

Voices, Violence, and Vantage Points: Feminist Research Methods

WGSS 291V

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:30-3:45

Instructor: Dr. Stina Soderling

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Office hours: Tuesdays, 1-2pm, Thursdays, 10:30-11:20, or by appointment

Feminists argue that it matters not only what we know, but how we come to know things. In this course, we will explore how feminists do research, as well as engage with already-existing information. Topics will include: Indigenous feminist research, lesbian history-writing, and feminist media campaigns such as #SayHerName and #MeToo. Throughout the course, we will look at how feminists use research in their activism; for the final project, students will complete a proposal for a research project that can be used in social movements.

Since this is a course about feminist methods and ways of learning, we will experiment with a key tenet of feminist process: building the project (that is, the course) together. This syllabus is thus a starting point, a collection of suggested ways of learning, through assignments and readings. As the semester progresses it is open to change, to accommodate the collective learning process.

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.

Department writing tutor

A wonderful resource offered by WGSS is a department-specific writing tutor. This semester, Faune Albert holds this position. She is available to meet about your writing assignments, either during drop-in office hours or by appointment. Her weekly office hours are Mondays and Wednesdays from 10-2 and Thursdays from 2-4 in South College W414. You can also reach her via email, at falbert@umass.edu. I warmly recommend meeting with a writing tutor; I find that it improves student writing greatly.

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.

Computer policy

I ask that you do not use a computer in class. It's distracting for both you and the class (including the instructor). Research shows that students retain less information when taking notes on a laptop than by hand.

Contacting the instructor

The best way to contact me is in person. I hold weekly office hours on Tuesdays from 1:00 to 2:00pm and Thursdays from 10:30 to 11:20am; if these times do 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.

Assignments

Notebook – For each class session, you will write one page in your course notebook. These notes will form the basis for developing a final project. Questions to consider in writing your notes: what did you find useful about the methodological approach of the author(s)? Could you implement any of their strategies in your project? What questions would you ask the author(s)? Are there points where you would challenge the author(s)? Bring your notebook to each class session, and be prepared to raise discussion questions based on your notes.

Final paper and presentation – The major assignment of the semester is a research proposal. Drawing on course readings and your notebook, you will design a research project based in feminist methodologies. The assignment is to write the proposal, not carry out the project, though I suggest that you consider writing a proposal for a project that could be carried out for another class, an independent study, or other venue. Over the course of the second half of the semester, you will submit an outline and draft of your proposal, as well as present it to the class. These are all opportunities to gather feedback, in order to strengthen the final version of the proposal.

Other course requirements

Attendance – You are expected to attend all class meetings, and to arrive on time. You are allowed up to three absences before your grade starts to drop. Tardiness counts as half an absence, as does in-class cellphone use, as I expect you to attend with both mind and body. I do not differentiate between excused and unexcused absences; it is up to you how, or if, you use your allowed absences. In the case of an emergency that will require sustained absence from the course, do talk to me. Please note that I consider medical records to be confidential information, and you are never obligated to provide such proof of illness. If you tell me that you need accommodations because of illness, I trust you.

Participation – Feminist pedagogy and scholarly process emphasize learning as a collective process; thus, you are expected to be an active participant in the classroom. This means sharing your thoughts, analysis, and questions. It also means listening carefully and being part of creating an environment where everyone has space and time to speak. When participating in conversations and discussions, think about how your comments build on what has been said so far, and respond to questions posed by others.

Classroom facilitation roles: In order to create a participatory classroom space, we will divide the various tasks involved in facilitating classroom process. These include “time keeper,” “stack keeper” (keeping track of who raises their hand), and “vibe watcher” (being attentive to how people seem to be feeling; if everyone has space to participate; and if a brief break is needed). As a class, we might also decide on other roles. You are expected to take on one of these roles at least three times during the semester. You may volunteer to participate in facilitation more frequently for extra credit.

Extra credit

Beginning-of-semester office hours – In addition to regularly scheduled office hours, I will hold extended office hours during the first three weeks of the semester. In my experience, students

who engage in a dialogue with the instructor early on in the semester do better throughout the course, and attending office hours is a possibility to begin that dialogue.

Semester outline

Tuesday, January 23 – Introductions

Thursday, January 25 – Why feminist methods?

bell hooks, “Theory as Liberatory Practice”
Rebecca Solnit, “Men Explain Things to Me”

Tuesday, January 30 – Creating a classroom for research and learning

Clay Shirky, “Why I Just Asked My Students to Put Their Laptops Away”
Rachel Cohen-Rottenberg, “10 Questions About Why Ableist Language Matters, Answered”

Thursday, February 1 – Creating a classroom for research and learning, continued

Jo Freeman aka Joreen, “The Tyranny of Structurelessness”
Cathy Levine, “The Tyranny of Tyranny”
Derrick Jensen, excerpts, *Walking on Water* : “grades,” “choices,” and “giving up control”
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”

Tuesday, February 6 – Roots and relations

Jodi Beniuk, “All My Relations: Reclaiming the Stories of Our Indigenous Grandmothers,” in
Atlantis
Leanne Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, chapters 1 and 2

Thursday, February 8 – Locating feminism: primary sources and archival research

Location TBA – possible visit to library and archives

Agatha Beins, *Liberation in Print: Feminist Periodicals and Social Movement Identity*, chapter
2: “Locating Feminism”
“I Had the Advantage of Disadvantage,” interview with Laurel Thatcher Ulrich

Tuesday, February 13 – Manifestos and interviews: writing the history of feminist activism

How We Get Free, excerpts

Thursday, February 15 – Intersectionality and #SayHerName

Kimberle Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins”
Kimberle Crenshaw, video, “The Urgency of Intersectionality”

Tuesday, February 20 – Subjectivity and objectivity: feminist and critical ethnography

John Jackson, *Real Black: Adventures in Racial Sincerity*, excerpts
Kamala Visweswaran, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*, excerpts

Thursday, February 22 – Researching humor

Guest lecture by Kirsten Leng

readings TBA

Tuesday, February 27 – The role of the university

Roderick Ferguson, excerpts, *We Demand*

Thursday, March 1 – The role of the university, continued

Taiaiake Alfred, “Warrior Scholarship: Seeing the University as a Ground of Contention”

Tuesday, March 6 – Decolonizing feminist research?

Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck, and Angie Morrill, “Decolonizing Feminism: Challenging Connections between Settler Colonialism and Heteropatriarchy”

Linda Tuhiwai Smith, excerpts, *Decolonizing Methodologies* (read at least chapters 1 and 3)

Thursday, March 8 – Decolonizing feminist research, continued.

Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor”

Tuesday, March 20 – Feminism and scientific research

Anne Fausto-Sterling, “Dueling Dualisms,” from *Sexing the Body*

Proposal outline due

Thursday, March 22 – Feminism and scientific research, continued

Rebecca Jordan-Young, excerpts, *Brainstorm*

Tuesday, March 27 – Learning from the land

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, “Land as Pedagogy: Nishnaabe Intelligence and Rebellious Transformation”

Thursday, March 29 – Learning from the land, continued

Robin Wall Kimmerer, excerpts from *Braiding Sweetgrass*: “The Gift of Strawberries,” “An Offering,” “Asters and Goldenrod,” “Learning the Grammar of Animacy,” “Allegiance to Gratitude,” “The Sound of Silverbells”

Nora Murphy, excerpts from *White Birch, Red Hawthorn*: “Stranded,” “The Cedars,” “The Elm”

Tuesday, April 3 – Learning from the land, continued

Eli Clare, excerpts, *Exile & Pride*

Thursday, April 5 – Activism and scholarship

Macarena Gómez-Barris, excerpts, *The Extractive Zone*

Proposal draft due

Tuesday, April 10 – Activism and scholarship, continued

Macarena Gómez-Barris, excerpts, *The Extractive Zone*, continued

“Mujeres Creando: Bolivian Anarcha-Feminist Street Activists,” from *Quiet Rumours*

Thursday, April 12 – #MeToo

Readings: class-sourced materials

Tuesday, April 17 – no class, Monday schedule

Thursday, April 19 – Magic, mystery, spirit

M. Jacqui Alexander, “Pedagogies of the Sacred: Making the Invisible Tangible”

Luisah Teish, excerpts, *Jambalaya: The Natural Woman's Book of Personal Charms and Practical Rituals*

Tuesday, April 24 – TBA

Thursday, April 26 – TBA

May 1 – no class, May Day