Seminar Description

This discussion-based seminar course explores the social construction of race through the lens of whiteness. Why talk about whiteness? Contrary to popular belief that we are now living in a post-racial society, systemic racial discrimination and inequality persists. By considering whiteness as both a race and historical system of privilege, we can gain a deeper understanding of the persistence of racism that can better inform our strategies to end it. Over the course of the semester, we will draw upon the work of critical race scholars and theoretically and practically examine the distribution of privilege within American society at both the interpersonal and institutional levels, as well as consider how whiteness operates within the social constructs of class and gender.

Through writing and in-class group discussion in both small and larger groups, you will examine your own identities and lived experiences and consider how consciously or unconsciously they are affected by these processes, as well as consider strategies for challenging racism and privilege at the individual and institutional levels. This seminar will facilitate the development of a critical racial consciousness by building a cognitive understanding of racism and critically reflecting upon one’s life experiences in the context of privilege. While the course employs a critical lens upon society, it is not structured to produce a monolithic way of thinking. Instead, the course encourages reflection and questioning of how and why we think in certain ways and the influence (intended or unintended) this can have on our interactions.

We all have unique experiences and perspectives on the issue of race and it is important that we are prepared to not only discuss those thoughts and feelings, but also welcome being challenged. Although these topics may be uncomfortable to talk about, it is important to realize that we can learn a great deal from each other through active listening and dialoguing.

“Hidden biases are bits of knowledge that are stored in our brains because we encounter them so frequently in our cultural environments. Once lodged in our minds, hidden biases can influence our behavior toward members of particular social groups, but we remain oblivious to their influence. Most people find it unbelievable that their behavior can be guided by mental content of which they are unaware.” [Banaji and Greenwald, 2013 in Blindspot, pp. xii]
Seminar Objectives

- **Increase one’s cultural competency:** Identify and articulate your personal feelings, fears, attitudes and behaviors about the issues of privilege and racism in order to build a better understanding of self. Develop an empathetic understanding of a perspective different from your own and demonstrate receptiveness to being challenged on views and beliefs. Recognize and discuss how white privilege operates in everyday discourse.

- **Build the components of a racial consciousness:** Explain the historical relationship between white privilege, inequality and racism and how it has and continues to structure contemporary society. Be able to clearly define and differentiate the concepts of prejudice and racism. Understand one’s own racism and racial prejudices and how that influences one’s behavior and interactions with others. Articulate your own path to racial conscious and identify steps for becoming more racially aware.

- **Develop a racial justice advocate identity:** Describe the ways in which you can be critical racial justice advocate in your everyday life. Conduct a mini-sociological research project on how whiteness, privilege, and racism operates in everyday life. Describe and develop specific strategies designed to challenge racism on both the individual and institutional levels through an action project focused on racial justice.

Seminar Requirements

**Class participation (25% of your grade)**
Class participation is required, as much of the learning will take place in the classroom through participation in class discussions. It is expected that when you are in class you will participate and come to each class session having completed the assigned readings and prepared to discuss the material. The quality of your participation as well as absences and lateness will be noted as this has an effect on group discussion. More than one absence from class will result in points deducted from your class participation grade.

**Four (4) Reflection Papers (15% of your grade)**
You will be asked to submit a reflection paper to Prof. Piatelli at the end of each week as noted on the syllabus (for a total of 4 reflection papers). Note that the frequency of these papers will decrease as you begin to write your thematic papers (see below for a description of those papers). These papers should be a maximum of three (3), double-spaced pages and emailed to Prof. Piatelli no later than Thursday at 4:00 p.m. for the week they are due.

In these papers, you should discuss how you are interacting with the course material and discussions (the ideas presented by the authors, the way that you are integrating the readings into your thinking, the way your personal experiences may/may not related to the issues raised by the readings/discussions). The writing can be informal, but should be thoughtful, reflective and draw upon the reading and discussion. Your papers should NOT simply be a summary of a reading, film or class discussion, but rather demonstrate how you are relating the readings/film/class discussion to each other, to readings from other weeks, and/or your own life. You may also explore ideas that may not be covered in class or that you may be hesitant to assert verbally.

Possible questions to think about when writing: How do the readings, films, and/or discussions make me feel? Do I sometimes feel uncomfortable? Why? Do the readings make me think differently about my own life experiences? Does the author raise issues I have not thought about before? Is there something that has been bothering me that I have felt reluctant to bring up in class? Is the class raising issues I want
to learn more about? Is this class making me think about things in new ways?

Each paper will be evaluated based on its thoughtfulness, insight, and engagement with the course material and discussion. I may draw on your reflections (anonymously) in the classroom to foster discussion. I also encourage you to share your reflections in the classroom.

Three (3) Thematic Papers (40% of your grade)
You will be asked to complete three papers on a particular theme discussed in class. These papers are more formal than the reflection papers and MUST cite the readings from the course syllabus in a more detailed manner. These assignments will be distributed in class before the due date and copies can also be found on Canvas (approximate page length requirements are noted on the assignment sheet).

Assignments will be submitted to Prof. Piatelli by email by 4:00 p.m. on the due date.

Thematic paper #1 Historical Memories of Race (10%)  Due: Thursday, Oct. 23
Thematic paper #2 Racial Identity Development (10%)       Due: Thursday, Nov. 6
Thematic paper #3 Observing and Analyzing Racetalk (20%)  Due: Thursday, Nov. 20

Action Project and Presentation (20% of your grade)
This assignment involves working with at least one of your classmates (preferably a small group) in analyzing and presenting a critical issue regarding race. As a group, you will develop and present your project to the class on one of the class presentation sessions (see course schedule). Presentations will be scheduled in 30-minute increments. As a part of your presentation, you should plan to leave at least 5 minutes for class discussion. (We may adjust timeframe depending on how many presentations we have scheduled for the semester.) More information on this assignment will be forthcoming during the semester and a copy can also be found on Canvas. Project Update: Due: Thursday, Nov. 13

Required Texts (available in bookstore and on reserve)

Seminar Policies
Grading scale and late work: 95-100 (A); 90-94 (A-); 87-89 (B+); 84-86 (B); 80-83 (B-); 77-79 (C+); 74-76 (C); 70-73 (C-), etc. As the assignments build upon your knowledge throughout the course, it is important that you complete your assignments on time so that you are able to receive feedback to improve your learning and I can evaluate my effectiveness in the classroom. If you have extenuating circumstances that will prevent you from completing your assignments on time, you must come see me BEFORE the due date to discuss a possible extension. Otherwise, you will lose 5 points each day the assignment is late.

For information on Boston College’s academic integrity policy, please visit: www.bc.edu/offices/stserv/academic/resources/policy/#integrity.
Seminar Schedule

Monday, September 8
How do we talk constructively about race?

**Readings:**
* Tatum, Chapter 2 (The complexity of identity)
* Tatum, Chapter 10 (Embracing a cross-racial dialogue)

**I: THEORIZING RACE AND WHITENESS**

Monday, September 15
Why study race and whiteness?
The social construction of race

**Readings:**
* Rothenberg, Introduction; Chapter 1 in Part One (Richard Dyer, The matter of whiteness)

Monday, September 22
Researching race
Historical constructions of whiteness

**Film in class:** Race: The power of an illusion, Episode 2: The story we tell

**Reading:**
* Horsman, Reginald. (1997). Race and manifest destiny: The origins of American racial Anglo-Saxonism. In Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (Eds.), *Critical white studies: Looking behind the mirror* (pp. 139-144). LIBRARY RESERVE
* Rothenberg, Chapter 7 in Part Two (Charles Mills, Global white supremacy)
Monday, September 29
Historical constructions of whiteness (continued)
Fluidity of whiteness

Readings:
* Abdulrahim, Sawsan. (2008). ‘Whiteness’ and the Arab immigrant experience. In Amaney Jamal & Nadine Naber (Eds.), Race and Arab Americans before and after 911: From invisible citizens to visible subjects (pp. 131-146). LIBRARY RESERVE

Monday, October 6
Prejudice, racism and privilege

Film on your own: White privilege: Racism, white denial & the costs of inequality
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8SIINVfqnxw

Readings:
* McIntosh, Peggy. (1998). White privilege, color and crime: A personal account. In Coramie Richey Mann and Marjorie S. Zatz (Eds.), Images of color, images of crime: Readings (pp. 52-60). LIBRARY RESERVE
* Tatum, Chapter 1 (Defining racism)
* Trepagnier, Chapter 1 (Rethinking racism) and Chapter 4 (The production of institutional racism)

II. RACISM AND PRIVILEGE IN EVERYDAY LIFE

NO CLASS Monday, October 13

Monday, October 20
Exploring identity development and racial awareness

Readings:
* Chesler, Mark, et.al. (2005). White students in the university In Challenging racism in higher education (pp. 79-98). LIBRARY RESERVE
* Tatum, Part II (Understanding blackness in a white context, all chapters); Part III (Understanding whiteness in a white context, Chapter 6); Part IV (Beyond black and white, all chapters)
* Trepagnier, Chapter 5 (Race awareness matters)

Additional Suggested Readings:
* García, José. (2007). The hatred within. In Andrew Garrod, et.al. (Eds.), Mi voz, mi vida: Latino college students tell their life stories (pp. 72-88). LIBRARY RESERVE
* Lee, Leah. (2007). Korea is my heart and soul, America is my mind and spirit. In Andrew Garrod and Robert Kilkenny (Eds.), Balancing two worlds: Asian American college
students tell their life stories (pp. 108-122). LIBRARY RESERVE

**Monday, October 27**
Exploring identity development and racial awareness (continued)

**Readings:**
* Carbado, Devon and Mitu Gulati. (2013). Acting out the racial double bind (or being black like Obama). In *Acting white? Rethinking race in post-racial America* (pp. 1-20). LIBRARY RESERVE
* Wise, Tim. Entire book

**Monday, November 3**
Thematic Paper #2 Due Thursday
White talk/Race talk

**Readings:**
* Rothenberg, Chapter 3 in Part Four (Paul Kivel, How white people can serve as allies to people of color in the struggle to end racism)
* Trepagnier, Chapter 2 (Silent racism) and Chapter 6 (Antiracist practice)

**Monday, November 10**
Action Project Update Due Thursday
Whiteness on the college campus

**Readings:**
* Chesler, Mark, et.al. (2005). Students of color in the university. In *Challenging racism in higher education* (pp. 99-120). LIBRARY RESERVE
* Tatum, Beverly Daniel. (2007). What kind of friendship is that? The search for authenticity, mutuality, and social transformation in cross-racial relationships.
In *Can We Talk About Race?* (pp. 83-104) **LIBRARY RESERVE**

**Monday, November 17**
Whiteness and affirmative action

*Readings:*
  * Sander, Richard J. and Stuart Taylor, Jr. (2012). The idea of mismatch and why it matters. and Why academics avoid honest debate about affirmative action. In *Mismatch: How affirmative action hurts students it’s intended to help, and why universities won’t admit it* (pp. 3-14 and 175-184). **LIBRARY RESERVE**
  * Tatum, Part III (Understanding whiteness in a white context, Chapter 7)

**Monday, November 24**
Whiteness and the criminal justice system
Whiteness and the educational system

*Readings:*
  * Bloom, Lisa. (2014). The state misses its best evidence (pp. 49-72); Closing arguments: a disaster for the prosecution (pp. 157-174); Bring it on, make my day, stand your ground (pp. 279-292). In *Suspicion nation: The inside story of the Trayvon Martin injustice and why we continue to repeat it*. **LIBRARY RESERVE**

**Monday, December 1**
Presentations

**Monday, December 8**
Presentations