THTR 1001.01 Choreography as Social Identity in the American Musical  
Christin Essin, Assistant Professor of Theatre, College of Arts and Science

W 4:10-5:40pm (one 50-min. session: 1/11; eight weekly 90-min. sessions: 1/18-3/22)

Course Description
As popular entertainment, the American musical has provided a stage to enact a variety of characters that embrace and confront dominant perceptions of social identity and the shifting demographics of U.S. culture. Since the emergence of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein’s integrated musicals during the mid-twentieth century, choreography has contributed significantly to the development of iconic characters who both reinforced and shaped contemporary understandings of gender, race, ethnicity, and class. Jack Cole’s jazz movements in Gentlemen Prefer Blondes accentuated Marilyn Monroe’s feminine sexuality; Jerome Robbins’s salsa-inspired rhythms in West Side Story drew boundaries between Anita’s Puerto-Rican allegiance and Maria’s assimilationist desire; Savion Glover’s staccato tap/rap numbers in Bring in ‘Da Noise, Bring in ‘Da Funk punctuated the characters’ different narratives of the black experience in U.S. history.

This class will examine musical choreography, both in film and live performance, as artistically embodied expressions of American social identity. The primary texts for the course will be films and video clips (accessible from the OAK site), augmented by essays that introduce students to the language of dance and theories of social identity. Representative choreographers and musicals include:

- Agnes de Mille (Oklahoma!; Carousel)
- Katherine Dunham (Casbah; Stormy Weather)
- Jerome Robbins (On the Town; The King and I; West Side Story)
- Bob Fosse (Sweet Charity; The Pajama Game)
- Michael Bennett (A Chorus Line; Dream Girls)
- Savion Glover (Bring in ‘Da Noise, Bring in ‘Da Funk; Shuffle Along)
- Bill T. Jones (Spring Awakening; Fela!)
- Andy Blankenbuehler (In the Heights; Hamilton)

Evaluation
Students will be evaluated based on class participation (30%), four short (one page) movement analyses (40%), and a small group discussion facilitation (30%).