STPEC 101
Social Thought and Political Economy
Fall 2014 Syllabus*

Professor: Jen Sandler, Ph.D.
Email: jsandler@anthro.umass.edu
Office: Machmer 209
Office Hours: Tuesday 1-3pm, and by appointment

Course Overview and Structure

Welcome to STPEC 101! This course will familiarize new students with the program and its intellectual vision. STPEC is a rigorous, democratically run, interdisciplinary academic program. STPEC is also a community of students, staff, instructors, alumni, and friends that will help you navigate your time at UMass. It is also my hope that we become a strong and effective critical learning community over the course of the semester. The course is designed to enable that to happen.

The content of this course is organized around concepts students will encounter in subsequent STPEC courses, as well as in the STPEC community and the greater world. It will provide an introduction to social theory, political economy, critical understanding of race, gender, sexuality, power, global inequalities, and the post-colonial world. Students will have the opportunity to learn how to read and use theory versus how to read and use history; how to recognize, frame and make an argument; communicate for effective dialogue; and how to begin to identify what you believe about social justice and why.

STPEC 101, like STPEC’s other core classes, is seminar-style, emphasising discussion and reflection. We will engage in many activities and group discussions each class. Lectures will happen, but they will be brief and intertwined with your active engagement with the material being presented. Your participation is expected and of great value to both your own and others’ learning. Because the class is two and a half hours long and in the late afternoon/early evening, feel free to bring food and drinks. We will also have a short break mid-class.

STPEC is not an average undergraduate program, and this is not an average introductory class. The material is challenging and may be difficult to understand. The goal of this class is to provide structure and space for students to work through these challenges to begin to experience how theory, history, narrative, and analysis can be used as tools to develop a critical understanding of the world and ourselves, social problems and social change.
Accessibility

STPEC is committed to providing successful learning opportunities for every student. If you have a documented physical, psychological or learning disability on file with one of the university disability service offices, you may be eligible for academic accommodations to help you succeed at UMass. Please talk to me immediately -- in the first two weeks of class -- so that we can make appropriate arrangements to support your learning and success.

We also understand that there can be barriers to receiving documentation, or that psychological or learning disabilities may present themselves in the course of adapting to the college environment and heightened academic expectations. Students are urged to be proactive and meet with me if they feel they are experiencing such barriers to their success in this course.

Use and Citing of Sources

When you cite a source of a concept or quote, you must cite it in one of the academically acceptable formats. This includes references to websites. Just the name of the author and the book or article is not sufficient, nor is mentioning that the text is online. It does not matter to me which format you use (APA, MLA, Chicago). If you do not know how to cite academically, you might consult the online guide by the American Anthropological Association, http://www.aaanet.org/pubs/style_guide.htm.

Wikipedia can and should be used as a general reference. It is a great way to get acquainted with different authors and ideas, but it does not work as academic citation. You can use the site, but then you must check on the references and quote from the references read, not from the information supplied by Wikipedia. Consulting wikipedia is like asking several people who believe they know about something to tell you what they know; it’s second-hand information, and hence should only be a starting point for your learning about a topic.

Academic Honesty

Academic honesty is ultimately about respect: respect for the intellectual work of others, respect for the process of intellectual exchange, respect for this class, and respect for your own self. As Aretha Franklin demands: “respect yourself!”

DO NOT PLAGIARIZE. This basically means no copy and pasting and no direct paraphrasing without attribution of the quote/idea to the author. Any form of academic dishonesty (including but not limited to plagiarism from another student's writing) will result in an automatic failure in this course, following UMass policies. In addition, Umass requests that instructors turn students to the University Academic Honesty Board for further academic discipline, a process that does not sound like fun for anybody involved.
Grading

I dislike the idea and process of grading for many reasons, and I am certain that paying much attention to grades gets in the way of students’ development of mature critical thinking skills and habits. My advice is to hew closely to the spirit of the assignments, and to take seriously the process as well as products involved with this class.

Because I realize that life is challenging and some weeks it can be tough to get everything done, I have provided two ways for students to engage in meaningful make-up and extra-credit activities. These are included with the assignment descriptions. These are your sole opportunities to make up for a missed assignment.

Here is the obligatory grading formula for this class:

25% (deduction from A for each instance of slacking)
   Participation, including attendance, in-class participation, and Moodle Forum participation (see assignment description)

10% (ok/not for each entry)
   Weekly Journal (see assignment description) turned in with unit paper

25% (A-F scale)
   Units 2 and 3 Papers (12.5% each) - 3-5 pages each, prompts provided

25% (A-F scale)
   Final Project (group poster project; description provided)

15% (A-F scale)
   Final Exam (take-home essay questions)

Assignments

Assignments in this class are designed to give you a range of ways to engage with the material.

Moodle Forums: Moodle forums are where we will grapple with the readings together before class. Every week, you will spend a bit of time on Moodle posting either two thoughtful questions or one response. You’ll alternate: each student in group 1 will post questions and each student in group 2 will post response paragraphs the first week, the next week you’ll switch, and so on.

Questions on a Moodle Forum might include statements to start out, to help people understand the thinking behind the question.
You may ask questions of clarification (e.g. what does the author mean when he talks about institutions?), analysis (e.g. It seems like things have gotten better for queer people under neoliberalism. Does neoliberalism necessarily make everything worse for everyone, or just some things worse for some people?), comparison (what’s the difference between Butler’s and hooks’ ideas about feminism?), or context (e.g. what was the Black Panther Party, which the author talks a lot about?). Your questions should always be specific, never vague, and at least one of your two questions should point to a specific passage in the text.

Clarification or context questions can be personal or ask for examples, but should not be about beliefs or opinions. That is, you may ask questions such as “what’s an example of how neoliberalism plays out if you’re a poor person who can’t buy anything?” or even “I’d love to ask anyone to share a specific personal or observed experience of institutional racism if they feel comfortable, so that I can understand what that looks like.” These are questions that may help people understand concepts from the readings. But you should not ask moodle questions resembling “do you agree with the author when she says that the patriarchy is still relevant? Do you consider yourself a feminist?” We will talk plenty about what we each think during class; the point of the questions and responses before class is to help everyone understand the material a little better when they arrive.

**Post questions by 4:00 on Monday!** All questions posted later than 4pm will not be counted as submitted.

**Responses** on Moodle Forums should be approximately 1-2 paragraphs. It is fine to choose the same question as someone else. You may either respond to the response paragraph or just offer your own alternative response.

Don’t simply look for the easiest question to respond to! Please prioritize clarification and analysis questions, particularly if you feel you understood the reading well. Answering these will help other students the most.

**Response paragraphs must be posted by 12pm (noon) on Tuesday!** Responses posted later will not count.

Please follow the moodle threads in which you are a participant!

**Moodle Forum make-ups:** If you miss a week of question or response, you may make it up by responding to a response (creating a dialogue). You may use this make-up response a maximum of two times over the course of the semester.

**Journals:** The journal is a way for you to demonstrate rigorous engagement with the material in a less academic-feeling format. Each one should be an approximately 1-2 page entry, completed shortly after each class and using the prompt provided. The journals are a mechanism for working through some of your personal politics that will come up in this class if all goes as
intended. The prompts are intended to help you work through your personal relationship to, reaction to, and integration of the course material in a critical way. These are not just opinion journals! You may write in whatever style you like, as long as I can understand what you are saying. But writing informally must not mean thinking less rigorously. If you follow the prompts, listed on the syllabus after each week’s reading and also on Moodle, I believe you will get a lot out of this weekly assignment. It will also come in handy during the take-home final...

You will turn in your journals three times during the semester. Journals that are less than one day late will be counted at half credit. After one day post-deadline, your journal will not be counted for that unit.

**Unit Papers:** There will be two unit papers assigned. These are 3-5 page papers that will ask you to synthesize your learning from the readings. These are analytical papers, and are intended to be difficult. The paper prompts will be provided one week before each due date.

A paper copy of each Unit Paper must be turned in during class on the day it is due to receive full credit. Unit Papers turned in late (via email) will lose one letter grade per day late. Don’t be late!

**Final Project:** The final project is a group project through which you will bring together the various strands of your learning in this class, collaborating with your classmates to work through a particular, complex socio-political issue. You will present your issue in multi-media format to the rest of us as an interactive poster session! We will talk a lot about this as the semester progresses, and you will receive a detailed assignment description in early November.

**Take-home final: Essay Questions**
You will have a take-home final consisting of three questions that require you to synthesize and utilize the knowledge and work you have done over the course of the semester. You will receive the final exam questions on the last day of class (December 2nd), and your final will be due on December 10th. Late finals will lose one letter grade per day late.

**Extra Credit:** Go to STPEC (or other approved) public lectures or events, and write up a thoughtful 1-page (single-spaced) response. The first half should provide an analytic summary of one of the speaker’s main points, while the second half should engage critically with this main point. (Critical engagement may involve a discussion of what you understood, what you didn’t understand, and what are some good questions you have or things you need to know in order to engage more rigorously with the speaker’s points.) You may write up to three of these extra credit assignments, each due one week after the event. Each accepted extra credit assignment will earn you 1 point toward your final course grade.

**Your successful week in STPEC 101 (a suggested schedule)**
Tuesday 4pm: Come to class, with your reading printouts (or annotated electronic
versions) and any notes or assignments. Participate!

Wednesday-Friday: Write in your journal, or write the Unit Paper if it’s due next week.

Friday-Monday: Do your reading for next week!

Monday before 4pm: Post analytical questions to Moodle if you’re assigned to questions this week.

Monday night - Tuesday before noon: Post 1-2 paragraph response to Moodle if you’re assigned to respond this week.

Tuesday before class: Read Moodle responses, if at all possible

Tuesday 4pm: Come to class, with your reading printouts and any notes or assignments. Participate!

Course Schedule

Unit 1: Theory, Social Justice, and You

9/2 Week 1 - Introduction
Why are we all here? What is political economy? Why do we need a department focusing on “social thought”?

Journal assignment: what conditions have shaped your identity and your power?
(what are identity and power to you?)

9/9 Week 2 - Who am I, who are you, who are we? How do we know what we think we know? Why do we think in the way that we think?


Journal assignment (after 9/9 class): Identify a specific area in which you have primarily dominant or “official” knowledge, or in which your “common sense” has been constructed for you and is something you take for granted (i.e. “China,” “healthy food,” “Islam,” “Democracy”) Unpack the construction of your knowledge: how do you “know” what you think you know?
*This is a really hard journal assignment. If it feels easy, you’re doing it wrong.

9/16 Week 3 - What is Theory and What Can It Do?

Andrea Smith, Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy

**Read this article with the following question in mind: what does theory do here? We will discuss that question more so than the content.**

Journal Assignment (after 9/16 class): What social issue or topic do you want to learn how to think about in a deeper way? Why is this of particular interest to you? Explain, please!

**Unit 2: Thinking About People**

9/23 Week 4 (Journal Due!) - Feminist Theory, Politics, Art, and Activism
- Second wave feminist excerpts (Dworkin, Steinem) TBD
- Poetry and Spoken Word: TBD
- Feminist art - TBD on Moodle
- Global feminist activism: web sites
- National feminist activism: web sites
- Campus activism: Guest speaker

Journal: What does it mean to you to be a man/woman? Where does that come from? Did any of the readings or activities/discussions in class make you question your assumptions about feminism or gender equity? Explain.

9/30 Week 5 - Gender Theory
- Butler (a few pages from *Gender Trouble*, plus video)
- Blog posts: feministing, jezebel (TBD)
- Popular culture issue: TBD
- In class: spoken word videos and gender caucuses

Journal: How do you perform your gender? What is one way that people perform their gender that makes you uncomfortable? Why? Bonus: at some point this week, perform gender differently than usual or expected in a particular setting (“trouble” your gender performance). Reflect on the experience.

10/7 Week 6 - Racial Justice and Critical Race Studies
- Blog posts: (Black Girl Dangerous - selection of posts)
- In class: racial identity formation workshop, “seeing/reading race” activity, campus activism presentation

Journal: Debrief the workshop from class. How did they make you feel? Think about something that felt uncomfortable. Why did it feel uncomfortable?

10/14 - NO CLASS - MONDAY SCHEDULE
10/21 Week 7 - Queer Theory
   Reading TBD
   Pop/alt culture - hang out in the blogosphere and encounter heteronormative, homophilic, and various gay and queer politics (diff views of family and marriage equality, QPOC youth support, undocuqueer activism, etc.) - examples on Moodle
   In class: what would it look like to “queer” our lives and worlds?

Journal: Debrief the workshop from class. How did it make you feel? Why?

Unit 3: Thinking About Power

10/28 Week 8 - (Journal and Unit 2 Paper Due!)- Forms of Capital
   [for moodle this week: everyone post questions about Bourdieu by Monday at 4pm]
   Bourdieu article on forms of capital
   Khan - chapter from Privilege

Journal: What are the forms of capital your education has afforded you? How do you use your non-monetary capital to gain or demonstrate/perform power?

11/4 Week 9 - Subject Production / Governmentality
   Michel Foucault - short excerpt from Power/Knowledge, TBD
   Chapter from Foucault and Education, Ed. Stephen Ball, TBD
   Web-based sources on the school-to-prison pipeline

Journal: Did Foucault totally blow your mind, or what?! Go.

11/11 - VETERANS DAY - No Class

11/12 Week 10 - WEDNESDAY is a Tuesday schedule - It’s The Economy, Stupid (three of many stories)
   David Harvey - One chapter from Short History of Neoliberalism, TBD
   Robert Reich film Inequality

Unit 4: Pulling it All Together!

11/18 Week 11 - (Journal and Unit 3 Paper Due!) - Postcolonial Thought
   TBD video clips and short readings

In Class:
Final Project, Example and Assignment Description:
  Bringing various theoretical resources to bear on understanding a social
  justice issue in the real world

No Journal: Work on final Projects!

11/25 Week 12 - Concept Reviews and Mutual Teaching (in preparation for take-home
final exam)
  no reading, no journal - Work on final Projects!

12/2 Week 13 - Final Project Poster Presentations
  Course evaluations
  Take-home Final distributed

  Final Take-Home Essays Due December 10 (on Moodle)

*A bit of the verbiage in this syllabus is taken directly or adapted from prior STPEC 101 syllabi.
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