Course Description

We are witnessing the global emergence of new modes and understandings of identity, as well as a backlash against so-called identity politics. But what is identity anyway, and why does it matter? In this course, we will examine seminal works that engage the problematics of identity in ambitious and creative ways. Our readings will span philosophy, literature, and the natural and social sciences, sometimes complicating distinctions between personal, social, and cultural identities. When and how is identity mental, biological, or historical, and how does it relate to notions of truth, imagination, the self, and the other? How do conceptions of identity evolve across and along modernity? How do we make sense of competing or plural identities? What kind of arguments and writing strategies have been used to theorize identity, and what can we learn from such examples as thinkers and writers?

Goals of the course:

• to introduce you to major texts and traditions of thought regarding identity in its many senses, across disciplines and periods
• to develop your skills in reading a wide variety of genres and literatures, analyzing various modes of argumentation, and writing clearly and effectively
• to develop a socially and historically informed understanding of the concept of identity, that is, to see its development between and across historical moments, societies, cultures and power structures.

Textbooks available at NYU Bookstore (print copies required)


**Supplemental readings available on NYU Classes**

Course Requirements and Policies

Assessment

Participation, Attendance (20%)

Coming prepared to lectures and actively participating in recitations are essential components of the course and are considered the norm. Recitations differ from lectures in that they are based around discussion and dialogue; they provide a forum for dealing with issues raised by the lectures and readings, as well as for preparing you for papers and exams. Many of the texts we are dealing with are difficult to read on one’s own: make the most of the classroom as a space for respectful, cheerful, collective engagement with them. There will be short writing assignments incorporated into recitations, occasional quizzes, and your 1-page field trip report (see Week 5) is part of this grade. See attendance policy on next page.

Close reading assignments (25%: 5%, 10%, 10%)

One of the major skills in conceptual learning is the ability to read a text closely for argument, mode, logic, style, and figurative language. These short papers increase in length, starting at 2 pages, then 3, then 4 (double-spaced). They are your opportunity to show you can identify and evaluate ideas, and the mode they are presented in, within a context of other ideas. Since we are working with some very dense and difficult writers, these papers will help you develop clear reading, reflecting, and writing skills. No secondary sources are needed, and none should be consulted.

Midterm exam (20%); Final exam (20%)

Exams are a useful and efficient way of assessing how you are absorbing and digesting the course material. In general, we are looking for your ability to identify textual material, reproduce the main arguments, respond to and analyze a set of ideas in a clear and relevant way. You may be examined on any material from the assigned readings, as well as on content from lectures and recitation. Exams are cumulative. Exams will comprise of three parts: 1) quotation identification and its significance (if you have not read the texts, you will not be able to do this!); 2) short answer questions and 3) short essay, chosen from two topics.

Final paper (5-6pp; 15%)
For the final paper, you will build on one of your short close reading assignments. This paper will demonstrate your ability to synthesize and evaluate ideas at a more complex and sustained level. More information will be distributed in recitation.

Policies

Attendance

Attendance is taken in both lecture and recitation. Two absences from lecture, and two absences from recitation are granted with no questions asked. Use these judiciously. We do not need to be informed of the details. It is your responsibility to catch up what you missed by asking a classmate for her/his notes.

For further absences, you will need to show formal documentation (a doctor’s certificate, a notice of jury duty, for example). Going over 4 absences without documentation will result in the lowering of your final grade 2% points per absence. Missing 6 lectures or sections (total) or more will severely jeopardize your ability to pass the class.

Late arrivals are disruptive to the professor and your fellow classmates; two late arrivals will count as one absence.

Textbooks and Course Readings

Bring print copies of all readings to lecture and recitation. Lectures and *especially* recitations only work if everyone brings their texts; attending your recitation without them will count as an absence.

Assignments

Detailed assignment instructions will be distributed in lecture or recitation and made available on NYU Classes. If you are away the day they are distributed, please access them online. You are encouraged to read the assignment closely and ask for clarification early. Assignments are due on the days indicated on the syllabus (double-spaced, 12-pt font, Times New Roman or Cambria). Submitting assignments late prevents your instructors from giving your work timely attention and feedback; please be respectful of our work schedules and hand them in on time. Late assignments will be penalized 5% per day. Although we will give you feedback on each submitted piece and are happy to discuss work with you, it is our firm policy not to change grades after they are determined.
Exams

The mid-term exam will be taken as scheduled on the syllabus; the final exam will be on the designated exam day. Because a whole new exam would have to be written for each absent student, please note that exams cannot be administered in advance or made up afterwards, except in cases of documented medical emergencies.

Electronics

This class is an opportunity for you to be “unplugged”, allowing you the space to do careful and focused reading and thinking. Due to increasing evidence of the false ability to “multitask”, no electronic devices are permitted in lecture or recitation. These include laptops, cell phones, iphones, ipads, kindles etc. Please be respectful of your classmates and teachers and turn them off on entering the classroom.

NYU Classes Website

Power point lecture slides and assignment details will be posted on the NYU Classes site. Your recitation instructor may also post reading and discussion questions here.

Communication

For questions about course content, assignments, assessment and special situations, the best thing to do is stop by our office hours and speak to us in person. If emailing, we will try our best to respond within 24-48 hours. Please do not email professors or recitation instructors for information already on the syllabus.

Disabilities

Students with disabilities should register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (mosescsd@nyu.edu; 726 Broadway, 2nd Floor; tel. 212.998.4980), which can arrange for things like extra time for assignments. The instructor must also be notified at the beginning of semester for special accommodations regarding exams and assignments.

Academic Integrity

See NYU’s full statement on academic integrity at the end of the syllabus. Any instance of academic dishonesty—either on an assignment or an exam—will result in an F and will reported to the relevant dean for disciplinary action. Remember that plagiarism is a
matter of fact, not intention.

Grading

See the Core Curriculum statement on grading guidelines at the end of the syllabus.
Reading and Lecture Schedule

Note: “NYUC” means NYU Classes

The reading listed for each date is to be completed before coming to lecture

Week 1: The Philosophical Tradition and Its Limits

Mon Jan 22
- Introduction

Wed Jan 24
- Parmenides. *On Nature*. John Burnet, trans. (NYUC) [c. 3 pp.]
- Buddha. *The Dhammapada*. Acharya Buddharakkita, trans. (NYUC) [c. 26 pp.] 

Week 2: The Philosophical Tradition and Its Limits (continued)

Mon Jan 29
- René Descartes. *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Meditations I & II. (NYUC) [c. 15 pp.]

Wed Jan 31

Week 3: The Modern Subject and the Rise of the Novel

Mon Feb 5
- Miguel de Cervantes. Chapters 1-9 of Part I of *Don Quixote*. (NYUC) [c. 70 pp.]

Wed Feb 7
- Miguel de Cervantes. Chapters 22-24 from Part II of *Don Quixote*. (NYUC) [c. 40 pp.]
- In-class viewing of Velázquez’s *Las Meninas* and self-portraits by Rembrandt and Dürer.

Week 4: The Modern Subject and the Rise of the Novel (continued)
Mon Feb 12
  • Mary Shelley. *Frankenstein* (through chapter 4). [c. 50 pp.]

  **2-page close reading paper due**

Wed Feb 14
  • Mary Shelley. *Frankenstein* (through chapter 12). [c. 80pp.]

**Week 5: The Modern Subject and the Rise of the Novel (continued)**

Mon Feb 19
  ****PRESIDENTS DAY: NO CLASS**

Wed Feb 21
  • Mary Shelley. *Frankenstein* (remaining chapters). [c. 130pp]

**Week 6: Identity and Modern Science**

Mon Feb 26

Wed Feb 28

  **1-page field trip report due in recitation**

**Week 7: Identity and Modern Science (continued)**

Mon Mar 5

Wed Mar 7

  **3-page close reading paper due**
Mon Mar 7

- Daniel C. Dennett. “In Darwin’s Wake, Where Did I Go?” and “Consciousness in Human and Robot Minds.” (NYUC) [c. 30 pp.]

Wed Mar 9

- MIDTERM EXAM in lecture (no recitations)

**SPRING BREAK**

**Week 9: Identity and Modern Science (continued)**

Mon Mar 19


Wed Mar 21


**Week 10: Identity and Modern Science (continued)**

Mon Mar 26


Wed Mar 28


**Week 11: National and Transnational Identities**

Mon Apr 2

- Walt Whitman. “Walt Whitman” (a.k.a “Song of Myself”). (NYUC) [c. 80 pp.]

  - In-class exercise with the online Walt Whitman Archive

Wed Apr 4

- José Martí. “Coney Island” and “Our America.” (NYUC) [c. 15 pp.]

**4-page close reading paper due**
Week 12: National and Transnational Identities (continued)

Mon Apr 9

- Arturo Alfonso Schomburg. “The Negro Digs Up His Past.” (NYUC) [c. 10 pp.]
- In-class exercise with the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture online collections

Wed Apr 11

- Guest Lecture by Lorgia García Peña, Roy G. Clouse Associate Professor of Romance Languages and Literatures and of History and Literature at Harvard University

** assignment: visit the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture

Week 13: Marxist and Freudian Approaches

Mon Apr 16

- Karl Marx. “Estranged Labor.” (NYUC) [c. 10 pp.]
- In-class viewing of scenes from Charlie Chaplin’s Modern Times.

Wed Apr 18

- Sigmund Freud. Civilization and its Discontents (chapters I - II). (NYUC) [c. 30 pp.]

Week 14: Marxist and Freudian Approaches (continued)

Mon Apr 23

- Sigmund Freud. Civilization and its Discontents (chapters III - V). (NYUC) [c. 30 pp.]
- In-class viewing: Slavoj Žižek on Civilization and its Discontents. (NYUC).

Wed Apr 25

- Sigmund Freud. Civilization and its Discontents (chapters VI & VII). (NYUC) [c. 30 pp.]
- Handout from Frantz Fanon’s Black Skin, White Masks. [1 p.]
Week 15: Contemporary Perspectives

Mon Apr 30

- Gloria E. Anzaldúa. “How To Tame a Wild Tongue.” (NYUC) [c. 13 pp.]

Wed May 2

- The Combahee River Collective. “The Combahee River Collective Statement” (NYUC) [c. 20 pp.]

**review session in recitation**

Week 16: Contemporary Perspectives (continued)

Mon May 7

- Edwin Torres. “A Nuyo-Futurist's Manifestiny” [c. 10 pp.]
- Performance by Edwin Torres

**final paper due**

**Final exam: TBA**