

WGSS 340: Feminist Theory

Taught by: Dr. Jess River Vooris AKA “Prof V” or “Dr. River”

Pronouns: they/them [\[learn more here\]](#)

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Zoom Office ID: 440 702 2754

Office Hours: 9 am-noon on Mondays/Wednesdays and 4-6 pm on Thursdays.

Course Description/Requirements:

This course deepens students’ understandings of how feminist perspectives situate power and privilege in relationship to interlocking categories of gender, race, class, sexuality, ability and nation. Through foundational theoretical texts, it expands students’ understandings of significant theoretical frameworks that inform women’s, gender, critical race and sexuality studies, as well as debates and tensions within them. These frameworks include political activism, standpoint epistemologies, critiques of scientific objectivity, intersectionality, postcolonialism, queer theory, transnational critique and eco-feminisms. By interweaving core feminist texts with contemporary cultural and artistic artifacts, the course helps students examine the relationships between everyday experiences, political institutions, forms of resistance and theoretical meaning-making.

This course will meet twice a week for a discussion-based class. Please visit me during my office hours (virtual or in person when covid conditions allow) as I would love to learn more about what you are thinking and learning (in this class and at Depauw more generally), and I am happy to answer any question you have about class and class materials.

Be sure to let me know during office hours or via email if you need support, or any specific accommodations, the sooner the better. Students with disabilities or who need time from class to observe religious holidays, please contact me as soon as you can to make any arrangements necessary.

Acknowledgements: Thank-you, Katie King for your examples of feminist pedagogy, and the importance of taking risks when learning. Thank-you, Donna Bickward for the Feminist Theory syllabus that helped me write this one (especially the learning objectives!), Rebecca Barrett-Fox and Mimi Khúc for your guidance around accessible teaching, and Lydia Wilson Marshall for DePauw-specific resources.

Learning Goals and Course Objectives:

Why read feminist theory? Feminist theorists analyze various manifestations of inequity in order to suggest possibilities for social change. This course provides an introduction to a wide range of contemporary feminist theories. Although the approaches taken by theorists differ significantly – and often sharply -- they share one general understanding: we live in a system structured on power for some at the expense of others; this results in various manifestations of dominance, oppression, marginalization, privilege, and resistance.

Our goals include:

- Becoming familiar with and deepening our understanding of some of the texts, authors, and issues in contemporary feminist theory, with particular attention to categories of difference and intersectional approaches.
- Developing the ability to recognize how theory and theoretical frameworks impact the ways we are able to understand the world.
- Asking questions of the silent assumptions, expectations, and implications of social practices and theoretical interpretations and responses.
- Applying feminist theory to understanding elements of our own lives
- Sharpening our theoretical, analytical, and critical skills through reading, thinking, speaking and writing.

Required Materials

Readings will be uploaded on Moodle as PDFS or links.

How the course will be organized

- This is a discussion course that meets on campus twice a week

Each week students should:

- Carefully read/watch/listen to the class materials and take notes on them
- Come to class prepared to talk and share your thoughts with others

This course is unique because

- There is usually a mix of students from different majors
- Some folks already have taken several WGSS courses, and others may have only taken 1 or 2.
- Together we will create an open community where we can learn from each other

Creating a community of learning means we must:

- Build a space where each member of the class feels comfortable about sharing their thoughts.
- Understand that we may not always agree, but that disagreement can be a positive, productive part of learning
- Listen carefully to each other and treat each other kindly and with respect.
- Remember that we all have something to contribute, every one of us is learning (including me!) and it is okay to ask questions.
- Understand that learning means taking risks, trying new things, playing around, guessing at times, making mistakes and recognizing that sometimes we won't get it right the first time.

Note: Part of my role as a professor is to guide your learning. I may interrupt if someone

is using outdated language or saying something harmful, and I may suggest a way of re-wording a question or statement to be more inclusive. Please take these moments as an opportunity to grow and learn—hopefully this is one reason you are in this course!

Communication for the Course

Moodle: E-Reserves, an updated syllabus, and course calendar will be kept on Moodle. Note that some of the reading materials will be links to outside websites.

FYI: Privacy and Moodle. Please note that Moodle keeps track of when you log in, what links you click, and how long you keep any part of the Moodle open. Thus, I can tell if you haven't logged in for a week, or if you never opened a particular file.

Email: Please send an email to jessicavooris@depauw.edu if you have questions/comments about the course, readings, or want to make an appointment with me. It will be helpful if you include the course number and a relevant subject heading with your email. **Example:** WGSS 340, question about the Anzaldua reading

Note that emails sent after 7 pm may not be responded to until the morning, and I will not be checking email frequently on the weekends. Please give me at least 24 hours to respond, however, if you don't hear from me in 48 hours, do send a reminder email! . (Note: if you email after 7 pm on Friday, I may not reply until Monday morning).

Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays from 9 am to noon, and by appointment. My office is Ashbury Hall 205C. I am also happy to meet you on Zoom—please email me if you want to meet virtually: Zoom Room ID: 440 702 2754. Please drop by to chat with me about any questions that you have about course materials, or to just let me know more about your interests and what you are excited about learning.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS AND SCHEDULE

Graded Assignments

20% Class Attendance/Participation
5 % Class Community Points
10 % Leading Class Discussion
15 % Mid-Semester Check-In
20% Manifesto/Letter
30% Learning Analysis

20% Class Attendance/Participation

This is a discussion-based course, and your participation is important. You are expected to come to class having read and taken notes on the material, and to be ready to discuss the

material. The success of the class will depend on everyone sharing their ideas and perspectives. If you are someone who has a hard time speaking up in class, note that you can show that you are actively participating through your listening, your reactions to what your classmates are saying, and your note-taking.

Please visit me in my office hours if you are concerned about your participation due to anxiety, neurodivergence, or any other reason. If you are sick, I want you to prioritize your health (and the health of your classmates) over coming to class. Please stay home and rest if you need to, just communicate with me about why you are missing class. Also, please chat with your classmates about what you have missed, email me if you have specific questions about readings, and/or come visit me during office hours to make up for missed class time.

5% Class Community Points: These are gained in a variety of ways, and are specifically related to being part of a class community, and taking on an active role in supporting your classmates' learning. This includes annotating the syllabus the first week of class, volunteering to be the class note-taker for students who miss class, being a time-keeper for in-class activities, or catching up students who had to miss class on a particular day.

10 % Leading Class Discussion: Once a semester each of you will lead part of class discussion. This will require you to prepare notes on the readings, discussion questions, and a short media clip/reading/poem/song/visual to share with class.

15 % Oral Exam/Check-In: This will be an opportunity for us to check-in and talk about how the class is going so far. It is meant to be a conversation where you will have the opportunity to share the knowledge that you have gained over the course of the semester, and address any questions that you have about concepts and texts.

Questions that I will Ask:

What have you learned in this class so far this semester?

Which reading has been the most useful or important or interesting to you and why?

What questions do you have about readings/texts or feminist theory more broadly?

20% Manifesto/Activist Letter: After Spring Break you will choose a feminist issue that you care about, and write a letter to someone explaining the issue and what can be done to create change. 2-4 pages. **Due:**

30 % Learning Analysis and Writing Portfolio: Your learning analysis will be a synthesis of the course, your understanding of different feminist theories, and how they apply to your own life and experience in the class. Along with your learning analysis you will attach a curated selection of writing from across the semester, with notes about how your thinking has changed over the course of the semester. The assignment with full details and requirements will be posted on Moodle, but I will note here that the format of the learning analysis essay does not have to be a traditional paper; you can turn in a creative story, a poem, or something of your own choosing, as long as it includes an analysis of your learning and feminist theories. Written Essay: 5-8 pages. Other formats: Let's chat about length. Due Date: **Final Exam Time.**

Course Schedule *Instructor reserves the right to change with advance notice*

Week One: Introductions

Tuesday, February 1

- Syllabus—annotate activity
- Community Agreements
- Intentions

Thursday, February 3

- Adrienne Rich, "Claiming an Education" (4 pages)
- Mia McKenzie, excerpt from *Black Girl Dangerous* (5 pages)
- adrienne maree brown, "We Are Still Beginning" and "We Will Not Cancel Us" from *We Will Not Cancel Us and Other Dreams of Transformative Justice* (7 pages)
- Malkia Devich Cyril, "Afterward" from *We Will Not Cancel Us* (5 pages)

Week Two: Feminist Knowledge Production:

Tuesday, February 8

- bell hooks, "Theory as Liberatory Practice" (12 pages)
- bell hooks, "Consciousness-Raising" (5 pages)
- Robin Wall Kimmerer, "Sky Woman Falling" (8 pages) and "Asters and Goldenrod" (9 pages) from *Braiding Sweetgrass*

Thursday, February 10

- Gloria Anzaldua, "Conciencia de la Mestiza" (15 pages)
- Eli Clare, "Stolen Bodies, Reclaimed Bodies: Disability and Queerness" (7 pages)
- TV Reed, "The Poetical is Personal" from *The Art of Protest*

Week Three: Feminist Knowledge Production and Feminist Writing

Tuesday, February 15th

- bell hooks, "Theory as Liberatory Practice" (12 pages)
- Gloria Anzaldua, "Conciencia de la Mestiza" (15 pages)
- Gloria Anzaldua, "Letter to Third World Women Writers" (10 pages)

Thursday, February 17th

- TV Reed, "The Poetical is Personal" from *The Art of Protest* (31 pages)
- Audre Lorde, *Poetry is Not a Luxury* (3 pages)

- Natalie Goldberg, “Free Write” from *Writing Down the Bones* (2 pages)

Week Four: Black Feminist Thought and Intersectionality:

Tuesday, February 22

- Ida B. Wells, “A Red Record” (CN: discussion of lynchings, sexual violence)
- Combahee River Collective Statement
- Kimberlee Crenshaw “Urgency of Intersectionality TED Talk”

Thursday, February 24

- Elsa Barkley Brown “What Has Happened Here” (14 pages)
- Kai Green, [“Navigating Masculinity as a Black Trans Man”](#) (6 pages)

Week Five: Thinking about Sex/Gender

Tuesday, March 1st: NO CLASS

- ~~Gayle Rubin, “Thinking Sex”~~

Recommended for folks who haven’t taken a WGSS course: [The Gender Book](#)

Thursday, March 3rd

- Kath Weston, “Unsexed” from *Gender in Real Time* (2002)
- Alex Iantaffi and Meg-John Barker, “Genders” from *Life Isn’t Binary* (2019)

Recommended: “The Education of Little Cis” by A. Finne Enke

Week Six: Inclusions/Exclusions: Racism, Lesbian Separatism, Trans Feminism

Tuesday, March 8, 2022

- Sara Ahmed, “Speaking About Racism” from *On Being Included* (32 pages)

Thursday, March 10, 2022

- 1970s and Collective Memory by A. Finn Enke
- Chapter from *Excluded* by Julia Serano

Week Seven: The Care We Dream Of: Disability Justice:

Tuesday, March 15, 2022

- Christine Meserindino, "Spoon Theory" (2 pages)
- Eli Clare, "Moving Through Cure" from Brilliant Imperfection (16 pages)

Thursday, March 17, 2022

- Zena Sharman, "Queer Alchemy: Perverting the Health System, Fighting to Win" from The Care We Dream Of (20 pages)
- Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, "Nobody Left Behind But Wanting to Run Like Hell. (8 pages)
- Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, "So Much Time Spent in Bed" from Care Work (7 pages)

Week Eight: Feminist Affect Theory

Monday, March 21st

- Ann Cvetkovich, Intro to Depression: A Public Feeling (26 pages)
- [Interview with Mimi Khuc](#) (4 pages)
- Asian-American Tarot Deck (we will look at this in class--I also have a link to digital copies if you want to take a look before class)

Wednesday, March 23rd

- Mia McKenzie "The Secret of Queer Joy" from Black Girl Dangerous (3 pages)
- Sara Ahmed, "Introduction" The Promise of Happiness (20 pages)
- Sara Ahmed, "Feminist Killjoy Toolkit" Living a Feminist Life (15 pages)

Week Nine: Spring Break

Week Ten: Class cancelled--sickness

Week 11: The Politics of Desire:

Tuesday, April 12th

- Jane Ward, Intro of The Tragedy of Heterosexuality (32 pages)
- Angela Chen, "Compulsory Sexuality and (Male) Asexual Existence" from Ace: What Asexuality Reveals about Desire, Society and the Meaning of Sex (14 pages)

Thursday, April 7th Thursday, April 14th

- Anne Koedt, "Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm"
- adrienne maree brown, "Who Taught You to Feel Good" and "Uses of the Erotic by Audre Lorde annotated by adrienne maree brown from Pleasure Activism (10 pages)
- adrienne maree brown and others: "highs, lows, and blows of casual sex" from Pleasure Activism (7 pages)

Recommended: Compulsory Heterosexuality by Adrienne Rich, Conclusion of The Tragedy of Heterosexuality

Week Twelve: Transnational Feminisms

Tuesday, April 19th

- Chandra Mohanty, "Western Eyes Revisited" (33 pages)
- recommended: Chandra Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes" (28 pages)

Thursday, April 21st

- Haunani-Kay Trask, Feminism and Indigenous Hawaiian Nationalism (12 pages)
- Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, "Nishnaabeg Internationalism" (16 pages)

Week Thirteen: Reproductive Justice

Tuesday, April 26th

- Introduction to *Somebodies Children* by Laura Briggs (24 pages)
- [This Land podcast Season 1 episode 8](#) (36 minutes)
- recommended: excerpt from "The Natural Mother of the Child: A Memoir of Nonbinary Parenthood" by Krys Malcolm Belc
- Recommended: This Land Season 2

Thursday, April 28th

- [the lost baby poem](#) by Lucille Clifton
- PODCAST: On the Media called "[Body of Law: Beyond Roe](#)" (53 minutes, transcript available too)
- [The Abortion Underground](#) (18 pages, pdf below in case the link is paywalled, audio option also available)

Week Fourteen: Art as Theory, Zines, and Making Kin

Tuesday, May 3rd

- !Women, Art, Revolution movie (hour and 22 minutes)
- Engaging the Other: Zines in the Classroom (first 6 pages give the history of zines)

Thursday, May 5th

- Donna Haraway, "Making Kin Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene" (5 pages)
- Recommended: "Physics of Melanin" from *Disordered Cosmos* by Chanda Prescod-Weinstein (Chapter 5, 19 pages)

Week Fifteen: Queer Ecologies and Class Wrap-Up

Tuesday, May 10th

- Introduction to *Emergent Strategy* by adrienne maree brown (39 pages in total--if that is too much, please read pgs 13-29)
- In class we will fill out evaluations!

Thursday, May 12th

- no readings, class wrap-up--ZINE making in class!

ADDITIONAL CLASS POLICIES:

Citations:

It is important as scholars and writers that we respect the work of others, and that we make sure to cite our sources. I like to think about citations as a way to give credit, as a way to guide a reader to more information, and as a way to be a part of a community conversation.

If you are unsure of how to properly cite your information and how to avoid plagiarism please refer to online guides on MLA, APA and Chicago Style formatting. I do not have a preference for which one you use, but please pick one and use that consistently throughout an assignment. If you still need help with citations, please set up an appointment to talk with me.

Access Statement (words by Mimi Kúrc):

"Everyone's access needs matter, and we will try collectively to meet them as they arise. Access needs are needs that when met enable participation in the course to the fullest--therefore they are wide-ranging and can be met in wide-ranging, creative ways. I am committed to making participation as accessible as possible. Please let me know if anything comes up that makes

participation feel hard. Perhaps you are unused to thinking about access needs--no worries, that's what this course is supposed to help you develop. We are taught not to have needs, that needs mean we are "weak"; resist this impulse. That is the biggest lesson I want you to take away from this class."

"Access, as Aimi Hamraie has taught me, is relational. This means that creating access and accessibility is something we do together, in relationship and community. It requires a shared commitment to each other's wellbeing and participation in the community space, and requires communication and negotiation and flexibility. We learn each other's needs and try to meet them as best we can, so that we can all participate as much as possible in this classroom space. Everyone has access needs, and these needs change over time. I will try to anticipate as much as possible but I cannot know everyone's needs at all times. When you become aware of your access needs, please communicate them to me. I do not require any documentation or working with any university support services--I believe you, and will work with you to generate structures to meet your needs as much as possible. I repeat: I believe you."

LATE POLICY:

I will always accept late work, however, I will not always have time to provide the same level of qualitative feedback on late-work as I provide on work that is turned in on time. Work turned in within 24 hours of the deadline will not be penalized. Work turned in after this 24 hour grace period will lose 10 percent of the full amount of points possible.

FERPA and Confidentiality

FERPA, the federal law that guards student privacy, prohibits me from discussing your performance in this class with anyone except you without your permission, which must be on file with the university, not simply told to me. To ensure compliance with this law, I will not respond to emails from students unless they originate from university email addresses. Out of respect for the privacy of your classmates, do not record or screenshot any part of this class for use outside of this class, even if you omit identifying information about the speaker or poster.

COVID Plans/Remote Teaching Considerations:

My plan is to teach this course in person when possible, while also being mindful of the seriousness of Omicron, and doing my best to prioritize the well-being of everyone in this class. If significant numbers of our class will not be able to attend in person, we will shift to a remote format. Please keep me informed as much as you can, about any missed classes, so I can plan accordingly.

At this point, I am not planning on teaching in a hybrid fashion (in person AND zoom), although I may re-evaluate if the technology in the classroom would allow this. I WILL be building in class note-taking and presentations, and ways for folks to catch up if they have to miss class, and I DO want you to prioritize your safety and health over attending in person. Folks can also Zoom into my office hours if they have specific questions, or want to go over what they missed from class.

Camera/Mic Policies If We Need to Shift to Zoom

- I encourage but do not require cameras to be on
- Please upload a photo or avatar on your zoom profile if possible
- Please mute your mic when not speaking
- Chat/Text is an excellent way to communicate

If possible, I would like for folks to have their cameras on during any video-conference class sessions. For me, personally, it is easier to engage if I can see people's faces on the screen, and this enables us to try to recreate the sense of being in person while connecting remotely.

However, I understand that there are many reasons someone might not want to, or be able to use their camera, therefore, I do not require cameras to be turned on. Likewise, it's lovely to hear your voices, but the chat is also an excellent way to communicate.

How to Get Help: There are different resources for different problems you may encounter. Be sure to contact the right resource to get help. If you contact the wrong person, this will delay getting your problem solved.

- For help understanding a concept from the course, contact me via email.
- For technical problems with Moodle, like not knowing how to upload an assignment, please contact moodle@depauw.edu for support.
- For all other technical problems with online systems at the university, like how to access your grades, contact our Tech Help at HelpDesk@depauw.edu or 765-658-4294.
- For help dropping or adding a course, contact your advisor or the registrar's office at 765-658-4141.
- For help locating resources for your papers, contact a research librarian by phone at (765) 658-4444, email at library@depauw.edu, or via chat by going to the library's website: <https://libanswers.depauw.edu/>
- For help finding a peer tutor for this class, email acadpeer@depauw.edu for an appointment or sign up here: <https://www.depauw.edu/academics/academic-resources/academic-resource-center/>
- To improve your writing, set up an on-campus or remote meeting with a writing tutor from our writing center. Sign up using the left-hand menu here: <https://www.depauw.edu/academics/academic-resources/academic-resource-center>
- For support with presentations, public speaking, or even discussion skills, you can find a peer tutor through the S-Center: Sign up using the left-hand menu here: <https://www.depauw.edu/academics/academic-resources/academic-resource-center>
- For help with food insecurity, there are a few options in Greencastle, including: Putnam County Emergency Food: 600 Tennessee St, Greencastle, IN 46135. Contact: (765) 301-4431
- For an appointment with a mental health counselor, contact our campus counseling center. To schedule an appointment, please email counselingservices@depauw.edu or call 765-658-4268.

- If you would prefer to text someone regarding mental health, text NAMI to 741741. If you would like to talk to someone about domestic violence or sexual assault you can contact:

- Elizabeth Gertz (Coordinator of Sexual Assault/Interpersonal Violence Prevention/Education, Phone: 765-658-1088, Email: elizabethgetz@depauw.edu)
- Sarah Ryan, (director of the Women's Center) Phone: 765-658-4173, Email: sryan@depauw.edu.
- **SASA (Sexual Assault Survivor Advocate) Support is available 24/7 at 765-658-4650.**

If you would like off-campus support: Family Support Services of West Indiana has DV programs: <https://fsswci.net/domestic-violence>. If you want to speak to someone anonymously you can call the National Domestic Violence hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE. Or RAINN's National Sexual Assault Hotline: 1-800-656-4673 or chat: <https://hotline.rainn.org/online>

- If there are other resources you need but don't know where to find, please ask! Or if you have any additional resources that you think should be here—please leave info in a comment!