

# WOMEN'S STUDIES 396: STUDIES IN LESBIAN & GAY CULTURES IN THE CONTEMPORARY UNITED STATES

**Summer 2007 / Edwards Campus**

**Instructor:** Milton W. Wendland  
**Office:** No Edwards Campus Location (yet!)  
**Telephone:** No phone calls, please.

## **Office Hours**

Virtual Office Hours: via email 11:00 a.m. to noon MWF  
Onsite Office Hours: 220RC (our classroom) 3:00 – 4:00 MWF

**Email:** milton@ku.edu

Put "WS 396" in the subject line so your email doesn't get buried in my inbox.

## **COURSE DESCRIPTION & GOALS**

This course explores the varieties of culture created and experienced by people who identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and others in the contemporary United States.

After completing this course, you should be able to do each of the following:

- ✚ Trace a general history of lesbians and gays in the United States
- ✚ Locate and recognize moments of cooperation and conflict in lesbian and gay cultures
- ✚ Critique the development, presentation, and representation of those cultures
- ✚ Explore the intersections of race, religion, class, and other axes of identity with sexual orientation

Because we are going to be covering a large amount and variety of material in a short time, it is important that we keep in mind several guiding questions that will help us tie the materials together.

- ✚ How have the terms for sexual orientations changed over time and how are those changes reflected in, caused by, or irrelevant to the larger culture?
- ✚ How do race, class, gender, religion, and other axes of identity inflect (i.e., alter, add to, detract from, complicate, or simplify) sexual orientation?
- ✚ How have lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people come together or kept themselves separated from one another and from the larger culture?

## **REQUIRED MATERIALS**

- ✚ **Book:** Faderman, Lillian. Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America. New York: Penguin, 1991.
- ✚ **In-Class Screenings:** In this course, visual texts are equal to written texts.
- ✚ **Blackboard Readings and Handouts:** Some readings will be posted on Blackboard. You should print these readings, prepare them BEFORE the day scheduled for discussing them, and bring them to class on the days they are assigned. To save ink, you might want to set your printer to "draft" mode and/or use on-campus printing services for free (e.g., at Watson Library). Other readings will be handed out in class.

## HOW TO PREPARE FOR CLASS

This is a discussion or seminar-style course, not a lecture course. This means that you should always be prepared for class by preparing the texts ahead of time and coming to class with questions, reactions, disagreements, examples, etc related to the texts, marking up your texts with highlights and notes and marginalia, and be able to refer to specific passages and page numbers during discussion. Remember – texts include written materials as well as audiovisual materials. Reading well means more than just moving your eyes over the printed words on page until you reach the end or just sitting with your eyes on the screen until you see the final credits of a film or documentary. A good way to prepare would be to ask these questions:

1. **Key Premises of the Reading:** What are the main points of the text? How does the author/director support the main points? What evidence is offered or missing? What assumptions are made by the text? Who wrote/directed this, and does it make a difference? How would the text be different if someone else wrote/directed it? Who is the audience for this text? Would the point of this reading be different if it focused on a different population (e.g., middle-class black bisexual men instead of upper-class black lesbian women) and how?
2. **Context of the Reading:** Why would we read this article for this particular class meeting? How does the text relate to the other texts for this course – is it saying the same thing? Something different? How does the text fit with class discussions? Your own experiences? Material from other courses? How does this text deal with material in historical context (i.e., what else was happening at the same time as the material in the reading) and does it matter? Could this text have been created today? Could it have been created 25, 50, or even 100 years ago? Why or why not?
3. **Your Stand on the Reading:** Do you agree with the ideas in this text or do you think it's just bullsh\*t? Why? What makes you feel this way – class discussions? Your own experiences? Material from your other courses, reading, or your job/career? Does this reading have any bearing on your own life?

## CLASSROOM DISCUSSION & PARTICIPATION

This class is discussion-based, so all of us must come to class ready to **engage the texts (both written and visual) and each other critically**. Some topics like sexuality raise issues that are controversial or which evoke strong personal feelings. We'll be exploring topics that might confuse, anger, excite, or offend you; please use whatever reaction is provoked to further our discussion in a critical manner.

"Critically" in this sense means being able to point out and discuss strengths and weaknesses in texts, thinking about what assumptions and definitions are being used in a text and why, being able to compare and contrast texts, and being able to take a stand and support it with reason and reference to the texts (even if you don't "really" hold that opinion in your "real" life). Comments about whether or not you liked something are not "critical" unless you are also able to explain why. "Critically" does not mean jumping to conclusions, assuming that your understanding of a text is the only or best understanding, using epithets, verbally attacking people, bullying, shouting, etc. Although I expect us all to participate in discussions equally, as the instructor I reserve the right to end or alter discussions as needed to keep us on track. (Words and behavior that don't productively further the discussion can be considered "academic misconduct" under University rules and regulations.)

**Disagreements and open expression are part of critical thinking.** Our goal in this class is not to discover any "right answer" but rather to locate, develop, and articulate ways of understanding these topics as well as to learn how to locate and evaluate the assumptions that underlie various stances and opinions.

Pop quizzes aren't very much fun for any of us, but if I get the sense that you aren't preparing the texts for our class meetings or if classroom discussions are lackluster or uncritical, we'll use class time for pop quizzes (usually an in-class essay), which will count toward your final grade.

## GRADES AND ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS

This course uses a standard 90/80/70/60/50 grading scale. You can access your grades at any time by using Blackboard Grade Book. After noon on Sunday, July 29<sup>th</sup>, absolutely no adjustments will be made to the grade of any individual assignment or activity for any reason whatsoever, so you should be certain to check Blackboard Grade Book often and to address any concerns about your grades as soon as possible before that date. **EXTRA CREDIT, LATE WORK & EXTENSIONS, and INCOMPLETES (for individual assignments or for the course) are NOT AVAILABLE.**

Participation (includes reading, watching, listening & speaking)	50 points
Daily Participation/Discussion 25 points total	
Discussion Questions (5 days at 5 points each)	

Take-Home Reflection Essay	25 points
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LGBT Sidebars (5 at 5 points each)	25 points
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<b>TOTAL POINTS POSSIBLE</b>	100 points*
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**\*Attendance affects your final grade as shown in the table below.**

### DAILY PARTICIPATION

You should participate in each class meeting. Failure to do so will reduce your participation grade. See "Classroom Discussion & Participation," below. Ad hoc assignments are tied to our readings and might require you to visit and evaluate websites, create a list of some sort, conduct an informal survey of friends and family about some issue, browse magazines, or complete an in-class activity. These projects will be part of your participation points. Ad hoc assignments will generally be graded as credit/no credit.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

You will be randomly assigned five days for which you are required to submit discussion questions. You should prepare three discussion questions and submit them to me via email no later than high noon on the day our class meets. (For example, discussion questions covering the readings assigned for Wed July 11<sup>th</sup> are due in my inbox by noon on Wed July 11<sup>th</sup>.) Discussion questions should focus on the texts assigned for that day, and at least one of the three questions should address more than one text (which might mean that you have to consider texts we've already read or viewed).

"Discussion" questions invite discussion and conversation; "information" questions simply ask us to define a term or describe an event or remember some fact. A good way to develop a discussion question is to take note of any place in the texts that you find yourself angered, surprised, confused, amused, or shocked.

### TAKE-HOME REFLECTION ESSAY

The reflection essay will serve as a sort of "almost comprehensive exam" in which you are asked to address a general issue about LGBT cultures using our course texts and your own critical thinking skills. You'll have a choice of questions. Tentatively, you'll receive the questions on Friday, July 20<sup>th</sup>, and turn the essay in on Monday, July 23<sup>rd</sup>. We'll discuss this in class closer to the date.

### LGBT SIDEBARS

Sidebars are brief, informal but otherwise thorough moments when you introduce the rest of the class to some element of LGBT that we aren't otherwise covering due to our time restrictions. These might be current events, books, songs, people, events, places, concepts, plays, musicals, movies, paintings, controversies, laws or court cases, celebrities, debates, photographs, TV, or more. Usually I will assign you a particular sidebar topic and your presentation can be drawn from easily-accessed sources like local libraries, video stores, or legitimate internet sources (NOT Wikipedia!).

We'll discuss this more in class and I'll provide you with an example. Presentations should describe the event, provide historical and/or theoretical context, address controversy where applicable,

make connections with assigned readings where possible, trace implications for our class topic, and invite questions and responses. General requirements for the sidebar: (1) If I don't assign a topic to you, you must clear your own idea with me via email by noon on the day you are scheduled to present. (2) Your sidebar must include some visual or aural element (e.g., something we can show on the document camera or a clip from a movie or a song). Handouts for the class aren't required but do make presentations more useful. (3) You must submit a 1-page outline or narrative of your sidebar presentation to me if you want credit. This should include: citations for all sources you used, a brief outline or narrative of your presentation that includes a description of what "it" is that you are presenting, how it relates to that day's reading and/or our class in general, what you found surprising / challenging / disturbing / novel / etc about it, and at least one question/activity that you will pose to the class.

## ATTENDANCE

**Attendance is required.** Arriving more than 10 minutes late or leaving at any time before class is dismissed is the same as being absent. In addition, in-class behavior that indicates that you are not participating fully (e.g., reading the newspaper, writing notes, sleeping, etc) counts as an absence. Absences also mean that you miss whatever material is covered in class. In-class work that you miss cannot be made up for any reason. Absences affect your course grade, according to the chart below, regardless of the reason for the absence. The only exception is "mandated religious observance," as defined by the University Senate Rules & Regulations.

ABSENCES (FOR ANY REASON)	CHANGE TO GRADES
0-1 class meeting	No addition or subtraction to final grade
>1 but </= 2	Final grade lowered by one letter (e.g., A → B, B → C, etc)
>2 but </= 3	Final grade lowered by two letters (e.g., A → C, B → D, C → F)
3 or more class meetings	<b>If you miss 3 or more class meetings, you will receive an F for the entire course, regardless of any other points you might have earned. (e.g., A → F, B → F, etc)</b>

You should contact a classmate for notes; the size of the class does not allow me to review materials or entire lectures with you personally when you miss class although you are welcome to stop by during my office hours if you have specific questions.

**IMPORTANT!** During almost every class discussion I will ask you to explain yourself, to answer "why," or to take your answer a bit further. I will also play "devil's advocate" to get you to think through points we make in class. When I use these tactics to further the discussion it does not mean that your answer or comment is "wrong," or that you aren't doing well or that I'm trying to "catch you" or "embarrass you." **QUITE THE CONTRARY!** It means that you are onto something good that we need to explore more!

## PLAGIARISM & ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT

**Academic misconduct** includes disrupting class, plagiarizing others' ideas, cheating, harassing others, and more. **Plagiarism** is presenting someone else's ideas, writing, or thoughts as your own. This means more than just failing to give credit for direct quotes! It also includes using ideas and thoughts that belong to or are unique to someone else. **If you are unsure about whether something counts as academic misconduct or plagiarism, don't do it and/or ask BEFOREHAND!** The excuses that you

“did not know” or that you “didn’t realize what you were doing,” or that you “didn’t mean to” are insufficient.

While studying together in pairs or groups is an effective way to challenge yourself, to understand the material, and to generate ideas, you should NEVER work with anyone else (whether they are in this class or not) on any course assignments that will be turned in for a grade (e.g., response papers, quizzes, presentations, final projects, etc). **If you have questions about whether or not working together is appropriate, ASSUME THAT IT IS NOT APPROPRIATE and ASK FIRST.** If you submit any assignment that is notably similar to the assignment submitted by any other student in this course or that otherwise appears to be in violation of these codes and policies, you can expect that I will begin the process outlined under “Academic Misconduct” in the Student Handbook to investigate the matter fully.

As an enrolled student at KU, you are presumed to be familiar with university policies relating to plagiarism, academic misconduct, and related topics. See the Student Handbook at <http://studenthandbook.ku.edu/> for university policies and guidelines with regard to plagiarism, academic misconduct, harassment, and the like. The entire Student Handbook is available for purchase at local textbook stores and is available online at <http://www.studenthandbook.ku.edu/>. These policies are also available in the Timetable of Classes and through the Office of the Vice Provost for Student Success, located in Strong Hall or online at <http://www.vpss.ku.edu/index.shtml>.

## **SPECIAL NEEDS, RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES, UNFORESEEN CIRCUMSTANCES, ETC**

If you have **special needs or conditions** (physical, learning, or otherwise) that need to be addressed, the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) / Disability Resources (DR) arranges accommodations and services for students who are eligible. Contact SSD at 22 Strong Hall or by telephoning them at (785) 864-2620 (V/TTY) as soon as possible. Accommodations are available ONLY through the SSD. It is YOUR responsibility to contact the SSD or other appropriate KU office. Information about their services can be found at <http://disability.ku.edu>. You may also contact me privately in regard to your needs in this course, but all special accommodations must be handled through SSD/DR.

If you have **recognized religious observances** that conflict with course events or requirements please let me know by Wednesday, July 4<sup>th</sup>, so that we can discuss and arrange a reasonable accommodation before the course is underway.

**If unforeseen circumstances** emerge during the semester that may seriously hinder your progress or performance in this course (e.g., two broken legs, a major bicycle accident, a serious family crisis), please contact me right away. Together we can perhaps reach a solution or compromise that will enable you to continue and complete course requirements successfully, although if the situation warrants you may need to withdraw from the course because our course is under such time constraints and “incompletes” are not possible

**A NOTE ABOUT MY OWN LIMITATIONS:** Sometimes I have a small hearing problem, particularly with accents or if someone is speaking to me from a distance. I apologize in advance if I ask you to repeat yourself on occasion or if I need to ask for assistance from another member of the class in helping me to hear what you are saying.

<p><b>Course requirements, reading schedule, and other course-related issues are liable to change – It is your responsibility to check your registered email address and Blackboard and to attend class.</b></p>
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