

August 11, 2020

Dear Parents and Students,

Welcome to Plano Senior High School, and welcome to American Studies! AMSTUD is a unique course even in a normal year, but with the extraordinary circumstances of this year, we'd like to share with you some basic information so that you have a clear idea of what to expect.

First and foremost Mr. Cone and Mrs. Thomas will be your teachers in the virtual classroom AND the face-to-face classroom all year. All AMSTUD students are co-seated in the sections, which means that those who have chosen PISD@home will be receiving the same instruction, assignments, and assessments as those who choose to return to school face to face. We will strive to create the same experience for both virtual and face to face students.

Regardless of the changes in instructional environment, our goals for the course remain the same, which are:

- **Provide well-rounded content.** This is a rigorous, fast-paced course that is devoted to developing a deeper understanding of American history and culture. The ability to discuss American literature, music, and art within the context of American history is at the true heart of the AMSTUD program. Students will have to confront controversial issues head on and deal with them in a thoughtful manner that considers multiple points of view. Students will have to go beyond the basics in order to gain a full understanding of the forces that have shaped this nation, its history, and its people. Addressing the questions of what America is, what it means to be an American, and where America is going will be a driving force in our curriculum. We also want to develop students' ability to express themselves in an effective, meaningful way. In this way, the class is not just a study of American culture – it is a way for students to examine where they fit into the American mosaic and how they can shape it.
- **Develop skills that will serve our students well in college.** This is a college-level course, and it will require college-level work. Part of the purpose of this class is to help students develop study skills, note-taking skills, writing skills, speaking skills, reading skills, analytical skills, digital skills and a work ethic that will serve them well in college and beyond.
- **Prepare our students for both AP exams.** We deliberately save this goal for last. The bottom line for many parents and students is that this class sets students up for the ability to take two different AP exams and gain college credit for each. We sincerely believe that, if we achieve our first two goals, this one will take care of itself. We do not *teach* to a test; we *test* to the test. We have designed our assessments in class to prepare our students for the format of the exam.

Student Expectations:

Students will participate in learning activities everyday, even on days when synchronous learning is not scheduled. Students will have homework assignments, including, but not limited to, reading from the AP US History textbook, *Give Me Liberty*, which is available as a digital app on Webdesk, as well as selected nonfiction and fiction passages that will be provided in PDF format.

On synchronous days, students will be expected to join the Zoom call on time, have their cameras on, and be ready to participate. As this is a double-blocked class, not all days will require students to be live on camera for the entire two hour period.

For our 1st/2nd period block and our 3rd/4th period block, synchronous learning is required on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and for our 6th/7th period block, synchronous learning is required on Wednesdays and Fridays.

Additionally, our 1st/2nd period will log on and connect with us at 10:00 every Monday, as part of our PSHS 2nd period weekly check in. This is a district requirement.

AMSTUD Schedule 8/17-9/4

Period	Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
1st	9:00 - 9:50	Async Time	1/2 Class	Async Time	1/2 Class	Async Time
2nd	9:56 - 10:50	1/2 Check-in 10-10:30				
3rd	10:56 - 11:46	Student Async Time/ Teacher Meeting Time	3/4 Class	Student Async Time/ Tutorials Available/ Office Hours 11-12	3/4 Class	Async Time
4th	12:52 - 12:42					
Lunch	12:42 - 1:33		Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
5th	1:33 - 2:23	Tutorials Available/ Office Hours 1:30-3:30	Conference	Conference	Conference	Conference
6th/7th	2:29 - 3:19		Async Time	6/7 Class	Async Time	6/7 Class
7th	3:25 - 4:15	Async Time				

Grading:

Daily grades are 40% and major grades are 60% in each quarter. There will be no semester exams this year, so each 9 weeks counts as 50% of the semester grade.

There is only one grade for AMSTUD, but because of the fact that students' transcripts must show U.S. history and English, all grades are kept in the AP U.S. History gradebook until the end of the grading period, at which point, the average is transferred to the AP English gradebook.

Daily completion of work is expected, and late work is not accepted in most cases. Make up work is allowable with excused absences only. We understand that extenuating circumstances sometimes arise. Students are strongly encouraged to be advocates for themselves and maintain open lines of communication with their teachers. This is a skill that will serve them well in college and the workplace.

Communication:

Students will have immediate, synchronous access to teachers during tutorial times and office hours, via Zoom and e-mail. Students - when contacting teachers, be sure you are using only your school issued e-mail account. E-mail is faster than communicating through Google Classroom comments. Teachers will respond to all student and parent e-mail within 24 hours.

Tutorials/office hours:

Mondays 1:30-3:30 PM

Wednesdays 11:00-12:00 PM

Course Materials and Content:

At the beginning of each unit, we will provide a Unit Calendar with all required reading assignments and assessments. Each Monday, we will provide a Week-At-A-Glance document to guide students. All activities will be posted on Google Classroom

What parents can do:

Though this is a college-level class, we acknowledge that we are still dealing with high school students, and the experience of at home learning and blended learning is challenging in many different ways. We are both parents, too! To that end, we want to work with parents to make sure that students are successful. Parents can help their children in a number of ways:

- **Understand that the course is rigorous.** This class may be harder than classes that students have taken up to this point in their academic careers. It is not uncommon for grades to be lower than they have seen before. We don't think students should settle for lower grades, but parents should know that there is a considerable step up in skills and effort from what may have made them successful in the past. By definition, a college-level class that is geared toward (though not limited to) gifted and talented students is going to be asking students to perform at least two grade levels above where they are now as high school juniors. In addition, it is important to remember that this single class counts as **two** AP class credits. While the workload for this class may seem daunting, it is worth noting that the average student will spend almost 30% of his/her class day with us.
- **Follow your child's progress.** There are a number of ways parents can do this. One of them is to follow the calendars that are posted in our Google Classroom and be sure your e-mail is updated in the PSHS system so that you can receive Guardian Summaries in Google Classroom. Another is to use the district's Parentviewer program that allows parents to keep track of their child's grades. Please remember that the English gradebook will be blank until the end of the grading period. The AMSTUD grades are kept in the U.S. History gradebook.
- **Talk with your child about the world.** This class discusses a lot of big issues, and students will be forced occasionally to function outside of their comfort zone. This is especially true when historical issues crop up as current events. The most important influence on who they are and how they view the world comes from you. We encourage you to discuss some of these big issues at home.
- **Help your child with their long-term vision.** We encourage parents to help their children start planning for their future. To that end we encourage parents to visit the College Board's website (www.collegeboard.org), where they can access information on the AP program, the SAT, and financial planning information. In addition, students and parents can access information on colleges and universities, including their policies for AP credit.
- **Feel free to talk to us.** Over the course of the year, if you have questions or would like to discuss your child's performance in class, feel free to contact us via e-mail.

We sincerely hope that this will be a successful year for all of our students. While we are all challenged by these extraordinary circumstances, the growth that comes from these challenges can be rewarding in unexpected ways. Thank you for all that you do to help ensure your child's success.

Sincerely,

The PSHS American Studies Team

Sheela Thomas, sheela.thomas@pisd.edu

Matt Cone, matt.cone@pisd.edu