

**WGSS 397: Transgender Politics and Critical Thought  
Spring 2015**

Class Meetings: 2:30-3:45, Tue/Thu  
212 Bartlett Hall

Sonny Nordmarken

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Office Hours: Tue 1:00-2:20 PM or by appointment

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**Course Description**

Transgender studies is a new and rapidly-growing interdisciplinary field today. This course will examine both long-standing and recent political debates, critiques, and practices of resistance in the field. Investigating these issues, we will consider the following questions. How are trans and gender diverse individuals' lives implicated by interrelated regulatory regimes of gender, racism, colonization, neoliberal global capitalism, nationalism and homonationalism, ableism, medicalization, empire, state governmentality, and ideals of normative embodiment? How do cultural assumptions of sex as fixed and binary shape interpretive frames and thus policies, institutions, administrative systems and social practices that trans people must negotiate? What discursive processes produce, discipline, expel, and erase bodies, and which bodies do they erase? What issues animate trans and gender diverse communities in the U.S. and across global sites, in this historical moment? How are trans and gender diverse people resisting complex systems of oppression? Through active engagement, both in and outside of class, we will build a critical analytical framework around contemporary trans politics and theory.

**~ A Note ~**

We will cover some very intense topics in this class (e.g. social rejection, sexual violence, medical abuse, hate violence and killings, racism, genocide). Regardless of your personal experience, the material may be emotional. In addition, political issues in trans communities are often sites of heated debate. Strong feelings around different perspectives can manifest in the classroom. To mitigate these challenges, I invite you to reflect in an ongoing journal assignment in order to emotionally process the readings, discussions, and any experiences you have related to the course. The aim here is to help you experience and move through your feelings, deepen your understanding, and develop resilience while also nuancing your political orientation and encouraging your academic engagement. That said, please examine this syllabus and honestly assess your own comfort with the topics listed herein. If you are concerned about much of the material, you might consider taking a different class. Please make use of the self-care resources in this syllabus. I have included some on and off campus resources that might be useful for you and your friends.

## Course Learning Objectives

In this course, each student will:

1. Develop a nuanced understanding of gender and power
2. Become familiar with inequality and injustice particular to gender diversity
3. Examine how race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, nation and context shape the lives of gender minorities
4. Develop critical thinking, self-reflection, and analytical skills
5. Build arguments in conversation with critical thought in trans studies
6. Communicate analyses clearly through writing and speaking

## Assessment

**Participation.** Come to class prepared to discuss the assigned readings, attend the entire class period, and speak regularly in class. Your participation grade will consist of five components:

- Attendance (including tardiness and partial class attendance)
- Your discussion questions posted on Moodle by 10 pm the night before class
- Class discussion participation and in-class work
- Attendance at one outside of class community event related to the course
- **Reflection Journal.** Reflective writing on course content, class discussions, and life experiences. You may also use this space to collect quotes, collage images, draw, write creatively, or use in whatever way you wish that is useful for your engagement in this class. I will collect these two times during the semester. There are some required journal assignments, but for the most part, this journal is a creative and reflective space for you to use as you wish in order to digest, process, and think through ideas and experiences that arise during the course of the class.

I will evaluate the level of effort and engagement demonstrated in these components, taking them into account as a whole when assigning a participation grade. (15%)

**Synthesis Papers.** 2-3 pages. 3 total. (30%)

**Analytical Paper.** 5-7 pages. Due in two installments: draft 1 and draft 2. (30%)

**Social Action Project:** In teams of two, students will complete a creative, community-engaged project during the course of the semester. At the end of the semester, students will present their projects. (25%)

## Materials

The primary text we will use in this course is:

***The Transgender Studies Reader 2***, edited by Susan Stryker and Aren Z. Aizura and published by Routledge in 2013. Be sure you buy #2, not #1. They have similar cover images, but the one you want is green, not blue: It looks like this →



All remaining course materials will be available on Moodle.

## Resources

***Each Other:*** Write down contact information of 3 classmates. These will be your go-to contacts for this class. If you miss class, contact them (not me) to find out what you missed:

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***Your Instructor:*** Direct contact with the instructor is an important part of students' learning. Do attend my office hours at least once this semester.

***Disability Services:*** Students with disabilities: Welcome! It is my effort to move beyond compliance to create a welcoming space for all abilities and learning styles. If you need accommodations due to a disability, please talk to me, and contact Disability Services at **413-545-0892** (Voice/TTY) or [ds@educ.umass.edu](mailto:ds@educ.umass.edu) or 161 Whitmore within the first two weeks of class. All information and documentation of the disability will be confidential.

### ***Writing Support:***

- **WGSS Writing Tutor, Elise Swinford:**  
"I am available to meet with students to discuss any aspect of writing." Her office hours are 1:30-3:30 on Tuesdays and Thursdays and 2-4 on Wednesdays in Bartlett 102, or by appointment: [eswinfor@english.umass.edu](mailto:eswinfor@english.umass.edu).
- **The Writing Center**  
<http://www.umass.edu/writingcenter/index.html>  
[writingcenter@acad.umass.edu](mailto:writingcenter@acad.umass.edu) or 413-577-1293.

### ***Self-Care Resources:***

- **Community Peer Support: 5 College Trans Support Group**  
[https://www.facebook.com/groups/fivecollegesupport/?ref=br\\_tf](https://www.facebook.com/groups/fivecollegesupport/?ref=br_tf)
- **On-Campus Professional Support:**
  - **Chris Overtree at Psychological Services Center**  
<http://www.umass.edu/psc/> or 413-545-0041
  - **The Center for Counseling and Psychological Health (CCPH):**  
413-545-2337 or <http://umass.edu/counseling>
  - **Lydia Rackenburg**  
is a counselor at CCPH who works with trans and queer clients.
  - **LGBT Drop-In Support Group:**  
This group, facilitated by Lydia and Hillary, meets Wednesdays 6:30-8:00 pm at CMASS in 102 Wilder Hall.
- **Off-Campus Professional Support: Ethan Suniewick, therapist**  
415-237-1737 or <http://www.askethan.org/index.html>
- **Allyship and Advocacy: Hillary Montague-Asp at the Stonewall Center**  
[hmontagu@educ.umass.edu](mailto:hmontagu@educ.umass.edu) or [\(413\)-545-4867](tel:413-545-4867) or [413-345-2751](tel:413-345-2751).

### ***Community Centers at UMass:***

<http://www.umass.edu/studentlife/support/diversity-and-support>

- **The Stonewall Center:**  
413-545-4824 or <http://www.umass.edu/stonewall/>
- **Center for Women and Community:**  
<http://www.umass.edu/ewc/> or 413-545-0883
- **Center for Multicultural Advancement and Student Success:**  
[cmass@stuaf.umass.edu](mailto:cmass@stuaf.umass.edu) or 413-545-2517
- **Women of Color Leadership Network:**  
413-545-1671 or <http://www.umass.edu/ewc/programs/wocln/>
- **Office of Religious and Spiritual Life:**  
[http://www.umass.edu/religious\\_affairs/](http://www.umass.edu/religious_affairs/) or 413-545-9642

**OIT:** For technical problems with Moodle, call OIT at 545-9400 or go to <http://www.oit.umass.edu/support/moodle/a-quick-tour-moodle-students>.

## Expectations and Policies

**Conduct:** Be on time. Listen to your classmates. Maintain a respectful atmosphere. Communicate professionally, including in email correspondence. Do not pack up early or leave class early. In addition to my expectations, we will collaboratively create course discussion guidelines and conduct agreements, which I will post on Moodle.

**Electronic Devices:** You may not use cell phones during class; they are to be silenced and put away. You may not use any electronic devices in class, *unless I invite you to do so.*

**Communication:** All communication from you to me must be **in person**, either before or after class, in office hours, or by appointment. If you have a question, first consult the syllabus and/or a classmate before asking me. I will send out announcements and reminders via Moodle. You are responsible for reading all emails from me or your classmates in entirety. If you have a concern, we'll set up a meeting to discuss it.

**Email Etiquette:** Please compose your emails to your instructor using formal letter-writing conventions. Use professional language in your correspondence, including a salutation, such as "Dear Sonny" (yes, you can call me Sonny) or "Hi Sonny."

### **Grading Scale:**

Highest	Lowest	Letter
100.00 %	94.00 %	A
93.99 %	90.00 %	A-
89.99 %	87.00 %	B+
86.99 %	84.00 %	B
83.99 %	80.00 %	B-
79.99 %	77.00 %	C+
76.99 %	74.00 %	C
73.99 %	70.00 %	C-
69.99 %	67.00 %	D+
66.99 %	60.00 %	D
59.99 %	0.00 %	F

**Grade Concerns:** If you would like to discuss a grade, I ask that you wait at least 24 hours before making an inquiry. We can meet in office hours or we can make an appointment. You have one week to inquire about a grade. I do not discuss grades via email.

**Late Policy:** All written work must be submitted **in hard copy** and **on time**. I do not accept assignments late, except for in extenuating circumstances. If you have extenuating circumstances, contact me as soon as possible in advance of the due date, if possible.

**Academic Honesty:** Academic dishonesty is prohibited in all programs of the University. Academic dishonesty includes but is not limited to: cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, and facilitating dishonesty. Appropriate sanctions may be imposed on any student who has committed an act of academic dishonesty. For the University's Academic Honesty Policy, please see: [http://www.umass.edu/dean\\_students/codeofconduct/acadhonesty/](http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/codeofconduct/acadhonesty/).

## Semester Calendar

### Unit 1: Transgender Studies and Politics: Origins and Orientations

Tues, Jan 20:  
Introductions

Thurs, Jan 22:  
Stryker and Aizura, "Introduction," TSR 2  
Or Stryker and Currah, "Introduction" pages 1-9  
Recommended: Bornstein, "Chapter 1;" Enke, "The Education of Little Cis," TSR 2; Stryker, "An Introduction to Transgender Terms and Concepts"  
**Due: Intentions and Goals Statement**

Tues, Jan 27:  
Stone, "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto"  
Snorton, "A New Hope: The Psychic Life of Passing"

Thurs, Jan 29:  
Stryker, "My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage"  
Nordmarken, "Becoming Ever More Monstrous: Feeling Transgender In-Betweenness"

Tues, Feb 3:  
Muñoz, "The White to Be Angry": Vaginal Davis's Terrorist Drag," TSR 2

### Unit 2: The Production and Policing of "Problem" Bodies & Problem Bodies' Resistance

Thurs, Feb 5:  
Sears, "Electric Brilliancy: Cross-dressing Law and Freak Show Displays in Nineteenth-century San Francisco"  
**Due: Social Action Project Proposal**

Tues, Feb 10:  
Screen in Class: *Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton's Cafeteria*  
**Due: Synthesis Paper 1**

Thurs, Feb 12:  
Suess, Espineira, and Walters, "Depathologization"  
Clare, "Body Shame, Body Pride: Lessons From the Disability Rights Movement," TSR  
Chase, "Hermaphrodites With Attitude: Mapping the Emergence of Intersex Political Activism"

Tues, Feb 17: NO CLASS, MONDAY SCHEDULE

Thurs, Feb 19:  
Beauchamp, "Artful Concealment and Strategic Visibility: Transgender Bodies and U.S. State Surveillance After 9/11," TSR 2

Tues, Feb 24:

Screen in Class: *Cruel and Unusual: Transgender Women in Prison*

**Due: Reflection Journal Part 1**

### **Unit 3: Violence, Meaning, and Memorialization**

Thurs, Feb 26:

Namaste, "Genderbashing: Sexuality, Gender, and the Regulation of Public Space"

Tues, Mar 3:

Bettcher, "Evil Deceivers and Make Believers: On Transphobic Violence and the Politics of Illusion," TSR 2

**Due: Synthesis Paper 2**

Thurs, Mar 5:

Lamble, "Retelling Racialized Violence, Remaking White Innocence: The Politics of Interlocking Oppressions in Transgender Day of Remembrance," TSR 2

Gossett, "Silhouettes of Defiance: The Memorialization of Historical Sites of Queer and Transgender Resistance in an Age of Neoliberal Inclusivity," TSR 2

### **Unit 4: Indigeneity, Coloniality, and Decolonization**

Tues, Mar 10:

Aizura, Cotten, Balzer/LaGata, Ochoa, Vidal-Ortiz, "Introduction"

Boellstorff, Cabral, Cardenas, Cotten, Stanley, Young, and Aizura, "Decolonizing Transgender: A Roundtable Discussion"

Thurs, Mar 12:

Miranda, "Extermination of the Joyas: Gendercide in Spanish California," TSR 2

*Two Spirits*

Tues, Mar 17 and Thurs, Mar 19: NO CLASS, SPRING RECESS

Tues, Mar 24:

Wesley, "Twin-Spirited Woman: Sts'iyo yesmesti yexw slha:li"

**Due: Synthesis Paper 3**

Thurs, Mar 26:

Lewis, "Thinking Figurations Otherwise: Reframing Dominant Knowledges of Sex and Gender Variance in Latin America," TSR 2

Tues, Mar 31:

Dutta and Roy, "Decolonizing Transgender in India: Some Reflections"

### **Unit 5: Neoliberalism and Political Economy**

Thurs, Apr 2:

Irving, "Normalized Transgressions: Legitimizing the Transsexual Body as Productive," TSR 2

Tues, Apr 7:

Aizura, "The Romance of the Amazing Scalpel: 'Race,' Labor, and Affect in Thai Gender Reassignment Clinics," TSR 2

**Early submission deadline: Paper Draft 1: Email to me by 12 Noon**

Thurs, Apr 9:

Read: Peer Review Samples

**Due: Paper Draft 1**

Writing Workshop in class

Tues, Apr 14:

**Social Action Project Presentations**

Thurs, Apr 16:

**Social Action Project Presentations**

Tues, Apr 21:

**Social Action Project Presentations**

Thurs, Apr 23:

**Social Action Project Presentations**

**Due: Reflection Journal**

Tues, Apr 28:

Last Day of Class

**Due: Paper Final Draft**

**Due: Self Evaluation**