HUM 370-5 / GNDR_ST 332 / SOCIOL 376

“Race/Gender/Sex & Science: Making Identities and Differences”

Spring 2022

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 3:30-4:50, in Harris L06

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Office hours this quarter (by appointment):
For exact availability and to sign up for a slot in advance:
https://calendly.com/professor-epstein/office-hours

A copy of this syllabus can be found on the Canvas site for the course:
https://canvas.northwestern.edu/courses/166032
Summary:

Over the course of this quarter, we will keep coming back to two reciprocal questions:

- How do scientific claims and technological developments help transform cultural understandings of race, gender, and sexuality?
- How do cultural beliefs about race, gender, and sexuality influence scientific knowledge and medical practice?

That is, we will focus on the dynamic interplay between science, technology, and medicine, on the one hand, and race, gender, and sexuality, on the other. Taking up a series of controversial issues and cases from the recent past and the present, we will explore the connections between expert findings, social identities, and political arguments. The assumption is that studying these controversies sheds light on how developments in the life sciences affect our understandings of who we are, how we differ, and how social inequalities are created, perpetuated, and challenged.

In our readings and discussions, we will examine the roles of science, technology, and medicine in redefining race, gender, and sexuality; the ways in which cultural beliefs about race, gender, and sexuality have influenced scientific research and the development of knowledge; and the efforts by individuals and social movements to challenge scientific institutions and assert new claims about identity, difference, and inequality. More specifically, over the course of the quarter, we will take up such questions as:

- How many sexes are there, and how do we know?
- What is the scientific status of our ideas about race?
- How are medical and legal ideas invoked in determinations about people’s gender identities?
- How do medical technologies become “gendered”?
- How are ideas about racial differences reproduced by algorithms?
- How have new reproductive technologies, and new methods of tracing ancestry, changed notions of kinship and racial belonging?
- Is sexual identity a biologically determined state, and what is at stake in asking the question?
- How should gender, race, and sexuality be taken into account when human populations are studied in clinical research? When patients are examined in the clinic?
- How have scientists and physicians sought to study and repair human sexual functioning?

Our goal is not to resolve these controversial issues but, rather, to understand their stakes as well as the ways in which different people, groups, and social institutions have taken positions in relation to them.
Course Requirements:

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

- Class attendance and participation: 15%
- Short critical summary of a reading (twice): 20% = 10% each
- Paper topic, partial biblio., office hours visit: 5%
- In-class midterm: 20%
- Outline of your paper: 5%
- Short oral presentation based on research paper: 5%
- PowerPoint accompanying oral presentation: 5%
- Research paper: 25%

A number of the assignments, including the submission of the paper topic and the outline, are intended to encourage you to move forward with the final paper in a timely way and—importantly—to give me the chance to weigh in with suggestions and feedback. The short oral presentation has the same function, but it also allows each student in the seminar to learn a bit about what everyone else is working on.

Here are the details:

1. **Class attendance and participation (15%)**: This is a seminar, and your presence and participation are expected. (Just to be prevent any misunderstanding: even though attendance and participation constitute only 15% of the grade, that doesn’t mean that you can never attend, turn in the assignments, and still pass the course. You do have to show up!)

2. **Two critical summaries** of an assigned reading (10% each).

   For your first critical summary, choose one of the readings assigned for either April 7 or April 12. For your second critical summary, choose one of the readings assigned for either April 14 or April 19.

   Please submit each summary as a Word document using the inbox set up for that purpose on Canvas under “Assignments.” Each summary must be submitted **at least 24 hours before that class meeting** (that is, by 3:30 pm on the day before). Each summary should be 1½ to 2 pages, typed, double-spaced, with a standard font and one-inch margins.

   Your summary should carefully summarize the main arguments and discuss the reading critically in relation to the themes of the course. These summaries should be written out in full paragraphs; they should not take the form of a list or bullet points. Please proofread carefully and pay close attention to matters of style, syntax, and organization. (If your paper has a lot of careless errors and does not seem to have been proofread adequately, I will ask you to re-do it.) You do not need to provide a reference list, but quotes and paraphrases should be followed by in-text citations placed inside parentheses—for example, “(Richardson, 912).”
Note: Because writing the critical summary should help prepare you for the seminar discussion, I will look to the people who wrote summaries to take the lead in participating in the discussion that day.

3. **Paper topic and partial bibliography, plus office hours visit (5%)**: By [noon on Wednesday, April 20](#), please submit a 1-2 paragraph description of your paper topic, along with a partial and provisional bibliography (at least 5 sources), as a Word document using the inbox set up for that purpose on Canvas under “Assignments.” (See point 7 below for more information about the paper assignment.)

If your paper will be thematically similar to, or will have any overlap in actual content with, any other paper you have written in the past or are writing this quarter, please also provide a clear description of the overlap as well as an explanation of how your paper for this class will differ.

**In addition, you are required to attend my office hours no later than Wednesday, April 27** to discuss your paper topic with me in person. I will hold extra office hours that week and the two weeks before.

4. A **closed-book in-class midterm** on [Thursday, May 5](#) (20%): On the midterm, I will ask you to provide 2-3 sentence definitions of terms and concepts that have been covered in readings and seminar discussions. In some cases, I will 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, out of which I will ultimately choose 12. You will write in a blue book that I will provide—no notes, books, or electronic devices are permitted.

5. **An outline of your research paper (5%)**: By [noon on Monday, May 16](#), please submit an outline as a Word document using the inbox set up for that purpose on Canvas under “Assignments.” The outline doesn’t have to be fancy or highly detailed, but it should clearly convey the main sections and topics of your paper. A simple way to structure it would be to create a numbered list of the main sections of the paper and then, for each section, add a sentence or two explaining what you will be doing in that section.

Of course, if you prefer to submit a more detailed outline that breaks each section down into sub-sections (and sub-sub-sections), that would be welcome, but it’s not required.

6. At our last two class meetings (Thu May 26 and Tue May 31), we will meet by Zoom and each of you will share your screen to deliver a short **oral presentation (using PowerPoint)** describing your research paper (10%). Your **PowerPoint file must be submitted on Canvas in the inbox set up for that purpose by 9:00 am on Thursday, May 26.** (You do not need to submit a text for the oral presentation.) Please do not use any file type other than PowerPoint.

You will be graded on the quality and clarity of the oral presentation as well as the quality and clarity of the PowerPoint (5% each).

I will provide details about the length of your presentation. (Please use a timer or stopwatch to keep track of the time.) To permit time for everyone to present, I request that you stay on Zoom till 5:30 for those two class meetings unless you have an irresolvable conflict.
In your presentation, you should identify the topic of your paper, present your research question in relation to the topic, give an explanation of what you did to research it, and tell us your preliminary findings. If there is anything you would like feedback on or suggestions from the group about, please also say so. We will devote some time after each presentation to Q&A and feedback.

The PowerPoint should include both text and images. Please make sure slides are easily readable. It can be useful to include an “Overview” slide near the beginning to outline where you will be going.

7. A research paper, due by noon on Monday, June 6 (25%). The paper must be no less than 10 pages (typed, double-spaced, with a standard font and one-inch margins), not counting the bibliography. (Nothing longer is expected, but if you do submit a longer paper, please don’t exceed 13 pages, not counting the bibliography.) Please submit your paper as a Word document using the inbox set up for that purpose on Canvas under “Assignments.”

Your paper should investigate a specific research topic of your choice related to the themes of the course. It must draw on course materials but must also extend beyond course readings. To give you an idea of the kind and scope of project I’m looking for, I will post on Canvas (under the assignment) a list of some of the paper topics from previous years.

The paper must be in essay format and must advance or prove an identifiable central argument (or thesis) that is stated clearly at the beginning. Please proofread carefully and pay close attention to matters of style, syntax, and organization. (If your paper has a lot of careless errors and does not seem to have been proofread adequately, I will not accept it.)

Your paper should include a title and should be broken into sections with headings. Use parenthetical citations for quotes and references to other texts. List all such texts in your bibliography. (You may use any standard bibliographic style, as long as you are consistent.)
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:

♦ The past two years of disruption from Covid have affected all of us, though in many different ways. As we continue to adjust to changing circumstances, 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 Covid procedures. As of this writing, masks will not be required in the classroom in Spring quarter. However, “the University strongly recommends masking in areas where distancing is not possible.” Furthermore, members of the campus community have been asked “to be conscientious of each other and honor individual requests where possible.” With these guidelines in mind, I ask each of you to make an informed decision about mask use based on your own needs, judgments, and preferences. You should not hesitate to wear a mask if that makes you feel safer or more comfortable.

♦ This course will make use of the Canvas course management system. The direct link for this course is https://canvas.northwestern.edu/courses/166032. 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 using this link: https://calendly.com/professor-epstein/office-hours. Please sign up in advance. The sign-up webpage will indicate which slots are in person and which are via Zoom. Also, please note that my office is on the second floor of a building without an elevator. Any student for whom stairs pose difficulties may email me to work out an alternative.

♦ 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.

♦ No books are assigned for this course. All 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.

Similarly, your participation grade is a score, not a percentage. Therefore, if you are a great participant, you should expect to receive a 93 to 96, because that corresponds to an A. (You are not likely to get 100, because that would be a high A+.)

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.

♦ 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. I also urge you to consider evidence that indicates many students learn better when they take notes by hand (because the act of writing forces them to think about the ideas) and that the distracting effects of technology interfere with long-term retention of information. (See https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/07/27/class-cellphone-and-laptop-use-lowers-exam-scores-new-study-shows.)

♦ Class will be conducted as a seminar, not as a lecture course. I will typically 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! 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 36-hour “extension bank” that can be used up over the course of the quarter if needed. For example, if you turn in your first assignment two hours late, then you still have 34 hours “in the bank” that you can use later in the quarter if necessary. (This does not apply to the midterm, which must be taken at the scheduled time.) Once you have used up your banked hours, late assignments will be marked down except in unusual circumstances. Generally, it is still to your advantage to submit an assignment late rather than never. However, late final papers may not be accepted at all, if they arrive too late during finals week for me to grade them by the time grades are due.

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 includes the themes of sexuality, gender, and race 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; and using information from the internet without appropriate citation even if that information has no identifiable author (such as information from a Wikipedia page). 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, typically is 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 2022 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 31: INTRODUCTION**


Please also read pp. 2-9 of the syllabus carefully before coming to class.

**WEEK 2**

**TUE, APR 5: THEORETICAL BACKDROP: CO-PRODUCTION AND LOOPING EFFECTS**


**REMINDER:** You must turn in a critical summary of one of the readings for either April 7 or April 12 by 3:30 pm on the day before that class.

**THU APR 7: THE SEXING AND GENDERING OF SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE**


**WEEK 3**

**TUE APR 12: THE GENDERING AND SEXUALIZING OF TECHNOLOGIES, AND THE TECHNOLOGICAL PRODUCTION OF SEXUALITY**


**REMINDER:** You must turn in a critical summary of one of the readings for April 14 or April 19 by 3:30 pm on the day before that class.

**THU, APR 14: SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND RACIALIZATION (I)**


**THU, APR 21: ATTEND PROF. EPSTEIN’S LECTURE ON “THE FUTURE OF HEALTH,” DELIVERED TO THE RUTGERS UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH ON WOMEN (VIA ZOOM, 3:30-5:00 PM)**

**WEEK 5**

**TUE, APR 26: CATEGORICAL POLITICS IN SCIENCE, MEDICINE, AND SOCIETY (I)**


**THU, APR 28: CATEGORICAL POLITICS IN SCIENCE, MEDICINE, AND SOCIETY (II)**

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


**WEEK 6**

**TUE, MAY 3: NATURE, CULTURE, AND SEXUAL IDENTITIES**


**THU, MAY 5: ****IN-CLASS MIDTERM**

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

**WEEK 7**

**TUE, MAY 10: RECONSTRUCTING KINSHIP: IDENTITY, DIFFERENCE, AND THE TECHNO-ECONOMICS OF REPRODUCTION**


**THU, MAY 12: CHANGING MEDICAL PRACTICE (I)**


**WEEK 8**

**REMINDER:** Your *outline* of your paper is **due by noon on Monday, May 16.**

**TUE, MAY 17: CHANGING MEDICAL PRACTICE (II)**


**THU, MAY 19: SCIENCE, ACTIVISM, AND THE POLITICS OF INCLUSION AND DIFFERENCE (I)**


**WEEK 9**

**TUE, MAY 24: SCIENCE, ACTIVISM, AND THE POLITICS OF INCLUSION AND DIFFERENCE (II)**


**REMINDER:** Your *PowerPoint file* for your oral presentations is **due by 9 am on Thursday, May 26.**
THU, MAY 26: STUDENT PRESENTATIONS (VIA ZOOM; CLASS RUNS TILL 5:30 PM)

TUE, MAY 31: STUDENT PRESENTATIONS (VIA ZOOM; CLASS RUNS TILL 5:30 PM)

**REMINDER:** Your research paper is due on Canvas by noon on Monday, June 6 (the first day of Exam Week).