

## Women's Studies 201

### *Critical Perspectives in Women's Studies*

#### Course Information

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<b>Office Location &amp; Number</b>	Bartlett 73 (basement), 577-0710 or 545-1922 (Women's Studies office)
<b>Office Hours</b>	Tues and Thurs, 12:30-1:30 and by appointment
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<b>Class Info</b>	Fall 2004, Tues and Thurs, 9:30-10:45, Bartlett 127

#### Course Description

*The quality of light by which we scrutinize our lives has direct bearing upon the product which we live, and upon the changes which we hope to bring about through those lives. It is within this light that we form those ideas by which we pursue our magic and make it realized.*

Audre Lorde, *Sister*, p. 36

*The story is older than my body, my mother's, my grandmother's. For years we have been passing it on so that it may live, shift, and circulate.*

Trinh. T. Minh-ha, *Woman Native Other*, p. 137

This course will introduce you to the vibrant field of Women's Studies and its unique interdisciplinary perspective grounded in a commitment to individual and social transformation. Questions that we will interrogate throughout the semester include: What does it mean to be a woman? How is the category of "woman" constructed differently across social groups, cultures and historical periods? Are there common experiences and essential characteristics that define all women? How do the differences between women according to race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and nationality complicate our commonalities? How do we integrate these cross-cutting categories in analyzing women's multiple identities and social positions? How can an understanding of women's lives empower us to act as agents of personal and social change? In exploring these questions, the course material will incorporate social science research, literature, political essays, film, poetry and art. The course has a strong comparative focus between women in the U.S. and women around the world, emphasizing transnational linkages and the processes of globalization.

#### Readings

**Required Texts:** All books are available at Food for Thought Books, 106 East Pleasant St. 413-253-5432 in Amherst Center and are also on reserve in the library. Additional readings will be distributed.

- 1) An Introduction to Women's Studies: Gender in a Transnational World, by Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, eds, McGraw-Hill, 2002. ISBN: 0-07-109380-X
- 2) Women without Class: Girls, Race, and Identity, by Julie Bettie. University of California Press, 2002. ISBN: 0520235428
- 3) The Handmaid's Tale, by Margaret Atwood. Anchor Books, 1998. ISBN: 038549081X
- 4) Maid in the U.S.A., by Mary Romero, Routledge; 10th Ann edition 2002. ISBN: 0415935415

## Goals & Organization

### Goals

- 1) to gain an understanding of the major intellectual concepts and debates that are the foundation of a Women's Studies interdisciplinary perspective.
- 2) to develop a feminist analysis that enables you to view yourself and your various social worlds (family, school, workplace, hometown, country, environment, etc.) through a critical "gender lens" that prioritizes the experiences and contributions of women.
- 3) to master the basic tools of feminist inquiry – including the ability to identify gendered processes, to pose theoretical questions, to understand current debates, and to learn methods of research, criticism and advocacy.
- 4) to engage actively with feminist concerns in the college and local community.
- 5) to gain a deeper understanding of yourself, your relationships and the society in which you live
- 6) to envision social institutions, policies, relations, ideologies and practices that foster respect, health, safety, equality, esteem and empowerment of all women.
- 7) to develop written and verbal skills for developing ideas, exchanging ideas with others, and presenting these ideas to a broader audience
- 8) to create a learning environment that instills confidence in your abilities to articulate and interpret your own experiences, and to empower you to take action on the things you care about.

### Organization

This course aims to give you an experience of Women's Studies as an integrated intellectual perspective with numerous cross-currents and debates across interdisciplinary boundaries. Introductory courses can be both exciting and frustrating in that they cover so many topics in such a short period of time. Thus, I have designed the course to give you both breadth and depth as you venture into new intellectual terrain. The main reader for the course, *An Introduction to Women's Studies: Gender in a Transnational World* (referred to as *Text*) addresses the many broad subfields within Women's Studies. I have also assigned selections from two full-length books. The first, *Between Voice and Silence*, focuses on women's construction of gender, race and class identities during adolescence, integrating course sections on socialization, education and identities. The second, *Domestica*, examines relations between Latina domestics and their employers, and addresses the course sections on women and work, globalization, migration and diaspora. We will also read a novel, *Woman on the Edge of Time*, which will allow you to examine feminist fiction and relate it to arguments in other readings. Rather than completing one section and moving on to another topic, we will weave and layer the many different strands of feminist thought, drawing connections and contrast between different authors and analytical approaches.

## Requirements

We all have intense feelings about our gendered identities and the practices and structures that shape them. Let's work together to create a space that honors the sensitivity and privacy of the issues we will discuss. I ask each of you to take responsibility for building a classroom environment based on trust, confidentiality and community while at the same time challenging each other in intellectually rigorous discussions.

This course follows a seminar format, which means that it is based mostly on class discussion and interactive learning exercises rather than lectures. This requires that you come prepared to think critically, articulate ideas coherently, listen attentively and respect the diversity of experiences and perspectives of your classmates. Because active class participation is so important for the success of this class, I have designed the assignments to facilitate deeper engagement with the readings and richer discussions. The class is structured around frequent, shorter assignments which allow me to provide you with regular feedback. In other words, this is not a course that you will be able to "cram" for. In order to do well in this course, you must take time to digest and integrate the course material through consistent work over the course of the semester.

- **Class participation, Discussion Board and In-class Assignments (10%)** Class participation will include regular attendance, informed and thoughtful contributions to discussion, in-class writing, posting to the electronic discussion board (at least five times) and participation in group exercises. You are expected to keep up with the readings and come to class prepared with comments and questions. You are expected to attend every class session and to let me know the reason for absences, preferably ahead of time. Students who have more than THREE unexcused absences will have their grades penalized. The attendance sheet will be passed out only at the beginning of class.
- **Homework Assignments (25%) (5 assignments – 2 pages each)** I will assign short (hopefully fun and creative) homework assignments designed to enrich understanding of the readings through applications to your current social world. (eg. I may ask you to interview a roommate or friend, observe social interactions in your dorm, or collect data from the TV or Internet and then report your findings to the class). You need not do every assignment but you must submit at least seven (approximately every other week), four of these during the first half of the semester (before the midterm).
- **Class Discussant and Essay (15% - 2-3 pages)** You will sign up to be a class discussant for one class session. This will involve writing a short essay analyzing and critiquing (not merely summarizing) the assigned readings, presenting your arguments briefly to the class (5-10 minutes), generating discussion questions and leading discussion. You will work together with another student and present on the same readings, I encourage you to meet first with me to find engaging ways to collaborate (eg. One of you can address the strengths, the other focus on the weaknesses; one of you can agree, the other disagree with certain key debates). You will each, however, submit, your own written memo, which you must post to Web CT by noon of the day before you are to be a discussant.
- **Take-home Midterm Essay (20%) (4-5 pages)** You will write an analytic paper synthesizing and critiquing the readings. I want you to demonstrate mastery of the readings while asserting your own ideas and arguments about the topics we have addressed.
- **Group Research/Action Project (30%)** This assignment is designed to help you synthesize and apply the readings toward understanding and shaping own social worlds, to foster collaborative learning, to develop public presentation skills, and to get you out of the classroom and into the streets! Students will work together to design a project based on one of the course topics. Possible projects include: organizing an activist event on campus or in the community; proposing a policy for political or social change; creating collective artwork (mural, sculptures, video, theatrical performance); writing and reading poetry, short stories or other creative writings; researching a topic of local concern (date rape, gender pay gap at the university, immigrant women's work in the Pioneer Valley, funding for women's sports, etc.). You will report and analyze your project in both oral and written form as follows:
  - 1) **Prospectus (5%)** Your group members will collectively write a plan for completing your group project, including the topic, goals, implementation, contribution by each individual member, schedule and selected readings.
  - 2) **Group Presentation (10%)** You will work with a group of about five students to organize and lead a class session on a specific topic of your choice. I encourage you to connect with local organizations and/or attend events and activities pertaining to your topic (eg. interview a midwife, attend meetings of feminist organizations on campus and/or in the community, observe gendered interactions at a fraternity party). I also encourage you to use visual aids, multimedia, role plays, etc. to make your class presentation original and engaging. You can regard your group presentation as an opportunity for you to present the arguments and findings from your research project (see below) while drawing connections between your topic and the work of your classmates. Your group will receive one collaborative grade.
  - 3) **Research Report (15% total) (5-7 pages)** Your research report will describe your group project, its strengths and weaknesses, and how your findings support or refute the arguments in the readings. While you should include relevant background sources, I do not expect you to conduct extensive library research, but to concentrate on applying and synthesizing the course readings and discussions to your groups' findings and arguments. We are not having a final

exam so this research report must demonstrate your mastery of the course readings. You will each receive an individual grade for your paper.

### Academic Honesty

Academic dishonesty, in any form, will not be tolerated and you are responsible for educating yourself about the University's official policy on academic honesty <<http://www.umass.edu/umhome/policies/honesty.html>

*If an instructor finds that a student has violated the University's Academic Honesty Policy, the instructor has the right to lower the student's grade, or even to fail the student for the course. Students have the right to appeal such a grade penalty by an instructor. The University Academic Honesty Board, which must be notified by instructors of any grade penalty, reviews all student appeals. The Board may sustain or recommend modification of the penalty given by the faculty member, or may recommend sanctions exceeding those originally given, such as suspension or expulsion from the University.*

## Course Schedule

( I reserve the right to make changes in the schedules as I see appropriate.)

### Part I – Women's Bodies in Science and Culture (Weeks 1-4)

#### Week One

**Sept 9 Introduction to the Course****Thursday**

- What is Women's Studies? Why should I study it?
- Overview of course content, assignments and expectations. Self-introductions. Gloria Steinem, "If Men Could Menstruate." Ms Magazine, October 1978. (in-class)

#### Week Two

Discussants: 1) \_\_\_\_\_ 2) \_\_\_\_\_

**Sept 14 What is Gender?: Scientific and Social Constructions****Tuesday**

- Jagger and Rothenberg, "Theories of Women's Subordination"
- Andemichael, "Chameleon" (handouts)
- Introduction (Text)

**Sept 16 Sex Differences Across Cultures****Thursday**

- Part I, Intro, Sec 1: B, D, E and Sec 2: B, C, D (Text)
- *Film: The Miracle of Life*

#### Week Three

Discussants: 1) \_\_\_\_\_ 2) \_\_\_\_\_

**Sept 21 Making of Race, Sex and Empire****Tuesday**

- Part I, Sec 3: A, B, C, E Sec 4: D, E (Text)
- *Film: Warrior Marks*

**Sept 23 Population Control, Reproductive Rights and Health Education****Thursday**

- Part I, Sec 5: A, B, C, E, Sec 6: A, B, C, E (Text)

#### Week Four

Discussants: 1) \_\_\_\_\_ 2) \_\_\_\_\_

**Sept 28 Medicine in a Historical Perspective: Medicalized Motherhood, Birth and Midwifery****Tuesday**

- Part I, Sec 4: B, C (Text)
- Excerpt form Naomi Wolf's *Misconceptions* (handout)
- DaSilva, Melanie, "A Brief History of Childbirth in America"
- Guest Speaker: Melanie DaSilva, childbirth educator and midwifery advocate

**Sept 30**      **Feminist Utopias and Dystopias**  
**Thursday**    *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Chapter 5, e-reserve  
                  *The Handmaid's Tale*, pp. 1-99

**Part II – Gendered States: Individuals, Communities, Nations (Weeks 5-7)**

**Week Five**

*Discussants:* 1) \_\_\_\_\_ 2) \_\_\_\_\_

**Oct 5**            **The Battle for Reproductive Control**  
**Tuesday**        *The Handmaid's Tale*, pp. 103-195

**Oct 7**            **Envisioning Alternative Futures**  
**Thursday**        ▪ *The Handmaid's Tale*, pp. 199-311

**Week Six**

*Discussants:* 1) \_\_\_\_\_ 2) \_\_\_\_\_

**Oct 12**          **Gendering the Nation-State**  
**Tuesday**        Part II, Sec 1: A, C, D, Sec 2: A, B, C, D (Text)

**Oct 14**          **New Social Movements and Identity Politics**  
**Thursday**        ▪ Part II, Sec 3: A, B, C, D, Sec 4: A, B, C, D (Text)  
                      *Film: Tongues Untied*

**Week Seven**

*Discussants:* 1) \_\_\_\_\_ 2) \_\_\_\_\_

**Oct 19**          **Feminist Organizing Across Borders**  
**Tuesday**        Part II, Sec 5: A, B, C, D, F

**Oct 21**          **Gendered Education and Socialization**  
**Thursday**        ▪ *Women Without Class: Girls, Race and Identity*, Chapters 1 and 3, pp. 1-31, 57-94

**Part III – Identities, Culture, and Representations (Weeks 8-10)**

**Week Eight**

**Oct 26**          **Intersections of Race, Gender and Class in Identity Construction**  
**Tuesday**        *Women Without Class: Girls, Race and Identity*, Chapters 4-5, pp. 95-166

**Oct 28**          **Sameness, Difference and Alliances Between Women**  
**Thursday**        *Women Without Class: Girls, Race and Identity*, Chapters 6-7, pp. 167-206  
                      Part III: Sec 3, C, D, E, Sec 4, A, B, C

**Week Nine**

*Discussants:* 1) \_\_\_\_\_ 2) \_\_\_\_\_

**Nov 2**            **Representational Practices and Artistic Production**  
**Tuesday**        ▪ Part III: Intro, Sec 1, A, B, C, Sec 2, A, B, C, D  
                      ▪ *Film: Guerrillas in Our Midst*

**Nov 4**            **Consumer Culture, Advertising and Cyberculture**  
**Thursday**        ▪ Part III: Sec 5, A, B, C, D, Sec 7, A, B, C (Text)  
                      ▪ *Film: Perfect Image*

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**Week Ten**

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*Discussants:* 1) \_\_\_\_\_ 2) \_\_\_\_\_

**Nov 9**      **Beauty Culture: Commodifying the Body**  
**Tuesday**    ▪ Part III, Sec 6, A, B, C, D, E, F, G

**Nov 11**      **NO CLASS – Veteran’s Day**  
**Thursday**

<b>Part IV – Gendering Globalization and Displacement (Weeks 11-13)</b>
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**Week Eleven**

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*Discussants:* 1) \_\_\_\_\_ 2) \_\_\_\_\_

**Nov 16**      **Women, Work and Immigration**  
**Tuesday**    ▪ *Maid in the USA, 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary edition*, Intro, Chapters 1-2, 4-5, pp 1-75, 101-63  
              ▪ Text, Part IV, Intro, Sec 4, A

**Nov 18**      **Race, Gender, Class and Domestic Service**  
**Thursday**    ▪ *Maid in the USA, 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary edition*, Chapters 6-7, Afterword, pp. 165-205  
              ▪ Text, Part IV, Sec 4, B, C

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**Week Twelve**

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*Discussants:* 1) \_\_\_\_\_ 2) \_\_\_\_\_

**Nov 22**      **Travel and Tourism,**  
**Monday**      ▪ Part IV, Intro, Sec 1, A, D, Sec 4: D

**Nov 23**      **Relocation and Removal, Diasporas**  
**Tuesday**    ▪ Sec 2, A, C, D, E, Sec 3, A, B, C  
              ▪ *Film: Sidet: Forced Exile*

**Nov 25**  
**Thursday**    **THANKSGIVING - NO CLASS**

**Part V – Student Group Presentations and Course Conclusion (Week 13-14)**

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**Week Thirteen**

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*Discussants:* 1) \_\_\_\_\_ 2) \_\_\_\_\_

**Nov 30**      **Economic Globalization, Production and Consumption**  
**Tuesday**    Part IV, Sec 5, A, B, C, Sec 6, A, B, C

**Dec 2**  
**Thursday**    **Group Presentations**

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**Week Fourteen**

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**Dec 7**  
**Tuesday**      **Group Presentations**

**Dec 9**  
**Thursday**      **Course Conclusion and Evaluation: AB (Text)**