

WESTERN UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND WOMEN'S STUDIES
GSWS 1021F: Introduction to Sexuality Studies
Fall 2026

(Preliminary Outline, subject to change)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This interdisciplinary half-year course introduces students to the field of sexuality studies. The course approaches sexuality as a social and political formation shaped by history, culture, institutions, and power. Students will consider how some bodies, desires, relationships, and sexual practices come to be understood as normal, healthy, or respectable, while others are treated as deviant, dangerous, or in need of regulation. How might sexuality studies help us think more critically about intimacy, identity, pleasure, reproduction, and justice? Drawing on feminist, queer, trans, critical race, Indigenous, disability, and reproductive justice scholarship, students will examine how sexuality is represented, organized, contested, and lived. Topics may include colonialism and sexual regulation, biological sex and intersex politics, disability and sexual rights, dating cultures, sexual racism, trans sexualities, reproductive justice, sex education, campus sexual cultures, and contemporary sexual politics.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Define and distinguish key concepts in sexuality studies, including sex, gender, sexuality, desire, identity, and sexual norms.
- Demonstrate an introductory understanding of sexuality studies as an interdisciplinary field.
- Analyze how social norms shape ideas about bodies, identities, desires, relationships, and family.
- Explain how sexuality intersects with race, class, Indigeneity, disability, gender, age, and other social formations in specific contexts.
- Critically assess contemporary debates related to sexual regulation, reproduction, sex education, sexual identity, and sexual justice.
- Interpret scholarly texts, films, and other cultural materials using concepts from sexuality studies.
- Formulate a focused research question related to sexuality studies.
- Locate, evaluate, and use scholarly sources through relevant academic databases.

REQUIRED TEXTS

There is no required textbook for purchase. All readings will be available via the Course Readings webpage. Hyperlinks to assigned readings are also provided in the syllabus and on OWL Brightspace.

ASSESSMENTS

1. Tutorial Participation — 10% (ongoing)

Students are expected to attend tutorials prepared to discuss the assigned course materials. Tutorial participation may include small-group discussion, short in-class activities, and other forms of engagement. The best 5 of 6 tutorial participation grades will count toward the final course grade.

2. Reading/Concept Checks — 10% (ongoing)

Students will complete short LMS quizzes designed to support regular engagement with the readings and key course concepts. The best 8–10 quiz grades will count toward the final course grade.

3. Midterm Exam — 20%

The midterm exam will take place in class in Week 7. It will assess students' understanding of key concepts, readings, and themes from the first half of the course.

4. Case Analysis Assignment — 25%

Students will write a short course-based analysis of a case, media object, public debate, cultural text, or policy issue related to sexuality studies. The assignment will ask students to apply concepts from the course and draw on assigned readings. No independent research is required unless otherwise specified.

5. Final Exam — 35% (December Exam Period)

The final exam will be scheduled by the Registrar and written in person. It will assess students' understanding of key concepts, readings, and themes from across the course.

WEEKLY BREAKDOWN

WEEK 1-What is Sexuality Studies?

WEEK 7- The Dating Game

WEEK 2-Sex and Empire

WEEK 8- Sexpectations

WEEK 3-The Trouble with "Nature"

WEEK 9-Trans Desires

WEEK 4- The Right to Desire

WEEK 10-Reproductive Injustice

WEEK 5-Straight Talk

WEEK 11-Bad Sex Ed

WEEK 6- Midterm

WEEK 12 - Sexual Politics Now