Course title and number: Lesbian Issues  
WS 350  3 Credits

Course Description: This course assumes that sexuality is embedded in social structures and interconnected with various forms of structural injustice. Keeping in focus that lesbian women are a very diverse people, we review historical trends, consider issues of definition, and study relationships, family, and community, including a unit on lesbianism and religion.

Course Prerequisites: Either WS 110, WS 150, or AACS 150

Course Objectives:
1. To work toward a definition of lesbian, with understanding of the biological, psychological, and political issues involved in the task of definition.
2. To understand the complexities of the question of whether sexuality is inborn or socially constructed.
3. To learn the history of lesbian women in the U.S. from the late 19th century to the 1990s, including awareness of historical change in notions of gender and sexuality.
4. To understand how cultural, social, and political changes in twentieth-century U.S. affected the lives of lesbian women.
5. To understand how gender, race, ethnicity, class, physical ability, and age interstructure with sexuality.
6. To gain knowledge of the institutionalization of heterosexism in the U.S. society; the dynamics of homophobia; the interconnection with sexism, racism, and other forms of structural injustice.
7. To learn about negative and positive attitudes towards sexuality in organized religion (particularly current work in Christianity, Judaism, and paganism), and theological efforts to integrate sexuality and spirituality.

Student Outcomes:
Students Will:
1. develop in writing a working definition of lesbian.
2. show in writing an understanding that the biological, psychological, and political issues informing the question of whether sexuality is inborn or socially constructed.
3. demonstrate knowledge of the history of lesbian women from the late 19th century to the present, particularly how cultural, social, and political changes affected their lives.
4. demonstrate in writing and orally how the social location (race, ethnicity, class, etc.) of lesbian women has affected their experience and their politics.
5. demonstrate in writing and orally knowledge about the institutionalization of heterosexism in the U.S. and around the globe; the dynamics of homophobia; the interconnection with sexism, racism, and other forms of social injustice.
6. report on in writing and orally the developing efforts in theology (Christianity, Judaism, paganism) to integrate sexuality and spirituality.

Topical Outline of the Course Content:
a. Definitions of lesbian: psychological and political perspectives on the task of definition.
Definitions of sexuality; e.g., narrowly genital definitions of early sexuality research in the 1940s; broader definitions in current research, including sociological dimensions; notions of the erotic in contemporary womanist and theological literature.

The causes of sexuality. Current biological research, including the search for gay gene; debates between gay white male biologists and feminist women biologists; political and scientific issues in this research.

The history of the psychological study of sexuality and lesbianism. A critique of the Kinsey Heterosexual/Homosexual Rating Scale, its advantages and disadvantages.

The cultural history of lesbian women. Topics include romantic friendships of the late 19th century; the pathologizing of lesbianism at the turn of the century; the gay world of Harlem in the 1920s; butch/femme roles and issues in mid-century and in the 1980s; lesbians in the Armed Services and in the McCarthy era; the Stonewall Rebellion (1969) and gay liberation. Changes in notions of gender and sexuality during these historical events.

Bisexuality, transgender, and intersex issues. Definitions, issues in current research. Similarities and tensions between lesbians, bisexual, transgendered, and intersex persons.

The institutionalization of heterosexism in the U.S. society. The dynamics of homophobia.

Differences and similarities among lesbians according to social location (race, ethnicity, class, etc.).

Current theological efforts to integrate sexuality and spirituality.

Guideline Suggestions for Teaching Methods and Student Learning Activities:

a. Discussion in large groups, small groups, and dyads.

b. Short lectures.

c. Films.

d. Guest Speakers.

e. Student presentations.

Guideline Suggestions for Methods of Student Assessment:

a. Weekly journals, including response to assigned reading.

b. Short papers.

c. Oral reports on research projects.
d. Field trips: Suggestions: Lesbian Hersoty Archives in Brooklyn, LGBT Community Center in NYC

Suggested Readings, Texts and Films:

**Books**

Nestle, Joan. *A Fragile Union*.

**Films**

*A Boy Named Sue* (57 minutes, 2000)
*Anyone and Everyone*
*For the Bible tells Me So* (90 minutes, 2007)
*The Brandon Teena Story* (81 minutes, 1998)
*Boys Don’t Cry* (118 minutes, 1999)
*Connie and Ruthie: Every Room in the House*
*ForbiddenLove* (85 minutes, 1992)
*Hand on the Pulse* (52 minutes, 2002)
*If These Walls Could Talk II*
*Last Call at Maud’s* (75 minutes, 1992)
*Lesbian Tongues: Lesbians Talk about Life, Love and Sex* (90 minutes, 1989)
*Living with Pride: Ruth Ellis*
*Our House* (2000)
*Rainbow’s End*
*Scent of a Butch*
*You Don’t Know Dick*

**Bibliography of Supportive Texts:**


Kantor, Martin. *Homophobia: The state of sexual bigotry today*.


Tin, Louis-George and Mark Redburn. *Dictionary of homophobia: A global history*.


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Original Departmental Approval Date:

Reviser's Name and Date: Dr. Arlene Holpp Scala, July, 2009.

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