Course Abstract

This is a graduate seminar in feminist theory, and constitutes a core course for students enrolled in the Graduate Certificate Program. The seminar will be organized around questions that emerge for feminism from discourses of transnationalism, states, economies, race, affect, and sexuality and gender. It will draw from multiple located feminist works. Given that students will be approaching the work from several disciplines, and with a range of theoretical expertise, we will be emphasizing the methodological and historical contexts for each of the works we will be discussing in class.

Feminist theory is the critical place where activists and intellectuals engage in deep thinking and have arguments about ethics and politics. This course is an invitation to the subjects and terms of these fights. It takes seriously Clare Hemmings’ invitation to stop writing “progress” (or worse, decline) narratives for feminism and feminist theory—or, more bluntly, to take up Liz on Goodreads provocation that there is something well worth the trouble in work like Catherine McKinnon’s, which so many have found it fashionable, recently, to simply dismiss. It is sheer intellectual laziness to pretend that there is something called “70s feminism” or “80s feminism,” that it is singular, that we know what it is, and we are better than that now. Rather, the course explores major themes and questions in feminist theory from the 1970s to the present in a dialogic and recursive way, putting texts and writers in conversation with each other that are sometimes decades apart.

**DAY-TO-DAY BUSINESS OF THE COURSE**

There are many things we could do in this or any graduate seminar. We can locate readings in relationship to broader scholarly fields. We can engage in a rigorous critique of how books are put together—evidence and argument—in hopes of better understanding how to write good books (and dissertations). We can read closely. We can hold up arguments or turns of phrase that seem particularly smart and wonderful, or conversely, those that we particularly disagree with. We can look at books or articles for what they offer for our own research, teaching, activism, or ethical engagement . . . among other things.
Rather than use one or another of these approaches, the class will be organized by the approaches that are specific to each of this particular group’s needs. We will start off each class by writing as many questions as we can think of on the board and we will then orient our subsequent discussion around those questions. The goal is to build intellectual friendships and community through the work of naming our honest questions and particular agendas. It is also my hope that the seminar will be fun, even occasionally thrilling, in the way an elegant idea or a particularly provocative conversation can be exhilarating.

Academe has trained us all to think of learning as a competitive affair. One scholar right, another wrong; students compete against each other for the highest grade. In truth, though, all learning and thinking takes place in the context of intellectual communities—written, virtual or face-to-face. Institutions of higher education like this afford us the privilege and pleasure of reading together and learning from one another. Our job in this seminar is to create an intellectual community, one in which all are enriched by each other’s readings. Of course, some of this is difficult material, without a doubt, which is exactly why we need each other’s help to read it as well as to try to understand how it can (or fails to) speak to our situation in the context of the world. This imposes on each of us the responsibility of reading carefully, speaking up about our insights and questions, and listening respectfully to each other (which is not to say always agreeing).

**Books**

1. Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider* (Crossing Press, 1984, 2007 edition is also fine)

ALL ARTICLES ARE ON THE U-DRIVE IN A FOLDER TO WHICH ALL ENROLLED CLASS MEMBERS ARE SUBSCRIBED.

**Grading and Assignments**

15% Class Participation  
20% Four 2 pp. reading response: (5% each)  
40% Two 5-7pp papers (20% each)  
25% Final paper
1. Write four 2 pp. reading response papers. These have been frontloaded at the beginning of the semester to help you get quick feedback on your reading and writing.

2. Write two 5-7 pp. reading-response papers bringing together at least two of the readings in the weeks prior to the paper.

3. Write a 10 pp. conference paper that includes original research on a subject of your choosing related to the course material.

Attendance Policy:

You are expected to come to each class with the reading done. If you must miss a class, email the instructor. Two absences are a cause for concern. If you miss three or more classes, plan on meeting with me to discuss options related to making up the work, taking a grade reduction, or repeating the course.

**WEEK-BY-WEEK SCHEDULE**

**SEPTEMBER 3:** Overview

**METANARRATIVES**

**SEPTEMBER 10:**


>>> 2 pp. paper due
CRITICAL RACE FEMINISMS

SEPTEMBER 17:


>>>2 pp. paper due

SEPTEMBER 24:


>>>2 pp. paper due

OCTOBER 1:


>>>2 pp. paper due

ECONOMIES AND STATES

OCTOBER 8:


***NO CLASS TUESDAY OCTOBER 15 (MONDAY SCHEDULE)***

OCTOBER 22:


>>>5-7 pp. paper due. Is MacKinnon’s liberalism implicated in the formation that Duggan and Brown are critiquing? Why or why not?

**POSTCOLONIAL FEMINISMS**

**OCTOBER 29:**


**SEXUALITY AND GENDER**

**NOVEMBER 5:**


**NOVEMBER 12:**


>>>5-7 pp paper due comparing Butler with Wittig or Rubin (or both).
AFFECT

NOVEMBER 19:


NOVEMBER 26:


NATURECULTURES

DECEMBER 6
