

MUS 121: Writing About Queer and Trans Music  
Fall 2024, 3 units, 8/28/2024-12/21/2024, M, 1:40-4:25 PM



Poe M. Allphin (he/him), Adjunct Lecturer

Email [musqueens@gmail.com](mailto:musqueens@gmail.com) for questions and to submit assignments

Office hours by appointment on Zoom. All materials hosted on [Brightspace](#).

**Sick policy:** Please do not come to class if you are sick with something contagious. If you have covid, suspect you may have covid, the flu, a stomach bug, a nasty cold, strep throat, pinkeye, etc., please do not come to class. I will work with you to help you get caught up. If you have something that is non-contagious (such as a migraine, food poisoning, or a broken bone) it is up to you whether you come to class, although I encourage rest in these situations as well. The fewer students who come to class sick, the less likely it is that I will get sick and need to cancel class.

### Course Description

In this class, we will read, talk, and write about queer and trans popular musics (broadly construed, though mostly focused on the 20th and 21st-century U.S.). Throughout the semester, we will read various types of writing from autoethnographies to journal articles. We will also focus on identifying and evaluating arguments and sources used in the writings we will read throughout the semester. Students should emerge from this class with increased skills in research and critical reading and comfort writing in a range of styles.

### Expectations

As this is a weekly three-hour class, the time will be divided between lecture, discussion, and active writing. *Please bring your notebook and a writing implement to class (in addition to a laptop if you wish).* Since this is a writing course, the editing and revision stages are important components of each project, which is why the course paper is broken into several stages. Readings listed for each week should be done **before** class to stimulate a lively discussion. The two best ways to get better at writing are to read and to write, so we will be doing a lot of both this semester! ***Brief course expectations below, more details at the very end of the syllabus:***

- 1. Communicate! Let me know when you will be absent, when work will be late, if you are falling behind, or if you have questions.** If there is an emergency, first take care of yourself and others and then communicate with me when you can. You do not need to provide personal or medical details.
- 2. Ahead of time is best, later is second best. I want you to succeed in this course. Let me know if you have any specific accessibility needs, whether or not they are registered with The Office of Special Services for Students with Disabilities.**
- 3. You should have already used spell check on any typed work that you submit.**
- 4. You may not use ChatGPT or other AI.**
- 5. You must cite your sources and you may not plagiarize. Let me know if you are unsure of how to cite or paraphrase something.**

***Please note: I do not respond to emails on the weekends or evenings, but will respond to most weekday emails within 48 hours.***



## Assignments:

**10.15 & 12.16 | 1:1 Zoom Meetings (2 meetings = 10 pts)**

**9.09 | Week 1 Discussion (1 pt)**

**9.23 | Citation Zine (5 pts)**

**9.30 | First-person Piece (10 pts)**

**10.20 | Topic Proposal and Bibliography (12 pts)**

**10.28 | Intro and Lit Review (12 pts)**

**11.04 | Midterm Presentations (12 pts)**

**11.25 | Week 12 Discussion (1 pt)**

**12.09 | First Draft (12 pts)**

**12.20 | In-class Activities ('the notebook') (10 pts)**

**12.20 | Final Project (15 pts)**

The **final course project** could take many forms: an autoethnography or a research paper (10-15 pages), a podcast or short podcast series (with a typed transcript), etc. The methodology for this project could include surveys, interviews, music analysis, literary analysis, oral histories, archival work, theory, and more. Have another idea for a form or methodology? Let me know!

*Grading is mostly done on a completion basis. It is expected that you are incorporating or engaging with feedback from earlier drafts as you move towards the final project.*

## Legend

⇒ = in-class writing exercise

☒ = assignment due on Brightspace

## Resources

[Writing Center | Queens College, CUNY](#)

[Writing \(about music\) resource list](#)

[Digital and Physical Archives](#)

🔊 [Class Playlist](#)



## Course Schedule

**Week 0: 9.02** - no class, college closed

**Read:** this syllabus and introduction from Geffen, Sasha. *Glitter Up the Dark*.

**Listen:** [Gender Reveal Episode 1: Gender 101](#) (or read transcript [here](#))

**Watch:** Intro to MUS 121

**Primary Source Set:** spend time looking through [these](#) (at least the first page)

**Week 1: 9.09 | R&B, Rock, Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the 1950s and 1960s**

**Note:** \* no class meeting since Poe's away for a conference\*

☒ *discussion on Brightspace*

**Read:** Geffen, Sasha. Chapter 1: "Screaming the Beatles" in *Glitter Up the Dark*.

**Read:** Mahon, Maureen. "Rocking and Rolling with Big Mama Thornton" in *Black Diamond Queens*.

**Primary Source Set:** Watch opening of *Hard Day's Night* and listen to recordings mentioned in reading (on Brightspace).

**Week 2: 9.16 | 1st class at Queens • Queer/Trans Autoethnographies**

**Read:** Wark, McKenzie. "Xeno-Euphoria," in *Raving*. Duke University Press, 2023. You can also listen to "[Happy Flesh](#)" and follow along in the text!

*contains: mentions of sexual assault, sexual encounters, transphobia.*

**Read:** Tongson, Karen. "Goodbye to Love." In *Why Karen Carpenter Matters*. MIT, 2019.

**Week 3: 9.23 | The Gay Modernists**

Talk about (evaluating and using) primary and secondary sources

☒ *citation zine due*

⇒ make citation zines

**Read:** Hubbs, Nadine. "Introduction: Composing Oneself." In *The Queer Composition of America's Sound: Gay Modernists, American Music, and National Identity*, University of California Press, 2004.

**Read:** Hubbs, Nadine. "A French Connection: Modernist Codes in the Musical Closet." *GLQ* 1 June 2000; 6 (3): 389–412.

**Week 4: 9.30 | The Women's Music Movement**

☒ *short first-person piece due.*

⇒ topic brainstorming session

**Read:** Geffen, Sasha. "Butch Throats" in *Glitter Up the Dark*.

**Read:** Stone, Sandy. "Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto."



**Week 5: 10.07 | The Introduction and the Literature Review**

⇒ intro brainstorming session & writing exercises

**Read:** materials posted on this week's Brightspace module

**Read:** [How to Write a Research Article | Society of American Archivists](#)

**Week 6: 10.15 | 1:1 Zoom meetings on Tuesday**

**\*no class Monday, college closed\***

☒ *topic/project proposal and preliminary bibliography due end of week (10.20)*

**Week 7: 10.21 | Trans Voices and Race**

**Read:** Pennington, Stephan. "Willmer Broadnax, Midcentury Gospel, and Black Trans/Masculinities." *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 22, no. 1 (2018): 117–25. OR listen: OFTV 8: Spirit of Gold

**Read:** Awkward-Rich, Cameron. "'She of the Pants and No Voice': Jack Bee Garland's Disability Drag." *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 7, no. 1 (2020): 20-36.

**Week 8: 10.28 | Trans Voices and Bodily Autonomy**

☒ *draft of intro and lit review due*

**Read:** Wilbourne, Emily, "The Queer History of the Castrato" in Fred Everett Maus, and Sheila Whiteley (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Queerness* (2022; online edn, Oxford Academic, 11 Jan. 2018).

**Read:** Allphin, Poe M., "This Is Your Voice on T: Sonic Transition Timelines and Narratives of the Natural." *Resonance* 1 June 2024; 5 (2): 123–142.

**Week 9: 11.04 | Midterm Presentations**

☒ *slides or notes from five-minute presentation due*

**Week 10: 11.11 | Music, Memory, and AIDS**

**Read:** Cifor, Marika. "Introduction: For the Record: AIDS, Archives, and Vital Nostalgia." In *Viral Cultures: Activist Archiving in the Age of AIDS*, 1–34. University of Minnesota Press, 2022. fierce pussy's *For the Record* graphic mentioned by Cifor: [Visual AIDS](#).

**Week 11: 11.18 | Janelle Monáe, Afrofuturism, and Cyborg Realness**

**Read:** Geffen, Sasha. *Glitter Up the Dark*, Chapter 5.

**Read:** Murchison, Gayle. "Let's Flip It! Quare Emancipations: Black Queer Traditions, Afrofuturisms, Janelle Monáe to Labelle." *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 22 (2018): 79-9.

**Read:** Valnes, Matthew "Janelle Monáe and Afro-Sonic Feminist Funk." *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 29, no. 3 (2017).



## Week 12: 11.25 | Queer/Trans Musical Theatre

☒ *discussion on Brightspace*

**Listen:** *Fun Home*

**Peruse:** Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*

**Listen:** *A Strange Loop*.

**Read:** Phillips, Maya. "'A Strange Loop' Review: A Dazzling Ride on a Mental Merry-Go-Round." *The New York Times*, April 27, 2022.

## Week 13: 12.02 | Conclusions and Writing Workshop

**Read:** materials posted on this week's Brightspace module

*Bring in-progress drafts*

## Week 14: 12.09 | Peer Review

☒ *first full draft due*

## Week 15: 12.16 | 1:1 Zoom meetings in place of class

12.20: ☒ **final version of project due**

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**Please let me know at any point if you have accessibility needs that are not being met by this course**, whether or not they are accommodations through The Office of Special Services for Students with Disabilities. QC Policy: Candidates with disabilities needing academic accommodation should: 1) register with and provide documentation to the Special Services Office, Frese Hall, Room 111; 2) bring a letter to the instructor indicating the need for accommodation and what type. This should be done during the first week of class. For more information about services available to Queens College candidates, visit the website, or contact: Special Services Office: Wahidur Roni, Frese Hall, Room 111; [wahidur.roni@qc.cuny.edu](mailto:wahidur.roni@qc.cuny.edu).

**No plagiarism.** For the purposes of this class, this includes using AI such as ChatGPT. If you are having trouble finding quality sources, do not know how to paraphrase, or are unsure of how to properly cite your sources, reach out to me and we can work on that together. Never copy and paste from the internet or anywhere else without 1) critically evaluating your source, 2) indicating that it is a quote by putting it in quotation marks (" "), and 3) showing where you got the information by citing the source. If you paraphrase (significantly rewrite but use the information), you still need to cite your source (indicate where you got the information). I recommend Chicago Style for citations, but if you are more familiar with another style, use that one. CUNY Policy: Academic Dishonesty is prohibited in The City University of New York and is punishable by penalties, including failing grades, suspension, and expulsion as provided here.