Department of Women's and Gender Studies
WMST 890: Special Topics

Special Topics: Exploring Intersectionality: Theories, Methods, and Practices of Social Change
Fall 2013
Tuesdays 3:30-6:15
Instructor: Dr. Michele Tracy Berger
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Course Description: ‘Intersectionality’ (the attention to interlocking forms of oppression and privilege), as an interpretative tool is one of the prominent contemporary contributions made by scholars in the field of women’s studies that now broadly extend across the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences. This course takes stock of this transformative paradigm.

We will seek to:
1) examine diverse interpretative frameworks of intersectionality: How have scholars used it as a theory, paradigm, concept, and practice of social change?
2) Examine its development across many fields of study: Intersectionality is a term applied to different approaches, perspective, and methodologies. We will look for patterns, debates and controversies, sifting through and extracting insights that are most useful for our current research.
3) Examine methodological innovations: Intersectional approaches suggest a breadth and applicability to wide variety of communities, topics and research methods. As such, an intersectional approach typically requires a degree of researcher self-reflexivity and insight into the shape, design, and analysis of a project. We will consider the challenges and opportunities of employing intersectional research.
4) Examine ‘bridging theory and praxis’: Many scholars who employ intersectional approaches also make linkages between theorizing about ‘matrices of domination’ and engaging in efforts to ameliorate such inequalities. What are practical applications for using intersectional knowledge that help to achieve positive institutional change and social justice?

We will especially focus on issues of race, class, gender, ability, nation and sexual orientation. Graduate students from all fields welcome.

Course Objectives and Goals:
At the conclusion of this course, students should:

-Recognize the historical trajectory of intersectionality as a theoretical concept and research paradigm rooted in Black feminism(s) and critical legal studies, including the core texts of the movement
-Acquire content-based knowledge about the substance of intersectional social theories and research-based approaches from both the humanities and social sciences
-Understand the core dilemmas facing founding scholars of intersectionality theory and the ways in which later scholars have responded to and adapted these approaches
-Be conversant in current approaches to intersectional research, including specific discipline-based and interdisciplinary methods of intersectionality
-Explore the possibilities for intersectionality -- as theory, method and activism -- to catalyze change, address problems (e.g., inequity, stratifications, etc.) and promote social
Professor’s Objectives and Goals
1) To help students develop the ability to critically examine theoretical assumptions and evaluate theoretical arguments.
2) To convey the importance of intersectionality as knowledge production, lived experience and its potential ability to effect social change

Course Structure and Expectations

This course will be conducted as a workshop where we each share our work. Through lectures, I plan on presenting my current research about intersectionality and invite critical commentary and feedback. I will not be telling you the “truth” of intersectionality, but rather will be highlighting the current debates, controversies and themes that frame this emerging area of knowledge. I also expect you to share your current and/or emerging research interests as they converge and/or diverge with intersectional analyses both throughout the course as well as in our final presentation panels.

We will build a collective framework about intersectionality using as our data (a) the substance of our class discussions; and (b) current, cutting-edge scholarship (assigned readings and your individual research projects). Rather than thinking of yourself as a student who simply takes notes, I encourage you to think of yourself as part of a research team composed of scholars at varying stages who are actively involved in analyzing and using intersectionality.

Requirements:
Class Participation 50%
3 Analytic Memos: 15%
Leading Class Discussion and Two Presentation Memos 15%
Paper 20%

Grading: Your grade will be based on a combination of the work you do over the course of the semester.

Participation: The success of this seminar will depend on the quality of your preparation and participation. I encourage you to approach course readings and interpret class discussions in light of how they articulate with your questions, concerns and/or research agendas. In class sessions, I expect you to raise questions and share information about your particular areas of expertise and interest. Just as I bring a specific set of questions concerning my own research to the course, I hope that you will identify your interests and do likewise. **Also see Principles for Seminar Discussions

Analytic Memos. Three short (3-5 page) analytic essays are due across the semester. Details and requirements for each essay will be distributed in advance of each due date. These papers are designed to showcase students’ abilities in critical, written expression; analytic thinking and comprehension of course content.

Facilitating Class Discussion
Discussion Group Leaders: In collaboration with one or more students, you will lead a discussion on assigned readings twice during the semester. As a team you should (1) provide a 10-15 minute review of the main ideas of that week’s readings; and (2) develop a framework or interpretive approach to the readings that draws out discussion broad themes submitted for that week. Your goal is identify thematic focal points for in class discussion. More information will be distributed during the first week of class.

- Principles for Seminar Discussion

- Intersectionality is an extremely lively area in addition to being controversial in society. It is also an area about which everyone has perspectives. Therefore, a central goal of this course is to provide an analytical framework that will help us understand everyday observances and occurrences. “Common sense” about race, gender, and class, sexuality, etc., is transformed into “analytical sense” through study, but also through discussion.
- The following guidelines are intended to facilitate our seminar discussions. Some of them may sound obvious, but past experience makes it clear that they need to be made explicit.
- Preparation for Seminar Discussions: (a) All students must come to the seminar discussion with at least one question written down. These questions do not need to be grandiose or profound – they can deal with issues of clarification, meaning, interpretation, or reflect something you don't understand. The point is to enter the discussion with something you’d like to learn from it. (b) For each reading, write a paragraph that reviews the major themes of the article/book, what you think the "punch line" is, and your thoughts on reading this piece. If you do this diligently, you will be well-prepared for a lifetime of scholarship (as well as your comprehensive exams, should you choose to pursue a PhD). (c) Above all: Do the readings carefully.
- Readings: Discussions should revolve around the week’s readings, rather than the larger topic or something that one or more students find interesting. There can be a tendency in seminars toward a "bull session" about the topic that is not informed by the readings. This can be in part because students are rushed and don’t find the time to complete the readings before class, but when this happens, the interaction crucial to a seminar simply can’t occur. In this course, the issues raised and problems analyzed will center on the assigned texts.
- Comments & Brevity: Not every comment needs to be earth-shattering or brilliant. One of the reasons that students can feel intimidated in seminars is because it seems that the stakes are high, and the only legitimate comments are those that show complete mastery of the subject matter. There are several general rules about comments that should facilitate broader participation: (1) Every comment that reflects an attempt to engage the material seriously is valuable. Simple questions often turn out to be the most difficult to answer. (2) Asking for clarification of readings or previous comments is as appropriate as substantive comments. In addition, comments should be kept short and to-the-point. It’s always possible to add elaboration as necessary.
- Listening & Equity: In a good seminar, comments from different participants are linked to one another. A given point is followed up, and the discussion has continuity. In some seminar discussions, however, comments become disconnected, because participants are not listening to each other and reflecting on what is actually being said. For this course, we should attempt to maintain continuity in our
comments and discussion. In addition, while we should acknowledge that different exposures to the material and different personalities lead to different levels of active participation, it should be our collective goal to have as equitable participation as possible. The discussion leader has the right to curtail speeches by people who have dominated the discussion.

- **Arguments, Competitiveness, Consensus**: Despite the emphasis on equity, our seminar discussions are meant to expose theoretical debates. We might not all agree on a given issue. However, arguments and debates must at all times be grounded on respect for the other participants. Aggressiveness and competitiveness are simply not acceptable. While we won't usually reach consensus, we should pursue "cooperative conflict": theoretical advance that comes out of constructive but not antagonistic conflict.

- **The Right Answer**: By now, most students realize that for the most part "right" answers are few and far between. This is why theoretical debates exist. The theoretical approach that a person takes may clearly influence their interpretation of even specific empirical evidence. As long as a student is willing to debate their position and can provide a clear justification for the position they take, they are fulfilling the requirements of the class. Trying to discover what the instructor "thinks" about a subject is frequently beside the point, and it almost certainly will not provide the "right" answer to a question.

- **Discussion Leading**: In order for discussions to have continuity, equity, and the other dynamics mentioned above, it is necessary that the discussion leader take a strong role. The discussion leader needs to have the ability to tell someone to hold off a point that doesn't relate to the current discussion, cut rambling points short, and so forth. However, seminar participants have the responsibility of letting the leader know when too much monitoring is going on.

- **Collective Self-Evaluation**: The success of a seminar is a collective responsibility of all participants. Professors (and discussion leaders) cannot waive magic wands to promote intellectually productive settings. It is essential that we treat the seminar as something under our collective control, and something that can be challenged and transformed. Any problems should be dealt with through open discussions. We can work together to make the seminar exactly what we hope it will be.

(adapted from Erik Olin Wright and Joya Misra)

*thanks to Dr. Kathleen Guidroz for additional adaptation*

**Presentation Memos:**

When it is your turn to facilitate class discussion you will also turn in a memo. In these one-page, single-spaced, word-processed memos, you will discuss and critically evaluate the readings for a particular class session. The memos are meant to assist you in carefully considering the arguments within the readings, and what these arguments suggest about contemporary theory more broadly. **Memos should not simply be used to summarize the readings** – You should provide evidence that you have thought analytically about the readings in some depth and considered their implications. More information will be distributed the first week of class.

Memos should be one single-spaced page in length and are **due in class during the day of your presentation.** Late memos will not be accepted. Nor will you receive credit for memos written for class sessions in which you are absent.
Paper
Your seminar paper presents you with an opportunity to place class material in dialogue with your existing and/or potential research interests and/or your program requirements. The seminar paper should be approximately 15 pages excluding your bibliography. I am more interested in the quality of the arguments that you advance in your paper than in comprehensive coverage of a body of scholarship. Your seminar paper should dovetail with established research interests and should serve you. We will work to identify ways to draw on your current work (i.e. MA thesis or doctoral chapters) to support this requirement.

We will allocate class time during the course for you to share your project with the group and receive feedback. Students who plan on using this course as preparation for comprehensive exams, are encouraged to use this course to prepare your reading lists and write a seminar paper that might be included in your portfolios.

For students without a developed research project, I will spend time guiding you through to clearly identify a researchable topic.

The reading assignments for this course are paced to give you an opportunity to develop, by the end of the semester, both a comprehensive bibliography for your seminar paper and a well-written document.

Getting in touch with me:
The best way to talk to me outside of class is to come to my office during office hours or talk with me before or after class, or during our break. Please do not expect quick responses to email unless it concerns an urgent or pressing matter. I will not discuss course substance, grades, etc., over email; I will only answer logistical questions. I will use email and/or post to SAKAI to send information about minor changes in readings or other assignments. Any questions about course content, your grades, or other related issues must be discussed in person.

Other Things That You Should Know (also see ‘The Care and Feeding of This Professor’ sheet)
This seminar requires a high level of student organization and preparedness. Over-scheduling on your part, work conflicts, childcare responsibilities, and/or other personal matters that could be foreseen are typically not grounds for extensions. If you do have an unexpected major problem of some sort that compromises your performance, please do not hesitate to contact me. Generally, I do not give incompletes but assign grades based on work accomplished by the end of the semester. Please keep in mind that I grade work that has been submitted to fulfill incompletes when I can. It might be some time before you receive a grade.

Attendance for this course is mandatory. You are allowed 1 “no questions asked” absence. Each absence after this point will result in a 10% reduction of your final grade unless there are extenuating circumstances. Do not enroll in this course if you anticipate problems.

If you need to miss class for observance of a religious holiday, it is your responsibility to notify the instructor prior to the class and holiday. Please check the Graduate Bulletins for the university’s policy regarding religious holidays and student work.
Tardiness and leaving class early are distracting to other students and strongly discouraged. If you cannot make it on time or must leave early, please try to be as considerate as possible while entering and leaving the classroom.

Please de-activate cell phones and beepers or set them on silent notification.

**Other Academic Business**

**The Honor Code**

“The Honor Code represents UNC-Chapel Hill students’ commitment to maintain an environment in which students respect one another and are able to attain their educational goals. As a student at Carolina, you are entering a community in which integrity matters—integrity in the work you submit, and integrity in the manner in which you treat your fellow Carolina community members.”

http://newstudents.unc.edu/content/view/24/77/

I am committed to treating Honor Code violations seriously and urge all students to become familiar with its terms set out at http://honor.unc.edu/honor/code.html. If you have questions it is your responsibility to ask me about the Code’s application. All exams, written work, and other projects must be submitted with a statement that you have complied with the requirements of the Honor Code in all aspects of the submitted work.

**Disability:** If you have a documented disability that may require assistance, you may need to contact the Academic Services office that houses Academic Success Program for coordination in your academic accommodations. Please contact me to discuss any accommodations that may be required to satisfy your needs.

**Resources:** My purpose as a professor is to help you to excel in this learning environment. Should you need further assistance, please consult the following on-campus resources:

- The Writing Center: [http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/](http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/)
- Academic Success Program (for students with learning disabilities (LD) and/or attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD): [http://www.unc.edu/depts/lds/](http://www.unc.edu/depts/lds/)
- Learning Center: [http://www.unc.edu/depts/acadserv/learn.html](http://www.unc.edu/depts/acadserv/learn.html)
- Counseling and Wellness Services: [http://campushealth.unc.edu](http://campushealth.unc.edu)

**If you are interested in pursuing the Graduate Minor in Women’s and Gender Studies, please schedule a time during the semester to speak with Dr. Berger.**

**Required Texts**

All texts will be available for purchase at the UNC bookstore. Copies will also be made available on reserve in the R.B. House Undergraduate Library. If the cost of the books presents a problem, try reading the reserve copies. You may also be able to find books used or cheaper in local bookstores or through Internet booksellers.

Required:


Recommended:


**KEY DATES:**
- Friday, Sept 20, 1st Analytic Memo Due, 5pm
- Friday, Oct 18th, 2nd Analytic Memo Due, 5pm
- Friday, Nov 1, 3rd Analytic Memo Due, 5pm
- Tuesday, Dec 10th, Seminar Paper Due, 4pm

All materials uploaded to Sakai unless otherwise noted

**SCHEDULE**

**Week 1**
- **Why Intersectionality? Why Now/?Review of Syllabus, Introductions**

  **• AUG 20**
  - Gudrun-Alexi Knapp. 2005. “Race, Class, Gender: Reclaiming Baggage in Fast Travelling Theories.” Intersectional Research Database, a database prepared by the Consortium on Race, Gender and Ethnicity at the University of Maryland. The link is available through www.crge.umd.edu http://mith.umd.edu/crge/ird/
  - Leith Mullings and Amy Schultz, “Intersectionality and Health” In Gender, Race, Class and Health
Week 2

**Origin Stories/ Global Social Movements, Black Feminism and Race/Class/Gender Studies**

- **AUG 27**
  
  **Readings:** Vivian May. 2007. *Anna Julia Cooper, Visionary Black Feminist: A Critical Introduction* (selections from) (SAKAI)


  Kimberlé Crenshaw, Nira Yuval-Davis, and Michelle Fine. 2009. “A Conversation with Founding Scholars of Intersectionality.” *The Intersectional Approach*


Week 3

**What's Wrong With the Center?**

- **SEP 3**
  
  **Readings:** Jessie Daniels and Amy Schultz. 2006. “Constructing Whiteness in Health Disparities Research” In *Gender, Race, Class and Health*


  Jennifer Sherwood, J. H. “The view from the country club: Wealthy whites and the matrix of privilege.” In *The Intersectional Approach:*

  Yvette Taylor, et. al. 2011. Theorizing Intersectionality and Sexuality (Selections from) (SAKAI)


Week 4

**Experiencing Theory: The Standpoint**

- **SEP 10**
  
  **Readings:** Audre Lorde. 1983. The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. In *Sister Outsider* (Lorde 1983) (SAKAI)


Week 5 What Makes Theory “Critical”?

SEP 17 Readings: Patricia Williams, *The alchemy of race and rights: Diary of a Law Professor.* (Part 2)

Collins, P. H. (2000). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness and the politics of empowerment.* 2nd ed. (Chapters 1 & 2) (SAKAI)


DUE Sept 20: 1st Analytic Memo Due: How does the concept of an intersectional standpoint challenge traditional academic notions of objectivity and theory? (3-5 pgs.)

Week 6 Intersectionality and Interdisciplinary Knowledge: Women’s Studies and Social Justice Feminism

SEP 24 Readings: Nira Yuval-Davis. “Intersectionality and Feminist Politics.” In *The Intersectional Approach*


Week 7 Intersectionality and Disciplinary Knowledge: Sociology, Political Science and Public Health


Amy Schultz and Leith Mullings, “Reconstructing the Landscape of Health Disparities Research: Promoting Dialogue and Collaboration Between Feminist Intersectional and Biomedical Paradigms” In *Gender, Race, Class and Health*


*Informal research paper check-in
Week 8  Intersectionality as an Analytical Category

October 8  Readings: (**All on SAKAI except Cole and Sabik)


Elizabeth Cole and Natlie Sabik, “Repairing a Broken Mirror: Intersectional Approaches to Diverse Women’s Perceptions of Bodies and Beauty” In The Intersectional Approach

Week 9  Queer/Intersectionality

OCT 15  Readings:
Alison Kafer. 2013. Feminist, Queer, Crip (selections from) (SAKAI)


DUE: October 15 2nd Analytic essay: What role does ‘race’ play as a category of analysis in intersectionality? Must race always be central to intersectionality as a theoretical frame?

Week 10  Intersectionality as an Analytic Category II
OCT 22 Readings: Additional readings TBA based on student feedback and interest

Julia Sudbury. 2004. "From the Point of No Return to the Women’s Prison: Writing Spaces of Confinement into Diaspora Studies" (Sudbury 2004) (SAKAI)


Week 11 Intersectionality and the Academy

OCT 29 Readings: Patricia Collins. 2009. Foreword: Emerging intersections-building knowledge and transforming institutions” In Emerging intersections

Mako Fitts. 2009. “Institutionalizing intersectionality: Reflections on the structure of women’s studies departments and programs” The Intersectional Approach

Bonnie Thorton Dill. 2009. “Intersections, identities, and inequalities in higher education” In Emerging Intersections

Bonnie Thorton Dill et. al. 2009. “Transforming the campus climate through institutions, collaboration, and mentoring” In Emerging Intersections

Additional Readings TBA

DUE: Friday, NOV 1-3rd Analytic Memo Due: Critical Literature Review

Week 12 Public Policies

NOV 5 Readings:


Kia Caldwell. 2009. “Black women and the development of intersectionality health policy in Brazil.” In, The intersectional Approach: Transforming the academy

Amy Schultz, et al. “Intersections of Race, Class and Gender in Public Health Interventions” In Gender, Race, Class and Health

Jones-DeWeever, et al., 2009. “Racial, ethnic, and gender
disparities in the workforce, education, and training under welfare reform.” In *Emerging intersections: Race, class, ... Approach*


Julia Sudbury and Margo-Okazawa-Rey. 2009. *Activist Scholarship: Antiracism, Feminism, and Social Change* (Selections from) (Sudbury and Okazawa-Rey, eds., 2009)

*Students will distribute literature review, 5-7 pages of beginning draft prior to class*

**Week 14 Nov 19—Research Day-No Class**

**Week 15 Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory/New Directions** *(ALL on SAKAI except Zambrana and Russo)*


Jamie Rogers and Ursula Kelly. 2011. “Feminist intersectionality: Bringing social justice to health disparities research” (Rogers and Kelly 2011)


Nina Lykke. “Intersectional Analysis: Black Box or Useful Critical Feminist Thinking Technology?” (Lykke)


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Week 16  Student presentations/Wrap-Up

Dec 3  Before the last class, students will circulate drafts of material with an introduction Reflect and celebrate

Papers due: by 4pm Tuesday Dec 10th