

American Studies 335  
New England  
M. W. F. 1:00 - 1:50  
CAS 120  
Roger Williams University  
Fall Semester 2011

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Hours: M. W. F 11:00 - 12:00  
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## Course Introduction

*History and Culture of the New England region examining the varieties of New England life from Colonial Plymouth to modern Boston, as well as the continuities of New England tradition in education, religion, seafaring, and milling. 3 credits*

Roger Williams University Catalogue

Well, we'll do some of the above. American Studies as a mode of investigation borrows insights and methodologies from a wide variety of disciplines. This time around, we will be using concepts drawn from cultural geography, gender studies and material culture studies to a greater degree than ever before. I've made these changes out of a conviction that these have been under represented in the courses I've offered to this date. Newness always brings a degree of risk. The books used are likely to be quite different from other books with which you are familiar, and we'll have to work hard at understanding the concepts which underlie the work. The chief question we're going to be investigating is how the land and land settlement patterns influenced the shape of New England Culture as it emerged. We'll be looking at the New England Village in fact and myth, at the web of social relationships which underlay village life, at some of the types of homes which formed the state on which that life was lived out, at contributions New England makes to American Culture generally, through the activities of persons important in New England history, and through some of the attitudes and ideologies which seem important in contemporary New England.

### Texts

Wood, William

*New England's Prospect*, edited with an introduction by Alden T. Vaughan  
Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993

Wood, Joseph S.,

*The New England Village*  
Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1997

Hansen, Karen V.

*A Very Social Time: Crafting Community in Antebellum New England*  
Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996

Nylander, Jane C.

*Our Own Snug Fireside: Images of the New England Home, 1760-1860*  
New Haven, Yale University Press, 1993

Drake, Samuel Adams

*New England Legends & Folklore* (reproduction of 1883 edition)  
Edison, NJ: Castle Books, 1993

We'll use these five texts in the order given. After the first units of this course we'll be working in more than one text simultaneously, so you will need to purchase them all early in the semester.

I will also ask you to download and read some materials from the internet, as well. It will be most efficient if you buy a three ring notebook in which to keep those materials.

American Studies 335 is one of a group of American Studies course with a focus on the relationship between geography and culture. The nature of New England is shaped by the nature of the land itself, and we'll be exploring that relationship all semester. The five books for the course reflect this:

- **William Wood's** book recounts an Englishman's first impression of the New World, including its topography and natural resources. We'll be comparing his impressions with the impressions of two other early colonists, which you'll download from the Internet. More about this later
- **Joseph Wood's** book recounts the development and elaboration of what has become the dominating symbol of New England, the Village. Some of you may have visited either Sturbridge Village or Mystic Seaport, each of which is a partial recreation of a typical 19<sup>th</sup> century New England environment. As we work our way the book we'll come to understand why villages developed *where* they did (for example, why is downtown Bristol on Narragansett Bay and not on Mount Hope Bay, as Roger Williams University is? And we'll also learn how some of the things we come to associate as "typical" of the village from the very beginning actually represent a deliberate creation of an image, beginning not in colonial times, but as recently as the 1870s,
- The shape and nature of the village physically creates the shape of the village society and culture. We'll look at this through **Karen Hansen's** book. How did men and women in New England Villages relate to each other. What were the typical institutions through which they interacted. Here, we'll look at everything from the role of the Church to the role of the Picnic.
- **Jane Nylander's** book takes us to a more intimate level—the individual house. As I write this, I don't know how many of you are life-long residents of New England or how many of you are visiting just to go to college here. But either way, houses are important objects of study by historians. A house acts as a stage set upon which the drama of lives is enacted, and the New England house is distinctive because it enables and enforces certain fairly specific patterns of behavior
- **Samuel Drake's** book is very different from the rest in that it is a collection of works of the imagination—folk tales, legends, poems, and the like, recorded when New England was much closer in character to its origins than perhaps it is now. Folk literature unlike High literature, is also a product of geography. You'll notice that Drake organizes his book geographically<sup>1</sup>. This makes it fit within the framework of the course. I hope you'll enjoy it...not only the tales, but the wonderful 19<sup>th</sup> century engravings which illustrate it.

### Internet Requirement

More and more, academic literacy and scholarship cannot be said to be complete without a knowledge of the internet as a resource and tool. There will be a number of exercises in this course which will require significant time spent online. Those of you with computers will not find this too difficult. In fact, internet resources are available 24 hours a day, barring the occasional system crash. Resources and tutorials are available through a website I've created for this course at <http://amst335.homestead.com>. This is a work in progress, and you will be expected to visit it weekly as assignments for the following week will be posted there.

We will make extensive use of Bridges in this course as well. Written work will be submitted through it. I will also offer opportunities to submit rough drafts prior to submission for final grades. Bridges is the system replacing Blackboard. I'll be learning it at the same time you are learning it. If it turns out to be more complicated than I expect, we'll find ways to work around the complications. If necessary, I will send out an SOS to the folks at Information Technology to drop by and tutor us all.

### **Work and Evaluation**

The vast majority of the work you prepare for a grade in this course will be written outside of class. Most assignments will be fairly short (3-5 pages), and I'll accept an informal style of documentation. However, I won't be happy with work which is mentally or grammatically sloppy. Some of this work will be more like take-home examinations in other words, there will be a question or questions to which each of you will respond. The rest of it will be more free form: perhaps involving some private investigation of your own with a report of the results. I expect that there will be four of these, all told. There will also be an informal class presentation based on the fourth paper (which will itself be based on the Drake book).

The first of these papers will be presented to you about the third week of class, and will be based upon William Wood's book and the internet assignment materials I send you to find and think about. You'll have about 10 to 11 days (a week and the weekends around it) to work on the paper

Very shortly I will stop using paper to distribute instructions. There will always be a hard copy version available through the internet for those who like to keep such things handy, but in the interest of tree-saving, I'll leave the decision about whether to print off a hard copy to the individual student. Note: you will be able to print off anything which is web-based. There will also be a required class presentation, based on work which you will turn in in writing.

### **Grading will be based on approximately these proportions:**

**4 short papers as described above... 20 per cent of your grade each.** One of these will be based on the folk literature associated with a specific New England Place, and this will form the basis of your class presentation. The paper and presentation will happen near the end of the semester, but I'll be asking you to select your place fairly early in the term.

**Class Presentation based on one of those papers, 10%:** I would expect this paper to be of greater length and more fully developed conceptually than the others.

**Attendance and Participation, Quizzes if there are any, 10%**

**Attendance will be recorded. Four** unexcused absences will lower your grade a notch. **FIVE** unexcused absences will result in a grade of F. I'm liberal in the reasons which I accept for excusable absences: these would include, for example, illness, a family emergency, or a scheduled activity of another class or Roger Williams University athletic team. An absence caused by leaving early on weekends is NOT excusable. I will circulate a sign-in sheet for you record your attendance. Use the mailbox communicate with me

regarding absences.

I'm looking forward to sharing this semester with you. One of the joys about teaching New England is that the region is so very compact. If you're willing, and interested, we may schedule trips to one or more of the easily accessible New England locales: Plimoth Plantation, Sturbridge Village, Mystic Seaport, New Bedford, or even Martha's Vineyard. I'll get you talking about this early on in the semester.

Mike Swanson

1. The locales for the New England Legends
  - a. [\*Boston Legends\*](#)
  - b. [\*Cambridge Legends\*](#)
  - c. [\*Lynn\*](#) and [\*Nahant Legends\*](#)
  - d. [\*Salem Legends\*](#)
  - e. [\*Marblehead Legends\*](#)
  - f. [\*Cape-Ann Legends\*](#)
  - g. [\*Ipswich\*](#) and [\*Newbury Legends\*](#)
  - h. [\*Hampton\*](#) and [\*Portsmouth Legends\*](#)
  - i. [\*York, Isles-of-Shoals,\*](#) and [\*Boon-Island Legends\*](#)
  - j. [\*Old-Colony \(Plymouth\)\*](#) Legends
  - k. [\*Rhode Island Legends\*](#)
  - l. [\*Connecticut Legends\*](#)
  - m. [\*Nantucket Legends\*](#)