

**Writing, Identity, and Queer Studies: In & Out, Either/Or, and Everything In Between**  
English 221/ Writing Program 211/ Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies 201: Dickinson College, Fall 2018  
M/R 1:30-2:45; Althouse 201

Class website: [www.blogs.dickinson.edu/everythinginbetween](http://www.blogs.dickinson.edu/everythinginbetween)

Professor Sarah E. Kersh

kershs@dickinson.edu

[sarahkersh.com](http://sarahkersh.com)

Office Hours:

Thurs 10-11:30, Fri 8:30-10 and by appt

Office phone: 717-254-8952

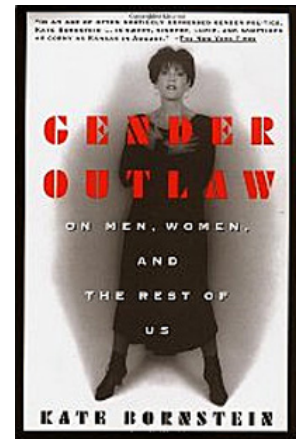
Office: Historic President's House, 6B\*

\*NOTE: My office is located on the 2nd floor, which is only accessible by going upstairs. This building does not have an elevator. If this is problematic for you, I will gladly arrange to meet you on the main floor or at another, more accessible, location. Please let me know.

**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:

- *Written on the Body* by Jeanette Winterson (ISBN: 978-0-679-74447-4)
- *Mosaic of the Dark* by Lisa Dordal (ISBN: 978-1-62557-986-7)
- *Cereus Blooms at Night* by Shani Mootoo (ISBN: 978-0-8021-4462-1)
- *Autobiography of Red* by Ann Carson (ISBN- 978-0375701290)
- *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* by Alison Bechdel (ISBN: 978-0-618-87171-1)
- Additional readings are available on our class website unless otherwise specified in the syllabus.
- *Writing Analytically*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed by David Rosenwasser and Jill Stephen (ISBN: 978-1337284448)\*

\*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.

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\* **Content Note:** 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.



**Course Objectives**

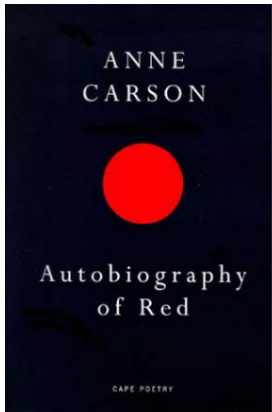
As per the English Department’s Learning Goals, by the end of this course students will be practiced in:

- 1) the ability to frame and develop several pieces of writing from invention through revision stages
- 2) the ability to use workshop to edit thoughtfully the writing of their peers and to incorporate suggestions from student and faculty comments into their own writing process, as well as correct essays for grammar, spelling, structure, and proper format
- 3) the ability to read carefully, and learn from, exemplary pieces of writing germane to the course topic

**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 two* class periods without penalty. I do not distinguish between “excused” and “unexcused” absences, so please use these judiciously. I strongly advise you keep at least one free absence “in the bank” in case something comes up. 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 any changes of assignments. **If you miss more than three classes your grade will decrease per missed class.** If you have extenuating circumstances, please contact me as soon as possible.



“ Words bounce. Words, if you let them, will do what they want to do and what they have to do.

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. (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.)

”

**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:

Attendance and Participation	15%
Paper #1	15%
Paper #2	20%
Blog Posts and other writing	30%
Final Paper	20%

Final letter grades will be assigned in the following way:

A = 93-100	B- = 80-82	D = 60-69
A- = 90-92	C+ = 77-79	F = 0-59
B+ = 87-89	C = 73-76	
B = 83-86	C- = 70-72	

**A Note About 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 final paper grade at the end of the semester. I will reject any reflection I feel is insufficient or unsuitable.

### **Participation:**

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.

### **Technology:**

The point of my course technology policy is to create a distraction-free environment for you and the people sitting near you. Therefore, during class time, you may only use laptops and tablets for e-readings and taking notes. If you are using technology appropriately, you will spend far more time looking at your classmates than you do looking at the screen. You may not have Facebook, games, or internet sites open during class, and doing so will end your computer/tablet privileges. We recommend you switch off your wireless connection to help you avoid unwanted distractions. Please turn your phone to silent and enclose it completely in your bag away from your sight and touch. Translation devices are allowed if you speak to me first. Per Pennsylvania state law, the use of recording devices is not permitted unless specifically cleared for accommodation purposes.

### **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.

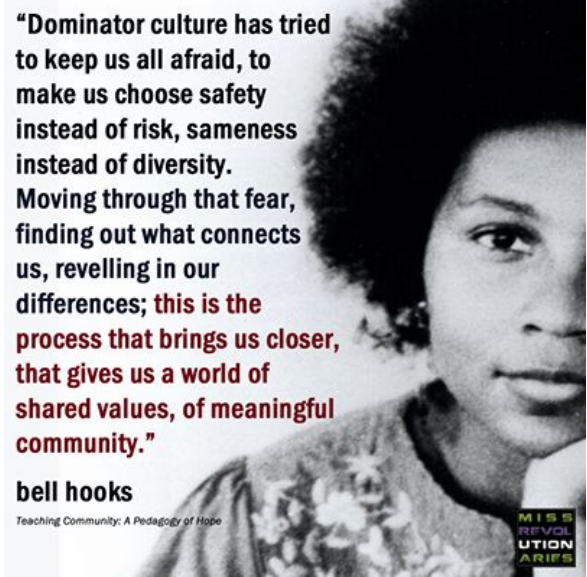
**“How can I know what I think until I see what I say?” – E.M. Forster**

### **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.**

### **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.



**“Dominator culture has tried to keep us all afraid, to make us choose safety instead of risk, sameness instead of diversity. Moving through that fear, finding out what connects us, revelling in our differences; this is the process that brings us closer, that gives us a world of shared values, of meaningful community.”**

**bell hooks**

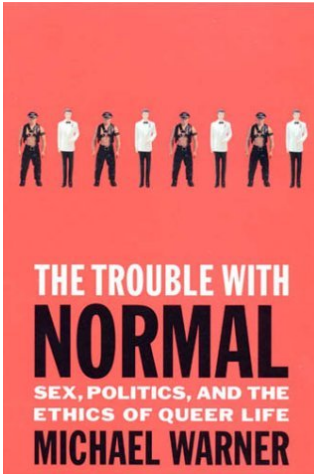
Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope

**MISS  
REVOL  
UTION  
ARIES**



**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. ([https://www.dickinson.edu/download/downloads/id/963/community\\_standards](https://www.dickinson.edu/download/downloads/id/963/community_standards) )*

**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 values diverse types of learners and is committed to ensuring that each student is afforded an equal opportunity to participate in all learning experiences. If you have (or think you may have) a learning difference or a disability – including a mental health, medical, or physical impairment– that would impact your educational experience in this class, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) to schedule a meeting with Director Marni Jones. She will confidentially discuss your needs, review your documentation, and determine your eligibility for reasonable accommodations. To learn more about available supports, go to [www.dickinson.edu/ODS](http://www.dickinson.edu/ODS) , email DisabilityServices@dickinson.edu, call (717) 245-1734.*

**Other Needs:**

I am committed to providing equal educational opportunity to all students. 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. Please note I do not usually check email after 5:00 pm or on weekends.


**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: \_\_\_\_\_



The Bechdel Rule by Alison Bechdel  
[www.feministliterature.net/the-bechdel-rule](http://www.feministliterature.net/the-bechdel-rule)



NOTE: This COURSE SCHEDULE MAY CHANGE.  
Please see our class website for more up-to-date information  
Class website: <http://blogs.dickinson.edu/everythinginbetween/> (password: Kersh)

While I intend to stay as faithful to this syllabus as possible, I reserve the right to make changes at any time to accommodate the evolving needs and interests of the class. Changes will always be announced in class prior to the date they take effect. Absent students are responsible for any changes announced in class. 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. (red assignments are writing assignments or exams)

### **Week 1**

Monday 9/3

~ Class Introduction

Thursday 9/6

~ read: pp vii-17 from *The Trouble with Normal* by Michael Warner

~ *Writing Analytically*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed pp1-14

### **Week 2**

M 9/10

~ *Written on the Body*, pp1-31 (until section break)

~ finish excerpt from *The Trouble with Normal*; pp 24-40

~ complete: [Writing Questionnaire](#)

R 9/13

~ *Written on the Body*, pp31-75

~ *Writing Analytically*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed, pp 14-21

### **Week 3**

M 9/13

~ *Written on the Body*, pp75- 125

~ *Writing Analytically*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed, pp 21-33

R 9/17

~ *Written on the Body*, pp125-190

~ [blog post#1 due](#)

### **Week 4**

M 9/24

~ "Queer and Now" by Eve Sedgwick (PDF) (focusing on "Christmas Effects," pp 5-9)

~ *Mosaic of the Dark*, pp1-40

R 9/27

~ *Mosaic of the Dark*, pp 41-end

~ [comments due](#): Comment on at least 2 of your peers' blog posts. Comments should be about 75-100 words and work to either a) make connections across posts, b) make connections to other texts from in or outside of class, or c) offer another answer to the "So What?" question.



## Week 5

M 10/1

~ poet Lisa Dordal's visit to our class; come prepared with two questions to ask her

\*\* Lisa Dordal will be reading at 7:00pm in the Stern Great Room. Students are required to attend. Please let me know asap if you cannot make it.

R 10/4

~ excerpt from Judith Halberstam's *In a Queer Time and Place*; pp 1-7

~ excerpt from Elizabeth Freeman's *Time Binds*; pp 1-9

~ [blog post #2 due](#)

## Week 6

M 10/8

~ Read 2 poems: "[Diving into the Wreck](#)" by Adrienne Rich and "[Coal](#)" by Audre Lorde

~ Read Halberstam: "[On Pronouns](#)" and "Terms & Definitions" (PDF)

~ [comments due](#)

R 10/11

~ [In-class Peer Review](#)

## Week 7

M 10/15

~ New York Times review of *Autobiography of Red*

~ Begin Anne Carson's *Autobiography of Red* pages 21-59 \*\*start at the beginning of the novel in verse (we'll read the beginning pages later)

R 10/18

~ [Paper #1 Due](#)

## Week 8

M 10/22 – FALL PAUSE; no class

R 10/25

~ Read *Autobiography of Red* pp 60-97

~ excerpt from Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, "From Interiority to Gender Performatives"; pp 134-41

~ [Blog Post #3 Due](#)

## Week 9

M 10/29

~ Read *Autobiography of Red* pp 98-146

R 11/1

~ read *Autobiography of Red*'s Interview (pp 147-149) as well as the front matter (pp 3-20)

~ [Blog Post #4 Due](#)

## Week 10

M 11/5

~ read Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*, pp 1-67

R 11/8

~ read *Cereus Blooms at Night*, pp67-102

~ read Jose Esteban Muñoz, excerpt from *Cruising Utopia*

~ [comments due \(comment on either post #3 or post #4\)](#)



### **Week 11**

M 11/12

- ~ read Foucault excerpt from *History of Sexuality* (PDF)
- ~ read *Cereus Blooms at Night*, pp103-138

R 11/15

- ~ read *Cereus Blooms at Night*, pp 139-188
- ~ [Blog Post #5 Due](#)

### **Week 12**

M 11/19

- ~ finish *Cereus Blooms at Night*, pp188-249
- ~ [comment on two final posts](#)

R 11/22

- ~ Thanksgiving—No class

### **Week 13**

M 11/26

- ~ bell hooks “Language: Teaching New Worlds/New Words” from *Teaching to Transgress* (PDF)
- ~ [Peer Review: Paper #2](#)

R 11/29

- ~ [Paper #2 Due](#)

### **Week 14**

M 12/3

- ~ Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home*, chapters 1-4 (pp1-120)
- ~ bring with you an example from pop culture today of working through identity that resonates with you. Can be song lyrics, clip from a show, or an image, etc.

R 12/6

- ~ *Fun Home*, finish novel

### **Week 15**

M 12/10

- ~ [Peer Review: Paper #3](#)

R 12/13

- ~ final class wrap up

**Final Paper Due with Writer’s Memo Due: by 5:00pm on Thursday December 20**