Women’s Studies 301: Gender and Critical Inquiry

Fall 2009
Tuesdays and Thursdays 10:00-11:50
210 UTS

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Course Description:

This course is designed to introduce you to key themes and concepts in contemporary feminist theory. Although in one quarter we cannot cover the breadth of feminist theory, the goal of this course is to help you develop the tools to read, critically engage, write about, and produce your own feminist theories. Throughout this course, we will ask: What is feminism? Why does feminism need theory? What is the relationship between feminism, gender, and the often contentious category of Women?

We will begin by examining the diverse ways that feminism has been defined in different social and historical contexts. Paying specific attention to how recent feminist work has problematized the coherence of the category of Women, we will focus on the ways in which feminist theorists have disturbed gender’s biological foundation in sex and interrogated the ways that gender is constituted in relation to other categories of difference (such as race, class, nation, and sexuality).

Building on these themes, we will then turn to the multitude of ways that feminists have theorized key issues that shape women’s lives such as nationalism, work, sexuality, and the production of knowledge. Finally, we will interrogate the implications that these theories have for how we conceptualize different forms of feminist solidarity.

This is a Writing Intensive Course, which means that one of the primary goals of the course is to expand and develop your writing skills. In addition to more formal writing assignments, we will use writing as a tool for critically engaging the texts we read throughout the course.
Required Reading:

The following book is required reading for the course:

Carole R. McCann and Seung-Kyung Kim, eds., *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives, 2nd Edition*

This book is available for purchase at In Other Words bookstore. In Other Words will be selling books at the Women’s Resource Center during the first week of classes. See attached handout for more information.

In addition to the required books, articles will be made available to you electronically through Blackboard. To access these readings, go to bb.pdx.edu, log in with your ODIN username and password, and select readings from the course menu. Please print out the articles so that you can more effectively take notes and so that you can have them to refer to during class discussions. Please do not use your laptops in class. These articles are required reading for the course. Therefore, it is important that you plan ahead to have regular internet access.

Course Requirements:

1. *Attendance and Participation (10%)*: Students are expected to attend all class meetings, be on time, finish all reading assignments prior to class, and be engaged in class discussions. Participation includes both speaking and listening. Therefore, students should come to class prepared to both express their own thoughts and questions on course material and to listen and learn from their classmates. Class discussions are an essential component of this course, and the success of the course depends upon your participation. You are allowed to miss two classes without it affecting your grade. For each class you miss after the two excused absences, your attendance grade will be reduced by the equivalent of one full letter grade. If you miss more than six classes, you will automatically fail the course. Exceptions to this policy may be made due to illness, in which case it is your responsibility to contact me and make arrangements to make up missed work in a timely manner.

2. *Feminist Theory Dictionary (5%)*: Throughout the course, we will maintain a “dictionary” of feminist theory terms on Blackboard. You are expected to contribute to the dictionary by defining terms that come up in the reading at least five times over the course of the quarter. You will get more details about the dictionary during the second week of class.

3. *Group Presentation (5%)*: Each student is expected to participate in a group presentation on one of the texts discussed in the course. Your presentation should highlight important points from the article, make connections to other texts we have read, and raise questions for group discussion. Your presentation should not simply be a summary of the texts but rather should demonstrate your
own analysis. Your presentation may take whatever format you like. The articles for group presentation are noted with asterisks in the course schedule. We will decide on groups during the second week of class.

4. **Response Papers (25%)**: Students are required to write short (approximately 500 words) response papers to the assigned readings each week. These papers are designed to help you think critically about the readings and to help prepare you for class discussions. You will be provided with a prompt that you should address in your response paper. Response papers will be evaluated based on the quality of your engagement with the readings. Response papers are due in class every Tuesday. Response papers should be typed (although it is preferable that you turn in a handwritten response paper than none at all). You may miss one response paper without it affecting your grade, and you are not required to turn in a response paper the week the short essay is due. However, because the purpose of the response papers is to facilitate class discussion, they will not be accepted late.

5. **Short Essay Assignment (20%)**: A short essay (approximately 4 pages) will be due on **October 22**. You will be given a prompt to respond to, and we will do work in class on developing and revising your essays.

6. **Long Essay Assignment (35%)**: A long essay (8 pages) will be due on **December 8**. You will be given a prompt to respond to, and we will do work in class on developing and revising your essays.

You are responsible for meeting the above deadlines, for information given in class about assignments and changes to the syllabus, and above all, for contacting me about any problems that you may encounter. The material covered in this course can be quite challenging. Therefore, if you have questions or are struggling with the material in any way, it is essential that you come talk to me as soon as possible. Additionally, if there are personal issues that make it difficult or impossible for you to complete assignments or come to class, it is your responsibility to let me know in a timely manner so that we can work together to make sure that you successfully complete the course.

**Course Schedule and Reading Assignments**

Note: Readings are located as follows:

- FTR: *Feminist Theory Reader*
  All other readings are available online through Blackboard or at the website indicated.

**I. Key Terms and Problems**

9/29: Introduction

10/1: Feminism and Theory
1. Avery Gordon, “Theory and Justice.” (Blackboard)
2. Simone de Beauvoir, “Introduction” to The Second Sex, FTR pp. 34-42.

10/6: Theorizing Oppression
Response Paper: Pick one of these two essays to write about. What does the author or group identify as the “problem” to be solved or the oppression to be addressed? How does the author or group define their own political stance? What vision for liberation does the essay put forward?

10/8: Science, Social Construction, and the Sexed Body
2. Ann Fausto-Sterling, “Dueling Dualisms” (Blackboard)

10/13: Rethinking Sex and Gender

10/15: Intersectionality and Mutually Constituted Categories
1. Evelyn Nakano Glenn, “Integrating Race and Gender” (Blackboard)
2. Elsa Barkeley Brown, “What Has Happened Here” (Blackboard)

10/20: Power, Performance, and the Body
1. Sandra Lee Bartky, “Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power,” FTR 404-418

10/22: Borders and Belonging
Short Essay Due

II. Issues and Themes in Feminist Theory

A. Gender and the Nation

10/27: Nations and States
2. Jacqui Alexander, “Not Just Any(Body) Can Be a Citizen” (Blackboard)

10/29: Indigenous Feminisms
1. Selections from Andrea Smith and J. Kehaulani Kauanui, “Native Feminisms Engage American Studies” (Blackboard)

B. Sexuality and Power

11/3: Sexual Violence

11/5: Race and Sexuality
1. Evelynn Hammonds, “Toward a Genealogy of Black Female Sexuality” (Blackboard)

C. Gendering Labor

11/10: Marxism and Feminism
1. Maria Dalla Costa and Selma James, “Women and the Subversion of the Community” (http://www.generation-online.org/p/fpdallacosta2.htm)
2. Johnnie Tillmon, “Welfare is a Women’s Issue” (Blackboard)*

11/12: Gender and the International Division of Labor
1. Heidi Hartmann, “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism,” FTR pp. 206-221.*

D. The Production of Knowledge

11/17: Feminist Standpoints

11/19: Post-Structuralist Theories
1. Joan Scott, “The Evidence of Experience” (Blackboard)

11/24: Situated Knowledges
E. Feminist Solidarities

12/1: Transnational Solidarities

12/3: Political Locations

12/8: Long Essay Due