WS 9461F: Biopolitics, Feminism, & Health

Day, time and place of lectures: Mondays 10:30am - 1:30pm
Instructor: Jessica Polzer

Class Location: Lawson Hall 2210
Office hours: Mondays, Tuesdays 2:00-3:30, or by appointment
Office number: Lawson 3255
E-mail: jpolzer@uwo.ca

Course Description
Biopower –power over life itself – is, arguably, one of the most important ideas for understanding contemporary social and power relations and the gendered politics of health that characterize our present. Developed by Michel Foucault, the introduction of this idea into the fields of social and political thought has generated much critical thought about how power operates in modern societies by intervening into the vital characteristics of persons and populations, and through the administration of “life itself”.

The course begins by tracing the origins of the theoretical concept of “biopower” with a close reading of Foucault’s History of Sexuality: Volume I. We then consider how the concept has been revised and extended by feminist scholars and other critical theorists and applied in the context of specific contemporary theoretical concerns and substantive topics: intersectionality, reproduction, genetics, disease surveillance, security, disability, global health. Present throughout many of the course readings is the theme of “risk”, and a concern with how discourses on risk are implicated in biopolitics, at the level of the individual body and the social body.

This course will appeal to students with who wish to develop a deeper understanding of how feminists and critical health scholars have engaged with Foucault’s work, and who seek to gain a theoretically-informed understanding of the intersectional and political anatomy of health in the 21st century.

Course Texts

Expectations
This class will be conducted as a seminar with emphasis placed on discussion of ideas that emerge from the required course readings. The success of this class is largely dependent on the Instructor and the students coming to class prepared to discuss assigned readings. The Instructor will come to class prepared to give an overview of key themes and background for the week’s topic and/or to facilitate group discussions. Students are expected to contribute to class discussion on a regular basis, to have completed the readings prior to class each week, and to bring notes they have made on the readings to class.
Prerequisites
Graduate students enrolled in WS 9461 who are not graduate students in the Department of Women’s Studies & Feminist Research must receive permission of the Department and Instructor. Students are responsible for ensuring that they have successfully completed all prerequisites. Lack of prerequisites may not be used as basis for appeal. Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Course Organization
The course is organized generally into 3 sections. Part I focuses on the origins of the theoretical concept of “biopower”. Part II explores implications of biopower for women and traces important revisions and extensions of the concept as “risk politics” drawing on the work of feminist writers and other critical social theorists. Part III focuses on specific topics in the study of biopolitics, including health, reproduction, race, genetics and security.

Overview of Class Schedule

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week #</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sept 9</td>
<td>Introduction to the History of Sexuality</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sept 16</td>
<td>Introduction to the History of Sexuality</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sept 23</td>
<td>Introduction to the History of Sexuality</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sept 30</td>
<td>Feminist (Re)Visions and (Ex)Tensions</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Oct 7</td>
<td>Intersectionality in/as Biopolitics</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Oct 14</td>
<td>Reproduction</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Oct 21</td>
<td>Biopolitics as Risk Politics</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Oct 28</td>
<td>Biological Citizenship</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Nov 4</td>
<td>FALL READING WEEK</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Nov 11</td>
<td>Disability</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Nov 18</td>
<td>Precarious lives</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Nov 25</td>
<td>Global Biopolitics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Dec 2</td>
<td>Course conclusion</td>
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</tbody>
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Sept 9
Week 1 –The Origins of Biopower: Introduction to History of Sexuality
Required Reading
Foucault, M. (1990). The History of Sexuality. Part I: We “Other Victorians” (pp. 3-13)

Sept 16
Week 2 – The Origins of Biopower: History of Sexuality, cont.
Required Reading
Foucault, M. (1990). The History of Sexuality. Part II: The Repressive Hypothesis (pp. 15-49)

Sept 23
Week 3 – The Origins of Biopower: History of Sexuality, cont.
Required Reading
Foucault, M. (1990). The History of Sexuality, Part IV: The Deployment of Sexuality (pp. 77-98, 103-131)

CONCEPT ANALYSIS PAPER DUE – Thursday September 26

Sept 30
Week 4 –Feminist (Re)Visions and (Ex)Tensions
Required Reading

Recommended
McLaren, M. (2002). Feminism, Foucault and Embodied Subjectivity. Albany: SUNY Press. Ch 4. Pp. 81-116. (Note: This is a very accessible book on how feminists have taken up Foucault’s work.)
Oct 7
Week 5 - Intersectionality in/as Biopolitics

Required Reading

Recommended

Oct 14
Week 6 – Reproduction


Recommended

Oct 21
Week 7 – Biopolitics as Risk Politics


**Recommended**


Stacey, J. and Bryson, M. Queering the temporality of cancer survivorship. *Aporia, 4(1)*, 5-17.


**Oct 28**

**Week 8 – Biological Citizenship**

**Required Reading**


**Recommended**


**Nov 4**

**Fall Reading Week**
Nov 11
Week 9 - Disability
Required reading

Recommended

Nov 18
Week 10 – Precarious lives
Required reading

Recommended

Nov 25
Week 11 – Global Biopolitics
Required Reading


**Recommended**


**Dec 2**

**Week 12 – Course conclusion and evaluations**

In this class, we will conclude the course and do evaluations. As well, students will present their ideas for their final papers in class to get feedback from the instructor and their peers.

**FINAL ESSAYS DUE JANUARY 6 – DATE to be confirmed, Women’s Studies drop box and on OWL**

**Evaluation**

Evaluation will be based on the following breakdown:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Paper</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concept Analysis: Biopower</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Thursday Sept 26</td>
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<tr>
<td>Critical Reflection # 1</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Due in class on the date of selected reading</td>
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<tr>
<td>Critical Reflection # 2</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Due in class on the date of selected reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Paper</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>January 6, in WS drop box (to be confirmed)</td>
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All written assignments should be typed, in 12-point font, and double spaced. Please include a title page with the title of your paper, and your name and student number. Electronic paper submissions will not be accepted unless special arrangements are made.

**Concept Analysis Paper (20%)**

Before reading week, students will write a short paper (5 pages maximum) that articulates their understanding of the theoretical concept of biopower. This paper will help students articulate their understanding of theoretical ideas early on in the course, and will provide a strong foundation upon which to build their successive papers. Detailed instructions will be provided in class.

**Critical Reflection Papers (2 X 20%)**

The purpose of the critical reflection papers is to help students cultivate their critical analysis skills through a close reading of the course texts. **No outside reading is required**. Guidance on how to develop a thoughtful critical reflection will be provided.
Students will compose two critical reflections (6 page maximum, each). Students will submit their first critical reflection paper during weeks 4 through 7, and their second critical reflection paper during weeks 8 through 11. Critical reflections should focus on at least one required reading and may include recommended reading.

Students will sign up for readings and dates that correspond with their interests and schedules. Critical reflection papers are due in class on the date of their assigned reading. Students are expected to present some of their reflections in class in order to stimulate discussion and further engagement with the readings (see also Participation and Informal Presentations, below).

Final Paper (40%, date TBD)
Students are required to develop a critical analysis on a topic of their choice that is relevant to feminism, health (broadly conceived) and biopolitics (e.g., prenatal genetic testing, mental health, preimplantation genetic diagnosis, biobanks, HIV/AIDS, infertility, pregnancy, gendered technologies of governance, health-related surveillance, security, disability). Papers must integrate and be informed by one or more themes covered in the course. Students will have the opportunity to discuss their topics in class and to meet with the Instructor for further guidance. Papers should be between 18 and 23 pages, double spaced. Students are expected to draw on both required and recommended course readings as relevant and to conduct research beyond the course readings in order to develop their analysis on their specific topics.

Participation and Informal Presentations
Students are expected to attend class prepared to discuss the required course readings and to contribute to class discussion thoughtfully. Students are not graded for attendance. In cases of persistent absenteeism without accommodation, the instructor will follow up respectfully with the student and may request to meet in person. Keeping notes on the required readings is essential to engaging with the ideas in the texts and is strongly recommended. Journaling your thoughts and ideas as they emerge in relation to the required readings will help you construct your critical reflection papers, your presentations, and your final papers.

Students are required to do three informal presentations. The first will focus on the key themes and ideas of Parts II through V in the History of Sexuality (during weeks 2 and 3). The second and third presentations will focus on students’ selected reading/s for their critical reflection papers (during weeks 4 to 7 for critical reflection paper #1, and weeks 8 to 11 for critical reflection paper #2). Presentations are meant to be rigorous but informal. The purpose of the presentation is not to show that you got the ideas “right”, but is to rather to engage with the ideas in the reading, elaborate your understanding of the course material, and stimulate discussion with your peers. Do not be afraid to let your thinking show. By communicating your interpretations of the course material, this will help to further an understanding of the course material in the class by inspiring further thought, reflection and discussion. The presentations themselves will not be evaluated. Strong presentations will: (i) attend to the text closely; (ii) identify and engage with the relevant themes in the reading; and (iii) raise questions for discussion.
Policies

Policy on Late Assignments
Late assignments will only be accepted without penalty if a prior agreement with the Instructor has been made or if a valid medical certificate is provided. In the event that a student is unable to meet a deadline, for medical or other reasons, it is their responsibility to negotiate an alternate deadline with the Instructor.

Students who submit assignments late without making a prior agreement with the Instructor will be penalized 3% for every 24-hour period past the assignment deadline. Students who negotiate alternate deadlines with the Instructor and who do not meet the revised deadlines will be penalized 3% for every 24-hour period past the revised deadline.

Assignments not submitted in class must be submitted in the WS drop-box. Assignments will NOT be accepted by email.

Email Etiquette and Expectations for OWL Use
The Instructor will check email regularly from Monday to Friday. Students who wish to communicate with the Instructor by email should clearly indicate the course number (WS 9461) in the subject line. Responses to students’ emails will be made as promptly as possible. If a student does not receive a response from the Instructor within 48 hours, a second email is acceptable as a polite reminder of the student’s question or concern.

Use of OWL is a course requirement. Students are expected to use OWL as required to download instructions for assignments and to communicate with the class.

Student Accessibility Services
Western is committed to achieving barrier-free accessibility for all its members, including graduate students. As part of this commitment, Western provides a variety of services devoted to promoting, advocating, and accommodating persons with disabilities in their respective graduate program.

Graduate students with disabilities (for example, chronic illnesses, mental health conditions, mobility impairments) are encouraged to register with Student Accessibility Services, a confidential service designed to support graduate and undergraduate students through their academic program. With the appropriate documentation, the student will work with both SAS and their graduate programs (normally their Graduate Chair and/or Course instructor) to ensure that appropriate academic accommodations to program requirements are arranged. These accommodations include individual counselling, alternative formatted literature, accessible campus transportation, learning strategy instruction, writing exams and assistive technology instruction.