

**SDS
381H1**

INTRO TO TRANS STUDIES

**MARK S. BONHAM CENTER FOR SEXUAL DIVERSITY STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO**

FLORENCE ASHLEY

Course time

Thursdays, 3 pm to 5 pm

Office hours

Thursdays, 5 pm to 6 pm and
by appointment

Email

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Dubbed the “Transgender Tipping Point” by TIME Magazine, the year 2014 has augured a momentous shift in trans communities’ place in the Global North sociopolitical landscape. In the bittersweet throes of a newfound visibility, the nascent field of trans studies had to compose not only with a changing social world but also a proliferation of perspectives as more and more trans scholars sought a home in academia.

Rather than focusing on foundational text from the early days of trans studies, this course centers contemporary debates and publications by trans scholars who will undoubtedly shape the trans studies of tomorrow. The goals of the course are (1) to critically engage with the possibility and possibilities of trans studies, (2) to explore contemporary understandings of trans subjectivity, and (3) to problematize the logics of visibility in contemporary trans politics.

ATTENDING CLASS

IN-CLASS EXPECTATIONS

Classes will be held by video on Zoom. Some students might be uncomfortable turning on their video for any of a range of understandable reasons. While having video on can make classes livelier and more dynamic, video is not required for this class. If you have video on and your pet comes on screen, you are expected to introduce them to the class. Unless they are too shy.

During class, your name should be clearly displayed. If you are comfortable doing so, I strongly encourage displaying your pronouns after your name. I ask that students refer to one another using the pronouns included on students' display names. To avoid (mis)assuming pronouns and gender based on appearances, students should use 'they/them/their' when referring to classmates who do not include pronouns in their display name. You are absolutely welcome to try out new names (and pronouns) throughout the course but you should email me if you change your display name so I can keep track of your participation across names.

The class will critically discuss difficult and contentious materials relating directly and indirectly to anti-trans violence, suicide, discrimination, harassment, and stigma. Students will come from varied backgrounds and will have varying levels of familiarity with trans communities and trans studies. For some, it will be very familiar and speak to their lived experience. For others, it will be an entirely new topic. In between lies a large spectrum, from people who are questioning their gender to committed assistants to occasional allies. It is likely that students (or I) will make mistakes, say something hurtful, use archaic or inappropriate terminology, misgender someone, or otherwise make others uncomfortable. And unfortunately, trans students will likely bear the brunt of that emotional load. It is an unavoidable result of the course topic, although I have not assigned readings by starkly anti-trans sources and we will not be delving into the merits of anti-trans arguments. Nevertheless, I cannot guarantee that the virtual classroom will be a safe space—however we may conceptualize that. I however hope that it can serve as a space for mutual respect, careful listening, insightful conversation, and personal growth and I will intervene to ensure that the atmosphere remains welcoming to marginalized students. I expect everyone to be particularly sensitive and respectful when others share their lived experience in class. The online-only context of the class makes engagement difficult and the last thing we want is for students, especially trans ones, to withdraw and stop sharing because we couldn't make them feel sufficiently respected and appreciated.

Please email me with suggestion for making the class a more welcoming learning environment. This is also a learning experience for me too and I am always looking to improve.

STUDYING DURING A PANDEMIC

Life during a pandemic absolutely sucks. None of us are truly okay; we're all pretending. Chances are you know people who have lost their jobs, been evicted, were hospitalized for COVID-19, and perhaps even died. You might fall under any of those categories (except the last one, unless zombies are a thing now, which to be quite honest I wouldn't be entirely surprised by). Throughout the course, you may be facing financial uncertainty, additional care responsibilities, and poor mental health. Finding motivation to do your readings and attend class might turn out to be a constant struggle.

I am fully committed to making sure that you learn everything you were hoping to learn from the class. I will make all accommodations I can to help you understand the class material, participate in class, and do well on your assignments. The flexibility and leniency with which I approach course expectations and grading when students face difficulties are intensified under pandemic conditions. If you tell me you are struggling, I will not judge you or think any less of you. I hope you will extend me the same grace.

You don't owe me personal information about your health. You are, however, always welcome to talk to me about things you are going through. Together we can try to find you the support you need. If you need

additional help or time, or if you feel like you're behind in the class, please talk to me! I will work with you and we will do our best to figure something out. While I hope you will learn a lot from the class, your physical and mental health are of utmost importance.

EVALUATIONS

OUTLINE OF EVALUATIONS

1. Participation (20%)
2. Critical reflections (15% x 2)
3. Final essay proposal (10%)
4. Final essay (40%)

IMPORTANT DATES & LATENESS POLICY

- October 15: Turn in first critical reflection by 11:59 pm
- November 5: Turn in your final essay proposal by 11:59 pm
- November 9: Course drop deadline
- November 26: Turn in your second critical reflection by 11:59 pm
- December 3: Turn in your self-assessment of participation by 11:59 pm
- December 22: Turn in your final essay by 11:59 pm

All assignments must be submitted by the deadline written in the syllabus. The syllabus prevails. If I make changes to what is written in the syllabus, I will send the information by email to make sure that everyone has it.

If you think you will not be able to submit your assignment in time, you must contact me as soon as reasonably possible. Assignments are penalized 2% per day they are late including weekends. I will not accept assignments more than one week late. The penalty does not apply if the assignment is late due to a documented injury, illness, or other circumstances beyond your control (as defined by the university). I reserve the right to exempt students from the lateness penalty on a case-by-case basis for any reason I consider valid with or without documentation.

PARTICIPATION (20%)

Important date: December 3rd at 11:59 pm

One of the best skills you can learn from university courses is how to ask interesting and relevant questions. Throughout the course, I encourage you to ask questions that points towards potential confusions, uncertainties, conflicts, possibilities, and critical junctures that stem from the course's content.

However, valuable engagement does not solely consist of asking questions during class. It can also mean asking and answering questions on Perusall, doing optional readings, attending trans studies conferences, and engaging with trans scholarship and communities outside of class time. I view trans

studies as an engaged discipline that should question the boundary between academic and extracurricular worlds.

To reflect the multifaceted nature of participation, I will ask you to self-assess your participation in the course (due December 3rd at 11:59 pm). While I will make my own observations during the term, your self-assessment will help guide my evaluation and draw my attention to components of participation that I might not have picked up on. When evaluating participation, I will be keeping in mind the additional difficulties posed by the pandemic and the online nature of the course; I am deeply aware that it can be difficult to stay motivated during these times and evaluations will reflect as much. The self-assessment will also be an opportunity to point out any reason for absences that I may not be aware of, but I hope you will feel comfortable emailing me during the year so that we can see how best to optimize your learning.

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS (15% x 2)

Important dates: October 15th and November 26th at 11:59 pm

To hone your ability to critically ask and reflect upon questions, you will have to write two short reflection essays. The reflection essays should ask an insightful question that is left unanswered by an assigned reading (or multiple readings together) of your choice and then explore how it could be answered and what its implications are for the viewpoint put forward in the paper and/or for trans studies more generally. What I want to see is whether you're able to take the material further than what's on the page and reflect on its broader implications in a concise and clear manner. Trans studies can get wordy and even undecipherable. Learning how to communicate thoughts clearly in few words is an important skill to develop.

I will evaluate you based on the structure of the essay (25%), clarity of the writing (25%), and on how insightful and compelling the question and corresponding discussion are (50%). Given how you are evaluated, you will want to write your two reflections on articles that inspire you.

The critical reflections should be of a maximum of 400 words, use 1.5 line spacing, a standard serif font like Times New Roman or Garamond, and either .doc, .docx, or .pdf file type. You do not have to use any formal citation style and can simply refer to the title of the paper in "quotation marks" or *in italics*.

The first reflection essay must be on assigned reading(s) up to and including October 15th, whereas the second one must be on reading(s) from October 26th to December 3rd, inclusively. The first essay is due on October 15th and the second essay is due on November 26th at the latest, but you can and are encouraged to submit them at any time you want before those dates.

FINAL ESSAY PROPOSAL (10%)

Important date: November 5th at 11:59 pm

Your final assignment and the largest component of your grade will be to write an original research paper in trans studies, which will have to cite class readings (I leave the number up to you) and at least two scholarly sources not assigned in class (that cannot be taken from the optional readings).

To help you prepare for the final essay, you will have to submit a short proposal. The proposal should clearly set out what research question you will address and/or what argument you will be making in your

final essay. It should explain what kinds of sources and approaches you will be drawing on to write the paper. Your research question/topic should draw on course themes and readings but can expand beyond them. If you're worried about going a bit too far beyond the scope of the course, you should email me so that I may tell you whether it would be an adequate choice for the final essay. The proposal should tentatively identify which class readings you will draw on as well as one of the two external sources.

The goal of the proposal is to help you think through and prepare for the final essay. Having you submit the proposal early one ensures that you won't be struggling to find a topic in the middle of exam week but is more importantly an opportunity for me to give you feedback on the quality of the idea and manageability of its scope (it shouldn't be too small or too big an idea for the length requirements). You will be graded on the scope of the essay (25%), clarity and structure of the proposal (25%), and quality of the essay idea and sources proposed (50%).

The proposal should be of a maximum of 300 words, with 1.5 line spacing, a standard serif font like Times New Roman or Garamond, and either .doc, .docx, or .pdf file type. Your references must be consistently formatted using either author-date or footnotes, but you can pick between APA, MLA, Chicago, McGill Cite Guide, Bluebook, or a mixture of those styles. So long as the style is consistent and all the important information (author, title, publisher/journal, date, volume, page numbers) is there, I'm happy.

FINAL ESSAY (40%)

Important date: December 22nd at 11:59 pm

The final assignment is to write an original research paper in trans studies. It must cite class readings (I leave the number up to you) and at least two scholarly sources not assigned in class (that cannot be taken from the optional readings).

The purpose of the assignment is to hone your ability to conduct independent research, analyze texts on your own, and contribute to interdisciplinary scholarship. Your essay should put forward a clear and cogent argument related to the readings and themes explored in the course. It shouldn't merely summarize what is already said in the course readings and external sources you cite but should use them to make an original contribution. The final essay must be on the general topic set out in your proposal, as modified based on my feedback. It is normal and okay for your thinking to have evolved and shifted since the proposal, but I should be able to see a clear genealogy between the proposal and the final essay. Any significant change to the final essay topic is subject to my permission.

Your essay will be graded based on the quality of the argumentation (30%), use of sources (20%), structure of the essay (20%), clarity of the writing (20%), and clarity of the thesis (10%).

The essay should be a maximum of 2,000 words long, with 1.5 line spacing, a standard serif font like Times New Roman or Garamond, and either .doc, .docx, or .pdf file type. Your references must be consistently formatted using either author-date or footnotes, but you can pick between APA, MLA, Chicago, McGill Cite Guide, Bluebook, or a mixture of those styles. Like with the proposal, make sure you use a consistent style that includes all the important information (author, title, publisher/journal, date, volume, page numbers).

READINGS

All readings will be available online on Perusall and Quercus. Perusall (<https://perusall.com/>) is a collaborative reading platform that lets you comment and discuss the text with your classmates and myself. You will have to create a free account and will be able to find the class using the course code XXXXXX-69FAP. While the Perusal platform is not mandatory (due to ever-present risks of technological issues), it will help the course feel more interactive despite the online-only context and I strongly recommend using it.

You should come to class prepared to critically discuss the course readings. To encourage you to attentively read the material, I have kept the amount of reading under 40 pages per week (with a few exceptions). If you are interested in digging deeper, I encourage you to do the optional readings and/or email me to ask for further readings on any topic. There are so many fantastic writings in trans studies that I couldn't fit into the reading list and I would be more than happy to make recommendations.

Talk of transphobia, racism, ableism, trauma, mental illness, suicide, and violence abound in trans studies and the readings for this class are no exception. As such, you should generally expect all readings to engage with those topics. I have provided specific trigger warnings after some of the reading's total pages, e.g. [19 pages; TW suicide], to identify first-person accounts and graphic discussions of with commonly triggering topics (sexual and physical violence, self-harm, suicide, and addiction). I did not have an opportunity to carefully review the material for potential triggers and have a limited experience with trigger warnings; it is therefore likely that I have missed some necessary warnings. If you require more or different trigger warnings, please email me and I will work with you to ensure that you can engage with the course as fully as possible. If you are unable to read assigned works because of their content, you should read one from the optional readings instead or, if there are none on that day, email me for an alternative suggestion.

SEPTEMBER 10 – INTRODUCTION [12 PAGES]

- “GLAAD Media Reference Guide – Transgender,” *glaad.org* [7 pages]
- C. Jacob Hale, “Suggested Rules for Non-Transsexuals Writing about Transsexuals, Transsexuality, Transsexualism, or Trans ____.” *SandyStone.com* (18 November 2009) [3 pages]
- Anne Tagonist, “Fuck You and Fuck Your Fucking Thesis,” *Huck Finn on Estradiol* [LiveJournal] (10 December 2009) [2 pages]

SEPTEMBER 17 – BEING TRANS IN UNIVERSITY [33 PAGES]

- Jen Manion, “The Performance of Inclusion: The Pronoun Go-Round and the New Gender Binary,” Public Seminar (27 November 2018) [7 pages]
- Dean Spade, “We Still Need Pronoun Go-Rounds: A Response to Jen Manion,” Public Seminar (1 December 2018) [7 pages]
- Ruth Pearce, “A Methodology for the Marginalised: Surviving Oppression and Traumatic Fieldwork in the Neoliberal Academy” (2020) *Sociology*, advance online publication [19 pages; TW suicide]

Optional:

- Finn Enke, “The Education of Little Cis: Cisgender and the Discipline of Opposing Bodies” in *Transfeminist Perspectives in and beyond Transgender and Gender Studies* (Temple University Press, 2012) [18 pages]

SEPTEMBER 24 – WHAT’S TRANS STUDIES? [28 PAGES + VIDEO]

- Viviane Namaste, “How To Become An American Transgender Theorist (A Recipe)”, *YouTube* (1998), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9NX2OkvLzmU> [7m51s]
- Cael M. Keegan, “Getting Disciplined: What’s Trans* About Queer Studies Now?” (2020) 67(3) *Journal of Homosexuality* 384-397 [14 pages]
- Andrea Long Chu and Emmett Harsin Drager, “After Trans Studies” (2019) 6(1) *TSQ* 103-116 [14 pages]

Optional:

- David M. Halperin, “The Normalization of Queer Theory” (2003) 45(2-4) *Journal of Homosexuality* 339-343 [5 pages]

OCTOBER 1 – WHOSE VOICES DO WE HEAR? [35 PAGES]

- Jules Gill-Peterson, “Trans of Color Critique before Transsexuality” (2018) 5(4) *TSQ* 606-620 [15 pages]
- Syrus Marcus Ware, “All Power to All People? Black LGBTTI2QQ Activism, Remembrance, and Archiving in Toronto” (2017) 4(2) *TSQ* 170-180 [11 pages]
- Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, “Disability Justice/Stonewall's Legacy, or: Love Mad Trans Black Women When They Are Alive and Dead, Let Their Revolutions Teach Your Resistance All the Time” (2019) 6(2) *QED* 54-64 [9 pages]

OCTOBER 8 – LIVING IN/AND HAPPINESS [31 PAGES + VIDEO]

- Tourmaline and Sasha Wortzel (dirs.), *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* (United States: Frameline, 2018) [14m 42s; TW police violence]
- Blu Buchanan, “Being Samedi: Black Trans Necromancy, the Archive, and the Academy” [14 pages]
- B. Lee Aultman, “Injurious Acts: Notes on Happiness from the Trans Ordinary” (2019) 4(2) *Writing From Below* [17 pages; TW self-harm]

OCTOBER 15 – THESE BODIES IN WHICH WE LIVE [33 PAGES]

First critical reflection due by 11:59 pm

- Andrea Long Chu, “On Liking Women” (2018) 30 *n+1* [16 pages; TW physical violence, dehumanizing rhetoric]

- J. Horncastle, “Busting Out: Happenstance Surgery, Clinic Effects, and the Poetics of Genderqueer Subjectivity” (2018) 5(2) *TSQ* 251-267 [17 pages]

Optional:

- Eric Llaveria Caselles, “Dismantling the Transgender Brain” (2018) 14(2) *Graduate Journal of Social Science* 135-159 [25 pages]

OCTOBER 22 – THESE BODIES IN WHICH WE LIVE (BIS) [~40 PAGES]

- (To be confirmed) Tamsin Kimoto, “tRacing Face: Facial Feminization Surgery and a Racial Genealogy of Beauty” [~15 pages]
- Amy Marvin, “Technology and Narratives of Continuity in Transgender Experiences” (2015) 1(1) *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly* art. 6 [25 pages]

Optional:

- Evan Vipond, “Resisting Transnormativity: Challenging the Medicalization and Regulation of Trans Bodies” (2015) 8(2) *Theory in Action* 21-44 [24 pages]

OCTOBER 29 – WON'T YOU LOOK AT THE TIME! [42 PAGES]

- Alexandre Baril, “‘Doctor, am I an Anglophone trapped in a Francophone body?’ An Intersectional Analysis of ‘Trans-crip-t Time’ in Ableist, Cisnormative, Anglonormative Societies” (2016) 10(2) *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 155-172 [18 pages]
- Hil Malatino, “Future Fatigue: Trans Intimacies and Trans Presents (or How to Survive the Interregnum)” (2019) 6(4) *TSQ* 635-658 [24 pages]

Optional:

- LaVelle Ridley, “Imagining Otherly: Performing Possible Black Trans Futures in Tangerine” (2019) 6(4) *TSQ* 481-490 [10 pages]

NOVEMBER 5 – LONGING FOR BELONGING [38 PAGES]

Final essay proposal due at 11:59 pm

- Cristan Williams, “Radical Inclusion: Recounting the Trans Inclusive History of Radical Feminism” (2016) 3(1-2) *TSQ* 254-258 [5 pages; TW death threats]
- Qui Dorian Alexander, “Brother Insider: Towards a Trans* Onto-Epistemology” (2019) 42:1 *Thresholds* 5-16 [12 pages]
- Arielle Twist, “On Translating the Untranslatable,” *Canadian Art* (20 June 2018) [7 pages]
- Saylesh Wesley, “Twin-Spirited Woman: Sts’iyóye smestiyexw slhá:li” (2014) 1:3 *TSQ* 338-351 [14 pages]

Optional:

- Anonymous, “I’m an Arab trans woman and a Canadian immigrant – but I don’t technically exist in either of my countries,” *The Independent* (24 August 2017) [6 pages]

NOVEMBER 12 – READING WEEK, NO CLASSES <3

NOVEMBER 19 – TRANS LOVE AND PARENTHOOD [35 PAGES]

- Ben Vincent and Sonja Erikainen, “Gender, love, and sex: Using duoethnography to research gender and sexuality minority experiences of transgender relationships” (2020) 23(1-2) *Sexualities* 28-43 [16 pages]
- micha cárdenas, “Pregnancy: Reproductive Futures in Trans of Color Feminism” (2016) 3(1-2) *TSQ* 48-57 [10 pages]
- Syrus Marcus Ware, “Confessions of a Black Pregnant Dad” in Julia Sudbury (ed.), *Birthing Justice: Black Women, Pregnancy and Childbirth* (Paradigm Press: 2015) [9 pages]

NOVEMBER 26 – PUTTING THE ‘SEX’ BACK IN ‘TRANSSEXUAL’ [39 PAGES]

Second critical reflection due by 11:59 pm

- Skylar Adams, “Sex Work Saved My Life” (2020) 7(2) *TSQ* 272-273 [2 pages]
- Daze Jefferies, “Seawater/C-cup: Fishy Trans Embodiments and Geographies of Sex Work in Newfoundland” (2020) 11(1) *Imaginations* 17-35 [19 pages]
- Lua da Mota Stabile, “Sex Work Abolitionism and Hegemonic Feminisms: Implications for Gender-diverse Sex Workers and Migrants from Brazil” in Ben Vincent, Ruth Pearce, and Sonja Erikainen (eds.), *TERF Wars: Feminism and the Fight for Transgender Futures* (The Sociological Review Monograph Series, 2020) [18 pages; TW dehumanizing rhetoric]

Optional:

- Aqdas Aftab, “The Racialization of ‘Transamorous’ Desire: A Decolonial Critique,” *TSQ*Now* (3 August 2020) [5 pages]
- Carolyn Bronstein, “Pornography, Trans Visibility, and the Demise of Tumblr” (2020) 7(2) *TSQ* 240-254 [15 pages]
- Susan Stryker, “Dungeon Intimacies: The Poetics of Transsexual Sadomasochism” (2008) 14(1) *Parallax* 36-47 [13 pages]

DECEMBER 3 – DO WE WANT VISIBILITY? [27 PAGES]

Participation self-assessment is due at 11:59 pm

- Che Gossett, “Blackness and the Trouble of Trans Visibility” in Tourmaline, Eric A. Stanley, and Johanna Burton (eds.), *Trap Door: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility* (MIT Press, 2017) [8 pages]

- Amy Marvin, “Transsexuality, the Curio, and the Transgender Tipping Point” in Perry Zurn and Arjun Shankar (eds.), *Curiosity Studies: A New Ecology of Knowledge* (University of Minnesota Press, 2020) [19 pages]

Optional:

- Os Keyes, “(Mis)gendering” in Nanna Bonde Thylstrup, Daniela Agostinho, Catherine D’Ignazio, Annie Ring, and Kristin Vee (eds.), *Uncertain Archives: Critical Keywords for the Age of Big Data* (MIT Press, 2020) [8 pages]
- Florence Ashley, “The Constitutive In/visibility of the Trans Legal Subject: A Case Study” (2021) 28(1) *UCLA Women’s Law Journal* [41 pages]

SYLLABUS ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am in debt to Syrus Marcus Ware and Amy Marvin for the writing of this syllabus. Syrus Marcus Ware graciously shared his past SDS381H1 syllabus with me and Amy Marvin made her Transgender Studies Syllabus publicly available. They inspired my course description, in-class expectations, and set of evaluations. I am also indebted to Andrew Heiss, who made his syllabus publicly available, for the subsection on studying during a pandemic.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Toronto, where the university is and where I lecture from, lies on the traditional territory of many nations including the Anishnaabeg, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat. The name for Toronto comes from the Kanienke’haka word “tkaronto”, meaning “where there are trees standing in the water”—a reference to fishing weirs in the narrows of the river. The land is subject to Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit and is part of the Dish With One Spoon territory, a treaty between the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee that has incorporated newcomers over time. As a white settler, I come to the Dish With One Spoon through the 1764 Treaty of Fort Niagara.

Symbolized by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt, the treaty was designed to create peaceful hunting conditions for nations living in close proximity. The land was to be shared, used in common just as family members ate from one dish. The treaty was not respected by settlers. The territory was unilaterally appropriated by colonial forces, a violent dispossession of the First Nations of this land that continues today.