Birth Control: Population, Politics and Power

IDSEM-UG1398 Fall 2011
Mondays 3:30-6:10 pm
1 Washington Pl., room 601
Professor Lauren Kaminsky
Mondays 3:30-6:10 pm
Gallatin School, New York University
1 Washington Pl., room 601
lauren.kaminsky@nyu.edu

Office hours: M, W 12-2pm and R 10am-12, by appointment: http://goo.gl/zHwXI

What is the political and economic value of people? Who has the right to control human reproduction and why? How do individuals express reproductive autonomy, and how do states exercise population control? This course will focus on birth control (broadly defined as the management of human reproduction) as a lens through which to see how the evaluation and cultivation of national populations has shaped government in the modern world. In discussing and writing about topics such as race and eugenics, overpopulation and sustainability, sterilization and abortion, human rights and demographic nationalism, students will draw on a variety of primary and secondary sources to develop their own ideas about government and self-government in the age of birth control.

Required readings marked with an asterisk are available at Shakespeare & Co. (716 Broadway) and at the Course Reserve Desk at Bobst Library. Unmarked texts are available in PDF form on Blackboard. You must bring a copy of the assigned readings to class each week; this will factor into your class participation grade. Additional texts may be introduced in class; if you are absent, it is your responsibility to acquire a copy.

Attendance is required. No distinction is made between excused and unexcused absences, but more than two absences may result in the lowering of your grade by one full letter.

Assignments are due at the beginning of class time on the days listed below. Late work will not be accepted unless extraordinary circumstances merit prior approval. Incompletes will only be considered upon submission of a request for a grade of incomplete.

Grades will be calculated as follows:

Preparedness and depth of engagement in class discussions 30% of the final grade
Midterm essay due October 10 20% of the final grade
Research essay due November 21 30% of the final grade
Final essay due December 14 20% of the final grade

Plagiarism—accidental or otherwise—will result in failure. As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Consult www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html for a full description of Gallatin’s policy on academic integrity.
Preparation for class discussion involves reading each of the assigned texts carefully and thoroughly, then writing notes for yourself that move through the following three stages:

1. Articulate the author’s argument in a few sentences.
2. Outline the structure of the argument and its content.
3. Situate the text in relation to previous discussions, and identify salient questions or themes with which the author is engaged.

Students will be called on at random to provide one of these three reports as we begin to discuss each text. It is vital that you compose concise and considered notes in advance, as your responses will play an important role in assigning your class participation grade.

Schedule of texts to study in advance of the date for which they are assigned:

September 12 – “Ethics evolve with technology”


September 19 – Population and governmentality


September 26 – Eugenics, race and the nation


October 3 – Liberty and equality


October 10 – MIDTERM ESSAY DUE

No class today; submit midterm essay on Blackboard by 3:30pm.
October 17 – Overpopulation


October 24 – Sterilization and modernization


October 31 – Pronatalism and abortion


November 7 – Kinship and cultural politics


November 14 – Surrogacy and gamete donation


November 21 – RESEARCH ESSAY DUE

No class today; submit research essay on Blackboard by 3:30pm.
November 28 – Morality and mortality


December 5 – Abortion and personhood


December 12 – Fear of the near future


December 14 – FINAL ESSAY DUE

Submit final essay on Blackboard by 3:30pm and bring a hard copy to class.