TO ACCOMPANY PROPOSAL FOR ADDITION OF COURSE TO AN EXISTING UNST CLUSTER

Name of proposing faculty members: Shirlee Geiger, Jamie Ross
Title of proposed course: W5106H 312 - Feminist Philosophy
From which department(s): Women's Studies, Philosophy
For which cluster: Women's Studies
Name of cluster coordinator: Johanna Brenner

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COURSE APPROVED FOR CLUSTER INCLUSION BY

DEPARTMENT CHAIR(S): 

CLUSTER COORDINATOR:

CHAIR, CLUSTER COORDINATORS:

CHAIR, UNST COMMITTEE:

Copies of completed document are to be filed with appropriate cluster coordinator(s) as well as sent to appropriate department chair(s), UNST Scheduling, and Chair, Cluster Coordinators.

University Studies: March, 1999
PROPOSAL FOR A JUNIOR-SENIOR LEVEL CLUSTER COURSE

Course Title: WS/PHL 312 Feminist Philosophy

A. COURSE DESCRIPTION: Critically examines traditional schools of philosophical thinking from a feminist perspective.

B. COURSE DEVELOPMENT: This is an existing course which has been offered jointly by Women's Studies and Philosophy for several years. The course enrolls students from a broad range of backgrounds and academic interests. The course is appropriate for general education because students from various backgrounds have found the course accessible and productive for their learning. Several of the basic debates in feminism explored in this course are introduced in the Sophomore Inquiry Course. These topics include: women's health and reproductive lives, sexuality, the impact of race, class, sexual orientation and other differences on women's experiences of gender. The course helps to increase the interdisciplinary breadth of the cluster which has no courses from the Philosophy area. It also complements several other courses in the cluster, including Biopolitics and Genes and Society, both of which draw on feminist epistemology and take up some of the ethical dilemmas which are raised in this course.

C. GENERAL EDUCATION GOALS

1. Inquiry and Critical Thinking
   Like all philosophy courses, Feminist Philosophy engages students in the process of identifying the implicit premises in people's thinking and subjecting them to critical inquiry. Feminist thinkers have described the masculinist assumptions of much of liberal thought and responded to them in a variety of ways. Feminist thinkers themselves also operate with unidentified assumptions. We pay attention to these assumptions, because they shape current controversies and conversations among feminists. In developing critical thinking skills, the course focuses on the logic of arguments and how controversies can be understood by paying attention to premises, inferences, and reasoned dialogue as opposed to mere disagreement.

2. Communication
   The course focuses on teaching students how to carry out respectful, productive communication rather than just airing differences and venting frustrations. We use understanding intellectual traditions of feminism to analyze the frameworks that individual feminist thinkers draw upon as a route to respectfully and reasonably criticizing them. From a feminist perspective, differences of opinion or method are not to be resolved through institutional power but through challenges to foundational assumptions. The course requires written essays and small group participation. Students gain experience with oral presentation when they are required to report back to the whole class on the outcomes of their small group work or in taking responsibility for leading a class discussion on a topic.
3. Human Experience
The course familiarizes students with a process by which a particular state of affairs can be described using different concepts. This gives students an appreciation for how conceptual differences are the ground for different perceptions and evaluations of human behaviors and institutions. Focusing on the relationship between our ways of thinking and our ways of living, students come to appreciate how different conceptual schemes come to be predominant and how these might be challenged when addressed from new points of view, such as women’s experience and feminist philosophies.

4. Ethical Issues and Social Responsibility
Feminist philosophy has at its core questions about social, political, economic, and personal values. Feminism takes the core philosophical question, how shall we live?, and addresses it from the point of view of women. Ethical issues, such as a woman’s right to her own body, the moral status of sexuality, the criteria for a just society, are central questions explored in the course. Students also have the opportunity to address a core question in social responsibility: how shall we best organize ourselves as a community. Once this question is asked from the point of view of women's experience, many of the classic answers to this question in Enlightenment thought are revealed to be untenable. Thus, the course opens up a space for students to question and develop their own views on social responsibility.

D. COURSE OUTLINE (see attached syllabi, one for each instructor)
Course Description:

Traditional philosophy is the pursuit of objective knowledge. Feminist philosophy challenges this with the claim that philosophy is the study of knowledge from individual points of view, in the context of social, political and historical constraints. Feminist philosophy reinterprets the goal of objectivity from its position as value free to an understanding of objectivity as an ever increasing subjective plurality. This course will explore the sources of the transformation through the works of women philosophers. Feminism is based on the premises that women have been and continue to be oppressed in which case the goal is to emancipate and empower women, and the premise that gender is a fundamental category of analysis.

We will cover issues relating to the philosophy of: the natural world, health, law, sexuality, gender, power/knowledge, race, scientific theory, and ethical theory.

The course is interdisciplinary in two senses. It focuses on feminist theory as a field of study that calls for thought and analysis using experimental methods, quantitative methods, and qualitative methods from a variety of disciplines in the sciences and humanities. In addition it requires students from a broad spectrum of majors to assess the future of issues involving women’s lives. The individual women’s lives from which a variety of perspectives on these topic emanate, arise across national boundaries.

The writing emphasis stresses the need for using language and writing as an extension of your critical reasoning skills to communicate your own informed and thoughtful positions.

Objectives: We will explore and evaluate the reasoning of each selection as to its: assumptions, premises and criteria. You should ask yourself the following questions when you read the assignments:

-----What is the problem?
-----What question is the selection answering?
-----Whose question is it?
-----Are reasons being offered to support claims? Are they good reasons?
-----What are the assumptions being made?
-----Is what is said true? How can I find out?
Class Requirements:
1. Reading is due on the day indicated on the syllabus. All the reading is required unless indicated as recommended.

2. Preparation for class, attendance at class, and participation in class discussions especially during colleague presentations, are also required and will play a role in the grade evaluation for the class.

3. Essays: There will be weekly 1-2 page essays for each reading due that week. I will give you questions to choose from. These essays will be used to facilitate small group class discussion.

4. Papers: There will be two short papers (4-5 pages) and one longer (10 pages - due the day you would otherwise take a final).
   - Paper #1 will be an essay that combines responses to the issues raised in class with personal reflection.
   - Paper #2 will be a critical response to the readings. I will provide you with questions in advance. These papers will be reviewed and evaluated by your colleagues as well as by me.
   - Paper #3 will be an expansion and revision of one of these papers. It must combine either your research with some theoretical perspective or personal voice with theoretical concerns.

5. Presentations - An individual or group will facilitate class discussion on designated days. You should be prepared with a list of questions that are as yet unresolved in your mind and be prepared to lead the class in a discussion to help you resolve the outstanding issues. These questions should be derived from the assigned reading or related reading that you did in addition to the assigned reading. They should be established together or individually.

Grades:
- Paper #1: 20% Due: 4/21/97
- Paper #2: 20% Due: 5/19/97
- Presentation: 15% Due: your choice on sign up sheet
- Paper #3: 25% Due: 6/9/97
- Weekly Essays: 20%
REQUIRED AND RECOMMENDED READINGS:

WEEK ONE
3/31/97

ENGENDERED RATIONALITIES: WAYS OF KNOWING/AUTONOMY AND REASON

Introduction; Critical Thinking Skills; Liberal Feminism

WEEK TWO
4/7/97

THE DOMINATION OF WOMEN AND THE NATURAL WORLD


recommended:

WEEK THREE
4/14/97

ENGENDERING HEALTH AND WOMEN’S BODIES

Tong, Rosemarie, chapter 3


recommended:
Zita, Jacquelyn N. "The Pre-menstrual Syndrome "Dis-easing" the Female Cycle." Hypatia. vol 3, #1. 1988
WEEK FOUR
4/21/97

GENDER AND SEX

Tong, Marie. chapter 4


recommended:

PAPER ONE DUE
COLLEAGUE EVALUATIONS

WEEK FIVE
4/28/97

ETHICS


recommended:

PRESENTATION

Film: "A Question of Silence." (to be shown during week before Phil. of Law)
WEEK SIX
5/5/97

FEMINIST PHILOSOPHY OF LAW


PRESENTATION

WEEK SEVEN
5/12/97

FEMINISM AND RACE

Frankenberg, Ruth. The Social Construction of Whiteness. chapters, 1, 4, 6


PRESENTATION

WEEK EIGHT
5/19/97

FEMINIST PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE


Schulman, Bonnie. "What If We Change Our Axioms?: A Feminist Inquiry into the Foundation of Mathematics" (unpublished paper)


SECOND PAPER DUE/COLLEAGUE EVALUATIONS
WEEK NINE
5/26/97

NO CLASS - MEMORIAL DAY

WEEK TEN
6/2/97

EPISTEMOLOGY


PRESENTATION

WEEK ELEVEN
6/9/97

FINAL - PAPER THREE DUE
Feminist Philosophy
PSU Summer Session 2000
Shirlee Geiger

Syllabus

Course Goals

I believe feminism is primarily a kind of activism -- not a kind of philosophy, not a set of beliefs or theories, not an intellectual orientation of any kind. But in a class on feminist philosophy, our focus will be on the thinking behind feminist activism, not the activism itself. **Our primary objective is to come to understand the theories, values and internal complexities of feminist thinking, in the context of the intellectual issues and givens of the times.** I think of this as an intellectual history class, leading up to contemporary issues. Still, I will try very hard to remember the practical activist reality of feminist struggle, even as we concentrate on the abstract and speculative intellectual theorizing of feminist philosophy. For me, personally, much contemporary academic feminist work is disconcerting and discouraging because I can see no connection between theory and activist practice.

In teaching about the thinking of feminists, my goals are

- To participate in the ongoing work of seeing to it that feminist thinking does not get “lost” again, as it has in the past. For example, I studied none of the thinkers described in our text in the 8 years I went to philosophy school. Their work had not made it onto the list of “great thoughts of great thinkers” which formed the philosophy curriculum of my time. I want to be part of maintaining the changes in course content created by feminist activism.

- To examine the grounds for feminist disagreement. Feminists disagree with each other. A lot. Some of it is quite brutal. I know many women who feel hurt, angry, and bitter about their treatment by other feminists -- over recent incidents as well as some long in the past. In this class, I want to understand the intellectual sources of these disagreements. I believe it is easier to be respectful of differences when we “know where someone’s coming from.” Understanding an intellectual or activist tradition in feminist work can provide a context in which contemporary thinkers can disagree in respectful ways.

- To figure out what we each think about these matters, anyway. In these times that are often labeled “post-feminist,” many of the issues and dreams of feminists remain unresolved and unrealized. But women’s political struggle is no longer a top and burning topic of the day, as it was in my young adulthood. It seems to me there are fewer conversations about feminism. We’re not making headlines, so there are fewer inducements and opportunities to talk and explore and read, in order for us each to find or create an understanding of
feminist issues truly our own. This class, then, offers an invitation to understand feminist matters, in order to understand yourself and what you believe.

Assignments and Grades

I will provide a set of study questions for our use this quarter. They are intended to serve as directed reading questions, guides to lectures, an indication of the order of our reading and topics, discussion questions, and your writing assignment. There will be 10 questions. Each answer could get at most 10 points, for a total of 100 points possible for all ten. Your letter grade for the course will be based on points accumulated on your answers to the study questions. (90-100 A, 80-89 B, 70-79 C) If you do not receive ten points on an answer, you can re-do the work, or perhaps answer a related question, if you would like more points. There are also several extra credit questions available, and you are welcome to submit extra credit writing on any topic that interests you.

There are no quizzes, tests, research papers or written requirements other than the study questions. Attendance and participation are encouraged, but have no part in the formula for determining your grade. I will not submit a grade lower than a “C” except by special arrangement. If you have accumulated less than 70 points by the end of the term, I will submit a grade of “incomplete.” I reserve the right to raise anyone’s grade above the letter determined by answers to the study questions for any reason I judge relevant.

Reading Material

Our textbook is Feminist Theory, by Josephine Donovan. It is available at In Other Words Bookstore (232-6003), and in class the second class meeting.

We will be reading three short essays:

   Baker, “Pricks and Chicks”
   Eherenreich, “The Politics of Other Women’s Work”
   Sullivan, “Why Men Are Different”

Access to these essays will be discussed in class.

I will be available before or after class, by appointment. To set up a time, please call me at my PCC number: 244-6111 x3580. I am also available there for phone consultations or just to talk.
Study Questions for Feminist Philosophy

(1) (read Donovan’s Chapter One) Describe the following aspects of liberal feminist thinking. (Please do not quote from Donovan at length)
(a) faith in rationality
(b) belief in the ontological similarity of men and women
(c) belief in education as a means of social change
(d) conception of the individual as agent
(e) belief in natural rights

(2) (read Donovan’s Chapter Two) First, describe the cultural/romantic thinking which I call the “transvaluation project” – please be sure to give at least two specific examples of transvalued male and female characteristics. Second, give one reason for thinking this project constitutes “reverse discrimination” and one reason for thinking it does not. (You are welcome to tell me what you really think on this issue, if you’d like.)

(3) Cultural/romantic feminists main disagreement with liberal feminists is (in my view of the matter) over (b) in (1) above. Trace out the implications for cultural/romantic feminists for (a), (c), (d) and (e) of the liberals program, given the basic disagreement over (b).

(4) (Read the essay by Sullivan) Many people had strong responses to Sullivan’s essay, which appeared in the New York Times Magazine. There were intense letters to the editor several weeks running – some praising and some trashing his work. Please compose a letter to the editor regarding it.

EXTRA CREDIT: Liberal and Romantic/Cultural feminist traditions leave us a rich legacy of intellectual and activist work. Think out the implications of characteristic thinking for each tradition on the following issues: abortion rights, single gender schools or organizations, surrogate mother contracts, sex work, gay/lesbian marriage.

(5) (Read Donovan’s Chapter 6 and the essay by Baker) Many radical feminists consider institutionalized male control of female sexuality to be central to our oppression. In this tradition, Baker’s conclusion is that we conceive of those who play the female as harmed, and we conceive of those who play the male sexual role as harmers. Describe his reasoning, based on an analysis of sexual metaphors.

EXTRA CREDIT It is important to me that you clearly understand what is meant by saying oppression is institutionalized. My best try to make this clear is through
my argument for the institutional character of rape. Please describe the three steps in my reasoning, and respond.

(6) In past classes, we’ve had interesting conversations around radical feminists’ analysis of sexual politics. Pick one of the following and discuss at least two different points of view on it:

- What would a radical feminist analysis of s/m sexuality look like?
- The radical feminist analysis might have been accurate once, but socialization regarding sexuality has changed since the 1970s and 80s. It is no longer accurate.
- The radical feminist view implies that some sexual pleasures are politically taboo, while some are PC. But women’s sexuality has already been bounded and other-directed. More rules are NOT what we need.
- A real radical feminist is a lesbian. Of course.

(7) (Donovan’s Chapter 3 and the essay by Ehrenreich)
Marxists main complaints against radical feminist thinking are that it is ahistorical, essentializing, and does not take into account the material basis of women’s oppression. Please say what this means.

EXTRA CREDIT Here’s a basic Marxist lexicon. Define each term or phrase.

(8) Ehrenreich summarizes the history of feminist analysis of “the politics of housework” in the first part of her essay. She says that currently housework is becoming part of a “servant economy”. Please describe at least three things about the current politics of housework that she believes raise troubling moral issues. Do you agree with her analysis?

(9) (Donovan’s chapter 8) In the 1980s and 90s, “identity politics” emerged as an important corrective to the way white and middle class issues dominated feminist agendas in the 60s and 70s. When connected to a post-modern suspicion that all categories, labels and theories are essentialist and oppressive, we end up with a radical pluralism. Is this compatible with a feminist vision? Please give at least reasoning path leading to an affirmative answer to this question, and one leading to a negative answer. Which do you think is right?

(10) (Donovan’s chapter 7) Please describe three things that distinguish a care orientation to morality from a justice orientation, according to the work of Gilligan and colleagues. Do you, from your experience and thought, believe this is a genuine gender difference? Please explain.