WS 1023G: Gay Life and Culture in the 21st Century

The department would like to recognize that we are located on the traditional land of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenausaune, Lenape and Attawandaron peoples.

Instructor: Jeremy Fairall  
Email: jfairall@uwo.ca  
Office Hours: Thursday 2PM-4PM (or by appointment)

Teaching Assistants:  
Amy Keating (akeatin@uwo.ca)  
Kelly McGillivray (kkmcgill@uwo.ca)

Course Description:  
In No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive (2004), Lee Edelman argues that queer people are “held in thrall by a future continually defined by time itself, constrained to pursue the dream of a day when today and tomorrow are one” (30). In the decades following the Stonewall riots of 1969, queer liberation has appeared, to may queer scholars and activists, as if it were perpetually on the horizon, a promise of a “tomorrow” that was, as Annie sang, “always a day away.” With recent strides that have been made towards marriage equality, legal status, and popular visibility, the 21st century would appear to be the fulfillment of the long-awaited promise of freedom and equality. Still, as Michael Hobbes reports in “The Epidemic of Gay Loneliness” (2015), “the rates of depression, loneliness and substance abuse in the gay community remain stuck in the same place they’ve been for decades.” So, what is really happening in contemporary gay life? This course will examine the state of gay life and culture in the 21st century through a variety of texts, from readings in Queer Theory and journalism to selections from contemporary literature and cinema, that will engage with issues of marriage, politics, health, popular culture, race, and identity. Finally, we will examine what it means to claim the identity of “gay” in the 21st century, when the range of identity categories have become at once more expansive and contentious.
Learning Objectives:
This course will enable students to
• Gain a general knowledge of the key concepts of Queer Theory.
• Acquire a broad understanding of some of the major issues and perspectives of contemporary gay life.
• Gather, review, evaluate and interpret information relevant to the topic.
• Develop skills related to critical thinking and analysis, oral and written communication, and scholarly research.

Required Texts:
Bill Konigsberg, *Openly Straight* (Scholastic, 2013) [Available at the UWO Bookstore]
*BPM (Beats Per Minute)* (dir. Robin Campillo, 2017, 140m.) [Available for viewing on Criterion On-Demand]
All other reading/viewing material will be provided, or linked to, on the course OWL site.

Evaluation:
Tutorial (Attendance and Participation) 15%
Participation (Forums) 20%
• Week 1-7 10%
• Week 8-12 10%
Critical Essay (800-1000 words) 25%
Research Proposal 10%
Research Essay (2250-2500 words) 30%

How this course will work:

Lectures: I will post my weekly audio lecture (generally about an hour long) to the course’s OWL site on Monday mornings, sometime before noon. It is recommended that you complete each week’s readings/viewings prior to listening to the lecture, so that you are free to make notes and reflections on the material. The weekly lectures will NOT be a summary of each week’s assigned texts, but rather a discussion of each week’s topic that draws (among other materials) from the texts and videos that I have assigned for the week, so please do not think of either the lectures or the assigned readings/viewings as substitutes for each other.

Class Forum: As noted above, my weekly audio lectures will run about an hour in length. The in-person version of this course was designated two hours of lecture time per week, which would have included time for class discussion. As we are currently unable to meet face-to-face, the discussion portion of our course will take place in the forum section of the course’s OWL site. At the beginning of each week (around the same time that I post the audio lecture), I will open a new discussion forum for that week’s topic, which you are expected to use to continue each week’s conversation. Typically, you should aim for posting three contributions to the forums per week, though you should keep in mind that I will be grading these discussions more on the strength of their content than on their frequency (which is to say, a post saying nothing
more than “I agree with what (x) said!” won’t be worth much). You should always feel free to start your own sub-topics if you feel that something relevant is not being addressed, but also try to build on discussions that are already taking place if you can. Remember that these forums are intended as space for communicating ideas and for healthy debate, so please be as respectful of your colleagues in these forums as you would be in a classroom setting (I will be participating and, occasionally, if needed, (re)directing the conversations). In terms of grading, your participation in these forums is worth 20% of your grade, but the grade will be split in half throughout the term: after Week 7, I will give you a grade (worth 10% of your final grade) based on your participation in the forums up to that point. This will not only give you a second grade (in addition to your Critical Essay) to consider before the Add/Drop date, but it will serve as a kind of “progress report” for how you are doing in this aspect of the course during its first half.

**Tutorial:** In addition to the weekly lectures, and your participation in the Class Forum, you are expected to attend your weekly tutorial sessions, where you will be graded, by your tutorial leaders, on your attendance and participation. Unlike the weekly audio lectures, which are posted online for you to access at any time, the weekly tutorial sessions will be synchronous, meaning that you are expected to meet, virtually, with your tutorial group each week at time of the specific tutorial section that you signed up for. If you are unable to make a tutorial session due to illness, please notify your tutorial leader via email in advance of the tutorial. If a student misses more than 3 tutorials without a proper reason (illness, bereavement), they will receive a zero grade for the tutorial portion of the course.

**Assignments:** As there is no midterm or final exam for the course this year, your grade will be weighted heavily towards written assignments. There due dates for each of these are listed on the Course Timetable below. Late assignments will be accepted for a full week after the initial due date, with a demerit of 2% per day that an assignment is late (accommodations will be made for students regarding issues of lateness or bereavement, but please be sure to consult me no later than one week after the assignment is due if you need such consideration). You will be provided with more information about each of these assignments as they approach, but a brief rundown of each assignment is as follows:

**Critical Essay:** Write an 800 to 1000-word critical essay on a topic of your choice (subject to instructor approval) that relates to the course material. This may include any film, television program, web series, fiction text (novel, short story, comic book/graphic novel, children’s picture book) or video game that relates to the subject of the course. This assignment does not require the use of any secondary sources, although you are expected to properly document any sources that you do use, including the subject of your essay.

**Research Proposal:** In anticipation for your final research paper, you are to submit a 3-4 page proposal in which you a) identify your research topic, b) explain and discuss why you chose this topic, and c) list and briefly outline 4-5 secondary sources that you intend to use in your research. While this assignment is meant to encourage you to think about a topic that you are interested in, you will, as with the Critical Essay, want to consult with either myself or your tutorial leaders regarding your topic in advance.
Research Essay: Write a 2300 to 2500-word essay on the topic that you have chosen and identified in your Research Proposal. Your research will focus on any topic related to the subject of the course, although you will want to concentrate on issues which require constructing an evidence-based (rather than critical) argument. You may wish to consider relevant issues relating to health, politics, representation, education, business, or global affairs.

Course Timetable:

Week 1: Introduction

Week 2: Who’s Gay?
- Judith Butler, “Imitation and Gender Insubordination”
- Cody Lawrence, “Brief Thoughts on Bi-Erasure”
  [https://codylawrenceagain.medium.com/brief-thoughts-on-bi-erasure-469c551b8eb8]

Week 3: It Gets Better?
- Derritt Mason, “On Children’s Literature and the (Im) Possibility of It Gets Better”
  [https://highline.huffingtonpost.com/articles/en/gay-loneliness/]
- The Christmas Setup (trailer) [YouTube]

Week 4: Pop Culture
- bell hooks, “Madonna: Plantation Mistress or Soul Sister?”
- Shura, “What’s It Gonna Be?” [YouTube]

Week 5: Out of (and into) the Closet
- Bill Konigsberg, Openly Straight.

Week 6: Reading Week (no class)

Week 7: The Gay Male Gaze
- Kevin John Bozelka, “The gay-for-pay gaze in gay male pornography”
  [https://ejumpcut.org/archive/jc55.2013/BozelkaGayForPay/text.html]

**Critical Essay Due**
Week 8: Queer Politics
- John D’Emilio, “Capitalism and Gay Identity.”
- Nathan J. Robinson, “All About Pete”
  [https://www.currentaffairs.org/2019/03/all-about-pete]
- *Am I Next? Gay and Targeted in Chechnya* [YouTube]

Week 9: AIDS
- *BPM (Beats Per Minute)* (dir. Robin Campillo) [Available on Criterion On-Demand]
- Leo Bersani, “Is the Rectum a Grave?”

Week 10: Race
- Julie Depelteau and Dalie Giroux, “LGBTQ Issues as Indigenous Politics: Two-Spirit Mobilization in Canada”
- Stanley Crouch, “The Roots of Black Homophobia”
  [https://www.theroot.com/the-roots-of-black-homophobia-1790880835]
- “Don Lemon to Kevin Hart: Walking away right now is your choice” [YouTube]

**Research Proposal Due**

Week 11: Disability
- Robert McRuer, “Compulsory Able-Bodiedness and Queer/Disabled Existence”
- Patrick Strudwick, “This Is What Dating Is Like When You’re LGBT and Disabled”

Week 12: Masculinity
- Matt Baume, “Why ‘Straight Acting’ Insults the Memory of Stonewall” [YouTube]

**Research Essay Due**
Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women’s Studies: Grading Criteria

A+ (90 to 100)
One could scarcely expect better from a student at this level.

A (80 and up)
Superior work which is clearly above average
• Challenging and specific thesis that is clearly developed
• Correct and interesting sentence structure
• Sophisticated writing style
• Appropriate documentation
• Quotations well integrated into the text, with proper documentation
• Evidence of originality or independence of thought
• Provision of strong analysis
• Complexity, and subtlety in approach to subject
• Well-organized with a logical development of the argument

B (70 to 79)
Good work, meeting all requirements, and eminently satisfactory
• Clear development of a specific thesis, with proper paragraphs
• Correct sentence structure
• Adequate documentation
• Allowance for some (minor) problems such as:
  • errors in factual content or interpretation
  • some minor errors in terminology or general writing skills
  • occasional lapses in clarity, including vagueness, incompleteness, flaws in structure

Note: A grade in the range of 75-79 indicates an essay that borders on an A but has some significant flaw that prevents giving out the higher grade.

C (60 to 69)
Competent work, meeting requirements
• Generally correct but tends to provide more description than analysis
• Tends to be too general or superficial in the handling of material
• Weaknesses in argument including a descriptive thesis, a mechanical approach, lack of adequate evidence, documentation, or support
• Problems with grammar or matters of style
• Simplicity of thought, structure, or expression
D (50 to 59)

*Fair work, minimally acceptable*

- Does not provide an argument or a line of thought
- Major difficulties with logical structure, and expression of ideas
- Topic has not been thought through
- Errors of grammar and diction interfere with understanding
- Over-generalization with inadequate support, evidence, or documentation

F (49 and down)

*Fail*

- Assignment submitted does not apply to course
- Basic requirements of the assignment are not met

**Plagiarism with intent to deceive (to be handled by the department)**

Photo credits (l to r): “What’s It Gonna Be?” (dir. Chloe Wallace, 2016), *BPM (Beats Per Minute)* (dir. Robin Campillo)