

SOCIOL 101-6-20

**“First-Year Seminar:  
Identity and Identification”  
Spring 2023**

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:30-10:50 am, in University Hall 218

**Professor Steven Epstein  
Department of Sociology  
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**Contact info**

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**Office hours this quarter (by appointment, in-person and online)**

**For exact availability and to sign up for a slot in advance:**

**<https://calendly.com/professor-epstein>**

*A copy of this syllabus can be found on the Canvas site for the course:*

**<https://canvas.northwestern.edu/courses/189521>**

## **Summary:**

Who are we and who gets to say? This seminar explores the tension between the social emphasis on *identity* (naming who we are and claiming where we belong) and the technological processes of *identification* (distinguishing people for administrative purposes). Using texts primarily from the social and historical sciences, we will pivot back and forth between considering the many kinds of identity currently in circulation (racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual identities; illnesses identities; political identities; etc.) and the rise of techniques and technologies that seek to identify people and fix them in place (from the invention of surnames, to the rise of forensic techniques such as fingerprinting, to the creation of the “average” person in opinion research, to the role of DNA testing in telling us who we are). The object of the course is to better understand the historical and social circumstances that determine where people fit—how they know themselves and are known—and to trace the diverse cultural and political implications of identity and identification.

## **Learning Objectives:**

At the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Understand and explain the concept of identity and its many meanings.
- Appreciate the usefulness of the concept of identity as well as its potential limitations.
- Reflect on the historical and social processes that have shaped the diverse kinds of identities that people may claim.
- Analyze practices of identification, including the technologies and processes by which states and other social actors identify and trace individuals.
- Understand the tensions between identity and identification.

At a more general level, the goal is to help you learn how to evaluate evidence, construct persuasive arguments, and express yourself clearly both verbally and in your writing.

## **Course Requirements:**

Your **grade** for the quarter will be calculated on the basis of the following **course requirements**:

Class attendance and participation	21%
3 short writing assignments (about 3 pp. each)	39% = 13% each
In-class midterm	20%
Oral final exam	20%

Here are the details:

**1. Class attendance and participation (21%):** This is a small seminar, and its success will depend on the quality of our conversations. Your presence and participation are expected. (Just to prevent any misunderstanding: even though attendance and participation constitute only 21% of the grade, that doesn't mean that you can turn in the assignments, take the exams, and still pass the course even if you never attend. You do have to show up regularly to receive a passing grade.)

**2. Three short writing assignments (13% each).** As noted below on the syllabus, these short essays are **due on April 12, May 10, and May 22 at 3:00 pm**. In each case, I will post a specific prompt on Canvas under "Assignments" six days before the due date. Each of the essays will require you to grapple with the assigned readings. However, the first essay will also be somewhat personal in that it will involve, in part, reflections on your own identity.

Please submit each writing assignment as a Word document using the inbox set up for that purpose on Canvas under "Assignments." Each summary should be 2-1/2 to 3-1/2 pages, typed, double-spaced, with a standard font and one-inch margins.

These assignments are intended in part to help you improve your essay-writing skills. Please proofread carefully and pay close attention to matters of style, syntax, and organization. (If your essay has a lot of careless errors and does not seem to have been proofread adequately, I will ask you to re-do it.)

**3. A closed-book, in-class midterm on Thursday, April 27 (20%):** On the midterm, I will ask you to provide definitions of terms and concepts that have been covered in readings and seminar discussions. You will be asked to write approximately three sentences for each definition, and you should make clear how and why the term is relevant to the course. In some cases, I may also ask you to give an example. To help you prepare, I will provide a longer list of possible terms and concepts one week in advance (April 20), out of which I will ultimately choose around 12. You will write in a blue book that I will provide—no notes, books, or electronic devices are permitted.

**4. An oral final exam (20%)** that will be conducted one-on-one with me, over Zoom, at a scheduled time during exam week, June 5-9. (Any student who prefers to schedule the exam for the reading period should contact me in advance.) The exam will take the form of a 20-minute conversation in which we discuss the themes and concepts covered in the course, as well as your impressions and conclusions. To help you prepare for the exam, I will put together a list of possible discussion questions and topics and post the list on Canvas on May 25.

### **Course Mechanics and Policies:**

*Please read the following bulleted items carefully. Along with providing basic information, this section also serves as **fair warning** of my classroom policies and expectations.*

- ◆ I encourage you to keep me posted about any issues you may be experiencing that might impact your attendance at, participation in, or work for this course. Students can find

useful resources for safety and security, academic support, and mental and physical health and wellbeing at the NUhelp website (<https://www.northwestern.edu/nuhelp/>) and on the NUhelp app (<https://www.northwestern.edu/nuhelp/get-help/nuhelp-app-features.html>).

- ◆ We will follow all announced [health and safety guidelines](#) with regard to Covid. Masks are not currently required. Those who wish to wear masks are very welcome to do so. (I continue to wear a mask indoors.)
- ◆ This course will make use of the **Canvas** course management system. The direct link for this course is <https://canvas.northwestern.edu/courses/189521>. Students are responsible for logging in, checking regularly for posted announcements, and obtaining readings and assignments from the site.
- ◆ Important course **announcements** may also be sent to students' registered campus email addresses. You are responsible for monitoring those email accounts.
- ◆ Unless you are directed to do so by me, please do not use Canvas to send broadcast announcements to the rest of the class. If you have material that you think should be shared, please ask me to distribute it.
- ◆ You are welcome and encouraged to sign up to see me during my **office hours**. My office hours are by appointment, and I will offer both in-person and Zoom options. Please sign up to see me using this link: <https://calendly.com/professor-epstein> (being sure to select the correct set of options, depending on whether you want to meet in-person or via Zoom). Please sign up at least one hour in advance. For Zoom meetings, I will follow up with a link.
- ◆ This syllabus, schedule, and modalities of instruction (in-person, via Zoom, etc.) are **subject to change** in the event of unforeseen circumstances. Announcements of changes will be posted on Canvas and emailed to students.
- ◆ **Two books** are assigned for this course. They are available **for purchase** from the bookstore at Norris, and they are also **on reserve** at the main library.

Saguy, Abigail C. 2020. *Come Out, Come Out, Whoever You Are*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Stein, Arlene. 2018. *Unbound: Transgender Men and the Remaking of Identity*. New York: Pantheon Books.

All **other course readings** are available for **download** from the Canvas site in the form of PDFs. Please bring readings with you to class, either as printouts or on your laptops or tablets. Note that some PDFs appear sideways when viewed in Adobe Acrobat. They will print fine as is, but to read them on screen, select "Rotate View" from the "View" menu.

- ◆ Over the course of the quarter, your **grades** will become accessible to you on Canvas. Please let me know immediately if there are any recording errors.

Your grades on Canvas will take the form of numerical scores (not percentages, even if Canvas displays a percent sign). For each assignment, you can convert your numerical score to a letter grade equivalent by using the following key:

97-100	A+
93-96	A
90-92	A-
87-90	B+
Etc.	

To reiterate a point that students sometimes are confused about: the grades you receive from me are **scores, not percentages**. Students sometimes think that if they do well on an assignment then they should receive a grade of 100 for that assignment, but 100 corresponds to an A++. So, for example, if you are a great participant, you should expect to receive a 93 to 96 for your participation grade, because that corresponds to an A. You are not likely to get 100 unless your participation is beyond extraordinary. (Similarly, if you never participated, your grade would be 55, not zero, because 55 corresponds to an F.) If you have any questions about this, feel free to ask.

Your **overall course grade** will be calculated simply by multiplying each numerical score by its respective weight (for example, 0.2 for the midterm), summing up the results, rounding up or down to the *nearest* whole number, and then converting to the letter grade equivalent. (If your grade is right on the cusp—for example, 92.5—I round up to the higher grade, but I do not round up for anything below the “.5” cutoff.)

- ◆ Students are responsible for all material in the readings, class presentations, and class discussions. **Class attendance** is required. While I will post my PowerPoints on Canvas, these are not intended to be comprehensive, and often they will not make complete sense by themselves. Students are expected to attend class in order to learn the course material.
- ◆ I also fully expect that students will be not just physically present in the classroom but also mentally present (that is, conscious and not otherwise occupied—even intermittently—with email, texting, social media, computer games, shopping, or other online activities).

You may bring **technology** to the seminar room as long as you can handle it responsibly and respectfully. Laptops and tablets should be used for note-taking or other class-related purposes only.

- ◆ Class will be conducted as a seminar, not as a lecture course. I will often begin with a mini-lecture (some framing comments and background information), and then I will facilitate a discussion. Come to class having *already read* the readings for that day (bring them with you), and be prepared to **participate!** Please do ask questions and offer opinions! We will be discussing controversial topics, and debate is part of that.

Disagreement with the instructor or fellow students is fine, as long as you are polite and patient in how you go about it. That is, I am open to a wide range of views, but I insist on our always showing respect for one another.

- ◆ I am granting every student a 24-hour “**extension bank**” for the three writing assignments that can be used up over the course of the quarter if needed. For example, if you turn in your first essay two hours late, then you still have 22 hours “in the bank” that you can use later in the quarter if necessary.

Once you have used up your banked hours, **late assignments** will be marked down except in unusual circumstances. However, it is still to your advantage to submit an assignment late rather than never.

**NOTE:** The extension bank may not be used for the midterm or the final, which must be taken at the scheduled times.

- ◆ Please note that there is no excuse for failing to keep **electronic backups** of your data (for example, on flash drives, external hard drives, cloud storage sites, or other computers) in case your primary computer fails or your hard drive crashes.
- ◆ All written work for the course must be **typed, double-spaced**, using a standard font and 1-inch margins on all sides.
- ◆ Any student requesting **accommodations related to a disability or other condition** is required to register with AccessibleNU (accessiblenu@northwestern.edu; 847-467-5530) and provide me with an accommodation notification from AccessibleNU, preferably within the first two weeks of class. All information will remain confidential.
- ◆ Any course that addresses themes such as sexuality, gender, race, illness, etc., may contain material that will startle or even upset some students. Please keep this possibility in mind and be forewarned.
- ◆ I am committed to strict enforcement of university regulations concerning **academic integrity**, which means **I report ALL suspected violations** of the policy (including suspicion of cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, obtaining an unfair advantage, unauthorized collaboration, and aiding and abetting academic dishonesty) to the Assistant Dean for Academic Integrity, who then carries out a formal investigation. It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with the [university’s policy](#) on academic integrity. See the [WCAS website](#) on academic integrity and [Academic Integrity: A Basic Guide](#) for more information.

Examples of plagiarism include but are not limited to: directly copying work written by another person without an appropriate citation; modifying a few words written by someone else, but otherwise presenting another person’s ideas as if they were your own without appropriate citations; using information from the internet without appropriate citation even if that information has no identifiable author (such as information from a

Wikipedia page); and using text generated by an artificial intelligence algorithm or chatbot. In addition, while I encourage students to collaborate when studying or learning course material, it should be clear that **no collaboration** is permitted on written work or exams, and any collaboration in those cases constitutes academic dishonesty.

If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism or academic dishonesty, please ask me! **Confirmed violations of academic integrity will result in both an administrative penalty and an academic penalty.** The administrative penalty, assigned by university officials, is often **suspension** for one quarter; any such suspension becomes part of your record, which is made available on request to potential employers and graduate school admissions committees. The academic penalty is assigned by the instructor, and my own policy in almost every case is to assign a **failing grade FOR THE ENTIRE COURSE.**

- ◆ This course makes use of **Turnitin**, a software product that compares your work against other texts in its database in order to safeguard academic integrity. Students agree that by taking this course all required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. Use of the Turnitin.com service is subject to the Usage Policy posted on the Turnitin.com site. Please contact me if you have any questions about Turnitin.
- ◆ Please be respectful of those around you. At the beginning of class, make sure your **cell phone** is turned off or set to vibrate. And please don't chat with other students during class. In addition, arriving late, leaving early, and walking in and out of class are distracting to those around you. Obviously they are sometimes unavoidable. But I'd appreciate your keeping them to a minimum.
- ◆ This syllabus and all PowerPoint presentations for this course are copyright 2023 by Steven Epstein. **Please do not post any materials related to the course on the internet without the permission of the instructor.** This includes sites such as "Course Hero." Students are also prohibited from selling (or being paid for taking) notes during this course to or by any person or commercial firm without the express written permission of Professor Epstein. No **audio or video recordings** of class are permitted without the instructor's permission.

## **Schedule of Readings and Assignments:**

### WEEK 1

THU, MAR 30: INTRODUCTION

Lie, John. 2004. *Modern Peoplehood*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Pp. 233-36 (section 2 of Ch. 6: “Identity”).

*Please also read pp. 2-7 of the syllabus carefully before coming to class.*

## **Part One: Modern Histories of Selfhood and Surveillance**

### WEEK 2

TUE, APR 4: COMING OUT AS...

Saguy, Abigail C. 2020. *Come Out, Come Out, Whoever You Are*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. Pp. 1-67 (Ch. 1-4).

THU, APR 6: COMING OUT AS... (CONT.)

Saguy, *Come Out*, pp. 68-133 (Ch. 5-7).

**\*\*Prompt for first writing assignment posted on Canvas.**

**\*\*DUE WED, APR 12 AT 3:00 PM.**

### WEEK 3

TUE, APR 11: IDENTITY, COMMUNITY, AND BOUNDARIES

Tavory, Iddo. 2016. *Summoned: Identification and Religious Life in a Jewish Neighborhood*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Pp. 122-44 (Ch. 7: “The Neighborhood as Moral Obstacle Course”).

THU, APR 13: MODERN STATES AND “LEGIBLE” CITIZENS

Scott, James C. 1998. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven: Yale University Press. Pp. 64-71.

Torpey, John C. 2000. *The Invention of the Passport: Surveillance, Citizenship, and the State*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 1-2, 93-103, 117-121.

### WEEK 4

TUE, APR 18: AVERAGE AMERICANS AND KNOWN CITIZENS

Igo, Sarah Elizabeth. 2007. *The Averaged American: Surveys, Citizens, and the Making of a Mass Public*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Pp. 103-49 (Ch. 3: “Polling the Average Populace”).

Igo, Sarah Elizabeth. 2018. *The Known Citizen: A History of Privacy in Modern America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Pp. 17-54 (Ch. 1: “Technologies of Publicity”).

THU, APR 20: AVERAGE AMERICANS AND KNOWN CITIZENS (CONT.)

**\*\*Midterm discussed in class, and list of possible terms and concepts posted on Canvas**

Igo, *Known Citizen*, pp. 55-98 (Ch. 2: “Documents of Identity”).

Igo, *Known Citizen*, pp. 307-49 (Ch. 8: “Stories of One’s Self”).

WEEK 5

TUE, APR 25: FORENSIC TECHNOLOGIES AND PRACTICES OF IDENTIFICATION

Cole, Simon A. 2001. *Suspect Identities: A History of Fingerprinting and Criminal Identification*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. [Pages **TBA**]

Alder, Ken. 2007. *The Lie Detectors: The History of an American Obsession*. New York: Free Press. Pp. 215-28 (Ch. 16: “Pinkos”).

THU, APR 27: **\*\* IN-CLASS MIDTERM**

**No books, notes, or electronic devices. Blue books provided.**

**Part Two: Technological Projects, Threats, and Opportunities**

WEEK 6

TUE, MAY 2: THE DNA REVOLUTION: FAMILY BELONGING AND RACIAL MEANINGS

Copeland, Libby. 2021. *The Lost Family: How DNA Testing Is Upending Who We Are*. New York: Abrams Press. Pp. 1-21 (Prologue and Ch. 1).

Nelson, Alondra. 2008. “Bio Science: Genetic Genealogy Testing and the Pursuit of African Ancestry.” *Social Studies of Science* 38: 759-783.

THU, MAY 4: THE DNA REVOLUTION: FAMILY BELONGING AND RACIAL MEANINGS (CONT.)

Panofsky, Aaron, and Joan Donovan. 2017. “When Genetics Challenges a Racist’s Identity: Genetic Ancestry Testing among White Nationalists.” *SocArXiv*. <https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/7f9bc>.

Lee, Catherine, and Torsten H. Voight. 2020. “DNA Testing for Family Reunification and the Limits of Biological Truth.” *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 45 (3): 430-454.

**\*\*Prompt for second writing assignment posted on Canvas.**

**\*\*DUE WED, MAY 10 AT 3:00 PM.**

WEEK 7

TUE, MAY 9: QUANTIFIED SELVES AND ILLNESS IDENTITIES

Lupton, Deborah. 2016. *The Quantified Self: A Sociology of Self-Tracking*. Cambridge, UK: Polity. Pp. 64-87 (Ch. 3: “‘An Optimal Human Being’: The Body and the Self in Self-Tracking Cultures”).

Barker, Kristin. 2002. “Self-Help Literature and the Making of an Illness Identity: The Case of Fibromyalgia Syndrome (FMS).” *Social Problems* 49: 279-300.

THU, MAY 11: SURVEILLANCE AND SECURITY: FROM IDENTITY THEFT TO BORDER POLITICS

Cole, Simon A., and Henry N. Pontell. 2006. “‘Don’t Be Low Hanging Fruit’: Identity Theft as Moral Panic.” In *Surveillance and Security: Technological Politics and Power in Everyday Life*, edited by Torin Monahan, 125-147. New York, NY: Routledge.

Van der Ploeg, Irma. 2006. “Borderline Identities: The Enrollment of Bodies in the Technological Reconstruction of Borders.” In *Surveillance and Security: Technological Politics and Power in Everyday Life*, edited by Torin Monahan, 177-193. New York, NY: Routledge.

WEEK 8

TUE, MAY 16: ETHNIC IDENTITIES AND CENSUS CATEGORIES

Espiritu, Yen Le. 1992. *Asian American Panethnicity: Bridging Institutions and Identities*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. Pp. 112-33 (Ch. 5: “Census Classification: The Politics of Ethnic Enumeration”).

Rodríguez-Muñiz, Michael. 2021. *Figures of the Future: Latino Civil Rights and the Politics of Demographic Change*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Pp. 56-79 (Ch. 2: “Strength in Numbers”).

**\*\*Prompt for third writing assignment posted on Canvas.**

**\*\*DUE MON, MAY 22 AT 3:00 PM.**

THU, MAY 18: TRANS IDENTITIES: DOCUMENTATION POLITICS AND SELF-DEFINITION

Spade, Dean. 2015. *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. Pp. 73-93 (Ch. 4: “Administrating Gender”).

Stein, Arlene. 2018. *Unbound: Transgender Men and the Remaking of Identity*. New York: Pantheon Books. Pp. 3-42 (Introduction and Ch. 1).

WEEK 9

TUE, MAY 23: TRANS IDENTITIES: DOCUMENTATION POLITICS AND SELF-DEFINITION (CONT.)

Stein, *Unbound*, pp. 43-110, 251-77 (Ch. 2-4, 10).

THU, MAY 25: BEYOND IDENTITY?

Brubaker, Rogers, and Frederick Cooper. 2000. “Beyond ‘Identity.’” *Theory and Society* 29: 1-47.

**\*\*List of possible topics and questions for the oral exam posted on Canvas.**

WEEK 10 & READING PERIOD

TUE, MAY 30: NO CLASS—OFFICE HOURS DURING CLASS TIME

EXAM WEEK

**\*\*Oral exams by appointment (June 5-9)**