

### **Course Information**

CRN: 202210.10133 WMST-200-DL1 (Spring 2022)  
Instructor: Kylie Musolf, [kmusolf@gmu.edu](mailto:kmusolf@gmu.edu)  
Meeting Time: T/R 3:00-4:15 pm  
Meeting ID: [932 8730 7991](https://www.zoom.us/j/93287307991)  
Passcode: bellhooks  
Office Hours: TBD, schedule appointments via [www.calendly.com/kylieeee](https://www.calendly.com/kylieeee)

### **General Overview**

The aim of this course is to bring students together on an inquiry into a tradition of systemic thought on the ways in which the category, meaning, and ideology of gender shapes our everyday lives and colors our horizons of hope. We will first sketch an altogether too brief intellectual history of feminist defense of women's rights and recognition up until Simone de Beauvoir transformed intellectual history by making the "woman question" into a genuine question: what is a woman? We, too, will dwell on this question for the duration of the course as we read and think with some of the brightest, boldest minds in art history, philosophy, political theory, theology, poetry, sociology. We will pay close attention to the mutually reinforcing categories of gender, race, sexuality and class in our lives.

### **Mason Course Catalogue Description**

"Interdisciplinary introduction to women's, gender and sexuality studies, encompassing key concepts in the field, history of women's movements and women's studies in America, cross-cultural constructions of gender, and a thematic emphasis on the diversity of women's experience across class, race, and cultural lines. Limited to three attempts."

### **Student Learning Objectives**

- Learn the basic vocabulary of feminist theories to add nuance to difficult conversations around contemporary issues.
- Practice listening and observation skills (i.e. critical analysis) using feminist lenses through dialogue, research, and reflection.
- Reflect deeply on our own social positions and the ways that political, biological, and cultural concepts and structures make sense of our lives.

### **Warning**

My training is in philosophy, which means that in this course we are focused on asking smart questions and seeking rigorously reasoned answers. Other approaches to this course may privilege anthropological reflection on women's behaviors or sociological analysis of gendered social practices. Instead, we will focus on thinking through the conceptual foundations that make these and other kinds of inquiries into our gendered world possible. Perhaps surprisingly, this course is not particularly reading heavy, but it is undoubtedly thinking heavy. Almost every week we will focus on one canonical feminist thinker, deliberately and carefully unpacking her ideas and arguments. Rarely will you be asked to read more than 30 pages per class meeting; nonetheless, our readings are immensely dense and will take significant time each week to understand. In other words, be advised but not afraid that this course is theory heavy.

### **Course Materials**

All materials will be provided on Blackboard.

## **Grading**

Attendance and Participation: 30 points

Reaction Essays: 40 points

Definitions Essay: 5 points

Short Answers: 10 points

Final Essay: 15 points

Total: 100 points

### Attendance and Participation (30%):

- Attendance is absolutely mandatory for this course. Tardiness is not tolerated and may count as an absence at my discretion. To earn credit for attendance, you will need to have your camera on for the duration of the course period.
- The readings will vary weekly in length and density. Plan to spend about two hours per class meeting ruminating on the assigned texts, regardless of length.
- Importantly, in class participation will not look the same for everyone. Some folks will need to learn to listen as a form of participation; some folks will need to practice speaking up. Take some time to think about what kind of participation goals you have for yourself in this course and we will discuss what productive participation looks like in class together.
- There may be up to three quizzes in the semester if I notice students are in need of motivation to prepare for class discussions.
- Individual meetings are required for every student at least once per semester, conducted over zoom. In these 10–15-minute meetings, we will be able to discuss your work and any of your concerns in depth.

### Definition Essay (5%):

Prior to the start of the second class meeting, submit a one-page (double-spaced) essay answering the following questions: 1) what is a woman? 2) what is gender and how does it relate to sex? You do not need to consult outside sources or read ahead. This is just to gauge who you are as a writer and thinker in the beginning of the course. Graded for completion.

### Response Essays (40%):

You will write four reaction papers, each worth 10 points. The first will engage Iris Marion Young's important essay, "Throwing Like a Girl." The second will deal with Linda Nochlin's "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" The third essay will treat issues of gender diversity that arise in the documentaries and essays on transgender and intersex experience that we will cover after spring break. Finally, you will analyze Patricia Hill Collins' "matrix of domination" as it shows up in major American institutions. I will read drafts of these essays up to a week prior to the deadline. You can rewrite one of these essays after it has been graded. Specific instructions are at the end of this syllabus.

### Short Answers (10%):

In preparation for the essays, I will pose a few short answer exercises to help you fortify your thinking and writing. These may be in class activities or homework assignments.

### Final Essay (15%):

We will discuss the final essay structure as we near closer to the end of the semester, but you can expect it to be like the response papers.

## **Policies and Requirements**

Reasonable Accommodations- Please be in contact with me directly, as well as Disability Services, should you require any accommodations for the course. For more info:

Disability Services at George Mason University is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students by upholding the laws that ensure equal treatment of people with disabilities. If you are seeking accommodations for this class, please first visit <http://dsgmu.wpengine.com/> for detailed information about the Disability Services registration process. Then please discuss your approved accommodations with me. Disability Services is located in Student Union Building I (SUB I), Suite 2500. Email: [ods@gmu.edu](mailto:ods@gmu.edu) | Phone: (703) 993-2474

Trigger/Content Warnings- I have chosen not to place trigger warnings on specific pieces in the syllabus because triggers are unique and highly personal. It's not possible for me to discern in advance what content has the potential to be upsetting and/or triggering to every one of my students, and I do not want to inadvertently create a hierarchy of what material is "intense" or "real" enough to warrant a warning.

Academic Integrity- If you aren't familiar with GMU's Academic Integrity policy, read up here:

"To promote a stronger sense of mutual responsibility, respect, trust, and fairness among all members of the George Mason University community and with the desire for greater academic and personal achievement, we, the student members of the University Community have set forth this: Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal and/or lie in matters related to academic work." More information about the Honor Code, including definitions of cheating, lying, and plagiarism, can be found at the Office of Academic Integrity website at <http://oai.gmu.edu>

Late Work- Late work submission is not a right but a privilege. You may submit one reaction paper up to three days late, no questions asked.\* After that, there will be questions. For your one late assignment, just indicate somehow that this assignment is "FASHIONABLY LATE."

\*This does not apply to your final essay because final grades must be submitted on the university's schedule.

## **Course Schedule**

Tuesday, January 25 – Syllabus, course introduction

Thursday, January 27 – Elsa Barkley Brown, "African American Women's Quilting"

Tuesday, February 1 – Sor Juana, "Reply to Sor Filotea"

Thursday, February 3 – Constance Grady, "The waves of feminism, and why people keep fighting over them, explained"

Tuesday, February 8 – Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (excerpt)

(last day to drop the course)

Thursday, February 10 – Sojourner Truth, "Ain't I A Woman?"

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Tuesday, February 15 – Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*

Thursday, February 17 – Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (cont.)

Tuesday, February 22 – Iris Marion Young, “Throwing Like a Girl”

Thursday, February 24 – Iris Marion Young, “Throwing Like a Girl” (cont.)

Tuesday, March 1 – bell hooks, “Feminist Politicization: A Comment”

Thursday, March 3 – bell hooks, “Feminism: A Transformational Politic”

First Essay Due

Tuesday, March 8 – Linda Nochlin, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?”

Thursday, March 10 – Linda Nochlin, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” (cont.)

(Spring Break: March 14-20)

Tuesday, March 22 – Adrienne Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Experience”

Second Essay Due

Thursday, March 24 – Adrienne Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Experience” (cont.)

Tuesday, March 29 – Film, *Disclosure*

Thursday, March 31 – TBD

Tuesday, April 5 – Film, *Intersexion*

Thursday, April 7 – TBD

Tuesday, April 12 – Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*

Third Essay Due

Thursday, April 14 – Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* (cont.)

Tuesday, April 19 – Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction and the Meaning of Liberty*

Thursday, April 21 – Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body* (cont.)

Tuesday, April 26 – Angela Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*

Thursday, April 28 – Angela Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (cont.)

Tuesday, May 3 – Audre Lorde, *Poetry is Not a Luxury*

Fourth Essay Due

Thursday, May 5 – Audre Lorde, *Poetry is Not a Luxury* (cont.)

Final Exam Period (T.B.A) – Final Essay Due

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## **Instructions for Response Papers**

### What is a response paper?

A response paper is a short essay that allows you to focus on a particular issue – based on our reading and our discussion of a text. Your thesis will announce this topic clearly and your essay will show why this topic mattered in the larger context of the work and why it was interesting to you. Often, these papers will apply a concept, argument, or theory to a real-life situation.

### How should I prepare for this paper?

Do the assigned reading and note the major themes, concepts, and arguments. Take notes while you read and be sure to complete any relevant short answer exercises. Read the prompt twice and ask any necessary clarifying questions before you begin your essay. You may elect to complete the assignment as a standard academic essay or propose in writing, in advance, a creative response. You must get approval by the instructor beforehand to submit a creative response.

### How should it start?

Your first sentence should announce the general thesis. The following sentences should announce the details of your analysis. Do not begin your essay with overgeneralizations and broad statements about women or humanity or the dawn of time, avoid quotations and dictionary definitions at all costs. A typical thesis statement might look something like:

“In this essay, I analyze Simone de Beauvoir’s claim that one is not born a woman in the context of contemporary gender-reveal party practices. First, I situate the claim within the context of Beauvoir’s work, paying attention to the distinction she makes between sex and gender. Then I will briefly explain the practice of gender-reveal parties and then finally provide an account of what I expect Beauvoir would say if asked about the practice. This application of Beauvoir’s argument is important because it reveals a pervasive misconception of the meaning of gender today.”

### How should it end?

A conclusion that summarizes the main points of the essay is necessary for a longer paper that investigates a number of different themes. For such a short paper, there is no need for a strong conclusion. It is up to you.

How should I structure my paper?

After the introduction, you should spend about half the paper placing your thesis within the context of the work. There is no need to summarize the entire work. In the case of the introduction that I suggested, you should simply explain Beauvoir's famous claim that gender is constructed rather than innate in the first paragraph, and then clarify her distinction between sex and gender. The remaining half or third of the paper should be devoted to the application. There, you should still use the original text to illustrate your point, but you must argue your own perspective.

How long should it be?

Reaction papers for this course should be at least 1200 words. You may go up to 1400 but I encourage you to stay concise. Please put the final word count (not including references) at the end of the paper.

How/What should I cite?

Every response paper will have at least one main source, which means that you MUST have a bibliography and you must use one of the three following citation methods: MLA, APA or Chicago.

Should I use "I"?

Yes. This does depend on your professor. In my case, given that I am asking for your view, I certainly would prefer the use of "I." Be advised however, you should never start any sentence in any response paper with "I feel."