

Politics of Desire

Politics 295, Fall 2020 – SYLLABUS

Instructor: Dr. Alena Wolflink

Class: Mondays and Wednesdays, 7:15-9:45pm (CST); Zoom

Office Hours: By Zoom appointment

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Description

This course surveys political theory literatures on the topic of desire. Readings will survey historical and contemporary theories of consumption and exchange, feminist perspectives on political economy, and democratic and queer theories, and topics will include the relationships between ideas about desires and ideas about identity, bodies, needs, and preferences. We will think about desire as it manifests in a number of parts of our individual and collective lives, such as its relationship with race, gender, and sexuality, capital, aesthetics, food, sovereignty, and inclusive pedagogy. We will especially tackle the problem of how to transcend affinities for hierarchy and distinction and in their place generate desires for democratic equality.

Learning Objectives

My objectives for student learning in this course include both knowledge and skills. By the end of the quarter, you will:

- Be familiar with the arguments and ideas presented in the readings and in classroom discussions.
- Understand some main theoretical debates around the politics of desire and its intersections with democracy, identity, and capitalism and be familiar with examples from the political world to which the debates speak.
- Thoughtfully read complex texts and analyze arguments.
- Communicate your own ideas and arguments, verbally and in writing.

Requirements

I expect you to attend all class meetings and/or complete all class activities, and to thoughtfully read all course materials. Your course grade will include the following components:

1. Attendance – 15%
 - Synchronous option: Present at Zoom meetings; arrives on time and stays for duration of meeting
 - Asynchronous option: Discussion forum assignments completed
2. Participation – 15%

Synchronous option: Qualitative participation in Zoom meetings

Asynchronous option: Qualitative participation in forum assignments

3. Four short papers – 40% (10% each)
4. Reading quizzes (maximum of eight given, lowest score dropped) – 15%
5. Final project – 15%

Extensions and incompletes are only for emergency cases. Contact me immediately – and in advance of any due dates – should urgent, unavoidable, and unforeseen circumstances interfere with your completion of the requirements.

Expectations

Readings:

The readings are the foundation of the course. Much of the reading is dense and difficult, and full of unfamiliar ideas. You must give yourself sufficient time to actively **read and re-read** the materials slowly, carefully, and thoughtfully. *You should plan to spend a number of hours a week reading and re-reading the course materials and preparing for class discussion.* If you have taken these steps and are still having difficulty engaging in the course materials, arrange to see me in office hours.

Synchronous Discussions:

Discussions provide an opportunity for more in-depth discussion and analysis of the material. Attendance and participation is required, and you are expected to be an active and consistent contributor. More specifically:

- You must come to class prepared to analyze and reflect on the readings—this means you must complete the assigned readings prior to class. Come to class on time, and bring a copy of the readings with you. If you are consistently late or frequently arrive without a copy of the assigned readings (or your notes), this will impact your participation grade.
- You will be expected to raise questions related to the material, share perspectives on and interpretations of the readings and discussion topics, and engage in respectful and thoughtful debate.

Class discussion makes up a significant portion of your grade in this class. I will use these guidelines to rigorously evaluate your work in this class:

A: Solid, consistent, outstanding contributions, active listener

B: Participated well most days with contributions and as an active listener; or someone who made solid contributions, but contributed too often or took over conversations

C: Present but not much more- i.e. little to no participation, just showed up to class and breathed.

D: Did average work or less, or who was present/breathing but regularly came to class without the texts.

F: Not in attendance enough to judge participation

Policies for Asynchronous Work

The course is designed to be enjoyed through synchronous discussions. However, if circumstances arise that prevent you from attending any one (or several) of these meetings, you can “make up” the work for a particular class meeting by participating in the asynchronous version of the class posted on Moodle. This option features flexible deadlines, but requires more written work as a replacement for your contributions in synchronous attendance and participation. All discussion questions, assignments, and due dates for asynchronous work will be posted in Moodle, and they will be available several hours before our synchronous meetings.

Writing:

Clear writing is an extremely difficult task that can only be mastered through practice. Virtually no one is a born writer. Virtually everyone can be a good – even outstanding – writer. Focused papers will help to develop your skills, but they will require significant time thinking, writing, and revising and reworking. I will also be available to meet with you to discuss your papers, however, these meetings must be conducted in person. I also encourage you to seek help from the Writing Center or friends to review papers for you. At the very least, proofread your own work.

I take the responsibility of grading your work seriously, and will always strive to be fair and accurate in my evaluations. I will use the following standards for the evaluating written work in this course:

- A: Excellent work, with clear, challenging, original ideas supported by sufficient, appropriate, logically interpreted evidence. The essay should engage the reader in the inquiry, convincingly answer opposing views, be well organized, and free of significant flaws. An ‘A’ paper should be not just good but outstanding in ideas and presentation.
- B: Good to very good work, with a clear thesis supported by sufficient, appropriate evidence, organized and interpreted logically. The ‘B’ paper may have some outstanding qualities but be marked by significant flaws which keep it from being an ‘A’; or it may be all-around good work, free of major problems but lacking the deeper insight necessary for excellence.
- C: Satisfactory work, but not yet good. The ‘C’ paper meets the basic requirements of a thesis supported by interpretation of specific evidence, but it needs work in thinking and/or presentation. There may be a lack of clarity, the evidence may not always be sufficient and appropriate, or the interpretation may have logical flaws. The essay may have organizational or mechanical problems that keep it from being good. The ‘C’ paper may be good in some respects but poor in others, or it may simply be adequate but not noteworthy overall.

- D: Barely passing work that shows effort but is so marred by serious problems that it cannot be considered a satisfactory paper.
- F: Failing work—for example, a hasty, sloppy paper that shows little or no thought, effort, or familiarity with the text.

Some Classroom Practices and Policies

- Your curiosity and participation are essential to your learning success in this course. Please feel free to raise your hand if you have a question—every question brings something of value to the class.
- Bring your readings to every single class.
- Be on time. Do not leave midway through class except during break or in case of emergency.
- All course materials are available on Moodle; please be familiar with everything that's there.
- It is imperative that you check your Beloit email account for class communications. I will always try to respond to your emails within 24-48 hours.
- Any form of academic dishonesty or plagiarism will be met with a failing grade and referral to the college for further discipline.

Textbooks

There are two books that we will read in their entirety, and thus that you will be required to have in hand on the weeks that we discuss them. However, I am flexible about if and where you purchase them, and about editions. Both are on reserve at the Beloit College library and available for digital lending and/or audiobook. The texts are:

- Tommy Pico, *Feed*
- Plato, *The Symposium*

Schedule of Classes and Readings

Monday, Oct 19th: Introduction to the Course Requirements and Themes

Wednesday, Oct 21st: Bodies in the Classroom

bell hooks, "Eros, Eroticism and the Pedagogical Process"

Monday, Oct 26th: Types of Desire

Plato, *The Symposium*

Wednesday, Oct 28th: Regulating Desire

Alan Hunt, *Governance of the Consuming Passions* (chapters 2, 3, and 9)

Monday, Nov 2nd: Interlude...Desires for Political Transformation

Judith Butler, "Violence, Mourning, and Politics"

Wednesday, Nov 4th: Needs and Desires

Christopher Berry, "Luxury Goods"

Natalie Wynn, "Opulence," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jD-PbF3ywGo>
[In-class]

Monday, Nov 9th and Wednesday, Nov 11th: Cultivating Desires for Democratic Equality

Adam Phillips, "Superiorities" (until pg. 19 "IV" for Monday, the rest for Wednesday)

Monday, Nov 16th: Sexuality and Complexity

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (chapter 1)

Wednesday, Nov 18th: Desires as Creativity/Inspiration

Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power"

Monday, Nov 23rd and Monday, Nov 30th: Desires for Sovereignty and Freedom (and Food)

Tommy Pico, *Feed* (read up until "Track 8" for the 23rd, the rest for the 30th)

Wednesday, Dec 2nd: Final Projects

Presentations/Discussions of Final Projects

All course assignments must be completed by Monday, Dec 7th at 10pm, no exceptions