GSWS 320-4: Special Topics: The Creation and Re-creation of the Downtown Eastside

Professor: Willeen Keough
Email: wkeough@sfu.ca
Office: SFU Vancouver
Office hours: TBA
Lecture: Mondays 13:30 – 17:20; SFU Vancouver

Course Description:
The Downtown Eastside (DTES) of Vancouver has gone through many changes over the past 150 years. A First Nations hunting and fishing territory for thousands of years, the area became the centre of the emerging city of Vancouver at the turn of the 20th century and a thriving working-class neighbourhood through much of the 1900s. Since the 1970s and 1980s, however, the area has been represented in new and disturbing ways. Dubbed “Canada’s poorest postal code” in the media and popular understanding, the DTES has been defined by outsiders as a “dumping ground” for the city’s social problems: addiction, poverty, homelessness, prostitution, gender violence, and HIV/AIDS. Yet the DTES is much more than the sum of the challenges it faces, and residents and their allies have re-appropriated the neighbourhood and re-created a strong sense of community, mutual caring, and activism. Today, however, residents struggle to maintain their community in the face of increasing gentrification and its related impacts, including a radical decline in social housing, increasing rents and food prices, growing hostility towards low-income residents, and ultimate displacement. Through an exploration of written primary sources, cultural productions, oral narratives, and websites, and through engagement with the community, this course will seek to understand the intersection of inequalities situated in gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, age, class, disability that have created and re-created Vancouver’s Downtown. It will also encourage students to consider how we might integrate academic work with a commitment to social action.

Course Texts and Courseware:
Selected writings from the Internet, films, and photographs
Special coursepack

Course Evaluation and Assignments:
Attendance and participation 15%
Written reading responses 10%
Written reflection on film or class speaker 15%
Interactive community research activity (group) 30%
Individual research and reflection paper 30%

Prerequisite: 15 units

THE DEPARTMENT OF GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND WOMEN’S STUDIES ENCOURAGES CLARITY OF THOUGHT AND EXPRESSION AND GOOD WRITING. STUDENTS WILL BE EVALUATED ON THESE SKILLS IN ALL COURSES GIVEN BY THE DEPARTMENT. IN ADDITION, THE DEPARTMENT WILL FOLLOW POLICY 110.02 WITH RESPECT TO “INTELLECTUAL HONESTY,” AND “ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE” (WWW.SFU.CA/POLICIES/TEACHING)