Course Description:
This course is intended to introduce students to literature from a wide range of orientation perspectives often referenced collectively as queer. The queer community is a pluralistic one inclusive of many distinctive identities—lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, trans-gendered, and inter-sexed—that the literature in this course will explore. Distinguishing among LGBTI identities is important not only to appreciate the individual richness of experience and varying perspectives each offers, but also to understand the unique challenges each group faces both from a mainstream straight culture as well as between and within queer communities themselves. The belief that sex, gender, and even orientation are binary and oppositional still dominates contemporary American culture. Much of the literature we will look at this semester deconstructs such normative binary categories and demonstrates the variety of orientation identities and the fluid aspects of sex, gender, and orientation as perceived by a significant segment of society. By reading texts from the queer communities, all students will increase their awareness of the level of difference that exists among sex, gender, and orientation identities. While orientation(s) will be the central focal point in the literature of the course, they do not exist in isolation; we will also explore intersections with race, age, class, ability and other identity categories. At the heart of the course is the goal of giving a voice and place of inclusion to those who are too often marginalized, as well as better preparing all students for existing difference.
This course will focus on American literature of the 20th and 21st centuries with an emphasis on the historical context of each piece.

Required Texts:
David Henry Hwang:  *M Butterfly*
Nella Larson:  *Passing*
Daphne Scholinski:  *The Last Time I Wore a Dress*
April Sinclair:  *Coffee Will Make You Black*
Coursepack Readings

Course Objectives:
1. Draw cultural distinctions among lesbian, gay, bi-, trans, and intersexed groups
2. Identify specific historical/contemporary challenges faced by LGBTI groups
3. Debate what constitutes queer literature
4. Examine the origins of the term “homosexual” and its implication for the creation of difference
5. Critique heterosexism and straight privilege
6. Identify key issues within LGBTI communities
7. Chart the access to privilege that queer communities have achieved
8. Investigate what goals are yet to be accomplished and how to realize them
9. Examine literature’s ability to advocate for social change

**Cultural Contrasts Goals:**
1. Students will discover values, beliefs and judgments outside their cultural sphere
2. Students will recognize features of cultural variation (e.g. gender, religion, language, race, etc.)
3. Students will discuss critically their own culture-based values, beliefs and judgments in order to frame them in a comparative context.
4. Students will identify how human cultures develop, adapt and transform

**Film Critical Response: 30%**
We will be watching several contemporary films over the course of the semester and treating them as primary texts to be explored, discussed, and critiqued. These films will provide a meaningful contribution to the themes and issues that are uncovered in the literature. In order to help you prepare for our discussions and to build your critical and analytical skills, you will write a two page, single spaced response to the film. The focus of the critique will be to engage with the cultural contrasts goals; specifically, you will need to identify a value, belief or judgment that exists in the film and compare/contrast it with your own culture-based response.

**Reading Quizzes 30%**
Rather than having one major exam on the literature, there will be numerous reading quizzes throughout the semester that will test you on the readings for the day. These quizzes will be unannounced, but they are not designed to trick you, only to test that you have read the material carefully and thoroughly. You should prepare for a quiz whenever a reading assignment is due. Consistent and conscientious reading will help you succeed with this part of the grade.

**Participation in Oral Discussion/In-Class & Homework Assignments 10%**
The two most important things that you bring to this class are 1) Time to read each text closely and thoroughly, and 2) A willingness to engage ideas critically and with an open mind. Come to class having completed the assigned readings. Be prepared to participate actively in rigorous discussions about the content and form of what you have read. It will help you to write down thoughts or questions you have in the margins of the text. Also be sure to bring to class a written list of several questions or points of interest you have about each piece—this will help ensure good discussions. I approach class meetings as dialogues in which we all learn from one another. Don’t look to me for “the answers.” Instead, I look forward to listening to your questions, insights, and interpretations of the texts. Please be aware that non-toleration of other people’s opinions will not be tolerated! :-) Disagreement makes for good discussions, but be respectful of other people’s differences and listen with courtesy. Due to the nature of the course, we will be discussing materials that some students may find sensitive (sexual abuse, hate crimes, homosexuality, etc). If you are uncomfortable having direct and open conversations about such topics, you may want to reconsider your enrolment in this course. It is critical that those in the classroom maintain a safe space for open discussion; everyone in the class should feel comfortable voicing opinions and ideas.
The “in-class assignment & homework” segment of the grade is designed to offer credit for occasional in class group work that will take place over the semester: in-class exercises, spontaneous writings, and group activities that will be assigned for completion during the class period (or as homework). You are expected to stay focused on the subject assigned during these informal discussions and activities.

**Final Research Paper 30%**

A) Creative Option:
When reading through the semester’s required texts, I am hoping that some of you will find personal connections in them to your own lives. Maybe you have wrestled with issues of gender, race, sexual orientation, or class identity in ways similar to those of the authors we discuss in class. The creative option for the final paper is a place to explore such ties. I encourage you to seek connections and use the readings, if possible, to open new avenues and insights into yourselves. When using this kind of autobiographical approach, it is imperative (for this paper) that you demonstrate the links between the texts and your lives. In other words, you may not simply use the paper to write uncritically about yourself. You’ll need to show specific ways in which the texts correspond to issues you have grappled with or how they have helped instruct you about issues you weren’t aware of—maybe responses to queer individuals in school, the coming out process, or heteronormativity for example. The goal here is to illuminate both the texts and your understanding of yourself.

B) Traditional Research Option:
You may choose to do a more formal, research-type paper on a topic of your choice that relates to the issues we have discussed in class. You might, for example, read other works by authors we’ve covered in class, or do further research on one of the themes or subjects that is of special interest to you. You may be interested in reading further about the queer liberation movement beginning with Stonewall, in researching the current US policies for same sex marriage, in investigating the treatment of the intersexed or the historical response to HIV/AIDS in the 1980’s—or in the present. The possibilities here are endless.

* As you read the texts, keep an eye out for material that you would like to pursue further. If you are interested in a particular area, come and talk to me about exploring it as your research paper; it’s never too soon to be thinking about a topic.

**Attendance Policy:**
Because so much of your total grade in this course depends upon in-class responses, activities and discussions, and participation in lecture and debate, your attendance is absolutely crucial. Your input and presence are what will make the classroom vital. You may miss only four classes before it adversely affects your grade. Repeatedly arriving late to class also counts as an absence. You must reserve these absences for those times when you really need them. I will not make decisions about whose excuses sound legitimate and whose don’t, nor allow some people “freebies” and not others. The attendance policy is *not negotiable.* Please do not ask me to excuse you from class,
regardless of the reason. If you know in advance that you will not be in class, it is your responsibility to get the assignments from me or from someone else in the class. You are responsible for making up work that you missed because of absences. If you are absent on a day an assignment is due, you must turn it in early or give it to a classmate to turn in for you. I will not accept late work without penalty. Contact me (or a classmate) to find out what you missed and stay on schedule. Any student who misses more than four classes will have their final grade dropped 1/3 letter grade for each additional absence.

**Ethics and Plagiarism:**
You have to do your own work and appropriately identify work that is collaborative, borrowed, or copied from other sources, including your own work from other classes. Obviously, when you use graphics, works, words, citations, or even ideas from other sources, including the Internet, you are under the legal and ethical obligation to identify these sources according to citation norms. You may use projects from another class as a base for projects in this class, but you must consult me first if you are doing this. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please contact me. Using work that is not yours and not appropriately identifying it will usually result in an F for the course.

**Note:**
Students with disabilities (physical, learning, psychological) who may need accommodations are advised to make an appointment with the Coordinator of Services with Students with Disabilities. If anyone has a documented disability that I should be aware of, please let me know as soon as possible.