Getting to Know Each Other:

how identity shapes knowledge and ignorance in today’s social world

This course examines the relationship between social identity and epistemology. Specifically, the course asks: What is an epistemic standpoint? Or, rather, what is the role of social identity in constructing and disrupting systems of knowledge and ignorance? And, how do various social identities give access, or prevent access, to facts about the world? We will look at the relationship between knowledge possession and various identity traits like gender, sex, ability, race, and class, asking whether it’s possible to understand each other across such different standpoints. We will also consider whether intersections between multiple modes of identity challenge standpoint theory as a helpful theoretical tool. Furthermore, we will ask whether its possible for individuals to be harmed as “knowers” in virtue of their social identity? If so, how might we resist such epistemic harm? Finally, we will think together about how we might resist identity-based ignorance. Individuals should be prepared to reflect upon their own identity-based knowledge and ignorance as part of the course.

We will read on the topic from a variety of disciplines in the humanities including philosophy, queer theory, sociology, and anthropology, as well as from spaces outside of the academy. We will begin with some preliminary background on Marx’s dialectical materialism as its taken up by Nancy Hartstock, and then Black Feminism in the work of the Combahee River Collective. After receiving input from students about their own interests and experience at the start of the term, I will determine, from [this](https://criticaltheory.northwestern.edu/documents/critical-epistemology-lexiconjan-2019.pdf) working bibliography (particularly from the ‘epistemology of social identity’ sub-sections), which readings make the most sense for our group. Among other selected works, we will almost certainly read excerpts from Sandra Harding’s *Feminist Standpoint Reader*, Patricia Hill-Collins’ *Black Feminist Thought*, Eve Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet*, Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera*, and Charles Mills’ “White Ignorance” in thinking about various social identities as they related to epistemic advantage and disadvantage. In thinking about epistemic harm and forms of resistance, we will read works like Miranda Fricker’s *Epistemic Injustice,* Kristie Dotson’s recent work,José Medina’s *The Epistemology of Resistance,* Judith Butler’s *Undoing Gender*, Maria Lugones’ *Pilgramages*, and Boaventura De Sousa Santos’ *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide*, among other possible selections.