

Anth 490: Senior Seminar - Anthropology of Reproduction

Syllabus - Spring 2006 Kathleen Saunders

Required Texts

Robbie Davis-Floyd. *Birth as an American Rite of Passage*, 2nd ed.
Lynn Thomas. *Politics of the Womb: Women, Reproduction, and the State in Kenya*.
Sarah Franklin and Helena Ragone, eds. *Reproducing Reproduction: Kinship, Power, and Technological Innovation*.

Course Description

Humans have never left reproduction to biological chance. Families' and social groups' survival and prosperity depend on getting reproduction "right." From the earliest rites of fertility to contemporary high-tech fertility regimes, both pro- and anti-natal cultural practices shape reproductive possibilities and probabilities. This course examines the cross-cultural practices surrounding reproduction and the theories used to understand these practices and their outcomes.

Course Objectives

1. to examine human reproduction theoretically and ethnographically
2. to explicate the intersection of human biology and cultural practices
3. to make the connections between modes of reproduction and other social systems
4. to consider how recent reproductive technologies reconfigure such reproductive concepts as "mother," "father," and "shared substance."
5. to integrate cultural notions of reproduction and continuity with cultural notions of mortality and finality

Course Format

This is a seminar. It is crucial that the assigned reading be completed prior to class. All students should come prepared with questions, comments, outside or supplementary information (when you have it), and a willingness to share. The more participatory the class, the richer the experience will be for all of us. Critical engagement with the instructor and with fellow students is welcomed and encouraged. We will be respectful of all good-faith points of view. See document on seminar participation under Course Documents.

Blackboard and Email

Blackboard is Western Washington University's online system for course information and communication. The course syllabus, reading and assignment schedule, and supplementary materials can be found on Blackboard. I will post announcements there often. Check it regularly. I also use the University email system to post breaking news or critical information. According to your student handbook, you are required to check your University account every 24 hours and can be held accountable for instructions, directives, etc. that are transmitted via email. If you prefer to use another provider, set your University account to automatically forward to the account that you do use regularly.

Academic Honesty

Standards of academic honesty will be rigorously upheld. Consult your student handbook for WWU policies regarding academic honesty (<http://www.ac.wvu.edu/~osl/js/jsacdish.html>).

Requirements

I. Meaningful Participation

Guidelines to meaningful participation:

- a. simply "being there" is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition. Students who miss more than three classes (unexcused) will fail the course.
- b. come to class prepared with assignments read, notes taken, comments ready
- c. remember that not all commentary is "meaningful" -- make connections to the course materials
- d. students should monitor their own contributions to avoid "free-riding" (too little contribution) or "dominating the floor" (too much contribution). If participation seems skewed, instructor will randomly call on students rather than solicit volunteers.

II. Reading Journals/Blogs

Students will maintain reading journals or blogs during the quarter. It is immaterial to me whether you produce typed reading journals which are collected three times during the quarter or keep up a reading blog on Blackboard. Once you select a format, however, stick to that format for the quarter. The content of each will be the same. Each chapter or article assigned should have an entry which consists of two parts. The first component is an abstract of the article. If you do not know how to write an abstract, go to the library and look at journals which do require abstracts. An abstract should not exceed one paragraph. The second part of the entry is your reader response to the chapter or article. It can consist of comments, questions, connections -- the sort of reflection that will be useful in generating and sustaining seminar discussion.

III. Research Paper

Students will write a scholarly research paper of 15-18 pages and will present the results of their research to the class during the last week of the term. Detailed instructions for the preparation of this paper will be disseminated during the first week of class. This is a "writing proficiency" class, therefore, paper preparation will be handled in stages. Paper topics must be approved by the instructor.

Grading

Journals 100

Paper 200

Active participation 30

Total possible 350

Standard letter grade assignment

Note: there are no exams scheduled in this class. Failure to attend end-of-quarter presentation sessions will lower your final grade by a full letter grade (e.g. a student who had a B+ according to point accumulation would receive a C+) because those presentations are part of the learning experience and it is extremely uncollegial to dismiss your peers' academic efforts. To receive an excused absence for a presentation session you must have a DOCUMENTED reason such as a doctor's verification, the police report of a tree crashing into your car on the way to class, etc.

WWU and your instructors are committed to equal opportunity and non-discrimination in all programs and activities. Requests for accommodation or assistance should be directed to the Office of Student Life, 650-3844.