

Queer Activism / Radical Scholarship: Beyond “Theory vs. Practice”**Prof. Margot Weiss****Office:** Center for the Americas (255 High Street), Room 201**Email:** mdweiss@wesleyan.edu**Office phone:** 860-685-5754**Office Hours:** Mondays and Wednesdays: <http://calendly.com/margot-weiss>

This course explores the relationship between scholarship and activism, with a focus on intersectional queer scholarship and activism—queer left, black radical, trans, immigration, prison abolition, and sex work—in the US. We will aim to connect the too-often bifurcated realms of academia and activism, theory and practice, and research and action, with the goals of: 1) thinking through the political stakes of knowledge-making in and outside the so-called “ivory tower,” 2) exploring interdisciplinary methodologies we might use to study and learn from (and with) activists (including ethnography, oral history, community archive), and 3) gain insight into the histories and current realities of social justice movements on and off campus. To put your theory into practice, you will undertake a semester-long radical research project on a queer issue or activist organization—past or present—of your choice.

This course is part of the Queer Studies Course Cluster and the queer studies concentration in American Studies. It is cross-listed with Anthropology and Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies.

Course Readings

All essays are available on the course Moodle. There is only one book required for this class:

1. Ryan Conrad (editor) and Against Equality (2014), *Against Equality: Queer Revolution, Not Mere Inclusion*. AK Press. isbn: 9781849351843

We will read parts of other books, so you can buy them if you wish – but I will also make .pdfs of the chapters available for you on the Moodle.

- **Jennifer Doyle (2015), *Campus Sex, Campus Security* (Semiotexte)
- Eric A. Stanley and Nat Smith, eds. (2011). *Captive Genders: Trans Embodiment and the Prison Industrial Complex*. AK Press
- Marc Bousquet (2008), *How the University Works: Higher Education and the Low-Wage Nation* (NYU Press)
- Christopher Newfield (2008), *Unmaking the Public University: The Forty-Year Assault on the Middle Class* (Harvard U Press)
- Paulo Freire (2000 [1968]), *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Bloomsbury)
- bell hooks (1994), *Teaching to Transgress* (Routledge)

Course Assignments

1. Weekly Memos / Posts ----- 20%
2. Group Research Project / Presentation ----- 20%
3. Final Research Project ----- 60% (total)

1. Weekly Memos/Posts: expand ← or → contract

Once a week, for 10 weeks, you will submit either a **TPQ memo** or a **blog post** on the readings. It is your choice which to do, and which day of class (Mon or Wed) to do it. **On the day you do not post, please come to class prepared to discuss one (or more) of your classmates' posts.**

Both have two purposes: 1) to give you a formal opportunity to reflect on the readings in a connective or synthetic way before class begins and 2) to serve as a starting place for class discussion. These posts should help you think through the material we've read, connecting the various authors, sorting out ideas, and allowing you to begin your own analysis. To aid in class discussion, always note particular quotations or pages that you wish to discuss.

- The **TPQ memo** should contain “two points and a question” on the readings (approx. ½ - 1 page). It asks you to **dig in** to the reading: you might, for example, do a close analysis of particular passages, sharpen contrasts between two author's arguments, or outline a key concept used in multiple readings. Your question should be a real, actual question that you would like to take up during class. You will likely need a few sentences to explicate your question. Aim for questions that connect to other important ideas or topics, get at the heart of some thorny issue, or open up a new way of thinking. **Formulate your TPQs after you have completed the reading. Bring your TPQ memo to class** so that you can refer to it during class discussion—you will turn it in to me after class. During the semester, you may be asked to direct our class discussion using your memo.
 - The **blog post** should apply the day's readings to something else: a story, image, billboard, film, or anything else sharable (if it is not an image, please describe in adequate detail). It asks you to **extend out**: show how the readings relate to something you've encountered in your life, help us understanding something more clearly, or how the media you have chosen provides an illustration or a counter-example to our readings. Be prepared to tell the class how the thing you are posting connects to the reading and our class questions. **Submit your blog post by 5pm the day before** our class session. The blog is at: <https://amst286blog.wordpress.com/>. I will send invitations at the start of the semester.
- ❖ Grading: outstanding / satisfactory / unsatisfactory (no credit)
 - ❖ You cannot turn Memos in late (after our class has begun) or redo them. You are encouraged to turn in more than 10 if you would like to count only the best or if you would like extra credit.
 - ❖ Type of grading: instructor
 - ❖ Weight: 20% (including your discussion on others' posts)

2. One Mini Research Project with Oral Presentation

Working with a partner, you will present once during the semester on a case study. The research should take you a few hours—the goal is not your polished presentation, but to start to connect the course material to your lives and interests and surroundings. This is also a chance to try out methods: archival / historical research, interviewing / oral history, and ethnography / participant observation. Pick the method best suited to what you want to know about the case (or combine). I expect you to spend a few hours doing primary research, and then an hour or two summarizing and analyzing what you have learned. What you will present to the class is a preliminary,

unpolished snapshot of the core ideas or insight. You can use media, a powerpoint, spoken word, graphs and charts – whatever will best convey the key insights you’ve learned to your peers. **You are encouraged to meet with me in office hours to discuss the project and get tips and help finding sources. You can also come see me if you have an idea for a project I haven’t listed.**

- ❖ Grading: outstanding / satisfactory / unsatisfactory (no credit)
- ❖ You cannot turn do this assignment late, or redo it. If there are unclaimed case studies, or you have an idea for a new one, you can do an extra project for extra credit.
- ❖ Type of grading: peer
- ❖ Weight: 20%

3. Major research project: 60% (total)

The centerpiece of this class is your individual research project. This can be on anything -- a past or present queer activist organization, activism on campus, histories of radical intellectual work, etc. You can use any method appropriate to your topic, including archival, historical, interview-based, ethnographic, autoethnographic, or theoretical. It should be related to “queer” and “activist,” but you can feel free to interpret these terms broadly. Because this is a major project, the last few weeks of the course are devoted to your research project, and there are key “milestones” to meet throughout the semester. Peer workshops and a research presentation are also part of this project.

- ❖ 5 Milestones – 20%
 - Grading: each milestone graded satisfactory / unsatisfactory (no credit)
 - Type of grading: instructor + peer (for presentation at Milestone 5)
 - You cannot turn in Milestones late, but you can redo them to achieve grade of “satisfactory” (except presentations)
- ❖ 4 workshops – 15%
 - Grading: outstanding / satisfactory / unsatisfactory (no credit)
 - Type of grading: peer
- ❖ Final paper -- 25%
 - Grading: traditional letter grades (A-F)
 - Paper is due at the very end of exam week. If you cannot turn in the paper on time, you will need to request an Incomplete for the course. (= no late papers)
 - Type of grading: instructor + self

Course Policies and Notes

1. Course in General: This is an intensive, reading- and research-heavy course designed for an active learner. You will get out of it what you put in to it – your active participation and enthusiasm is crucial to its success. Come to class on time and prepared, and contribute to our discussion in a relevant, present, and respectful way. Participation in this course means coming to class ready to ask questions, to think about what is at stake, and to begin to forge your own analysis. Your participation should be grounded in the reading; pointing us to relevant sections of an article or to a particular quote is most productive. Remember, participation does not just

mean talking, it means contributing to our collective learning – asking questions and expanding others’ insights is often as useful as making statements.

2. Office Hours: I am on campus and happy to meet with you on Mondays and Wednesdays, and some Tuesdays and Thursdays too. Please come and talk to me about course material, dynamics, or any concerns or ideas you might have. Schedule an appointment using my online calendar: <http://calendly.com/margot-weiss>. My office is located in the Center for the Americas, 255 High Street, on the second floor (room 201). If you need to phone, my office number is 685-5754. If you cannot make any of my available times, email me and I will work out an alternative time to meet with you.

3. Policy on Grading

We are trying something new in this class – please see the “[note on grading](#)” for more information.

4. Policy on Absences: You may miss two classes without explanation or penalty: think of these as your sick (or health) days, and take them as you see fit. I do not accept “excused” absences except in the case of catastrophic happenings, for which I would normally be notified by your class dean/other Wesleyan official. If you miss more than 2 classes, I may ask you to withdraw. Missing more than 5 classes is grounds to fail the course.

5. Policy on Late Work: For reasons that should become clear, in this course, you cannot turn in work late. There are possibilities for extra credit, and for re-doing assignments.

6. Policy on computers and cell phones in the classroom: Please talk with me if you want to use your laptop to take notes, store readings, or you have another documented reason for having it in the class. Otherwise, please do not use your laptop, cell phone, or other device during our class so that we can be more present with each other and our ideas.

Disability Resources

Wesleyan University is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from its programs and services. To receive accommodations, a student must have a documented disability as defined by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and provide documentation of the disability. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact Disability Resources as soon as possible.

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact Dean Patey in Disability Resources, located in North College, Room 021, or call 860-685-5581 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations.

Honor Code

All work must be done in compliance with the Honor Code. If you need help with proper citations or you have questions on how to avoid plagiarism, let me know or contact the **Writing Workshop**: <http://www.wesleyan.edu/writing/workshop/>

Syllabus

Sept. 5 Monday

Openings: what is the relationship between scholarship and activism?

- Symposium: “Activism in Queer Times” at Wesleyan, Oct. 31, 2014 listen: 12:40-51:00
- “Reinvigorating the Queer Political Imagination”: A Roundtable with Ryan Conrad, Yasmin Nair, and Karma Chávez of Against Equality. *American Quarterly* (2012)

refer to as needed: “Intellectuals,” “Politics,” and “Queer” from *Keywords for Radicals*

In class: Liberation Statements

I. QUEER + ACTIVIST METHODOLOGIES

What characterizes activist research? What methods have politically-engaged scholars used to study and learn from (and with) activists? What intellectual methods have activists used?

Sept 7, Wednesday: Queer Left Critique

- Christina Hanhardt (2013), “Canaries of the Creative Age” in *Safe Space*
- Karma Chávez (2013), “Coming Out as Coalitional Gesture?” in *Queer Migration Politics: Activist Rhetoric and Coalitional Possibilities*
- Amber Hollibaugh and Margot Weiss (2015), “Queer Precarity and the Myth of Gay Affluence” *New Labor Forum*
- Craig Willse (2015), “Introduction” to *The Value of Homelessness*

Rec: A Facilitator’s Guide and Toolkit for Participatory Action Research, by the Community Development Project

Sept 12, Monday: Queer Ethnography

- Martin Manalansan (2003), “Out There: The Topography of Race and Desire in the Global City” in *Global Divas*
- Deb Gould (2009), “The Pleasures and Intensities of Activism; or, Making a Place for Yourself in the Universe” in *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP’s Fight against AIDS*
- David Graeber (2009), “Preface” and “You Begin with Rage, You Move on to Silly Fantasies” in *Direct Action: An Ethnography*”

Sept 14, Wednesday: Queer/Sex Worker Histories

- Mindy Chateaufort, “Introduction” and “The Revolution is Finally Here,” in *Sex Workers Unite: A History of the Movement from Stonewall to SlutWalk*
- Reina Gossett and Sasha Wortzel, clips from “Happy Birthday, Marsha”

Case Study: Stonewall was a Riot

Sept 19, Monday: community archive/imagination work

- Ryan Conrad (editor) and Against Equality, *Against Equality: Queer Revolution, Not Mere Inclusion* AK Press.

Case Study: explore radical archives

Sept 21, Wednesday: Queer Black Radical Theory

- Cathy Cohen (1997), “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens” in *GLQ*

- Sarah J. Jackson (2015), “Ask a Feminist: A Conversation with Cathy Cohen on Black Lives Matter, Feminism, and Contemporary Activism” *Signs*
- Che Gossett, Reina Gossett, and AJ Lewis (2012), “Reclaiming Our Lineage: Organized Queer, Gender-Nonconforming, and Transgender Resistance to Police Violence” *New Queer Agenda in The Scholar and the Feminist*

Case Study: queering #blacklivesmatters

video: Roderick Ferguson: Socialism in Black Queer Time

Sept 26, Monday: prison abolition

- Regina Kunzel (2008), “Lessons in Being Gay: Queer Encounters in Gay and Lesbian Prison Activism” *Radical History Review*
- Eric A. Stanley (2011), “Fugitive Flesh” in *Captive Genders: Trans Embodiment and the Prison Industrial Complex*
- Julia Sudbury (aka Oparah) (2011), “Maroon abolitionists: Black gender-oppressed activists in the anti-prison movement in the US and Canada” in *Captive Genders: Trans Embodiment and the Prison Industrial Complex*
- Jodie M. Lawston and Erica R. Meiners (2014), “Ending Our Expertise: Feminists, Scholarship, and Prison Abolition” *Feminist Formations*

Rec: Morgan Bassichis, Alexander Lee, and Dean Spade (2011), “Building an Abolitionist Trans and Queer Movement with Everything We’ve Got” in *Captive Genders: Trans Embodiment and the Prison Industrial Complex*

Rec: Eric Stanley, Dean Spade, and Queer (in)Justice, (2012) “Queering Prison Abolition, Now?” *American Quarterly*

Sept 28, Wednesday: Research Project Due

Milestone 1: Research topic / area

Workshop 1: Discussion of research and methods

II. Universities as Sites of Protest

What are the histories of activism in the academy—from the student protests of the 1960s to contingent faculty activism today?

Oct 3, Monday: The Rise of the Neoliberal University

- Henry A. Giroux (2013), Public Intellectuals Against the Neoliberal University *Truth-Out*
- Marc Bousquet (2008), “Introduction: Your Problem is My Problem,” in *How the University Works: Higher Education and the Low-Wage Nation*
- Christopher Newfield, (2008) “The Discrediting of Social Equality,” “The costs of Accounting,” and “Hiding Culture’s Contribution” in *Unmaking the Public University: The Forty-Year Assault on the Middle Class*

Oct 5, Wednesday: Work in the University

- Marc Bousquet (2008), “The Faculty Organize, but Management Enjoys Solidarity” and “Students are Already Workers” in *How the University Works: Higher Education and the Low-Wage Nation*
- Purnima Bose (2013), “Inside the Corporate University” *Against the Current*

- Malini Cadambi Daniel (2016), “Contingent Faculty of the World Unite! Organizing to Resist the Corporatization of Higher Education” *New Labor Forum*

Rec: Naomi Greyser and Margot Weiss (2012), “Left Intellectuals and the Neoliberal University” *American Quarterly*

Case Study: how many adjunct professors are there at Wesleyan?

Oct 10, Monday: Student Activism on Campus

- film: “Berkeley in the Sixties”
- Sunaina Maira and Julie Sze (2012), “Dispatches from Pepper Spray University: Privatization, Repression, and Revolts,” *American Quarterly*
- Lilian Radovac (2012), “The Biggest Student Uprising You’ve Never Heard Of” *Chronicle of Higher Education*

Case Study: explore student protests at Wesleyan (recent or historical)

Oct 12, Wednesday: The University-Military-Prison Complex

- Piya Chatterjee and Sunaina Maira (2014). “Introduction.” *The Imperial University: Race, War, and the Nation-State*
- Julia Oparah (2014), “Challenging Complicity: The Neoliberal University and the Prison-Industrial Complex” in *The Imperial University*
- Dylan Rodríguez (2012), “Racial/Colonial Genocide and the “Neoliberal Academy”: In Excess of a Problematic” *American Quarterly*
- Scott Morgensen (2012), “Destabilizing the Settler Academy: The Decolonial Effects of Indigenous Methodologies” *American Quarterly*

in class: Jacqueline Stevens case at NU and *Ebony and Ivy*

Oct 17, Monday: Institutional Containment

- Sara Ahmed (2012), “Equality and Performance Culture” in *On Being Included*
- Amber Musser (2015), “Specimen Days: Diversity, Labor, and the University” *Feminist Formations*
- Roderick Ferguson (2012), “Administering Sexuality; or The Will to Institutionality,” *The Reorder of Things*

Case Study: history of queer, women’s, disability, ethnic, and/or African American studies

Oct 19, Wednesday: Methodology and Action Plan

Milestone 2: Methods and research plan

Workshop 2: Discussion of methods and project plan

> fall break

Oct 26, Wednesday: Sex in the University

- Jennifer Doyle (2015), *Campus Sex, Campus Security*

Case Study: title ix and the university today or/and sexual harassment of grad students/faculty

Oct 31, Monday: The Politics of Knowledge

- Bill Readings (1996) “The Idea of Excellence” and “The Scene of Teaching” in *The University in Ruins*

- Jennifer Fraser and Sarah Lamb (2014/15), “Queer Desires and Critical Pedagogies in Higher Education: Reflections on the Transformative Potential of Non-Normative Learning Desires in the Classroom”

Case Study: explore student evaluations of teaching: (how) do they work? what’s their history?

III. Radical Intellectuals

What might intellectuals—be they public, community, or so-called “ivory tower”—contribute to on-the-ground social movements and organizers—and vice-versa?

Nov 2, Wednesday: histories of radical intellectuals, I

- Antonio Gramsci (2014 [1971]), “The Intellectuals” in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*
- Paulo Freire (2000 [1968]), “Chapter 2” (and if you have time, “Chapter 1”) from *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

video: <http://www.freire.org/paulo-freire/>

Case Study: take over our class, Freire-style

Monday Nov 7, Monday: histories of radical intellectuals, II

- Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze (1977), “Intellectuals and power” in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*
- Gayatri Spivak (1988), “Can the Subaltern Speak?” *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*

in class: [Activism and the Academy](#)

Nov 9, Wednesday: histories of radical intellectuals, III

- Fred Moten and Stefano Harney (2004), “The University and the Undercommons: Seven Theses” *Social Text*
- bell hooks (1994), “Engaged Pedagogy” and “Theory as Liberatory Practice” in *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*

Case Study: explore the history of autonomous / free university projects

Nov 14, Monday: Literature review

Milestone 3: Literature review and rationale

Workshop 3: Conversation about literature and plans for project

Nov 16, Wednesday

no class – AAAs – research and reading time

IV. Research Projects

Nov 21, Monday: Implication/Audience

Milestone 4: Implications of your work

Workshop 4: Conversation about implications and audience

> **thanksgiving break**

Nov 28, Monday: Initial findings

Milestone 5: Initial findings, draft of your Introduction due

In-class: research posters and presentations

Nov 30, Wednesday:

In-class: research posters and presentations

Dec 5, Monday:

In-class: research posters and presentations

Dec 7, Wednesday: wrap up and radical research party

- Lisa Duggan & José Esteban Muñoz (2009), “Hope and Hopelessness: A Dialogue” in *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory*
- Max Haiven and Alex Khasnabish (2014), “Reimagining success and failure” in *The Radical Imagination: Social Movement Research in the Age of Austerity* (“Intro” recommended)

Optional: rough draft due Friday, Dec 9

meet with me/your peers

final paper due: Saturday, Dec 17 at 5pm