

ENGL 2850 – Intro to Queer Studies (HU, DV)

Salt Lake Community College

Fall 2024 (*online*)

Instructor:

Location:

Contact: via Canvas message or email at

Office Hours:

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Welcome to Intro to Queer Studies! This course provides an introduction to theories of sexuality and gender construction, particularly as represented and explored in literature, film, and other cultural texts. We'll consider the history of heterosexism and interrogate modern society's treatment of transgender, non-binary, lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual, and queer individuals and communities. This course welcomes everyone, whatever your identity.

REQUIRED TEXTS

- You don't have to buy anything for this class!
- All readings, lectures, and viewings will be linked each week on Canvas

COURSE CONTEXT

Some of the most divisive issues in modern US-American culture have been queer rights, specifically on issues such as marriage equality, the military's former "don't ask, don't tell," gay adoption, trans individuals serving in the military, hate crimes legislation, and so forth. Such issues generate copious debate, often set up along religious or political lines without considering the questions that underpin it all, namely: Does gender really exist? Why are some genders privileged over others in society? How is gender decided – biology? Psychology? Sociology? Are there only two distinct separate genders? What is the history of same-sex orientations and gender-variant/non-conforming identities? Who has the authority to speak about these matters and how do they get that authority? Are literary and media representations of queer people accurate/helpful/harmful/some combination?

These questions are not easily answered, especially if one considers other times and other cultures. Homosexuality had an important place in ancient Greek and Roman societies, and was accepted throughout much of Japanese and Chinese history, though it was not known as "homosexuality." It flowered at certain times in early Islamic culture. Prior to European conquest of the Americas and the African continent, gender variation and same-sex behavior were widespread, and both accepted and tolerated. Those called "transvestites," "transsexuals," or "transgender" in the U.S. are called different things in other cultures:

"waria" in Indonesia, "kathoey" in Thailand, "hassas" in Morocco, "bayot" in the Philippines, "kitesha" in parts of the Congo, "fa'afafine" in Samoa, "hijras" in India, and "berdache" among Native Americans. Those so identified receive varying levels of acceptance and even honor within the given culture.

The larger point is that sexual and gender "otherness" has existed always and everywhere, but is constrained by binary (that is, "either/or") thinking in much of the world.

COURSE FOCUS & GOALS

This course considers a variety of lenses that have been used to study/represent queer people, including history; religion/theology; medicine (psychiatry, psychology, sexology); political/legal/judicial; fiction and popular culture; and critical cultural theories, particularly queer theory.

Broadly, our course goals are as follows:

- Approach the study of queer identities, experiences, histories, etc., via the lenses of several critical cultural theories
- Develop sensitivity towards and appreciation of perspectives, cultures, and lifestyles that differ from your own
- Explore and apply critical cultural theories to examine gender and sexuality as social constructs, as well as to recognize that gender roles are unnecessarily restrictive, undergird privilege, and lead to discrimination
- Investigate how and why social norms are NOT eternal and unchanging
- Understand that sexual practices do not determine gender, or even sexuality
- Interrogate your own ideologies relating to identity and intersectionality, and reflect upon the ways you participate in, support, or reject dominant systems of gender and sexual oppression in the U.S.
- Understand and respond critically to civic conversations and become a legitimate participant in those conversations about gender, sexuality, identity, privilege, intersectionality, class, language, and ability

We will take a question-posing approach to our readings and discussions, for example:

- ❖ Why and how have heterosexual privilege and heteronormativity dominated human history?
- ❖ What exactly is queer theory and what can it do?
- ❖ How does one respond to ongoing sexual prejudice, heterosexism, and homophobia?
- ❖ Why does a culture that, on paper, believes "all Men are created equal" still allow open discrimination against some groups?

At the end of the class you should:

- ✓ Understand the history and roots of heterosexism and gender oppression in the U.S., and also in Western culture, as well as various movements against oppression

- ✓ Use queer theories in connection with other cultural theories to deconstruct socially constructed ideas of what constitutes “normal” sexual/gender identities as seen in cultural artifacts such as memoirs, novels, short stories, poetry, film and other media and be able to examine and critique texts to understand their power to shape societies and cultures
- ✓ Practice critical-thinking skills both in classroom discussion and written work to understand diverse opinions and values while reevaluating and learning to support personal views
- ✓ Understand what it means to be a gendered human and that we all embody the "other" to someone
- ✓ Develop the tools to express evolving understandings of personal bias and societal privilege, and critically examine ideas that could lead us towards being a more accepting, multicultural society

COURSE CONTENT DISCLAIMER

This course is designed to expose students to a myriad of belief systems and diverse perspectives, thus potentially challenging personal, political, and cultural values. Please be aware that challenging these values is intended to help us study important issues in context and to encourage more critical examination of our own lived experiences in connection with the lives, histories, and stories of people with whom we share this planet.

We will delve into texts that contain the following content: profanities, descriptions of sex and sexuality, descriptions of various forms of violence, interrogations of gender "norms" and sexuality, expanding our understanding of our individual and collective humanity.

I will not offer alternative materials/assignments because the stories that the writers/creators of these materials are part of our interrogations of gender, sexuality, and more. This intellectual experience is designed allow us to better understand each other, ourselves, and different experiences of gender and sexuality.

CONTENT WARNINGS & CHECKING EGOS

Our course materials and activities will often focus on mature, difficult, and potentially challenging issues of identity, power, privilege, inequality, and forgotten/erased American histories and experiences. As with any Diversity (DV) and Humanities (HU) course, the materials and activities here are often political and personal. Materials and activities might trigger strong feelings and maybe even memories. You may experience feelings of frustration, empathy, discomfort, anxiety, confusion, excitement, humor, trauma, and even boredom as part of the emotional fluidity in engaging with the course materials and activities. If you think a particular course text or topic might be especially challenging or unsettling, feel free to email me early in the week so we can work through it together.

I expect everyone to engage with and participate in discussing course materials in mature

and respectful ways. If you are struggling with the course materials, here are some tips: read through the weekly homework requirements in advance so that you know what is coming up; watch and read all cultural theory texts; read all of the assigned literature; ask me for help if you need it; ask questions when you have them about the cultural theories or literature before you participate in discussions, assignments, etc.

Some of us will have emotional responses to the materials; some of us will have emotional responses to our peers' interpretations of the materials; all of us should feel responsible for creating a space that is both intellectually rigorous and respectful. Above all, be respectful (even when you strongly disagree), be mindful of the ways in which our identities position us in the classroom, acknowledge that our experiences are valid but that they're not the only valid experiences that we'll be exploring and discussing in the classroom, be aware that our experiences and beliefs might be limited in scope/geography/diversity, check your egos—the literature, cultural theories, current events, cultural and pop cultural texts that ground this course invite us to step back from our egos so that we might consider the world that we share with others from different lenses and perspectives.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Since this class is all online, you are not required to be in a specific classroom at a particular time. However, each week you will be assigned specific readings and/or viewings, and you should budget around 4-8 hours per week to complete it. This is standard for an upper level, 3-credit-hour college course. (*NOTE: You will often have to put in more hours of homework during weeks in which a major project is due.*) Please make sure that your schedule allows for the time commitment that this course will require from you.

You will need to complete all homework (reading, watching, and/or listening) and have your thoughts and notes ready to reference during the “Daily Work” portion of the class.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

Your grade in the course will be determined as follows:

Daily Work (prep, participation, written work, quizzes, etc.)	50%
Midterm Project	20%
Final Project & course reflection	30%

The **midterm project** will address an issue you would like to research further. The goal is to understand how we can improve the obstacles faced by queer people – whether in our community, our state, our country, or anywhere in the world. You will then create a *research report, video, web page, or other idea of your choosing* on your issue, how you learned more about it, and what you believe can be done. Past projects have covered issues such as gay marriage, coming out, queer sports figures, AIDS/HIV, biological explanations for/research into sexual orientation, intersexuality, bisexuality, hate crimes, politics and

legislation, activism, sex education, filmmakers/writers/poets, etc.

The **final project** will ask you to synthesize your research from this semester's readings, films, and your own original research to address an issue that would improve the physical, emotional, social, cultural, legal, or material conditions of LGBTQ+ people. You can follow up on your midterm and turn it into an extended project, or you can choose a new topic. The idea is that your work here will have tangible applications to improve our world, whether it's through education and awareness, advocacy, or individual/collective action.

As the time approaches, I will also provide more detailed descriptions for each assignment.

OTHER IMPORTANT COURSE INFORMATION

Preparation: Your voice and presence matter! You are expected to read, watch, and/or listen to all assigned texts, and to complete the assignments connected with them, which may include quizzes, discussion posts, bi-weekly chats, and larger assignments.

Participation: English department policy stipulates that at least 10% of your final grade will be based on your attendance and participation. While we don't have class absences in the same way that a class meeting in person would, please note that I can see when you've last logged into Canvas and how much time you've spent with the work here. Please plan to log on at least two or three times a week to complete your work and turn in assignments.

Late Work: You may request an extension BEFORE a due date, so that I have time to review your request. Unexcused late work will likely be penalized with a reduction in points, though we can discuss options based on your circumstances. The main point here is—please communicate with me, and don't disappear or let things just slide away!

Revision Policy: You may revise any major assignment/project for a shot at earning more points on an assignment. Revisions must be submitted by the agreed upon time--contact me so that we can discuss what this time will be for your individual work.

PLAGIARISM

When you summarize, paraphrase, or quote someone else's media, words, or ideas, you must cite your source. Be especially careful to avoid plagiarizing Internet sources. No matter where material is taken from, failure to cite the source is plagiarism. Students who plagiarize may earn an "E" or "0" for the assignment, or an "E" for the course.

GETTING REALLY REAL ABOUT THIS COURSE

You will probably find this course challenging – possibly even difficult. You will be expected to do a lot of work, but it is absolutely possible to succeed in this course. The main

difference between an A and an E in this class is time, effort, participation, and revision. You will be most likely to succeed in this class if you realize that the work is not only your responsibility, but also your opportunity. The skills you learn in this class will likely help you for the rest of your academic career and even in your professional life. Good luck!

ENGL 2850 – COURSE SCHEDULE (READINGS & ASSIGNMENTS)

(*subject to change; see specific weeks as they are posted on Canvas for details and other readings*)

Date	Topic	Reading Due	Writing Due
week 1			
Aug. 20 – Aug. 25	Introduction to course, themes, & terms	see Canvas	- introduce yourself! - goals for this class
week 2			
Aug. 26 – Sept. 1	Queer Histories	see Canvas	- weekly activity - reading quiz
week 3			
Sept. 2 – Sept. 8	Sexology in the 19 th Century	see Canvas	- weekly activity - reading quiz - Queer Studies chat #1
week 4			
Sept. 9 – Sept. 15	Sexology, Activism, Science	see Canvas	- weekly activity - reading quiz
week 5			
Sept. 16 – Sept. 22	Queer Liberation	see Canvas	- weekly activity - reading quiz - Queer Studies chat #2
week 6			
Sept. 23 – Sept. 29	Queer Diversity & Intersectionality		- weekly activity - reading quiz - midterm proposal
week 7			
Sept. 30 – Oct. 6	Queer Literature, pt. I		- weekly activity - reading quiz - Queer Studies chat #3
week 8			
Oct. 7 – Oct. 13	Queer Literature, pt. II		- weekly activity - reading quiz
week 9			

Oct. 14 – Oct. 20	MIDTERMS		- MIDTERM DUE
week 10			
Oct. 21 – Oct. 27	Queer Film & TV, pt. I		- weekly activity - reading quiz - Queer Studies chat #4
week 11			
Oct. 28 – Nov. 3	Queer Film & TV, pt. II		- weekly activity - reading quiz
week 12			
Nov. 4 – Nov. 10	Queer Music		- weekly activity - reading quiz - Queer Studies chat #5
week 13			
Nov. 11 – Nov. 17	Queer Games		- weekly activity - reading quiz - final project proposal
week 14			
Nov. 18 – Nov. 24	Queer Digital Spaces		- weekly activity - reading quiz - Queer Studies chat #6
week 15			
Nov. 25 – Dec. 1	Queer Webcomics		- weekly activity - reading quiz
week 16			
Dec. 2 – Dec. 8	Prepping for Finals		- catching up - last Queer Studies chat
FINALS			FINAL PROJECT - reflection on course