

CARLETON UNIVERSITY
Faculty of Public Affairs
Department of Law and Legal Studies

**LAWS 6002 – Law, Regulation and Governance
Winter 2013**

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“Biopolitics is a strange term” Jodi Dean asserts in a 2010 essay in *Krisis* (2). She is signaling the contemporary proliferation of the notion of biopolitics through an incredibly wide range of social science and humanities writing. The term is used differently by different authors, and sometimes in conflicting ways. This course takes as a starting premise that biopolitics is a concept worth having in one’s intellectual toolbox and aims to assist students in sorting out its intricacies, engagements and critiques.

While the relationship between life and politics has a much longer intellectual history, most of the work specifically taking up ‘biopolitics’ is indebted to the ideas of Michel Foucault. In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (1986) and in several lectures given at the Collège de France in the 1970s (Foucault, 2003), Foucault offers the notion of biopower to demarcate a field of rationalized governmental activity beginning at the end of the eighteenth century whereby vital characteristics of human life – health, reproduction, death, sexuality, and so on – are brought within regimes of power and governance. “Biopower brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge/power an agent of transformation of human life Modern man is an animal whose politics places his existence in question” (1986: 143). Individual human beings are not the objects of governance, but rather their biological features, which can then be measured and aggregated at the level of population.

Foucault’s ideas have been applied, extended and critiqued in the ensuing decades by authors such as Giorgio Agamben, Gilles Deleuze, Donna Haraway, Michael Hardt and Anthony Negri, Achielle Mbembe, Elizabeth A. Povinelli, and Roberto Esposito, among others.

This turn to a new episteme of political rationality focused on the regulation and distribution of forms of life has implications for issues as diverse as euthanasia, genetic modification and biotechnology, environmentalism, international human rights, pregnancy and abortion, queer subjectivity, incarceration and war, terror and torture.

This seminar is intended as an advanced introduction to the concept of biopolitics mobilized through a collaborative close reading of a number of influential book-length works:

- We will begin by reading Thomas Lemke's 2011 book, *Biopolitics: An Advanced Introduction* (2012) in order to develop a shared "roadmap" to the various intellectual threads contributing to, and the lines of flight extending from, the intersection of life and politics;
- We will then tackle, Foucault's *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-79* (2008) working through his foundational ideas for ourselves;
- We will then collectively examine Nikolas Rose's *The Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Power and Subjectivity in the Twenty-First Century* (2007) as an accessible application and development of biopolitics in relation to the intersection of medicine, human life and biotechnology.
- Finally, we will review the 2011 collection, *Beyond Biopolitics: Essays on the Governance of Life and Death*, edited by Patricia Ticineto Clough and Craig Willse to explore what happens to biopolitics under advanced neoliberalism. The range of case studies and different perspectives in this collection will expose students to a variety of further applications and critical engagements in the contemporary governmental moment.

The final weeks of the course will feature presentations by members of the class on specific biopolitical topics of their choice that will ground their research essays.

Evaluation in the course will be as follows: classroom engagement and discussion 40%; two reading responses 20% (10% each); and a final paper 40%.

If you have any questions about the course, please do not hesitate to contact me at Sheryl_hamilton@carleton.ca.