

## **WGSS 292Q: Queer Interactions with the More-Than-Human World** **Spring 2017, University of Massachusetts**

Instructor: Dr. Stina Soderling

South College Room W219, MWF, 11:15-12:05

Office hours: Mondays, 2:00-3:30pm, or by appointment, W473 South College

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### Course description

What is a “human”? And what is “nature”? Using the tools of queer theory, this course takes a critical approach to foundational notions of the division between human and non-human. We will consider the ways that a queer lens blurs naturalized boundaries such as those between human and non-human, nature and culture, and life and death. In addition to reading and discussing these concepts, we will explore how we can use all our senses to form new understandings of the world we are part of. Assignments will include group work, writing, and cooking.

This is a small course, with an emphasis on learning as a collective endeavor. We will be building this course together. That means that the agenda is not set for the whole semester. An important part of your participation in this course is thus to design it as we go.

### Accessibility

I am committed to fostering a classroom environment that supports the full participation of all students. We all learn in different ways: some learn by reading, some by writing, some by talking and listening, some by actively doing. Most of us learn through a combination of mechanisms. In this course, you will be challenged to step into the learning process in various ways, such as those listed above. If you have individual learning needs and have ideas for how to make this course a better learning experience, please let me know.

If you have a documented learning disability, or think you might, and would like to request special accommodations, please contact Disability Services (<http://www.umass.edu/disability/>). I am always open to hearing about your needs and suggestions; however, you are in no way obligated to share any information about a disability with me or any other instructor, unless you yourself decide to do so.

### Teaching philosophy

My teaching philosophy is grounded on feminist and anarchist principles, and I hold that learning can be a collaborative and liberatory experience. I believe that as thinking, feeling beings, we all have something to offer in the learning process. In practical terms, this means that I ask us all to work together to make this course a meaningful experience for everyone involved. While I lay out guidelines and suggestions in this syllabus, they are all up for discussion, with three important exceptions: 1) any student accessibility needs, such as accommodations from Disability Services, shall be met; 2) all class participants must follow the academic integrity policies of the University of Massachusetts; and, most important of all, 3) all participants must strive to treat all class members with respect.

### On Title IX and mandated reporting

WGSS classes are a place where issues of sexual violence and other sexual misconduct are discussed as a matter of course. It's not a taboo subject, and feminists have long worked to develop theory and activism around sexualized violence, including rape, dating violence, child sexual abuse, and the like. If you want to discuss your own personal experiences of sexual violence in a class, we don't consider that a "report" covered by Title IX (although if you want faculty help and support in reporting sexual violence, we are here to help you do that). Other available resources on campus for addressing sexual violence include both confidential and non-confidential resources – non-confidential resources will keep your concerns private but will report your concerns to the Title IX coordinator or the Dean of Students Office, who will provide you with different options to assist you. Confidential resources will keep your concerns confidential and will provide you support, assistance in addressing safety concerns as well as other services such as providing you with an advocate. The resources can be found at [www.umass.edu/titleix/](http://www.umass.edu/titleix/)

### On names and pronouns

There is a long history of dialogue and activism around how we address one another, with respect to both names and pronouns. Students should be referred to by the name they prefer, and with the proper pronunciation, by faculty and other students. I will gladly honor your request to address you by the name you prefer and gender pronouns that correspond to your gender identity. Please advise me of your name's proper pronunciation, and any names or pronouns not reflected by the record in Spire early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records.

### Contacting the instructor

The best way to contact me is in person. I hold weekly office hours on Mondays from 2:00 to 3:30pm; if this time does not work for you, I am happy to set up a meeting at a different time. If you cannot make it to a scheduled meeting outside of office hours, you are expected to notify me at least 24 hours in advance. If you miss two scheduled meetings without giving proper notice, you may not schedule any other meetings outside of office hours for the duration of the semester.

I use email sparingly. Please allow for 3 weekdays for a response; I do not answer emails on weekends. I do not answer via email questions the answer to which can be found in the syllabus. If you email about a matter that is best addressed through a conversation, I may ask that you come to office hours or set up a meeting.

### Computer and cellphone policy

This course requires a high level of face-to-face engagement. To facilitate this, there is a no-electronics rule. Exceptions to this rule can be made for relevant use of electronics, for example for video clips or slide shows during student facilitations, or in case of an accommodation from Disability Services.

### Good to know

If you are at all struggling in this course, come talk to me! It is my job to facilitate your participation and performance in this course, and you do not "bother" me by asking for help. I have office hours weekly, and we can also schedule a meeting at a different time. I encourage you to attend office hours to check in with me, even if you are not struggling. That way, we can figure out together how to make this semester as beneficial as possible for you.

## Assignments

Attendance. Being present is an important component of this course, and you are expected to attend all meetings. Attendance means not only showing up, but staying present, in both body and mind, to the best of your ability, for the duration of the class period. In accordance to the no-electronics-rule, if you are on your phone, computer, or other electronic device during class time, I will consider you absent for that class meeting.

You can miss up to 3 class meetings without it affecting your grade. After this, your attendance grade will drop by 1 point for each absence. It is up to you how (and if) you use your absences; there are no “excused” versus “unexcused” absences, and, unless you will miss a major in-class assignment such as your facilitation date, you are not required to inform me that you will be missing class. If there are extenuating circumstances that will cause you to miss several class session, please do contact me. *If you miss more than 12 class meetings, you automatically fail the course.*

If you are late, this will count as half an absence. If you are more than 20 minutes late, it will count as a full absence.

Participation. Much of our learning will take place in conversation with each other. It is therefore crucial that you not only attend class, but also participate. There are many ways to participate in the course: partake in class discussion, bring in questions about the readings, bring in relevant outside material, partake in group work. In order to participate fully in class, it is vital that you have carefully read the assigned texts. You will be evaluated on the extent to which your comments relate to, and critically engage with, the assigned materials.

Weekly reflection. Approximately once a week, usually on Mondays (exact dates are marked on course schedule below), students will submit a reflection. There are 10 reflection dates; you must submit at least 7. These are informal assignments, meant to help you think about, and engage with, the material. They can take the form of a 1-2 page critical analysis; a journal entry; a poem; a drawing; a marshmallow sculpture... If the reflection is not in a written format, I ask that you either do a presentation on it, or submit a one-paragraph written explanation.

Reflection presentations. For three of your weekly reflections, you will do a five-minute presentation in class. These presentations will guide our discussion for the day. In order to ensure a somewhat even number of presentations on each reflection day, you must sign up in advance; no more than 3 students may present on any given day.

Discussion questions. In completing your readings for class, you are expected to bring in comments and questions. On at least 6 occasions, please hand in your questions at the end of class (1 point each). To get credit, you must also have raised the questions in class discussion.

Microbial pet. This course asks what it means to interact with the more-than-human world; this assignment attempts to answer this question. You will be asked to grow and take care of a microbial collective or organism, such as a sourdough. We will discuss the parameters of this assignment on February 3, during our microbial pet workshop.

Course project. The final assignment is a paper or project of your choosing. We will discuss this as the semester progresses, formulating a proposal and appropriate scope. The course project may be undertaken either individually or in a group.

## Grading

All assignments (with the exception of attendance and participation) will be graded pass/fail. This is to encourage you to engage with the material in challenging and at times perhaps risky ways. For example, you might try writing one of your weekly reflections in a genre new to you, or raise a difficult microbial pet, even at the risk of it dying.

For any assignment other than attendance, you have the option of a peer-grading process. A committee of 2 or 3 students, will evaluate your assignment. The committee must present an explanation of their grade, in person or in writing, to the instructor. The efforts of peer graders will be accounted for in the participation grade. Peer graders may also choose to have up to 2 weekly reflections be substituted for peer grading.

Attendance: 10

Participation: 20

Weekly reflection: 21 (3 points each)

Reflection presentations: 15 (5 points each)

Discussion questions: 6 points

Microbial pet: 8 points

Course project: 20

Total: 100

Letter grade percentage-equivalents: A: 94-100; A-: 90-93; B+: 87-89; B: 83-86; B-: 80-82; C+: 77-79; C: 73-76; C-: 70-72; D+: 67-69; D: 63-66; F: 0-62

*All written assignments must be submitted, on paper, in class on the due date. Unless prior arrangements have been made, I do not accept electronic submissions.*

## **Semester schedule**

*Subject to change*

### **January 23 - introductions**

#### **January 25 – quiz**

How well do you know this place?

#### **January 27 – what are queer perspectives on ecology and environment?**

Jasmine Kumalah, “A Path to Environmentalism”

Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson, “Introduction,” *Queer Ecologies*

Recommended: Charlene Spretnak, “Ecofeminism: Our Roots and Flowering”

**January 30 – introducing companion species**

Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, “Unruly Edges: Mushrooms as Companion Species”

**February 1**

Joan Roughgarden, “Introduction” and “Part I: Animal Rainbows,” from *Evolution’s Rainbow*

*In class: reflection presentation workshop*

**February 3**

Sandor Ellix-Katz, excerpts from *Wild Fermentation*

*In-class: First microbial pet workshop*

**February 6 – reflection presentations**

**February 8 – guest lecturer: Kiran Asher**

**February 10**

Noël Sturgeon, “Penguin Family Values: The Nature of Planetary Environmental Reproductive Justice”

**February 13 – reflection presentations**

**February 15**

Eric Zencey, “In Search of the Virgin Forest”

Eli Clare, *Exile and Pride*, “foreword” and “preface”

**February 17**

Eli Clare, *Exile and Pride*, “the Mountain” and “Clear cut: Explaining the Distance”

**February 22 – reflection presentations**

Eli Clare, *Exile and Pride*, “Losing Home”

**February 24**

Eli Clare, *Exile and Pride*, “Clearcut: Brutes and Bumper Stickers,” “Clear Cut: End of the Line” and “Casino: An Epilogue”

Jan Zita Grover, excerpts from *North Enough: AIDS and Other Clearcuts*

**February 27 – reflection presentations**

Eli Clare, *Exile and Pride*, “Freaks and Queers”

**March 1**

Eli Clare, *Exile and Pride*, “Reading Across the Grain,” “Stones in My Pickets, Stones in My Heart,” and “Afterword”

**March 3**

Chaone Mallory, “Ecofeminism and Forest Defense in Cascadia: Gender, Theory and Radical Activism”

**March 6 – reflection presentations**

**March 8**

Elizabeth Stephens, “Becoming Ecosexual”

Stacy Alaimo, “The Naked Word: Spelling, Stripping, Lusting as Environmental Protest”

**March 10**

Katie Hogan, “Undoing Nature: Coalition Building as Queer Environmentalism”

**March 20 – reflection presentations**

Sandor Katz, excerpts from *The Art of Fermentation*

*In-class: Second microbial pet workshop*

**March 22**

Andil Gosine, “Non-White Reproduction and Same-Sex Eroticism: Queer Acts against Nature,” in *Queer Ecologies*

**March 24 - waste**

Alexander Zahara and Myra Hird, “Raven, Dog, Human: Inhuman Colonialism and Unsettling Cosmologies”

**March 27 – reflection presentations**

**March 29**

Audre Lorde, excerpts from *The Cancer Journals* and *A Burst of Light*

**March 31**

Barbara Brenner, *So Much to Be Done*, excerpts

**April 3 – reflection presentations and planning for rest of semester**

**April 5**

Robin Wall Kimmerer, excerpts from *Braiding Sweetgrass*: “The Gift of Strawberries,” “An Offering,” “Asters and Goldenrod,” “Learning the Grammar of Animacy,” “Allegiance to Gratitude,” “The Sound of Silverbells”

***April 6-8: Living Waters, Animate Lands: Five College Native American and Indigenous Studies Symposium***

*You are expected to attend at least two symposium events.*

**April 7 – regular class meeting cancelled; attend symposium**

**April 10 – symposium debrief and confirming schedule for rest of semester**

**April 12**

**April 14 – no class meeting**

**April 18**

**April 19**

**April 21 – reflection presentations**

**April 24**

**April 26**

**April 28 – reflection presentations**

**May 1 – final meeting**