

WTQS 303: Trans Studies
Wells College, Fall 2023

Time: Monday and Wednesday 11-12:15

Location: ZAB 009

Taught by: Dr. Jess River Vooris aka “Prof V” or “Dr. River”

Pronouns: they/them

Email: jrvooris@wells.edu

Office: 209 Zabriski Hall

Office Hours: Office Hours: Mondays 12:15-1:30 pm and Thursdays, 10:45 am- 1:30 pm

COURSE DESCRIPTION/REQUIREMENTS:

This course offers students an overview of the rich and evolving field of transgender studies. Topics include: foundational concepts in gender diversity, key sociopolitical issues, pivotal moments in trans activism, and cultural representation and misrepresentation of trans lives. Particular emphasis will be placed on the intersections of trans lives with issues of race, class, disability, immigration status, and incarceration.

The first half of the course examines trans histories and trans people in the historical archives, paying particular attention to the fields of sexology and psychology, alongside LGBTQ community activism. The second half delves more into the contemporary moment within trans studies, looking at media representations, political legislation, and community organizing. Alongside academic texts, we will read memoirs and comics, watch films, and listen to podcasts produced for, by, and about trans people. This course will meet twice a week for a discussion-based class. Prerequisite: WTQS 148 or permission of instructor. Offered every other year. (3 sem. hrs.)

Please visit me during my office hours as I would love to learn more about what you are thinking and learning (in this class and at Wells more generally), and I am happy to answer any question you have about class and class materials.

Be sure to let me know during office hours or via email if you need support, or any specific accommodations, the sooner the better. Students with disabilities or who need time from class to observe religious holidays, please contact me as soon as you can to make any arrangements necessary.

Acknowledgements: Thank-you to Avery Dame and E Feinman for your examples of trans studies syllabi. Thank-you to Katie King, Ayu Saraswati, Heather Rellihan, and Barbara Shaw for your examples of feminist pedagogy, and thank-you to Rebecca Barrett-Fox and Mimi Khúc for your guidance around accessible teaching!

Required Materials

Note: The Feinberg book is available for free online (and printed for a small fee) and there are three copies of the Lukoff book in reserves in the library.

- Lukoff, Kyle. *Too Bright to See*. New York: Dial Books for Young Readers, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2021.
- Feinberg, Leslie. *Stone Butch Blues : a Novel*. 1993. [FREE LINK](#)
- Please buy a pack of masks (or get masks from the Sommer Center) for class.

How the course will be organized

- This is a discussion course that meets on campus twice a week

Each week students should:

- Carefully read the materials and take notes on them
- Come to class prepared to talk and share your thoughts with others

Creating a community of learning means we must:

- Build a space where each member of the class feels comfortable about sharing their thoughts.
- Recognize that we come to this class with different backgrounds and lived experiences
- Understand that we may not always agree, but that disagreement can be a positive, productive part of learning
- Listen carefully to each other and treat each other kindly and with respect.
- Remember that we all have something to contribute, every one of us is learning (including me!) and it is okay to ask questions.
- Understand that learning means taking risks, trying new things, playing around, guessing at times, making mistakes and recognizing that sometimes we won't get it right the first time¹.

Note: Part of my role as a professor is to guide your learning. I may interrupt if someone is using outdated language or saying something harmful, and I may suggest a way of re-wording a question or statement to be more inclusive. Please take these moments as an opportunity to grow and learn—hopefully this is one reason you are in this course!

Communication for the Course

Moodle: Class readings, an updated syllabus, course calendar, and announcements will be kept on Moodle.

Note: Moodle keeps track of when you log in, what links you click, and how long you keep any part of the Moodle open. This means I can tell if you haven't logged in for a week, or if you never opened a particular file.

Email: Please send emails to jrvooris@wells.edu if you have questions/comments about the course, readings, or want to make an

¹ This wording about taking risks and play is taken from a Katie King syllabus

appointment with me. It will be helpful if you include the course number and a relevant subject heading with your email. **Example:** WTQS 303: question about the Eli Clare reading

Note: email sent after 7 pm may not be responded to until the morning, and I will not be checking email frequently on the weekends. Please give me at least 24 hours to respond, however, if you don't hear from me in 48 hours, do send a reminder email! (If you email after 7 pm on Friday, I may not reply until Monday morning).

Classroom Policies

- Masks are required in class, please buy a pack of masks for the semester. If you forget a mask, I will have extras on hand to provide you with one. (For info about how masks help protect against covid and other viruses, [see studies here](#).) I hope that together we can protect each other, and create a community of care.
- Please respect physical distancing as much as possible, while also interacting with the space in a way that best meets the needs of your body. You are welcome to sit on the floor if you need to, stand up to stretch, or take a brief break from class by stepping outside.
- Technology: computers/phones are useful tools for learning, but can also be distracting to others. Please be thoughtful and intentional about your use of computers/phones during discussion.
- You are welcome to knit, draw, play with (quiet) fidgets, again just be mindful of others

Graded Assignments

20 % Participation

5% Active Engagement Points

10% Leading Discussion

20% Reading Responses (4 X 5 points each)

25% Educational Object Research Project

20% Trans Futures Final

20% Class Attendance/Participation

This is a discussion-based course, and your participation is important. You are expected to come to class having read and taken notes on the material, and to be ready to discuss the material. The success of the class will depend on everyone sharing their ideas and perspectives. If you are someone who has a hard time speaking up in class, note that you can show that you are actively participating through your listening, your reactions to what your classmates are saying, and your note-taking.

Please visit me in my office hours if you are concerned about your participation due to anxiety, neurodivergence, or any other reason. If you are sick, I want you to prioritize your health (and the health of your classmates) over coming to class. Please stay home and rest if you need to, just communicate with me about why you are missing class. Also, please chat with your classmates about what you have missed, and then email me if you have specific questions about readings. If you miss more than two classes in a row, you need to contact me about meeting in person or virtually during my office hours to catch up on what you have missed.

5% Active Engagement Points: These are gained through a variety of ways—adding to the collective class notes, attending my office hours or the class TA’s office hours, attending sexuality/gender-related campus events, writing a short review of a book, blog, or youtube video that is related to class topics that you have found, having a conversation with a friend outside of class about class topics, and many more. You can include the access survey as your first AEP.

I will list recommended readings/videos/songs/events/etc as AEP opportunities each week. You need to collect 5 AEP over the course of the semester—for each one you will write a short paragraph about what you did/watched/read.

10% Leading Class Discussion: Once a semester you will lead class discussion for 20-30 minutes. This will require you to prepare discussion questions along with a short activity for your fellow classmates.

20% Reading Responses: During the first half of the semester you will be required to turn in 4 reading responses. You can decide which day you complete the reading response, but you must submit them all before October 18th. These must be uploaded to Moodle by the Thursday of the week that we discuss a particular reading. You have the option of completing the assignment in written form, audio/video form, or in a visual/artistic form, as long as it fulfills the reading response requirements. See Moodle for a full description of the assignment.

25% Educational Object Research Project. As an individual, ~~or in pairs~~ you will choose a topic related to trans lives, identities, histories, and communities, and conduct research on that topic. You will then create something (a book/zine/video/podcast/theatre play) to share what you have discovered with the rest of the class and to educate a wider public. Finally, you will write a process paper about your research and the choices you made with your educational object.

20% Final: Imagining Trans Futures. This will take the form of a letter, audio message, comic or zine, where you will take key concepts from the class and use them to envision a different future for trans people, and trans communities.

Due Date: **Wednesday, December 13th at 5 pm**

Reading Schedule *Professor reserves the right to change the schedule with prior warning, an updated syllabus will be maintained on Moodle*

WEEK ONE: Introduction to Trans Stories and Narratives

Monday, August 28

- Introductions
- Trans Concept Web Exercise

Wednesday, August 30

- Sandy Stone’s “The Empire Strikes Back” from *The Trans Studies Reader*
- Eli Clare’s “Interludes” from *The Marrows Telling*

WEEK TWO: Thinking Sex/Gender and Trans/Cis

Monday, September 4

- Joan Roughgarden, “Evolution’s Rainbow” from *The Trans Studies Reader* (12 pages)
- Myra Hird, “Animal Transsex” from *The Trans Studies Reader* (13 pages)

Wednesday, September 6

- “The Education of Little Cis by A. Finn Enke (11 pages)
- [The Performance of Trans Inclusion](#) by Jen Manion (5 pages)
- [We Still Need Pronoun Go-Rounds](#), Dean Spade (4 pages)

AEP: Julia Serano, “Cissexism” and Kai Green’s [“Navigating Masculinity as a Black Trans Man”](#)

WEEK THREE: Gender as Sensation, Gender and The Body

Monday, September 11

- Sabrina Imbler "Morphing Like Cuttlefish" *How Far the Light Reaches: A Life in Ten Sea Creatures*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2022.
- Alok Vaid-Menon ["What Makes Us Beautiful? What Makes Us Free?"](#) (65 Minutes, [Transcript Here](#))

Wednesday, September 13th

- ~~Julia Serano excerpt from Sexed Up~~
- Da’Shaun L Harrison, “Meeting Gender’s End” *Belly of the Beast*. North Atlantic Books (2021) (19 pages)
- Caleb Luna, “The Gender Non-Conformity of my Fatness” *Fat and Queer: An Anthology of Queer and Trans Bodies and Lives*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers (2021) (5 pages)

AEP: [The Ocean is a Place of Queer Possibility Outside/In Podcast](#) (30 minutes), Janet Mock, Redefining Realness

WEEK FOUR: Trans Histories: Before We Were Trans

Monday, September 18

- Kit Heyam, excerpts from *Before We Were Trans*

Wednesday, September 20

- Emily Skidmore, “Beyond Community” from *True Sex: Trans Men at the Turn of the Century*

AEP: Mary Weismantel, *Towards a Transgender Archeology*, Deborah A. Miranda, *Extermination of the Joyas*, (27 pages)

WEEK FIVE: Trans Histories into the 20th Century

Monday, September 25

- Susan Stryker “A 100 Years of Trans History” from *Transgender History* (27 pages)

Wednesday, September 27

- Susan Stryker, “Transgender Liberation” from *A Transgender History* (30 pages)

AEP: [Magnus Hirshfeld Podcast](#)

WEEK SIX: Histories Continued and Stone Butch Blues

Monday, October 2

- Emily Skidmore, “The Good Transsexual”
- Finn Enke, “Collective Memory and the Transfeminist 1970s”

Wednesday, October 4

- [Stone Butch Blues](#) Part One

WEEK SEVEN: Trans Histories at the Turn of the Century

Monday, October 9 NO CLASS: FALL BREAK

Wednesday, October 11

- [Stone Butch Blues](#) Part Two

WEEK EIGHT: The Trans Internet-

Monday, October 16

- Chapter from Avery Dame-Griff’s *Two Revolutions: History of the Trans Internet*

Wednesday, October 18

- Library Research Day

WEEK NINE: Medicalization of Trans Bodies

Monday, October 23

- Dean Spade, Mutilating Gender
- Eva Hayward, Spider City Sex

Wednesday, October 25

- Aren. Z Aizura, Romance of the Amazing Scalpel
- Alvaro Jarrín, Untranslatable Subjects: Travesti Access to Public Health Care in Brazil

WEEK TEN: Narratives of Violence and Survival -kae and ember lead discussion

Monday, October 30

- Watch in Class “Major!”

Wednesday, November 1

Finish “Major!” in class, discuss film and following readings:

- Cautious Living, Black Trans Women & the Politics of Documentation, from *Trap Door*
- Cece McDonald’s Prison Letters “Go Beyond Our Natural Selves” Trans Studies Quarterly May 2017.

AEP:

- Dean Spade, Their Laws Will Not Make Us Safer, *Against Equality*
- Jin Haritaworn and C. Riley Snorton, Transsexual Necropolitics,
- David Valentine, The Calculus of Pain, from *Imagining Transgender*

WEEK ELEVEN: Trans Visibility and Cultural Production

Monday, November 6

- *Paris is Burning*
- Article about Paris is Burning

Wednesday, November 8

- *Pose*

AEP: Gawking, Gaping, Staring, by Eli Clare

WEEK TWELVE: Trans Families and Reproduction

Monday, November 13

- Tobi Hill-Meyer’s essay “Donor Mom” from *And Baby Makes More*
- Essay from *Spawning Generations*
- Excerpt from “The Natural Mother of the Child: A Memoir of Nonbinary Parenthood” by Krys Malcolm Bec

Wednesday, November 15

- *Tomboy* film

AEP: Trevor MacDonald et al, chestfeeding article

WEEK THIRTEEN: Trans Childhoods

Monday, November 20

- Vooris, “The ‘New’ Trans Child” in *Queer Youth Histories*
- [Vooris, drag kids blog post](#)

Wednesday, November 22

- NO CLASS THANKSGIVING BREAK

WEEK FOURTEEN: Too Bright to See

Monday, November 27

- Part one *Too Bright to See* by Kyle Lukoff

Wednesday, November 29

- Part two *Two Bright to See* by Kyle Lukoff

WEEK FIFTEEN: Class Wrap-Up–Current Events

Monday, December 4

Wednesday, December 6

ADDITIONAL CLASS POLICIES:

Citations:

It is important as scholars and writers that we respect the work of others, and that we make sure to cite our sources. I like to think about citations as a way to give credit, as a way to guide a reader to more information, and as a way to be a part of a community conversation.

If you are unsure of how to properly cite your information and how to avoid plagiarism please refer to online guides on MLA, APA and Chicago Style formatting. I do not have a preference for which one you use, but please pick one and use that consistently throughout an assignment. If you still need help with citations, please set up an appointment to talk with me.

Access Statement (words by Mimi Khúc):

"Everyone's access needs matter, and we will try collectively to meet them as they arise. Access needs are needs that when met enable participation in the course to the fullest--therefore they are wide-ranging and can be met in wide-ranging, creative ways. I am committed to making participation as accessible as possible. Please let me know if anything comes up that makes participation feel hard. Perhaps you are unused to thinking about access needs--no worries, that's what this course is supposed to help you develop. We are taught not to have needs, that needs mean we are "weak"; resist this impulse. That is the biggest lesson I want you to take away from this class."

"Access, as Aimi Hamraie has taught me, is relational. This means that creating access and accessibility is something we do together, in relationship and community. It requires a shared commitment to each other's wellbeing and participation in the community space, and requires

communication and negotiation and flexibility. We learn each other's needs and try to meet them as best we can, so that we can all participate as much as possible in this classroom space. Everyone has access needs, and these needs change over time. I will try to anticipate as much as possible but I cannot know everyone's needs at all times. When you become aware of your access needs, please communicate them to me. I do not require any documentation or working with any university support services--I believe you, and will work with you to generate structures to meet your needs as much as possible. I repeat: I believe you."

LATE POLICY:

I will always accept late work, however, I will not always have time to provide the same level of qualitative feedback on late-work as I provide on work that is turned in on time. Work turned in within 24 hours of the deadline will not be penalized. Work turned in after this 24 hour grace period will lose 10 percent of the full amount of points possible.

FERPA and Confidentiality

FERPA, the federal law that guards student privacy, prohibits me from discussing your performance in this class with anyone except you without your permission, which must be on file with the university, not simply told to me. To ensure compliance with this law, I will not respond to emails from students unless they originate from university email addresses. Out of respect for the privacy of your classmates, do not record or screenshot any part of this class for use outside of this class, even if you omit identifying information about the speaker or poster.

COVID Plans/Remote Teaching Considerations:

My plan is to teach this course in person when possible, while also being mindful of the seriousness of Covid, and doing my best to prioritize the well-being of everyone in this class. If significant numbers of our class will not be able to attend in person, we will shift to a remote format. Please keep me informed as much as you can, about any missed classes, so I can plan accordingly.

At this point, I am not planning on teaching in a hybrid fashion (in person AND zoom), although I may re-evaluate if the technology in the classroom would allow this. I WILL be building in class note-taking and presentations, and ways for folks to catch up if they have to miss class, and I DO want you to prioritize your safety and health over attending in person. Folks can also Zoom into my office hours if they have specific questions, or want to go over what they missed from class.

Camera/Mic Policies If We Need to Shift to Zoom

- I encourage but do not require cameras to be on
- Please upload a photo or avatar on your zoom profile if possible
- Please mute your mic when not speaking
- Chat/Text is an excellent way to communicate