Theorizing Marriage in the United States: Historical and Present Considerations
AS 100.258

Course Description:
The vast majority of Americans get married at some point in their lives, yet marriage itself as a phenomenon remains crucially under-theorized. This course, a lower-level undergraduate seminar, seeks to introduce students to a variety of questions surrounding the role of matrimony in American life, emphasizing marriage’s long and contested history in the United States, as well as analyzing how matrimony functions in public life in 2019. This course will help students to think through questions such as, “was marriage always a part of the United States?”; “how has marriage changed over time?”; “why do people get married in 2019?”; “what have alternative relationship models been besides marriage?”; “what is the relationship between nuptials and the American state?”. While primarily emphasizing historical literature, this course will cross disciplinary boundaries. The course will also examine contemporary cultural sources like theknot.com, howtheyasked.com, and the popular television show Say Yes to the Dress. This class will center intersectional and queer approaches to addressing course questions, demonstrating the ways that questions surrounding matrimony are inherently bound up with issues concerning race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and other categories of identity. Ultimately, after completing this course, students will achieve a more rigorous understanding of marriage’s historical roots, as well as be able to think critically about the role of an institution that is so vital to many Americans’ lives. Students will also demonstrate their sharpened analysis through the completion of a final paper based on course content.

Course Requirements:
• 25% - final paper: This course will require a final paper of no more than 12 pages, based on course readings and class content. Due Friday, December 13, with a required outline or full draft (per student’s preference) due Friday, November 22. Students are required to have meetings with me to discuss these drafts the week of December 2.
• 10% - 800-1000-word writing assignment: due Thursday, October 17.
• 30% - 300-word weekly blog posts with critical commentary on course readings (9 total in semester): Students may choose which weeks they want to complete them. The “9 total” accounts for skipping 3 weeks. However, at least 2 blog posts must be completed by September 23, and at least 6 total must be completed by November 4. Students will receive three grades for the blog posts, each located roughly one-third of the way through the semester. These grades will aggregate
my overall assessment of the students’ performance via blog posts. The latter grades for blog posts will be weighted more heavily in determining the overall grade for this section. Blog posts are due by 7 am, posted to Blackboard, each Monday of class. Students are responsible for being prepared for full discussion of readings in class, even for weeks they have not completed blog posts.

- 35% - active, in-class seminar participation and presentations. Each student will be asked to bring in a primary source during one week of our discussion, and provide a brief (10-15-minute) overview connecting that source to our course material/reading materials for that week. I will provide participation grades midway through the semester, and trends in improvement will be weighted more heavily in determining the overall grade for participation.

**Due Dates**
Blog posts are due by 7 am, posted to Blackboard, each Monday of class.

All of the below dates are on Mondays, unless otherwise noted:

- September 23: First blog post grade is for blog posts through September 23
  - 2 blog posts must be completed by this date.
- October 14: First participation grade is for participation through October 14
- October 17 (Thursday): Short writing assignment due
- November 4: Second blog post grade is for blog posts through November 4
  - 6 blog posts must be completed by this date.
- November 22 (Friday): Final paper outline/draft due
- December 2: Third and final blog post grade for blog posts through December 2
  - Second and final participation grade is for participation through December 2
- Week of December 2: Mandatory meeting with instructor to discuss outline/draft
- December 13 (Friday): Final paper due

**Class Policies**

- **Inclusive, safe environment:** One of my major goals for this semester is to have this room be an inclusive, safe space for all students. If you feel I am not meeting this goal for any reason, please let me know.

- **Guidelines for discussion:** Thoughtful discussion is integral to successful completion of this course. Students are very encouraged to share their opinions and thoughts on the readings and issues discussed in class. However, students must be mindful of being respectful of each other’s opinions and feelings.

- **Attendance:** Attendance and active, thoughtful participation are essential to this course. Students are expected to attend all course meetings. Students with legitimate reasons for missing class should contact me in advance of the missed class.

- **Assignment lateness:** All assignments must be turned in by the time specified on the syllabus. Late assignments will be marked down by a third of a letter grade for each day
late (i.e., an A paper would go down to an A-, a B+ to a B, etc.), unless students contact me in advance of the deadline for an extension.

**Technology usage:** Students are expected to pay full and complete attention in class. Laptop usage is perfectly acceptable in class for academic reasons. However, technology usage should not distract a student from class participation.

**Ethics:** The strength of the university depends on academic and personal integrity. In this course, you must be honest and truthful. Ethical violations include cheating on exams, plagiarism, reuse of assignments, improper use of the Internet and electronic devices, unauthorized collaboration, alteration of graded assignments, forgery and falsification, lying, facilitating academic dishonesty, and unfair competition.

Report any violations you witness to the instructor. You may consult the associate dean of student conduct (or designee) by calling the Office of the Dean of Students at 410-516-8208 or via email at integrity@jhu.edu. For more information, see the Homewood Student Affairs site on academic ethics: (https://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/student-life/student-conduct/academic-ethics-undergraduates).

**Disabilities:** Any student with a disability who may need accommodations in this class must obtain an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services, 103 Shaffer, (410) 516-4720, studentdisabilityservices@jhu.edu.

**Anxiety, stress, and mental health:** If you are struggling with anxiety, stress, depression or other mental-health-related concerns, please consider visiting the JHU Counseling Center. If you are concerned about a friend, please encourage that person to seek out their services. The Counseling Center is located at 3003 North Charles Street in Suite S-200, and can be reached at 410-516-8278 and online at http://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/counselingcenter/.

**Family accommodation policy:** You are welcome to bring a family member to class on occasional days when your responsibilities require it (for example, if emergency child care is unavailable, or for health needs of a relative).

**Potential changes:** While this syllabus will mostly stay the same, it is possible that I will make small changes throughout the semester. I will certainly notify you well in advance of any such changes.

**Course texts**
The following books are required course texts. They are all available at the bookstore, and are available on reserve at the library. I encourage you all to acquire the books in the way that makes the most sense to you – whether it be buying the books at the bookstore (the most expensive option), ordering them online, or checking them out from the library. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions about accessing course material. Any edition of these books will suffice.


All articles and book chapters/excerpts will be available via this course’s e-reserve listings (requires JHU log-in).

**Part 1: Introduction to Thinking about Marriage**

**Part 2: Marriage and its History**

**Part 3: Contemporary Marriage and its Futures**