

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
Department of Women's Studies and Feminist Research
WS3333F Contemporary Topics in Critical Race Studies
September – December 2015

Instructor: Erica S. Lawson

Location: Lawson Hall, Room 3234

Class Time: Tuesdays, 10:30 – 1:30pm

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Course Description

With a focus on examining the changing meanings of race and racism in the twenty-first century, this course addresses some of the following questions: How is race central to the production of knowledge? How do 'racializing processes' occur in social relations? 'How does racial formation' take place in conjunction with other identities? How are racial identities contested? What are the gendered dimensions of race? And how do racialized groups and their allies challenge racist practices? These questions will be addressed by looking at how racial knowledge informs public policy, politics, economics, identity, the 'welfare state,' multiculturalism, the "War on Terror," and other aspects of governing practices in everyday life. The purposes of the course are to a) discuss and analyze the conceptual frameworks for understanding the multi-faceted and intersectional dimensions of race and racism, and b) to examine how these inform social justice movements and other initiatives that seek to challenge racial violence.

Learning Objectives

- Explain the theoretical conceptualizations of race and racism
- Describe and identify racializing practices in social life
- Analyze how racial knowledge informs public policy and other aspects of governance in social life
- Recognize some of the debates within the discipline of critical race studies
- Explain how intersectional identities shape analyses of, and responses to race and racism.

Learning Outcomes

- Clear and concise writing and oral communication
- Demonstrated ability to engage in critical thinking
- Improved research skills
- Understanding the importance of theory and praxis

Evaluation

The following assignments are designed to assess the learning objectives and outcomes.

(1) Participation 10% (5% for attendance and 5% for class participation)

The participation grade is based on regular attendance; informed, active, and thoughtful contributions to class discussions with respect to readings.

(2) Analytical/Reflective Papers: 4 papers x 10% = 40%

The purpose of the analytical-reflective papers is to strengthen critical engagement with readings through

thinking and writing each week. There are two parts to this assignment. First, all students are expected to write four papers, four pages in length; and second, each student is required to do a short presentation on one of the four papers. You cannot choose a reading that has already been discussed in class. Review the course readings and choose your articles and presentation time early. I will post your selections on OWL Sakai. Each paper must adhere to the following instructions (although you can interpret and address them according to your style):

Part One:

- Provide a brief overview of the reading (e.g. the author's central focus, theories, arguments, methodology, etc.)
- Discuss how race, racialization and/or racism are taken up in the reading (or the critical race lens that you use to assess the piece)
- Provide an analytical reflection of the reading in relation to other course readings or discussions, personal experience, or to a contemporary event (e.g. an issue in the news)

The papers must make direct, concrete and specific reference to the selected readings to demonstrate an engagement with the instructions. Do not write a point-form summary; all papers must be submitted at the beginning of the class.

Part Two:

(3) Presentation: 10%

The purpose of this assignment is to assess your clarity in communicating ideas and writing thoughtful, engaging questions. Of the four papers that you will write, choose one for a brief presentation. Assume that everyone has read the article so you are not required to describe it in detail; in any case, this is not a good use of limited time. Use bullet points two and three in the instructions above as your guide. Pose two good discussion questions. If you wish, you can use power point or other creative methods to make your presentation and support your arguments. The presentation is limited to 10-15 minutes.

(4) Mid-term test: Essay questions 2 x 10% = 20 %

The mid-term test will be held on (date to be determined). It will consist of two essay questions and students will have ninety minutes to write the test. Students will be allowed to consult hard copies of their notes. The essays will be graded according to the quality of analysis, in-depth knowledge of class materials, organization, and clarity of ideas.

(5) Research Paper: 20%

A final essay, 10 - 12 pages in length (including references), typed, and double-spaced. The essay must address a topic of your choice in relation to the central issues discussed in the course. Papers will be assessed on how well they integrate course materials as well as research related to the topic of choice. The essay should use a minimum of ten scholarly sources, at least five of which should come from sources different from our course readings. I encourage you to choose your topic early and to submit a short abstract for review (no more than a paragraph). I will read these and provide feedback before you begin to write. Please note that submitting abstracts is optional, but they are useful for helping you to clarify your essay focus and organization.