The concepts of identity and its correlative – difference – have played a prominent role in contemporary political and social theory as well as in public controversies over the past decades. A large and diverse literature in philosophy, political science, sociology, psychology, anthropology, literary theory, and other fields attests to their importance, yet surprisingly, no canonical texts focus the broad-ranging debates or help to consolidate a conventional approach. Therefore to study some of the complex questions surrounding identity and difference – what do these ideas mean? what phenomena do they refer to? why have they become highly politicized? – we consider basic theoretical approaches and then explore works that take up some aspects of the main categories used to define identity/difference: nation, gender, race, religion, and class. We will examine important texts, literature and films to gain a broad grasp on a complicated set of issues about how identities/differences are constructed, where they come from, how they are used by groups to define or delineate others, why we need them, and how they are tied to questions about individuality, social order, rights, freedom, justice and equality.

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- read, critically appraise, and feel comfortable discussing various types of texts and artistic creations
- differentiate between explanatory (positivist) and normative/advocative (politically engaged) conceptions and theories of identity and difference
- understand specific historical transformations that have affected our conceptualizations
- apply theoretical tools to understand and explain concrete examples
- use ethical (moral/normative) arguments to debate and defend positions regarding these questions in contemporary politics

Course requirements

- Class presentation: 10%
  - Approximately ~7 minutes
  - The presentation should: (a) summarize briefly the main argument, approach or methods, and findings of your assigned article(s) or book; (b) evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the readings; and (c) identify outstanding questions on the topic for the week. A hand-out should be provided for the class.
- Participation & weekly response papers (1-2 pp, single or double-spaced): 25%
  - Weekly reaction papers emailed to me by noon on the day of class (except for the day you present)
- Two papers:
  - 6-8 pg: 25% (First draft; peer review; & final draft)
    - Draft due Monday February 22; Peer Review due Thursday, February 25; Final draft due Friday, March 4.
  - 18-20 page research paper; 35%, using at least 6-8 independent sources. Due May 2.
General points
Absences will significantly reduce your grade. All requirements must be fulfilled to pass the course (including weekly response papers). Strict adherence to the Pledge of Academic Integrity is expected. No computers or phones are allowed for use in the classroom. Assignments may be modified, according to instructor’s judgment.

Policy on Classroom Participation
Every student is expected to participate in discussion each class, with substantive observations, arguments and opinion. This is a seminar and we learn in part from our interaction with one another and from having to articulate arguments and points of view. And remember: no question is silly! Asking questions is one of the best ways to learn. Your classmates will thank you.

WID requirements
This course is part of the “writing in the disciplines” (WID) program. Your final grade will be based on your writing and your participation in class. You will write 2 main papers. The first shorter paper must undergo peer-review & revision. Your draft grade will count (modestly) toward the final grade on the paper. For the final research paper, you may submit a draft to me with sufficient time to return comments.

The writing assignments are constructed to help you learn two different types of writing characteristic of political theoretical analysis: (1) The first paper will include textual analysis and critical reasoning through comparison of two or more writers (read in class) on a specific question; (2) The research paper must demonstrate: formulation of a research question about some aspect or concrete case/problem of identity/difference; use of high-quality sources to explore your question; careful analysis, consideration of alternative answers, and a convincing defense of your thesis. A grading rubric for the papers will be provided on the course website.

I. Situating questions of identity/difference

1/14 Introduction
- Perennial questions – Sophocles, Antigone
- Share individual write-ups.

1/21 What is identity? What is difference?

1/28 Historical turning points in the emergence of modern conceptions of identity/difference.
- Encountering the unknown other: Tzvetan Todorov, Conquest of America, 1982/1999, pp. 3-50. E-reserves
- “Global Political Discourse” Ch. 2 of Identity\Difference, William Connolly, 2002, pp. 36-63. Hand-out or pdf.
Explaining identity formation.
- Psychology: Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, 1968, Ch. 1 (Prologue) and pp. 91-96. E-reserves

II. Categories of demarcation and struggle

2/11 Nation

2/18 Nation
- “Blood and Belonging” BBC film by Michael Ignatieff

2/25 Gender
- Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, pp. TBD (hand-out)

3/3 Gender
- Paul Churchill, TBD

3/10 Race
- Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the world and Me*
- Films: Malcolm X and Selma

SPRING BREAK

3/24 Religion

3/31 Religion/culture/politics
- *Submission*, Michel Houellebecq, 2015

4/7 Class
- Film: Winter’s Bone or your choice of film
III. Living identity & difference

4/14 Multiculturalism
- Will Kymlicka, Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights, 1996. TBD.

4/21 Humanism and cosmopolitan

Additional Sources
- Iris Marion Young, Justice and the Politics of Difference, 1990.