

Introduction to Gender & Women's Studies

BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

The City University of New York

Department of Social Sciences, Human Services and Criminal Justice

GWS 100 0504/0505

Fall 2021

Professor C Ray Borck, Ph.D.

cborck@bmcc.cuny.edu

Fully Online, Asynchronous

COURSE DESCRIPTION: This introductory level, interdisciplinary course explores the basic concepts and perspectives of Gender & Women's Studies from an intersectional angle; that is, examining the ways in which gender intersects with race, ethnicity, nationality, class, sexuality, sexual identity, disability, and other categories. The concepts of gender - the roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a society considers appropriate for men and women - privilege and oppression, intersectionality, and feminist praxis will be at the core of this course. After a background in the history and significance of Gender & Women's Studies as a field of study, you will learn to critically examine how institutionalized privilege and oppression shape individual lives and intersecting identity categories.

REQUIRED TEXTS: All required texts are posted as PDFs under Course Materials. You are not required to purchase any books for this course. However, you are required to watch films, so you may need to rent/purchase films online if you cannot find them available for free. Finding the films is your responsibility. Many of them are available on YouTube, Amazon, Netflix, Hulu, etc. You will also listen to podcasts - many (if not all) of them are available online for free. Feel free to reach out to me via email if you have any trouble accessing the materials for the course. I will be able to help you.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS: This course is "asynchronous" distance learning, meaning that the entire course will take place online, with no "face to face" component via Zoom or any other platform. All of the content for the course is on **Blackboard** (although you will have to venture into other parts of the Internet in search of films and podcasts).

Since we never "meet," in some ways this course resembles an Independent Study. Usually when I am teaching 30 students in a classroom I assign everyone to do the same readings and watch the same films because we are all learning the same things together. And every semester I teach my courses differently (because otherwise I get bored). I don't have a particular agenda about "the right way" to teach Introduction to Gender & Women's Studies - there are a million ways to do it! (This is part of what makes teaching so fun and exciting for me).

Choose your own adventure:

As such, I have designed this course as a sort of "Choose Your Own Adventure" course. Here's what I mean: You all have the same *types* of assignments - more details about that below - but briefly, these assignments require you to read some texts (articles or chapters), watch films, and listen to podcast episodes. But since you are all out there doing this one your own, instead of me choosing exactly what you will read, watch and listen to, I have compiled (below) well-curated (if I do say so myself) lists of material for the class *that **you** will choose from*. I have uploaded all of the available readings to Blackboard so you are not responsible for locating those, but you will have to find the films and podcasts that you choose.

Types of Assignments:

You will write *Film Critiques*, *Podcast Reflections*, and *Reading Responses* (as well as a *Gender Autobiography* at the end of the semester (more specific instructions on all of that below), but you will choose which films you watch, which podcast episodes you listen to, and which readings you read (although they must be from one of the lists below). We have no traditional “midterm,” “final,” or “tests.” I find the Blackboard Discussion Board to be relatively useless (for our purposes), so we will not use it.

Before you really dive into any specific material, you should spend some time looking at the reading, film and podcast options (this may require some googling) so that you can curate the class you want. This is your assignment for the first week. You will create the class of your dreams. Your personal class may be one that is all about *gender and race*, or *gender and sexuality*, or *gender inequality*, or *feminism*, or *sexual violence*, or *masculinity*, or *gender identity*, or *transgender issues*, or *intersex issues*, or *gender history*, or *feminist theory*, or *LGBTQIA2S+ movements*, or *women’s liberation*, or *the sexual revolution*, or *reproduction / reproductive rights*, *virginity*, *erectile dysfunction*, *manscaping*, *mansplaining*, *cat calling*, *drag*, *crossdressing*, *ball culture*, *sex hormones*, and more! You’re welcome.

Now let’s get into the nitty gritty of the assignments. First is our schedule, assignment due dates, and how much each assignment is worth (it all adds up to 100%) in the table below, then there are some more elaborated instructions:

CLASS SCHEDULE, ASSIGNMENTS, CREDIT

Weeks (Aug 25-Dec 21)	Assignments	Credit
1: Aug 25-31	Spend the first week reading and understanding this syllabus, looking through the materials and assignments on Blackboard, and beginning to choose and locate the materials you want to use for your assignments. In short: Figure out what’s going on in this class (and your other classes, and your life outside of class!) and begin to plan and schedule and manage your time (<i>I cannot stress the importance of time management enough</i>).	
2: Sep 1-7	Film Critique 1	5%
3: Sep 8-14	Podcast Reflection 1	6%
4: Sep 15-21	Reading Response 1	7%
5: Sep 22-28	Film Critique 2	5%
6: Sep 29-Oct 5	Podcast Reflection 2	6%
7: Oct 6-12	Reading Response 2	7%
8: Oct 13-19	Film Critique 3	5%
9: Oct 20-26	Podcast Reflection 3	6%

10: Oct 27-Nov 2	Reading Response 3	7%
11: Nov 3-9	Film Critique 4	5%
12: Nov 10-16	Podcast Reflection 4	6%
13: Nov 17-23	Reading Response 4	7%
14: Nov 24-30	Film Critique 5	5%
15: Dec 1-7	Podcast Reflection 5	6%
16: Dec 8-14	Reading Response 5	7%
17: Dec 15-21 (Finals Week)	Gender Autobiography	10%
	All late/make-up work must be submitted by Dec 21	

As you can see, you have one assignment per week. Personally, I think this is very manageable, but remember that you will spend a couple hours reading/watching/listening and then (at least) a couple hours writing your assignments - manage your time accordingly.

Doing well in school is almost exclusively about time management. Actually doing well in life is almost exclusively about time management. Remember this forever.

You will write 5 Film Critiques, 5 Podcast Reflections, and 5 Reading Responses. The instructions for each of these types of assignments are different (e.g. a podcast reflection is different than a reading response), but within type, the instructions are the same (i.e. the instructions for all film critiques are the same even though you will watch a different film for each one).

Then you have a Gender Autobiography Assignment as your final assignment.

Trigger Warning:

Many of these materials should disturb, disrupt, disorient, confuse, or upset you. However, take care of yourself and skip anything too emotionally harrowing. Hopefully you will also experience moments of inspiration, empowerment, excitement, righteousness, growth, understanding, compassion, identification, and resonance.

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Assignments and Instructions:

1. Film Critiques (5 Total, 5 points each, 25% of your overall grade)

For each Film Critique you will choose one film from the list below (for a total of 5). You will then locate your chosen film online and watch it. As you are watching the film, take notes, especially notes that will help you answer the questions you will have to answer in your short papers, which are.....

1. What is the overall point/purpose/perspective/lesson of the film?
2. What are all of the ways that it is relevant to the study of gender and society?
3. What are the three most important things that you learned while watching the film?
4. What kind of impact/influence do you think this film has on its viewers? (Include the impact it had on you).
5. To what extent do you agree/disagree on the perspective/content/message? Explain your reasoning.

For each assignment, copy and paste these questions into whatever word processor you use (Word, google docs, Pages, etc) and type a one-paragraph (at least) response to each of the questions. Your overall word count for each assignment should be around 500-700 words. So the assignments are basically organized as a series of short-answers (as opposed to an “essay”).

Formatting: Font should be 12 point. Spacing should be 1.5.

Upload them on Blackboard by the due date (which is always by 11:59 pm on the Tuesday of the week during which the assignment is scheduled—our weeks run Wednesdays to Tuesdays because the semester starts on a Wednesday).

You are welcome to turn in any assignments early. I will accept late assignments but they may be marked down for being late. Plan to stay ahead so that you don't fall behind.

Here is the list of films you will choose from. I have not included synopses so I recommend that you google each of the titles to get a sense of what they are about before you choose which five you will watch for this class, and in what order. I have bolded my personal favorites.

- Boys Don't Cry
- The Brandon Teena Story
- Breaking Free
- But I'm A Cheerleader
- **The Danish Girl**
- **The Death and Life of Marsha P. Johnson**
- **Disclosure**
- Feminists: What Were They Thinking?
- Girl Rising
- **Gender Revolution** (this is a good primer/introductory film that I often show at the beginning of classes)
- Generation M
- **Hedwig**
- **How to Survive a Plague**
- **Hip Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes** (a little dated but very good)
- India's Daughter
- **Intersexion** (highly recommend—you will learn so much!)
- Live Nude Girls Unite
- **The Mask You Live In**
- **Milk**
- **Miss Representation**
- **Moonlight**
- On the Basis of Sex

- **Paris is Burning** (a classic and just so much fun!)
- **Pussy Riot: A Punk Prayer**
- Real Boy
- She's Beautiful When She's Angry
- Suffragette
- Transformer
- **Ukraine Is Not A Brothel**
- You Don't Know Dick

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2. Podcast Reflections (5 Total, 6 points each, 30% of your overall grade)

These are the instructions for each of your reflections:

At the top of your paper write the title of the podcast and episode you listened to, then write a one-paragraph summary of the content of the episode. Then answer the following questions:

1. What does this episode teach us about gender and society?
2. What information is presented?
3. What is the perspective of the hosts or story-tellers?
4. What is the historical and/or cultural significance of the content?

Your overall word count for each assignment should be around 500-700 words.

Many of these podcasts have transcripts available (but unfortunately not all of them) — this can be particularly helpful for students learning English.

Similarly, many of the films can be viewed in a different language or with subtitles.

CHOOSE FROM THE FOLLOWING LIST:

PODCAST NAME	EPISODE TITLE	DATE / NUMBER	SYNOPSIS
You're Wrong About (Do yourself a huge favor and listen to at least one of the episodes of this podcast — this is a suggestion not a requirement).	Cancel Culture (Very smart, very relevant)	June 7 2021	
You're Wrong About	The Chicks vs.	May 3 2021	

	The Iraq War		
You're Wrong About	The "Twinkie Defense"	Nov 19 2020	
You're Wrong About	Sex Offenders	Aug 7 2019	
You're Wrong About	The Stonewall Uprising	June 27 2019	(one of the best sources I have encountered on the subject)
You're Wrong About	Sexting	June 11 2019	
You're Wrong About	Roe v. Wade	Nov 21 2018	
You're Wrong About	The Duke Lacrosse Rape Case	Nov 14 2018	
This American Life (not technically a podcast but arguably one of the best radio programs of all time)	I enjoy being a girl, sort of	Apr 10 1998	https://www.thisamericanlife.org/99/i-enjoy-being-a-girl-sort-of
This American Life	Testosterone	Aug 30 2002	https://www.thisamericanlife.org/220/testosterone
Radiolab	Blame	Sep 12 2013	Our beliefs on blame are interrogated in three acts, including an examination of child pornography, a new sector of legal reasoning — neurolaw — that could change how we punish criminals, and an appraisal of forgiveness that will make even the most generous spirits feel impossibly unevolved.
Invisibilia	The Power of Categories		follows the story of Paige, who identifies as both male and female.
Hidden Brain	The Edge of Gender	Nov 19 2018	Gender is one of the first things we notice about the people around us. But where do our ideas about gender come from?

TED Radio Hour	Gender, Power, and Fairness	Feb 1 2019	The Me Too movement has changed the way we think and talk about gender discrimination.
Stuff You Should Know	How the Gender Pay Gap Works	Apr 12 2016	The gender pay gap is the amount of time into the next year a woman must work to earn as much as a man did the previous year.
Stuff You Should Know	How Gender Reassignment Works	Oct 10 2010	A comprehensive look at gender identity “disorders” and the gender reassignment process.

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3. Reading Responses (5 total, 7 points each, 35% of your overall grade)

You have *a lot* of choices here. These texts vary in length and difficulty. In some cases I may have uploaded an entire book - if that’s the case, you’re only required to read one of the chapters and you can choose which one. But for the most part, these are individual chapters, essays, and articles that I have used in my teaching (and research) over the years. I encourage you to challenge yourself.

A note on reading:

Some of these texts are very difficult. For example, I have read Donna Haraway’s *Cyborg Manifesto* countless times over the past 15 years and sometimes I still feel like I have no idea what she’s talking about. That’s okay. Even when you are confused, keep reading. You can also read about the readings online — a good way to support your comprehension. My goal is to expose you to some of these texts, but you won’t master them (although I definitely dare you to). Another tip: If you are struggling, after each paragraph, write a little summary for yourself. The worst thing you can do is get frustrated and then totally disengage or start cheating. We must learn to tolerate our own frustration, boredom, and stupidity (I have to remind myself of this everyday).

Before reading the texts, you should do a little googling to read about the author and the publication - you may also need to google to answer some of the response questions.

For each text, your response will answer the following questions.....

1. What is the overall purpose/thesis/point of the chapter/essay/article?
2. *How* does the author (or authors) make their point(s)? What do they discuss? What evidence and examples do they give?
3. How does the author conceptualize of women? men? gender?

4. What is your personal reaction to the piece? How does it make you feel? To what extent do you agree/disagree and why?

You should format these like you format the other assignments described above — copy and paste the questions into a document and type your responses as short-answers below each question. Your overall word count for each assignment should be around 500-700 words.

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--interlude--

****police siren alert!****

—(woop woop)—

This is important: and this goes for all assignments: **Your writing needs to demonstrate serious engagement with the text/film/podcast episode. It should be immediately obvious to me that you read/watched/listened carefully, took notes, thought critically, drafted, edited and revised. Your work should be as thorough and thoughtful as possible.** Don't just write something down to get the assignment done. **You will be graded on the extent to which your assignments demonstrate a focused engagement.** And for the love of goodness, **never plagiarize.** If it looks like you googled for the easiest answers, didn't really read/watch/listen, just read some summaries online, or are answering the questions as quickly and easily as possible, or if you plagiarize (goddess forbid!)¹ — none of that will count as having even attempted the assignment. I will give you a zero and you won't have the opportunity to redo it. **You should always be doing the very best job that you can do.** That's another life tip.

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Which brings us to the question of my **feedback on your assignments.** If you are doing something wrong, I will explain it in the comments. Otherwise, if you are doing everything right, I might just give you a grade and move on, so, **if you want feedback, please write that in the “notes” section of the assignment**—here you can ask specific questions or ask for general feedback. The reason I ask that you do this if you want feedback is because, while I am happy to give feedback, it is time consuming, and some students simply don't care (which is totally fine!) and just want their grade. So

¹ We (professors) know that **most students plagiarize because they are insecure, fearful and/or out of time.** This is understandable, we (humans) all experience these feelings and stresses. **It's your job to give it a shot, fake it 'til you make it, risk failure, and make the time.**

(Another life tip: **When you have no confidence, pretend you have confidence.**)

Here's the reason plagiarism makes (some/many/most) professors so angry/emotional: It's basically the equivalent of a student writing a personal letter to the professor that says,

“I think you are stupid and don't really read my assignments. I also don't really care that much about this topic that you care about deeply and spent the majority of your life thinking, writing, and teaching about. I have no respect for myself or others.”*

(Another life tip: **When you have no self-respect, pretend you have self-respect.**)

*Granted, this does happen in the profession so you might get away with it.

instead of using a lot of time giving comments on every single assignment, I would rather know in advance who really wants feedback and who doesn't.

Here are your reading choices, again I have highlighted my favorites which has more to do with my personal interests than in the quality of the writing, I will admit.

- *Independent Woman* by Simone de Beauvoir
- *Mapping the Margins* by Kimberlie Crenshaw (this is the text that coined "intersectionality")
- ***The Politics of Black Feminist Thought* by Patricia Hill Collins**
- ***Subjects of Sex, Gender, Desire* by Judith Butler**
- *Cyborg Manifesto* by Donna Haraway
- *A Selection of Female Masculinity* by Jack (formerly Judith) Halberstam
- *The Tanner Lectures* by Dorothy Allison
- *A Selection from Intercourse* by Andrea Dworkin
- *The Uses of Anger* by Audre Lorde
- *The Meaning of Emancipation According to Black Women* by Angela Davis
- The first several chapters of *Feminism is for Everybody* by bell hooks
- *Sexual Difference and Ontology* by Alenka Zupancic
- ***On Liking Women* by Andrea Long Chu**
- *Skirt Chasers* by Julia Serano
- *Until Black Women Are Free, None of Us Will Be Free* - New Yorker
- *Feminist Philosophy* - Stanford Encyclopedia
- *Woman as Other* - Simone de Beauvoir
- *A Hundred Years of Transgender History* - Susan Stryker (Ch. 2)
- *An Introduction to Transgender Terms and Concepts* - Susan Stryker (Ch. 1)
- ***Do You Get to Choose How Big Your Penis Will Be* - C Ray Borck (yours truly)**
- ***Laboring Now: Current Cultural Constructions of Pregnancy, Birth and Mothering* - Barbara Katz Rothman**
- ***A Brief History of Virginity Loss***
- ***Spill: scenes of black feminist fugitivity* by alexis pauline gumbs**
- ***This is my voice on T* - C Ray Borck (yours truly) & Lisa Jean Moore**
- ***Doing Justice to Someone: Sex Reassignment and Allegories of Transsexuality* - Judith Butler (one of my favorite pieces of writing)**
- ***Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire* - Judith Butler**
- ***Putting 'Daddy' in the Cart: Ordering Sperm Online* - Lisa Jean Moore and Marlana Grady**
- ***Resisting Medicine, Re/modeling Gender* - Dean Spade**
- *Clitoral Conventions and Transgressions; Graphic Representations in Anatomy Texts 1900-1991* - Lisa Jean Moore and Adele E Clarke
- *How Gender Structures the Prison System* - Angela Davis
- ***The Rise of Erectile Dysfunction***
- *Assume the Position: The Changing Contours of Sexual Violence* - Patricia Hill Collins
- *Regulating Motherhood: A Foucauldian Analysis of the Social Construction of the Mother* - Eliza Garwood
- *Suicide by mass murder: masculinity, aggrieved entitlement, and rampage school shootings*

- Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: And Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory - Judith Butler
- **Homie - Danez Smith** ([A gorgeous book of poetry](#))
- **Diagnosing Desire** (selection) - **Alyson Spurgas**

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4. Gender Autobiography (1, 10% of your overall grade)

You will write an autobiographical essay about your own gender identity. The purpose of this assignment is for you to apply some of what we have learned thus far in the course to your own self, subjectivity, development and identity.

Below is a list of questions you should consider addressing in your essay. Please note: You are not required to answer all of these questions. You should write about the questions that are most interesting to you.

You have a lot of freedom in how you choose to organize the assignment. **One caution:** Be mindful that your essay stays on the topic of your own gender identity. When you find your narrative wandering, bring your analysis back to the task at hand.

I recommend that you start out by free-writing unselfconsciously, edit out the extraneous, identify your central insights, and elaborate from there.

- What gender were you assigned at birth? Who decided? Based on what information did they make the decision? How did your guardians/parents feel about your sex/gender? What expectations did they have of you and your life based on what sex you were assigned at birth? (If possible and desirable, call them up and have a conversation about it. Find out what they say about these questions. Reflect on these conversations in your analysis).
- How do you think your life would have been different if you had been born a different sex/gender?
- What was your gender socialization like during early childhood? When is the first time you became aware of your gender or can remember thinking “I am a girl” or “I am a boy”? Where were you? How did you find out you were a boy/girl? What did you think about this/these discovery/ies?
- What do you consider to be the main gender milestones throughout your life? What were the defining moments of your gender? When you think of your own gender identity, what are the specific memories that you have and why are they meaningful to you?
- What are your gender insecurities and where do they stem from?

- Are there ways that you are gender-nonconforming? How? Why?
- In what ways is your gender stereotypical? How? Why?
- How are you treated because of your gender? What are aspects of this treatment do you like/dislike?
- What choices can/do you make about your gender? *How* do you *do* your gender? What *kind* of man or woman (and/or non-binary, etc) are you? What kind of man/woman/etc do you want or try to be? What aspects of your gender are important to you? What accounts for their import?
- Whose gender do you admire (this could be someone you know in your life or a famous person or a character—whatever)? What is admirable about this gender?
- How is your gender influenced by other aspects of your identity (e.g. your race, sexuality, age, culture, religion, ethnicity, etc)? Cue intersectionality.
- Does this assignment feel difficult for some reason? Do any of these questions piss you off? Great. Write about it.

Formatting guidelines: 5-10 pages (that's 1,250-2,500 words). Use headings that break your paper into sections. You should decide which of the above questions are most interesting to you, what stories you want to tell, in what order, etc. I'd say just start writing and see what happens. After you draft it, read what you have written and then write an introduction telling the reader (Yours Truly) what's to come.

Be brave. Get creative.

Use concepts and ideas that came to you during the course. Tie readings, films and podcast episodes into your essay about yourself. i.e. describe parts of this course (and/or other courses/books/art/film/media) that have impacted the way that you think about your own gender identity.

This is really an essay about you, but lean on course materials where it is useful or helpful.

I encourage you to be vulnerable and personal but obviously don't disclose anything you don't feel comfortable sharing with me.

Feel free to include copies of photos, drawings, poems, art, etc.

You should give your paper a snappy title, then the introduction, then a header summarizing the theme of each section, and the conclusion. Again, you can look at my *Do you get to choose* essay for an example of how this is done.

Bibliography: Your bibliography is just a list of the readings you read, films you watched, and podcasts you listened to. It doesn't need to be formatted in any special way - you can just list the titles.

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Some general information I am required to include on syllabi:

Course Student Learning Outcomes (Students will be able to...)	Measurements (means of assessment for student learning outcomes listed in first column)
1. Attend class prepared to critically analyze course texts via writing and discussion	1. Completion of assignments
2. demonstrate engagement with the assigned text	2. Extent to which engagement of the texts are evidenced in the assignments

3. demonstrate via writing a critical understanding of the course texts and their relations, interconnections and contradictions	3. Written assignments
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Below are the college's general education learning outcomes, the outcomes that are checked in the left-hand column indicate goals that will be covered and assessed in this course. (Check at least one.)

	General Education Learning Outcomes	Measurements (means of assessment for general education goals listed in first column)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Communication Skills- Students will be able to write, read, listen and speak critically and effectively.	assignments
<input type="checkbox"/>	Social and Behavioral Sciences- Students will be able to apply the concepts and methods of the social sciences.	assignments

Evaluation and Requirements of Students BMCC is committed to the health and well-being of all students. It is common for everyone to seek assistance at some point in their life, and there are free and confidential services on campus that can help.

Single Stop www.bmcc.cuny.edu/singlestop, room S230, 212-220-8195. If you are having problems with food or housing insecurity, finances, health insurance or anything else that might get in the way of your studies at BMCC, come by the Single Stop Office for advice and assistance. Assistance is also available through the Office of Student Affairs, S350, 212-220-8130.

Counseling Center www.bmcc.cuny.edu/counseling, room S343, 212-220-8140. Counselors assist students in addressing psychological and adjustment issues (i.e., depression, anxiety, and relationships) and can help with stress, time management and more. Counselors are available for walk-in visits.

Office of Compliance and Diversity www.bmcc.cuny.edu/aac, room S701, 212-220-1236. BMCC is committed to promoting a diverse and inclusive learning environment free of unlawful discrimination/harassment, including sexual harassment, where all students are treated fairly. For information about BMCC's policies and resources, or to request additional assistance in this area, please visit or call the office, or email olevy@bmcc.cuny.edu, or twade@bmcc.cuny.edu. If you need immediate assistance, please contact BMCC Public safety at 212-220-8080.

Office of Accessibility www.bmcc.cuny.edu/accessibility, room N360 (accessible entrance: 77 Harrison Street), 212-220-8180. This office collaborates with students who have documented disabilities, to coordinate support services, reasonable accommodations, and programs that enable

equal access to education and college life. To request an accommodation due to a documented disability, please visit or call the office.

BMCC Policy on Plagiarism and Academic Integrity Statement Plagiarism is the presentation of someone else's ideas, words or artistic, scientific, or technical work as one's own creation. Using the idea or work of another is permissible only when the original author is identified. Paraphrasing and summarizing, as well as direct quotations, require citations to the original source. Plagiarism may be intentional or unintentional. Lack of dishonest intent does not necessarily absolve a student of responsibility for plagiarism. Students who are unsure how and when to provide documentation are advised to consult with their instructors. The library has guides designed to help students to appropriately identify a cited work. The full policy can be found on BMCC's Website, www.bmcc.cuny.edu. For further information on integrity and behavior, please consult the college bulletin (also available online).