

Land Acknowledgement

UBC's campus is located on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the xwməθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam) people. The land it is situated on has always been a place of learning for the Musqueam people, who for millennia have passed on in their culture, history, and traditions from one generation to the next on this site.



GERM 501B 001: Biopolitics

The University of British Columbia
Dept. of Central, Eastern, and Northern European Studies
Winter 2021 T1 | 3 Credits
W | 14:00–17:00 | Buchanan B 216

Instructor Contact

Dr. Ervin Malakaj
Pronouns: he/him
Student Hours: after class & by appt
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Course Description & Goals

This graduate seminar offers an introduction to discourses on biopolitics. It will focus on the trajectories spanning writing from the 19th century to today, examining various traditions that pursue the primacy of the administration of life and death in society. A particular investment of the seminar will be to activate biopolitical discourses for literary, cinematic, or cultural production broadly conceived. To this end, we will read theoretical texts alongside cultural texts and will develop frameworks for how to productively bring these in conversation with one another.

The class is conducted in person (with the possibility that the pandemic situation might compel us to move to online, synchronous meetings). Each course session follows a variation of the following structure: 1. An introduction to the session with short lectures on key historical and theoretical background required for discussion. 2. Structured conversation and in-class activities. 3. Wrap-up lecture with comments about how discussion relates to upcoming lectures/course work.

Course Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to

- **describe** select developments in biopolitical discourse
- **discuss, analyze, and interpret** representative texts with a thematic and analytic focus on biopolitics
- **design and develop** an original research project with a thematic and analytic focus on biopolitics

Grade Breakdown*

Attendance/Participation	20%
Weekly Responses/Questions	20%
Close Analysis	20%
Final Paper	40%

Grading Scale

A+ (90-100%)	A (85-89)	A- (80-84)
B+ (76-79)	B (72-75)	B- (68-71)
C+ (64-67)	C (60-63)	C- (55-59)
D (50-54)	F (0-49)	

***Note:** You must receive a passing grade for each component to receive a passing grade in the course.

Books and Reading Materials

This book is available to be purchased either through the UBC bookstore or through online vendors.

1. Timothy Campbell and Adam Sitze, *Biopolitics: A Reader*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2013. ISBN: 978-0-8223-5335-5
2. Kathrin Röggla, *wir schlafen nicht*. Frankfurt: Fischer, 2004. 9783104902814.
3. **Recommended:** Thomas Lemke, *Biopolitics: An Advanced Introduction*, transl. Eric Frederick Trump. New York: New York University Press, 2011. ISBN: 978-0-8147-5242-5.

Online on our Course Reserves Site/Canvas Site

The URL for our course reserves site is: <https://courses.library.ubc.ca/c.Zf8HHC>. You can also reach the course reserves site through our Canvas site. There you will find the following texts:

1. Lauren Berlant, "Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)," *Critical Inquiry* 33.4 (2007): 754–780.
2. Slatan Dudow, *Kuhle Wampe, or Who Owns the World?*
3. Michel Foucault, "Chapter 11, 11 March 1976," *"Society must be Defended": Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976*, transl. David Macey. New York: Picador, 2003. pp. 239–264.
4. Franz Kafka, *In der Strafkolonie*. <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/25791>
5. Ronak K. Kapadia, "Introduction: Sensuous Affiliations. Security, Terror, and the Queer Calculus of Forever War," *Insurgent Aesthetics: Security and the Queer Life of Forever War*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2019. pp. 1–43.
6. Peter Kuper, "In the Penal Colony," *Kafkaesque: Fourteen Stories*. New York: Norton, 2018. pp. 115–150.
7. Karl Marx, "Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy," *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, transl. N.I. Stone. Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1904. <https://archive.org/details/acontributionto04marxgoog/page/n6/mode/2up>
8. Jasbir K. Puar, "Introduction: The Price of Getting Better," *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017. pp. 1–32.
9. Kyla Wazana Tompkins, "We Aren't Here to Learn What We Already Know." *LA Review of Books*. September 13, 2016. <http://avidly.lareviewofbooks.org/2016/09/13/we-arent-here-to-learn-what-we-know-we-already-know/>.
10. Robert Musil, *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß*. <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/34717>
11. Alexander Weheliye, "Racism: Biopolitics," *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014. pp. 53–73.

Attendance and Participation

An ideal environment for the course is achieved when we are all present, prepared, and eager to engage the material in our class. Engagement takes place differently for different people: being engaged can take place by responding to class discussions, asking for clarification, agreeing with the point someone makes in class, respectfully challenging a point someone made in class, etc.

One of the main aspirations of the course will be to help you develop verbal communication skills on complex topics. To this end, I will develop material and prepare exercises, which will facilitate the development of such skills; however, the activities don't work without *your* contribution. Meaning, even though you may not be a vocal participant in other contexts, think of our class as a perfect venue in which you can practice being more vocal.

What does it mean to be prepared? You will succeed in our class by reading the material for the days on which it is assigned. Reading, for our purposes, is not a passive activity: take notes about things you found engaging, confusing, illuminating, frustrating in a given text. Those notes (in the margins, on printouts, in notebooks) will come in handy when you are asked to tell your classmates about your reading and viewing experience. Being prepared also means that you should have the text in front of you and access it in some fashion (hard copy or digital) during class discussion.

As for attendance, you will succeed in the course by attending regularly and being on time for class sessions. You are allotted one absence. Each session you miss thereafter will result in significant deductions of points for this component of the class. As for tardiness: three times tardy counts as one absence.

Weekly Reflections & Discussion Questions

You will complete weekly reading reflections and prepare discussion questions for our session due on Canvas before our weekly class meeting. These will not be graded but will receive a complete/ incomplete. You will receive a prompt for these on our Canvas site. There will be no weekly reflections due in the first and last two weeks of the semester, nor will there be any due during weeks when you have a short analysis paper or abstract due, or during midterm break.

Short Analysis Paper

You will complete a short analysis paper (3 pages) on a topic related to the course material. You will receive a prompt for this ahead of the deadline.

Presentation

In order to expand your understanding of contemporary discourses on biopolitics, you will pick one recent (published in the last 5 years) monograph that in some way relates to biopolitics and present it to the class in a 15-minute presentation followed by a q & a. You'll decide on the book for your presentation in consultation with me. You will receive a prompt for this assignment with detailed specifications ahead of deadline.

Final Paper

You will complete an original, argument-driven paper (10 pages) related to the material and the topic of our course. As part of this process, you will write an abstract outlining your intentions for the paper. I will approve the topic. You can base your final paper on the short analysis paper you completed for class. You will receive prompts for this assignment with detailed specifications ahead of deadline.

Inclusive Course

You will effectively learn in an inclusive space that continues to challenge you intellectually. I will strive to foster such a space in the forums used for class. Most of all, *YOU* are required to contribute to the shaping of such an inclusive and intellectually stimulating setting by honoring the diverse backgrounds, statuses, and experiences of your fellow students. Please communicate to me any concerns or needs that immediately relate to your learning in this regard.

Communication

Communication is essential for your success in our course. I will send you regular updates about class via email and will post to our Canvas site. For this reason, you should regularly (i.e., daily) check your official UBC email account and our Canvas site for important announcements about our course.

If you send me an email, I would like you to know that I prefer to be on first-name basis with graduate students. Begin an email with a salutation such as “Dear Ervin:” and you can close with “Best/Yours/Sincerely,” I will respond to your email within one or two business days and usually do not respond to email on weekends. During professional travel (unlikely during a pandemic!), I will be unavailable via email but will respond to your inquiries as soon as I return to campus.

Academic Accommodation

If you require any accommodation that can improve your experience in and facilitate success in the classroom, please reach out to me. Moreover, be sure to consult the Vancouver Academic Calendar, which provides helpful information about the services to which you have access as UBC student. For more info:

<http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/Vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,34,0,0>. Here is an excerpt from the Calendar:

The University of British Columbia recognizes its moral and legal duty to provide academic accommodation. The University must remove barriers and provide opportunities to students with a disability, enabling them to access university services, programs, and facilities and to be welcomed as participating members of the University community. The University's goal is to ensure fair and consistent treatment of all students, including students with a disability, in accordance with their distinct needs and in a manner consistent with academic principles.

The UBC Centre for Accessibility can provide accommodations that enable successful classroom experiences for students with accessibility needs. For more information, visit: <https://students.ubc.ca/about-student-services/centre-for-accessibility>.

Academic Integrity

The academic enterprise is founded on honesty, civility, and integrity. As members of this enterprise, all students are expected to know, understand, and follow the codes of conduct regarding academic integrity. At the most basic level, this means submitting only original work done by you and acknowledging all sources of information or ideas and attributing them to others as required. This also means you should not cheat, copy, or mislead others about what is your work. Violations of academic integrity (i.e., misconduct) lead to the breakdown of the academic enterprise, and therefore serious consequences arise, and harsh sanctions are imposed. For example, incidences of plagiarism or cheating may result in a mark of zero on the assignment or exam and more serious consequences may apply if the matter is referred to the President’s Advisory Committee on Student Discipline. Careful records are kept in order to monitor and prevent recurrences.

I’d be happy to discuss this with you in more detail. You can also find more info about UBC’s official academic integrity policy here: <http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/Vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,286,0,0>.

Content Warning

Our class will feature written and visual material which depicts violence. These texts are not included in our syllabus because of an interest to engage gratuitously in violence. We will instead approach these texts intellectually and assess in which ways and why violent material is deployed in a given cultural text. I respect your perspective and will be very glad to discuss this with you individually.

Personal and Intellectual Support for Learning

UBC provides services to help students succeed in learning and being in our campus community. This includes services on topics such as academics, money, immigration, health and wellbeing. You can find out more information about various programs following this link: <https://students.ubc.ca/support>. If you feel comfortable, reach out to me. I can try to provide additional information about available resources.

Copyright

All materials of this course (course handouts, lecture slides, assessments, course readings, etc.) are the intellectual property of the Course Instructor or licensed to be used in this course by the copyright owner. Redistribution of

these materials by any means without permission of the copyright holder(s) constitutes a breach of copyright and may lead to academic discipline. I do not permit students to record classes.

COURSE SCHEDULE

The semester schedule is not absolute. I will adjust it as needed to suit the needs of the class.

Week 1	Work in Class	Prepare for Class
September 8	Introduction How to Read Theory	Tompkins, "We Aren't Here to Learn What We Already Know"
Week 2	Work in Class	Prepare for Class
September 15	Structures of Capitalism Marxism vs. Biopolitics	Marx, "Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy" Dudow, <i>Kuhle Wampe oder wem gehört die Welt?</i> (on Kanopy)
Week 3	Work in Class	Prepare for Class
September 22	Death/Life	Foucault, "Right of Death and Power over Life" (<i>Biopolitics: A Reader</i>) Foucault, "Ch 11, 17 March 1976" (" <i>Society must be Defended</i> ")
Week 4	Work in Class	Prepare for Class
September 29	Punishment	Kafka, "In der Strafkolonie" Kuper, "In the Penal Colony"
Week 5	Work in Class	Prepare for Class
October 6	Sovereignty * Note: Short Analysis Due *	Agamben, "Intro: <i>Homo Sacer</i> " (reader) Agamben, "The Politicization of Life" Agamben, "Biopolitics and the Rights of Man"
Week 6	Work in Class	Prepare for Class
October 13	Power/Desire	Musil, <i>Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß</i>
Week 7	Work in Class	Prepare for Class
October 20	Slow Death & Debility	Berlant, "Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)" Puar, "Introduction: The Cost of Getting Better"
Week 8	Work in Class	Prepare for Class
October 27	Fatigue	Röggla, <i>wir schlafen nicht</i>
Week 9	Work in Class	Prepare for Class
November 3	Coloniality/Racism * consultations for presentation *	Mbembe, "Necropolitics" Weheliye, "Racism: Biopolitics"
Week 10	Work in Class	Prepare for Class
November 10	Mid-Term Break: no class!	
Week 11	Work in Class	Prepare for Class
November 17	Insurgency * Note: Final Paper Abstract Due *	Kapadia, "Introduction: Sensuous Affiliations. Security, Terror, and the Queer Calculus of Forever War"
Week 12	Work in Class	Prepare for Class
November 24	Presentations	
Week 13	Work in Class	Prepare for Class
December 1	Presentations	

Final Paper: submit the final paper to me through our Canvas site by Monday, December 13, 11:59 pm.