

## 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, 9:45-10:45 and by appointment
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<b>Class Info</b>	Spring 2004, Tues and Thurs, 11:15-12:30, Bartlett 212

#### 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, by Julie Bettie, University of California Press; 2002, ISBN: 0520235428
- 3) Woman on the Edge of Time, by Marge Piercy, Fawcett Books, 1976, ISBN: 0449210820
- 4) Domestica, by Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, Univ of CA Press, 2001, ISBN: 0-520-22643-7

## 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 in individual, group and social processes.
- 3) to master the basic tools of feminist inquiry – including the ability to identify gendered processes, to pose theoretical questions and engage with 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 ourselves and our intimate relationships
- 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 as agents of personal and social change.

### 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, *Women Without Class*, focuses on women's construction of gender, race and class identities in a California high school, 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 social practices and institutions that shape them. Thus, we must 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 mutual trust, confidentiality and a sense of community while at the same time engaging in intellectually rigorous and challenging 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 high rates of absenteeism and tardiness (regardless of excuses) will have their grades penalized. The attendance sheet will be passed out only at the beginning of class.
- **Homework Assignments (15%) (7 assignments – 1-2 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%)** You will sign up to be a class discussant for one class session. This will involve writing a short essay (roughly 2 pages) analyzing and critiquing (not merely summarizing) the assigned readings, presenting your arguments briefly to the class (roughly 5-10 minutes), generating discussion questions and responding to questions and comments. There will be one or two other discussants who will present on the same readings and I encourage you to meet together 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 (15%) (3-5 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.
- **Evaluation (10%) (2-3 pages)** For the first analytic paper assignment, you will exchange your paper with another student and comment on each other's work. This is an opportunity for you to learn from each other and develop important skills in constructive but critical evaluation of written work.
- **Group Research/Action Project** 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. You will choose groups and topics during the third week of classes. 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 (20% total) (5-7 pages)** Your research report will describe the data collected for your group project, the strengths and weaknesses of your methods, 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 instead concentrate on synthesizing the course readings and discussions and analyzing your own and your groups' findings and arguments. We are not having a final exam so this research report must demonstrate your mastery of the course readings. Final draft is due the last day of class. 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. The Board may also recommend sanctions for offenders who have committed multiple violations of the Academic Honesty Policy but who have not appealed the faculty members' decisions.

### Summary of Assignments and Due Dates (all assignments are due at the beginning of class)

**Feb 26** – Group Prospectus Due (5%)

**March 4** – Take-home midterm due

**March 11** – Evaluations Due (10%)

**Weeks 13-15** – Group Presentations (10%)

**Dec. 11** – Final Research Report Due (20%)

**Class Discussant and Memo (15%)** Sign up for dates

**Homework Assignments (15% - 7 submissions)**

**Class Participation and In-Class Assignments (10%)**

## 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

**Jan 29, Thursday**     **Introduction to the Course**

- 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) \_\_\_\_\_

- Feb 3 Tuesday Contemporary Feminist Theories and Creating a Feminist Classroom**
- Jagger and Rothenberg, "Theories of Women's Subordination"
  - Cervenak et al, "Imagining Differently: The Politics of Listening in a Feminist Classroom"
  - Andemichael, "Chameleon" (handouts)
  - Introduction (Text)

- Feb 5 Thursday Sex Differences Across Cultures**
- Part I, Intro, Sec 1: B, D, E and Sec 2: B, C, D (Text)

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**Week Three**

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

- Feb 10 Tuesday Making of Race, Sex and Empire**
- Part I, Sec 3: A, B, C, E Sec 4: D, E (Text)
  - *Film: Warrior Marks*

- Feb 12 Thursday Population Control, Reproductive Rights and Health Education**
- Part I, Sec 5: A, B, C, E, Sec 6: A, B, C, E (Text)

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**Week Four**

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

- Feb 17 Tuesday Medicine in a Historical Perspective: Medicalized Motherhood, Birth and Midwifery**
- 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

- Feb 19 Thursday Feminist Utopias: Envisioning Alternative Futures**
- Woman on the Edge of Time*, pp 1-133

<b>Part II – Gendered States: Individuals, Communities, Nations (Weeks 5-7)</b>
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**Week Five**

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

- Feb 24 Labeling Women Insane**
- Woman on the Edge of Time*, pp 134-251

- Feb 26 Transgressive Sexual Identities and Gendered Performances**
- TBA
  - *Guest Speaker: dancer from Ballet Trockadero*
  - Group Prospectus due in class

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**Week Six**

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

- March 2 Tuesday Resisting Oppression**
- Woman on the Edge of Time*, pp 252-376

- March 4 Thursday Gendering the Nation-State**
- Part II, Sec 1: A, C, D, Sec 2: A, B, C, D (Text)
- Take-home midterm essay due

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**Week Seven**

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

**March 9 Tuesday**     **New Social Movements and Identity Politics**  
▪ Part II, Sec 3: A, B, C, D, Sec 4: A, B, C, D (Text)  
*Film: Tongues Untied*

**March 11 Thursday**     **Feminist Organizing Across Borders**  
▪ Part II, Sec 5: A, B, C, D, F  
▪ Evaluation of classmates take-home midterm essay due

**NO CLASS - SPRING BREAK – March 16 and 18**

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

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**Week Eight**

**March 23 Tuesday**     **Gendered Education and Socialization**  
*Women Without Class: Girls, Race and Identity, Chapters 1-3, pp. 1-94*

**March 25 Thursday**     **Intersections of Race, Gender and Class in Identity Construction**  
*Women Without Class: Girls, Race and Identity, Chapters 4-5, pp. 95-166*

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**Week Nine**

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

**March 30 Tuesday**     **Sameness, Difference and Alliances Between Women**  
*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

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

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**Week Ten**

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

**April 6 Tuesday**     **Consumer Culture, Advertising and Cyberculture**  
▪ Part III: Sec 5, A, B, C, D, Sec 7, A, B, C (Text)  
▪ *Film: Perfect Image*

**April 8 Thursday**     **Beauty Culture: Commodifying the Body**  
▪ Part III, Sec 6, A, B, C, D, E, F, G

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**Part IV – Gendering Globalization and Displacement (Weeks 11-13)**

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**Week Eleven**

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

**April 13 Tuesday**     **Women, Work and Immigration**  
▪ *Domestica: Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence, Part I, pp. 3-62*  
▪ Part IV, Intro, Sec 4, A

**April 15**     **Finding and Keeping Jobs in the Informal Service Sector**  
**Thursday**     *Domestica, Part II, pp. 63-136*  
Part IV, Sec 4, B, C

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**Week Twelve**

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

**April 20**     **Negotiating Intimate Social Relations and Inequalities Between Women**  
**Tuesday**     ▪ *Domestica, Part III, pp. 137-245*

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

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**Week Thirteen**

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

**April 27**     **Relocation and Removal, Diasporas**  
**Tuesday**     ▪ Sec 2, A, C, D, E, Sec 3, A, B, C  
                  ▪ *Film: Sidet: Forced Exile*

**April 29**     **Economic Globalization, Production and Consumption**  
**Thursday**     Part IV, Sec 5, A, B, C, Sec 6, A, B, C  
*Film: Made in Thailand*

<b>Part V – Student Group Presentations (Weeks 14-15)</b>
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**Week Fourteen**

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**May 4**  
**Tuesday**     **Group Presentations**

**May 6**  
**Thursday**     **Group Presentations**

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**Week Fifteen**

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**May 11**  
**Tuesday**     **Group Presentations**

**May 13**  
**Thursday**     **Course Summary and Evaluation**  
Conclusion: AB (Text)

**[Final Paper Due Last Day of Class]**