

Women's Studies 201 – Section 1
Critical Perspectives in Women's Studies

Tuesday/Thursday 9:30-10:45am

Bartlett 302

SPIRE # 74847

Instructor Information

Instructor Elizabeth Cahn

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Course Description

This course introduces students to core ideas and practices in the challenging and vibrant field of women's studies. Women's studies is devoted to understanding women's lives and creating social transformation to improve the lives of women, men, and children. We will explore how the concept of "woman" is elaborated, amplified, and subverted through multiple axes of identity, difference, and location. We will come to a better understanding of how these issues affect the goals and power dynamics of our analysis of the world and creation of new knowledge for the benefit of women.

Through individual and group activities and projects, we will develop new ways of seeing and understanding our complex 21st century world from the perspective of women's lives and through the varying lenses of not just sex and gender, but also race, class, sexual orientation, and nationality. Depending on the interests of students and available time, we will also discuss other aspects of identity and forms of difference such as ethnicity, age, and disability. Throughout the semester we will work to understand our own positionality and move toward developing a standpoint that acknowledges power and difference in our lives and those of others.

Required textbook

Grewal, Inderpal, and Caren Kaplan. 2006. *An introduction to women's studies: gender in a transnational world* (2nd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill. Available at Food for Thought Books in Amherst.

Additional texts and readings

Additional text(s) will be determined as the semester proceeds. Additional texts will probably include one short theory book and one literary work.

Additional readings will be available on e-reserves. E-reserves can be found at <http://ereserves.library.umass.edu>.

Course materials such as syllabus and assignments will be posted on WebCT after they are handed out in class. WebCT can be found at <https://webct.oit.umass.edu>.

Course goals

As individuals and as a class we will develop an intersectional, integrative, and transnational feminist perspective on women's lives. We will apply core feminist ideas to our own experiences and use these ideas to understand the experiences of people very different from ourselves. We will move from perspective to standpoint.

We will grapple with major issues in feminist thought and activism including questions such as “How have sexual difference and gender been defined at different times and in different locations?” “How does power interact with identity in the form of lived experience?” “How do we understand and work with differences between women as well as commonalities?” and “What constitutes positive social change for women (and those important to them), and how do we enact these changes?”

We will practice engaged and thoughtful listening, speaking, and writing. We will carry out small-scale group activism projects. We will reflect on our learning and our stumbling blocks and develop new goals for feminist work. We will probably feel nervous and laugh and maybe cry a little bit and get to know each other and at the end we will be mostly the same but also kind of different and glad we were here.

Structure and organization of the course

Your learning experience in the course will be structured through assigned readings, in-class discussions and activities, a series of directed writing assignments, and a small group project. Each type of assignment facilitates a different type of learning and a different way of demonstrating your learning throughout the semester.

In this course learning is a group activity as well as an individual one. It is important to everyone’s learning process that each student completes the readings before class, comes to class on time, listens carefully, participates actively in discussions and activities, and engages thoughtfully with all aspects of the course. In-class activities will vary and will be based on the readings and previous course content and activities.

Grading and evaluation

Evaluation and your final grade will be based on the following elements of the course:

- 1) attendance and participation in class (20% of your final grade),
- 2) six (6) individual assignments (65% of your final grade),
- 3) one (1) group assignment (15% of your final grade).

You will receive feedback on each assignment as the course proceeds. If you feel you are struggling to complete the work or there is a wide discrepancy between the amount of effort you put forth and the grades you are earning, please let me know so we can develop a strategy for addressing this.

You should use all elements of the course to demonstrate your understanding of the material we address. Criteria for evaluation include the following:

- 1) demonstrated familiarity with the assigned readings, whether or not discussed in class;
- 2) thoughtful listening and response to the ideas of others;
- 3) depth of insight, analysis, and critique;
- 4) well-organized and clear presentation of ideas;
- 5) quality of writing;
- 6) development of intersectional/integrative/transnational analysis; and
- 7) improvement over the semester.

Final grades will be based on the following scale:

91-100	A
81-90	B
71-80	C
61-70	D
60 and below	F

You are encouraged to utilize the academic support services provided by the University of Massachusetts. These include Disability Services, the Learning Resource Center, and the University Writing Center. If you need help figuring out what services you may need, please contact me or Karen Lederer, the Women's Studies Program Undergraduate Advisor.

The University Writing Center opens Monday, September 18, 2006, and is located in the southwest corner of the W.E.B. DuBois Library's Learning Commons. It is open Monday-Wednesday 10am-10pm; Thursday 10am-7pm; and Sunday 2pm-7pm. The Writing Center operates on a walk-in basis. Please bring a copy of your work and assignment with you.

Course requirements (100 points)

I. Class attendance and participation (20 points)

Students are expected to attend every class meeting, for the entire length of the scheduled class, unless prior arrangements have been made with the instructor. An attendance sheet will be circulated at the beginning of class. Please be sure to sign it.

Classroom discussions will be organized so that everyone has an opportunity to participate. Bear in mind that active, engaged listening is as important a contribution to group interaction as speaking, and your skills in this area will be considered in your participation grade.

II. Individual written assignments (65 points)

The majority of your written work in this course will be in the form of short, written essays of limited length on very directed topics. Each essay will focus on a particular issue or section of the course content. Late papers will have points deducted.

Assignment 1 (10 points)

Introductory Essay: Perspective

Assignment 2 (10 points)

Social and Historical Constructions of Gender

Assignment 3 (10 points)

Gendered Identities in Nations and States

Assignment 4 (10 points)

Representations, Cultures, Media and Markets

Assignment 5 (10 points)

Gendering Globalization and Displacement

Assignment 7 (15 points)

Concluding Essay: Standpoint

III. Group project assignment (15 points)

The course also includes a small group activism project (Assignment 6), which will be presented during class time near the end of the semester. Project topic(s) and groups will be determined by the instructor in consultation with students. Some time will be allowed during class for group work, but you will also have to meet as a group outside of class on a regular basis.

Additional course information

Accommodations

If you have a documented learning disability—or think you may have one—or there is another circumstance that might affect how you learn or how you can demonstrate your learning in the course, please let me know as soon as possible so we can arrange for any accommodations you may need.

Classroom policies and practices

Organize your life so that you do not miss class or routinely arrive late.

The first few minutes of class and the last few minutes of class are often the occasion for important announcements and information about the next class that will not be repeated. If you have not finished the readings or the assignment, come to class anyway. Your presence is still important and your absence will be noticed.

If you must miss a class, let me know in advance by sending me an email or giving me a written note prior to the class you will miss. “Excused” absences include appropriate religious holidays or prearranged major surgery, but you must let me know in writing in advance. Assignments must still be turned in on the date originally due even if you have an “excused” absence from class.

If you miss class due to unanticipated emergency or illness, send me the email or give me the note afterwards. You may also call the Women’s Studies office and ask them to put a note in my mailbox.

More than two “excused” absences will affect your grade negatively. More than two “unexcused” absences (that is, no written communication from you prior to or immediately after the fact) will affect your grade extremely negatively. More than three unexcused absences will prompt me to forward your name to the Women’s Studies Undergraduate Advisor so she can follow up with you.

Please keep eating and drinking during class to a minimum as these activities can be very disruptive to others.

Turn off cell phones, pagers, and other electronic devices before class begins. If you expect to be contacted during class due to an emergency, let me know at the beginning of class and we will make special arrangements for this.

I reserve the right to allow or disallow laptops, tablets, etc., to be used during class. If you need an assistive device in class because of a learning disability, please let me know during the first week of class.

Language and learning

Every effort will be made to ensure that this classroom is a positive, supportive, safe place for the expression of diverse, individual ideas and opinions related to the course. Complete safety cannot be guaranteed but trust is built over time as each individual in the group practices engaged and empathetic listening and speaking behaviors.

Please be thoughtful and careful about your use of language, invocation of stereotypes, use of slang terms, etc., in this class. Language and behavior that is disrespectful toward others, including the instructor, or that disrupts the classroom environment, will not be tolerated. If you have concerns about these matters, please do not hesitate to express them during class or to the instructor as soon as you identify a problem. I will work with you to find an appropriate solution.

Academic honesty and academic integrity

Learning is a process that occurs in relationship to other people's ideas, spoken words, and writings. In this process it is essential that we recognize and acknowledge the sources that contribute to our own thoughts and words.

Academic honesty refers to the imperative to avoid stealing the ideas and work of others and presenting them as our own, or misrepresenting where our work and ideas come from. Academic integrity is far more than academic honesty or the simple avoidance of cheating and plagiarism. Academic integrity grows from genuine interest in ideas and their sources, respect for each person's thought process and learning process; and ethical behavior in all matters related to membership in a community of learners, teachers, and researchers.

Appropriate methods of citing sources and referring to the ideas of others will be discussed in relation to our specific assignments as the course proceeds. I assume that the majority of students are honest and ethical and do not intend to violate either the letter or the spirit of academic honesty policies; however, anyone found doing so will be subject to the consequences outlined in the appropriate UMass policies.

Undergraduate students at UMass are governed by the Code of Student Conduct and Academic Regulations. You are responsible for knowing and following these policies.

The Code of Student Conduct may be found at http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/code_conduct/.

Academic Regulations can be found at <http://www.umass.edu/registrar/media/academicregs.pdf>.

The policy on Academic Honesty can be found at

http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/code_conduct/acad_honest.htm.

The following is excerpted from the University of Massachusetts Policy Concerning Academic Honesty.

Academic dishonesty includes but is not limited to:

Cheating - intentional use, and/or attempted use of trickery, artifice, deception, breach of confidence, fraud and/or misrepresentation of one's academic work.

Fabrication - intentional and unauthorized falsification and/or invention of any information or citation in any academic exercise.

Plagiarism - knowingly representing the words or ideas of another as one's own work in any academic exercise. This includes submitting without citation, in whole or in part, prewritten term papers of another or the research of another, including but not limited to commercial vendors who sell or distribute such materials.

Facilitating dishonesty - knowingly helping or attempting to help another commit an act of academic dishonesty, including substituting for another in an examination, or allowing others to represent as their own one's papers, reports, or academic works.

Sanctions may be imposed on any student who has committed an act of academic dishonesty

Overview of course schedule

See separate detailed schedule for assigned readings

Week	Month	Date	Section of course	Activity	Assignment
1	Sept	7 R	Intro	Introduction Intro to course, syllabus	Assignment 1 handed out
2		12 T		Student introductions Learning in women's studies	
		14 R		Integrative/intersectional/transnational perspectives in women's studies Project work	Assignment 1 due
3		19 T	Part One	Social and Historical Constructions of Gender Review syllabus <i>Last day to add or drop with no record</i>	Assignment 1 handed back
		21 R			
4		26 T			
		28 R		Project work	Assignment 2 due
5	Oct	3 T	Part Two	Gendered Identities in Nations and States	
		5 R			
6		10 T			
		12 R		Project work	Assignment 3 due
7		17 T	Part Three	Representations, Cultures, Media and Markets <i>Last day to drop with DR on record</i>	
		19 R			
8		24 T			
		26 R		Project work	Assignment 4 due
9		31 T	Part Four	Gendering Globalization and Displacement	
	Nov	2 R			
10		7 T			
		9 R		Project work	Assignment 5 due
11		14 T	Part Five	Further Intersection/Integration	
		16 R			
12		21 T		Project work	
		23 R		<i>Thanksgiving holiday, no class</i>	
13		28 T			
		30 R		Group project presentations	Assignment 6 due
14	Dec	5 T			
		7 R			Assignment 7 due
15		12 T		Wrap-up <i>Last day of class</i>	
16		22 Fri		All late work due <i>last day of exams</i>	

T = Tuesday

R = Thursday

Final grades are due 2 January 2007 at noon.