

LIT 166A: Representations of Gender in Medieval Literature:
Queer Medievalisms
Summer Session 1 | 2024

Instructor Information

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Office Hours: Wednesdays from 5pm to 6pm via Zoom

Meeting ID: [922 9128 9485](#)

Password: 459335

Meeting Information:

Location: Physical Sciences 114

Time: Tuesday/Thursday 1PM - 4:30PM

Course Description:

The medieval world is far more distant from our own world than we might realize. Although it is easy to acknowledge some changes—technology, for example, is very different now—there are other aspects of medieval society that we tend to assume function similarly. One of the most significant aspects of the medieval world that is vastly different from our own world is their approach to sexuality and gender.

The texts of this course reflect a strong sense of fluidity around notions of gender and sexuality in the premodern period. *The Canterbury Tales*, one of the most well-known pieces of medieval literature, contains reflections on alternative forms of knowledge that are reminiscent of feminist and queer theory today, along with characters that exude campiness while at the same time preaching Catholic sermons. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* features interwoven seduction and hunting narratives that blur the lines of eroticism before venturing into the territory of crossdressing. Finally, *Silence* presents a trans character who is guided by the personifications of Nature and Nurture through inheritance struggles and seductions gone awry. These tales contradict notions of gender and sexual fluidity as contained to the present moment, and this course charts a path of queer historicism through the medieval period.

Together, we will discuss the course texts alongside key contributions to queer and trans theory in order to figure out how to understand a world that is so different—yet also so similar—to our own.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- **Interpret** medieval texts in translation and in Middle English.
- **Analyze** the construction of gender and sexuality in medieval literature using queer and trans theory.

- **Identify** a text's arguments about queerness, sexuality, gender, religion, chivalry, aesthetics, and morality.
- **Compare and contrast** several texts from roughly the same time period (13th-14th centuries).
- **Create** coherent and convincing analyses and arguments, and communicate them effectively.

Course Texts*

*Given that many of the texts for the course are available online, buying the books themselves is not required. However, do keep in mind that translations may differ; try to find translations by the translators in the citations below to ensure we're all reading the same text. Additionally, we will be reading *The Canterbury Tales* in the original language (Middle English); you may access translations to the text (I have listed a fantastic free resource below), but our analysis will focus on the original text. If you would like to use free versions of the course texts and have trouble finding them, I would be happy to assist.

Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The Canterbury Tales*. Jill Mann, ed. New York: Penguin Classics, 2005.

Free online version: <https://chaucer.fas.harvard.edu/pages/text-and-translations>

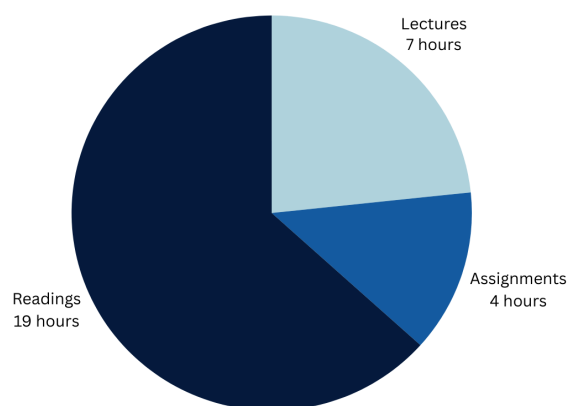
Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. James Winny, editor and translator. Ontario: Broadview Press, 1995.

Silence: A Thirteenth-Century French Romance. Sarah Roche-Madhi, ed. and trans. Michigan: Michigan University Press, 1999.

Expected Student Hours

Systemwide Senate Regulation 760 specifies that one academic credit corresponds to a total of 30 hours of work over a quarter. Because summer courses are 5 weeks long, the expectation is that 30 hours per week will be devoted to course-related work. Given the variability of reading and assignment difficulties/lengths, the breakdown of hours below is a rough outline; during some weeks, the time spent on each aspect of the course may vary.

Task	Hours per Week
Lecture Attendance	7 hours
Written Assignments	4 hours
Readings	19 hours
Total	30 hours



Assignments & Assessments:

- **Attendance and Participation:** Because this is a summer course, there are only ten days total of class, so attendance is mandatory and vital. We will also be in session for several hours each class day, so participation in class discussion is mandatory as well. Expectations for participation will be covered on the first day of class. In order to make up for an absence, please contact the instructor *before* the class you will miss.
- **Reading Checks:** At the start of each class, there will be a short reading check designed to keep students accountable to the reading assignments for class and engaged with the content they are reading. These cannot be redone except in extenuating circumstances.
- **Connection Notebooks:** Each week, students will contribute to a connection notebook, a Google document used to compile their personal engagements with the readings. Connection notebooks are a space for students to discuss their thoughts about the text, pose (and perhaps even try to answer) interesting questions, suggest connections to other media they've engaged with, in or out of the class, and to reflect on the course content. Entries should be at least 500 words long and should remain on the topics of the course (or make explicit how other topics are related). The writing may be informal. These will be graded on a credit/no credit basis - as long as students complete an entry that follows the requirements, they will receive credit for that entry.
- **Final Paper:** Students will compose one final paper, due by 5PM on Monday, July 29. This paper will be between 1,000 and 2,000 words—roughly 4-5 pages, double-spaced—and should include a strong argument (and accompanying analysis) of one of the texts we engaged with during the course. We will discuss the exact requirements later in the course, and prompts will be distributed before Week 5.

Grading:

Assignment	Grade Type	Total Points Available
Attendance and Participation	A-F	30 points
Reading Checks (8 total)	A-F	40 points (5 points each)
Connection Notebook Entries	Complete/Incomplete	50 points (10 points per entry)
Final Paper	A-F (rubric will be given)	80 points
Final Grade	A-F	200 points

Grade Scale:

A = Excellent = 180 - 200 points = 90% - 100%

B = Good = 160 - 179 points = 80% - 89%

C = Fair = 140 - 159 points = 70% - 79%

D = Poor = 120 - 139 points = 60% - 69%

F = Fail = 119 or fewer points = 59% or below

Course Schedule:

Week / Unit Goals	Content / Skills
<p>Week 1: Queering Chaucer</p> <p>We will begin the class with a mixture of theory and content. Working off of the theoretical contributions of Michel Foucault and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, we will begin to analyze sections of <i>The Canterbury Tales</i>, one of the most well-known medieval texts. Our engagements with the text will reveal Chaucer's commitment to representing individuals from all levels of medieval hierarchies and his appreciation for the <i>lingua vulgata</i>—the language of the common folk, Middle English at this time—and alternative sources of knowledge. This week will foreground future encounters with medieval literature throughout the course and beyond.</p> <p>Connection Notebook #1 due Friday at 5PM</p>	<p>Day 1: Welcome & Introductions to Queer Medievalisms</p> <p>Icebreakers, Syllabus Overview, Classroom Guidelines/Tone Setting</p> <p>In-Class Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Excerpts from Michel Foucault's <i>History of Sexuality</i>• Excerpts from <i>The Canterbury Tales</i>, General Prologue (frame narrative + portraits) <p>Lecture: Medieval Approaches to Gender and Sexuality; Introduction to Chaucer and <i>The Canterbury Tales</i>; Reading Middle English</p> <p>Discussion Questions: How do we analyze texts from a time period so vastly different from our own? How can we begin to understand pre-modern gender and sexuality? What tools are necessary to have prepared when approaching medieval literature?</p> <hr/> <p>Day 2: <i>The Canterbury Tales</i> and Alternative Epistemologies</p> <p>Reading Check #1</p> <p>Readings to Prepare Before Class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale (begins on p. 211; 44 pages total) <p>In-Class Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Excerpts from Valerie Traub's "The Joys of Martha Joyless: Queer Pedagogy and the (Early Modern) Production of Sexual Knowledge" in <i>Thinking Sex with the Early Moderns</i>.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Queer and Now” <p>Lecture: Introduction to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Valerie Traub; What <i>Is</i> Queerness?</p> <p>Discussion Questions: Where does the Wife of Bath gain her knowledge? How does the Wife of Bath position herself in relation to the many men she is traveling with? What forms of knowledge are prized by the Wife of Bath, and what forms of knowledge are criticized? How are queerness and knowledge production linked?</p>
<p>Week 2: Queer Religiosity</p> <p>We will turn this week to a significant aspect of European medieval literature: religious imagery, particularly Catholic symbolism. We will parse through selections from <i>The Canterbury Tales</i> before delving into <i>Sir Gawain and the Green Knight</i>, an Arthurian romance that details a knight’s year-long quest to prove himself. We will consider how queerness and religiosity are linked and put in tension with each other, and turn towards avenues of queerness that reach beyond human experiences.</p> <p>Connection Notebook #2 due Friday at 5PM</p>	<p>Day 3: Medieval Queer Coding</p> <p>Reading Check #2</p> <p>Readings to Prepare Before Class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Friar’s Prologue and Tale (begins on p. 255; 14 pages total) • The Summoner’s Prologue and Tale (begins on p. 270; 22 pages total) <p>In-Class Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excerpts from the Pardoner’s Prologue/Frame and the description of the Pardoner from the General Prologue • Excerpts from Susan Sontag’s “Notes on ‘Camp’” and assorted responses from queer theorists <p>Lecture: Catholicism in Medieval Europe; Religion and Social Hierarchy; Situating Queerness as Excess (Muñoz)</p> <p>Discussion Questions: What is the significance of the stark differences between the Friar, the Summoner, and the Pardoner? How are religion and queerness linked through their prologues and tales? If we had to guess, what would their stances be on queerness and how it is constructed? What is being communicated through their dialogue?</p> <hr/> <p>Day 4: <u>NO CLASS - HOLIDAY</u></p> <p>Over the long weekend, you will have some extra reading to makeup for the time we won’t be able to meet together. Please prioritize Fitts 1 and 2 of <i>Gawain</i> and read through as much of the Halberstam as possible.</p>

Week 3: Premodern
Homosociality and Homoerotics

This week, we will turn our full attention on *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, focusing intently on the concept of chivalry as it is constructed in the text. We will examine the dual storylines of seduction and hunting in context with each other and with premodern queerness, and consider how these tales contribute to Gawain's formation of courtly, knightly, chivalrous masculinity.

**Connection Notebook #3 due
Friday at 5PM**

Day 5: Call of the Queer Wilds

Reading Check #3

Readings to Prepare Before Class:

- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Fitts 1 and 2 (30 pages)
- J. Halberstam, "Introduction" to *Wild Things* (29 pages)

Lecture: Introduction to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*; Medieval Literature and Catholic Symbolism; Arthurian Romance as a Genre

Discussion Questions: Is the figure of nature and the wild in Gawain a representation of normativity? Of queerness? Of something else? What is the relationship between queerness and nature? What is the significance of the passage of time in the tale? How does the passage of time feel, both in and out of the text?

Day 6: Seduction and the Hunt | The Aesthetics of Chivalry

Reading Check #4

Readings to Prepare Before Class:

- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Fitts 3 & 4 (37 pages)

In-Class Readings:

- Excerpts from Josè Esteban Muñoz's Introduction to *Disidentifications*
- Excerpts from J. Halberstam's "Queer Temporalities and Postmodern Geographies"

Lecture: The Chivalric Code in the Medieval Court; Premodern Notions of Time

Discussion Questions: How do the characters in the text both practice and play with the chivalric code? What does it mean to find loopholes in social contracts? What are the aesthetics of chivalry, as constructed in the text? How do we interpret Gawain's crossdressing and the responses of both the Green Knight and the court? What do we make of the end of Gawain's tale? Considering that this was written around the same time as *The Canterbury Tales*, how do the values and arguments of the texts compare?

<p>Week 4: Premodern Gender Outlaws</p> <p>This week, we will begin reading <i>Silence</i>, a Middle French romance that, like <i>Sir Gawain and the Green Knight</i>, considers gender in relation to chivalry. However, the protagonist of the romance, Silence, is born a girl and only begins to act as though she is a boy in order to fit within the line of noble succession. As we begin reading the text, we will consider how it positions gender as a constructed aspect of our identity and how Silence evades our binaristic retrospective gaze.</p> <p>Connection Notebook #4 due Friday at 5PM</p>	<p>Day 7: Reproductive Futurity and Gender Play</p> <p>Reading Check #5</p> <p>Readings to Prepare Before Class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Silence</i>, Lines 1-1650 (38 pages) <p>In-Class Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excerpts from Jason Cromwell’s “Queering the Binaries: Transsituated Identities, Bodies, and Sexualities” • Excerpts from Joey Gamble’s “Toward a Trans Philology” <p>Lecture: Introduction to Trans Theory; Introduction to <i>Silence</i></p> <p>Discussion Questions: Why are Nature personified? How does the text describe Nature? What is Nature’s approach to Silence, and what is Silence’s approach to Nature? What are the conditions set forth around Silence’s transness?</p>
	<p>Day 8: Gender Creation and Construction</p> <p>Reading Check #6</p> <p>Readings to Prepare Before Class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Silence</i>, Lines 1651-3339 (39 pages) <p>In-Class Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excerpts from Kate Bornstein’s <i>Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us</i> <p>Discussion Questions: How do youth, puberty, and adulthood shift transness in <i>Silence</i> and in the body? How does Nurture interact with Nature and with Silence? What is the significance of Silence’s name, and does that significance shift with Silence’s body?</p>
<p>Week 5: Transing the Premodern</p> <p>This week, we will finish reading <i>Silence</i>, paying special attention to how the text crafts premodern transness. As the text moves further into Silence’s life, we will examine the implications of her complex gender outside of the house and within the world at</p>	<p>Day 9: Trans Heroism</p> <p>Reading Check #7</p> <p>Readings to Prepare Before Class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Silence</i>, Lines 3340-4919 (37 pages) <p>In-Class Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excerpts from J. Halberstam’s <i>Female Masculinity</i> • Jen Manion’s keyword entry for “Transbutch”

<p>large. Furthermore, we will consider how plotlines of seduction and trickery are further complicated by Silence's unsettled gender performances.</p> <p>Connection Notebook #5 due Friday at 5PM</p>	<p>Lecture: Discussing Characters with Unstable/Uncertain Genders; Queerying Medieval Social Order</p> <p>Discussion Questions: How does Silence interact with the chivalric code? How Silence's approach to chivalry compare to Gawain's? How does Silence's chivalry trouble constructions of masculinity and femininity in the world around them? What are the implications of a trans medieval hero?</p>
	<p>Day 10: Feminine Trickery, Violence, and Victory</p> <p>Reading Check #8</p> <p>Readings to Prepare Before Class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Silence</i>, Lines 4920-6705 (42 pages) <p>In-Class Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excerpts from Lee Edelman's Introduction to <i>No Future</i> • Excerpts from José Esteban Muñoz's Introduction to <i>Cruising Utopia</i> <p>Lecture: Queer Futurity (Edelman and Muñoz)</p> <p>Discussion Questions: What does resolution look like for queers in the premodern? What do we make of the ending of <i>Silence</i>? Are unsettled endings really endings? What does <i>Silence</i> argue about the roles of men and women in medieval society?</p>
<p>Final Exam</p>	<p>The final exam will be due by 5PM on Monday, July 29.</p>

ACCESSIBILITY

UC Santa Cruz is committed to creating an academic environment that supports its diverse student body. If you are a student with a disability who requires accommodations to achieve equal access in this course, please affiliate with the DRC. I encourage all students to benefit from learning more about DRC services to contact DRC by phone at 831-459-2089 or by email at drc@ucsc.edu. For students already affiliated, make sure that you have requested Academic Access Letters, where you intend to use accommodations. You can also request to meet privately with me during my office hours or by appointment, as soon as possible. I would like us to discuss how

we can implement your accommodations in this course to ensure your access and full engagement in this course.

TITLE IX/CARE ADVISORY

UC Santa Cruz is committed to providing a safe learning environment that is free of all forms of gender discrimination and sexual harassment, which are explicitly prohibited under Title IX. If you have experienced any form of sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking, know that you are not alone. The Title IX Office, the Campus Advocacy, Resources & Education (CARE) office, and Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) are all resources that you can rely on for support.

Please be aware that if you tell me about a situation involving Title IX misconduct, I am required to share this information with the Title IX Coordinator. This reporting responsibility also applies to course TAs and tutors (as well to all UCSC employees who are not designated as “confidential” employees, which is a special designation granted to counselors and CARE advocates). 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. The goal is to make sure that you are aware of the range of options available to you and that you have access to the resources you need.

Confidential resources are available through [CARE](#). Confidentiality means CARE advocates will not share any information with Title IX, the police, parents, or anyone else without explicit permission. CARE advocates are trained to support you in understanding your rights and options, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and more. You can contact CARE at (831) 502-2273 or care@ucsc.edu.

In addition to CARE, these resources are available to you:

- If you need help figuring out what resources you or someone else might need, visit the [Sexual Violence Prevention & Response \(SAFE\) website](#), which provides information and resources for different situations.
- [Counseling & Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#) can provide confidential counseling support. Call them at (831) 459-2628.
- You can report gender discrimination and sexual harassment and violence directly to the University’s [Title IX Office](#) by calling (831) 459-2462 or by using their [online reporting tool](#).
- Reports to law enforcement can be made to the UC Police Department, (831) 459-2231 ext. 1.
- For emergencies, call 911.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

All members of the UCSC community benefit from an environment of trust, honesty, fairness, respect, and responsibility. You are expected to present your own work and acknowledge the work of others in order to preserve the integrity of scholarship.

Academic integrity includes:

- Following exam rules
- Using only permitted materials during an exam
- Viewing exam materials only when permitted by your instructor
- Keeping what you know about an exam to yourself
- Incorporating proper citation of all sources of information
- Submitting your own original work

Academic misconduct includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Disclosing exam content during or after you have taken an exam
- Accessing exam materials without permission
- Copying/purchasing any material from another student, or from another source, that is submitted for grading as your own
- Plagiarism, including use of Internet material without proper citation
- Using cell phones or other electronics to obtain outside information during an exam without explicit permission from the instructor
- Submitting your own work in one class that was completed for another class (self-plagiarism) without prior permission from the instructor.
- Violations of the Academic Integrity policy can result in dismissal from the university and a permanent notation on a student's transcript. For the full policy and disciplinary procedures on academic dishonesty, students and instructors should refer to the [Academic Misconduct page](#) at the [Division of Undergraduate Education](#).

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

The materials in this course are the intellectual property of their creators. As a student, you have access to many of the materials in the course for the purpose of learning, engaging with your peers in the course, completing assignments, and so on. You have a moral and legal obligation to respect the rights of others by only using course materials for purposes associated with the course. For instance, you are not permitted to share, upload, stream, sell, republish, share the login information for, or otherwise disseminate any of the course materials, such as: video and audio files, assignment prompts, slides, notes, syllabus, simulations, datasets, discussion threads. Conversely, any materials created solely by you (for example, your videos, essays, images, audio files, annotations, notes) are your intellectual property and you may use them as you wish.

RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATION

UC Santa Cruz welcomes diversity of religious beliefs and practices, recognizing the contributions differing experiences and viewpoints can bring to the community. There may be times when an academic requirement conflicts with religious observances and practices. If that happens, students may request reasonable accommodation for religious practices. The instructor will review the situation in an effort to provide a reasonable accommodation without penalty. You should first discuss the conflict and

your requested accommodation with your instructor early in the term. You or your instructor may also seek assistance from the [Dean of Students office](#).

ALL-GENDER RESTROOMS

UC Santa Cruz is committed to the well-being of all students and cares about all students feeling safe and welcome, regardless of their gender identity, expression, and/or embodiment. The [Lionel Cantú Queer Center](#) has worked with students and campus staff to create more safe and accessible restrooms for transgender and genderqueer students, staff, faculty, alumni, and UCSC visitors. A [complete list of all-gender restrooms](#) on campus was compiled and is maintained by the Cantú Queer Center.

PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNITY

The University of California, Santa Cruz expressly prohibits students from engaging in conduct constituting unlawful discrimination, harassment or bias... [More here](#). I am committed to providing an atmosphere for learning that respects diversity and supports inclusivity. We need to work together to build this community of learning. I ask all members of this class to:

- be open to and interested in the views of others
- consider the possibility that your views may change over the course of the term
- be aware that this course asks you to reconsider some “common sense” notions you may hold
- honor the unique life experiences of your colleagues
- appreciate the opportunity that we have to learn from each other
- listen to each other’s opinions and communicate in a respectful manner
- keep confidential discussions that the community has of a personal (or professional) nature
- ground your comments in the texts we are studying. Refer frequently to the texts and make them the focus of your questions, comments, and arguments. This is the single most effective way to ensure respectful discussion and to create a space where we are all learning together.

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

In our in-class and online discussions and dialogues, we will have the opportunity to explore challenging, high-stakes issues and increase our understanding of different perspectives. Our conversations may not always be easy. We sometimes will make mistakes in our speaking and our listening. Sometimes we will need patience or courage or imagination or any number of qualities in combination to engage our texts, our classmates, and our own ideas and experiences. We will always need respect for others. Thus, an important aim of our classroom interactions will be for us to increase our facility with difficult conversations that arise inside issues of social justice, politics, economics, morality, religion, and other issues where reasonable people often hold diverse perspectives. This effort will ultimately deepen our understanding and allow us

to make the most of being in a community with people of many backgrounds, experiences, and positions.

REPORT AN INCIDENT OF HATE OR BIAS

The University of California, Santa Cruz is committed to maintaining an objective, civil, diverse and supportive community, free of coercion, bias, hate, intimidation, dehumanization or exploitation. The Hate/Bias Response Team is a group of administrators who support and guide students seeking assistance in determining how to handle a bias incident involving another student, a staff member, or a faculty member. To report an incident of hate or bias, please use the following form: [Hate/Bias Report Form](#).

CONTENT ADVISORY

This course examines some texts, images, and videos that contain descriptions of violence and/or scenes depicting violence. I will do my best to provide individual warnings on the syllabus for course materials and in presentation slides for class content that are particularly sensitive. My hope is that these notifications will help your engagement by allowing you to prepare to work through challenging material. I encourage you to do what you need to care for yourself. If taking care of yourself means that you need to step outside during class, either for a short time or for the rest of the class, you may do so without academic penalty. If you do leave the class for a significant time, please make arrangements to get notes from another student or see me individually to discuss the situation.

STUDENT SERVICES

[Counseling and Psychological Services](#)

Many students at UC Santa Cruz face personal challenges or have psychological needs that may interfere with their academic progress, social development, or emotional wellbeing. The university offers a variety of confidential services to help you through difficult times, including individual and group counseling, crisis intervention, consultations, online chats, and mental health screenings. These services are provided by staff who welcome all students and embrace a philosophy respectful of clients' cultural and religious backgrounds, and sensitive to differences in race, ability, gender identity and sexual orientation.

[Student Success and Engagement Hub](#)

The Division of Student Success provides campus-wide coordination and leadership for student success programs and activities across departments, divisions, the colleges, and administrative units.

[Tutoring and Learning Support](#)

At Learning Support Services (LSS), undergraduate students build a strong foundation for success and cultivate a sense of belonging in our Community of Learners. LSS

partners with faculty and staff to advance educational equity by designing inclusive learning environments in Modified Supplemental Instruction, Small Group Tutoring, and Writing Support. When students fully engage in our programs, they gain transformative experiences that empower them at the university and beyond.

Slug Support Program

College can be a challenging time for students and during times of stress it is not always easy to find the help you need. Slug Support can give help with everything from basic needs (housing, food, or financial insecurity) to getting the technology you need during remote instruction.

To get started with SLUG Support, please contact the [Dean of Students](#) Office at 831-459-4446 or you may send us an email at deanofstudents@ucsc.edu.

Slug Help/Technology

The ITS Support Center is your single point of contact for all issues, problems or questions related to technology services and computing at UC Santa Cruz. To get technological help, simply email help@ucsc.edu.

On-Campus Emergency Contacts

For all other help and support, including the health center and emergency services, Click here to go to UCSC's [Emergency Services](#) page. Always dial 9-1-1 in the case of an emergency.