Instructor: Cameron Awkward-Rich  
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Office: South College W421  
Virtual Office: https://umass-amherst.zoom.us/j/94568620701  
(Meeting ID: 945 6862 0701)  
Office Hours: Thursday 11:30-1:30 (in person)/Friday 1-3 (virtually) or by appointment

*To avoid scheduling conflicts, please do sign up for office hours here: calendly.com/cawkwardrich or email me with proposals for alternate times to meet.

Genealogies of Feminist Thought  
Tuesday 2:30-5pm | Dickinson Hall 206 | WGSS 701

Course Description:

This graduate seminar in feminist theory constitutes a core course for students enrolled in the Graduate Certificate in Advanced Feminist Studies. The seminar will be organized around the following questions: 1) What are the stories scholars tell, implicitly and explicitly, about the genealogies—the histories and contested presents—of the field of feminist thought? and 2) How do these stories—their undergirding assumptions and ways of marshalling evidence—in turn affect what feminist thought is, does, and knows? As such, we will approach “feminist thought” and “feminist studies” as both ways of knowing and, themselves, objects of thought.

As with any theory course, the content of this one is reflective of the instructor’s own disciplinary location, interests, and knowledge. For that reason, this course should not be understood as a comprehensive survey of feminist thought — that would be impossible!—nor as definitive. Rather, this seminar will serve as a space for developing your skills as a reader, intensive reflection on how (and whether) to situate your own work in relation to the field, and building a foundation from which to continue your inquiries. A start.

Required Texts

- *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Routledge, 1990), Judith Butler

The above have been ordered through Amherst Books (8 Main Street, Amherst), not through the UMass system; an ebook version of each is also available through the UMass library. If you have any trouble accessing these books or any of the other reading, please reach out to me sooner rather than later.

**All other course material will be provided to you online**
This is a very reading-intensive class. Learning how and what to prioritize as you read is a crucial scholarly skill that reading-intensive courses are intended to help you practice. To this end, keep in mind that theory might be difficult, but that you can approach the reading with different kinds of questions in mind—and therefore different priorities—depending on your work, your existing knowledge of the field, and your future plans.

You might read to develop a map of the field – who are the major players, where are the conflicts, where are the points of agreement, etc. You might read for models of the kind of writing you’d like to produce. You might read for concepts that you can take back to your projects, whether they are critical, creative, or simply the project of living. You might read for the places of clarity or confusion. So: please read as much as you can, as well as you can in order to be a generous participant in our seminar, but please don’t worry about ‘mastering’ the material (or performing mastery).

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**Evaluation**

**Notebook + Reflection Paper (50%)**

I ask that each of you keep a notebook: digitally, by hand, whatever suits you best. In your notebook I would like you to keep notes on the reading in two ways, one highly structured and one highly unstructured. Your unstructured notes should simply be a record of your reading and thinking—quotes that you liked, things the reading makes you think of, half-baked questions, complaints, doodles, etc.—and can be formatted however you like. Your structured notes should record specific information about at least two readings per session (in the case of full-book weeks, annotate the introduction plus one chapter), e.g.:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Title of essay” by [Author] [date of publication]</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Context</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author’s field, context of publication (is this a monograph, an article in a special issue, who published it, does it seem to be responding to some event in particular, etc)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key terms and quotes, (according to you)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Further reading</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who is this author drawing from/in conversation with, what essays would you have to read to fully “get” this one?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Convergence with other readings</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Divergence from other readings</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Your main takeaway(s)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Your main point(s) of confusion or concern</strong></td>
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At least one way you might take this reading back to your own work

- Instead of traditional reading responses, you will be responsible for uploading your structured notes to Moodle by 12:30 on the day of class. You must do so at least six times (5% per instance) over the course of the semester to get full credit for the notebook.

- The remaining 20% of your grade in this category comes from a ~3 page reflection paper, due before you leave for fall break and no earlier than 11/8. These can be very informal but, basically I ask that you look back in your notebook and answer two questions: 1) In retrospect, what patterns do you notice about what you pay attention to in the reading (i.e. what threads have you been following this semester)? and 2) What new question(s) have arisen for you as an outcome of this course and how might you go about answering them and/or continuing to think with them?

Final Paper / Project (30%)
You have several options for the final. Each of these is intended to provide a structure for reflection/inquiry, not for demonstrations of mastery:

1. **Creative Option (for MFA and/or undergraduate students):** A substantial act of creativity (e.g. a chapbook or packet of poems, a short story, a short series of images…) + a ~5-7 page artist statement reflecting on how the work is engaging with the intellectual content of the course.

2. **Critical Option, Application (for anyone, but most useful for MA/PhD students with a sense of what their thesis or dissertation will be about):** choose a project to work on that both engages substantively with at least one or two concepts from this course and also fits in with your larger research trajectory, examination prep, or thesis/dissertation plan. This might mean producing a seminar paper that applies theoretical content from this course to your research area. But this might also mean: compiling an extended annotated bibliography, writing a conference paper, writing a literature review, etc. If you are having trouble thinking about what might be useful for you to do, please come talk to me.

3. **Critical/Creative Option, Cartographic (for anyone):** Using the course reading, try to produce a visual ‘map’ of the field of feminist thought. Then, write a ~5-7 page account of your map: what decisions did you make and why, what is the story about feminist thought that your map communicates (explicitly and implicitly), what does it leave out, to what effect?
Discussion Leader (20%)
From 9/27 to 11/1 a pair of students will be responsible for orienting our discussion during the second half of each class period. You will do so by collectively generating two or three discussion questions about the day’s reading and leading the discussion that unfolds around them. These questions can be clarification questions (take us to a particular paragraph to close read together), application questions (but do make sure to provide us with necessary context!), critical questions (identify inconsistencies/paradoxes in the theory and ask about their consequences), and so on. You might use Professor Kyla Wazana Tompkins’ guide to writing discussion questions (linked on Moodle) as a resource. You are welcome to lead the discussion however you’d like – in the past, most students have opted for a structured activity (small group work, concept maps, etc). However, generally, the goal is simply to a) practice the pedagogical skill of generating discussion and b) provide space for questions, concerns, learning styles, and preoccupations that are not mine.

Participation (Ungraded Aspirations)
This course is discussion-based, so your participation is vital to making it function. There are many ways to be engaged and many styles of participation. But, at minimum, I ask that you: do the reading, come to class, and participate in in-class discussions to the best of your ability. I recognize that some students have trouble speaking up in class due to shyness, language barriers, processing speeds, and so on. Because public speaking is a useful skill, I nevertheless encourage you to push yourself to participate verbally. To facilitate this, we’re going to use the first ten minutes of each class period to gather our thoughts.

Finally, this is a course that requires us to work through emotionally and politically vexed questions around race, gender, sexuality, and so on. To do so well will require us to sit with our own and other’s discomfort, not-knowing, and pain, to practice extending each other (and ourselves) patience and generosity. That said, if you have concerns about how the class discussions are proceeding, please don’t hesitate to be in touch with me.
In Summary:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of Final Grade</th>
<th>Course Component</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30%</td>
<td>Notebook</td>
<td>Turn in 6 sets of structured notes – notes for two texts (two essays or two chapters) counts as one set</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Reflection Paper</td>
<td>Use your notebook as the basis for a 3-4 page reflection. Due between 11/8 and 11/22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30%</td>
<td>Final Project</td>
<td>Choose from the list of project types. Due 12/19.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Discussion Leader</td>
<td>On your assigned day, prepare one or two discussion questions and help guide class discussion. I teach on Tuesdays 10-11:15, so if you want feedback on your questions or activity plan, please keep that in mind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–</td>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>Do the reading, come to class (or let me know if you will be absent), engage with your peers as best you can.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td>Total</td>
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*Importantly, you will get full points for each category *as long as you do it*. I will be looking at and pulling from your structured notes + giving you feedback on your final and response paper. However, my general philosophy is that we are in the room together because there is something you need or want from this course and that thing is different for each of you. So, get it.
COVID (and other apocalypses):

As I am putting together this syllabus, we are once again deeply uncertain about how the semester will unfold. But: Please don’t come to class sick, please feel free to mask, please communicate with me and your peers about your needs, please try to be patient with me and with each other.

You’ll notice that I have a generous absence policy – as long as you communicate with me, missing class will not count against you. Also, if you need to Zoom into class you are welcome to do so using the “office hours” zoom room – please make sure to communicate with me in advance so that I can know to have my laptop set up. However, please do keep in mind that seminars are intended to help you practice thinking in real time with others, a vital component of academic life that asynchronous learning is not very good at modeling.

Policies:

Absences / Late Work
Again, the functioning of the course depends on your showing up. However, because I understand that things come up, you are allowed one absence, no questions asked. Beyond that, if something comes up (health trouble, personal crisis, etc.) and you anticipate missing class or needing an extension on an assignment, you won’t lose points so long as you communicate this to me in advance.

Accessibility
The University of Massachusetts Amherst is committed to providing an equal educational opportunity for all students. If you have a documented physical, psychological, or learning disability on file with Disability Services (DS), Learning Disabilities Support Services (LDSS), or Psychological Disabilities Services (PDS), please notify me within the first two weeks of the semester so that we may make appropriate arrangements: http://www.umass.edu/disability/procedures.pdf

However, I also assume that we all have different learning needs, many of which don’t fall under the official rubric of disability. If you have official or need unofficial accommodations, please speak with me at the beginning of the semester to work out together what that will mean. I also assume that brains and bodies change overtime, so if you find that you are having trouble at any point during the semester, please come talk to me and I will be happy to help you find ways to succeed, which may or may not mean making use of the resources available at Disability Services.

Title IX
Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies (WGSS) classes are a place where issues of sexual violence and other sexual misconduct are discussed as a matter of course. It’s not a taboo subject, and feminists have long worked to develop theory and activism around sexualized violence, including rape, dating violence, child sexual abuse, etc. If you want to discuss your own personal experiences of sexual violence in a class, we don’t consider that a “report” covered by Title IX (although if you want
faculty help and support in reporting sexual violence, we are here to help you do that). Other available resources on campus for addressing sexual violence include both confidential and non-confidential resources—non-confidential resources will keep your concerns private but will report your concerns to the Title IX coordinator, or, the Dean of Students Office who will provide you with different options to assist you. Confidential resources will keep your concerns confidential and will provide you support, assistance in addressing safety concerns as well as other services such as providing you with an advocate. The resources can be found at www.umass.edu/titleix/.

Communication
With a few exceptions, all course material will be posted to Moodle and I do not check my work email on weekends. Therefore, please check Moodle regularly, and consult it/the syllabus first if you have a question. I do welcome email inquiries, though, and will do my best to get back to you promptly!

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**Reading Schedule**

General Note: Feminist thought builds from, intervenes in, and is in dialog with the larger body of social/critical/literary theory. However, in this class we will mostly not be reading theorists like Foucault, Marx, Freud, Lacan, Deleuze, etc., even though their imprint is palpable in what we will read. I've made this choice — and it was a choice — based on the assumption that you will do this kind of canonical reading elsewhere, in your home departments. What WGSS is here to do, then, is to help you understand feminist thought as a domain with its own history and present, even as it is necessarily entangled with and enabled by others.

**Introductions**

9/6 “Genealogy”? “Thought”?
- Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”

9/13 Feminist Story Telling 1*
- Hemmings, Why Stories Matter, Introduction + Part 1
  - Bring in examples of progress, loss, and/or return narratives to discuss. If they are related in some way to your own research interests is even better!

(9/19 - Last day of add/drop for graduate students)
9/20 Feminist Story Telling 2

  - Check out at least three feminist theory journals and read abstracts for their most recent issues. What did you notice about the stories we’re telling now? Come prepared to discuss. (*Differences, Signs, Feminist Formations, Critical Inquiry, Australian Feminist Studies, Catalyst, Hypatia, Feminist Theory*—at least two from this list, a third can be one of your choosing)

*I’ve borrowed the activities for these weeks from my colleague Angie Willey.

Some Stories We Tell

For the next six weeks, we will read work that clusters around contemporary keywords or sites of attachment/conflict in contemporary, mostly US-based academic feminist thought. For the most part, each week consists of at least one touchstone essay and one to three essays that extend, mine, or reorient that touchstone in light of present concerns, new research, etc. Please keep in mind that each of these weeks could be classes in themselves, so they are by definition not comprehensive. The point is to ask—what are the genealogies of feminist thinking in the present, what are the stories we tell, with what materials, to what effects?

9/27 Intersectionality

- Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection”*
- Jasbir Puar, “‘I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess’: Becoming-Intersectional in Assemblage Theory”
- Patricia Hill Collins, “Intersectionality’s Definitional Dilemmas”
- Jennifer Nash, “Institutionalizing the Margins”

*There are two essays of Crenshaw’s that are regularly cited as ‘origin points’ of intersectionality. The relationship between them is interesting and I would encourage you to read both at some point. However, in the interest of not overburdening us, I’ve assigned only the first essay. However, the other essay “Mapping the Margins” is also available to you in our Moodle. I’ve also posted the Combahee River Collective Statement, France Beal’s “Double Jeopardy,” and Patricia Hill Collins’ “Black Feminist Thought in the Matrix of Domination”—all cited ubiquitously, among other writing, as instances of black feminist theorizations of intersectionality whose metaphors fell by the wayside in favor of ‘the intersection.’

10/4 Ungendered Flesh

- C. Riley Snorton, Chapter 1 and 2, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity*
10/11 Coloniality
- Chandra Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses”
- María Lugones, “Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System”
- Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument” (very long!)

10/18 Performativity

10/25 Affect, Feeling
- Audre Lorde, “Poetry is not A Luxury” and “Uses of the Erotic”
- Sarah Ahmed, “Collective Feelings: Or, The Impressions Left by Others”
- Eve Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading, Reparative Reading”
- Lauren Berlant, “Cruel Optimism: On Marx, Loss, and the Senses”

11/1 Work/Life
- Silvia Federici, “Wages Against Housework”
- Angela Davis, “The Approaching Obsolescence of Housework: A Working-Class Perspective,” from *Women, Race, and Class*
- ME O’Brien, “To Abolish the Family”
- Saidya Hartman, “The Belly of the World: A Note on Black Women’s Labors”


**Feminist Thought on/in The University**

11/8 Feminism's in the University (1)
- Selections from *Women's Studies on the Edge* (Duke UP, 1997/2008), Joan Wolloch Scott (ed)
  - Joan Wolloch-Scott, "Introduction"
  - Wendy Brown, “The Impossibility of Women’s Studies”
  - Robyn Wiegman, “Feminism, Institutionalism, and the Idiom of Failure”
  - Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Teaching and Researching in Unavailable Intersections"
  - Beverly G. Sheftall with Evelyn M. Hammonds, "Whither Black Women's Studies"

11/15 Feminism's in the University (2)
- Selections from *Institutional Feelings: Practicing Women's Studies in the Corporate University*, Special Issue of *Feminist Formations* 27, iss. 3, Winter 2015. (We will choose four)
  - Amber Jamilla Musser, “Specimen Days: Diversity, Labor, and the University”
  - Tiffany Lethabo King, “Post-Identitarian and Post-Intersectional Anxiety in the Neoliberal Corporate University”
  - Arrigoitia et. al, "Women's Studies and Contingency"
  - Agathangelou et al. "Sexual Divestments from Empire"
Merri Lise Johnson, "Lez Be Honest"
"Practicing Institutional Feelings: A Roundtable"

11/22 **NO CLASS, TODAY IS ACTUALLY FRIDAY** (but your reflections are due)

11/29 Presentations / Workshops
12/6 Presentations / Workshops

Final Projects Due 12/19 by 11:59pm
(or, realistically, by when I wake up on 12/20)