

# Philosophy 308: Philosophy of Race and Gender

University of Massachusetts Lowell  
Department of Philosophy  
Spring 2014

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**Meeting Times:** Tues Thurs 12:30PM-1:45PM  
**Course Location:** Dugan Hall 211 - SC  
**Course Number:** 8633  
**Office Hours:** Tues Thurs 11:00AM-12:00PM

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**I. Course Description:** In this course, we will analyze and deconstruct the multifaceted notions of race and gender, as well as matrixes of power that give rise to resultant inequalities based on these identity categories. We will examine the difference between race and ethnicity, sex and gender, as well as the distinction between sexuality and gender. We will explore the intersectionality of race, gender, sexuality, class, nationality and other identity markers. Our course will consider a host of challenges introduced by transgender, transsexual, and intersex identities, and assess whether (or not) they have eroded the notion of gender. Accordingly, our investigation will direct us toward a series of questions: Are race and gender intrinsic features, present in the empirical world or are they historicized, culturally or socially constructed? Apart from racialized or gendered-bodies, how do objects, artifacts, and concepts (e.g., music/food, “blue for boys, pink for girls”) become racialized or gendered? Intuitions that inform our analysis of race and gender extend to social identities more broadly, such that we might similarly ask: What constitutes identity and how are identities formed? Are identities (like race, gender, etc.) innate, learned, linguistic, or socially mediated? Furthermore, why do identities matter? Why have entire populations been oppressed as a result of identity formation? Do identities extend to non-human entities (e.g. technological artifacts/bots, non-human animals, etc.)? How do identities differ from selves? Were identities formed in the modern period, as some have argued? Are some identities chosen while are not others? What role does patriarchy, classism, racism, xenophobia, homophobia/biphobia/transphobia/etc. or colonialist histories play in the formation and maintenance of oppressive identity hierarchies? These are the types of pursuits we will explore in our course.

**II. Course Objectives:** The aim of the course is to 1) broaden your theoretical presuppositions about the world we inhabit by critically examining the open and free-exchange of ideas that theorists/philosophers have contributed throughout the ages for the advancement of human knowledge; 2) draw your own well-informed and well-reasoned conclusions about general philosophical problems of human life; 3) explore your own place in the world and your own philosophical journey in search of truth, meaning and personal understanding.

**III. Course Format:** The course involves a combination of lectures, films, discussions, weekly readings, take-home assignments and in-class examinations. Occasionally, we may include other media (such as film, artwork, etc.) with special significance to course content or we may invite guest speakers to contribute to our class discussions. Weekly lectures and in-class discussions will not be posted online or made available outside of class. Regular attendance and active participation is an indispensable part of the pedagogical process, contributing to an integral portion of your overall course grade.

**IV. Course Texts:** In addition to the following required course text, supplementary instructional material will be made available as needed.

1) Linda Martin Alcoff and Eduardo Mendieta, eds., *Identities: Race, Class, Gender, and Nationality* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007). ISBN: 0631217231.

**V. Course Requirements and Grading Procedure:** Your grade for the course is based on the total number of points accumulated from 1 midterm exam, 1 final exam, 1 term paper, an attendance and participation score, and a brief in-class presentation. The *approximate* grading scale used to assess your final course grade is modeled upon the following grade point system:

94-96 % = A	80-83 % = B-	67-69 % = D+
90-93 % = A-	77-79 % = C+	64-66 % = D
87-89 % = B+	74-76 % = C	60-63 % = D-
84-86 % = B	70-73 % = C-	57-59 % = F

Exams administered during the term will be writing-intensive/essay-based format, conventional in most philosophy courses; hence, there will be no “multiple choice” questions or “fill-ins” on any exam. Detailed instructions on how to write an essay for a philosophy exam will be provided several weeks before the first exam is administered. The breakdown for 5 sections that constitute your overall course grade is detailed below:

#### **V.1 Attendance and Participation: 10%**

Regular attendance is essential for succeeding in this course. Attendance and participation constitutes (fully awake) physical presence and active in-class participation; this involves speaking up and contributing to our in-class discussions. The weekly lectures will assume that students have done the assigned readings (and thought critically about them) before coming to class; therefore, please be prepared to discuss the material enthusiastically. In the event that you are unable to make it to class, please remember that you are nonetheless responsible for obtaining and knowing any material covered during your absence (absences do not absolve you from accountability). Each absence is penalized at 2 points per class meeting; students who come to class late will not receive credit after attendance has been taken. Excessive absences will very likely impact your understanding of the material, thereby preventing you from succeeding in the course. What’s more, information such as weekly reading assignments, handouts, and current announcement of exams, is often made during class. Lastly, *please make sure you have a current Umass Lowell email account and check it frequently (at least daily). I often email students course updates and other pertinent announcements as new information becomes available.*

#### **V.2 Midterm Exam: 25%**

A three part midterm exam will test knowledge base acquired in the first half of the term. The basic format is 2 long essays and 1 short essay. The midterm exam is worth 25 points total; the long essays are worth 10 points each and the short essay is valued at 5 points. You may also attempt an extra credit question at the end of your exam which may boost your overall exam score (see section VI on extra credit).

#### **V.3 Term Paper: 25%**

The term paper assignment asks you to explore an issue or theme relevant to race, gender, identity, or other related topics. You may write on any topic that interests you from our course readings; it is also possible to write on related material that we may not be studying directly. Recommended

length for these papers is 6-8 pages. More detailed information on the term paper assignment will follow.

#### **V.4 Final Exam: 25%**

A final exam will be administered at the end of the term. The final will be very similar to the midterm in format, though it will cover knowledge base acquired in the second half of the term. It is not a *comprehensive* exam, which means that it will not cover everything we learned since the first week of class, but only material acquired in the second half of the semester.

#### **V.5 Class Presentation: 15%**

Each student is required to conduct an in-class presentation. This may involve presenting one of the readings for the course (excluding short excerpts), research material from your term paper, an in-class dialogue of a text, or other possibilities. Student presentations run approximately 10-15 min each, depending on content, complexity of material, and classroom dynamics. Students may present material individually, in pairs, or small groups. Presentations are assessed for strength, clarity, originality, and engagement with course content. Students should discuss their presentation ideas with me well in advance of their proposed presentation date. *Presentations may not be conducted during the final lecture week of the semester.*

**VI. Extra Credit:** While there are no formal assignments made for the exclusive purpose of gaining extra credit points, students have the opportunity to earn “extra credit” on both the midterm and final exams. Please keep in mind that extra credit exam questions may not come directly from the text and might be more challenging than ones contained in the body of the exam. Generally speaking, extra credit problems are set to a higher degree of assessment.

**VII. Make-Up Exams and Late Work Acceptance Policy:** Please make every effort to take the midterm and final exam during their regularly scheduled time. Make-ups may only be administered in the event of serious and compelling reasons beyond the student’s control; this includes but is not limited to immediate family emergencies, documented medical reasons, or other university-approved exemptions. You must notify me in advance of your impending emergency and schedule a mutually-convenient appointment time for any make-ups. Please submit all written work on time, late work is penalized at 10 points per day after the due date.

**VIII. Snow Emergencies and Unexpected Class Cancellations:** In the event of an unexpected campus wide emergency due to inclement weather or other unforeseen circumstances that result in class cancelation, I will contact you (by email) with specific instructions on how the emergency impacts any exams, papers, or other assignments scheduled for the day/s in question. Depending on where we are in the semester, I may postpone your exam, convert it to a take-home, or make other arrangement for you to complete the assigned course work.

**IX. Class Conduct and Miscellaneous Policies:** A successful learning environment is generated by respect, professional courtesy, and kind consideration of others. Please refrain from eating (drinks are fine), sleeping, talking privately, texting, and using any and all electronic equipment (i.e., cell phones, iPods, Blackberrys, personal stereos/headphones, recording devices, scientific calculators, laptops, etc.) while in class. If it is imperative that you use your phone, please conduct your business outside of class as quickly as possible and disable your phone before returning to class. For special or personal circumstances, please see me in advance about any exceptions to the prohibition on the use of electronic devices in class. In addition, please do not bring young children or non-human animals/pets (unless pre-approved by the university) to class. Finally, if you have any questions or concerns with respect to grades or your specific course performance, please contact me personally. As a general rule, your grades

(among other educational records) are confidential, thus I am *not permitted nor required* to discuss your course performance with anyone else on your behalf. The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (also known as FERPA) prohibit me from discussing your educational records with other parties. In brief, please conduct yourselves appropriately and adhere to commonsensical, mutually beneficial, classroom etiquette.

**X. Special Circumstances and Students with Disabilities:** Please do not hesitate to meet with me in the event that you encounter difficulties of a personal nature that may hinder your ability to succeed in this course. Students with documented disabilities (physical, learning, etc.) which may impact course performance must contact me during the first week of the term and *especially before any graded work is submitted* so that I may accommodate your needs as early on as possible. If you would like to request accommodations or review the university's policies governing disability disclosures, please contact the Office of Disability Services at (978) 934-4574 or visit their office located at One University Avenue, Cumnock Hall, Suite C4, Lowell, MA 01854.

**XI. Tentative Course Outline:** (Subject to revision as needed)

- Week 1: 1/21, 1/23: Introduction to Race, Gender, and Identity: *Identities*, Book Introduction
- Week 2: 1/28, 1/30: Foundations of Identity: Ch 3, Ch 4, Ch 34
- Week 3: 2/4, 2/6: Race and Identity: Ch 5, Ch 6, Ch 7
- Week 4: 2/11, 2/13: Race and Ethnicity: Ch 8, Ch 9
- Week 5: 2/18 (No Class: Presidents Day), 2/20: UMass Lowell Gender Studies Conference
- Week 6: 2/25, 2/27 (No Class: APA Central): Ethnicity and Ethnorace: Ch 10, Ch 11
- Week 7: 3/4, 3/6: Gender and Identity: Ch 16, Ch 17, Ch 18
- Week 8: 3/11, 3/13: Race, Gender, and Intersectionality: Ch 19, Lorde (Handout), **Midterm Exam**
- Week 9: 3/18, 3/20: No Classes—Spring Recess
- Week 10: 3/25, 3/27: Gender, Sexuality, and Identity: Ch 21, Ch 22
- Week 11: 4/1, 4/3: Transgender, Transsexual, and Intersex Identities: Ch 24, Ch 20, Bornstein (Handout)
- Week 12: 4/8, 4/10: Masculinity and Gender: McGann, Bordo, Stoltenberg (Handouts)
- Week 13: 4/15, 4/17: National and Transnational Identities: Ch 25, Ch 26
- Week 14: 4/22, 4/24: Contemporary Reconfigurations: Ch 29, Ch 30, Ch 31
- Week 15: 4/29, 5/1: Postcolonial and Global Identities: Afterword, **Term Paper Due**
- Week 16: **Final Exam**