Course details

Fall 2016

CLASS MEETING TIME: Weds 6:15PM–9:15PM*
Location TBA.

* Please *Note*: There will be 2 (two) Friday make up days (9:00AM–12:00PM)

Instructor Contact Information

Prerequisites

N/A

Course Description

“When I discover who I am, I’ll be free.”

Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*

“I am not one and simple, but complex and many.”

Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*

Identity politics in the US, as an analytic concept, as a field of study, and in practice, has evolved since its (modern) inception in the mid-twentieth century. Presently, identity politics in the US encapsulates a broad range of theories, concepts, ordering principles, and practices located in the “shared” experiences of marginalization and oppression of individual subjects based on their actual or apperceived membership within certain communities. Rather than organizing around sociopolitical and/or economic belief systems, ideological platforms, or political party affiliations, political movements/organizations based on identity typically aim to declare, clarify, and secure sundry rights and freedoms to enhance the wellbeing of a specific constituency that has been marginalized within the larger societal context. Members—or rather designated or self-appointed representatives—of such a constituency re/assert or re/claim ways of explaining and understanding their distinctiveness, their experiences, that directly challenge a dominant constituency’s (oppressive) characterizations of out-groups’ experiences. The ostensible overarching goal is to obtain greater self-determination, autonomy, and recognition of the value and worth of the marginalized group’s experience.

Identity politics has profoundly impacted the fabric of American political culture, and affected the political, legal, and socioeconomic actuality of those who reside within and without classificatory schema based on identity. For example, in the 21st century the hyper-development of technological mediums of communication has enabled media (social and traditional) to saturate the public mind about the extant and ever-growing divide between and among Americans based on binary identity oppositions—liberals v. conservatives, urbanites v. urbanites v.
suburbanites, black v. white, police v. minorities, young v. old, native-born v. immigrant, heterosexual v. homosexual—based on notions of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and ideology, among other things.

In this seminar, we will explore identity and the politics of American identity, and the affects/effects politicized identity has for members of the American polity by employing various media sources reporting on current events in conjunction with select academic materials. We will examine and analyze the historical and present manifestations of politicized identity in the US, interrogate proffered binaries, and delve into the enterprise of critically evaluating identity, politicized identity, and the effects each has on American identity. Identity politics has had and continues to have a profound e/affect on defining the potential and actuality of political, social, and economic reality for individual subjects. This seminar will provide students with an introduction to select theoretical perspectives and approaches that seek to explain and understand identity. The course employs materials from the media, humanities, social sciences, and law to explore politicized identity in the US.

### Goals/Outcomes

Ideally, the aims of this course are for students to:

1. Develop knowledge and understanding of philosophical, historical, sociocultural, political, and economic factors underpinning identity and identity politics.

2. Be conversant with, and have an appreciation for, select approaches to/theories of identity politics in the US.

3. Develop a critical perspective of identity and politicized identity.

4. Learn to apply theories to political problems and gain insight into politicized identity.

5. Through leading a class discussion and participation, learn how to ask questions and facilitate thoughtful and respectful academic debate.

6. Question preexisting ideas and beliefs about identity and the politics of identity.

### *Assessment Components*

**Interactive Presentation:** (See Additional Information below) **25% of final grade**

**Weekly Journal:** (See Additional Information below) **50% of final grade**

**Research Paper:** (See Additional Information below) **25% of final grade**

- Note: Failure to timely submit or fulfill any required course component may result in grade reduction or failure of the class.
## Assessment Expectations

**Grade A:** Student demonstrates excellent comprehension of subject matter and materials. Student engages materials and offers insightful commentary in assignments. Assignments show strong evidence of critical thought. Student effectively incorporates readings, class discussion, and original thought into all assignments. Student actively and substantively leads/participates in class discussion.

**Grade B:** Student demonstrates significant comprehension of subject matter and materials. Student engages materials. Student effectively incorporates readings and class discussion into assignments. Student actively participates in class discussion, and demonstrates a degree of critical thought in assignments and discussion.

**Grade C:** Student demonstrates a basic understanding of subject matter and materials. Assignments address basic aspects of the subject matter. Student sufficiently incorporates materials into assignments. Student participates in class discussion, and attempts to incorporate critical thought in assignments and discussion.

**Grade D:** Student has limited understanding of the subject matter and materials. Assignments do not incorporate assigned materials effectively. Limited critical thought or engagement with materials. Very limited class participation.

**Grade F:** Student has very limited understanding of subject matter and materials. Assignments do not incorporate assigned materials. Very limited critical thought or engagement with materials. No class participation.

## Grade conversion policy of NYU–Washington DC

NYU–Washington, DC uses the following scale of numerical equivalents to letter grades:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Numerical Range</th>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100–94</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93–90</td>
<td>A-</td>
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<tr>
<td>89–87</td>
<td>B+</td>
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<tr>
<td>86–84</td>
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<td>83–80</td>
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<td>79–77</td>
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<td>69–67</td>
<td>D+</td>
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<tr>
<td>65–66</td>
<td>D</td>
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<tr>
<td>below 65</td>
<td>F</td>
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</tbody>
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## Attendance Policy of NYU–Washington DC

Study abroad at Global Academic Centers is an academically intensive and immersive experience, in which students from a wide range of backgrounds exchange ideas in discussion-based seminars. Learning in such an environment depends on the active participation of all students. And since classes typically meet once or twice a week, even a single absence can cause a student to miss a significant portion of a course. **To ensure the integrity of this academic experience, class attendance at the centers is mandatory, and unexcused absences will affect students' semester grades.** Students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence. Repeated absences in a course may result in failure. At all Global Academic Centers, unexcused absences will be penalized with a two percent deduction from the student’s final course grade.
To seek an excused absence for medical reasons, students must email or discuss with the Academic Program Coordinator in advance of their missed class (if not an emergency). For an excused absence, students must produce a doctor’s note (dated and signed by medical professional) with the exact dates of the missed class and/or exam clearly indicated. Please discuss medically excused absences with the Academic Program Coordinator.

Non-medical absences must be discussed with the Academic Program Coordinator prior to the date(s) in question, who will communicate the absence to all relevant faculty members. If faculty members do not receive notification, the student has not procured an excused absence.

NYU Washington, DC expects students to arrive to class promptly (both at the beginning and after any breaks), to be attentive, and to remain for the duration of the class. If full class attendance and participation becomes a problem, it is the prerogative of each instructor to apply the rule for unexcused absences, which may include, but is not limited to, a two percent deduction from the student’s final course grade.

Students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence. This means they should initiate email and/or office hour discussions to discuss any missed lectures and assignments and arrange a timeline for submitting missed work.

Please note that for classes involving a field trip or other external visit, transportation difficulties are never grounds for an excused absence. It is the student’s responsibility to arrive at the announced meeting point in a punctual and timely fashion. Staff members may always be reached by cell phone for advice regarding public transportation.

### Late Submission of Work Policy of NYU–Washington DC

1) Written work due in class must be submitted in a timely manner during the assigned class time to the professor.

2) Late work should be emailed to the faculty as soon as it is completed. (If the assignment must be submitted in person, the Academic Program Coordinator can collect on behalf of the faculty between the hours of 9–5, M–F.)

3) Late work will be reduced for a fraction of a letter grade (e.g., A to A-, A- to B+, etc.) for every day it is late, including weekends.

4) Written work during the semester that is submitted 5 days after the submission date (including weekends) without an agreed extension fails and is given a zero.

5) Students who arrive to class late for an exam do not have automatic approval to take extra time to complete the exam.

6) Students who miss an exam (including the final) without previously arranged permission will receive a zero on that exam.

7) Assignments due during finals week that are submitted more than 3 days without previously arranged extensions will not be accepted and will receive a zero. Any exceptions or extensions for work during finals week must be discussed with the Site Director.
Students with Disabilities Policy of NYU—Washington DC

Accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at +1-212-998-4980 or see their website (http://www.nyu.edu/life/safety-health-andwellness/students-with-disabilities.html) for further information.

Plagiarism Policy of NYU—Washington DC

As the University's policy on “Academic Integrity for Students at NYU” states: “At NYU, a commitment to excellence, fairness, honesty, and respect within and outside the classroom is essential to maintaining the integrity of our community. By accepting membership in this community, students take responsibility for demonstrating these values in their own conduct and for recognizing and supporting these values in others.” Students at Global Academic Centers must follow the University and school policies.

The presentation of another person’s words, ideas, judgment, images, or data as though they were your own, whether intentionally or unintentionally, constitutes an act of plagiarism.

NYU Washington, DC takes plagiarism very seriously; penalties follow and may exceed those set out by your home school. All your written work must be submitted as a hard copy AND in electronic form to the instructor. Your instructor may ask you to sign a declaration of authorship form.

It is also an offense to submit work for assignments from two different courses that is substantially the same (be it oral presentations or written work). If there is an overlap of the subject of your assignment with one that you produced for another course (either in the current or any previous semester), you MUST inform your professor. For guidelines on academic honesty, clarification of the definition of plagiarism, examples of procedures and sanctions, and resources to support proper citation, please see:

http://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/academic-integrity-for-students-at-nyu.html

http://gls.nyu.edu/page/gls.academicintegrity

http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity


Religious Observance Policy of NYU—Washington DC

Students observing a religious holiday during regularly scheduled class time are entitled to miss class without any penalty to their grade. This is for the holiday only and does not include the days of travel that may come before and/or after the holiday.

Students must notify their professor and the Office of Academic Support in writing via email at least one week in advance before being absent for this purpose.

Required Text(s)

You are not required to purchase a textbook(s): All class materials will be posted to NYU Classes.
Supplemental Texts(s) (not required for purchase)

N/A

Internet Research

ANY material obtained from the Internet MUST be properly cited with acceptable academic format (e.g., MLA).

Additional Required Equipment

N/A

Additional Information

1. The Instructor reserves the right to alter the syllabus as needed. Students will be given reasonable notice of any changes.

2. **THIS IS A READING-INTENSIVE SEMINAR**: The assigned readings are necessary in order to provide the student with basic materials to adequately engage and critically analyze complex conceptual approaches/frameworks. Also, the readings reflect the fact that each session is comprised of 2 classes.

3. **THIS IS AN INTERACTIVE SEMINAR**: You are expected to actively and substantively participate in class discussion, activities, debate, and presentations.

4. This seminar (materials, discussion, assignments) is both theoretical and applied. The seminar is devoted to students becoming proficient and conversant with theory and conceptual analysis and with employing empirical data to explore and critically evaluate theoretical contentions.

5. Please follow all classroom etiquette/policies (Stated below)

Guidelines for Assignments

A. Interactive Presentation

1. *Format* – 30–40 minutes formal presentation on an assigned topic/reading(s). Students will pick a topic/reading and class period to present. Allocation of dates and topics/readings will be determined during the first class session. Power Point or other formal presentation format is acceptable and recommended but not required; use of the whiteboard is acceptable. If Power Point, etc., is utilized, email the presentation to the class and instructor before class begins. If Power Point is not utilized, then 1., a hardcopy of formal presentation points for the instructor and class is required, and 2., email a copy to instructor. **Loss of points will occur when**: 1., Unclear/incoherent presentation – up to 12.5 points. 2., Insufficient critical thought/reflection, insufficient engagement with materials/class – up to 12.5 points. 25% of final grade.

2. *Substance* – *Very* brief summary of reading. Bulk of presentation should be spent on your analysis of the topic/reading – in particular, a critique/analysis of the proffered thesis/argument should be presented. Presentation should not paraphrase, regurgitate, etc., material; rather, the presentation should highlight your select critical analysis of some major aspect(s) of the reading’s
thesis/hypothesis, implications, and/or methodology. Presentation should be focused, clear, and engage the assigned topic/reading. Most importantly, the presentation should engage the audience; i.e., you are not simply presenting information to a passive audience. Active class participation is to be facilitated, e.g., through group activities, posing, answering, and debating questions. Media accounts can be incorporated into the presentation if related to subject matter. I will provide individual feedback after presentation. (See Section D for more details).

B. Journal

1. **Format** – Title page, one-inch margins, 1.5 or double-spaced, 11 or 12-font Times New Roman, Word doc, consecutively numbered pages. Proper grammar, citation, style, etc., is expected and required. Clear, coherent prose is expected when writing entries. MLA format or other major academic format acceptable for citation. Journal entries should be 2–4 pages. Journal constitutes 50% of final grade. Each entry is worth 4 points (12 entries multiplied by 4 points (for each entry) = 48 points total (2-point round up in your favor when all entries are submitted on time). **Loss of points per entry will occur when:** 1., Improper formatting, unclear/incoherent grammar/prose, lack of citations – up to 2 points. 2., Insufficient critical thought/reflection, insufficient engagement with materials – up to 2 points.

2. **Substance** – The overall purpose of the journal is to record the development of your perspective(s) on the politics of American identity. The journal assignment is designed to stimulate critical thought and analysis, and to document continuity and change in your thought. Each entry should engage the materials; critical reflection and analysis on theories, concepts, principles, issue-areas etc., covered in materials and class discussion is the focus of each journal entry. Your view, opinion, of the readings (supported by the materials) is expected. Entries should be comprised of:
   a. A **very** brief summary of the study’s approach, methods, and claims.
   b. At least one paragraph addressing any unique findings or interesting aspects of the study.
   c. At least one paragraph offering your questions or concerns about the study.
   d. The bulk should be your view/opinions of argument/contentions made.
   e. Incorporate media weekly media articles that will be volunteered by your peers, sent by me, and/or that you share with class because you find an article of interest/relevance to the subject matter.
   f. An excellent entry extends beyond the aforementioned requirements and explores how you might build on these findings if you were a researcher.
   g. Suggestion: Actively and substantively engage the materials. Formulate an informed opinion. Deconstruct that opinion. Evaluate your and others’ opinions, views, etc., in light of class materials and discussion. You will find yourself engaged in an evolving thought process that should be reflected in the journal. You are not limited to 4 pgs., but no more than 5 pgs. suggested. I will provide feedback on entries. (See Section D for more details).

3. **Due date/timeline** – **One journal entry per session to be turned in via email as a Word doc before the beginning of each class beginning Session 2, with last entry due Session 13 (NO exceptions, unless approved medical excuse provided). Complete each entry prior to each class.**

   *Note: Failure to submit entries on time may result in loss of points and denial of 2-point round up.*
C. Research Paper

The research paper constitutes 25% of final grade. (See Section E for more details).

D. Preparation for Journal Entries/Presentations/Class Discussions

You will maximize your learning experience if you actively engage the materials and the class. The presentation format includes ample time for substantive participation by all students in discussions. (You will find that most of class time will likely be spent on discussion). You will critically explore the content of the assigned readings in your journal entries, presentations, and class discussion. During the week, if you come across a news story relevant to our course content you can send it to me. I will send out the articles I receive from students for discussion as well as some of my own.

You should always keep in mind and prepare some type of notes as you do the readings on each of the following questions for every assigned reading (for journal entries and prep for research paper):

1. Identify the author’s argument, and try to summarize it in one or two sentences. For instance, What are the logical steps of the argument? Does the author propose a theory? An interpretation? Can you identify normative assumptions or philosophical foundations of the argument? What is the evidence?

2. Do you find the argument compelling? What are its strengths and weaknesses?

3. How does the analysis in a text measure up to analyses offered by other authors we are reading in this seminar (or arguments made in other texts you have read)? With your own life experience?

4. How well do the theory and/or findings apply outside of the text, i.e., are they helpful if we want to understand important questions or phenomena beyond the reading? For example, what exactly constitutes an identity really? Is it a sociocultural construct, or a “real” thing?

Be prepared to engage and discuss the materials with the aforementioned questions in mind

E. Research/Writing Requirements

Research paper should be 10-12 pages. Standard format (i.e., title page, one-inch margins, 1.5 or double-spaced, 11 or 12-font Times New Roman Word doc). To achieve a high grade, you must present a coherent argument, fully engage assigned readings, and provide support for your argument. Excellent papers will go beyond this standard to also demonstrate some originality of thought, convincing argumentation, and a polished and effective writing style.

Suggested Research Directions/Questions (Note: While I suggest that you focus on one or more of the questions below, you are not limited to these questions; you may write on a question(s) of your choice, provided you consult with me and get prior approval for the proposed topic).

1. How can we explain and understand politicized identity? How does the fact that individuals occupy multiple identities impact notions of clearly defined identities that, in turn, form the basis for political mobilization? Race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, and immigration status—how (or can) an individual subject determine which sub-identity controls, weighs more or most in an identity calculus (What am I?). Can we discuss one of these identities without discussing the other?
2. How does identity matter for politics? Does its relevance change across other categories of difference? Can there be such thing as a “true” or “genuine” identity, or is it a sociocultural construct that is employed for the exercise of control and augmentation of power by elites?

3. How do intersecting identities matter beyond the identity of the individual—in communal interaction, in institutions, and as structure? Does identity precede the individual or vice versa? What are the consequences of subscribing to either view of identity? Is identity a misnomer?

4. Are group-based political movements always subject to some degree of marginalization (e.g., can we have a feminist movement that includes the needs/issues of women of color and/or low-income women? Can we have an LGBTQ movement that addresses the concerns of trans individuals?)?

5. How do race, ethnicity, gender, and class influence our understanding of politics? How does politicized identity limit or enhance the well being of identity groups, the larger polity, the distribution of resources and power? Does the individual fall under the tyranny of “properly” defined identity? Does or can an individual get “lost” in a master narrative of a group’s identity? Who exactly has the power and legitimacy to articulate an identity for a group?

A superior paper will make excellent use of the readings, in conjunction with original questions and insight, to examine the social, political, cultural, and/or economic construction of identity on multiple levels. Your research paper should be question-driven (not descriptive) and should use class materials, presentations, and discussions. (External sources are acceptable but not required).

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**Classroom Etiquette**

1. Please arrive on time; lateness is extremely disruptive. If you must be late, please enter in an unobtrusive and quiet manner. Once the class has started, students are expected to stay until the end of the class period. Lastly, please be attentive and respectful for the duration of the class period; refrain from talking or making other noise while in class. Failure to arrive promptly and remain for the duration of the class will result in student being marked absent.

2. **Electronic Devices.** Personal computers (for the purpose of note-taking) should be the only electronic devices utilized while attending class. Please refrain from engaging in online social media of any kind (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, and the like) while using computers in class. While I can understand the allure of passing time in class via social media, doing so will negatively impact your experience/final grade; if you are caught using social media for part or all of class time, then you are, in essence, not in class and may be marked absent. While in class please turn off/silence ALL electronic devices, including but not limited to cell-phones. The noises emitted from various electronic devices are disruptive. Please do not use a cell phone in class. If you are expecting or must take a call, excuse yourself quietly from the classroom; please do not answer your phone while in the classroom. Please do not use a cell phone while in class for any purpose. Interruptions of this nature will negatively impact your experience/grade in the class. I reserve the right to ask you to leave the classroom and mark you absent if you violate this policy. Problem behavior will be reported to the Academic Director/Coordinator. I expect that you comport yourself properly, in a civil and respectful manner.

3. Respect and civility between students, and students and instructor, is basic and expected at all times.
Session 1 – Wednesday, August 31, 2016

I. Introduction: The Politics of Identity


Session 2 – Wednesday, September 07, 2016

II. Identity as a Political Construct & Strategy – Explaining & Understanding Identity


Session 3 – Friday, September 9, 2016 (Note: Make Up Class, 9:00AM-12:00PM)

Identity as a Political Construct & Strategy (Cont.)


Session 4 – Wednesday, September 14, 2016

III. Culture, Psychology & Identity


Session 5 – Wednesday, September 21, 2016

Culture, Philosophy & Identity (Cont.)


5. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (Excerpt from Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, eds., Literary Theory 2nd ed. (Blackwell, 2004)), pp. 1017-1030.


Session 6 – Wednesday, September 28, 2016

IV. Problematizing Identity: Essentialism, Authenticity & Recognition of Self


Session 7 – Wednesday, October 5, 2016

Problematizing Identity (Cont.)


Session 8 – Wednesday, October 12, 2016

V. *E Pluribus Unum*: Amalgamation or Fragmentation?


Session 9 – Friday, October 14, 2016 (Note: Make up Class 9:00AM-12:00PM)

E Pluribus Unum: (Cont.)


Session 10 – Wednesday, October 19, 2016

VI. Law, State Power & Identity Politics


Session 11 – Wednesday, November 9, 2016

Law, State Power & Identity Politics (Cont.)


Session 12 – Wednesday, November 16, 2016

VII. Identity Politics, Racism & Sexism


Session 13 – Wednesday, November 30, 2016

VIII. Constructing Politicized Identity


Session 14 – Wednesday, December 7, 2016

CONCLUSION

Finals Week – Wednesday, December 14, 2016

*RESEARCH PAPER DUE*

Scheduled Activity