

“Errant Syllabi” Workshop Précis

On October 18th-20th 2019, scholars and graduate students from Rutgers, Northwestern and UNAM gathered to engage in a cross-disciplinary discussion about teaching Latin American and Latinx Feminisms, Cuir/Queer and Gender Theory. In anticipation of the meeting, the participants (i) developed or revised a syllabus in one or more of these areas; (ii) suggested one significant article or reading in the field for others to include in their teaching; and (iii) prepared a presentation on a keyword that they found particularly transformative in their research and/or teaching in the field. Exchanging syllabi and core bibliographic materials in advance allowed workshop participants to focus on pedagogical maneuvers and methodologies that not only enliven the classroom, but align more closely with the radical and cutting-edge content of these courses and the aspirations of the critical, decolonial university.

The workshop involved collaborative discussions about how best to implement innovative teaching strategies such as pairing canonical with non-canonical texts; thematizing issues of translation and untranslatability; galvanizing orthodox texts that ought to be taught but require novel approaches; and foregrounding a critical interrogation of terms in the field that have become institutionalized (e.g. “Latin American”; “Latinx”; “Gender/Género”; “Queer/Cuir”). In large and small groups, participants discussed the challenges, both experienced and anticipated, that accompany critical pedagogies, and they offered one another suggestions for how to devise syllabi so as to more effectively implement these critical teaching strategies. Additionally, participants had the opportunity to demonstrate how they themselves put these teaching strategies into action by teaching one another the significance of the key words that they found particularly important and transformative for their understanding of the field. This was not only helpful in closing the gap between pedagogical theory and practice, but it was a unique occasion for professors, graduate student lecturers, and teaching assistants to see one another in a pedagogical mode and learn from their colleagues as teachers in the field, as well researchers. Finally, each of the small groups collectively produced a thematic, three-week sequence that could be used as an essential segment of a syllabus. The first sequence focused on Latinx feminist thought and concepts of domestic labor and indebtedness; the second sequence considers decolonial queer and feminist studies through the themes of sex, desire and bodies; and the third sequence centers performance and art, as well as the pedagogies of crossing to frame discussion surrounding Latinx or Latin American feminisms, gender/género and queer/cuir, for example.

As a whole, the workshop not only led to the production of a set of syllabi and compilation of bibliographic materials for current and future scholars to implement in their courses; moreover, it (i) provided professors and graduate students with the opportunity to reflect upon the process of syllabi construction in underrepresented areas of philosophy and gender studies in a manner that foregrounds critical pedagogy; (ii) generated three-week sequences that can be used in a range of courses; and (iii) disseminated knowledge regarding the best practices for implementing novel strategies for pedagogy informed by Latin American and Latinx critical theory, queer theory, and gender theory.

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