

# FEMINIST POLITICAL THEORY

POL 433/GWS 433 - **Fall 2011** - Time: Tu and Th 2:00-3:15 pm

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Office Hours: Tu and Thur 11-12:30 and by appointment

Log in to our D2L coursepage for important materials and updates

## Course description

Because gender is socially constructed, it is instructive to study how gender ideologies--which profoundly shape today's intellectual inquiries and political realities--have been articulated in the form of political theory (how we think about relations of power). We will review traditions of (conventional, modernist, Western) political theory associated with feminisms, as well as anti-racist, queer, postcolonial and poststructural critiques. The latter will be engaged to illuminate sex, gender and power as socially constructed and how this complicates conventional understandings of 'politics' and 'theorizing.' Finally, we will survey how feminists theorize power relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century context of neoliberal governmentality, militarized insecurities and economic inequalities.

## Course objectives

The objectives of this course are to: 1) sensitize students to the social construction of gender and its implications for theorizing power relations; 2) familiarize students with debates and developments in feminist theorizing and understandings of power/politics; and 3) encourage students to make connections between theory and practice. We will pay particular attention to issues of intersectionality: how gender is inextricable from other axes of institutionalized 'difference' (especially: ethnicity/race, class, gender, sexuality and national location) and what this means for theory and practice.

## Class processes and expectations

In this seminar environment, we will explore various issues in contemporary feminist theory regarding power and politics. The course is introductory in the sense that it covers a large number of topics without exploring any with sufficient depth and care. At the same time, however, the course is advanced in the sense that much of the assigned reading is theoretically sophisticated and so demands very close attention.

Some students may find the topics covered in this class controversial. Learning in this class differs from, say, calculus: it requires a willingness to examine one's own assumptions about theorizing, politics and gender. 'Reflectivity' is very helpful - this involves paying attention to your emotional and intellectual reactions to the material, and noting especially what prompts 'resistance' and exploring why this is so. One key objective of the course is to move beyond simplistic 'either-or' positions; whatever your political positioning, it is important to appreciate how complex (and often uncomfortable) analyses of power are - especially when they

challenge us to rethink familiar assumptions or realize our complicity in unequal power relations.

To facilitate exploration of the course topics and collaborative learning processes, it is a requirement of the course that students make time to meet in small groups outside of class for at least one hour weekly. Students report enjoying the social interactions and different learning opportunities these small groups afford. As compensation for the time they involve, I have reduced the amount of required reading and we will attempt to conclude our classroom sessions closer to 3:00 than 3:15pm. We will discuss details regarding group constitution during the first session and further instructions are posted on our D2L coursepage.

I note here that this is an upper-division undergraduate course. I therefore expect students not only to be well prepared (as in lower level courses) but also to show initiative in class participation and in taking up the challenge of critical, intellectual inquiry (as is appropriate for advanced students). I will conduct the course more as a seminar than a lecture, with the expectation of active participation by all members. There are many complex issues to be acknowledged and as much as possible addressed, and I hope that discussions are lively! The study of these topics is inherently interesting because our daily lives are profoundly shaped by power, gender, and how we think about (theorize) these dynamics.

This course is a joint responsibility. I have taken a great deal of time with selecting materials and preparing coursework, and I look forward to working with you throughout the semester. I am committed to making this a thought-provoking, stimulating and enjoyable course. But the success of the course depends on student participation, and especially, your willingness to engage the materials and ask hard questions about the world(s) we live in. I encourage you to take the course seriously and learn about some of the most current issues in theories/theorizing and the politics of making knowledge claims.

An advanced undergrad course in 'feminist political theory' presupposes and requires some background in thinking about politics, theorizing and feminism. Because students vary dramatically in terms of this background, we start the course by quickly reading a short and relatively simplistic overview of feminism as theory/practice. (Some points/claims in this 'conventional' account of feminism will subsequently be re-examined.) I then intend to teach the course as it is named and at an advanced level. If you have *\*no\** understanding/background in these topics you might want to rethink your place in this course; if you remain you might need to plan on extra work required to improve your knowledge base. I have posted on our coursepage a list of 'recommended' readings to help in this regard, and I can provide pdf files for many of these. *Please contact me sooner rather than later if you need assistance, or any time if you have questions, concerns or suggestions for improving the quality of the course and our collective learning experience.*

### Course expectations and evaluation

*Grade components:* Your course grade will reflect a combination of: 1) attendance, preparation and participation, including small group reports [10%]; 2) quizzes and short essay assignments throughout the semester [20%]; 3) group project [10%]; and 4) essay exams/papers [60%]. Further details and guidelines (regarding preparation of materials, grading criteria, etc.) will be posted on D2L and discussed in class. I will continually post announcements/news regarding the course on our D2L webpage so **make sure that you are able to access this site and do so frequently**. If you are having trouble, ask someone in a computer lab to assist you.

*Preparation and participation:* Students are expected to attend all class sessions (and

weekly group meetings) and to participate in class discussions and group meetings on the basis of an engaged and critical reading of each session's assignments *prior* to sessions. Students are expected to arrive for class *\*on time\** and remember to turn off cell phones and other noise-making devices. Because this is an upper-division course, lectures will not focus on 'explaining' the readings to you; I will expect you to have done the readings; **to bring questions you have to class**; and to be prepared to discuss the readings from the perspectives of analytically engaged, informed students. Lecture material will 1) focus on background and context, providing a framework for understanding and locating the particular readings, and 2) will emphasize the development of ideas and debates, suggesting where/how the readings are located in regard to theoretical developments and their implications. Because these materials are quite challenging, attendance and participation is imperative to avoid 'getting lost' or confused and to enable a collective learning process. In short, I expect students to come to class prepared to discuss the readings and to participate actively and thoughtfully.

Please note that "active and thoughtful participation" is in no way limited to providing "correct answers" to questions; rather, it means any participation in discussion that is a sincere attempt to come to terms with the material and/or advance the class's consideration of the issue at hand. Such attempts may include raising your own questions about the text, pointing out connections that you see, responding to another student's comments, and so forth. "Listening respectfully" means taking the texts' and other students' ideas seriously, and making an honest effort to understand their basis, even when those ideas are not agreeable to you. Listening respectfully also applies to yourself; it means taking your own ideas seriously, and speaking them when appropriate, *while allowing your ideas to develop over time*, and while pursuing an understanding of their basis. **Note:** once you have chosen to remain enrolled in this class, I will assume that you are aware of and have accepted these 'ground rules' for the course.

University of Arizona rules regarding the syllabus require that I include the following:

Plagiarism: all work submitted must be the student's own. You are responsible for being familiar with the University's policies regarding plagiarism and the UA Student Code of Academic Integrity: <http://studpubs.web.arizona.edu/policies/cacaint.htm>

Threatening behavior by students' is not permitted at any time; you are responsible for being familiar with the University's policies in this regard: <http://policy.web.arizona.edu/~policy/threaten.shtml>

Students with special needs who are registered with the S.A.L.T. Center (<http://www.salt.arizona.edu/>) or the Disability Resource Center (<http://drc.arizona.edu/>) must submit appropriate documentation to the instructor if they are requesting special accommodations.

### Required texts and reading assignments

Two books are required.

Tarrant, Shira. 2009. *Men and Feminism*. Berkeley, CA: Seal Press/Perseus.

Warnke, Georgia. 2011. *Debating Sex and Gender*. New York: Oxford University Press.

All additional reading assignments are posted on D2L as pdf files.

### Schedule of Reading Assignments

**Aug 23:** Introductions and course expectations; paperwork and getting started.  
No reading assignment, but be aware that the entire Tarrant book must be completed by Aug 30.

## **PART I: Reviewing Feminisms**

**Aug 25:** Completing the prerequisites: Reviewing feminisms  
Tarrant: Prologue (vii-ix) and pp.1-88

**Aug 30:** Completing the prerequisites  
Tarrant: pp. 89-134

### **Sep 1:** Getting started

Sarachild, Kathie. 1978. "Consciousness-Raising: A Radical Weapon." Excerpts.  
"Getting Together: How to Start a Consciousness-Raising Group," by Cape Cod Women's Liberation (1972).

Douglas, Susan. 2012. 'Enlightened Sexism.' In *Women's Voices, Feminist Visions: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Susan M. Shaw and Janet Lee. 2nd Edition. Boston: McGraw Hill. Pp. 479-483.

## **PART II: Feminisms and their politics**

### **Sep 6:** Political theory without feminism

Brown, Wendy. 1987. Where is the Sex in Political Theory? *Women & Politics*. 7 (Spring): 3-24.

### **Sep 8:** Surveying feminist theories

Tong, Rosemarie. 2009. 'Introduction.' *Feminist Thought: a more comprehensive introduction*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. Pp. 1-9 and notes pp. 293-294.

### **Sep 13:** Liberal feminism

Wollstonecraft, Mary. Excerpt from A Vindication of the Rights of Woman in *An Introduction to Women's Studies*, ed. Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan. Boston: McGraw Hill, 2006. Pp. 164-166.

The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA)

Rudy, Kathy. 1999. Liberal theory and feminist politics. *Women & Politics* 20, 2: 33-57.

### **Sep 15:** Radical feminism

Stoltenberg, John. 2000. *Refusing to be a Man: Essays on Sex and Justice*. Revised edition. London: UCL Press. Pp. xi-xxvii.

### **Sep 20:** Socialist feminism

Eisenstein, Zillah R. 1979. Developing a theory of capitalist patriarchy and socialist feminism. In *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*, ed. Zillah Eisenstein. New York: Monthly Review Press. Pp. 5-40.

### **Sep 22:** Anti-racist, 'women of color' feminism

- Grillo, Trina. 2006. Anti-Essentialism and Intersectionality. In *Theorizing Feminisms: A Reader*, ed. Elizabeth Hackett and Sally Haslanger. New York: Oxford University Press. Pp. 30-33 only.
- Reagon, Bernice Johnson. 1983. "Coalition Politics: Turning the Century," in *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 2000: 356-368.
- Garcia, Alma M. The Development of Chicana Feminist Discourse. In *An Introduction to Women's Studies*, ed. Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan. Boston: McGraw Hill, 2006. Pp. 207-211.

**Sep 27: Queering boundaries**

- Duggan, Lisa. Making it Perfectly Queer. Excerpted in *An Introduction to Women's Studies*, ed. Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan. Boston: McGraw Hill, 2006. Pp. 211-215.
- Cantu, Lionel, Jr. With Eithne Luibheid and Alexandra Minna Stern. 2010. In *Feminist Theory Reader*, ed. Carole R. McCann and Seung-Kyung Kim. New York: Routledge. Pp. 281-290.

**Sep 29:**

- Butler, Judith. 1992. Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of 'Postmodernism.' In *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott. New York: Routledge. Pp. 3-21.

**Oct 4: Essay exam/paper**

**PART II: Complicating feminism, theory and politics**

**Oct 6:** Warnke, Preface and pp. 1-28

Oct 11: Warnke, pp. 29-51

Oct 13: Warnke, pp. 52-74

Oct 18: Warnke, pp. 75-120

**Essay exam/paper**

**PART III: Feminists theorize 21<sup>st</sup> century politics**

[I anticipate that we will read some of the articles listed below, but am waiting to see how our first few weeks go before finalizing the schedule for the final third of the course]

Flax, Jane. 1987. Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory. *Signs* 12: 621-643.

Marchand, Marianne and Anne Sisson Runyan. 2011. 'Introduction.' Pp. 1-23 in Marianne Marchand and Anne Sisson Runyan, eds. 2011. 2<sup>nd</sup>. Ed. *Gender and Global Restructuring: Sightings, Sites and Resistances*. London: Routledge.

- Kimmel, Michael S. 2003. 'Globalization and its Mal(e)contents: The gendered moral and political economy of terrorism. *International Sociology* 18, 3: 603-620.
- Blanchard, Eric M. 2003. Gender, International Relations, and the Development of Feminist Security Theory. *Signs* 28, 4: 1289-1312.
- Brown, Wendy. 2005. 'Neoliberalism and the end of liberal democracy.' Pp. 37-50 in her *Edgework*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Cockburn, Cynthia. 2010. Gender relations as causal in militarization and war. *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 12, 2: 139-157.
- Peterson, V. Spike. 2007. Thinking Through Intersectionality and War. Special Issue on 'Race, Gender, Class, Sexuality and War.' *Race, Gender & Class* 14, 3-4: 10-27.
- LeBaron, Genevieve and Adrienne Roberts. 2010. Toward a feminist political economy of capitalism and carcerality. *Signs* 36, 1: 19-44.
- Young, Iris Marion. 2003. The Logic of Masculinist Protection: Reflections on the Current Security State. *Signs* 29, 1: 1-25.
- Peterson, V. Spike. 2010. A Long View of Globalization and Crisis. Special Issue on 'Globalization and Crisis.' *Globalizations* 7, 1 (Mar): 179-193.
- Butler, Judith. 2009 Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics. *AIBR* 4, 3: i-xiii.  
[www.aibr.org](http://www.aibr.org)
- Kirk, Gwynn and Margo Okazawa-Rey. 2007. *Creating Change: Theory, Vision, and Action in Women's Lives: Multicultural Perspectives* (McGraw-Hill 2007). Pp. 569-583.

Group Projects before the semester concludes

**Dec 9: FINAL EXAM/PAPER 1-3pm**