Graduate Course Proposal: Indigenous Gender and Sexuality Studies

This course provides a critical engagement with key concepts and debates in the burgeoning field of Indigenous gender and sexuality studies. Over the past four decades, Indigenous political resurgence has become both energized and complicated by a recognition of social issues within Indigenous communities “that cut across the boundaries of nation, language, and culture”—issues often shaped by differences of gender and sexuality (Huhndorf and Suzack 1). The establishment of the Native Women’s Association of Canada in 1974 and the adoption of the term “two spirit” at the Third International Gathering of American Indian and First Nations Gays and Lesbians in Winnipeg in 1990 attest to Indigenous peoples’ increasing efforts to counteract colonization at the levels of both the macropolitical structures of statecraft, law, and policy and the microprocesses of embodied and intimate daily life. Rather than understanding colonization as a two-pronged attack on ostensibly separate public and private domains, this course will analyze how settler colonialism has mobilized compulsory heteroconjugality to control not only Indigenous identities and “family formation[s]” but also Indigenous “collective decision-making, resource distribution, and land tenure” (Rifkin 8). In this way, Indigenous modes of governance have been re-cast as “extralegal cultural difference” reducible to anthropological categories of kinship filiation rather than “competing kinds of legality or governance” (Rifkin 12).

As Indigenous political mobilization informed by gender and sexual difference has increased, it has been accompanied by the growth of rich intellectual and artistic work that theorizes colonization’s complex effects upon gendered, sexualized, and racialized bodies. At the same time, this scholarship and cultural production has also sought to re-claim the heterogeneity of alternative Indigenous understandings of gender and sexuality as well as of family and community. This course will read such artistic and intellectual work in dialogue in order to engage with the following questions: How do Indigenous intellectuals and artists re-imagine the body, erotics, intimacy, the family, and kinship? Which of these terms are commensurate with Indigenous ways of knowing and which may be colonial impositions? In what ways might Indigenous scholars and artists re-claim culturally-specific understandings of gender and sexuality without lapsing into idealized versions of pre-contact authenticity? While the majority of the texts and contexts studied in this course will be drawn from work produced on Turtle Island (an Indigenous name for the North American continent), students are welcome to draw connections across other geopolitical locations.

Assignments:
- Two 2-3 page (double-spaced) response papers. [10% of final grade]
- One 35-minute seminar presentation and subsequent leading of class discussion. [35% of final grade]
- One research paper, approximately 20 pages in length. This paper may be developed out of a seminar presentation, but it should constitute a substantial extension of the seminar and it should take into consideration the feedback obtained during class discussion and from the Professor. [45% of final grade]
- A mark will also be assigned for overall class participation (which includes attendance, insightful engagement with course readings, attentiveness to the comments of other class participants, and thoughtful and collegial contributions to class discussions). [10% of final grade]

Potential List of Weekly Topics and Readings

Indigeneity, Embodiment, and Practices of Everyday Life
Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel, “Being Indigenous: Resurgences Against Contemporary Colonialism”
Leanne Simpson, “Theorizing Resurgence from within Nishnaabeg Thought”

Indigeneity, the Family, and Kinship
Mark Rifkin, Introduction to When Did Indians Become Straight?: Kinship, the History of Sexuality, and Native Sovereignty

Contexts of Colonial Heteropatriarchy in Canada
From The Indian Act
Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, “(a found poem)”
Cheryl Suzack, “Emotion Before the Law”

Indigenous Feminisms
Joyce Green, “Taking Account of Aboriginal Feminism”
Verna St. Denis, “Feminism is for Everybody: Aboriginal Women, Feminism and Diversity”
Shari M. Huhndorf and Cheryl Suzack, “Indigenous Feminism: Theorizing the Issues”

Heteropatriarchy and Gendered Violence
Marie Clements, The Unnatural and Accidental Women
Marie Clements, “In the end you are made accountable”

Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women: Catalyzing Action
Amnesty International, Stolen Sisters: A Human Rights Response to Discrimination and Violence Against Indigenous Women in Canada
Chelsea Vowel, “A quick word on how debate on a MMIW inquiry is being framed” and “Why I don’t oppose a national inquiry on MMIW”
The “Am I Next?” Facebook Campaign

Idle No More and Women’s Leadership
Glen Coulthard, “#IdleNoMore in Historical Context”
Sylvia McAdam (Saysewahum), “Armed with Nothing More than a Song and a Drum”
Nina Wilson, “Kisikew Wiskwew, The Woman Spirit”
Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, “Fish Broth and Fasting”
Lesley Belleau, “Silence is Not Our Mother Tongue: Madewewwin, The First Taste of Sound”
Dory Nason, “We Hold Our Hands Up: On Indigenous Women’s Love and Resistance”
Indigenous Women of Turtle Island, “Letter to Prime Minister Harper from Indigenous Women of Turtle Island”
Rosanna Deerchild, “His Feast: Her Broken Fast”

**Indigenous Masculinities**
From Sam McKegney, ed. *Masculindians: Conversations on Indigenous Manhood*
Richard Van Camp, *The Lesser Blessed*

**Queer Indigeneities**
Andrea Smith, “Queer Theory and Native Studies: The Heteronormativity of Settler Colonialism”
Mark Rifkin, “Introduction” to *The Erotics of Sovereignty: Queer Native Writing in the Era of Self-Determination*
Kent Monkman’s art: view the images on the powerpoint slide and visit kentmonkman.com

**Queer Indigeneities (cont.)**
Scott Morgenson, “Settler Homonalism: Theorizing Settler Colonialism within Queer Modernities”
Qwo-Li Driskill, “Doubleweaving Two-Spirit Critiques: Building Alliances between Native and Queer Studies”