

Body Politik
Emily Balch Seminar POLS B001-15
Carpenter Library 17
T/TH 11:40-1:00PM

Visiting Assistant Professor, Dr. Sara Contreras
Email: scontrera1@brynmawr.edu
24 Hour Email Response Time Monday-Friday,
48 Hour Email Response Time Weekends.

Exclusive ESem Office Hours for Conferences: Monday-Thursday 3-4PM
You are required to attend four, twenty minute conferences throughout the semester.
[Booking Link](#)

Course Description

Why does the state seek to control our bodies? In this seminar, we will explore how the state has regulated, debated, and controlled our bodies for its own gain through predatory policies related to abortion, contraception, birth, reproduction, gender identity, and sexuality. How are these seemingly disparate laws related? How does the state manifest its desires through policy?

Through a comparative lens, we will see how the harshest policies are shaped by state desires, from China's One-Child Policy to Romania's Decree 770 to the current era of legislation on Trans healthcare in the U.S. We will examine how states manipulate domestic policies to produce desired outcomes, from growing a population to shrinking it, and how body autonomy represents one of the greatest threats to the state. Through interdisciplinary readings from political science, sociology, and history, and deep engagement with current events, we will attempt to understand why the state is so obsessed with our bodies and our lives. Students will be expected to complete in-class reflections, engage in meaningful discussions with their peers, and develop their writing skills through analytical essays. Students will challenge themselves intellectually by questioning the world around them and, in turn, learn to translate these complexities to the page.

Philosophy

The syllabus is a living document. As the semester goes on and we get to know each other, I will change around readings, add things, take things out, depending on you. You are expected to come to class, do the readings, talk to your peers, talk to me, and advance your knowledge as best you can. In return, I will make the class as engaging and interesting as possible while offering my time and ear to you.

Any changes I make to the readings will be reflected in the week to come's Moodle, which is where all readings and assignments will live.

Class Activities

We will meet twice a week throughout the semester. You are asked to come to class having read the readings, prepared any discussion questions or guided questions provided to you, and be ready to participate. The class layout typically includes brief lectures, case presentations, and an analytical discussion of the readings for each session. I may adjust the course design, class activities, or even assignments based on the attitudes and preferences of the class.

Policies

1. **Attendance** is mandatory. You are expected to come to class on time. If you are more than 15 minutes late, you will be marked absent. Please be courteous to your classmates and show up to class on time.
2. **Participation** is an important and vital part of your success in this class. Participation means you will come to class, contribute to small and big group discussions, and communicate with the professor outside of class when appropriate.
3. **Late Policy, Grace Day System.** Instead of a traditional late penalty, this course uses a Grace day system. Each student has **5 total grace days** to use over the course of the semester. Grace days allow you to submit an assignment after the deadline **without any grade penalty and without providing an explanation.**
 1. How grace days work:
 1. A grace day counts as a one, 24-hour period after the assignment deadline
 2. You may use multiple grace days on a single assignment if needed,
 3. Once your five grace days are used, no additional late submissions will be accepted unless otherwise stated.
 2. How to use grace days:
 1. You must email me by the original assignment deadline,
 2. No explanation is required
 3. Your email should simply state, "I am using X grace days for this assignment. I will have Y grace days remaining."
 4. It is up to you to keep track of your grace days.
 3. Important notes:
 1. Grace days are a limited resource; use them thoughtfully.
 2. They cannot be applied to assignments marked as non-extendable, including exams, anything due the last week of class or during finals week or assignments that include peer work.

If an assignment is due and you are experiencing problems with the submission portal, please send me an email with your assignment attached. Don't worry if I don't respond immediately; your email is proof that you had the assignment completed and were ready to turn it in on time.

Further, I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus, including readings, structure, and to policies, dependent on the course flow and attitudes. Refer to the weekly Moodle for insight into the next week.

Confidentiality in Classroom Discussions

In our class, we'll often engage in debates and discuss various issues that may be sensitive or personal. As a member of our learning community, I ask you to respect the confidentiality of these discussions. Please refrain from sharing any part of our classroom conversations on social media or any other public platform. It's important that everyone in the class, including myself as your professor, feels comfortable knowing who our audience is. While we may tackle public issues, our conversations in class are not meant for public dissemination, especially without the knowledge or consent of those speaking. Let's ensure our classroom remains a safe and respectful space for open dialogue.

Recording Lectures and Discussions

Recording in class – either lectures and/or class discussions – is prohibited for this class. With that said, any student who needs to record this class must first be found eligible by Access Services and share this eligibility with me. Class members must know that this class may be recorded under such circumstances, but that the person's privacy will be respected and not shared with the class.

Discrimination Policy

Bryn Mawr College is committed to providing an educational and employment environment free from discrimination and harassment based on protected characteristics. The College does not discriminate against any employee, applicant for employment, student, or applicant for admission on the basis of actual or perceived age, citizenship status, color, disability, gender identity/expression, genetic information, national origin, pregnancy or related conditions, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, veteran status, or any other characteristic protected by applicable federal, state, or local law.

This commitment is in accordance with federal civil rights laws, including Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, the Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Age Discrimination Act of 1975. <https://www.brynmawr.edu/inside/offices-services/civil-rights-title-ix/policies-inquiries>

Access Services

Bryn Mawr College is committed to providing equal access to students with a documented disability. If you need academic accommodations for a disability, you must first register with Access Services. You can email accessservices@brynmawr.edu to request an appointment to begin this confidential process. If eligible for accommodations per Access Services, you should schedule an appointment with me as early in the semester as possible to share your verification form and make appropriate arrangements. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and require advance notice to implement. More information can be obtained at the Access Services website. More information can be obtained at the Access Services website. (<http://www.brynmawr.edu/access-services/>)

Title IX Statement:

Bryn Mawr College is committed to providing an inclusive environment, free from sexual and gender-based discrimination. Title IX prohibits discrimination based on sex in any federally funded educational program or activity, and forms the basis for Bryn Mawr's policies and resources regarding sex discrimination.

The Bryn Mawr College Sexual Misconduct Policy prohibits Title IX sexual harassment, which includes sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, and stalking. Bryn Mawr's Policy is more extensive than Title IX, and also covers other gender-based misconduct.

<https://www.brynmawr.edu/inside/policies-guidelines-handbooks/sexual-misconduct>

Academic Policies

A comprehensive list of the college's academic policies may be found here:

<https://www.brynmawr.edu/inside/offices-services/student-success/academic-policies>.

Grading Scale:

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Letter Grade	Percentage Grade	4.0 Scaled Grade
A	93-100	4
A-	90-92.44	3.7
B+	87-89.44	3.3
B	83-86.44	3
B-	80-82.44	2.7
C+	77-79.44	2.3
C	73-76.44	2
C-	70-72.44	1.7
D+	67-69.44	1.3
D	63-66.44	1
D-	60-62.44	0
F	0-59.44	0

Acceptable and Unacceptable Use of AI

This AI policy reflects that this is a writing seminar, and we have to learn how to do things the hard way before we begin using shortcuts. Although this is a writing seminar, I am not a stickler for grammar. Rather this course is about thinking through problems and arguments, developing your voice and style, and organizing your thoughts. I want to hear *your* voice when I read, which is reflected in the AI policy below.

The use of generative AI tools is not permitted in this course for any activities, including the following:

- Impersonating you in classroom contexts, such as by using the tool to compose discussion board prompts assigned to you or content that you put into a Zoom chat.
- Completing group work that your group has assigned to you.

- Writing a draft, outline, or any version of a writing assignment.
 - Writing entire sentences, paragraphs or papers to complete class assignments.
- You are responsible for the information you submit based on an AI query (for instance, that it does not violate intellectual property laws, or contain misinformation or unethical content).

Any assignment that is found to have used generative AI tools in unauthorized ways will automatically receive a failing grade. Repeated abuse of the AI policy will result in an escalation with the college and Honor Board. When in doubt about permitted usage, please ask for clarification.

Beware of inaccuracies with AI tools in academic settings. Even assistive AI tools such as Grammarly may take it “too far”, recommending it rewrite a sentence over and over, until it is completely written by itself and not by you. Assistive AI is permitted only to check grammar and spelling, but it is up to you to preserve your voice, I recommend using basic spell-check such as that integrated in Microsoft Word.

Course Assignments and Grading

Writing Assignments (10%): These are smaller writing assignments you will be given that help you exercise your writing in varied forms.

Initial Diagnostic (2%)

Op-Ed (5%)

Annotated Bibliography Entry (3%)

Papers (45%): You will have three major papers throughout the semester. These will build in complexity and length while also exercising different areas of your writing skills. These grades will include any additional work you turn in to build the papers (outlines, drafts, etc.).

Paper #1 (10%)

Paper #2 (15%)

Paper #3 (20%)

In-Class Attendance and Participation (15%): A large part of your grade is attendance and participation. You must attend class and come prepared to participate in discussions. I will be evaluating participation and attendance in each class, so it is essential that you consistently give your best. You are allowed **one** unexcused absence throughout the semester; this absence will not hurt your grade, but any additional ones will. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to get notes from a classmate and stay up to date on your assignments. If you are more than 15 minutes late to class, it will be marked as an absence. Tardiness (less than 15 minutes) will also affect your grade. If you must miss part of class due to a doctor's appointment, please email me before class.

Conferencing and Reflection Entries (10%): Each day we will begin by having a brief writing exercise on a reflection question. You will write these in your notebooks (provided). I will not diligently read/grade these but rather glimpse them and if something sticks out, I'll comment. It is a space for you to explore the large questions in the class before we begin. Further you are required as part of the Emily Balch Seminars to attend 4 – 20-minute conferences with me throughout the year. Your attendance and participation in these will be a separate grade.

Reflection Entries (5%)

Conference Attendance and Participation (5%)

Final Portfolio (20%): Your final portfolio is your final assignment in the class. You will compile and revise Papers 1-3, while writing a short final paper that further reflects on your work and growth. This assignment will be due during Finals week.

Readings

We do not have any books required for purchase for this course. I will provide readings via PDF on Moodle. [Here is an article](#) about reading academic writing, including some helpful tips on how to generally approach the topic.

Course Schedule

****Assignments, readings are subject to change always check Moodle for the readings and up to date course activities.**

****Working Days** are listed as either “In-Class” or “No Class Meeting”. These are days dedicated to you working on an upcoming assignment. Some do not require us to meet in person (aka you have the day off and are expected to work at home) or some are working days in-class that will be dedicated to me teaching you a skill (writing an outline/draft, learning how to use Reference Managers, etc.). The days marked “Working Days, In-Class” are still required attendance.

Week #1 (8/31): Introduction and Initial Diagnostic

Tuesday: Intros, no readings!

Thursday:

****Initial Diagnostic due Sunday**

Week #2 (9/7): What is body politik?

Tuesday: Why are bodies political?

- Briggs, Laura. 2018. *How All Politics Became Reproductive Politics: From Welfare Reform to Foreclosure to Trump*. First paperback printing. Oakland, California: University of California Press. Introduction.

Thursday: When does the state enter the body?

- Barnett, Daly. 2022. “Security and Privacy Tips for People Seeking an Abortion”.

- “How Period Trackers Share Your Private Details.” 2026.
<https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20260715-how-period-trackers-share-womens-private-details> (August 5, 2026).

Week #3 (9/14): The State and Social Control

Tuesday: The Predatory State

- Hobbes, Leviathan. Excerpts.
- *Close Reading of Weber, Politics as a Vocation (In-Class)

Thursday:

- Migdal, State in Society. Excerpts

Week #4 (9/21): Population and Power

Tuesday: Why is the population a problem?

- Malthus, 1798, An Essay on the Principle of Population. Chapter 1.
- Bricker, Darrell Jay, and John Ibbitson. 2018. *Empty Planet: The Shock of Global Population Decline*. First edition. New York: Crown.

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Thursday:

- Sussman, Anna Louie, and By Anna Louie Sussman. 2019. “Opinion | The End of Babies.” *The New York Times*.
<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/11/16/opinion/sunday/capitalism-children.html>
- Berg, Anastasia, and Sophia Alvarez Boyd. 2024. “Opinion | Why Have Kids? A Liberal Case for Natalism.” *The New York Times*.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/09/16/opinion/anastasia-berg-falling-birth-rates-liberals.html>
- Talbot, Margaret. 2024. “J. D. Vance and the Right’s Call to Have More Babies.” *The New Yorker*. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/j-d-vance-and-the-rights-call-to-have-more-babies> (August 5, 2026).

**Op-Ed due Sunday

Week #5 (9/28): Reproduction and the Politics of Birth

Tuesday: Working Day, No Class Meeting.

Thursday: Pro and Anti Natalism

- Federici, Silvia. 2014. *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*. Second, revised edition. Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia. Chapter 2 (In-Class, Close Reading)
- Lee, Ji-Young (2024). A Brave New World? Pronatalism and the Future of Reproductive Technologies. *Humana.Mente - Journal of Philosophical Studies* 17 (46):25-53.

Week #6 (10/5): Abortion and State Authority

Tuesday: Abortion in Early America

- Mohr, James C. 1979. *Abortion in America: The Origins and Evolution of National Policy, 1800-1900*. Oxford [Oxfordshire] New York: Oxford University Press.

Thursday: Evolution of the Debate

- Dias, Elizabeth, and Lisa Lerer. 2024. *The Fall of Roe: The Rise of a New America*. First edition. New York: Flatiron Books.

**Paper #1 due Friday

Week #7 (10/12): Fall Break

Week #8 (10/19): Coercion, Incentives and Punishment

Tuesday: What the state needs to know.

- Scott, James C. 2020. *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. Veritas paperback edition. New Haven, CT London: Yale University Press.

Thursday: How the state coerces us.

- Leong, Pauline, and Krishnamurthy Sriramesh. 2006. "Romancing Singapore: When Yesterday's Success Becomes Today's Challenge." *Public Relations Review* 32(3): 246–53. doi:[10.1016/j.pubrev.2006.05.011](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2006.05.011).

Week #9 (10/26): Romania

Tuesday: Decree 770

- Kligman, Gail. 1998. *The Politics of Duplicity: Controlling Reproduction in Ceausescu's Romania*. 1st ed. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Thursday: Working Day, In-Class.

Week #10 (11/2): China

Tuesday: One Child Policy

- Greenhalgh, Susan. 2008. *Just One Child: Science and Policy in Deng's China*. ed. Susan Greenhalgh. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
doi:[10.1525/9780520941267](https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520941267).

Thursday: Working Day, In-Class.

**Paper #2 Due Sunday

Week #11 (11/9): Gender, Identity, and the State

Tuesday:

- Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.

Thursday:

- Johnson, Allan G. 2014. *The Gender Knot: Unraveling Our Patriarchal Legacy*. Third edition. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. Chp 2 Excerpts.
- Spade, Documenting Gender, 59 HASTINGS L.J. 731 (2008) Excerpts.

Week #12 (11/16): Sexuality, Morality, and the Law

Tuesday:

- Foucault, Michel. 2012. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. Westminister: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group. Part One

Thursday:

- <https://www.whobuiltamerica.org/item/a-virginia-court-investigates-thomasthomasine-hall/>
- *Lawrence et al v. Texas*

**Annotated Bibliography Entry Due Sunday

Week #13 (11/23): Working Week

Tuesday: Working Day, no in-class meeting.

Thursday: No Class- Thanksgiving

Week #14 (11/30): Citizenship, Race, and Belonging

Tuesday:

- "California Once Targeted Latinas for Forced Sterilization." *Smithsonian Magazine*. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/california-targeted-latinas-forced-sterilization-180968567/>
- "Reproductive Justice." *Sister Song*. <https://www.sistersong.net/reproductive-justice>

Thursday:

- Snorton, C. Riley. 2017. *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press. Intro.

**Paper #3 Due Sunday

Week #15 (12/7): Resistance and Survival

Tuesday:

- Scott, James C. 1985. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven (Conn.): Yale University press.

Thursday:

- Kaplan, Laura. 1997. *The Story of Jane: The Legendary Underground Feminist Abortion Service*. Chicago [Ill.]: the University of Chicago press.

**Final Portfolio due during Finals Week