Over the past several decades, a good deal of attention has been devoted to theorizing masculinity as a complex and historically variable construction whose relationship to “maleness” and “men” cannot be assumed as simple or self-evident. Scholars in history, literary studies, anthropology, film studies, philosophy, sociology and other disciplines have demonstrated that masculinity is a fragmented, unstable, and internally contradictory construct that is subject to constant negotiation, repetition, and challenge. The study of masculinity certainly enriches the larger field of gender studies, but the turn to “gender studies” (from “women’s studies”) has not been without its critics. In this class, we’ll read widely in gender theory focused on masculinity, with two goals in mind: to identify and evaluate the assumptions behind and methodologies for masculinity studies in various fields; and to enlarge our understanding of how masculinity, the male body, male subjectivity and male experience are constituted in particular historical, cultural, and social contexts. The larger question that will shadow our reading and discussion is: To what extent has the study of masculinity had an effect on the social and political relations of gender? Or, to put this question in more stark terms: Has attention to the construction of masculinity loosened the hold of male dominance in social, as well as academic, arenas, as feminist theorists of masculinity had hoped? Throughout our readings, we will also focus on how constructions of masculinity are stratified by ideologies of race, class, nation, and sexuality.

The course will be divided into the following topic areas: Theorizing/Deconstructing Gender; Theorizing Masculinity in the Disciplines; Masculinity, History, and the American Body Politic; Masculinities and Globalization; “Male” Bodies and Sexualities. The readings will be articles and book chapters, all posted on eCampus. We will typically read either one or two articles or book chapters for each class (depending on length and difficulty).

Students will write two 2-3 page response papers, to be shared with the class and to serve as the basis for our discussion each class; do a “follow the footnotes” project, to produce an expanded annotated bibliography with introduction; work in groups to construct, and present to the class, an undergraduate syllabus; and either write a 15-20 page paper OR a take-home exam (for which students will write the questions). This last option is meant to mimic a preliminary examination situation and so give students practice with that format.