

Western University
Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies

GSWS 3324F/3204F - Contemporary topics in Critical Race Studies
September to December 2025



Recognition of First Nations Territory: Western University is situated on the traditional land of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Lenape and Attawandaron peoples who have longstanding relationships to the region of southwestern Ontario and the City of London. In close proximity to Western, there are 3 local First Nations communities: the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, Oneida Nation of the Thames, and Munsee Delaware Nation. In the region of southwestern Ontario, there are 9 First Nations and a growing Indigenous urban population. Western recognizes the significant historical and contemporary contributions of local and regional First Nations and all of the Original peoples of Turtle Island (North America) to the development of Canada.

Course Instructor	Course Location	Time	Office Hour	Contact Info & Room Location
Professor Erica S. Lawson	UCC Room 67	Weds. 10:30 am - 1:30 pm	Weds. 1:30 – 2:30; or by appt. on zoom	elawso3@uwo.ca Email is the best way to contact me. You will receive a response within 48 hours (519) 661-2111 ext. 86941 GSWS – Lawson Hall Bldg, 3 rd Floor, room 3234

Course Description:

This is an essay based course. It examines the historical and intersectional roots of racism, its contemporary manifestations, and how it is resisted in protest movements. The course is organized thematically to address prominent topics in critical studies about race. These include (but are not limited to): anti-Black racism, critical race theory, Islamophobia, Antisemitism, and anti-Asian hate. Among the questions that frame the course are: What is racism and its formations? How does race shift and change over time? And how is race debated and contested in the twenty-first century? We will explore these, and other questions, with academic sources from across disciplines, as well as in popular culture/media, documentaries, and podcasts.

***Note*:** Conversations about race and racism can be empowering, but they can also be triggering. Racism, colonialism, Islamophobia, and Anti-semitism for example, are not merely abstract. They are rooted in violence, can be felt in embodied ways, and manifested in what Saidiya Hartman describes as ‘afterlives’: “(e.g., the afterlife of slavery and colonialism).” The readings, films, documentaries, discussions, podcasts, and such, addressed in the course, may be difficult for some people. With this in mind, I encourage you to debrief and to take care of yourselves.

Prerequisites: GSWS 2220E or GSWS 2273E or permission of the Department

Course Objectives:

By the end of this course, and as a group, we should know (among other things):

- How racism is conceptualized and operationalized
- How people become racialized
- How race privilege works
- Critical Race Theory
- How racism is denied (e.g., in favour of euphemisms like “colourblind-ness”)
- How racism continues to be challenged on multiple fronts

Through our assignments, lectures, and discussions, we will also:

- Sharpen our critical analytical and presentation skills
- Improve our writing and editing abilities
- Learn how to read theory closely and critically
- Apply theory to an informed assessment of world issues and events
- Develop an understanding of the politics of racial power

****Note:**** From time to time, I may pose questions from readings to be addressed in small group discussions and shared with the rest of the class. This means that you must come prepared to discuss the readings.

Assignments and Evaluation: (Please review assignment instructions in the “Assignment” Tab in Brightspace). Please review course policy about generated AI. All written assignments must be uploaded to Turnitin.

1. Analysis of one of two documentaries: 15%, 3-4 pages
2. Analysis of one of two course readings: 15%, 3 – 4 pages
3. Two hour quiz: 25%; two short answers and a long answer
4. Annotated Bibliography: 15%
5. Final Essay: 20%, 8-10 pages
6. Attendance and Participation: 10%

Grading Standards and Final Grades

Grade	Percentage
A+	90-100% - One could hardly expect better from a student at this level
A	80-89% - Superior work which is clearly above average
B	70-79% -Good work, meeting all requirements & eminently satisfactory
C	60-69% - Competent work, meeting requirements
D	50-59% - Fair work, minimally acceptable
F	Below 50% - Assignment submitted does not apply to course

COURSE & ACADEMIC POLICIES

Course Material: All course material, including assignment instructions, will be posted to OWL Brightspace: <https://westernu.brightspace.com/>

Students are responsible for checking the course OWL site

(<https://westernu.brightspace.com/>) regularly for news and updates. This is the primary method by which information will be disseminated to all students in the class. This is where marked assignments will be returned.

If students need assistance with the course OWL site, they can seek support on the [OWL Brightspace Help](#) page. Alternatively, they can contact the Western Technology Services Helpdesk. They can be contacted by phone at 519-661-3800 or ext. 83800.

Extenuating circumstances for missed deadlines: You will note that I have included two deadlines for each written assignment to minimize requests for extensions. I am not inclined to accept assignments after the second deadline without communication from your academic advisor.

Formal Documentation Designation statement: Please note that written assessments and the mid-term quiz are central to the learning objectives for this course. Accordingly, students seeking academic consideration for this assessment will be required to provide formal supporting documentation. Students who are granted academic consideration for this assessment will be provided with the following opportunity to make up this work: make-up exam and re-weighting written work.

Note that supporting documentation is always required for academic consideration requests for examinations scheduled by the office of the registrar (e.g. December and April exams).

General information about missed coursework

Students must familiarize themselves with the *University Policy on Academic Consideration – Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs* posted on the Academic Calendar: <https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academicpolicies/appeals/academicconsiderationSep24.pdf>

This policy does not apply to requests for academic consideration submitted for attempted or completed work, whether online or in person. The policy also does not apply to students experiencing longer-term impacts on their academic responsibilities. These students should consult: [Accessible Education](#).

For procedures on how to submit Academic Consideration requests, please see the information posted on the Office of the Registrar's webpage:

<https://registrar.uwo.ca/academics/academicconsiderations/>

All requests for Academic Consideration must be made within 48 hours after the assessment date or submission deadline.

All academic consideration requests must include supporting documentation; however, recognizing that formal documentation may not be available in some extenuating circumstances, the policy allows students to make one Academic Consideration request without supporting documentation in this course.

Additional Statements:

Electronic Devices: As a courtesy to other people and to minimize disruptions, please do not use your phone in class unless this is absolutely necessary. If you're expecting a call, keep your phone on vibrate, and step outside the room to take it. Electronic devices (laptops, iPads, smart watches, etc.) are not permitted in the mid-term quiz. .

Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously, and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, here:

<http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academicpolicies/appeals/scholasticdisciplineundergrad.pdf>.

Statement on the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

ChatGPT and its various analogues are not “research help” nor are they “grammar checkers.” They produce text based on a predictive model as to what word is most likely to come next. When asked to cite “research,” they have no capacity to do actual research, so they invent articles and books. You may find yourself citing a work whose author and title are complete fictions; more often, the AI attributes its imaginary research paper to a real scholar, but not necessarily one who even works in the area. Using a Generative AI app may seem like an easy way to manage your time or to simplify your workload, but if you use it without acknowledging that you are doing so, you are cheating. You are also depriving yourself of the value of education, since by using ChatGPT you are not building your own skills in critical thinking, research, or communication, all of which are areas of significant interest to potential employers. In brief, if you use a Generative AI app to help with your assignment, you must identify every part of your assignment that you did not write yourself. Anything else is a violation of academic integrity and subject to all the same penalties as more traditional types of plagiarism. If ChatGPT use is suspected, you may be asked to show your rough work, to answer questions about your sources and your research process, and to explain your argument orally”

(original emphasis; GSWS department wording on ChatGPT)

Statement on the use of plagiarism-checking software

All written assignments must be submitted for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

Policy on Accommodation for Religious Holidays

Students should review the [policy for Accommodation for Religious Holidays](#) . Where a student will be unable to write examinations and term tests due to a conflicting religious holiday, they should inform their instructors as soon as possible but not later than two weeks prior to writing the examination/term test. In the case of conflict with a midterm test, students should inform their instructor as soon as possible but not later than one week prior to the midterm.

Academic Accommodation and Accessible Education

Academic Accommodation is “a means of adjusting the academic activities associated with a course or program of student in order to permit students with disabilities to participate in those activities at the University and to fulfill the essential requirements of a course or program.” <https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academicpolicies/appeals/Academic%20Accommodationdisabilities.pdf>. Students with disabilities are encouraged to register with Accessible Education at the earliest opportunity. “Accessible Education plays a central role in Western's efforts to ensure that its academic programs are accessible for all students”

<http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessibleeducation/index.html>

Special Examinations

A Special Examination is any examination other than the regular examination, and it may be offered only with the permission of the Dean of the Faculty in which the student is registered, in consultation with the instructor and Department Chair. Permission to write a Special Examination may be given on the basis of compassionate or medical grounds with appropriate supporting documents. To provide an opportunity for students to recover from the circumstances resulting in a Special Examination, the University has implemented Special Examinations dates. These dates as well as other important information about examinations and academic standing can be found [here](#).

Support Services

Academic Advising

Your Home Faculty's Academic Advising Office will support or refer whenever you have an issue that is affecting your studies, including information on adding/dropping courses, academic considerations for absences, appeals, exam conflicts, and many other academic related matters.

Do not hesitate to reach out to them if you are struggling and unsure where to go for help.

Contact info for all Faculties is here: <https://registrar.uwo.ca/facultyacademiccounselling.html>

Mental Health Support

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western (<https://uwo.ca/health/>) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Gender-based and sexual violence

Western University [is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence](#) (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website:

<https://www.uwo.ca/health/studentsupport/survivorsupport/get-help.html>. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

Learning Development and Success

Counsellors at the Learning Development and Success Centre <https://learning.uwo.ca> are ready to help you improve your learning skills. They offer presentations on strategies for improving time management, multiple-choice exam preparation/writing, textbook reading, and more. Individual support is offered throughout the Fall/Winter terms in the drop-in Learning Help Centre, and year-round through individual counselling.

USC

Additional student-run support services are offered by the USC, <https://westernusc.ca/services/>