Oberlin College  
Department of Politics  
Bogdan Popa  

Politics 336, Spring 2015  
Wed., 7-9:00 p.m; K237  
Office hours (Wed., 5-7pm)  
Or by appointment  

Seminar: Queering the Liberal Subject: Foundational Thinkers and New Developments  

This seminar offers an introduction to a body of queer political thought that critically investigates the dominant liberal ideal of the free and rational subject. The first section focuses on Friedrich Nietzsche and Michel Foucault, who have offered the most incisive critiques of this ideal. The second section traces the developments of their thinking within recent queer theory through the work of Judith Butler, Wendy Brown, Janet Halley and others. The seminar seeks to investigate what may come beyond liberalism and what are the limits of queer politics.  

REQUIRED READING  

The following books are required for the seminar. They are available at the Bookstore. You should buy your own copies and MUST always bring the appropriate work to class. Additional readings will be available in print reserve and on Blackboard. You MUST print out your own copies of readings available on Blackboard.


CLASS REQUIREMENTS  

The seminar will be run on a workshop model, mostly through student-led discussion. This means that is essential that you attend all sessions, are well prepared, and participate actively in discussion. Full attendance is required and any emergency absences (e.g. for medical reasons) must be excused ahead of time (you may contact me by phone, e-mail, or in person). **Any unexcused absence will result in a significant lowering of your final grade.** Punctuality is also important: please be in the classroom by 7:00 pm and make sure all written assignments are submitted on time (including Blackboard or e-mail assignments). Late arrival to class, or late submission of work, will
also result in a lowering of your grade. Please do not leave the room when class is in progress – it is disruptive to others.

Each week two or more students will be asked to serve as discussion leaders. They will each be required to write a two-three page "discussion paper" about part of the week's assignment, and to circulate it via Blackboard (and additionally by e-mail in case there are problems with Blackboard) to all members of the seminar by **NOON on the MONDAY before the session**. Other members of the seminar should carefully consider these papers and the discussion questions the leaders have formulated. They must post short responses to the questions, and their more general reactions to the discussion papers, on Blackboard **no later than NOON on the day of class**. Discussion leaders should read these posts before class and others should also try to do so.

Discussion papers should **not** only summarize the reading -- everyone will have read it! They should, above all, record your ideas about it, briefly setting out what you take to be important, interesting, provocative, or problematic, in what you have read -- and why. Each paper should end by clearly formulating one key question for discussion that arises from your discussion and that you think the seminar should address and one supplementary question. You will be expected to write at least two discussion papers in the course of the semester and also to introduce each paper, making clear why you have selected your questions and chairing the discussion of them.

In addition to preparing discussion papers, posting responses to other people's discussion papers on Blackboard, and participating in all class discussions, requirements for this seminar include writing an extended paper (not less than 15 or more than 25 pages double-spaced) on a topic of your own choice. This paper should be an outgrowth of the issues and materials studied in class. A title and a proposal for the paper (one or two pages), indicating what material it will cover and what it will argue, must be handed in **no later than the class meeting on WEEK 6** (sooner is better). You are strongly encouraged to meet with me while developing your proposal.

The last sessions of the seminar will be devoted to presentations of "work in progress" reports. These reports should be between 3 and 4 pages in length double-spaced. They must posted on Blackboard by **NOON on the MONDAY prior to the session where they are to be presented**. Your report should [a] present a clear synopsis of your topic and what you intend to argue in your final paper, [b] indicate the main materials you will draw on, [c] indicate any problems or issues about which you would like feed-back from the seminar: the aim is to share projects and assist each other with them, not to present highly polished or finished work. Another member of the seminar will be asked to serve as a discussant for each "work in progress" report, and everybody should come to class with written comments on the reports to share with the seminar and the author (you should bring an extra copy to give to the author). Final papers will be due on the exam date for the class.

The final grade for the course will be determined as follows:
(1) Attendance, preparation, and participation: 25%
This includes your general level of preparation and the quality of your Blackboard
and oral contributions to the seminar. Good oral participation involves quality as well
as quantity. It includes your ability to listen respectfully to others and thoughtfully to
respond to what they are saying, and your ability to develop logical arguments and
engage in reasoned debate. The quality of your oral presentation of your “discussion
papers” and “work in progress report” will be included in the assessment.

(2) Written “discussion papers” and “work in progress report”: 30%. You will write
at least two “discussion papers” and one “work in progress report”: 10% each. (If you
write more than two discussion papers your two best grades will be selected).

(3) Final paper: 45%

NOTE: discussion papers, work in progress reports, and final papers must be signed with
the honor code (this may be electronic for work posted on Blackboard). All written
assignments must normally be completed in order to pass the class.

ADDITIONAL POLICIES:

Plagiarism. We shall strictly abide by university regulations concerning plagiarism. Any
attempt at plagiarism will automatically lead to failure in this class. The definition of
plagiarism is simple: copying from outside sources and claiming the latter as your own
work. There have been several cases of plagiarism in previous classes and they were
always detected through the available software. You may, of course, refer to and draw
from printed sources, but you should properly acknowledge them. If you have any
questions, feel free to ask us in due course.

The use of other people’s words or ideas without proper acknowledgment is a serious
academic offence, for which you may be subject to a range of sanctions by me and by the
College. Do not bother trying—I will catch you. If you are unclear about what constitutes
plagiarism, please see Page 2 of the document “Students’ Rights and Responsibilities:
If you still have questions, please discuss them with me.

Disability: If you require specific accommodations because of a disability, you must come
speak to me and provide a letter from Disability Services by February 8.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND REQUIRED READING ASSIGNMENTS

Week 1 Introductory Session

Week 2 Foundations 1: Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals I (Preface, First Essay)

Week 3 Foundations 1: Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals II (Second Essay)
Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* III (Third Essay)

Week 4 Foundations 2: Foucault; The Rabinow Reader (169-214; 239-258)


Week 7:
Queer and Liberal Feminism:


Week 8:
Power and Feminism


**1-2 PAGE PROPOSAL FOR FINAL PAPER DUE IN CLASS**

Week 9:
Genealogy and Neo-Liberalism


Week 10: Power, Nietzsche and Foucault


Week 11: Queer Theory and Feminism:

Weeks 12 and 13: Student “work in progress” reports presented; final discussion.

Final papers are due at the end of the official exam period for this class.