
Womensst 301
Fall 2004

Theorizing Women's Issues
Tue & Thu: 1:00–2:15 pm
Bartlett 127

Professor Alex Deschamps

Office: Bartlett 7B » Tue & Thu 11:30 am–12:30 pm and by appointment

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Course Description

This course will aim to provide a conversation about Feminist Theories, and Theorizing Women's Issues, recognizing that there is no single unified set of rules that guides feminism. Feminist Thinkers represent a wide range of viewpoints but are all committed to social, cultural, economical, and political change. One of the goals of this course will be to illustrate the way academic feminism and women's activism can inform and reinforce one another. The course will be theoretically accessible but also theoretically nuanced. Students will be engaged in discussions about past and contemporaneous issues of women and feminism, resistance and power, and local and global praxis.

Reading selections will be organized thematically around issues crucial to women's experiences today. These themes include: a cross-section of texts from (1) an intellectual standpoint; (2) creating a third space, a *Borderlands* (Anzaldua), for learning and doing; (3) reshaping cultural and political representations of gender, race, class, and sexuality; (4) identifying sources of resistance, justice, agency, and praxis; and (5) translating knowledge into power.

We will examine the thinking that race and gender are mutually dependent, interlocking cultural constructions and projections from nineteenth century articulations to contemporary scholarship in diverse fields including, but not limited to, literary criticism and theory, history, critical race theory, religious studies, anthropology, sociology, and the history of science. We need to re-assert that ideologies of race, gender, class, and sexuality are reciprocally constitutive categories of experience and analysis – “intersectionality” aptly described by Kimberle Crenshaw, the interactions of race and gender as they shape lives and social practices.

There will be many complex, complicated questions – Does feminism have the potential to speak to and unite women across divisions of gender, race/ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation, and other socio-cultural classifications? How can we work to provide the necessary basis for a *multi-centered women's movement* in which all diverse women in their particularity are equally representative of the general condition of women – a movement in which diversity truly is a resource – locally and globally? Is that a possibility, and if so, what would that vision look like, what strategies could be put in place, or is that too much to expect?

Course Requirements

- ◆ Reading assignments must be *completed by the class period for which they were assigned*. You must be prepared to participate in class discussions, assignments and exercises. I highly recommend that you keep a well detailed and documented journal or notebook of readings, discussions, observations, video screenings and other relevant class materials.
- ◆ Every student will be required to participate in a panel, discussion, presentation, and occasional in-class assignments. Regular attendance is an absolute – **20%**. After *three unexcused* absences your grade will begin to be marked down by one letter grade. Excused attendances do not exonerate you from the course expectations and requirements. *All papers must be typed double spaced and within the specified page limit, using 12 point font. Late papers will be graded down.*

- ◆ **Three** short critical analysis papers – **30%**. These should be something like a précis, about 2 pages summarizing the focus, arguments, implications, and your thinking, on your readings of your choice. You will be expected to turn these in at various dates during the semester. **Due in class September 23rd, October 07th, and October 21st, 2004.**
- ◆ **One** out of class event. Students will have the option of attending any of the following events (cultural, political, organizing, lecture, presentation, artistic....) that can be linked to Women's Studies and the course content. Students will be expected to write a *three page* analytical report of the event – **15%**. Guidelines will be discussed. **Due no later than November 09th, 2004.**
- ◆ **One** analytical/researched paper – **25%**. Options and guidelines will be given. **Due November 23rd, 2004.**
- ◆ Action Project – **10%**. This will be a class project organized around working groups of domestic and global issues. Each student will write his/her individual learning paper with connections to theories, concepts, and course goals. **Due in class on December 09th, 2004.**

Academic Honesty and Other Undergraduate Policies

My assumption is that students are generally honest. You are responsible for knowing and following the University of Massachusetts Academic Guidelines. *Please read and familiarize yourselves with the University Policy Statement on Academic Honesty, Course Requirements, Attendance, Religious Observances, and other relevant policies, in the Undergraduate Rights and Responsibilities Booklet or at website <http://www.umass.edu/umhome/policies/honesty.html>.* Necessary action, in compliance with official guidelines, will be taken against students who commit academic dishonesty. Plagiarism of any kind will be detrimental to your tenure at the University. Avoid using written papers from the internet. Caucus with me about resources for learning needs.

Books

[Required Text]: Seung-Kyung Kim & Carole R. McCann, Eds., *Feminist Theory Reader: Local & Global Perspectives*. ISBN: 0415931533. Routledge, 2002.

Annemarie Jagosse, *Queer Theory: An Introduction*. NY: New York University Press, 1996.

Shahra Razavi, *Gender Justice, Development and Rights*. ISBN: 0199256454. Oxford University Press, 2003.

Daisy Hernandez & Bushra Rehman, *Colonize This: Young Women of Color on Today's Feminism*. New York: Seal Press, 2002.

Occasional readings [handouts and/or E-Reserve] will be given.

[Optional]: Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1984.

Available at Food For Thought Book-shop, North Pleasant St., Amherst and on reserve in the library

Course Calendar

Thu September 09	<u>Introductions, Syllabus, Expectations, Class Guidelines and Policies, Talking Points, Personal Inventories</u>
Tue September 14	<u>Lexicon of the Debate – What is Theory, Why Theory? Reading Feminist Theory, Epistemologies</u> Video Screening: bell hooks on Cultural Criticism – Part One. Readings: Working questions on Identity, Authority, and Reading Theory. [Text]– <i>Feminist Theory Reader</i> : Introduction, pp. 1-9 & 12-23.
Thu September 16	<u>Intersectionality, Integrative Analysis, and all the Complexities</u> Readings: [Handout/E-Reserve]– <i>Race, Class, Gender and Women’s Works: A Conceptual Framework in Race, Gender & Work</i> by Teresa Amott & Sulie Matthaie [Handout/E-Reserve]–Barbara Christian, <i>The Race For Theory</i> , in <u>Within The Circle</u> , Duke University Press, 1994.
Tue September 21	<u>Definitions and Movements</u> Readings: [Text]– <i>Feminist Theory Reader</i> : Selections from pp. 26-77 & 80-145
Thu September 23	<u>Feminist Theories: Many Spaces</u> Readings: [Handout/E-Reserve]– <i>The Development of Chicana Feminist Discourse, 1970-1980</i> , Alma M. Garcia, 1989. [Handout/E-Reserve]– <i>A Gender Diary</i> , by Ann Snitow in <u>Conflicts in Feminism</u> , 1990. ***Critical Analysis Paper 1 due***
Theorizing Intersecting Identities	
Tue September 28	<u>Race, Nation, and Class</u> Readings: [Text]– <i>Feminist Theory Reader</i> : pp. 148-239
Thu September 30	<u>Contextualizing the Sexuality Debates</u> Readings: [Text]– <i>Queer Theory: An Introduction</i>
Tue October 05	<u>Insider/Outsider: Identity and Multiplicity</u> Video Screening: Audre Lorde Documentary Readings: [Text]– <i>Queer Theory: An Introduction</i> (continuation)
Thu October 07	<u>Ongoing Sexuality Conversations</u> Readings: [Text]– <i>Feminist Theory Reader</i> : pp. 242-275 ***Critical Analysis Paper 2 due***

Theorizing Feminist Agency and Politics	
Tue October 12	<u>Standpoints</u> Readings: [Text]– <i>Feminist Theory Reader</i> : pp. 278-359
Thu October 14	<u>Poststructuralist Theories</u> Readings: [Text]– <i>Feminist Theory Reader</i> : pp. 364-435
Tue October 19	<u>Locations and Coalitions</u> Readings: [Text]– <i>Feminist Theory Reader</i> : pp. 438-470
Thu October 21	<u>Invited Panel</u> Readings: Selected Handouts *** <i>Critical Analysis Paper 3 due</i> ***
A New Generation of Voices Within Feminist/Womanist Discourse: Young Women of Color Redefining the Issues	
Tue October 26	<u>Family and Community: A Litany for Survival</u> Readings: [Text]– <i>Colonize This</i> : Selections from pp. 3-85
Thu October 28	<u>Our Mothers, Refugees from a World on Fire</u> Readings: [Text]– <i>Colonize This</i> : Selections from pp. 99-200
Tue November 02	<u>Going Through Customs</u> Readings: [Text]– <i>Colonize This</i> : Selections from pp. 203-292
Thu November 04	<u>Talking Back, Taking Back</u> Readings: [Text]– <i>Colonize This</i> : Selections from pp. 203-292
Tue November 09	<u>Student Panel</u> Student questions and perspectives *** <i>Last Date to turn in the Out of Class Assignment paper</i> ***
Thu November 11	No Class – Columbus Day Holiday
Sites of Transformation – Power, Resistance, Praxis	
Tue November 16	<u>Translating Knowledge into Power</u> Readings: [Text]– <i>Gender Justice, Development & Rights</i> : Part 1.
Thu November 18	<u>Feminism in Practice – Politics, Identity, and Global Praxis</u> Readings: [Text]– <i>Gender Justice, Development & Rights</i> : Selections from Parts 2 & 3
Mon November 22	<u>Multiculturalisms in Practice</u> Readings: [Text]– <i>Gender Justice, Development & Rights</i> : Part 3.

Tue November 23	<u>Reflexivity, Voice, and Third Spaces</u> Writing Exercises and Student Papers *** <i>Analytical/Researched Paper Due</i> ***
November 24-28	Thanksgiving Recess
The Local and the Global – Paradoxes, Possibilities, and Hope	
Tue November 30	<u>Class Action Project</u> Readings: Selected Handouts and Guidelines
Thu December 02	<u>Class Action Project</u> Readings: Selected Handouts and Guidelines
Tue December 07	<u>Circling Back – Why Theory? Why Feminist Theories</u> Readings: Selection and Excerpts from Gloria Anzaldua’s Writings.
Thu December 09	<u>Closing Exercises: The Then, The Now, The Future</u> *** <i>Individual Action Project Papers Due</i> ***

GUIDELINES FOR CRITICAL ANALYSIS AND RESPONSE PAPERS

These papers are suggested as a way to promote critical thinking and to monitor comprehension of the readings. Suggestions for writing the papers include (a) any reading (s) to focus your response and critique, (b) choose two or three points for the basis of your theme, (c) take risks and incorporate your perspectives about the subject *with* content from the readings, discussions, other resources if relevant. Feel free to comment on the contributions of the work, critically examine the “soundness” of the arguments. Discuss insights gained, implications for “praxis”, and/or limitations to the analysis.

Please be advised that I do not wish for you to summarize the reading material; rather, I am asking you to process, think, question, and synthesize the material in whatever way facilitates your own learning and best suits your capacities for self-expression. I would like you to address how the themes relate with or inform your personal understanding of the issues, and how this information can shape the way in which you interact in your environment and in your practice.

All papers must be typed double-spaced. ***They must not be more than two (2) pages.*** They should be thoughtful, informed, well organized, appropriately illustrated, and lucid. Essentially, I want to know that you have read, understood, and analyzed the readings. Grades will be based on the quality and clarity of your arguments as well as the organization of your ideas.

WOST 301

THEORIZING WOMEN'S ISSUES

PROF. A. DESCHAMPS

1. What commonalities and differences among women are you aware of in your daily life? What significance do these have for you? Is there any validity to the notion of universal "sisterhood" among women or is this based on a naïve and out-dated assumption of an earlier generation of the women's movement?
2. Can women give genuine informed consent to participate in the production and consumption of pornography?
3. What are some of the factors that make it difficult for lesbians to "come out of the closet" in our society. Do you think the atmosphere has changed significantly in recent years? What evidence can you give to support your position?
4. Can women simply ignore the messages about gender and femininity that are transmitted in popular culture through ads, magazines, and fashion?
5. Is the status of women in contemporary religion still an issue that requires feminist attention or have the major problems been resolved?
6. Is or should political activism be a criteria in the definition of feminism?

GUIDELINES AND OPTIONS FOR ANALYTICAL/RESEARCHED PAPER

Towards a Literary Practice of Feminist Standpoint Theory – Fiction and the Outsider Within (use article in NWSA Journal, Volume 16, Number 2, Summer 2004, pp.98-120).