Foundations of Gender Studies 2

MA Level Class
Winter 2019

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Class Time: Tuesday 1:30-3:10pm
Place: Z412

Course Description:

Feminist theory and practice has changed tremendously since the days of first and second wave feminism - as evidenced by the emergence of the term “Gender Studies” itself (from what had often originally been “Women’s Studies”). In this course, we will explore some of the ways in which feminist thinking has, since roughly the early 1990s, grown, changed, fractured, and striven for unity in response to challenges to universal concepts of “woman”, shifting understandings of gender and sexual difference, new thinking about power and agency, and sweeping reconceptualizations of the relationships between gender, bodies, and the borders of the human. Through close reading and in-depth discussion of key texts, we will trace these turns and their implications for how we see feminism as both academic discipline and political practice.

Learning Outcomes

This course will provide students with the opportunity to increase their awareness and understanding of key debates in recent feminist theory, as well as central tensions within contemporary feminist scholarship and politics. Through its emphasis on the close reading of texts, the course will strengthen students’ skills in critical scholarship, and encourage them to improve their analytical, writing, and presentation skills through reading, writing reaction papers, class presentations, and group discussion.

Student Responsibilities and Requirements

This is a discussion-based course, not a lecture course. It will, therefore, require a great deal of responsibility on the part of all of you. For each class, I will first introduce and contextualize the week’s topic. We will then, as a class, map out the central theoretical and analytical moves presented by the day’s readings, their specific arguments, and the relationships between them, and their location within broader patterns of feminist and other theorizing. The remainder of the class will be an open discussion of these
arguments and connections, and their implications – in which I will occasionally mediate or intervene. Thus, all of you will be expected to analyze, express your opinions about, and debate the assigned materials in depth.

Requirements:

1) Attendance and class participation (60%)

You are required to attend classes consistently: missing class without some official documentation of a medical problem may affect your grade. You are expected to take an active and constructive part in group discussions. N.B.: missing three (3) or more classes, for any reason, may result in failure of the course.

2) Group presentation (10%)

Assuming that the class has approximately 24 students, you will all form eight groups of 3 students each. Each group will then be responsible for conducting one class presentation, starting with the second class of the term. Each group’s presentation will contextualize the day’s reading by focusing on its author, first introducing her (who she is, where she received her PhD, in what university and what department she is teaching, etc.), and then giving a brief summary of her overall research focus (for this you should rely on sources such as book reviews of her key works, etc.). The presentation as a whole should take no more than 10 minutes, and all members of the group must participate in it equally.

3) Critical Comments (30%)

During the course of the term, each of you will write three (3), 2-3 page Critical Comments, each for a class of your choice (N.B.: you may not choose to submit a Comment for a day on which you are presenting). The Comment may focus on a single reading, or compare more than one reading from that day’s assigned materials.

These Comments are meant to stimulate your/our thinking and questioning of specific issues, and to enable all of us to address the topic more effectively; they are therefore critical to successful discussion in the class. In this sense (as, indeed, in all others), a great deal of responsibility for the success or failure of this course lies in your hands. Assessment of these will be based on cumulative progress made throughout the term, and will be worth 40% of your final grade.

Each Critical Comment should contain (but need not be limited to) the following elements:
1. CORE QUOTATION. You should quote a sentence or short passage from the text that you think is central to the main argument of the piece. Be sure to always cite the quotation properly.
2. ARGUMENT. Briefly, summarize the author’s main argument.
3. QUESTION. Raise a question about a point (not a fact!) you feel is not adequately accounted for, or supported, in the argument.
4. PERSONAL CONNECTION. Consider briefly how the argument made in the article fits or challenges your previous thinking about social movements/politics.
5. ANALYTICAL RELATION. Compare this argument with another you have come across, either in this course or in your previous study. Summarize briefly this previous argument (citing it properly), and explain how the present piece’s argument contrasts with it, or casts new light on the issues they have in common.
6. IMPLICATIONS. Discuss the potential implications that you see the current argument to have for our more general understanding of society and social change.

Critical Comments should not exceed three typed pages.

Critical Comments should be sent to me via email by midnight the night BEFORE the relevant class.

Grading:

General participation in class discussions will count for 60% of your grade; your class presentation will be another 10%. Reaction papers (all 3 together) will be worth the final 30% of the total course grade.

Class Schedule:

Part I. Feminism and Foucault: Structures/Agencies

Week 1


Week 2


Week 3

Routledge, pp.1-34, 128-41, 142-49.

film (outside of class): Paris is Burning (1990. dir. Livingston)

Part II. Postcolonial Feminisms: Distance, Difference, and Divergence

Week 4


Week 5


Week 6


Part III. Feminist Materialisms, New and Old: Embodiments and Environments

Week 7


Week 8


Week 9

Week 10


Part IV. Feminist Futures? Trans/feminist debates

Week 11


Week 12

Summary Discussion (no readings)