacities in shaping African trajectories.

* AFST 368a / EVST 369a / HIST 366Ja, Commodities of Colonialism in Africa  
  Robert Harms
This course examines historical case studies of several significant global commodities produced in Africa to explore interactions between world market forces and African resources and societies. Through the lens of four specific commodities—ivory, rubber, cotton, and diamonds—this course evaluates diverse industries and their historical trajectories in sub-Saharan Africa within a global context from ~1870-1990s. Students become acquainted with the historical method by developing their own research paper on a commodity using both primary and secondary sources.

* AFST 377a / AFAM 371a / FREN 370a, Caribbean Poetry in French  
  Thomas Connolly
An introduction to Caribbean poetry in French from the turn of the twentieth century to the present day. Topics covered will include literary, social, and political movements including surrealism, colonization, decolonization, immigration, the relation of French to other languages of the Caribbean including Créole, Spanish, and English, and points of contact between poetry, music, theater, and the visual arts. Students will learn how to read, comment on, and write about poetry. Primary authors will include Étienne Léro, Aimé Césaire, Saint-John Perse, Magloire-Saint-Aude, Édouard Glissant, René Depestre, Davertige, Jean Métellus, Raphaël Confiant, Suzanne Dracius, and Patrick Chamoiseau. Readings, assignments, and discussions in French. Ability to read, write, and discuss in French.

AFST 388a / ANTH 398a / EDST 388a, Anthropology of Education  
Staff
This course explores how the insights and concepts of social anthropology contribute to improved understanding of educational theory and practice in multicultural settings. The course draws on ethnographic approaches to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of the intricate relationship between personhood, learning, and the centrality of culture within various educational contexts in sub-Saharan Africa. It illustrates the realities of what it means to be growing up and living in multicultural and multilingual African nations. Students are encouraged to think critically about the potential benefits and challenges of applying the discourses, models,
African Studies (AFST) and systems of Western education as a means of "development." Assigned readings will help critically examine traditional categories such as 'gender,' 'class,' 'race,' 'kinship,' 'religion,' and 'nation.' Class discussions acknowledge the intricate interplay of these categories in the context of contemporary experiences of migration. By end of the course, students develop a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics shaping educational systems and intercultural relations in Africa and beyond. Ultimate aim is to equip students with the confidence and cultural sensitivity necessary for making informed comparisons of teaching and learning practices within a global context. 

* AFST 389a / ER&M 417a / MMES 389a, *Comparative settler geographies* Leslie Gross-Wyrtenz

This advanced undergraduate seminar delves into theories and comparative studies of recent and contemporary settler colonial geographies to ask the following questions:

1) What are the key characteristics of settler colonial geographies and (how) are they distinct from colonial geographies?  
2) What are the intellectual and political stakes of applying settler colonialism as an analytical lens?  
3) How does comparative analysis deepen or disrupt concepts such as sovereignty, race, and I/indigeneity, especially in a majority world context?  
4) How do Indigenous or/and occupied peoples contest settler cartographies through placemaking and other strategies?  

In this seminar, we read key theoretical texts in colonial, postcolonial, settler, Native, and Indigenous studies with an emphasis on global and Southern intervention. Alongside theoretical texts, we focus on four case studies that, to a greater or lesser degree, push the boundaries of settler colonial definitions and concepts: South Africa, Morocco/Western Sahara, Israel/Palestine, and southwestern China and Tibet. Where possible, we invite scholars with expertise in the cases to speak to the class. 

* AFST 396a / HIST 396Ja, *Revolutions and Socialist Experiments in Africa* Benedito Machava

This seminar explores the contours of Africa’s embrace and engagement with the most influential ideology of the twentieth-century. Why, and through which channels, were Africans attracted to socialism? Did particular forms of colonialism and decolonization push African political actors towards revolution and socialist experiments? Is it legitimate, as some scholars have suggested, to speak of genuinely African socialisms? If so, what was the nature of these socialisms and how did they differ from the versions of socialism around the world? What political, social, economic, and cultural ends did socialism serve in Africa? And what were the consequences and legacies of African socialist experiments? The seminar addresses these questions. Our goal is to place Africa in the mainstream of conversations about socialism. We begin with the assumption that, like any doctrine, socialism was the object of multiple interpretations, modification, and appropriation from its inception. In so doing, we challenge orthodox understandings of socialism, which hold the European versions as the pure models and the rest as diluted if not populist façades of the ‘true’ doctrine. We begin with theoretical readings that help us situate the major debates about socialism in general and socialism in Africa. We then proceed to examine the overall historical context in which African nationalists adopted socialism. We differentiate the first branch of “African Socialism” from the second wave of “Afro-Marxism.” We also pay close attention to issues of decolonization and political imagination; ideas and experiments of development; gender, morality, and social engineering. 

WR, HU
A practical and theoretical study of the traditional dances of Africa, focusing on those of Burkina Faso and their contemporary manifestations. Emphasis on rhythm, kinesthetic form, and gestural expression. The fusion of modern European dance and traditional African dance. Admission by audition during the first class meeting. **HU**

This is an interdisciplinary seminar on French cultural history from the 1930s to the present. We focus on issues concerning race and gender in the context of colonialism, postcolonialism, and migration. The course investigates how the silencing of colonial history has been made possible culturally and ideologically, and how this silencing has in turn been central to the reorganizing of French culture and society from the period of decolonization to the present. We ask how racial regimes and spaces have been constructed in French colonial discourses and how these constructions have evolved in postcolonial France. We examine postcolonial African diasporic literary writings, films, and other cultural productions that have explored the complex relations between race, colonialism, historical silences, republican universalism, and color-blindness. Topics include the 1931 Colonial Exposition, Black Paris, decolonization, universalism, the Trente Glorieuses, the Paris massacre of 1961, anti-racist movements, the "beur" author, memory, the 2005 riots, and contemporary afro-feminist and decolonial movements. **HU**

This advanced seminar examines the role that infrastructure plays in producing uneven geographies of power historically and in the “colonial present” (Gregory 2006). After defining terms and exploring the ways that infrastructure has been conceptualized and studied, we analyze how different types of infrastructure (energy, roads, people, and so on) constitute the material and social world of empire. At the same time, infrastructure is not an uncontested arena: it often serves as a key site of political struggle or even enters the fray as an unruly actor itself, thus conditioning possibilities for anti-imperial and decolonial practice. The geographic focus of this course is the African continent, but we explore comparative cases in other regions of the majority and minority world. **SO**

This seminar surveys the musical conversation that has circulated around the “Black Atlantic” cultural sphere (sub-Saharan Africa, Afro-America, the Afro-Caribbean, and Latin America) for most of the twentieth century, facilitated by the advent of sound recording and broadcast technologies at the beginning of the twentieth century, and articulated through discourses of black cultural connection and concrete histories of trans-Atlantic encounter. Many –though not all– of the readings focus on the decades immediately following World War II, when “Pan-Africanism” was an explicit and prominent political discourse. Others address earlier or later examples when the idea of cross-cultural connection was more implicit but equally influential. We trace the
unfolding of this conversation through a variety of sources: scholarly, personal (i.e. biographies/autobiographies), journalistic, and, of course, sonic. WR, HU

* AFST 491a, The Senior Essay   Veronica Waweru
Independent research on the senior essay. By the end of the sixth week of classes, a rough draft of the entire essay should be completed. By the end of the last week of classes (fall term) or three weeks before the end of classes (spring term), two copies of the final essay must be submitted.