

Gender Studies 380A: Queer Theory
Professor Melissa M. Wilcox
TTh 2:30-3:50, Olin 341
Whitman College
Fall 2008

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Office hours: M 2:00-3:30, Th 10:30-12:00 (If you can't make these times, see me for an appointment)
Coffee hour: M 3:30-4:30

Course description: Queer theory developed in the early 1990s out of the conjunction of feminist theory, sexuality studies, and queer activism. This course introduces students to some of the key authors and texts in queer theory, as well as applications of queer theory in a variety of academic fields and critiques of queer theory as androcentric, Eurocentric, overly intellectual, and impractical. It is recommended that students who take this class have previous exposure to theoretical writing in either the humanities or the social sciences. This course fulfills the Alternative Voices requirement.

Required texts:

- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*. New York: Vintage Books, 1990.
- Warner, Michael. *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999.
- Muñoz, José Esteban. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.
- Halberstam, Judith. *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. New York: New York University Press, 2005.
- McRuer, Robert. *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*. New York: New York University Press, 2006.

All books will be on reserve in Penrose, and you're also welcome to share books with a classmate in order to keep your expenses down.

Course requirements:

Final grades in this course will be calculated as follows:

Reflection papers (2 @ 15%).....	30%
Application papers (2 @ 15%).....	30%
Final paper.....	20%
Final paper presentation.....	5%
Preparation and participation.....	15%

Remember to keep all papers I return to you in case there are any discrepancies at the end of the semester. If you keep your papers, you can also track your own grade!

Reflection papers: For two of the books we cover this semester (you choose which two), you will need to write a 4- to 5-page reflection paper. In this paper, reflect on and critique (i.e., thoughtfully evaluate) the book, in whole or in part. You may address the overall argument, a chapter, or even a single passage of the book in your paper. Please indicate at the top of the paper that you're writing a reflection paper.

Application papers: For two of the books we cover this semester (you choose which two, but they must not be books you've addressed in your reflection papers), you will need to write a 4- to 5-page application paper. In this paper, apply the ideas from the book to an analysis of something else: a literary work, film, political agenda or strategy, legal case, performance, art work, organization, or anything else you can think of. As with the reflection papers, you don't have to try to cover the whole book: you can focus on the overall argument or one specific aspect. Please indicate at the top of the paper that you're writing an application paper.

Final paper: Your final assignment for this class is a 10- to 12-page queer analysis of *something*. You may draw on any of the books we've read in class for theoretical inspiration; you may also use other queer theorists or other books and articles by the authors we've read. But the core of your paper should be the queer reading of anything you can think of to look at from a queer perspective. You may want to make this paper an expansion of one of your application papers, or you may want to focus on something else entirely. Come see me in office hours if you need ideas to get you started. Final projects are due in class during our final exam session (Thursday, December 18, 9:00 a.m.).

Final presentation: During our final exam session, you will need to give a 10-minute presentation on your final paper. Be sure to explain what exactly you're doing a queer reading of; if appropriate, you may want to bring in presentation aids such as film clips, political brochures, literary texts, and the like. If you will need A/V equipment for your presentation, you need to notify me by Tuesday, December 9 so that I can reserve it. Note that our session will likely run long in order to fit everyone in; please plan on this final session lasting until noon.

Preparation and participation: Since this course relies heavily on discussion, it is extremely important that you be in class, on time and prepared, each day. Please come prepared to discuss the reading assignments in the study circle role that you have chosen each day. You are expected to bring the day's reading materials, or detailed notes on the reading, to class each day. **Students who miss more than four class sessions without informing me in advance will lose at least 50% of this portion of their grade.**

Course policies:

Students with disabilities: If you have a disability and need my help in making this course fully accessible to you, please feel free to contact me, either in person or through the Academic Resources Center (527-5213). I'll be happy to help in whatever way I can. If you suspect you have a learning difference but have not had your suspicions confirmed, the Academic Resource Center can help you to identify that difference and figure out how to adjust your learning style accordingly. *The only thing wrong with a learning difference is an inflexible education system.*

Inclusive language: Inclusive language is the use of accurate and unbiased gender terminology, and it is required in every assignment you complete for this course. There isn't room in this syllabus to go into the evidence for the importance of inclusive language, but the simple explanation is that language shapes how people think. When religious studies was considered to be the study of the beliefs of *man*, for instance, people (usually male scholars) tended to study male writers, male believers, male religious leaders, and so on simply because it didn't occur to them to study women as well. As a result, they had a less accurate understanding of religion than we have today. "Humanity" and "humans" are gender-inclusive terms; "man" and "men" are not.

Non-inclusive language also can be misleading, inaccurate, or vague. Traditional formal English, for example, requires that you use the singular pronoun "he" as a generic pronoun. Thus, you might write: "when a new member is initiated into the secret society, he must undergo several hours of ordeals." People who read that sentence are left wondering whether "he" includes women or whether this secret society is for men only. The solution? When you use singular generic terms (like "one," "anyone," "a person," etc.), use the combined pronoun "she or he." Or, for a less awkward sentence, simply use a plural noun ("people," "initiates," "members," etc.), because English has a non-gendered plural pronoun ("they").

Don't forget that inclusive language can also include sexuality – by the end of the first month of classes you'll know the term "heteronormativity" and how to avoid it in your writing.

I am always happy to help you find more inclusive language for what you want to say – see me in office hours if you'd like assistance with this.

Late fees: For the essays, five percentage points will be deducted for each day the assignment is late (yes, this includes weekends and holidays). There will be no make-ups for the group project or the final exam unless you make arrangements with me in advance.

Academic dishonesty: Honesty is an integral part of academic learning; any form of cheating expresses gross disrespect for the efforts of your teachers, the hard work of your classmates, and your own privilege in having access to a quality education. I will not hesitate to report and pursue incidents of suspected academic dishonesty, including cheating on tests, copying others' assignments, and plagiarism. **The maximum penalty for academic dishonesty is permanent expulsion from Whitman.**

<p>This class is an educational safe zone. It welcomes and respects the viewpoints of students of all sexual orientations and genders as well as all races, ethnicities, religions, and abilities. All members of this learning community are expected to treat each other with respect and dignity, and to listen especially carefully to the voices of culturally and socially disempowered groups.</p>
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Course Schedule

→ Watch for the arrows! They tell you when an assignment is due.

Part 1: Beginnings and Forerunners

Tuesday, 9/2: Introducing queer theory

Read: De Lauretis

Thursday, 9/4: Camp

Read: Sontag (handout)

Film: *Paris is Burning* (dir. Jennie Livingston, 1990, 77 min.)

Tuesday, 9/9: Drag cultures

Read: Newton (handout)

Thursday, 9/11: The repressive hypothesis

Read: Syllabus; Foucault Parts 1 and 2

Tuesday, 9/16: The social construction of sex

Read: Foucault pp. 53-91

Thursday, 9/18: Sex and power

Read: Foucault pp. 92-131

Tuesday, 9/23: Bio-power

Read: Foucault Part 5

Part 2: The Politics and Ethics of Normalization

Thursday, 9/25: Gay and normal

Read: Warner pp. vii-61

Tuesday, 9/30: Normalcy and marriage

Read: Warner pp. 61-116

→ **Foucault paper due**

Thursday, 10/2: Normalization and sex

Read: Warner pp. 117-171

Tuesday, 10/7: Normalization and HIV

Read: Warner pp. 171-218

Part 3: Queers of Color: Politics and Performance

Thursday, 10/9: Race and Melancholy

Read: Muñoz Preface, Introduction, Ch. 1

Film: *Looking for Langston* (dir. Isaac Julien, 1992, 45 min.)

Tuesday, 10/14: Fall Break! No class.

Thursday, 10/16: Mourning and re-visioning

Read: Muñoz Chs. 2 and 3

→ **Warner paper due**

Tuesday, 10/21: Gender and resistance

Read: Muñoz Chs. 4 and 5

Film: *The Transformation* (dir. Susana Aiken and Carlos Aparicio, 1995, 52 min.)

Thursday, 10/23: Performance and resistance

Read: Muñoz Chs. 6 and 7

Tuesday, 10/28: Making new worlds
Read: Muñoz Ch. 8

Part 4: Genderqueer Performances

Thursday, 10/30: Queer times and spaces
Read: Halberstam Chs. 1 and 2

Tuesday, 11/4: **No class – I will be out of town attending a conference.**

Work on your final project or reflection/application papers

→ Wednesday 11/5: Movie night? *The Crying Game* or *The Brandon Teena Story*

Thursday, 11/6: Storytelling: Transgender histories and films
Read: Halberstam Chs. 3 and 4

→ **Muñoz paper due**

Tuesday, 11/11: Transgender bodies in art and popular culture
Read: Halberstam Chs. 5 and 6

The Drag King Book

Thursday, 11/13: Queer subcultures
Read: Halberstam Ch. 7

Part 5: Crip Theory

Tuesday, 11/18: Doubly invisible
Read: McRuer Introduction

Thursday, 11/20: Reclaiming the word
Read: McRuer Ch. 1

→ **Halberstam paper due**

THANKSGIVING BREAK – November 22-30

Tuesday, 12/2: Disability, capitalism, and rehabilitation
Read: McRuer Ch. 2, Ch. 3 through p. 126

Thursday, 12/4: Noncompliance and composition
Read: McRuer Ch. 3 (finish), Ch. 4

Tuesday, 12/9: Imaging queer disability
Read: McRuer Ch. 5, Epilogue

→ **Last day to inform me of any A/V needs for your final paper presentation!**

Thursday, 12/11: Queer theory/crip theory readings of *Austin Powers*

No reading. If you need a study break, take a look at Austin Powers clips on YouTube or your favorite DVD. Bring relevant books with you!

→ **McRuer paper due**

Thursday, December 18, 9:00-12:00: Final paper presentations – Final projects due