

## **ENGL 2850 – Intro to Queer Studies (HU)**

**Salt Lake Community College**

Fall 2024

**Instructor:**

**Contact:** via Canvas message or email at

**Class Times:**

**Office Hours:**

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Welcome to Intro to Queer Studies! This course provides an introduction to cultural 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, nonbinary, lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual, and queer individuals and communities. This course welcomes everyone, whatever your identity.

### **REQUIRED TEXTS**

- All required texts will be available in the “Modules” section of our Canvas page!

### **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 US military's former “don't ask. don't tell” policy, 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, or a 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 represent and also to study queer people, including history; religion and theology; medicine (psychiatry, psychology, sexology); political, legal, and judicial approaches; 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, and in doing so, could challenge 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 or assignments, as these materials and their creators' experiences are part of the breadth and depth of our interrogations of gender, sexuality, and more. This intellectual experience is designed allow us to better understand ourselves, each other, and the different experiences of gender and sexuality that comprise the complex, multicultural individualities and societies we might identify with, or even have never engaged with.

## **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 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

You will be required to attend two 80-minute class sessions most weeks (except Election Day, Fall Break, and the National Day of Mourning/Thanksgiving holiday), and to complete between 4-8 hours of homework outside of class time each week. This is standard for an upper level, 3-credit-hour college course. (*NOTE: You will 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 our class discussions. It is also best to have the readings pulled up during class.

## COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

Your grade in the course will be determined as follows:

Daily work (prep, participation, written work, quizzes, etc.)	40%
Midterm project	20%
Presentation (pick one: midterm or final)	10%
Final project and course reflection	30%
Total	100%

The **midterm project** will address an issue you would like to research further. The goal is to understand how we can address 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 lectures, 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 paper and reflection, or you can choose a new topic. The idea is that your final project 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, presence, and preparation all matter! You are expected to read, watch, and/or listen to all materials assigned, and to prepare all writing assigned ahead of the class period in which it will be discussed (typically, upload work to Canvas as required). You are required to bring questions to class for discussion of our reading. Please plan to indicate your preparation by participating in discussions, whether in small groups or with the whole class.

**Participation:** Our English department policy stipulates that at least 10% of your final grade will be based on your attendance and participation. For this class, participation is folded in with daily work to make up 40% of your final grade. Missing more than 3 class sessions will result in a reduction of one half a letter grade for the course.

**Responsibilities:** To earn at least a C in this course, you must attend and fully participate in all but 3 class sessions, and also complete all assignments and projects on time. Because I value your involvement in this course, I will be taking attendance and marking participation each Monday and Wednesday that class is held.

**Missing Class:** Exceptions to this rule are only made due to family or personal emergencies and on a case by case basis. As per college policy, full credit will be available to those who are absent due to college functions. An official note from a coach, professor, or director will be required to make up this credit. Finally, there are no "excused" or "unexcused" absences. It will be up to each person to decide what their priorities are.

**Late Work:** You must request an extension BEFORE a project is due in order for me to consider and possibly accept your request. Unexcused late work will likely be penalized with a reduction in points, and the later the work, the greater the reduction, though we can discuss extension period and penalties for late work based on your circumstances. The main point here is--communicate with me and don't disappear or let things just slip 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 (for examples: email, websites, or discussion groups). It makes no difference whether you borrow material from print sources, from the Internet, from online databases, or from interviews; failure to cite your 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 differences between an A and an E in this class are 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)*

Date	Topic	Reading Due	Writing Due
<b>week 1</b>			
Wed 8/21	Introduction to course, themes, & terms	- WED: course syllabus	- introduction to you - reflection on starting the class
<b>week 2</b>			
Mon 8/26	Queer Histories	- MON: readings on Canvas - WED: readings on Canvas	- weekly activity
Wed 8/28			
<b>week 3</b>			
NO CLASS -			

LABOR DAY Wed 9/4	Sexology in the 19 <sup>th</sup> century	- MON: readings on Canvas - WED: readings on Canvas	- weekly activity
<b>week 4</b>			
Mon 9/9 Wed 9/11	Sexology, Activism, Science	- MON: readings on Canvas - WED: readings on Canvas	- weekly activity
<b>week 5</b>			
Mon 9/16 Wed 9/18	Queer Liberation & Normalization	- MON: readings on Canvas - WED: readings on Canvas	- weekly activity
<b>week 6</b>			
Mon 9/23 Wed 9/25	Queer Diversity & Intersectionality	- MON: readings on Canvas - WED: readings on Canvas	- weekly activity <b>- midterm proposal</b>
<b>week 7</b>			
Mon 9/30 Wed 10/2	Queer Literature, pt. I	- MON: readings on Canvas - WED: readings on Canvas	- weekly activity
<b>week 8</b>			
Mon 10/7 Wed 10/9	Queer Literature, pt. II	- MON: readings on Canvas - WED: readings on Canvas	- weekly activity
<b>week 9</b>			
Mon 10/14 Mon 10/16	<b>Midterms</b>		- presentations (MON WED)
<b>week 10</b>			
Mon 10/21 Wed 10/23	Queer Film & TV, pt. I	- MON: readings on Canvas - WED: readings on Canvas	- weekly activity
<b>week 11</b>			
Mon 10/28 Wed 10/30	Queer Film & TV, pt. II	- MON: readings on Canvas - WED: readings on Canvas	- weekly activity
<b>week 12</b>			
Mon 11/4 Wed 11/6	Queer Music	- MON: readings on Canvas - WED: readings on Canvas	- weekly activity
<b>week 13</b>			
Mon 11/11 Wed 11/13	Queer Games	- MON: play 1 during class - WED: play 1 before class	- weekly activity
<b>week 14</b>			
Mon 11/18 Wed 11/20	Queer Digital Spaces	- MON: readings on Canvas - WED: readings on Canvas	- weekly activity <b>- final project proposal</b>
<b>week 15</b>			
Mon 11/25	Queer Webcomics	- MON: first half, <i>TJ and Amal</i>	- weekly activity

Wed 11/27		- WED: last half, <i>TJ and Amal</i>	
<b>week 16</b>			
Mon 12/2	Prepping for Finals	- MON: final project presentations	- presentations
Wed 12/4		- WED: final project presentations	
<b><i>FINALS</i></b>	<b><i>Dec. 9 – Dec. 13</i></b>		
			- <b><i>FINAL PROJECT DUE</i></b> - reflection on course