Writing, Identity, and Queer Studies:  
In & Out, Either/Or, and Everything In Between  
Dickinson College, Spring 2015  
T/R 9:00-10:15; East College 406  
Class website: www.blogs.dickinson.edu/everythinginbetween

Professor Sarah E. Kersh  
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sarahkersh.com  
Office: East College 310  
Office Hours: Tues 10:30-11:30, Wed 1:30-2:30, Fri 10:30-11:30, and by appt.  
Office phone: 717-254-8952

Course Description  
Kate Bornstein writes: "I know I'm not a man...and I've come to the conclusion that I'm probably not a woman either. The trouble is, we're living in a world that insists we be one or the other." In this reading and writing intensive course, students will investigate how we approach the space outside of "one or the other" through literature, film, and narrative more generally.

Throughout the semester we will explore and engage critically with established and emerging arguments in queer theory, as well as read and watch texts dealing with issues of identity and identification. Although "queer" is a contested term, it describes—at least potentially—sexualities and genders that fall outside of normative constellations. Students will learn how to summarize and engage with arguments, and to craft and insert their own voice into the ongoing debates about the efficacy of queer theory and queer studies. Moreover, we'll take on questions that relate "word" to "world" in order to ask: How might our theory productively intervene in LGBTQ civil rights discourse outside our classroom? How do we define queer and is it necessarily attached to sexual orientation? How do our own histories and narratives intersect with the works we analyze?

Our course texts will pull from a range of genres including graphic novels, film, poetry, memoir, and fiction.

Course Materials  
The following texts are required for the course and are available at the college bookstore:

- **Cereus Blooms at Night** by Shani Mootoo (ISBN: 978-0-8021-4462-1)
- **Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic** by Alison Bechdel (ISBN: 978-0-618-87171-1)
- **Written on the Body** by Jeanette Winterson (ISBN: 978-0-679-74447-4)
- **Me Talk Pretty One Day** by David Sedaris ISBN-10: 0316776963
- **Writing Analytically** by David Rosenwasser and Jill Stephen (ISBN: 978-0-495-91008-4)*

*There is a copy of *Writing Analytically* on reserve at the library. If you chose it use that copy, you must photocopy the pages assigned for class so that you can have them with you in class.

Additional readings are available on our class website unless otherwise specified in the syllabus.

Course Objectives
~ Students taking the course can expect to learn to read and engage with difficult critical texts describing identities, their differences, and their intersections—especially when it comes to sexuality and gender identity
~ Students will also:
  * Learn tenets and vocabulary of queer theory
  * Develop a tolerance of uncertainty and respect for complexity

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• Demonstrate analysis—rather than passive summary, personal reactions, or opinions—in class discussion and in written assignments
• Apply theories from reading, using them as lenses

Word of warning: Some of the texts presented in this course are explicit in their treatment of sex, of bodies, and of violence. Reading and discussing these texts can be demanding in ways that are often unexpected, and your success in this class will require an open engagement with the material. I will make every effort to work with students who have difficulty; however, if you feel you are not inclined or able to work with explicit material, I encourage you to think about other course options.

Class Participation and Attendance:
This class is a workshop/seminar and therefore depends on the participation of its members. Failure to attend undermines the class as a whole. Attendance, therefore, will be a substantial part of your participation grade. You may miss up to three class periods without penalty. I do not distinguish between “excused” and “unexcused” absences, so please use these judiciously. If you miss the class for any reason, you are responsible for what went on in the class, including changes of assignments. I will not answer emails asking me to describe what went on in class. You are responsible for contacting one of your classmates to find out what went on, including changes of any assignments. If you miss more than three classes, for whatever reason, your grade will decrease per missed class. If you have extenuating circumstances, please contact me as soon as possible.

I also expect you to read the assigned material and prepared to ask questions and offer opinions about it during class. Attendance alone with little or no contribution will only earn you approximately a C in participation. I recognize that some students are hesitant to speak in front of class. If this is the case, please come talk with me during office hours early in the semester.

Class Partnership with the LGBT Center of Central Pennsylvania History Project
Over the course of the term, we will be partnering with the Central PA LGBT Center in Harrisburg and the Dickinson College Archives. We’ll be reading materials gathered by the archive and doing research to help annotate, contextualize, and analyze content already acquired by the center:
http://www.centralpalgbtcenter.org/lgbt-history-project

For your last project we will compose personal narratives that can be (though do not have to be) added to the archive. More details TBA

Requirements and Grading
Beyond participation, your grade will be based on weekly response paper and two more formal papers. The relative weight of each component is as follows:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance and Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper #1: Analysis and Close Reading</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper #2: Research Post/Closed Reading</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blog Posts and other writing</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Project and Paper</td>
<td>25%</td>
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Final letter grades will be assigned in the following way:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93-100</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-92</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83-86</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
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<td>C+</td>
<td>77-79</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>73-76</td>
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<td>C-</td>
<td>70-72</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>60-69</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0-59</td>
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Grade Calculations:
I use an excel worksheet to calculate my grades. If you would like to discuss graded work, please take at least two days to review my comments, along with the grading criteria for the assignment. While I don’t negotiate grades, I am happy to discuss strategies for improving your writing.

Extra Credit:
If you attend any Dickinson College screening, workshop, or lecture and write a 1-2 page reflection stating how the event related to this class and what was interesting about it for you, I will award 1 point extra credit. You may complete up to 5 extra credit reflections. These points will be added to your lowest paper grade at the end of the semester. I will reject any reflection I feel is insufficient or unsuitable.

Lateness, Cell Phones, and Other Disruptions:
Please make an effort to be on time. Class begins promptly and if you are more than ten minutes late, I will record you as absent. If you have a reason that may cause you to be late from time to time, please let me know. Please remember to turn OFF all cell phones unless otherwise directed. If you are a student athlete or member of a student group that requires you to miss class for a university-sanctioned event, please let me know as soon as possible.

Electronics:
I do not like for students to use laptops for general note taking in class. Since thoughtful listening and responding will be instrumental to the success of our course, I prefer students not rely on a laptop in class. Of course, there are always exceptions, so please come to speak with me if you might need to use a laptop in class. Tablets for textbooks are fine, as long as you refrain from surfing the web, checking Facebook, etc.

Deadlines:
Deadlines are firm. Unless you have asked for and received prior permission to extend the deadline or you have a signed medical excuse, late assignments will lose one grade increment per day late. I cannot accept assignments more than one week late.

Privacy
I request you all create a screen name under which you blog for our class. Our class will think about what it means to perform identity and blogging is one way we can engage the practice of identity and performance. Part of our class will be trying out new and different perspectives and positions. I recognize that these positions can change and grow; by using screennames we give ourselves the room to experiment without fear that our experiments will come back to hurt us. I am happy to remove any blog posts at the end of the term and/or you may remove your own writing. I ask that you let me know before you do so.

“How can I know what I think until I see what I say?” – E.M. Forster

Blog Posts:
You will complete a number of blog posts over the course of the semester as well as comment on other posts made by your classmates. These posts will be in response to prompts handed out in class or of your own direction. Over the course of the posts, I expect you to engage with the readings and discussions and not simply summarize them. I also expect you to make connections to other sources, media, and class texts so please add quotations, images, links, videos, etc that relate to the week’s topics and your interpretation of them. We will explore these skills in class.
Norman M. Eberly Writing Center:
Writers of all levels and abilities need feedback in order to develop their ideas and grow as writers. Dickinson's trained writing tutors can help you generate ideas, begin drafting, revise a rough draft, figure out your professor’s preferred documentation style, understand and respond to professor feedback, edit your writing – among other things. You can walk in or call and make an appointment at (717) 245-1620 (or 245-1767 for foreign language writing). For more information about hours and procedures, visit the web:
http://www.dickinson.edu/academics/resources/writing-program/content/Writing-Center/

Academic Integrity
With respect to all assignments in this course, I expect you to do your own work. You are certainly encouraged to discuss course content and readings with your fellow classmates, but your work in papers must be your own. Regarding outside sources, you will need to cite all of your sources. We will discuss ways of doing this before your first paper is due. If you have any questions about what constitutes cheating or plagiarism, please feel free to ask.

From Dickinson College's Community Standards:
Respect for ideas — our own and others’ — is a hallmark of academic integrity. We show respect by acknowledging when we have used another's words or ideas in our work. We expect others to acknowledge when they use our ideas or words in their work. Students are expected to do their own work on quizzes, papers, examinations, class assignments, etc. Normally, a paper may be submitted in fulfillment of an assignment in only one course. Exceptions require permission from the instructors. Collaboration must be noted in writing and requires the consent of all instructors.

(http://www.dickinson.edu/uploadedFiles/student_life/resources/dean_of_students/content/2012-2013%20Community%20Standards.pdf)

Accommodations
I am committed to including all students in this course and am happy to discuss accommodations with students, provided that this conversation happens early in the semester and definitely before any papers/projects are due. From Dickinson College's Disability Services:

Dickinson College makes reasonable academic accommodations for students with documented disabilities, according to equal access laws. I am available to discuss the implementation of those accommodations. Students requesting accommodations must first register with Disability Services to verify their eligibility. After documentation review, Marni Jones, Director of Learning Skills and Disability Services, will provide eligible students with accommodation letters for their professors. Students must obtain a new letter every semester and meet with each relevant professor prior to any accommodations being implemented. These meetings should occur as soon as possible in the semester, and at least five days before any testing accommodations. Disability Services is located in Biddle House. Address inquiries to Stephanie Anderberg at 717-245-1734 or email disabilityservices@dickinson.edu. For more information, see the Disability Services website: www.dickinson.edu/disabilityservices.

Other Needs:
If you have a concern or issue regarding this class, your ability to participate in it, or the material we are covering, please stop by my office hours or email me to set up an appointment. The sooner we can talk about your concerns, the better I will be able to help you negotiate a solution. I am committed to providing equal educational opportunity to all students.

NOTE: The policies, procedures, schedules, and requirements in this syllabus are subject to change— should any occur I will make every effort to give you plenty of notice.
**Class Contacts:**
If you miss class for ANY reason it is YOUR responsibility to contact another member of the class to see what you may have missed. Please make sure you have at least three contacts:

1. name: ______________________________ cell: _________________________

2. name: ______________________________ cell: _________________________

3. name: ______________________________ cell: _________________________

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The Bechdel Rule by Alison Bechdel

www.feministliterature.net/the-bechdel-rule
NOTE: This COURSE SCHEDULE MAY CHANGE.
Please see our class website for more up-to-date information

Course Schedule: Reading and Writing assignments are due in class on the date they are listed.
(underlined assignments are writing assignments)

Week 1
T 1/20  ~ Class Introduction
R 1/22  ~ read: pp vii-17 from The Trouble with Normal by Michael Warner
  ~ complete: Writing Questionnaire

Week 2
T 1/27  ~ finish excerpt from The Trouble with Normal; pp 17-40
  ~ read pp 23-25 in Writing Analytically
R 1/29  ~ Written on the Body, pp1-31 (until section break)

Week 3
T 2/3   ~ Written on the Body, pp31-75
  ~ read pp 26-32 in Writing Analytically (“The Method”)
R 2/5   ~ “Queer and Now” by Eve Sedgwick (PDF) (focusing on “Christmas Effects,” pp 5-9)
  ~ blog post #1 due

Week 4
T 2/10  ~ Written on the Body, pp75-125
  ~ excerpt on writing and identity (TBA) (PDF)
R 2/12  ~ Written on the Body, pp125-190
  ~ Writing Analytically, pp 94-99, “Reformulating Binaries”
  ~ blog post #2 due

Week 5
T 2/17  ~ David Sedaris Me Talk Pretty One Day
  ~ Judith Halberstam In a Queer Time and Place, “Queer Temporality and Post Modern Geographies”
R 2/19  ~ David Sedaris Me Talk Pretty One Day
  ~ Writing Analytically, pp 5-10
  ~ blog post #3 due


Week 6
T 2/24  ~ TBA (Audre Lorde? or Jose Muñoz?)
R 2/26  ~ In class Peer Review

Week 7
T 3/3   ~ excerpt from Judith Butler’s Gender Trouble, “From Interiority to Gender Performatives”
R 3/5   ~ Paper #1 Due (Close reading with evolving thesis)

Week 8: SPRING BREAK

Week 9
T 3/17  ~ Foucault (PDF)
R 3/19  ~ read Cereus Blooms at Night, pp1-67
  ~ Reading Journals due

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**Week 10**
T 3/24  ~ read *Cereus Blooms at Night*, pp67-102
R 3/26  ~ read *Cereus Blooms at Night*, pp103-188

~ Blog Post Due #4

**Week 11**
T 3/31  ~ finish *Cereus Blooms at Night*, pp188-249
R 4/2   ~ Theo van der Meer “Sodomy and Its Discontents” (PDF)

**Week 12**
T 4/7   ~ TBA
R 4/9   ~ Peer Review: Paper #2

**Week 13**
T 4/14  ~ *Fun Home*, chapters 1-4 (pp1-120)
~ Paper #2 Due
R 4/16  ~ *Fun Home*, chapters 5-7 (pp121-end)

**Week 14**
T 4/21  ~ TBA and excerpt from *Queer Art of Failure* (handout)
R 4/23  ~ TBA
    ~ hand in reading journal

**Week 15**
T 4/28  ~ Peer Review: Paper #3
R 4/30  ~ final class wrap up

**Final Paper Due with Writer’s Memo Due: during final period**