

# AMERICAN STUDIES

Vanderbilt University | Fall 2012

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 for corporate profit.”

## Common Learning

*Dana D. Nelson, Gertrude Conaway Vanderbilt  
 Professor of English and American Studies*

*John C. Ayers, Professor and Chair,  
 Earth & Environmental Sciences*

**W**e team-taught the American Studies Interdisciplinary Graduate Seminar (AMER 300) on the topic: “The Commons: History, Sustainability, Activism” in Spring 2012. The notion of the commons is not readily familiar to most people, so allow us to provide a brief overview before describing the course itself.

Garret Hardin’s 1968 article, “The Tragedy of the Commons,” influentially argued that left to themselves, ordinary people could not reasonably be expected to manage a common pool resource—like a pasture, irrigation water, or a fishery—in a responsible way. Individually selfish, humans compete with each other in a cycle of overuse that leads inevitably to tragedy on a finite planet. This thesis inspired academic study and policy development, and turned academic attention toward not just the problem of commons failure in the form of resource depletion but also durable commons—some that have existed for hundreds of years—all over the world.

In this same era, “globalization” has raised questions for activists about the privatization of resources that have long been held in common—like water, indigenous herbal remedies, or genes—and that are now being privatized for corporate profit. Activists have reclaimed of the concept of the commons as an ecological and a civic remedy to problems that ordinary folk as well as world leaders confront the world over. In our contemporary moment, the commons has academic, policy, legal, economic and activist dimensions, which we designed our course to take into account.

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## DIRECTOR'S NOTE

This past year, the American Studies program led a campus-wide conversation on the topic of sustainability. "The Sustainability Project" engaged faculty, students, and staff from across the University on this crucial issue through an array of speakers and events. Whether you attended Bill McKibben's keynote address or one of our eminent speakers on the topic of "The Commons," or viewed a film in the "Green Screen" series, or saw the exhibition of Gabriel Warren's polar art, or learned about environmental justice in Nashville on our road trip, or got up to speed on backyard composting at a brown-bag luncheon, we hope that you were involved in our project in some way.

The key way we hope to sustain this project is through the curriculum. Last year, Vanderbilt was able to offer a large array of courses across disciplines and schools on topics related to the environment. A new minor, directed by David Hess (Sociology), titled Environmental and Sustainability Studies will be available to students fall of 2012. The Cumberland Project, our faculty development workshop on sustainability, assembled its second cohort this past May and we look forward to the many new courses on sustainability that will be taught soon.

This upcoming year, which will be my last as Director, will see a continued focus on sustainability. Our spring conference will be on "Climate Change, Anti-Environmentalism and American Politics." We will also be organizing an event called, "Jobs That Change the World," which will introduce Vanderbilt undergraduates to innovators and entrepreneurs who are shaping new industries that are both for-profit and for the greater good.

I've had an amazing tenure as Director of the Program in American Studies. I can't imagine working with a more engaging group of faculty, students, and staff. I wish to thank all of you who have collaborated with me over the years. I look forward to participating in the program as a faculty member for many years to come.

Teresa A. Goddu  
*Director of the Program in American Studies*

CONTINUED FROM COVER

The course enrolled students from three Colleges and numerous disciplines (including Law and Economics, Environmental Engineering, History, Anthropology, Philosophy and English), and studied the concept of the commons and its associated theories and practices from the seventeenth-century to our own day, beginning with the vivid battles over enclosure in England and in colonial North America and the early United States. We considered how assumptions about various kinds of commons undergirded early US laws, as well as the intellectual idealism and political activism of the Revolutionary era, before turning to more contemporary questions concerning the enclosure of commons like water and the management of common pool resources. Students discussed how the commons inspires activist and legal responses to, for instance, the patenting of seeds, privatization maneuvers within the internet and knowledge commons, and global warming. We explored an array of living commons, for instance in local common gardens, in urban reclamation of civic commons, use of creative commons licenses for intellectual property, and collective management schemes such as coops and land trusts.

The course revolved around a speaker series, one for each three-week unit. We consulted with each speaker to develop readings for the first, preparatory week. In the second week of each unit, students read a book by the speaker and then attended the speaker's public lecture. After the lecture, the class met with the speaker in seminar to develop a more focused discussion of the implications of their work. In week three, students submitted a response paper to the unit in advance of class, which formed the basis for that week's discussion.

Our public speaker series featured internationally renowned experts on the Commons, including MacArthur Fellows and a Nobel Laureate. The speakers who lectured publicly and visited our seminar included:

- ★ **LEWIS HYDE:** poet, essayist, translator, and cultural critic with a particular interest in the public life of the imagination.
- ★ **PETER GLEICK:** an internationally recognized water expert, co-founder and president of the Pacific Institute for Studies in Development, Environment, and Security in Oakland, California.
- ★ **ELINOR OSTROM:** We were most fortunate to host Nobel Laureate Elinor Ostrom, the first woman to win the prize in economics for her empirical and theoretical work on actually-existing common pool resource regzmes and on game theory. Ostrom passed away shortly after her visit, on June 12, 2012.
- ★ **DAVID BOLLIER:** an American activist, writer, and policy strategist.



ELINOR OSTROM

Finally in the course's last unit, the class embarked on a field trip to study land, environmental, worker and activist commons. We visited the Woodlands Community Land Trust (on the TN/KY border north of Knoxville), a residential environmental trust where land is held in common by its residents, and Robinson Forest (southeastern KY), a University of Kentucky facility located in the heart of Appalachia's coal country, and one of the most biodiverse forests remaining in the US. There students engaged in conversations about the commons as a strategy for activism in the face accelerating mountaintop removal coal mining with writer Erik Reese, author of Lost Mountain.

## Report on The Sustainability Project

The 2011-2012 academic school year marked a series of speakers, courses, Road Trips, films and conferences, which together formed the Program in American Studies' Sustainability Project. Greater than the contribution of any individual event, the year-long series of events heightened the atmosphere of environmental awareness on Vanderbilt's campus. Our ultimate goal for this year of programming was to create a campus-wide conversation that would embolden Vanderbilt's efforts toward sustainability while deepening our understanding of what we are working toward.

The Sustainability Project actively pursued projects that could bring students, faculty, and staff together from across the campus from Gabriel Warren's "Polar Probing" exhibit (with the Vanderbilt Fine Arts Gallery) to Nobel Laureate Elinor Ostrom's lecture on collective action and The Commons (with the Department of Political Science, Medicine Health and Society, and the Center for the Study of Democratic Institution) to the Eco-Rolling Seminar to Hindman, Kentucky to explore mountain top removal (with the Office of Active Citizenship and Service) to courses on Energy and Environmental Law, Eco-Conscious Travel, and Water and Social Justice in Bangladesh. The Cumberland Project, a cross-disciplinary faculty development program organized with the Center for Teaching, created a space for faculty from across the University to work together as they redesigned or developed new courses on sustainability-related themes.

The Sustainability Project also welcomed input from student groups. As a result, some of our most rewarding collaborations were with students who found in The Sustainability Project a way to bring their ideas to the larger campus community. Among these projects were the Green Screen film series (with the Alternative Energy Club), which featured six films and discussions during the Fall semester, the Community Garden (with Vanderbilt Initiative for Vegetarian Awareness), a trip to the Keystone Pipeline protests in Washington D.C. (organized by SPEAR), and Joe Bozich's lecture on sustainable business models (with Vanderbilt Students for Nonviolence).

The Sustainability Project also connected Vanderbilt to Nashville's diverse sustainability community. Events like our keynote lecture from Bill McKibben, the Green Bag Luncheon Series (with the Sustainability and Environmental Management Office), and a community forum on the Backyard Chicken Bill drew audiences from our larger community.

We focused our programming in three key ways: first, we invited a number of important speakers to share their expertise with the larger Vanderbilt community on issues related to sustainability; second, we devoted significant energy toward building the curriculum across the University on sustainability (both by coordinating courses that already existed and by creating new courses through the Cumberland Project); third, we worked with units from across the University to encourage them to incorporate sustainability into their programming for the year.

The ways in which our programming encouraged people and programs to commit to this crucial issue are hard to quantify in the short term. We are hopeful that we have planted the seeds for a long-term commitment to this issue on our campus and within our community. The most visible outcome of this year of programming was the creation of a new minor in Environmental and Sustainability Studies. This minor, directed by David Hess (Sociology), will begin in fall 2012. The course offerings coordinated by The Sustainability Project and developed within the Cumberland Project will serve as the core curriculum for this new minor. Our focus during the 2012-13 academic year will be to develop a strategic plan for this new minor and to build faculty support for it. By developing The Sustainability Project into an academic minor (and in time a major or program), we see the project as having a long-term institutional impact.

The American Studies Sustainability Project was directed by Teresa A. Goddu, Associate Professor of English and Director of the Program in American Studies, and coordinated by Derrick R. Spires, Ph.D. Candidate in the Department of English. The Sustainability Project was generously funded by the Vanderbilt College of Arts and Science Fant Fund.



KEYNOTE SPEAKER, BILL MCKIBBEN, MEETS WITH STUDENTS.

## Cumberland Project Report, 2012

Joe Bandy, Assistant Director of the Center for Teaching and Affiliated Faculty in Sociology

On May 7th and 8th of 2012, American Studies and the Center for Teaching convened the second annual Cumberland Project, a series of discussions among twelve faculty about multiple dimensions of sustainability in higher education. The primary goal of the Cumberland Project is to inform and support the development of a curriculum on sustainability at Vanderbilt so that students may achieve a critical understanding of social-environmental issues and problems. A secondary goal is to further develop a community of scholars among Vanderbilt faculty that may better pursue effective inquiry and pedagogy around these issues.

The twelve participating faculty represented nine different departments, including Earth and Environmental Sciences, English, Film Studies, History, History of Art, Human and Organizational Development, Jewish Studies, Religious Studies, Theater, as well as the Ingram Commons. In the two years of the Cumberland Project, the twenty-four participants represent sixteen different departments.

The discussions focused on four main areas: teaching sustainability, connecting to place, interdisciplinarity, and teaching as storytelling. Within these areas, the participants had group discussions facilitated by Teresa Goddu (American Studies/English) and Joe Bandy (Center for Teaching/Sociology). They also heard from various presentations by resource faculty, including Vanderbilt's Beth Conklin (Anthropology) on teaching social dimensions of sustainability, Steve Baskauf (Biological Sciences) on ecological educational opportunities on Vanderbilt's campus, Dana Nelson (English) and John Ayers (Earth & Environmental Sciences) on the promise of interdisciplinary and team teaching, and Amanda Little (English) on teaching about environmental problems through storytelling. In addition, they heard presentations from Vanderbilt student, Sommers Kline ('13), on student interest in a curriculum on environmental and sustainability studies, and from the Director of Vanderbilt's Sustainability and Environmental Management Office, Andrea George, on opportunities to incorporate campus sustainability issues into courses. The two days also included time for individual and group reflection, as well as moments of experiential learning as the participants learned from each other about elements of the Vanderbilt campus and the Dyer Observatory.

The two days resulted in many fruitful discussions about such topics as:

- ★ The need to deconstruct the discourse of sustainability.
- ★ Problems of teaching social and ecological dimensions to environmental crisis, including the management of affective and ideological student responses to challenging issues.

- ★ The many unique and complementary contributions our disciplines make to the study of sustainability, and thus the need to teach about environmental issues through interdisciplinary pedagogies and team teaching.
- ★ The high impact pedagogies of experiential and community-based learning, and their challenges.
- ★ The ways that environmental or sustainability education can be enhanced by connecting students to a sense of place, whether it be the campus, Nashville, or the other natural and social settings throughout the state or region.
- ★ Ways of engaging students and teaching effectively through environmental story telling.
- ★ The possibilities of developing learning communities across departments and classes as a method of teaching students to think critically, problem solve, and learn in interdisciplinary ways about environmental issues.
- ★ Next steps for creating a more sustainable Vanderbilt by building on existing resources and further institutionalizing critical thinking about sustainability

In their evaluation of the project, the participants often stated how much they enjoyed the opportunities that they had to meet faculty from other departments and develop a community of practice around teaching sustainability.

Indeed, the 2012 participants committed to various follow-up activities:

- ★ Developing courses with units or projects on sustainability
- ★ Embracing more interdisciplinary and experiential forms of teaching
- ★ Building community with one another through continued collaboration
- ★ Developing learning communities across disciplines and courses
- ★ Further discussing sustainability education through a Cumberland Project Working Group that will meet regularly in 2012-13
- ★ Incorporating sustainability into other areas of campus life
- ★ Helping Cumberland Project facilitators and participants develop further resources for effective sustainability education

The 2012 Cumberland Project was an inspiring two days that ended with a great promise of growth and development of sustainability education at Vanderbilt. We look forward to facilitating this development over the following year and planning an equally stimulating and reflective experience for participants in 2013.

# Report for the Dartmouth Futures of American Studies Institute

Donika Ross, *American Studies Futures Fellow, English,*

Lacey Saborido, *American Studies Futures Fellow, English,*

Jennifer Mokos, *American Studies Futures Fellow, Community Research and Action*

The Futures of American Studies Institute, a week-long event held at Dartmouth College each summer, kicked off Monday evening, and began with a series of talks that interrogated the importance of the public commons, the slippages between the human and animal, radical empathy, and the ambiguity inherent in the word “future.” Current events like the Occupy movement, the Great Recession, and the mortgage crisis jockeyed alongside figures such as Emerson, Fitzgerald, and Douglass. Participants were encouraged to turn to imagination, not policy, to navigate the realities of a post-9/11 world where personhood, the nation, and the state are all up for grabs.



The second major component of the Institute was the daily seminar. Composed of graduate students and junior faculty, and led by a distinguished faculty leader, each seminar provided participants working on related topics with the chance to share current work and receive feedback from other seminar members. The bonding and intellectual engagement that occurred among the members of each workshop was one of the most valuable parts of the week.

Participants hailed from a variety of different disciplines and represented a range of research, scholarship, and presentation styles. Staying with the same workshop group for the week allowed participants to build rapport. Moreover, the faculty leader assigned to each workshop brought expertise to each session. By allowing participants to share their work with an interested and expert audience and by exposing them to emerging work in the field, the Institute provides an energizing environment in which to develop one’s scholarly interests.

The three attending Vanderbilt students each share a bit about their own papers and presentations below:

## Donika Ross:

On Wednesday afternoon, I presented a brief sketch of my first chapter, “The Cowboy Homodestic in Lonesome Dove, City Slickers, and ‘People in Hell Just Want a Drink of Water,’” which argues that the material conditions within Westerns normalize domestic spaces that would be considered non-normative or queer by today’s standards, and positions heterodomicity as one possibility among many. The chapter focuses specifically on cowboy homodomicity as one of the most visible but least noticeable domestic configurations. In turning to Larry McMurtry’s *Lonesome Dove* (1985), *City Slickers* (Ron Underwood, 1991), and Annie Proulx’s “*People in Hell Just Want a Drink of Water*” (1999), I find that the homodomes-

tic developments of fraternity via labor and pleasure, as well as the cowboy homodestic’s contingent relationship with the heterodomic, provide a framework for theorizing the relationship between men in both Westerns and contemporary American culture. The feedback I received was invaluable and provided a roadmap for revision. Listening to their projects was also helpful, because we were all able to draw connections between our work that would have been impossible outside the Institute.

## Lacey Saborido:

During my workshop session I presented a paper titled “Mrs. P Declines: Rhetorical Evasion and the Politics of Authorship in the Narrative of Louisa Picquet.” The text I discuss is a 19th century African American slave narrative written by a woman named Louisa Picquet, who works to secure the freedom of her mother and brother after reaching the free north. Picquet’s narrative was published as an interview transcript between Picquet and a white male interviewer. The paper tracks the rhetorical strategies that Picquet uses to maintain control of her narrative, despite the strategic questioning of her amanuensis, who is obsessed with miscegenation. I then used a reading of this exchange to tease out the politics of authorship for Picquet’s narrative and narratives produced by former female slaves more broadly. The project was very new when I brought it to the institute and I told my group that I was looking for an interesting framework to talk about Picquet and her narrative. Ultimately, I left with a new archive of secondary sources to look into and a handful of interesting angles I can take to sharpen and expand my project.

## Jennifer Mokos:

During the workshop, I presented a chapter from my master’s thesis that I am currently revising to submit for publication. The paper, which is titled “Symbolic Security: Revisibilizing Inequality in the Aftermath of Large-scale Flooding,” investigates the formation of community identity following the widespread flooding that occurred in Nashville in May 2010 through a semiotic analysis of the Opryland Hotel and the “We Are Nashville” fundraising campaign. The paper integrates photography and text to show how flooding events can function as sites for the revisibilization of hydrologic processes that reveal an underlying logic of inequality that is reflective of broader social and political rationalities. The feedback and suggestions that I received on my paper were incredibly helpful and will be valuable as I continue to revise the work. I also greatly appreciated the interest in my work and the conversations that continued throughout the week (and even since leaving the Institute).

# ‘To a Certain Degree’: Northern Education Reform and Early U.S. Literature

Matthew Duques, *American Studies Dissertation Fellow, English*

Following the American Revolution, northern citizens and non-citizens proposed diverse changes to all levels of formal education so that they fit with the region’s settler culture and economy, familiarized students with the nation’s new politics and laws, and amended what they saw as inequality and cultural inferiority. The first published U.S. school books accompanied these reforms and constituted an initial effort to mold not only the region’s but the country’s identity. From the start, however, this elaborate northern reform effort was hampered by its ambitious yet vague agenda, best exemplified by Thomas Jefferson’s claim that “the people’s minds must be improved to a certain degree.” Similar mandates and their comprehensive measures exacerbated rather than resolved tensions between self-determination and control, liberty and authority, separatism and settlement in the new nation.

My dissertation examines the relationship between this volatile education history and early U.S. literature. I focus on several influential and less well-known northern reform tracts, reformers, and school books, and their influence on the literary works of four popular authors: J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, Hannah Foster, James Fenimore Cooper, and Lydia Maria Child. Based on the connections between the representative materials from this history and these literary works, I demonstrate the impact of education reform on the consolidation of power along class, race, and gender lines after Independence and the mediated responses to that consolidation in novels addressing the country’s most pressing sociopolitical issues, including American Indian dispossession, women’s rights, slavery, and democracy.

How northern education reform proposals and school materials reflect the aspirations and anxieties of a broader post-revolutionary North American culture and how they influence early U.S. literature remains understudied. Thus far, scholars have turned to late eighteenth and early nineteenth century school and college archives and school-books to understand the drive to inculcate skills in personal and communal civic and aesthetic judgment for a transatlantic republic of letters. Scholars have also used education proposals and school records alongside American novels and poems to illustrate class, race, and gender-based national consolidation.

My dissertation is indebted to this scholarship, but builds on it in three ways. First, I treat formal education as a primary rather than supporting set of influential texts and contexts. Second, rather than uncovering transatlantic intellectual history and the

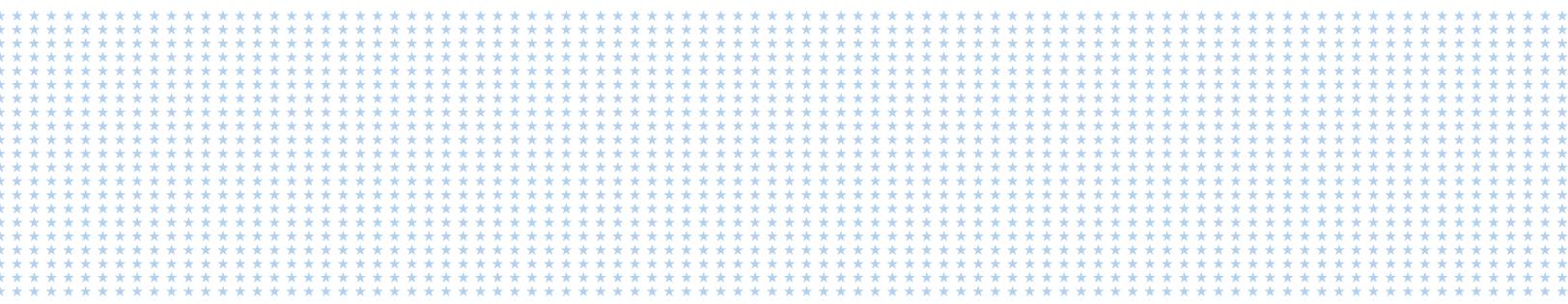
nation-framing work influenced by such history, I reconstruct the region as a geopolitical formation whose influence upon the rest of the country and the world depended on its ability to blend settler culture with national politics and to temper inequality and provincialism. Third, I view early U.S. novels as carefully crafted responses to trends in education reform designed to resolve post-revolutionary tensions. This relationship between education and literature becomes apparent with northern education as my focal point instead of the broader national aims, policies, and obstacles.

By shifting the focus of early U.S. literary and cultural studies away from founding documents and enlightenment political philosophy and toward the regional influence of formal instruction, my dissertation contests prevailing accounts of race, nation, and empire and American literature. On the one hand, this analytic lens prevents the tendency in this current scholarship to either condemn or exonerate the politics of white authors, or to presume that the ambivalence in their work can only be explained outside the nation based on their transnational affiliations. On the other hand, following anthropologists who have recently interrogated their own discipline, this lens emphasizes how the liberal arts curriculums and humanist missions of academies, schools, and colleges were implicated in the messy transitions of the post-revolutionary period.





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## New Course

### American Studies 201

Beginning in 2013, American Studies 201, "Serving and Learning," will be offered each spring semester. AMER 201 is a service-learning course for students who wish to take a hard and deep look at the meanings and motives behind community service, how to engage in meaningful service, and the challenges of integrating service with academic coursework. The course will be structured around a series of questions: What is service? Why serve? How does one serve? Does service make a difference? Does service enhance learning? Who benefits from the serving and learning? The objective of the course is to have students ask these questions, apply them to their own interests in service, and place those interests within the larger context of academic scholarship and research on community service. Marshall Eakin, Professor of History and Faculty Director of the Ingram Scholarship Program, will teach the course in conjunction with faculty from several different departments and schools.

## The 2012 Cumberland Project faculty members.



The 2012 Cumberland Project, a series of discussions among twelve faculty about multiple dimensions of sustainability in higher education.

READ MORE ABOUT THE SECOND ANNUAL CUMBERLAND PROJECT ON PAGE 5.

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