

Mellon Domestic-Study Abroad, Fall 2019

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Location: Miami, Florida

Transnational Activism: Crossing Borders, Contested Bodies, and Transculturalism.

Real and imagined borders are redrawn and continuously divide and fragment our contemporary world. Territorial, cultural and corporeal bodies are mapped with old and new markers of racial, ethnic, gender, sexual, religious, linguistic, nationalist, nativist, and immigrant statuses, and we have been witnessing virulent forms of political and physical violence. From anti-black, anti-immigrant and anti-refugee violence to ethnic cleansing to sexual assaults, homophobia, new forms of hate, fear and xenophobia have gripped our transnational world. The Age of Information Technology and Knowledge Economy in the 21st century has made it even more urgent to turn to humanistic inquiries and “humanities knowledge in action” to make sense of the new and old battles over bodies, borders and identities. This semester in Miami revolves around the questioning of normativized and institutional hegemonic systems, and the ability of citizens to challenge and influence political processes through different repertoires of action, exploring how human experience and values can be expressed and contested through creative endeavors.

Miami is a young, postcolonial city, largely viewed as a refuge for Cubans (“a ticket to freedom-land”). Its rich cultural diversity is often undermined by the tourism industry which advertises the city as a place where one can experience “the liveliness of the Caribbean and Latin America here in the United States.” This depiction of Miami erases the historical, cultural and socioeconomic complexities embedded in it and other Latin American and Latinx communities in the United States, reinforcing the hegemonic value of the assimilation and acculturation of immigrants into mainstream American society. This course seeks to challenge these paradigms, centering on salient humanist and humanities-based approaches to understanding how bodies and borders are both constructed and contested, and how and why interculturality and transculturality are necessary to move beyond narrow identity politics. As Fernando Ortiz points out in his canonical work, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, we need to recognise intercultural dynamics in any cultural interaction and explore “the product of a meeting between an existing culture or subculture and a migrant culture, recently arrived, which transforms the two and creates in the process a neoculture, which is also subject to transculturation” (186).* This will involve students to apply their in-class reading and learning to their first-hand experiences in Miami where they will be asked to unravel the dialectical process of culture-making in which all

communities simultaneously influence and change one another, by reinforcing and yet also altering hegemonic relations of power.

This interdisciplinary and integrative program has three main goals: 1) Combining the analytical methods of the social sciences and the humanities, we offer students a framework to study the historical and theoretical foundations of transculturalism and identity politics. Through classroom instruction, visits to museums, galleries, and cultural centers, students will explore the problematical character of identity and the multiple ways in which identities are formed, experienced, and transmitted. 2) We will particularly focus on how bodies, borders and identities are created, represented, and contested through visual art, public performances, music, language and cultural and literary texts. 3) In an effort to incorporate into our program the idea of a meaningful experiential and integrative learning that fosters both civic engagement and personal reflection, students, through an internship/practicum in the city of Miami will have the opportunity to make connections between the knowledge learned in the classroom and its practical application.

Courses:

- HISP 325/WGS 326: Queer Politics and Hispanisms
(Three connections 2058 Latino Culture, 2303 Modern Latin America and 2306 Sexuality)
- SOC 270: Immigration (SOC270)
- New course 398: Interculturality (co-taught by Prof. Kim and Prof.Perez-Toribio)
- Internship/Practicum 398

*Ortiz, Fernando. Cuban Counterpoint. Tobacco and Sugar. Translated from the Spanish by Harriet de Onis. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995.