

WOST 297F  
Course Syllabus  
Spring 2009

## Queer America: Alternative Genders and Sexualities in Twentieth-Century United States Literature and Film

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### **Course Description:**

Welcome to Queer America! Through literature (novels, short stories, poetry, and autobiographical narratives), theory, film (mostly documentary and independent) and historical studies, we will look at key moments in GLBTQ history in the United States from a perspective that understands race, sexuality, class and gender as inseparable, as always influencing and shaping one another. We will look at the history of political activism in gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender communities in relation to other social movements such as the civil rights movement, second wave feminism, and the anti-Vietnam war movement. This course is open to students for whom the topic might be new, as well as to those with experience or familiarity with the subject matter.

### **Required Readings and Texts:**

A course reading schedule is posted in the “Syllabus” folder on our SPARK page. You will automatically be given access to our SPARK page once you are registered for the class. You can access SPARK from the top right corner of the UMASS webpage ([www.umass.edu](http://www.umass.edu)). Please print out the reading schedule and follow it carefully. It contains due dates for readings and response questions, and it tells you what we will be doing in class each day. The homework that is listed on each day is due the *following* class.

### **All of the following required texts are available at Amherst Books in Amherst**

Bannon, Ann. *Beebo Brinker*  
Feinberg, Leslie. *Stone Butch Blues*  
Jagose, Anne Marie. *Queer Theory: An Introduction*

### **Other Course Readings:**

All other readings can be accessed through SPARK. Go to the “Readings” folder on our SPARK webpage. From there you can connect to the readings that are on E-Reserves or to the readings that I have posted on our web page under “Required Readings.” The reading schedule will tell you where each reading is located. The password to E-Reserves is ‘queer.’

## **Grading:**

### 60% Reading/Viewing Response Questions:

It is most important to me that you come to class having done the readings and with ideas or questions to share. This is your contribution to making our class one that has engaging discussions and a quality use of class time. To help facilitate this end, I will ask you to write responses to readings and films throughout the semester. You will choose from response questions posted on SPARK. They are due in class on the due date assigned. These questions are meant to help you to synthesize and think critically about the texts we read/watch, practice textual analysis, and be prepared for discussion. You are required to answer six of these questions over the course of the semester in 2-3 page, typed, double-spaced papers for each question. If you clear it with me ahead of time, you can write about something other than the questions I have posted, as long as it pertains to the same readings/film my question covers. The response due dates are listed on the course reading schedule.

### 25% Final Exam or Final Project:

You have an option of doing a final project (see description at end of syllabus) or taking a final exam. The final exam will be cumulative, and will take place during our assigned final exam time. If you plan to take the exam, please do not make plans to leave campus until after our scheduled exam.

### 15% Quizzes:

For each novel and some short stories, there will be a very short quiz that is meant to allow you to show that you have completed the reading. The quiz will be factual and based on the content of the texts. If you have done the reading, the quiz will be simple. **No make-up quizzes will be given without a documented excuse for missing class.**

### Attendance and Participation:

You are expected to attend class and to participate in discussion. You are allowed four absences without penalty. Please use these absences for illness, doctor's appointments and family emergencies. If you are experiencing a serious illness or family emergency that will cause you to miss more than four classes, then please come see me and provide documentation. If you will be absent due to religious observance please see me ahead of time to let me know. **For every absence over the first four, your grade will be reduced by one third of a letter grade. This is true even if you use your four absences and then encounter an emergency. So, save your absences for illness and family emergencies or events.**

### A Note on Participation:

**Speak up, ask questions, and make this class your own.** Please listen carefully to what others are saying or trying to say, and I will do the same. I will do my best to encourage

your participation and I am interested in what each of you has to say. **You don't have to agree with me to participate.**

In order to create a safe space for discussion and learning, I require that you speak to each other with respect. It's OK to have different opinions, but I ask that you share them in a way that is educational for and respectful to others. Please remember that for some people in this class the material is very new, and for others it will relate to their own lives in such a way that they might feel a deep personal investment in the material and discussion. I encourage everyone to ask any question they have, and I ask that you give each other the room to learn and grow throughout the semester.

### Contacting Me and Office Hours:

I encourage you to come to my office hours. In a course of 30-35 students, it helps me to know about the questions or experiences that you are having in relation to the class. You don't have to have a particular agenda to come talk to me during office hours. If you would like to meet with me, but can't make my office hours, please come speak to me and set up an appointment. I hope I see you all at some time during the semester during office hours! I will welcome your visit!

**Please see me immediately if any problems arise for you during the course; the sooner we address any difficulties, the more time we have to find a solution to the problem together. Please give me at least 24 hours to respond to e-mails!**

### Plagiarism:

The University's policies on plagiarism apply to ALL written work in this course. Taking a sentence, paragraph, or entire paper from an Internet source without using proper citation, or handing in someone else's writing as your own counts as plagiarism. To better understand the definitions of and penalties for plagiarism, please visit the following URL: [http://writingprogram.hfa.umass.edu/student\\_resources/plagiarism\\_policy.asp](http://writingprogram.hfa.umass.edu/student_resources/plagiarism_policy.asp)

### Learning or Psychological Disabilities:

UMass is committed to providing an equal educational opportunity for all students. If you have a documented physical, psychological, or learning disability on file with Disability Services, you may be eligible for academic accommodations to help you succeed in this course. If you have a documented disability that requires accommodation, please notify me within the first two weeks of the semester so that we may make appropriate arrangements. If you had a documented disability in high school, or if you think you might have a physical, learning, or psychological disability, I strongly urge you to contact Disability Services for consultation. Their number is: 545-0892, or e-mail inquiries to DS@educ.umass.edu

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Final Project/Exam Description

**Final Exam:** There will be a cumulative final exam that will be held during our assigned final exam time. This exam will be worth 25% of your final grade and will be in essay and short answer form. The topics for the essays and short answers will come from class discussions, lectures, and readings.

I am also offering some alternatives to the final exam. Any of the following options can be chosen in place of taking the final exam. They would also be worth 25% of your grade. Alternatives to the final exam are as follows:

**Final Paper:** This should be a scholarly, analytical paper that explores some topic, theoretical discussion, piece of literature, or film from our course. Your paper should be approximately ten pages and documented in MLA format. You should be making an **analytical argument** in your paper, **not just describing** a piece of literature/film or a theoretical debate. You should also contextualize your argument within the contemporary scholarship related to your topic by referencing and quoting from at least two secondary sources. If you choose this option, I highly recommend that you come see me to talk about your idea before you begin, and then at least once again when you have a draft or outline of your paper.

**Final Project:** I am open to hearing about any project of comparable effort and scholarly engagement that you might like to propose. For example, you might produce a video, do an oral history project, or create an art piece which incorporates the themes and/or scholarly debates we've discussed, or some other kind of creative work. The main criterion will be that you somehow bring in the material, debates, and themes that we have covered over the course of the semester. You will need to provide a written explanation of creative art pieces which includes a discussion of how the piece ties-in with the work we've done over the semester.

**Activist Project:** The final option is to do some kind of educational, advocacy or activist project that focuses on GLBT issues. This should be a project that takes place over the course of the semester, not just one time at the end of the semester. If you choose this option, you will still need to write a paper which describes your project and situates it within an historical and/or theoretical context. See me if you want to take this option so that we can discuss it in more detail.