Annual Conference "Education, the Arts, and American Studies" – Feldkirch 2024

The 51st AAAS conference will take place from October 17-19, 2024, at the University College of Teacher Education Vorarlberg, Austria. It will explore "Education, the Arts, and American Studies." Teachers and scholars interested in presenting a paper are asked to submit their proposals until May 31, 2024.

The topic of education is highly relevant in view of recent developments in the United States, such as legislation on curriculum content (i.e., Critical Race Theory, Intersectionality, etc.), book bans as well as parental involvement and control in education. The Covid-19 pandemic, marked by a devastating loss of lives, has also highlighted the need for a transnational perspective on education, including human and children's rights and debates about remote learning, mask mandates, and strategies for addressing learning gaps. It has also prompted certain changes and innovations, such as the adoption of various digital tools, platforms, and teaching methods that can enhance learning experiences, collaborations among learners and researchers, and increased access to education for individuals who may face geographical, economic, or other barriers to traditional forms of education.

At its inception, American Studies was defined by the desire to establish a common understanding of American culture. However, in the 1960s, with the rise of identity politics, this objective shifted to embrace the diversity of perspectives in approaching and teaching what it means to be an American. Americanists attempt to identify and decipher connections between cultural systems and texts, ranging from cave drawings to buildings and machines, to videos and memes. We understand the Arts as a broad term that refers to the creation and expression of human imagination in analog or digital formats, including visual and performing arts, literary and musical arts, public art and community activism.

Historically, American Studies has been an interdisciplinary field, contending with diverse perspectives on education and embracing innovative approaches to its multifaceted subject matter. Most recently, advances in AI technologies, including the availability of large language models (LLMs) and AI graphic generators, have necessitated an examination of applicable opportunities, challenges, and risks. This involves addressing questions related to the productive and democratic utilization of said technologies: While chatbots can facilitate personalized learning experiences, and AI analytics may provide valuable insights, deepfakes raise concerns

about misinformation, and the ethical and social implications of manipulated content. Further-more, biased algorithms can reinforce existing inequalities and stereotypes, affecting both education and artistic representations. Core goals of an American Studies or liberal arts education, such as creativity and critical thinking are at risk to become lost cultural practices.

The conference proposes to understand American Studies as a way of thinking, a "cognitive style," as Jay Mechling has called it (2011), or a certain "habit of mind" (Adam Golub 2012). At the same time, feelings have always defined America and have been reaffirmed as a fruitful lens for cultural analysis by proponents of the "emotional turn" (Lauren Berlant 2008, 2011; Sara Ahmed 2004, 2010; and Ann Cvetkovich 2003, 2012). The question that arises from this approach is how one can teach to *think* and *feel* like an Americanist. How does a reflexive, contextual, and aesthetic engagement with the arts stimulate the ability to move outside one's usual experience of reality and to experiment with new ideas and perspectives? As scholars, our responsibility lies in addressing these questions constructively, such as in an exploration of the question of what, why, and how we are teaching. This involves exploring how we can transfer the knowledge produced in the "ivory tower" to our immediate environment and support critical thinking and artistic expression, especially during challenging times.

Possible panels and papers should ideally combine education, the arts, and American Studies. Topics include but are not limited to:

- The arts in times of crisis across multiple formats
- American Studies and the role of
  - public art
  - visual arts
  - museums and exhibitions
  - acting, the body, and the performing arts
  - literature and culture
  - music and dance
  - film and serial formats
  - memorial art
- Aesthetic approaches to teaching American Studies
- Arts projects / interdisciplinary projects in teaching American Studies
- Feminist & intersectional pedagogies and methodologies in American Studies classrooms
- Teaching community activism and social change
- Opportunities, challenges, and risks of AI technologies, such as LLMs, chatbots, and image generators in the American Studies classroom
- Historical and political perspectives on the Arts and American culture
- Historical and political perspectives on education
- The impact of several factors on (higher) education and the Arts, such as
  - technological advancements
  - the Covid-19 pandemic
  - environmental sustainability
  - demands for access and affordability
  - advocacy of philanthropic organizations and institutions (e.g. the Smithsonian, the Library of Congress, and the National Endowment of the Humanities)
  - changing demographics
  - public policy and regulations
- Representation of the Arts/the artist in American literature/history/film/popular culture
- Education as a topic in American literature/history/film/popular culture

Keynote speakers:

Nassim W. Balestrini, University of Graz

Stephen D. Hoelscher, University of Texas at Austin

Shelley Fisher Fishkin, Stanford University

Please submit your proposals for either individual presentations (250-300 words) or pre-formed panels (approx. 600 words) along with a brief bio note for each presenter (up to 150 words) to Ingrid Gessner and Angelika Ilg (aaas2024@ph-vorarlberg.ac.at) by **May 31, 2024**. Each pre-formed panel should consist of 3-4 presentations and ensure a well-balanced diversity of presenters. For more, click here.

Articles based on selected conference papers will be published as a conference-themed special issue in *JAAAS: Journal of the Austrian Association for American Studies* (*https://jaaas.eu/jaaas*).