

**Introduction to Women and Gender Studies
George Mason University
Spring 2024**

Professor: Nichole Smith

Course Number: WMST 200-DL5

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Office Hours: Tuesday, 12:00-1:00 PM via Zoom. Otherwise by Appointment

I. Course Description:

This course introduces students to feminist and intersectional gender studies. As a result of interdisciplinary feminist scholarship and activism over the past 45 years, scholars in most disciplines now approach gender as variable systems of power that serves to disadvantage all women and marginalized men and communities. In this course, you will get the chance to examine a range of sources and studies that suggest that gender is a major social organizing principle that changes in time and place rather than a fixed or universal fact of biology. You will learn how gendered social practices exaggerate the differences between men and women and erase the differences among women themselves, and among men themselves. You will learn how there can be more than two gender, more than two sex, and multiple sexualities, as well as how these identities intersect with racism, class domination, ageism, and nationalism to form a matrix that creates “multiple jeopardy” for some while disadvantaging others.

As such, when we think of gender studies, or all interdisciplinary studies, our primary goal is to critically analyze and investigate what we have become socialized to believe as either natural through biological determinism, or essentialist perspectives on gender norms and behaviors. This class will be a broad overview into key areas of social life including gender and productive labor; gender and reproductive, unpaid labor; gender and education; gender and welfare; gender and family; gendered violence; gender and sexuality; the politics of reproduction; gender and immigration; and gender and the carceral state. By the end of this course, you will be able to identify how gendered practices in each aspect of our life overlap and are inseparable from the other practices of domination and subordination to form a social order called patriarchy.

II. Mode of Instruction

As set by the university, this class will be online asynchronous. This means that while you are not coming to a classroom, or an online zoom classroom, I expect the same level of engagement in terms of the completion of the assignments and the viewing of recording lectures/videos. One the first six weeks of class, I will record a lecture and have it to you on Blackboard. To make sure you have listened to it, **and** read the required readings for the week, I will have a reading check mandatory for you to complete three days after I post a recorded lecture (**Wednesdays at 11:59PM**). The remainder of the semester will be a mixture of lectures pertaining to the theme of the class day, or I may have a guest speaker that I will utilize as a type of podcast vibe. These are people that I have interacted with during my career in academia and in my professional world, who have expertise on the subjects that you will be reading/learning about. I will have my office hours open to anyone who does not understand the material to come or to ask questions. I am also open via email to chat.

III. Books and Other Required Reading

All reading materials will be available via Blackboard.

IV. Evaluation

A. Components of Final Grade

Introductory Questionnaire	5%
Reflection Papers	30%
Recorded Lecture/Reading Check	25%
Final Research Paper Proposal	10%
Research Paper	30%

B. Grading Scale

A+ 97-100	B+ 87-89	C+ 77-79	D+ 67-69
A 93-96	B 83-86	C 73-76	D 63-66
A 90-92	B- 80-82	C- 70-72	D- 60-62

C. Descriptions of Assignment

Fundamentals of Gender and Gender Inequality Reflection Papers

For the foundational knowledge of Gender Studies and the understanding of Gender Inequality, I will require a 1–2-page reflection paper on the lectures that I present to you. The reflection papers are a gauge for me to see not only how well you retained the information that I provided to you, but also applying them to thinking critically of how these systems, terms and terminologies affect the individual on the very micro (individual) interactional level. Below are the questions the I will be having you respond to:

1. **On Confronting Essentialist Perspectives on Sex and Gender:** What is the difference between biological sex and gender? If gender was a universal, biological truth, what fundamental characteristics would it have? Does it and why not?
2. **On Patriarchy as a Social System:** What is Patriarchy? How do individualistic notions of inequality obscure patriarchy's effects?
3. **On Gender and the Matrix of Domination:** How can we understand intersectionality and the Matrix of Domination in the context of oppression and marginalization?

The Reflection papers (all three) will be worth 30% of your final grade and are due the Friday of each assigned week at 11:59PM.

Introductory Questionnaire

The Introductory Questionnaire is so that I can get to know you, your specific accommodation for the course, and why you chose it. Simply answer to the best of your ability!

The Introductory Questionnaire is work 5% of your final grade and due Friday, January 19 @ 11:59PM.

Reading Lecture/Reading Check

Since we are not meeting in a classroom, there will be a two/three question reading and lecture check to ensure that 1. you've read the assigned readings and 2.) have listened to my lectures. This is not to catch you in a difficult question, but to make sure you've done the work for the week. They will require you submit a 1-2 page summary of the readings/lectures.

The Recorded Lecture and Reading Check will be worth 25% of your final grade and due the Wednesday of each assigned week at 11:59PM. There will be no reading checks due for the first week of class.

Final Research Paper Proposal

Within this class, you will be required to submit a final research paper, an analytical style essay, discussing the topic of your choice, either within the themes that I've presented for the week or anything surrounding gender and sexuality. This proposal should be 2 pages, double-spaced, including a working bibliography, of your research interests and preliminary research question.

The proposal will be worth 10% of your grade and due on Friday, March 22nd at 11:59PM.

Final Research Paper/Analytical Essay

The final research paper acts as an analytical essay regarding a certain topic that you have chosen that relates to the concepts and themes we've discussed in class. The instructions are as follows, and more in-depth on Blackboard:

-You will choose a topic surrounding the themes of the week, or something that we might not necessarily cover in class (I.e. gender and media, online culture, domestic or intimate partner violence, etc.), and formulate a research question that seeks to produce new knowledge surrounding the topic. This is not a chance for you to be broad and simply regurgitate the readings of the week—you will be conducting your own research about a specific topic, with a research question that I will approve.

-This will culminate in a 10–12-page research paper, double-spaced, and including a title page and bibliography. Given the nature of your potential question, I am also requiring at least six outside sources (outside of the texts presented) to make your argument.

-For the format of the final paper, I am specifically going to be looking for these sections:

- a. Introduction-where you introduce your research interest, question, and a brief background about the topic you're going to write upon.
- b. Theoretical Framework: We will be going over some theories in class. A theoretical framework helps to create a lens on how you will investigate your research question to understand issues of gender domination and gender inequality.
- c. Literature Review: A literature review is a review of scholarly sources tied to your research question/interest. I am requiring you to utilize about 8 research articles, which can be from the readings we go through this semester or on your own.
- d. Analysis and Conclusion: the analysis helps to specifically answer your research question, and also to give the potential for more research that can be conducted on your topic. The conclusion restates your research question and interest on your research interest.

-In addition, you will be required to submit a bibliography or reference page that will be done in APA citation. You must also submit a title page with it.

The final research paper will be due **Friday, May 3rd, at 11:59 PM** and will be worth 30% of your final grade.

Course Objectives:

After taking this course, students will have demonstrated:

1. Feminist frameworks for understanding gender as a social construct, gender relations, and gender inequalities
2. How to use feminist perspectives to understand how the construction of gender shapes our social, cultural, economic, political and/or personal lives and experiences
3. How structures of gender intersect with and are relational to other social structures such as, but not limited to, race, class, sexuality, age, and nationality.

V. Course Expectations and Specific Policies

There are several key aspects of general expectations that I have for my students. While there are some aspects of personal life that I understand need special care, I expect you to come to me and email me in a professional manner to address any concerns that you may have. Real life does happen, and in attempting to use a praxis of intersectionality in my teaching skills, I will accommodate you to the best of my ability.

However, there are some specific guidelines and requirements that I expect from you:

1. Take College-Level Reading Seriously

College is about reading. I expect you to take such college level reading seriously. And to begin thinking critically when it comes to note-taking and reading for my class. Having questions about readings I assign are fine and in fact encouraged. However, one who does not even attempt to do the readings is not deserving of credit for my class. If you are struggling with the readings, email me or come to my office hours. Do not expect to give up on the readings and have my help when assignments are due.

2. Writing is an Essential Part of your College Career

Understand the importance of critical and analytical writing. You are expected to present your ideas clearly, and concisely, both in the Reflection Paper Responses and especially in your Final Research Paper. What I recommend, when writing your papers, is to begin outlining the major aspects of your argument before beginning.

3. Ask for Help Early and Often

Come to my office hours. That's my pitch. Expect to get help immediately if you feel you are struggling with the course and the workload. Waiting until the end of the semester proves that you

only care about coming away with better grades and are not sincere in understanding the content material and your grade will reflect that. Even if this course is a requirement and you feel it is not important to your major/minor-however I may dispute that feminist studies is extremely important as a way of producing positive changes in all aspects of society-I expect you to complete my class with the same amount of fervor to learn as other courses.

If you are putting in the effort, regularly seeing me for help on assignments and are utilizing the writing center and tutoring if you need the extra help if you are struggling, I am certain that you will succeed in total completion of the course.

4. Respect the Opinions and Backgrounds of Your Fellow Classmates

People of all backgrounds and opinions will be coming into the classroom—and colleges themselves are a hub of diverse thinking and communities—so I will expect us to respect those ideas and opinions. Such opinions must be made thoughtfully, factually, and with the understanding that there will be dissent. That means that there will be no yelling, disrespect or mocking of students' opinions that are different from your own, online or otherwise. Students will also allow others to express themselves without someone else interjecting rudely or not talking over them.

5. Consult Your Syllabus Early and Often

Before you have questions not expressly stated in your syllabus, consult it first. If you email me a question stated in this handbook, I will email you the syllabus and require you to study it first. I will allow for one week in the beginning of class for clarification on the syllabus, and then afterwards I will respond in the above manner.

6. Life Happens, but Understand that I expect College to be your Responsibility and Concern

I expect you to be prepared for your class and to treat college as your primary responsibility. However, I understand that life sometimes happens, and that people do have other primary concerns. That means a full-time job, or responsibilities as a parent, or other outside endeavors. Despite this, I expect at least 9 hours of devotion per week for classwork and readings. I need to be seen and arrangements need to be discussed with me if you must be on call as a parent or primary caregiver as I have stated above during our semester.

Academic Integrity

Any cheating or plagiarism that I find will result in an automatic failure of the course, and a formal complaint will be filed. Please read up and be aware of the GMU's Academic Integrity Policy, which will be found below:

“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>.

Disability Accommodations

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 visit <http://ds.gmu.edu/> for detailed information about the registration process. Contact Disability Services at 703-993-2474 or ods@gmu.edu. Then please discuss your accommodation with me. I will honor all available accommodation.

Emergency Procedures

To prepare for campus closures or any other concerns, please become familiar with the university's established emergency procedures at ready.gmu.edu. If you have not already done so, register a cell phone to receive emergency notifications from Mason Alert (alert.gmu.edu). If the campus closes, our course schedule will remain unchanged. Always monitor your Mason email for course or campus updates.

IV. Schedule of Readings and Assignments

Readings Subject to change based on my own discretion

Week One: Welcome to Intro to Women and Gender Studies!

Shaw, Susan M. & Janet Lee. “Women’s Studies: Perspectives and Practices and Forty Years of Women’s Studies: Origins and Intersections.” in *Women’s Voices, Feminist Visions: Classic and Contemporary Readings*. Boston: McGraw Hill, 2004.

Week Two: Confronting Essentialist Perspectives on Sex and Gender

De Beauvoir, Simone, "Introduction," in *The Second Sex*. London: Jonathon Cape, 1956. Via Blackboard.

Zimmerman and West, "Doing Gender," Via Blackboard.

Week Three: Patriarchy as a Social System

John, Allan G., "Patriarchy, the System: An It, not a He, a Them, or an Us," via Blackboard.

Federici, Silvia, "Witch-Hunting and the Fear of the Power of Women," in *Witches, Witch-Hunting, and Women*. Oakland: PM Press, 2018. Via Blackboard.

Week Four: Gender and the Matrix of Domination

Watch, "Salt of the Earth," free via Tubi.

Watch River, Sylvia. *Speech at the 1973 Christopher Street Liberation Day Rally* (Via YouTube).

Collins, Patricia Hill, "Toward a Politics of Empowerment," in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge, 2000.

Week Five: Gender and the Social Construction of Difference and Inequality

Lorde, Audre, "Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference," via Blackboard.

Davis, Angela, "The Legacy of Slavery: Standards for a New Womanhood," via Blackboard.

Week Six: Feminist Theories, Historical Approaches

Foster, Johanna, "Key Feminist Theoretical Orientations in Contemporary Feminist Practice," via Blackboard.

Mohanty, Chandra, "Under Western Eyes Revisited," via Blackboard.

Week Seven: Gender, Race and Work

Davia, Angela, "The Approaching Obsolescence of Housework: A Working-Class Perspective," Via Blackboard.

Federici, Silvia, "Wages Against Housework," via Blackboard.

Week Eight: Gender and Violence I, US Approaches

Boswell & Spade, "Fraternities and Collegiate Rape Culture," via Blackboard.

Filipovic, Jill, "Offensive Feminism: The Conservative Gender Norms that Perpetuate Rape Culture, and How Feminists Can Fight Back," via Blackboard.

Week Nine: Gender and Violence II, International Perspectives

Watch *The Sixth Deaths of Marisela Escobedo*, via Netflix.

Wright, Melissa W. "Necropolitics, Narcopolitics, and Femicide," via Blackboard.

Andrea Smith, "Sexual Violence as a Tool of Genocide" via Blackboard.

Week Ten: Marriage, Families and Social Reproductive Labor

Margolies, Luisa, "Home: 'I didn't think I would live to come home'" & "Heartbroken: 'I have only my memories'" in *My Mother's Hip: Lessons from the World of Eldercare*. Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2004. Lessons will be completed with the chapters.

Week Eleven: Gender and Education

Fuentes, Annette, "Arresting Development: Zero Tolerance and the Criminalization of Children," via Blackboard.

Morris, Monique W., "Introduction and Struggling to Survive," in *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in School*. Chico: AK Press, 2017. Via Blackboard.

Week Twelve: Gender and Mass Incarceration

Watch *13th* via Netflix

Law, Vikki, "Mothers and Children, in *Resistance Behind Bars: The Struggles of Incarcerated Women*. Oakland: PM Press, 2009.

Week Thirteen: Gender and Immigration

Watch *Immigration Nation Episode One*, via Netflix

Silvia, Daniela, "He'd break down doors and come through the windows, or, if not, from the roof, up the fire escape," in Meyers, Steven and Jonathon Freedman (eds.), *Solito, Solita: Crossing Border with Youth Refugees from Central America*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2019. Via Blackboard.

Week Fourteen: Gender and Climate Justice

Gilio-Whitaker, Dina, "Hearts not on the Ground: Indigenous Women's Leadership and More Cultural Clashes," in *As Long as the Grass Grows: The Indigenous Fight for Environmental Justice from Colonization to Standing Rock*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2019. via Blackboard.

Week Fifteen: Gender and the Politics of Reproduction

Matthiesen, Sara, "Introduction," in *Reproduction Reconceived: Family Making and the Limits of Choice after Roe v. Wade*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2021.

Smith, "Better Dead than Pregnant: The Colonization of Native Women's Reproductive Lives," via Blackboard.