

Course Title: *Exploring American Identities: from Theory to Practice*

AAASI/AFRA/AMST/LLAS/WGSS 1000-level cross-listed course.

Written by Anne Gebelein, Associate Director, El Instituto, and Sherry Zane, Director, Women's Gender & Sexuality Studies Program.

Course description: In collaboration with CLAS institutes, the Democracy and Dialogues Initiative, and the Activist-in-residence Program, students will explore the social construction of American identities and lead discussions about the impact of those constructions on their lives. Students will learn academic vocabulary and theoretical frameworks for understanding race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and class, and will then be guided by DDI, institute faculty & TAs, and community activists to hold meaningful conversations about community differences; and to engage with anti-racist/anti-bias visions for solidarity and change.

In his inaugural address, President Katsouleas emphasized the need for experiential learning initiatives as part of the new liberal arts education that provides students a life-transformative experience. This proposal is written in support of the importance of Life Transformative Education (LTE) and the CLAS Strategic Plan's core values of diversity and empowerment as well as its Goal 1, of improving climate, diversity, equity, and inclusion. which supports the new College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS) strategic plan and educational mission "to foster curiosity, inquiry, and a thirst for knowledge about the world, preparing our students to be informed, critical citizens, and creative leaders in their professions and in society" (CLAS Strategic Plan, 2020). We, the faculty of El Instituto, Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies Program, Africana Studies Institute, Asian and Asian-American Studies Institute, and American Studies, propose a new General Education large lecture course that would allow our institutes to collaborate meaningfully with students early on in their academic career on the topics of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, and disability. This course would work in collaboration with the university's Democracy and Dialogues Initiative, which is working to increase democratic and civic capacity by supporting community dialogues on critical issues. In addition, it would invite UConn activists-in-residence to discuss their work to create bridges of understanding between groups in CT communities.

Participating institutes would each direct a 2-3-week segment of the course or provide a module for studying issues pertaining to their research/population focus. Each module would highlight a theoretical approach to understanding and discussing identity construction. This 1000-level course could be taught online, hybrid model, or in-person, but we envision the first course to be taught with synchronous discussion sections led by graduate students. The course would have 3 principal goals: to introduce

students to the intellectual projects the CLAS institutes engage in; to offer students vocabulary and theoretical frameworks for connecting intersectional categories of identity; and to guide students in how to dialogue successfully about their multidimensional perspectives.

Such an agenda exemplifies the broad goals of general education to educate students to understand, appreciate and enjoy diverse perspectives; to give them tools to participate in civic discourse and action beyond their years at UConn, and to confront the challenges of the world today. This agenda is also aligned closely with Content Area 4: Multiculturalism and Diversity, as it seeks to emphasize the social construction of race and gender in the US; to develop sensitivity to issues of representation; to develop an awareness of intersections of power identity and how those shape systems of privilege and inequity in society. This proposal is written in support of the importance of Life Transformative Education (LTE) and the CLAS Strategic Plan's core values of diversity and empowerment as well as its Goal 1, of improving climate, diversity, equity, and inclusion.

As this course would begin as a primer on academic approaches to understanding constructions of human difference in the United States, sample lessons might include the following:

1. Africana Studies Institute might teach a unit that explores the meaning of blackness as well as Black world forms of political and cultural activity in the African diaspora.
2. American Studies Institute might discuss intersectional linkages between class, empire, gender, and racial formation, and in the context of U.S. culture and its impact on the world.
3. El Instituto might use postcolonial theory to problematize the relationship of Puerto Ricans to other Latino groups in the U.S. and the attempted homogenization of US Hispanics.
4. WGSS might lend tools from feminist theory in an examination of sexual citizenship, gender-based violence, or intersectional representation in popular culture as a result of settler colonialism.
5. The Asian and Asian American Studies institute might teach about the history of U.S. wars in Asia and the shape of refugee populations from U.S. imperialism. Such work provides an important basis by which to examine the value of expressive culture from Asian American populations and the significance of writers/scholars like Viet Than Nguyen and Ocean Vuong in giving voice to displaced and disposed populations across the globe.

Where possible, institutes would seek to guide students in applying theory to local realities: AASI might lead students in considering how Burmese Karen in Hartford might experience intersectionality differently than Chinese in Storrs. Activists-in-residence would also lend a hand in assisting students in seeing the application of theory to local realities; all 3 activists for spring 2021 have experience working

with vulnerable and immigrant populations, including farm workers and the undocumented. Creating space in this course for students to reflect on local activists' anti-racist/anti-bias work in lessening social disparities will inspire them to apply academic training to their own communities, and to model visions of solidarity that activists employ in their work.

While students will be provided with tools for understanding diverse groups in the US - identification of populations, vocabulary, and frameworks of interpretation- the course will also dedicate time to helping them to develop practical tools for discussing social differences and to actively *employ* those tools as part of coursework. Students will be asked to examine best practices in engaging in challenging conversations about identity. They will utilize DDI materials and training. Students will participate in reflective journaling and small group conversations, and they will generate questions for anonymous classroom opinion polls on various categories of identity for large group discussion. They will meet synchronously with teaching assistants to engage in collaborative, authentic conversations about the content and its application. For writing homework, students will be asked to apply class concepts to what they observe regarding campus dynamics. After watching and analyzing effective conversations about challenging topics, they will be able to identify and eventually employ strategies utilized. The culminating project will be to create, organize, and execute a conversation about difference. This might be one internal to the class (and/or recorded on Webex) and students might be responsible for both directing one and evaluating a second, directed by a different student group. Students might also organize a conversation on systemic inequity that addresses intersections of anti-Black racism, racism, antisemitism, homophobia, sexism, ableism, etc. for a SUBOG group they belong to. Students with significant practice in these skills already might organize a conversation in their home community, place of worship, or workplace. Students with ambitious goals might be granted extra credit to direct a wider community conversation.

Faculty and graduate assistants would participate in DDI training for dialogues and deliberations; this training and experience would increase the marketability of our graduate students and help faculty members develop new skills needed for community engagement of antiracist and decolonial initiatives. Thus, 3 levels of learning - undergrad, grad and faculty - in how to plan and promote productive dialogue over social differences at the university and community level will have a ripple effect over time, contributing to authentic thinking and learning that will assist UConn in addressing real-world problems and in shaping institutional transformation and long-term health.

Course Goals:

1. Introduce students to CLAS programs and institutes, and the intellectual projects in WGSS, AFRA, AASI, LLAS, and AMST.
2. Assist students in understanding frameworks used in academia to explore constructions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, and disability. (Critical race theory, decolonial theory, feminist theories, etc)
3. Teach students that thinking is a critical part of being prepared to act.
4. Help students develop good practices for having difficult conversations.
5. Assist students in applying frameworks and practices in guided conversations about systemic equity and social justice that they themselves plan and execute.

Course Objectives:

By the end of the semester, students will be able to

1. Explain the terms “race”, “ethnicity”, “gender”, etc. their histories, and related vocabulary; explain how populations in the US are categorized and constructed, and how these categories shift with time.
2. Identify and summarize a variety of theoretical frameworks for discussing race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, and ability.
3. Seek out information about representative populations in appropriate venues and sources.
4. Articulate the ways in which interdisciplinary fields like Women & Gender Studies, Latino Studies, etc. apply theoretical frameworks to particular populations. Discuss how course concepts may play out differently depending on the groups and regions studied.
5. Generate typical research questions in these fields, as well as ones that are intersectional/transdisciplinary.
6. Analyze the social implications of media content in the experience of race, ethnicity, gender, etc.
7. Articulate best practices for having challenging conversations about diversity, equitable representation, and systems of privilege and inequity, and **model** these practices in conversations they organize and execute. (These practices include establishing ground rules; participating in thoughtful listening and reflection; challenging internal and external preconceptions and motivations; acknowledging privilege, position, and discomfort; seeking common ground or new understanding.)
8. Reflect in meaningful ways about their own representation and social location in society, as well as their power to contribute to civic dialogue and to shaping healthy societies.

Course Goals for Teaching Assistants:

By the end of the semester, TAs will

1. Understand and apply principles of anti-racist thinking and teaching
2. Be able to confidently direct conversations about sensitive topics with undergraduate students
3. Be able to add both experience in DDI and in critical theory to their c.v.

Assessments may include:

Regular reflection posts or short papers.

Synchronous Discussion Sections with Teaching Assistants each week.

Multi-modal assessments that allow students to identify theoretical perspectives and apply them to particular groups.

Social Location Assignments

Planning, execution, and evaluation of community conversation about race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, disability, etc.

Self-reflection paper, video, zine, body map, etc.

Potential Readings - Selections may include:

Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands - La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. 2nd ed. San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books, 1987. Print.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London, England: Routledge, 2015. Print.

Chin, Staceyann. *Other Side of Paradise*. New York, NY: Scribner, 2010. Print.

Collins, Patricia Hill. *Intersectionality as Critical Social Thought*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019. Print.

Crenshaw, K., 1991. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6)

Davis, Angela. *Women, Race and Class*. London, England: Women's Press, 2001. Print.

Delgado, Richard, and Jean Stefancic. *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction, Second Edition*. 2nd ed. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2012.

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Glasgow, Scotland: HarperCollins Distribution Services, 1970. Print.

Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Vol.1: An Introduction*. Harlow, England: Penguin Books, 1984. Print.

Hong, Cathy Park. *Minor Feelings, An Asian American Reckoning*. One World: 2020. Print.

Hooks, Bell. *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*. 2nd ed. London, England: Routledge, 2014. Print.

Jenkins, Morgan. *This Will Be My Undoing: Living at the Intersection of Black, Female, and Feminist in (White) America*. New York, NY: HarperPerennial, 2018. Print.

Kendi, Ibram. *How to Be an Antiracist*. Bodley Head, 2019. Print.

Kendall, Mikki. *Hood Feminism: Notes from the Movement that Women Forgot*. Viking Press, 2020. Print.

Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Old Saybrook, CT: Tantor Media, 2016. Print.

Love, Bettina. *We Want to Do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom*. Print.

Lugones, Maria. *Pilgrimages=Peregrinajes: theorizing coalition against multiple oppressions*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003. Print.

Nguyen, Viet Thanh. *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War*. London, England: Harvard University Press, 2017. Print.

Oluo, Ijeoma. *So You Want to Talk about Race*. Seattle, WA: Seal Press, 2018. Print.

Saad, Layla. *Me and White Supremacy: How to Recognise Your Privilege, Combat Racism and Change the World*. Quercus, 2020.

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. Harlow, England: PenguinBooks, 1995. Print.

Sheller, Mimi. *Mobility Justice: The Politics of Movement in an Age of Extremes*. London, England: Verso Books, 2018. Print.

Taylor, Keeanga-Yamahtta. *From #blacklivesmatter to Black Liberation*. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2016. Print.

Tuhiwai Smith, Professor Linda. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. 2nd ed. London, England: Zed Books, 2016. Print.

Vuong, Ocean. *Night Sky with Exit Wounds*. London, England: Jonathan Cape, 2017. Print.

Theoretical conversations will focus on teaching the following: Critical Race Theory, Feminist and Third-World Feminist theories, Transnational Feminism, Border Studies, Intersectionality, Decolonial theories, Anti-racism

Budget: We understand that the award stipend is \$7500.00 but considering both faculty members are APiRs with larger teaching loads, we respectfully request the full award stipend for each of us so we can devote serious time to working with Brendan Kane in DDI on the training needed for faculty and graduate students, Peter Diplock and staff in CETL, and work with e-campus to develop a stellar online component that meets Quality Matters standards.

Support Emails from DDI, AAASI, AMST,

Supporting emails:

Kane, Brendan

Thu 12/3/2020 4:51 PM

- Zane, Sherry;
- Gebelein, Anne

To:

Dear Dr. Zane and Dr. Gebelein,

As Director of the Democracy and Dialogues Initiative of Dodd Human Rights Impact, I write to express my enthusiastic support for the co-taught General Education large course that you are planning on the topics of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class and disability. The capacity of UConn students to speak across difference and dialogue over difficult subjects is a critical need in our classrooms and communities, and the course you propose will do important work to impart the required skills and experiences. The Democracy and Dialogues Initiative looks forward to working with you and your team to arrange the facilitator and moderator training that is essential to the vision you've laid out in the proposal. Please count DDI and myself among your partners.

Kind regards,

Brendan Kane

Associate Professor, History and Literatures, Cultures and Languages

Director, Democracy and Dialogues Initiative, Dodd Human Rights Impact

From: Chang, Jason Oliver <jason.o.chang@uconn.edu>

Sent: Friday, December 4, 2020 2:10 AM

To: Zane, Sherry <sherry.zane@uconn.edu>

Subject: Re: GEN ED

Thanks, Sherry. AAASI is in strong support of this course proposal as it continues to build substantive pipelines into our core curriculum and methods of inquiry.

The Asian and Asian American Studies institute might teach about the history of U.S. wars in Asia and the shape of refugee populations from U.S. imperialism. Such work provides an important basis by which to examine the value of

expressive culture from Asian American populations and the significance of writer/scholars like Viet Than Nguyen and Ocean Vuong in giving voice to displaced and disposed populations across the globe.

From: "Zane, Sherry" <sherry.zane@uconn.edu>

Date: Thursday, December 3, 2020 at 10:47 AM

To: "Chang, Jason Oliver" <jason.o.chang@uconn.edu>

Cc: "Gebelein, Anne" <anne.gebelein@uconn.edu>

Subject: GEN ED

Vials, Christopher - AMST

Fri 12/4/2020 1:01 PM

To:

- Gebelein, Anne;
- Zane, Sherry

Dear Anne,

American Studies strongly supports the proposal "Exploring American Identities from Theory to Practice." Thanks so much to you and Sherry for getting this together.

Best wishes,

Chris