

University of Pennsylvania
School of Social Policy & Practice
MSSP 780/MSW 780
Policy & “Difference” in Postmodernity

Spring 2017

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I. Course Description

Social constructions of “difference” permeate the institutions, spaces, and policies of society. These social constructions include but are not limited to the racialized, gendered, sexed, classed, and dis/abled formations of the body. By leaning on postmodern thinkers such as Jean-Francois Lyotard, Iris Marion Young, Pierre Bourdieu, Judith Butler, Jacques Derrida, Ernesto Laclau, and Michel Foucault, this seminar course will begin by engaging the questions of what is “difference” and how is “difference” discursively formed, shaped, and reproduced in society. The text of various laws and policies will be critically examined from each postmodern lens. The remainder two-thirds of the course will critically engage various more contemporary (post-)postmodern text from the social sciences, affect theory, queer and posthumanist studies that deal with the multiplicity of “difference” (e.g., race, gender, class, sexuality, and dis/ability) and the explicit and/or implicit policy implications of these works. Thus, we will critically engage policies such as the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, affirmative action, the Violence Against Women Act, and same-gender marriage among others. The underlying questions throughout the course will be to what extent does social policy enable the possibilities of freedom, justice and democracy for the ‘Other’, the deviant, the abject, the marginalized, those of assumed “difference”? And, to what extent does policy constrain those possibilities at the same time?

This course does assume familiarity with social theory and is an introduction to postmodern thought on the law, the political, and policy.

II. Educational and Learning Objectives

By the end of Policy & “Difference” in Postmodernity students are expected to demonstrate:

1. understanding of various perspectives of postmodern thought, particularly related to the construction and reproduction of “difference”;
2. ability to place more than one thinker in conversation with each other;
3. ability to apply various postmodern lenses of analysis to policy and the law, in general, and social policy, in particular;

4. a critical perspective of the possibilities of freedom, justice and democracy within/through policy and the law;
5. and, familiarity with and critical analyses of policies such as Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, affirmative action, disparate impact, censorship, health care, taxation, immigration, gender equity, and same-gender marriage.

III. Course requirements:

Expectations

Classroom learning is a fundamental component of your professional education. Students are therefore expected to attend each class, arrive to class on time, be in attendance for the full class. In the event that you are unable to attend class for any reason, you must notify the instructor in advance and learn how you are to make up the content you missed. Excessive absenteeism (i.e., missing more than two classes) is considered a serious problem the instructor will handle by meeting with the student and determining whether the student's educational adviser should be notified. Excessive absenteeism could result in course failure.

Students are expected to: (A) participate substantively in class discussions; (B) read on a weekly basis and come to class prepared to critically engage the reading assignments; (C) submit assignments by the due date and in accordance with the specified format.

Most importantly, students are expected to **HAVE FUN! HAVE FUN! HAVE FUN!**

Assignments

Students will be responsible for four assignments during the semester. These assignments will require students to demonstrate critically their understanding of the readings and critical analysis of policy.

Grades will be based on three criteria: online critical reading discussions, presentation, paper part 1, and paper part 2. Online critical reading discussion and the presentation are each worth 15% of your course grade and part 1 of the paper is worth 40% of your grade part 2 of the paper is worth 30% of your overall course grade

Format

All papers must be typewritten, in 12-point font, double-spaced, page-numbered, with 1" margins at the left, right, top and bottom. The cover page (not included in the page limit) should include the title of the paper, student's name, assignment number, professor's name and date submitted. Papers should be stapled, not paper-clipped. Papers **must be proofread** carefully for clarity, organization, spelling, punctuation, and other potential errors before submission.

In-text citations following APA or ASA style guidelines are required for all written assignments, with the specific source including authors' last names and year of publication, regardless of whether you are paraphrasing or using specific quotes. **A list of references cited or consulted must be included at the end of each paper in proper APA or ASA**

bibliographic form. Footnotes may be used where appropriate to further explicate a concept or issue.

You should keep a copy of each paper submitted. The instructor will gladly answer any questions regarding format, citing or organization. Papers written for other classes may not be submitted for written assignments in this course. Direct substitution of papers between courses may result in a failing grade for that assignment.

Plagiarism

Students are expected to conduct themselves consistent with the University of Pennsylvania's Code of Academic Integrity, which presents standards regarding plagiarism, multiple submissions and other actions. Students are expected to be familiar with the Code, which can be found at <http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/osl/acadint.html>

Evaluation

Assignments will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

1. demonstrates understanding of the reading and theoretical perspective;
2. demonstrates critical analysis of the readings;
3. and, applies postmodern perspective(s) to the analysis of policy.

Grading Policies

The final course grade is based on the student's performance on all assignments. Students whose performance is minimal or failing at midterm will be notified in writing.

Readings

It is expected that students will read required class assignments from the recommended texts and/or articles, and from relevant materials of their own choosing.

Required Texts

Ahmed, Sara. *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*. Durham NC: Duke University Press.

Alaimo, S., and S. Hekman. 2008. *Material Feminisms*. Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1991. *Language & Symbolic Power*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Butler, Judith. 2015. *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Mary Flexner Lectures of Bryn Mawr College). Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Foucault, Michel. 2010. *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*. New York NY: Picador.

Laclau, Ernesto. 1996. *Emancipations*. New York NY: Verso.

Lyotard, Jean-Francois. 1984. *The Postmodern Condition: A report on knowledge*.
Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

puar, jasbir. 2007. *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Durham NC:
Duke University Press.

Weheliye, Alexander. 2014. *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black
Feminist Theories of the Human*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Young, Iris Marion. 1990. *Justice and the politics of difference*. Princeton NJ: Princeton
University Press.

Additional readings will be posted on-line via Canvas: <https://canvas.upenn.edu/>

Week 1: January 18

Course Introduction. Introductions, review of the syllabus, and course requirements.

Part I: Postmodernism on “Difference” and Policy

Week 2: January 25

Jean-Francois Lyotard *The Postmodern Condition: A report on knowledge*
Read: Book

Week 3: February 1

Iris Marion Young *Justice and the Politics of Difference*
Read: Introduction, Chapters 1, 2, 5, 6, & 7

Policy Reading: 2003 Affirmative Action Case

Week 4: February 8

Pierre Bourdieu *Language & Symbolic Power*
Read: Chapters 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, & 11
(Recommended: Editor’s Introduction)

Policy Reading: PL 199, “Defense of Marriage Act”

Week 5: February 15

Michel Foucault *The Birth of Biopolitics*
Read: All of Part III

Policy Reading: DREAM Act Legislative Proposal

Week 6: February 22

Walter Benjamin “Critique of Violence”

*PDF is on blackboard.

Policy Reading: American Disabilities Act, Title I

Week 7: March 1

Jacques Derrida “The Force of Law”

(Recommended: Derrida “Differáncé” in *Margins of Philosophy*)

*PDF is on blackboard.

Policy Reading: American Disabilities Act, Title I

Note: No class on March 9 (Spring Break).

Week 8: March 15

Ernesto Laclau *Emancipations*

Read: Chapters 1, 2, 3, & 6

(Recommended: Ernesto Laclau & Chantal Mouffe *Hegemony & Socialist Strategy*)

Policy Reading: Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009

Week 9: March 22

Judith Butler *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*

Read: TBD

Policy Reading: PL 103-322 Violence Against Women Act

*Paper topic selections.

Part II: Social Science, Affect Theory, & Posthumanist Studies on “Difference” and Policy

Week 10: March 29

Stacy Alaimo & Susan Hekman *Material Feminisms*

Read: Introduction and Chapters 10, 11, & 12

Policy Reading: Temporary Assistance to Needy Families

Week 11: April 5

Jasbir Puar *Terrorist Assemblages*

Read: Conclusion, Preface, Introduction, Chapters 3

Week 12: April 12

Alexander Weheliye *Habeas Viscus*

Read: TBD

* Paper Part I: Critical Policy Analysis due.

Week 13: April 19

Sara Ahmed *On Being Included*

Read: TBD

Week 14: April 26

Ezekiel Dixon-Román *Inheriting Possibility: Social Reproduction & Quantification in Education*

Read: TBD

May 3

* Paper Part II: Policy Blog or Op-Ed due.

Online Critical Reading Discussion (15%)
Due: Tuesday Nights @ 9pm

Students are asked to participate in an online critical discussion on the readings. Students are **not** expected to summarize the readings but to provide a critical (or burning) response or question(s) to the readings and/or respond to classmate comments. This may be a statement or a question or a series of questions. Although it is not just okay but encouraged to use examples from media and popular culture it is important that the discussion stays tied to the text. The hope is for this online dialogue to take place before class and spillover into classroom discussion.

Presentation (15%)
Due: Selected Date

Students are asked to do a 5 minute presentation (no longer than 10 minutes) on one of the text and a particular policy that the text implicitly or explicitly has implications toward. Presentations should provide an explanation of the policy, explain the argument/analysis/implications of the text on the particular policy, and a critical analysis of both engaging the reading/thinker for the week. Students are encouraged to place that reading/thinker in conversation with another thinker discussed in the course. The presentations are expected to generate critical questions that will stimulate class discussion.

Paper Part I: Critical Policy Analysis (40%)
Due: April 12th

Students are asked to select a law or policy of their choice and write a 8 to 10 page paper analyzing (1) how the policy addresses issues of “difference”, (2) how “difference” is constructed in/through the policy, (3) what are the assumptions the policy makes about “difference”, (4) who is included and who is excluded, (5) how the policy enables possibilities, and (6) how the policy constrains possibilities. The paper should employ one or two of the (post-)postmodern perspectives as a lens of analysis. Students are able to engage other (post-)postmodern articulations and text that are not covered in the course as well as social science research and literature. Analyses can be based totally on the structure of the policy, the effects/consequences of the policy, the historical forces that enabled the creation of the policy, the philosophical or theologico-political foundations of the policy, or all of the above. Students are welcome to use this paper as an opportunity to work on a dissertation chapter, thesis, research project, manuscript publication, paper for professional conference presentation, or for the fun of the exercise. Paper topic selection should be made by March 20th and discussed with the Professor.

Paper Part II: Policy Blog, Vlog, Op-Ed, or Podcast (30%)
Due: May 3rd

Students are asked to take the paper from Part I and distill the critical policy analysis down to 800 to 1,000 words and for a broader public audience. In this assignment, it is not necessary (or even recommended) to refer to philosophical thinkers but rather to take their ideas and put

them to work, as you do in part I, but in a way that is digestible for a more general public and policy audience. It will be strongly encouraged that the final product of these policy blogs or op-eds be submitted for publication consideration in outlets such as the *New York Times*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, *TheHill.com*, or *The Huffington Post*.