History 512:375: Rutgers University
Gay & Lesbian History

History 375 introduces students to gay/lesbian/transgender/bisexual history, or what I will be calling queer history. Our focus will be on North America, although we will venture into the territory of the transnational as well. Students will gain a firm grasp of the trajectory of queer history since the mid-19th century, and of the ways in which this history is a critical part of the larger American story. You will become familiar with the major debates about definition and methodology within the field of queer history. Some of these include: What are we studying when we study queer history? To what extent should queer theory’s definitional move away from “identity” and towards “acts” influence the writing of this history? How big a challenge does the category of transgender pose to the field? For example, might some of those people usually categorized as gay or lesbian be better understood as transgender? Historically what has been the relationship between gay men and lesbians, and how has it shifted? Has the spatial orientation of queer history towards congestion (e.g. urban spaces) kept us from seeing the ways in which queer life often involves circulation between small towns and rural spaces and bigger cities? Does the periodization of queer history shift when we include understudied areas such as the South? Did the commodification of queer life, especially in the years after the Stonewall uprising, enabled or disabled movement for gay and lesbian liberation? Along the way we will pay attention to the critical issue of what constitutes convincing evidence when we are studying intimate life, an area marked by silences and reticence.

Please note that this class will consist of lectures and discussion. Course requirements include active participation in class discussion, an in-class midterm exam, in-class quizzes, Sakai assignments, and one 6-8 page paper based only upon course readings. I’ll expect you to come to class prepared to respond to questions that I’ll have set up in advance as reading prompts. Class participation and attendance are not incidental and will have an impact upon your grade.