George Mason University         Women and Gender Studies Program

WMST 402: QUEER THEORY

Spring 2014
Wednesdays, 4:30—7:10pm
Class Location: Robinson A246

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

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Office Hours: Mondays, 4:30-6:30pm or by appointment

Course Description
This course will offer an introduction to some of the historical and contemporary theoretical debates that have helped to shape the interdisciplinary field of queer studies. During the course of the semester, we will pay particularly close attention to the ways in which queer theories intersect with other interdisciplinary areas of thought, including feminist and lesbian theory, psychoanalysis and poststructuralist theory, disability theory, Marxist and postcolonial theory, critical race theory, and theories of transnationalism and globalization. In doing so, our primary goal will be to use queer theories both as a basis for understanding social inequalities, and as a way of developing forms of resistance to those inequalities. Other course goals include the following:

(1) To get a sense of the potential scope of queer studies and become familiar with its language, theories, and methods of critical engagement
(2) To consider what kinds of connections exist (or should exist) between queer theory and queer activism
(3) To gain a better understanding of the ways in which sexuality intersects with gender, race, class, ability, nation, ethnicity, religion, and political economy
(4) To address new forms of social inequality emerging within the context of globalization

Required Texts

• Additional readings will be available through Blackboard.
The required text is available for purchase through the campus bookstore. Alternatively, you may purchase the course text through any other bookstore or online retailer.

**Course Requirements**

- Class attendance and participation: 25% (includes reading responses and study questions)
- One in-class group presentation on the assigned readings: 15%
- Two 4-5 page papers based on the assigned readings: 15% each (30% total)
- A final research paper (10-12 pages) on any issue relating to queer theory, due on May 7th at 12 noon in 240K Johnson Center: 30%

**NOTE:** Assignments are due at the beginning of class on the assigned date. Any papers submitted after the due date will be subject to a late penalty.

Incompletes will not be awarded, except in cases of severe illness.

**Attendance and Participation**

*Attendance:* your daily presence is critical to the success of the class. I take attendance daily, using a sign-in sheet (if you are late for class, make sure that you sign the sheet after class). An excused absence requires proper documentation (i.e. a doctor’s note or written proof of participation in a University or work-related event). If you are more than 20 minutes late for class, your lateness will be considered ½ an absence. You are responsible for making up missed work and obtaining any materials that are handed out during the missed class. Be aware that repeated unexcused absences will impact your participation grade.

*Participation:* participation means coming to class ready and prepared to make an active contribution to our discussions. In-class participation consists of all in-class work (i.e. participation, class discussions, informal presentations, group work, writing, and quizzes). Please print off a copy of all the assigned readings for each day and bring them with you to class. It is absolutely **vital** for your participation in this course that you bring hard copies of the readings with you to class each day; repeated failure to bring the appropriate materials with you to class will affect your participation grade.

**Presentation**

You will do the in-class presentation in groups of two or three on a topic to be assigned early in the semester. Each presentation should be 15-20 minutes in length. The project will require strong collaboration on the parts of all group members in order to achieve a good grade. In addition to participating in the in-class presentation, each member of the group should submit a one-page description of their contribution to the project.
Papers
You will write two 4-5 page papers—both of which will respond to an essay prompt and/or series of questions related to the assigned readings—and one final research-based paper. Essay prompts for the papers will be distributed two weeks before the due date for each of the papers. These prompts will include more detailed instructions and grading criteria. Additional research is not required for either of these papers, although it could prove useful for your argument. The final paper must utilize at least two of the course readings and five outside sources, using MLA citation style. An assignment sheet for the final paper will be distributed later in the semester.

The Writing Center on campus can also help you with your written assignments. For more information see: http://writingcenter.gmu.edu

Late or Missing Work
Assignments are due as indicated above and/or as announced in class. You must complete all the assignments listed above to pass this class. Late assignments will be penalized by 20% for each day that they are late.

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity
All the work you submit in this course must have been written for this course and must originate with you in form and in content and with all sources fully and specifically acknowledged. In this course, the normal penalty for a violation of the code is an “F” for the term. Violations may also subject you to disciplinary action including the following: receiving a failing grade on an assignment; receiving a notation of a violation of academic integrity on your transcript; or being suspended from the University. You have the right to appeal any charges. For further information about the University’s policy regarding academic integrity see: http://mason.gmu.edu/~montecin/plagiarism.htm

Collaborative work of the following kinds is authorized in this course: peer review and critique of students’ essays by one another and, when approved by the instructor in particular cases, collaborative projects by pairs of students.

University Policies
I respect and uphold University policies and regulations pertaining to the observation of religious holidays; assistance available to the physically handicapped, visually and/or hearing impaired student; plagiarism; sexual harassment; and racial or ethnic discrimination. All students are advised to become familiar with the respective University regulations and are encouraged to bring any questions or concerns to my attention.

Students With Disabilities
Disabilities will be accommodated in conjunction with the Office of Disability Resources. If you think you have a qualified disability and need special accommodations, you should notify me and request verification of eligibility for accommodations from the Office of Disability Resources as soon as possible. You will need to contact the office at 703-993-2472.
**Instructor-Student Interaction**

Please take advantage of my office hours or schedule alternative times to see me if those hours don’t work for you, especially when you are writing papers. I am happy to speak with students about any aspect of the course. You may also e-mail me with any questions and comments about the course. Don’t, however, use e-mail as a substitute for coming to office hours. If you have substantive questions or comments, please come and see me.

**Women and Gender Studies Commitment to Diversity Statement**

The Women and Gender Studies program seeks to create a learning environment that fosters respect for people across identities. We welcome and value individuals and their differences, including gender expression and identity, race, economic status, sex, sexuality, ethnicity, national origin, first language, religion, age and ability. We encourage all members of the learning environment to engage with the material personally, but to also be open to exploring and learning from experiences different than their own.

**Women and Gender Studies at George Mason**

The Women and Gender Studies Program offers an interdisciplinary minor to undergraduate students. This is a 21-credit minor that works well with most majors and can be structured to fit your interests. Feminist scholarship has influenced many disciplines and the minor provides students with the tools necessary to engage with issues of gender, race, sexuality and class in various texts and contexts.

The Women and Gender Studies Center is located in the Johnson Center, Room 240K. The Women and Gender Studies Center organizes a variety of lectures, workshops, and activities relevant to campus life throughout the academic year. They also have a collection of over 1000 books relevant to Gender Studies, which students may check out with their George Mason ID card.

You can learn about the Women and Gender Studies Minor and the Women’s Center at: [http://www.gmu.edu/acadexcel/findex.html](http://www.gmu.edu/acadexcel/findex.html)

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**Syllabus—Subject to Change**

**Week 1: Introduction**

W Jan. 22nd  Introductions, course overview

In-class screening: *Dangerous Living: Coming Out in the Developing World* (John Scagliotti, 2003)

**Week 2: Thinking Sexuality Transnationally**

W Jan. 29th  Elizabeth Povinelli and George Chauncey (1999), “Thinking Sexuality Transnationally” *(Blackboard)*


Katie King (2002), “There Are No Lesbians Here: Feminisms, Lesbianisms, and Global Gay Formations” (Blackboard)

In-class discussion: Dangerous Living: Coming Out in the Developing World (John Scagliotti, 2003)

UNIT I: U.S. CONTEXTS AND HISTORIES

Week 3: The Social Construction of Sexuality

W Feb. 5th
Michel Foucault, History of Sexuality. Volume I (selections) (Blackboard)

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990), The Epistemology of the Closet (selections from the introduction) (Blackboard)


Week 4: Poststructuralist Feminism and Queer Theory

W Feb. 12th
Judith Butler (1990), “Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire” (Blackboard)

Judith Butler (1991), “Imitation and Gender Insubordination” (Blackboard)

Biddy Martin (1994), “Sexualities without Genders and Other Queer Utopias” (Blackboard)

Week 5: Queer Theory, Performativity, and Popular Culture

W Feb. 19th
Judith Butler (1993), “Gender is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion” (Blackboard)

Jay Prosser (1998), “Judith Butler: Queer Feminism, Transgender and the Transsubstantiation of Sex” (Blackboard)

In-class discussion: *Paris is Burning* (Jennie Livingston, 1991)

**Week 6: Transgender and Intersex Theory**


In class discussion: *Orange is the New Black* (Jenji Kohan, 2013)

In class viewing: *Hermaphrodites Speak* (Cheryl Chase, 1995)

**PAPER ONE DUE**

**Week 7: Disability, Intimacy and Asexuality**


In class discussion: *(A)Sexual* (Angela Tucker, 2011)

***Wednesday, March 5<sup>th</sup>: Laverne Cox, “Aint I a Woman: My Journey to Womanhood” (HUB Ballroom, 8-10pm) [Laverne Cox, trans actress of color in the critically acclaimed show *Orange is the New Black]*

**SPRING BREAK: Monday, March 10th to Sunday, March 16th**

**UNIT II: QUEER THEORY IN A TRANSNATIONAL FRAME**

**Week 8: Sexuality and Human Rights**


Alice Miller (2005), “Gay Enough: Some Tensions in Seeking the Grant of Asylum and Protecting Global Sexual Diversity” (Blackboard)


In class discussion: Getting Out (Refugee Law Project, Makerere University, 2011)

**Week 9: Queer Migration and Border-Crossing**

W Mar. 26th

Eithne Luibhéid (2008), “Queer/Migration: An Unruly Body of Scholarship” (Blackboard)

Carlos Decena (2008), “Tacit Subjects” (Blackboard)

Katie Acosta (2008), “Lesbianas in the Borderlands: Shifting Identities and Imagined Communities” (Blackboard)


**Week 10: Queering Development**

W Apr. 2nd

Susie Jolly (2010), “Why the Development Industry Should Get Over Its Obsession with Bad Sex and Start to Think About Pleasure” (Blackboard)


Ara Wilson (2010), “NGOs as Erotic Sites” (Blackboard)


**PAPER TWO DUE**

**Week 11: Transnational Queer of Color Critique**

W Apr. 9th

Jasbir K. Puar (2007), “Homonationalism and Biopolitics” and “The Sexuality of Terrorism” (Blackboard)
Gayatri Gopinath (2007), “Queer Regions: Locating Lesbians in Ligy Pullapally’s Sanbarram” (Blackboard)

In class discussion: Sanbarram (Ligy Pullappally, 2004)

**Week 12: Black/Queer/Diaspora**

W Apr. 16th Xavier Livermon (2012), “Queer(y)ing Freedom: Black Queer Visibilities in Postapartheid South Africa” (Blackboard)

Amanda Lock Swarr (2012), “Paradoxes of Butchness: Lesbian Masculinities and Sexual Violence in Contemporary South Africa” (Blackboard)

Amanda Lock Swarr (2012), “Stabane, Raced Intersexuality and Same-Sex Relationships in Soweto” (Blackboard)

In class discussion: Breaking Out of the Box (Busi Kheswa and Zethu Matebeni, 2011)

**CONCLUSION: FINAL PRESENTATIONS**

W Apr. 24th Final Presentations

W Apr. 30th Final Presentations

W May 7th Paper due by 12:00 noon in the Women and Gender Studies Center (240K Johnson Center).