GSWS 321-4: Special Topics:  
The Creation and Re-creation of the Downtown Eastside

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Lecture: Mondays 13:30 – 17:20; SFU Vancouver, HCC 1530

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, secondary literature, films, oral narratives, videos, and websites, and through engagement with speakers from the community, this course will seek to understand the intersection of inequalities situated in gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, age, class, and 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.

Learning Outcomes:
Students who participate fully in this course will be able to:
1. develop a critical understanding of gender, race, class, and sexuality as systems of difference that undergird inequality;
2. understand the DTES in terms of the intersectionality of these systems of difference;
3. understand that these categories are socially constructed and reconstructed over time and place;
4. appreciate how oppressed and exploited groups resist their subordination and struggle to recreate their own social and cultural identities;
5. enhance their abilities in critical analysis and improve their written and verbal communication skills.

Course Texts and Courseware:
All required readings will be available on SFU Canvas and/or the Internet.

Course Evaluation and Assignments:
Attendance and active participation 15%
Written reading responses 15%
Group facilitation of readings 15%
Op-ed 20%
Research paper OR ‘zine + paper OR social action + paper 35%

Prerequisite: 15 units

PLEASE NOTE that students who took GSWS 320-4 in the summer semester of 2013 may not take this current articulation of the course for credit.