

Feminist Approaches to Social Research
WMST 610-001 / SOCI 633-001 / WMST 890-003
Course Syllabus – Spring 2023

INSTRUCTOR	Leah M. Adams, Ph.D. [she/her/hers] <u>Office</u> : 3057 David King Hall <u>E-mail</u> : ladamse@gmu.edu
MEETINGS	Thursdays 4:30 – 7:10pm
OFFICE HOURS	Thursdays 3:00 – 4:00pm (or by appointment) *Office hours in person or <u>virtual</u> via Zoom – link available on Blackboard*
DEADLINES	January 30 is the last day to add this class February 6 is the last day to drop this class with no tuition penalty February 13 is the last day to drop this class with 50% tuition penalty

TECHNOLOGY

- **Official Communications via GMU E-mail:** Students must use their MasonLive email account to receive important University information, including communications related to this class. I will not respond to messages sent from or send messages to a non-Mason email address.
- **Class cancellation policy:** If the campus closes or class is canceled, students will be notified via their GMU email. The instructor will provide details regarding coursework and/or assignments.
- **Blackboard:** Activities and assignments in this course will regularly use the Blackboard learning system, available at <https://mymason.gmu.edu>.
- **Course Materials and Student Privacy:** All course materials posted to Blackboard or other course site are private to this class; by federal law, any materials that identify specific students (via their name, voice, or image) must not be shared with anyone not enrolled in this class. Video recordings – whether made by instructors or students – of class meetings that include audio, visual, or textual information from other students are private and must not be shared outside the class.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course provides an introduction to feminist approaches to social research via advanced interdisciplinary readings, in-depth analysis and discussion, and hands on experience with a selection of methods used by feminist researchers to study and communicate about social life. Throughout the semester, students will grapple with critical issues raised by feminist scholars (e.g., What makes a method “feminist”? What counts as evidence? What is the relationship between the researcher and participant?) as they develop their own research questions and consider how well various methods are equipped to meet or can be modified to meet the challenges and critiques discussed by feminist researchers.

COURSE FORMAT

The format of this class is mixed, and includes lecture, small-group discussion, in-class exercises, and media. Students will have the opportunity to lead class discussions and give a formal presentation in class.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Identify and describe the major feminist critiques of positivism in doing research with human participants
- Summarize key issues feminist researchers engage with in conducting “feminist” research
- Compare and contrast different methods of inquiry used by feminist scholars
- Construct a research question
- Differentiate between epistemologies, methodology, and methods
- Apply the skills above in oral and written products
- Assess the utility, including strengths and weaknesses, of different methods of inquiry to answer a research question of their choosing
- Critique and synthesize across methods used by previous researchers to answer a research question of their choosing
- Develop a research proposal that uses a feminist approach to answering their research question
- Sharpen their presentation skills in a brief, research-focused presentation

ASSESSMENT OF COURSE OBJECTIVES: COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Additional details and grading rubrics for assignments will be offered in class and/or via Blackboard.

- **Class Participation (20%):** Our weekly meetings will frequently require you to work with other students to practice using a method and/or discuss the benefits and challenges of such a method. Participation requires more than merely attending class and will be assessed not just via your spoken contributions in the larger group, but also via your small group engagement.
 - Due: Weekly in class
- **Research Question (5%):** Drawing on readings, lecture and discussion in class, you will develop and submit a research question of your choosing that will form the basis of much of your work this semester in seeking to understand what is meant by *feminist* methods. I recommend that you choose to focus on a content area (e.g., wellbeing, romantic relationships, depression) and (human!) specific population (e.g., Black women, transgender youth, women with physical disabilities) that you are passionate about, as it will likely help keep the process of examining this question from multiple methodological perspectives more interesting for you. In the interest of working smarter, not necessarily harder, I *highly* recommend that you choose a question that aligns with your anticipated thesis or project topic!
 - Due: February 20 by 11:59pm
- **Human Subjects Research Training completion (5%):** You will complete the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) program. The program consists of an online exam that ensures that all persons who engage in work with human subjects understand the inherent risks you may expose those participants to and how to avoid those risks. We will also discuss the degree to which feminist critiques and considerations are addressed by this training. Additional information is available here: <https://oria.gmu.edu/topics/human-subjects-training/>. You will submit your certification of completion to Blackboard.
 - Due: February 20 by 11:59pm

- **Positionality Statement (10%):** Once your research question has been determined, you will write and submit a (one- to two-page single-spaced, Times New Roman, 12pt font) positionality statement that describes your role as a researcher in relation to your research question. This assignment is meant to encourage you to engage with the foundational topics (e.g., power, access to knowledge, insider/outsider status) that we discuss as they apply to your own area of interest. Additional guidance will be available in class and on Blackboard.
 - Due: March 6 by 11:59pm
- **Methods Journal Entries (5 @ 5%):** For each of the five weeks listed in the section entitled “A Selection of Methodology & Methods Used By Feminist Researchers” in our schedule, you will submit a journal entry in which you reflect on the method discussed, how it could be used to answer your research question, and the strengths and challenges associated with doing so. Additional guidance will be provided in class.
 - Due: Mondays March 13, March 27, April 3, April 10, April 17 by 11:59pm
- **Annotated Bibliography (15%):** You will create an annotated bibliography of empirical works that address your research question. Your annotations should integrate summary and critical analysis, with special foci on the *methods* used and your interpretation of the extent to which the work embodies a *feminist* approach. Individual annotations should be no longer than 250 words. At least 8 relevant annotations should be included – use this work to help you move forward in your thesis or dissertation!
 - Due: April 24 by 11:59pm
- **Data Blitz (5%):** On our last day of class, you will give a short presentation (5-7 minutes!) on your research question and proposal, with an emphasis on your decision regarding the ideal method to use and how the empirical work will be *feminist* in nature. Although 5-7 minutes is not a lot of time, many conferences and professional meetings are turning to these brief, fast-paced research presentations and this is likely to be good practice in honing your presentation skills!
 - Due: Thursday, May 4 in class
- **Final Grant Proposal (15%):** Drawing on the course’s content, your annotated bibliography, and your methods journal entries, you will develop the start to a grant proposal in which you must synthesize and review the extant literature on your research question, identify the gap that your particular approach and perspective fills, why a feminist lens is needed in this area of inquiry, and present and justify the feminist method that you choose. Consistent with general grant guidelines (e.g., six pages at National Institutes of Health, ten pages [including all of narrative] at National Endowment for the Humanities), the proposal will have a strict page limit of six single-spaced pages (Times New Roman, 12pt font). Additional guidance will be available in class and on Blackboard, including a lecture focused on grant writing.
 - Due: Thursday, May 11 by 11:59pm

COURSE EXPECTATIONS & POLICIES

Attendance & Participation: Your involvement is key to the success of this class! Although I won’t be taking formal attendance, your participation via activities completed during class time is graded. It is expected that you will join us for class each week and that you will be an active member of our classroom community.

Assigned reading & required text: There is no required textbook, but there are readings each week! In lecture, class discussion, and in assignments, I will assume that you have completed your assigned reading. All assigned reading can be found on Blackboard in the “Weekly Course Content” tab.

For those who plan to continue to pursue research, the following book is recommended, but not required:

Biber, S.H. (Ed.) (2014). *Feminist research practice: A primer* (2nd ed.). Sage.

EVALUATION & GRADES

	Percentage of Grade
Participation	20%
Research Question Submission	5%
CITI Human Subjects Research Training	5%
Positionality Statement	10%
Methods Journal Entries x 5 @ 5% each	25%
Annotated Bibliography	15%
Data Blitz	5%
Final Grant Proposal	15%

Grades will be assigned on the following scale:

A+	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C	F
97 – 100%	93 – 96%	90 – 92%	87 – 89%	83 – 86%	80 – 82%	70 – 79%	< 60%

EXAM & HOMEWORK POLICY

Life often lives, and we cannot predict what the semester will bring us. In general, I do not offer makeup assignments or provide extensions without arrangements made beforehand with me (e.g., missing class for a religious holiday). Late work will lose one letter grade (10%) for every day late, up to 5 days, after which credit is no longer available. I work hard to keep us on track, and ask for the same from you.

Monica Policy (a.k.a. “Just one of them days”)

I do recognize that sometimes things just *happen* – life gets away from us, an unexpected issue arises. Because of this you’ve got **three** “Monica” days – three free days to be tardy on an assignment, no questions asked, no explanations needed. This means that you can submit a single assignment up to three days late without penalty (e.g., grade reduction), submit each of three assignments one day late without penalty, or some combination (e.g., one submission 2 days late, plus another 1 day late). Weekends count as days! If you use a Monica day, please write “Monica day +1” (or +2, +3) in your submission. It is up to you to keep track of how many Monica days you have left. Please also note that feedback on late work may also be delayed. The Monica day policy **does not** apply to final exams/papers/projects – those deadlines are set by the university.

Outside of the Monica Policy, there will be no extensions or makeups without penalty except in instances such as the following:

- Hospitalization or illness that has been documented and judged by me as preventing you from a) preparing adequately for an exam, b) attending class, or c) completing an assignment
- Death or serious illness in your family
- Court appearances

Decisions regarding extensions and makeups under these circumstances will be made on a case-by-case basis.

COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY

In this course, and across the University, I seek to create a learning environment that fosters respect for people across identities. I welcome and value individuals and their differences, including gender expression and identity, race, economic status, sex, sexuality, ethnicity, national origin, first language, religion, age, ability and other markers of social identity. I encourage all members of the learning environment to engage with the material personally, but to also be open to exploring and learning from experiences different from their own.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY & HONOR CODE

All students in this course are to become familiar with and follow the University's honor code, which does not tolerate any form of cheating and attempted cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing. Exams and assignments are expected to be individual efforts unless otherwise noted by me. Violations of the GMU Honor Code can result in failure of an assignment or exam, depending on the severity of violation. All violations will be reported to the Honor Committee. As the instructor for this course, I reserve the right to enter a failing grade to any student found guilty of an honor code violation. For more information on the Honor Code please visit: <https://oai.gmu.edu/mason-honor-code/full-honor-code-document/>

ACCOMMODATION OF DISABILITIES

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. Note that this provision includes the range of disabilities, including physical, psychiatric, and learning disabilities. If you are seeking accommodations for this class, please first visit <http://ds.gmu.edu/> for detailed information about the Disability Services registration process. Then please discuss your approved accommodations with me so that I can ensure that your needs are being met in this course. All academic accommodations must be arranged through Disability Services. Disability Services is located in Student Union Building I (SUB I), Suite 2500. Email: ods@gmu.edu | Phone: (703) 993 – 2474.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT, SEXUAL MISCONDUCT, AND INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE

As a faculty member and designated “Responsible Employee,” I am required to report all disclosures of sexual assault, interpersonal violence, and stalking to Mason’s Title IX Coordinator per university policy 1412. If you wish to speak with someone confidentially, please contact the Student Support and Advocacy Center (703-380-1434) or Counseling and Psychological Services (703-993-2380). You may also seek assistance from Mason’s Title IX Coordinator (703-993-8730; titleix@gmu.edu).

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

George Mason offers services to support students' academic and emotional development. Counseling and Psychological Services, located in SUB I room 3129 (caps.gmu.edu), offers workshops in academic skills, stress management training, and virtual counseling for students who would like some help with social, emotional, or educational concerns. Consider taking advantage of these resources if you need them. For additional information about other student support services offered, visit: <https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/knowledge-center/knowing-mason-students/student-support-resources-on-campus/>

GRATITUDE TO THE COMMUNITY OF SCHOLARS WHOSE WORK INFORMS THIS COURSE'S STRUCTURE & CONTENT

In crafting this course syllabus, I was aided by the publicly available works and time of others who have shared their course readings and assignment ideas. In particular, elements from this course are adapted from the works, labor, and/or time of: David P. Corwin, Ph.D., Shannon Davis, Ph.D., Sharrell Hassel-Goodman, M.A., Angela Hattery, Ph.D., and Stacia Kock, Ph.D.

TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE (Subject to Change)

*All readings available on Blackboard in the “Weekly Course Content” folder

Week	Date	Topic	What’s Due?
Foundational Topics in Feminist Social Research			
1	1/26	Course Intro & What are “feminist” methods?	
2	2/02	Feminist Epistemologies	
3	2/09	Crafting Research Questions	
4	2/16	Reviewing Literature & Annotated Bibliography	02/20 Human Subjects Training due; 02/20 Formalized research question due
5	2/23	Power & Location in Social Research	
6	3/02	Ethics in Feminist Research	03/06 Positionality statement due
A Selection of Methodology & Methods Used By Feminist Researchers			
7	3/09	In-depth Interviewing & Focus Groups	Mondays 3/13 – 4/17 by 11:59pm – Weekly methods journals due
8	3/16	No class – Spring Break! Stay safe!	
9	3/23	Critical-Participatory Action Research	
10	3/30	Ethnography	
11	4/06	Conducting Media-Based Research	
12	4/13	Surveys & Quantitative Methods	
Funding & Disseminating Feminist Research			
13	4/20	Funding Your Research	Annotated Bibliography due 4/24 by 11:59pm
14	4/27	Disseminating & Presenting Research	
15	5/04	Data Blitz Presentations & Wrapping Up	05/04 Data Blitz due in class
Final Projects Due:		Thursday, May 11 by 11:59pm	