(This course explores the relationship between urban space and transgender community formation by comparing the histories of this topic in both San Francisco and Vancouver. We will review recent scholarship on transgender community formation in San Francisco as an historical case study, and develop some research questions based on this body of knowledge. Students will be required to do original archival or field research to determine the applicability of our questions to the history of transgender community formation in Vancouver, and to use their research findings to revise our theoretical framework.

Although the subject matter of the course deals specifically with transgender history, the methodologies and practices we will learn will be broadly relevant for anyone interested in doing historical research. The course will examine the role of imperialism and colonization in the construction of gender identity in multicultural, multiracial, and multietnic milieus; the regulation of gender-variant practices in public space by Euro-American elites; circulation of gender-variant cultural knowledges and practices between elite, deviant, and marginal social groups; the emergence of scientific sexology and eugenics, and the proliferation of psychiatrized and pathologized identity categories for gender-variant people; the relationship between police regulation of "vice" subcultures and the historical geography of gender-variant populations; the emergence of transsexual discourses and embodiment practices in mid-20th-century; the social history of transgender social change movements; the relationship between transgender and feminist, gay, lesbian, and bisexual communities; implications of the AIDS/HIV epidemic for transgender populations; and contemporary transgender, queer, genderqueer, and post-queer cultural production and politics.

Assignments and Grading

Think of your work this semester as part of one, big, overarching, long, ongoing, shared project to learn what we can about transgender history in and around Vancouver. You will do a part of this project, and get graded on it, and then maybe (or maybe not) use some of your research elsewhere in your educational career, or in your work, or in your community life. Our collective goal as a class is to leave behind a useful body of work that will be built upon by future researchers. Ideally we will create some sort of joint document, perhaps a wiki that can live on the web and be easily accessed by other people. Collaboration and generosity are our goals.

Participation: 20%
Attendance is required. Students are expected to contribute regularly to discussions in the classroom and/or come for office visits, and/or communicate with me by email. Part of this class involves doing research work, which must be done outside of regular class hours.

Reading Journals: 20%
Students must offer one to three paragraphs of commentary—something along the lines of a blog posting—on each of the assigned readings. These should be turned in periodically throughout the semester.

Presentations: 20%
Students will be expected to make four 5-10min. presentations to the class about their research activities and findings. In these presentations you will need to do two things: share something about how your research is going, and offer some thoughts about what you are finding. Starting about the sixth week of class, a reasonable fraction of class time will be taken up by student presentation.

Written Report on Research Activities: 20%
By the end of the semester, you must prepare a written report of 10 or so pages describing your research activities—what sources you looked at, what archives or collections you used, which databases you checked, summaries of what you found—or what you learned from what you didn’t find. How you document your research activities will be as valuable for future researchers as anything that you might find.

Research Paper: 20%
By the end of the semester, you need to turn in a research paper, around 15 pages or so, that offers a thoughtful analysis of something you’ve discovered in your research, relating it to the framework and questions and chronologies that we’ve developed in the class. This will need to have footnotes and bibliography and be in proper academic form.

[Note for Graduate Students: you will need to write a research paper of roughly 25 pages, and will need to come to a graduate tutorial session scheduled every two or three weeks, Wednesday afternoons, in addition to doing the rest of the work for class.]