

INTRODUCTION TO WOMEN'S STUDIES
WS 101-006 / CRN 43974 / 4 credits / Winter 2010
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TR 12:00 – 2:00 pm / SH 207

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Course Description

In this course students analyze the varieties of women's experience in contemporary American society, consider how gender relations may be changing, and investigate the historical social, political, economic, and cultural forces that shape our lives relative to gender. Feminist thinking within and across academic disciplines frames the exploration of these topics. We'll explore relations of inequality organized along lines of race, ethnicity, nationality, class, sexuality, ability, appearance, age, and other categories of difference, in addition to gender.

Learning Objectives

All of us—students, mentors, and instructor—will be actively learning this term in this course. While we each have our particular roles, with their rights and their responsibilities, we all will teach each other and learn from each other as we co-create this course.

The following are the learning objectives—the desired results from our engagement with this material—for our course.

- Create and maintain a collaborative and inclusive environment, and reflect on our successes and failures as a collaborative, inclusive learning community;
- Understand fundamental concepts, theories, history, and contemporary expressions of feminism as a social justice movement;
- Investigate and analyze the social construction of gender and its intersections with other socially-constructed categories of difference (such as race, ethnicity, nationality, class, sexuality, ability, appearance, age, and others);
- Explore activism as a mechanism for enacting feminism in our spheres of influence;
- Inscribe feminism as we understand it through an individual final project and presentation of that project within our class learning community.

Starting Points

We all, in some way or another, act as oppressors (unknowingly, much of the time), as well as experience oppression. Simply and directly put, we all oppress and are oppressed. No one is free from this dynamic. Oppression is interlocking and pervasive and exists in many forms: sexism, racism, heterosexism, classism, and ableism, to name just a few. In this course, we will investigate gender-based oppression and its relationship to other forms of oppression, and we will explore the many ways that we might understand and deal with the reality of oppression in our world.

Starting from this place of curiosity about how we are all impacted by the dynamics of oppression, we will seek to create a feminist learning community that puts concepts and theories into concrete action both inside and outside our classroom.

Instructor's Expectations

The writer Angeles Arrien, in her book *The Four-Fold Way: Walking the Paths of the Warrior, Teacher, Healer and Visionary*, claims that there are four essential ways, lessons from shamanic traditions, which support an individual's quest for wisdom, creative expression, health, and the ability to adapt to change:

- ◇ *To show up, to be visible, and to empower others through example and intention*
- ◇ *To pay attention to what has heart and meaning*
- ◇ *To tell the truth without blame or judgment*
- ◇ *To be open, rather than attached, to outcomes*

I draw on these principles of authentic personhood heavily when designing a course (including grading criteria) and then co-creating that course experience in our classroom (with all of you as the other co-creators of that experience). I am interested in being in a class in which everyone is welcome and included and in which everyone takes responsibility for welcoming and including everyone else. I expect that we will practice bringing ourselves—our best selves—to this work every day with that intention: to be fully present to this experience and to companion each other as we make our way through it.

And that *is* a practice. Some days our best selves may look and sound and *be* a whole lot “better” than on other days. But I ask that each of you, if you choose to remain in this class, agree to take this same sort of commitment on for the duration of our time together and to investigate what that means to you. What do you need in order to practice your own version of this commitment?

In other words, what might this learning community look and feel like if we practice being *curious* about our own and others' experiences without needing to be *right*? How, in a university setting, might we operate from a place of a humble *not knowing* in order to build a large enough vision of community that we *all* can belong to it, if we so choose? What if, in this class, we risk living in the questions instead of rushing into answers? And what might feminism have to do with all this?

One non-negotiable: Refrain from using your cellphone while you are in class. If you need to text someone or make or receive a call, feel free to step out of class and return when you are finished.

Texts

Each of you will choose to read one of the following texts and to participate in a reading group facilitated by one of the course mentors. Each book group will also facilitate a class presentation of the themes of its book. The texts are listed below, along with the mentor who will lead the small-group discussions for that book:

- Gornick, Vivian. Fierce Attachments. Farra, Strous & Giroux, 2005. (Emma)
- Hale, Janet Campbell. The Jailing of Cecelia Capture. The University of New Mexico Press, 1987. (Monica)
- hooks, bell. The Will to Change. Washington Square Press, 2004. (Shelly)
- Hurston, Zora Neale. Their Eyes Were Watching God. HarperPerennial, 2006. (Kaleigh)
- Jervis, Lisa and Andi Zeisler. BITCHfest: Ten Years of Cultural Criticism from the Pages of Bitch Magazine. Farrar, Strous & Giroux, 2006. (Amira)
- Morrison, Toni. Beloved. Random House, 2004. (Sarah)
- Valenti, Jessica. Full Frontal Feminism. Seal Press, 2007. (Sam)

Additional required reading (articles, book chapters, other literature, and other media resources) will be available as downloadable files on the course Blackboard site.

Blackboard

Blackboard is PSU's course management system. We will use Blackboard to post readings, assignments, due dates, and class and general announcements. You will also be able to track your grade through Blackboard. Sign onto Blackboard at <http://www.psuonline.pdx.edu/>. You will need an Odin account to sign in; if you don't have an Odin account, see Vicki or one of the mentors.

Requirements

You will earn your grade in this course through attending and participating in class, creating several individual and group assignments, and completing a self-evaluation and reflection on your individual growth and learning. A few of the assignments for the course are required for all students, but each of you will also customize the course by choosing from among several other assignments. Your required Individual Course Plan, due on Tuesday, January 12, will outline your customized assignment plan for the rest of the term.

You'll find complete guidelines for the assignments that follow in the course Assignment Guide, to be distributed in class on Thursday, January 7.

The following elements of the course are required:

1. Attendance and Participation: 100 points

All students are expected to attend our class sessions each week. Your participation is essential to our classroom dynamic. Your unique insights from your life experience, your understandings of the readings, the questions posed to your colleagues—all are a valuable and fundamental part of the rich discussion and learning that will take place in our learning community. Without your full and active participation, we will be missing an important voice—*yours*.

In this course, we will learn from one another's social locations in regards to race, class, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. This is less of a lecture/note-taking class and more of an experiential, learn-as-you-go classroom process that you, your mentors and colleagues, and I will co-create together. As such, **it requires you to come to class each session, having read the materials thoroughly, ready to engage with it together.**

We have 20 class meetings this term, with each one worth 5 points. You will earn up to 100 points this term for arriving on time to, staying for the duration of, and participating actively in each class session. **For class sessions in which reading is scheduled, full participation also requires you to turn in one quote and a brief reflection from the readings due for that day.** Arriving late to class, leaving early, or failing to turn in a quote and reflection (Q&R) from the reading will result in your earning half points for that day's attendance and participation.

2. Individual Course Plan: 15 points (+ 3 extra credit points available); due Tuesday, January 12

In this assignment, you will identify your goals for this course and the grade you plan to earn, you will articulate how you intend to work toward achieving those goals and that grade, and you will identify which of the optional assignments you will complete. You will then use this Individual Course Plan at the middle and the end of the term as you reflect on and evaluate your work in the course.

The plan itself is worth 15 points. An optional 3 extra credit points are available if you include a photo of yourself attached to or pasted into your paper. (This will help Vicki learn your names.)

3. Test on the syllabus: 50 points; Tuesday, January 12

We will have only one test this term, and it will focus on the syllabus. More details about this in class.

4. Mid-term Reflection: 15 points; due Tuesday, February 9

In this piece, you will reflect on your progress toward achieving the learning goals you identified for yourself in your Individual Course Plan.

5. Book Group Presentation: 25 points; scheduled during weeks 7 & 8 of the term.

Each of the individual book groups will facilitate half of a class session to share the major themes of their books. The groups will have autonomy in determining how they'd like to present these themes, and the mentor who is facilitating the book group will help to guide the development of these sessions.

6. Individual Project: Academic/research paper OR creative work OR extended activism: 25 points; due Thursday, March 11

Each student will complete an individual project, as defined and chosen by the student. The individual project may be an academic/research paper, a thorough and thoughtful creative work, or an extended period of activism accompanied by a comprehensive reflection paper.

7. Sharing of Individual Project: 10 points; scheduled for our final 3 class sessions

We will celebrate our learning with presentations/performances of your individual projects, so that you may teach others what you learned through conducting your individual work.

8. Final Reflection and Self-assessment: 15 points; due Friday, March 19

Using the Individual Course Plan that you developed at the beginning of the term, you will reflect on your learning and evaluate your work this term.

The following assignments are those from which you will choose. In doing so, you will select whichever assignments you'd like to complete for a total of up to 45 points.

1. Interview with a Feminist: 15 points; due Tuesday, January 19

This assignment invites you to interview a self-identified feminist as a way to broaden and deepen your views of how persons come to think of themselves as feminists and what that means for their lives.

2. "After Reading" Reflection: 15 points; due Tuesday, January 26

Trivia, a feminist political and literary journal, featured a segment in which readers responded to feminist writing of the time with a personal reflection. This assignment is modeled after that.

3. The Language Experiment: 15 points; due Tuesday, February 2

This assignment provides you with the opportunity to become more aware of oppressive language, whether it's sexist ("bitch"), racist ("black sheep"), classist ("white trash"), heterosexist ("faggot"), ableist ("retarded"), and so on. Beyond noting the language you and others use and your experience of and personal response to it, you will critically analyze why and how the language is oppressive. You will also get a chance to practice interrupting oppressive language.

4. “Talk Back” Critical Reading Response: 15 points; due Tuesday, February 16

This assignment takes the “After Reading” reflection one step further. In this writing, you will critically engage with the ideas and points of the author to whom you are responding, identifying places of agreement and disagreement with the author and offering thoughts of your own to further the dialogue.

5. Media Analysis: 15 points; due Tuesday, February 23

This assignment invites you to engage with and analyze various media to determine the messages the media send, the content and style of those messages, and the possible impacts of those messages on the media’s readers/viewers/consumers.

6. Mind Map: 15 points; due Tuesday, March 2

This assignment asks you to create a visual representation of some aspect of your thinking, feeling and learning this term. Your mind map might express your interpretation of one or more of our readings, the intersection of the readings with your own lived experiences, your own social location, and so on.

There is also extra credit available this term. You will earn **5 points** for every feminist-y event you attend and either report out on in class or write up in a brief reflection, up to 20 points total. The “Announcements” section of Blackboard will include information on such events, and we will all announce them in class as well.

Grading

There are 300 points available to you this term. Letter grades will fall out this way:

- A = 90-100% = 270 points and higher
- B = 80-89% = 240-269 points
- C = 70-79% = 210-239 points
- D = 60-69% = 180-209 points

One final note on grading: In order to give meaningful and in-depth feedback to you on your written work, both Vicki and the mentors will read your assignments. Vicki alone will read the Individual Course Plan, the Mid-term Reflection, and the Final Reflection and Self-Evaluation; the other assignments, including Q&Rs, will be shared among Vicki and the mentors. **If you prefer to have a particular person read any of your assignments, be sure to note that person’s name at the top of your paper.**

Academic and Other Campus Supports

Descriptions of these support services are taken directly from their PSU websites.

- **Disability Resource Center:** Smith Center 435, 503-725-4150 (voice) and 503-725-6505 (TDD), <http://www.pdx.edu/uasc/drc.html>.
“The mission of the Disability Resource Center (DRC) is to collaborate with and empower Portland State University students with disabilities in order to coordinate support services and programs that enable equal access to an education and university life. To accomplish this goal, the DRC provides pre-admission and disability counseling, advocacy, educational training, and a variety of accommodations for equal access to the educational process and campus at Portland State University.” If you need physical or other accommodation, see me and/or contact the Disability Resource Center directly.
- **Center for Student Health and Counseling (SHAC):** University Center Building 200 (1880 SW 6th Ave.), 503-725-2800, <http://www.shac.pdx.edu/>.
- **Multicultural Center:** Smith Center 228, 503-725-5342, multicul@pdx.edu, <http://culture.pdx.edu/>. “The Multicultural Center provides a forum for collaborative cultural, educational, and social experiences at PSU and beyond. Our mission is to bring together students, faculty, staff and the community to promote respect, understanding, equality, social justice, and interdependence among people of diverse backgrounds.”
- **Queer Resource Center (QRC):** Smith Center 401, 503-725-9742, qrc@pdx.edu, <http://www.qrc.pdx.edu/>. “The Portland State University Queer Resource Center strives to provide an inclusive safe space in advocating for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning students, staff, faculty and their allies. Our mission is to serve the PSU and surrounding communities through both outreach education and social programming that promotes awareness.”
- **Undergraduate Advising and Support Center (UASC):** Smith Center 425, 503-725-4005 (voice) and 503-725-6504 (TDD), <http://www.pdx.edu/uasc>. “The UASC facilitates the transition of newly admitted and newly enrolled undergraduate students, promotes academic success by providing a supportive environment for continuing students, and serves as a central information and referral source for students to campus services, resources and academic advisers.”
- **Women’s Resource Center (WRC):** SW 10th & Montgomery (basement of Montgomery Hall), 503-725-5672, <http://wrc.pdx.edu/>. “Located in the basement of the Montgomery Building, the WRC provides a great student lounge and event space, a Leadership in Action program that gives students the chance to get involved with grass roots feminist activism, The Empowerment Project which provides resources to non-traditional women students, and sexual assault and domestic violence advocacy and information. Stop by anytime!”
- **Writing Center:** Cramer Hall 188, 503-725-3570, <http://www.writingcenter.pdx.edu/>

Schedule

Note: The following schedule—and this syllabus as a whole—should be considered a living document, a work-in-progress, a best guess at what we’ll be doing when. Given that we all will share collective decision-making responsibilities for many aspects of our course, our actual schedule is likely to change as we move through the term. **Bring your syllabus with you to each class session to write down any changes to our schedule.**

We will share responsibility for opening class each day. Also, for each class session in which reading is due, you will bring a quote and a brief reflection on that quote (Q&R) from one of the day’s readings. This will serve to help guide our class discussion as well as be a mechanism through which attendance will be taken. All articles listed below are available on our course Blackboard site.

Assignments written in bold-face are those which are required; those in regular type are the optional assignments from which you created your course plan.

Week	Date	Class Themes/Activities	Readings Due	Assignments Due
1	T 1/5/10	Introduce ourselves. Review syllabus. What is “feminism”? What is “Women’s Studies”?		
	R 1/7/10	Clarify questions about syllabus. Plagiarism 101 Discuss articles Discuss Individual Course Plan	Syllabus in entirety Baumgardner & Richards, “A Day without Feminism” & “A Day with Feminism” hooks, “Feminist Politics: Where We Stand” Valenti, “You’re a Hardcore Feminist, I Swear” & “I Promise I Won’t Say Herstory” <i>Optional: Shaw & Lee, “Women’s Studies: Perspectives and Practices”</i>	Q&R
2	T 1/12/10	Test on the syllabus Generate grading criteria for written assignments		Individual Course Plan
	R 1/14/10	Understanding “patriarchy” and “oppression” Meet with book group	Frye, “Oppression” Johnson, “Where Are We?” Moraga, “La Güera” Wong, “When I Was Growing Up” <i>Optional: Shaw & Lee, “Systems of Inequality & Privilege...”</i>	Q&R
3	T 1/19/10	The “First Wave”: <i>One Woman, One Vote</i>	Dicker, “First Wave Feminism: Fighting for the Vote”	Q&R Interview with a Feminist
	R 1/21/10	Discuss <i>One Woman, One Vote</i> Book group discussions	Your chosen book	Q&R
4	T 1/26/10	Understanding “the social construction of gender” Discuss Language Experiment	Feinberg, “We Are All a Work in Progress” Lorber, “The Social Construction of Gender” Richardson, “Gender Stereotyping in the English Language” Vincent, “Journey’s End”	Q&R “After Reading”

	R 1/28/10	Understanding “power” and “privilege” Book group discussions	Kimmel, “Real Men Join the Movement” Lorde, “The Master’s Tools...” McIntosh, “White Privilege and Male Privilege” Schacht, “Teaching about Being an Oppressor” Your chosen book	Q&R
5	T 2/2/10	Understanding “social location” and “the intersectionality of oppression”	Allison, TBA Collins, “Towards a New Vision” Lamm, “It’s a Big Fat Revolution” Lee, “Beyond Bean Counting” Pharr, “Homophobia, A Weapon of Sexism” Wise, “By the Color of Their Skin”	Q&R Language Experiment
	R 2/4/10	Women’s Studies Open House		
6	T 2/9/10	The “Second Wave”: TBA	Dicker, “Second Wave Feminism”	Mid-term Reflection Q&R
	R 2/11/10	Book group discussions/check-in/worktime		
7	T 2/16/10	Book group presentations		“Talk Back” Critical Reading Response
	R 2/18/10	Book group presentations		
8	T 2/23/10	Book group presentations		Media Analysis
	R 2/25/10	Book group presentations Debrief book group presentations		
9	T 3/2/10	The “Third Wave”: TBA Check in about individual projects	Baumgardner & Richards, “Who’s the Next Gloria?” <i>Bitch</i> , <i>Ms.</i> , and <i>World Pulse</i> magazines online	Q&R Mind Map
	R 3/4/10	Celebrations of Learning: Sharing of Individual Projects		
10	T 3/9/10	Celebrations of Learning: Sharing of Individual Projects		
	R 3/11/10	Celebrations of Learning: Sharing of Individual Projects		Individual Project
Finals Week		No class currently planned—but we’ll reserve this time in case of PSU closure this term, or other reason we may choose to use this class session.		Final Reflection and Self-assessment via email by Fri, 3/19, to vicr@pdx.edu

