

METHODS IN RELIGIOUS AND THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

A DOCTORAL SEMINAR TH9011 Spring Semester 2020 Princeton Theological Seminary Theology Department/Religion and Society Program Thursday 2:00 – 4:50 p.m.

Professor Mark Lewis Taylor

Office: Hodge 115 Phone: 497-7918

PURPOSES

- 1) To examine *major intellectual currents* setting the context(s) for contemporary theological methods. This is no mere survey course, but it does adopt a wide lens that embraces a significant array of the key theoretical matrices within which theologians are working today.
- To explore different conceptions of *how theological methods are related to theories in religious studies*. Thus, thinking this purpose statement in relation to the first one, we are situating theological method (a) against the broad background of major intellectual currents today, and (b) in relation to religious studies. In this two-fold context, the seminar continually returns to four inter-related questions: What is theology? How is theology in conversation with key intellectual currents of the day? What is "religion?" What is theology's relation to religious life and practice?
- In relation to the above two purposes, the seminar will also attend to the issues and crises emerging within a *transnational and world consciousness*. This is evident in the way the seminar will situate its work as two efforts of "re-thinking" that have for several decades been underway: (a) a rethinking of theological method in light of tricontinental worlds of the Americas, Africa and Asia, and (b) a rethinking of theological method as decolonizing *and* de-imperializing in ways that make integral also the indispensable insights of critical race, feminist and environmental theories and theologies.

SEMINAR PROCEDURES

The seminar meets once a week. The seminar's weekly format depends on each member's completing the assigned reading and submitting one-and-one-half-page Critical Reflections (single-spaced) for discussion and reflection. Here is how I propose working.

Each seminar day will be planned by a CONVERSANT. Conversants have the primary

responsibility of planning discussion for the seminar. They will formulate these plans on the basis of their own reading of the material and especially after studying the Critical Reflections submitted that week by all the other seminar members. Conversants will study the week's Critical Reflections by their peers, looking for ways to include their key insights within a planned seminar discussion. In other words, the seminar discussion is to be constructed out of materials provided by seminar members' Critical Reflections.

At the seminar itself, conversants may make brief introductory remarks to set the stage for our conversation. In fact, I encourage Conversants to offer, in these introductory remarks, some brief orienting thoughts about how seminar members interrogated and assessed the week's readings. Nevertheless, long discourses or summaries by conversants should be avoided. The aim at each seminar is well-orchestrated conversation, deliberately exploring key questions and issues raised by the readings and seminar members' Critical Reflections. Conversants should always presume that seminar members have done the readings and hence do not need summaries. I will serve as moderator for each seminar, and periodically provide short lectures (especially the first weeks).

All seminar members will post their own CRITICAL REFLECTIONS to the "Discussion Board" at the Blackboard site for this course, by noon, the day before the seminar (Wednesday noon). The Conversant of the week will, then, gather these Critical Reflections the day before the seminar, study them carefully, then sometime before the seminar create an agenda for our seminar discussion. It is usually helpful for the Conversants to bring a one to two-page outline of the discussion as they envision it.

The weekly Critical Reflection that is submitted by each seminar member, again, should take up no more than 1½ pages in length, single-spaced. Aim for brief, crisp, clearly articulated statements. (Remember, I'm freeing us all from seminar papers throughout the term, in order to enhance opportunities for careful and extensive reading and for your own deep thinking on the materials.)

You may formulate your Critical Reflections out of your sense that the author is unclear on a matter, because of your bafflement concerning an issue, because of a fundamental critique you want to make, or simply because you want to hear the seminar examine a particular theme or topic related to the reading. (Go ahead and risk asking the simple questions, e.g. "What does Tracy mean by "classic," or Wolfe by "settler colonialism," or Pérez by "altarities.")

APPROACHING EACH WEEK'S READING - "The Focal Reading"

One week prior to each week's seminar I will designate segments of the next week's assigned material as "The Focal Reading." Your Critical Reflections and our seminar discussions will concentrate first on that Focal Reading. For example, in the week of April 2 on Achille Mbembe, I will designate as Focal Reading, the "Introduction" and Chapter 3 from his book, *Necropolitics*. You are invited, even expected, to read as much more of the assigned materials as you can.

In your Critical Reflection you can take several routes. The aim is to get others to think deeply or carefully about some aspect of the assigned reading of the week. It is best to <u>develop *one such*</u> aspect in your page-and-a-half Critical Reflection. *Here* are further examples of the kinds of reflections that seminar members may ask:

- 1) **Of Clarification** seeking greater clarity about the nature of a given writer's position, about connections between readings, or about issues that continue from seminar to seminar.
- 2) **Of Critique** identifying and briefly developing weaknesses you perceive in an assigned text.
- 3) **Of Implication** exploring the implications for cultural critique, theology or something else, which you see generated by the assigned reading of the week.

SPECIAL ADMONITION: Your Critical Reflections are the material from which the Conversants will shape the seminar dialogue of the week. So please complete the reading as quickly as possible to submit your Critical Reflections and on time by noon, Wednesday.

TEXTS

- ATEEK, Naim. A Palestinian Theology of Liberation. Orbis Books, 2017.
- BROWN, Wendy. *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism: The Rise of Antidemocratic Politics in the West.* Columbia University Press, 2019.
- FANON, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth.* 1963. A new translation by Richard Philcox. Foreword by Homi Bhabha. Grove Press, 2004.
- ______. Toward the African Revolution. Grove Press, 1964.
- FOUCAULT, Michel, Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the College de France, 1975-1976, Picador reprint edition, 2003.
- FRASER, Nancy. The Old is Dying But the New Cannot Be Born. Verso Books, 2019.
- GRAY, Erin and HAIDER, Asad. Eds. *The Black Radical Tradition*. Verso Books, forthcoming 2019. Online PDF "underground" version here.
- HALLAQ, Wael B. Restating Orientalism: A Critique of Modern Knowledge. Columbia University Press, 2018.
- JOHNSON, Gaye Theresa, and LUBIN, Alex. Eds. *Futures of Black Radicalism*. Verso Books, 2017.

- MASALHA, Nur. *The Palestine Nakba: Decolonizing History, Narrating the Subaltern, Reclaiming Memory.* Zed Books, 2012). Selections only.
- MBEMBE, Achille. *Necropolitics*. Duke University Press, 2019.

 MIGNOLO, Walter D, and WALSH, Catherine E. *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*. Duke University Press, 2018.
- PÉREZ, Laura E. Eros Ideologies: Writings on Art, Spirituality and the Decolonial. Duke U. Press, 2019.
- ______. Chicana Art: the Politics of Spiritual and Aesthetic Altarities. Duke U. Press, 2017.
- PUAR, Jasbir K. The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability. Duke U. Press, 2017.
- ROY, Arundhati. My Seditious Heart: Collected Nonfiction. Haymarket Books, 2019 (1 essay).
- TRACY, David. The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism. Crossroad, 1981.
- WOLFE, Patrick. Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race. Verso, 2016.
- WYNTER, Sylvia. See online selected article in syllabus below.
- YOUNG, Robert J. C. *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*. 15th anniversary edition. Blackwell, 2016. Recommended only. Full book online here.
- YOUNTAE, An, *The Decolonial Abyss: Mysticism and Cosmopolitics from the Ruins*. Fordham University Press, 2017.

NOTE: In addition to the texts below, I will be consulting with seminar members about additional readings from: H. Dirksen L. Bauman, ed. <u>Open Your Eyes: Deaf Studies Talking</u>. Some of these themes are addressed in the 2nd choice for readings on April 16 below.

REQUIREMENTS

- 1) Completing all **required reading** on time. Try to get started on a week's reading early, so that you can keep up with the seminar's schedule.
- 2) Submit by 12 noon the day before the seminar (Wednesday) **your weekly Critical Reflection** on some problematic of each week's reading.
- 3) **Serve as a Conversant** for at least one of the seminars. Instructions for Conversants are also given above, under "Seminar Procedures."
- 4) Submission by term-time of a substantive paper on a topic that treats some

aspect(s) of the three purposes given on this syllabus and in relation to author(s) read for this class. Final papers may also be on figures and texts not read for this class. Also it is good to make selection of your final paper topic with your comps and dissertation areas in mind.

AGENDA

PART I

COLONIALITY OF POWER & THE THEOLOGICAL

"Method" in theology or other scholarship can be defined, initially here, this way: "a set of statements of the theoretical approach scholars use to develop their subject matter." At its best, a method is able to state also how it relates to other theoretical approaches. Thus, "having a method" suggests a level of critical consciousness about what one is doing in one's theoretical work. In theological discourse, this means being able to state how one's own theoretical approach functions among various other theological approaches. The terms "theory" and "theoretical" refer to thinking that reflects upon, usually in an ordered manner, human experiences in their multi-dimensional complexity, in their temporal and spatial registers. Theory at its best also – and I stress this mindful of theory in theological discourse – respects the extra-cognitive work performed by notions we call beliefs, ideas, dreams, myths, affect, the arts (popular and "fine" arts), and so on. By "extracognitive work," I mean also these notions as functioning systematically.

Part I begins with an Introduction by **Catherine Walsh** and **Walter Mignolo** to contemporary theories of "decoloniality" and its spiritual (at points even theological) dimensions. This will also be evident in the selection by **Sylvia Wynter.** She will set before our seminar, early on, the possibility of a discourse and practice where "human beings are magical. Bios and Logos. Words made flesh, muscle and bone animated by hope and desire, . . .". Be prepared for her expansive critique — Wynter's "unsettling" - of a secularity that all too often, in her political theology, also is a secularization of 16th c. European Christianity and later - a "de-godding," both necessary and problematic.

In this context we turn early in the seminar to the very instructive, even if

primarily Western synthetic treatment of religious and theological theory in **David Tracy's** work. Tracy makes clear how all religious and theological thinking is mediated by its settings ("contexts," or "publics"). Because of this, theology - especially at the level of method, but also in its constructive symbolic or doctrinal offerings - must necessarily engage problems that are also philosophical, social, cultural, psychological, economic and political. Consequently, constructs of gender, sexuality, race, nation, imperial and class formations are usually all unavoidable dimensions of critical theological theory.

JAN 30 – INTRODUCTION: DECOLONIALITY & THEOLOGY AS HERMENEUTICAL



Mignolo and Walsh, "Introduction," in *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis,* 1-11.

Tracy, "Systematic Theology as Hermeneutical" in *The Analogical Imagination*, 99-135.

FEB 6 – DECOLONIALITY AS DE-LINKING FROM THE "COLONIAL MATRIX OF POWER"

Mignolo and Walsh, *Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis.* The *c*omplete book. (But also review the "Introduction" we read for the previous week).



Strongly Recommended:

Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, after Man, its Overrepresentation – An Argument," in *CR: New Centennial Review.* Vol. 3. No. 3 (2003): 257-337.



FEB 13 – THEOLOGICAL METHOD I: THE PUBLICNESS OF THEOLOGY & RELIGION

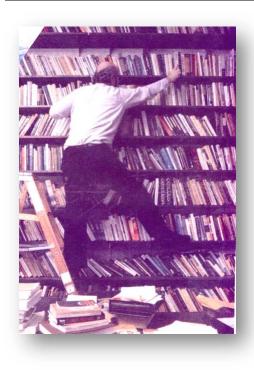
David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, "Part I: Publicness in Systematic Theology," xi-xiv, 1-98, 136-229 (Pages 99-135 were read last week. Review them if you need to).



Recommended:

David Tracy, "Five Basic Models in Contemporary Theology," *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology.* With a New Preface (University of Chicago Press, 1975), pages 22-34. On reserve.

FEB 20 – THEOLOGICAL METHOD II: THEORIZING THEOLOGICAL OPTIONS



David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, "Part II: Interpreting the Christian Classic," 231-456.

Left: "Imperial Reach?"
David Tracy, cover of New York Times Magazine,
November 9, 1986.

PART II

THEORY & THEOLOGY IN THE RUINS OF COLONIALITY AND NEOLIBERALISM

This second Part enables us to sample key theoretical interventions in the current era of the coloniality of power, which is often named "neoliberalism," a mode of governing everyday life and subjectivity on every continent. It names an epoch of the coloniality of power that is often supported by Christian religious beliefs and practices. This is all the subject of **Wendy Brown's** work. What this neoliberalism means for understanding the religio-political moment within the U.S. and Euro-American setting is further illumined by **Nancy Fraser**.

Within today's neoliberal epoch of the coloniality of power, of particular note is the resurgence of black radicalism carried by decolonizing thought in the U.S., the Caribbean and Africa. In this second part we trace this resurgence of this radicalism first in **Frantz Fanon**, and then on from **Cedric Robinson** and into the works of contemporary representatives of black radical thinking today.

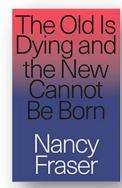
One of Part II's last week's texts focuses on a work in political theology, on "the decolonial abyss" by **An Yountae**. The second week turns to Cameroun philosopher **Achille Mbembe**, on the "politics of letting die" ("necropolitics"), which we consider in relation to thoughts on Biopower and deaf communities in Michele Friedner's essay. Both Mbembe and Friedner anticipate themes of Part III, the role of Israel-in-Palestine as exemplar of late modern colonial occupation.

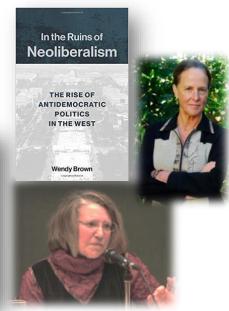
FEB 27 TODAY'S RUINS OF NEOLIBERALISM: WENDY BROWN AND NANCY FRASER

Wendy Brown, *The Ruins of Neoliberalism: The Rise of Antidemocratic Politics in the West* (Columbia University Press, 2019), Complete, except chapter 4.

Recommended in Brown, also: Brown, *The Ruins of Neoliberalism*, Chapter 4.

Nancy Fraser, *The Old is Dying and the New Cannot Be Born: From Progressive Neoliberalism, to Trump and Beyond* (Verso books, 2017). Complete.





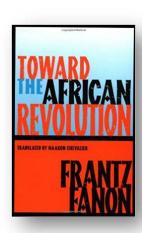
MAR 5 – FRANTZ FANON: RECLAIMING THE HISTORICITY OF COLONIZED EXISTENCE



Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth, 1-239.*______. *Toward the African Revolution,* chapters I, II, IV: sections 1-5, 7, 10, 12, 20, and chapter V.

Recommended:

Robert J. C. Young, "Africa IV: Fanon/Cabral," in Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*. Pp. 274-92, 15th anniversary edition. Blackwell, 2016). library e-book online here.





MAR 26 – "THE BLACK RADICAL TRADITION" - ITS LONGUE DURÉE AND EMERGENT FUTURES

Gaye Theresa Johnson and Alex Lubin, *Futures of Black Radicalism* New York: Verso, 2017. **Complete.**

Highly Recommended:

Avery Gordon, "Preface" in Cedric J. Robinson, *An Anthropology of Marxism*. 2nd ed. U. North Carolina Press, 2019. xiii-xxix. (at Blackboard e-Reserves)

Perhaps review online the "underground" version of *The Black Radical Tradition*, forthcoming, Verso by Drs. Erin Grey & Asad Haider.



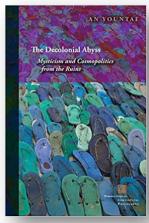


Cedric Robinson, author, Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition.

APR 2 – THEOLOGIZNG THE DECOLONIAL ABYSS

An Yountae, *The Decolonial Abyss: Mysticism and Cosmopolitics from the Ruins* Duke University Press, 2017.





APRIL 9 – NECROPOLITICS, BIOPOWER & DEAF COMMUNITIES

Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*. Trans. Steven Corcoran. Duke University Press, 2019. Pages 1-189.



NECRO

Michele Friedner, "Biopower, Biosociality, and Community Formation: How Biopower Is Constitutive of the Deaf Community," *Sign Language Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (Spring 2010): 336-45. (at Blackboard e-Reserves)

PART III

RE-ENGAGING THE SPIRITUAL - AND THE THEOLOGICAL?

In this final part of the seminar we press forward into contemporary theoretical works on spirituality, popular religiosity - and also theology as both problem and positive possibility. We thus re-engage key notions of David Tracy; so review his notions of spirituality and religion as "limit experience," experiences of the whole and Christian theological discourses of "manifestation," "proclamation" and "transformative praxis." Be prepared also to exercise your own creativity while you read this section's challenging viewpoints on art, political struggle, and emergent spirituality and theology.

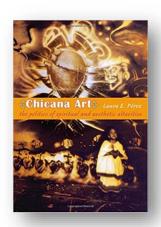
We begin Part III with the decolonial "spiritual" options provided by the works of Laura E. Pérez. Pérez shows how the thea/theological discourses of colonized peoples cast up new combinations of art, ritual performance, dreams—all of which help to form "decolonizing, culturally-hybrid spiritualities and aesthetics. I suggest that we read Pérez in relation to the essay here from Dirth

and Adams on the "Modernity/Coloniality of Ability."

Then, I have important select readings from two major works. The first is a thoroughgoing, theoretical critique of Western tradition, by **Wael Hallaq**, who exposes modernity's settler-colonial, neoliberal "genocidal structure of thought." The second reading is from **Jasbir Puar** who treats of queer theory, white supremacy and disability studies in the Western geopolitics of the U.S.-backed Israel in Palestine. What is thinking and spirit in the frame, "from Ferguson to Gaza?"

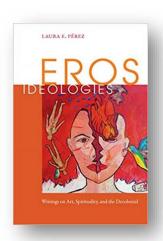
In the final week we theorize more fully the West's founding abyss of "settler colonialism" by way of **Patrick Wolfe's** writings, and then theologize with Palestinian theologians like **Naim Ateek** and supporting theorists such as **Nur Masalha**. We thus conclude the seminar thinking within what Christianized neoliberalism calls "the Holy Land," but which we know to be a contemporary structure of late modern occupation (Mbembe) where the West's "genocidal structure of mind" (Hallaq and Puar) remains at work – perhaps working a "radical hope."

APRIL 16 – LAURA E. PÉREZ: THE "POLITICS OF SPIRITUAL AND AESTHETIC ALTARITIES"



Laura E. Pérez, *Chicana Art: The Politics of Spiritual and Aesthetic Altarities*. Duke University Press, 2007. 1-49, 91-145. See especially footnotes 309-10n1 and 312n1.

Laura E. Pérez, *Eros Ideologies:* Writings on Art, Spirituality and the Decolonial. Duke University Press, 2019, 1-16, 17-23, 82-90, 92-111, 133-46, 192-209.

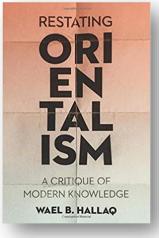


Thomas P. Dirth and Glenn A. Adams, "Decolonial Theory and Disability Studies: On the Modernity/Coloniality of Ability," *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*. 2019. Vol. 7 (1): 260-77. (also at Blackboard e-Reserves)

Paddy Ladd, "Colonialism and Resistance: A Brief History of Deafhood," in *Open Your Eyes: Deaf Studies Talking*, H-D Bauman, ed. (U.Minn Press, 2008), 42-59 (e-Reserves)

APRIL 23 –MODERN KNOWLEDGE, STRUCTURAL GENOCIDE & THE RIGHT TO MAIM

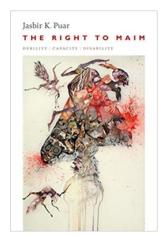




Wael B. Hallaq, *Restating Orientalism: A Critique of Modern Knowledge*. Columbia University Press, 2018.

Only:

Sovereignty and Structural Genocide," 179-227.

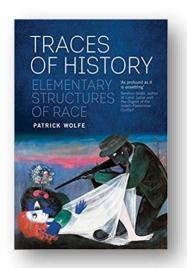


Jasbir K. Puar, *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability*. Duke University Press, 2017.

ONLY: "Preface," ix-xxiv, and Chapters 2, 3, 4 and Postscript, 63-160.



April 30 – INDIGENOUS DISPOSSESSION, ISRAEL-IN-PALESTINE, AND A "RADICAL HOPE"?



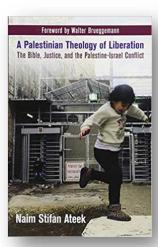
Patrick Wolfe, *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race*. Verso Books, 2016, 1-30, 203-270.

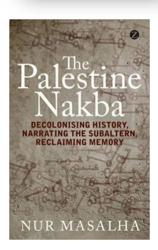
Naim Ateek, A Palestinian Theology of Liberation: The Bible, Justice and the Palestine-Israel Conflict. Orbis Books, 2017.

Nur Masalha, "Resisting Memoricide, Reclaiming Memory: Nakba Commemoration by Palestinians in Israel, in Masalha, *The* Palestinian Nakba: Decolonizing History,

Narrating the Subaltern, Reclaiming History (Zed, 2012), 229-250 and in the same book, "Epilogue: The Continuity of Trauma," 251-57. (at Blackboard e-Reserves)

Recommended: Masalha, "Introduction," and Chapters 1 and 6. (at Blackboard e-Reserves)





KEY DATES:

Last Seminar Meeting: April 30

Ph.D. Seminar Paper Due Date: May 11

Graduate Students Grades Due to Registrar: May 14

OTHER COURSE MATTERS AND GENERAL PRINCETON SEMINARY GUIDELINES

Please Read Carefully
Attendance

According to the *Seminary Handbook* (6.5.2), "It is normally expected that an enrolled student will attend a minimum of eighty percent of class periods. Failure to satisfy this minimum attendance requirement constitutes grounds for failure of the course."

Attendance at all sessions is expected. Please let the instructor know if you have to miss due to any unavoidable situation.

Calculation of Grade

Criteria	Percent of Final Grade
Comprehensiveness of Reading	15
Critical Reflections	20
Conversant Role	20
Final Paper	45

Grading Scale

Evaluating the following criteria above is never an exact science. Evaluators need to assess student submissions not only in light of their own disciplined senses of "excellence in scholarship", but also in light of the special gifts and situations of the student(s), and in light of the total performance of others in the class. Below is the numerical scale for rough guidance.

A	97-100
A-	92-6
B+	89-91
В	84-88
B-	79-83
C+	73-78

С	67-72
C-	59-66
D+	50-58
D	45-49
D-	40-44
F	0-39

PTS Academic Integrity Policy

As the *Seminary Handbook* states: "Freedom of inquiry can flourish only in a community that recognizes that intellectual integrity in one's academic work lies at the heart of its mission" (7.1). All students are expected to maintain integrity in all their academic submissions and oral presentations and abide by the academic integrity policy. Plagiarism includes but is not limited to unattributed quotations, unattributed paraphrasing, unauthorized multiple submissions, false citations, and false submissions. Please refer to the *Seminary Handbook* for specific terms, definitions, and institutional policies related to the norms of academic integrity.

Academic Support

The Office of Academic Affairs offers instruction and workshops to guide PTS students towards more efficient and effective academic study skills and strategies. For writing assistance, contact writing@ptsem.edu or visit in person at Library Room #3103.

Accessibility Accommodations

PTS provides reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities who self-identify through the Office of Academic Affairs. Students must register with the office (Academic Affairs, Admin Bldg Room 124, academic.support@ptsem.edu) for disability verification and determination of eligibility for reasonable academic accommodations. Please submit requests at the beginning of the semester or as soon as possible.

Food in the Classroom

In keeping with the seminary's policy, no food will be allowed in the classroom. Beverages (i.e., water, soda, juice, tea, coffee) with lids are permitted (*Seminary Handbook*, 9.4).

Title IX Statement

Please be aware all Princeton Seminary faculty members are "responsible employees," which means that if you tell me about a situation involving sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, or stalking, I must share that information with the Associate Dean for Institutional Diversity and Community Engagement who serves as the Seminary's Title IX/VI Officer. Although I have to make that notification, you will control how your case will be handled, including whether or not you wish to pursue a

formal complaint. Our goal is to make sure you are aware of the range of options available to you and have access to the resources you need. For more information on Title IX and Sexual Misconduct Policy, contact Dr. Victor Aloyo, Jr., at 609.688.1943 or Dr. Catherine Cook Davis at 609.497.7882.