ENGL 255  Survey of American Lit I  credit: 3 hours.
American literature and its cultural backgrounds to 1870. For majors only. Prerequisite: Completion of the Composition I requirement and ENGL 200.

This course satisfies the General Education Criteria for a:
Humanities – Lit & Arts
Cultural Studies - Western

This course is restricted to majors and will not be opened up to non-majors. The purpose of this course is to introduce you to American literature written before the Civil War and to assure that you have basic cultural literacy about terms, ideas, and events that will help you when you enroll in upper level literature courses. Our focus will be fourfold, encompassing specific literary forms, major literary movements, major historical events and problems, and finally the general history of intellectual ideas in this period. We will get at these problems by thinking broadly about American culture? from its earliest iterations up until the crackup called the Civil War. By looking at a variety of visual and verbal texts?from paintings, engravings, and maps to slave narratives, novels, poems, autobiographies, essays, and pamphlets?we will try to get to know this culture both through its parts (its poems, essays, and stories) and through our own cohesive reconstruction of these parts into an integrated whole?a story, which we will call, in our class, ?American Literature, Part I.? This is a course that will thus introduce you not just to the basic facts of American cultural history but that will challenge you to theorize the very practice of ?literary history??which is, in fact, a very special kind of storytelling that we practice in English departments. Along the way, our readings will range from the short to the long, from the conventional to the idiosyncratic, from commercial blockbusters to very big flops. The syllabus represents authors of different genders, classes, races, and regions, but the course is less devoted to giving equal representation to authors of different backgrounds than to thinking about how representation works to create conditions of inclusion and exclusion across American culture. The ?canon? we call ? American literature? only exists as a master narrative because of its tendency to include some and to exclude others. This produces an intellectual dilemma for surveyors like ourselves because we cannot reconstruct that which was never allowed to exist nor can any reader ever read everything a culture produces. We can?t fix this problem in an undergraduate survey class, but it is something I invite you to discuss and think about over the course of the semester.
Literature and the Arts, and Western Compartv Cult course.
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