

WGSS 201: Gender and Difference: Critical Analyses

Fall 2017, University of Massachusetts

Section 1

Instructor: Dr. Stina Soderling

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:30-3:45pm

Office hours: Wednesdays, 2:00-3:30pm and Thursdays, 11am – 12:30pm; or by appointment, W473 South College

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Syllabus is subject to change at the discretion of the professor.

“Gender and Difference: Critical Analyses” addresses central questions in Women's, Gender, and Sexualities, such as: What is gender? How does it intersect with other identities? What power structures influence our gendered experience, and how? What is feminist knowledge production, and why does it matter? We will ask these questions in spirit of mutual learning, with the assumption that we all have much to bring to the conversation, as well as much to learn. The field of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies is large, and no one course can cover all key topics and concepts. In this course, we will study a select number of issues, ideas, and activities, in order to learn how to think critically about gender and difference. My goal as the instructor is to help you develop a set of analytical tools that can be carried into other courses, and the world at large.

Accessibility

I am committed to fostering a classroom environment that supports the full participation of all students. We all learn in different ways: some learn by reading, some by writing, some by talking and listening, some by actively doing. Most of us learn through a combination of mechanisms. In this course, you will be challenged to step into the learning process in various ways, such as those listed above. If you have individual learning needs and have ideas for how to make this course a better learning experience, please let me know.

If you have a documented learning disability, or think you might, and would like to request special accommodations, please contact Disability Services (<http://www.umass.edu/disability/>). I am always open to hearing about your needs and suggestions; however, you are in no way obligated to share any information about a disability with me or any other instructor, unless you yourself decide to do so.

Teaching philosophy

My teaching philosophy is grounded on feminist and anarchist principles, and I hold that learning can be a collaborative and liberatory experience. I believe that as thinking, feeling beings, we all have something to offer in the learning process. In practical terms, this means that I ask us all to work together to make this course a meaningful experience for everyone involved. While I lay out guidelines and suggestions in this syllabus, they are all up for discussion, with three important exceptions: 1) any student accessibility needs, such as accommodations from Disability Services, shall be met; 2) all class

participants must follow the academic integrity policies of the University of Massachusetts; and, most important of all, 3) all participants must strive to treat all class members with respect.

On Title IX and mandated reporting

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, and the like. 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/

On names and pronouns

There is a long history of dialogue and activism around how we address one another, with respect to both names and pronouns. Students should be referred to by the name they prefer, and with the proper pronunciation, by faculty and other students. I will gladly honor your request to address you by the name you prefer and gender pronouns that correspond to your gender identity. Please advise me of your name's proper pronunciation, and any names or pronouns not reflected by the record in Spire early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records.

Contacting the instructor

The best way to contact me is in person. I hold weekly office hours on Wednesdays from 2:00 to 3:30pm and Thursdays from 11:00 to 12:30pm; if this time does not work for you, I am happy to set up a meeting at a different time. If you cannot make it to a scheduled meeting outside of office hours, you are expected to notify me at least 24 hours in advance. If you miss two scheduled meetings without giving proper notice, you may not schedule any other meetings outside of office hours for the duration of the semester.

I use email sparingly. Please allow for 3 weekdays for a response; I do not answer emails on weekends. I do not answer via email questions the answer to which can be found in the syllabus. If you email about a matter that is best addressed through a conversation, I may ask that you come to office hours or set up a meeting.

Required materials

Course readings: All readings are posted on Moodle. You are responsible for printing, reading, commenting on, and bringing a paper copy, with your comments, to class.

Pen and paper: We will frequently write in class. You are responsible for having material for doing so, and for handing in assignments at the end of class.

Unless otherwise noted, all readings and other course materials are required, and students are to

read/watch/listen to these *before* the class meeting for which they are assigned. For some meetings, there are additional materials listed as recommended. These provide more information, background, and/or clarification.

Computer and cellphone policy

This course requires a high level of face-to-face engagement. To facilitate this, there is a no-electronics rule. Exceptions to this rule can be made for relevant use of electronics, for example for video clips or slide shows during student facilitations, or in case of an accommodation from Disability Services.

Study groups

The class consists of 10 study groups. You will sign up for one of these during the first week. There are three mandatory components to the study groups: class facilitation, letters, and meetings with the instructor. All three are described in the assignment section. You are also encouraged to use the study group as a resource, for example by discussing readings and editing written assignments.

Triggers and challenging materials

WGSS courses frequently cover materials that can be emotionally challenging. We all come to class with our own histories; therefore, it is not possible to know which material might affect which people most deeply. I am always happy to meet with you if you know or think that parts of the course might prove triggering for you, so that we can devise an approach. While we will strive to create a classroom culture sensitive to our respective histories, we will not avoid difficult topics or conversations. I encourage you to take care of yourself, including stepping out of class if necessary.

Good to know

Part of learning is working together on difficult issues. This is often especially the case in WGSS courses. We will all make “mistakes” this semester; this does not mean that we are failing. I encourage you to step into spaces that might make you uncomfortable, while knowing that the community of the class, and me as an instructor, are here to support you.

If you are at all struggling in this course, come talk to me! It is my job to facilitate your participation and performance in this course, and you do not “bother” me by asking for help. I have office hours weekly, and we can also schedule a meeting at a different time. I encourage you to attend office hours to check in with me, even if you are not struggling. That way, we can figure out together how to make this semester as beneficial as possible for you.

Expectations

Attendance. Being present is an important component of this course, and you are expected to attend all meetings. Attendance means not only showing up, but staying present, in both body and mind, to the best of your ability, for the duration of the class period. In accordance to the no-electronics-rule, if you are on your phone, computer, or other electronic device during class time, I will consider you absent for that class meeting.

You can miss up to two class meetings without it affecting your grade. After this, your attendance grade will drop by 2 points for each absence. It is up to you how (and if) you use your absences; there are no “excused” versus “unexcused” absences, and, unless you will miss a major in-class assignment such as

your facilitation date, you are not required to inform me that you will be missing class. If there are extenuating circumstances that will cause you to miss several class sessions, please do contact me. *If you miss more than 9 class meetings, you automatically fail the course.*

If you are late, this will count as half an absence. If you are more than 20 minutes late, it will count as a full absence.

Of course, life does not always follow a neat semester schedule, and there might be reasons, expected or unforeseen, that prohibit your full participation and attendance in the course. In such circumstances, I encourage you to make an appointment to talk to me as soon as possible, so that we can figure out a plan. *I will never ask for doctors' notes or other medical documentation.* Such documents may contain very private information, and you are under no obligation to share it with me. I trust that you will be honest about your needs and circumstances, and you do not need to divulge sensitive information.

Participation. Much of our learning will take place in conversation with each other. It is therefore crucial that you not only attend class, but also participate. There are many ways to participate in the course: partake in class discussion, bring in questions about the readings, bring in relevant outside material, partake in group work. In order to participate fully in class, it is vital that you have carefully read the assigned texts. You will be evaluated on the extent to which your comments relate to, and critically engage with, the assigned materials. Occasionally, you will have small homework assignments, which are counted toward your participation grade.

Completing all assignments. Below is a list of course assignments. You are expected to complete all assignments by the stated deadlines.

Assignments

Daily free-write.

We will start each class session with a brief writing exercise. The purpose of this is to review your thoughts and arrive, with your whole self, in the classroom. You must hand in your free-write at the end of class in order to receive attendance credit for that day.

If you arrive to class late, and miss the free-write, you are expected to speak with me after class.

Syllabus quiz

The syllabus is the guiding document for this course. By staying enrolled in the course, you agree to follow the syllabus. To ensure that everyone is familiar with this document, we will have a short open-book quiz on its contents. *In-class, September 19.*

Facilitations

Starting September 28, a study group will lead a portion of each class meeting. This could include bringing in discussion questions, leading activities, assigning small-group work, doing a presentation. Creativity is encouraged! You will sign up for a facilitation date at the beginning of the semester. We will have a workshop on designing class facilitations on September 21. You must have signed up for a facilitation date before the workshop.

If you miss your facilitation date, we can try to find a different date. This is not guaranteed, however. Missing your original facilitation date will automatically lead to a 3-point deduction from your grade; if rescheduling is not possible, you will not receive credit for the facilitation.

Letters

The members of each study group will write letters to one another. Over the course of the semester, each member will write at least three letters, of at least 2 pages each. Each letter must: discuss at least three readings from the course, at least one of which must be new (i.e. assigned since the last letter); connect the readings to an outside event; respond to the previous letter.

While the letters are not papers or essays, they are academic class assignments. Thus, while the tone may be informal, the assignments should be carefully crafted and edited. This means proofreading for spelling errors; making sure all names are correct; having a paragraph structure that follows your line of thought and/or argument. You are expected to cite all your sources. We will have a citation workshop in February. Before the workshop, you will be graded on whether or not you cite sources; after the workshop, you will be graded on whether you are using correct citation practices.

Critical reading responses

You will write three critical reading responses. These are 1-page exercises, using a worksheet that will be distributed in class. For 9/28, write a response on a reading of your choice assigned between 9/5 and 9/28; for 10/31, on a reading assigned between 10/3 and 10/31; for 11/30, on a reading assigned between 11/2 and 11/30.

Due dates: September 28, October 31, November 30.

Media report

In order to help each other keep up with current events relevant to the course, each student will do an oral media report in class. You will sign up for 3 possible dates, and must do a report on one of these dates. Bring in a news source, explain what it is about and how it is relevant to the course.

Midterm meeting with instructor

Each study group will meet with the instructor in October. This fifteen-minute meeting is a chance to check in, make sure course requirements are clear, share any concerns, and plan your facilitation. Your groups will sign up for meetings at the beginning of the semester.

Outside events

During the course of the semester, you are expected to attend at least two outside events, such as a conference or lecture, that addresses themes relating to the course. Please bring in a paragraph about the event no more than two weeks after you attended (no later than the last day of class), describing what the event was, how it related to the course, and one thing you took away from the event.

Final reflection

At the end of the semester, you will write a 4-6 page paper reflecting on your learning process. We will go over the details of this assignment during the final weeks of the course.

Homework

Homework assignments must be handed in at the end of class, unless otherwise instructed. Remember to put your name on your assignments!

Policy on late assignments

As a rule, I do not accept late assignments. Deadlines are as much for me as they are for you: when you submit an assignment on time, I can plan to devote sufficient time to grading and feedback. If you are unable to complete an assignment, you must talk to me *before it is due*, to see if an extension can be arranged.

Grades

Attendance and free-writes: 15 points
Participation and homework: 20 points
Letters: 15 points (5 per letter)
Critical reading responses: 6 points (2 per response)
Media report: 3 points
Meeting with instructor: 8 points
Facilitation: 12 points
Outside events: 6 points (3 per event)
Syllabus quiz: 5 points
Final reflection: 10 points
Total: 100

Letter grade percentage-equivalents: A: 94-100; A-: 90-93; B+: 87-89; B: 83-86; B-: 80-82; C+: 77-79; C: 73-76; C-: 70-72; D+: 67-69; D: 63-66; F: 0-62

All written assignments must be submitted, on paper, in class on the due date. Unless prior arrangements have been made, I do not accept electronic submissions.

Extra credit

Book review. You may read a book of your choosing and write a 1-page review discussing your views of the book, how it relates to the course, and why you would or would not recommend it to others. 2 credits.

Author introduction. You may do a brief (2-3 minutes) presentation on an author *on the day which we are reading their text*. To receive credit, the presentation must include: some biographical data, the significance of the author, the context in which the text was written. Please email me at least 48 hours before class if you would like to do a presentation; you may do a presentation as long as nobody else has signed up for that author. 2 credits.

Outside event presentation. You may give a 5-minute presentation of one outside event you have attended. This must be done no more than two weeks after the event. Please email me at least 48 hours before class if you would like to do a presentation. 2 credits.

The last day to complete extra credit assignments is December 7.

Grading policy

Grades will be assigned according to the rubric posted on Moodle.

Semester outline

Tuesday, September 5 – introduction

What is feminism? – freewrite

Thursday, September 7 – What is feminism? What is WGSS?

Jessica Yee, introduction to *Feminism for Real*

Louis Esme Cruz, “Medicine Bundle of Contradictions”

Tuesday, September 12 – Calling in and calling out

Ngọc Loan Trần, “Calling IN: A Less Disposable Way of Holding Each Other Accountable”

Sian Ferguson, “Calling In: A Quick Guide on When and How”

Thursday, September 14 – Accessibility

Jillian Ford, “Embracing 'Crazy' in the 'Land of the Free”

Rachel Cohen-Rottenberg, “10 Questions About Why Ableist Language Matters, Answered”

Tuesday, September 19 – Knowledge and ignorance

Shannon Sullivan, “White Ignorance and Colonial Oppression: Or, Why I Know So Little about Puerto Rico”

Judit Moschkovich, “--But I Know You, American Woman”

In-class: syllabus quiz

Thursday, September 21 – Knowledge and ignorance, continued

Rebecca Solnit, “Men Explain Things to Me”

In-class: facilitation workshop

Tuesday, September 26 – Questioning feminist narratives

Paula Gunn Allen, “Who Is Your Mother? The Red Roots of White Feminism”

Sojourner Truth, “Ain't I a Woman?”

Thursday, September 28 – Intersectionality

Kimberlé Crenshaw, video, “The Urgency of Intersectionality”

Kimberlé Crenshaw, video, “On Intersectionality”

Recommended

Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins”

Tuesday, October 3 – Intersectionality, continued

Andrea Smith, “Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy”

Ijeoma Oluo, “Good Morning, America. Welcome to Your White Supremacy”

In-class: citation workshop

Thursday, October 5 – White privilege and fragility

Peggy McIntosh, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack”

Robin DiAngelo, “White Fragility: Why It's So Hard to Talk to White People About Racism”

Thursday, October 12 – Group-work day

Tuesday, October 17 – Class and identity

Dorothy Allison, “A Question of Class”

Cherríe Moraga, “La Güera”

Megan Lee, “Maybe I'm Not Class-Mobile; Maybe I'm Class-Queer: Poor kids in college, and survival under hierarchy”

Recommended

Raquel Reichard, “What It's Really Like to Be a First-Generation Latina College Student”

Thursday, October 19 – Law enforcement and police brutality

Andrea Ritchie, “Law Enforcement Violence Against Women of Color”

Critical Resistance and INCITE!, “Gender Violence and the Prison-Industrial Complex”

Angela Davis, “How Gender Structures the Prison System”

Tuesday, October 24 – Abolitionism

Angela Davis, “Feminism and Abolition: Theories and Practices for the Twenty-First Century,” from *Freedom Is a Constant Struggle*

Kalaniopua Young, “From a Native Trans Daughter: Carceral Refusal, Settler Colonialism, Re-routing the Roots of an Indigenous Abolitionist Imaginary”

Thursday, October 26 – Abolitionism, continued

José Martín, “Policing Is a Dirty Job, But Nobody's Gotta Do It: 6 Ideas for a Cop-Free World”

“Resisting State Violence in the Era of Mass Deportation: An Interview with Mizue Aizeki”

Tuesday, October 31 – Militarism and (neo)imperialism

Lila Abu-Lughod, “Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?”

Aqdas Aftab, “Visibility or Complicity?”

Mahroh Jahangiri, “PSA: Support Trans People But Not the Military”

Recommended

Sonali Kolhatkar, “Freedom through Solidarity: The Lie of 'Liberation'”

Thursday, November 2 – Gender, sexuality, and the environment

“The New United States Climate Alliance Is Good for Queers, and Everyone Else, Too”

Tuesday, November 7 – Labor

Cynthia Enloe, “The Globetrotting Sneaker” and excerpt from *Seriously!*

Thursday, November 9 – Labor, continued

Susan Bremer, “The Grind”

Tuesday, November 14 – Reproductive justice

Loretta Ross, “The Color of Choice”

Derek Hawkins, “Judge to Inmates: Get Sterilized and I'll Shave off Jail Time”

Dani McClain, “The Murder of Black Youth Is a Reproductive Justice Issue”

Thursday, November 16 – Reproductive justice, continued

Jennifer Nelson, “‘Abortions Under Community Control’: Feminism, Nationalism, and the Politics of Reproduction among New York City's Young Lords”

Tuesday, November 28 – Reproductive justice, continued

Sharmila Rudrappa, *Discounted Life: The Price of Global Surrogacy In India*, excerpt

Thursday, November 30 – Bodily autonomy

Isha Ray, “Public Spaces, Private Acts: Toilets and Gender Equality”

Christine Overall, “Public Toilets: Sex Segregation Revisited”

In-class exercise (reading beforehand recommended):

PISSAR, “Calling All Restroom Revolutionaries!”

Tuesday, December 5 – Bodily autonomy, continued

Audre Lorde, *The Cancer Journals*, excerpts

Barbara Brenner, *So Much to Be Done*, excerpts

Thursday, December 7 – organizing and challenges: love and anger

Audre Lorde, “The Uses of Anger”

Rachel Flowers, “Refusal to Forgive: Indigenous Women's Love and Rage”

Recommended:

Bettina Judd, “Bad Nerves”

Tuesday, December 12

Last day, wrap-up