Course Objectives and Description

The entry of women into the political sphere produces a challenge to the core concepts of political thought. Feminist political thought thus provides an important vantage point from which to think critically about the nature and limitations of key political concepts such as rights, equality, identity, and agency as well as the nature of politics itself. Feminist politics and theory pose deep challenges to some of the major commitments of modern political thought, particularly to those of liberalism, e.g., freedom as free choice and equality as formal and gender-neutral. But feminism is not as unified as its challenge to liberalism might suggest. It continually faces questions with regard to its boundaries, agendas, and even the subjects of feminism itself – what is a woman? How does the category of gender illuminate or eclipse power relations involving other categories of difference, such as those of culture, race, class, and sexual orientation?

This course will explore the variety of feminisms emerging out of women’s struggles for political inclusion (liberal, Marxist and radical feminisms) as well as more recent feminist theoretical challenges to the category of woman, identity politics, and rights-centered politics.

Required Texts
The following texts are required for this course and are available for purchase at the University bookstore and at Mary Jane Books (corner of Western Avenue and Quail Street). There will be a few additional readings made available on-line through Blackboard (as indicated in the schedule of readings).
Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (**new translation: Borde and Malovany-Chevallier, Vintage)*
Sara Evans, *Tidal Wave* (Free Press)*
Michaele L. Ferguson and Lori Jo Marso, eds. *W Stands for Women* (Duke)*
Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Penguin)*

Course Requirements
As a student in this course, you are required to:
- Attend class and arrive on time.
- Complete all readings by the assigned date.
- Come to class prepared to participate actively in discussions of assigned readings.
- Bring assigned texts to class with you.

**The use of laptops in class is strongly discouraged. Talk to me if there are extenuating circumstances.**
Evaluation
Short Papers (2) 25%; Exams (2): 35%; Final Exam 25%; Participation 15%

Exams: Your ability to understand and critically analyze the course material will be assessed through two midterms and one final exam. Exams will consist of short answer and in-class essays. The final exam will test you on material from readings and lectures from the entire semester. No make-up examinations, early examinations, or incomplete grades will be given, except in the event of serious personal or family illness or other extraordinary circumstances approved by the dean of undergraduate studies.

Papers: Two short papers will ask you to critically reflect on an assigned readings and/or film. You will be given a question to write in response to, using examples and evidence from assigned readings/films. You must be sure to cite (page numbers in the body of the essay) all of the passages or ideas taken from other authors.

You will be required to submit two copies of your paper: 1) on paper at the beginning of class on the due date; and 2) electronically through Blackboard’s Safe Assign, a program that evaluates the originality of written work. The purpose of SafeAssign is to guard against academic dishonesty by judging whether essays draw from sources without citation. For more information on SafeAssign, see http://www.albany.edu/its/bls/safe_assign.htm.

Participation: Participation is highly valued in this course and is essential for your success. The greater the quality and quantity of your participation, the more rewarding the class will be for everyone. You should always walk into class prepared with some contribution: a question, an interesting observation about the text, and/or an opinion on the readings. When the material is particularly difficult is the best time to bring questions about particular passages or key terms.

The participation grade is based on three components:
1) Attendance: Attendance will be taken each week, but attendance alone is insufficient to receive full credit for participation. Missing more than two (2) classes, lateness, or arriving unprepared to lecture will guarantee a grade of a C or lower. Two classes may be missed for whatever reason you deem sufficient. After that, additional absences will lower your participation grade, unless they are excused by the undergraduate dean’s office.
2) Class Discussion: Each student is expected to regularly make an active and thoughtful contribution to class discussions. This includes asking questions, offering observations about the readings and formulating opinions. You are particularly encouraged to respectfully respond to your fellow students’ thoughts and opinions.
3) In-class assignments: In-class assignments will consist of writing a short piece, one page or less, that will be used to test your understanding of the reading. In-class assignments will be given without notice periodically throughout the semester. There will be no opportunity to make up missed in-class assignments. Up to two missed assignments will be disregarded. Any missed due to documented, excused absences will also be disregarded.
Excused Absences
Students who are sick are strongly encouraged to stay home as necessary. For this reason, two absences will not be counted against your grade. This policy DOES NOT APPLY TO EXAM DATES. If you must miss an exam or more than two normal classes, you must have documentation from the dean of undergraduate studies (Lecture Center 30 Phone: 518-442-3950) or your grade will be adversely affected.

Reasonable accommodation
“Reasonable accommodations will be provided for students with documented physical, sensory, systemic, cognitive, learning and psychiatric disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring accommodation in this class, please notify the Director of Disabled Student Services (Campus Center 137, 442-5490). That office will provide the course instructor with verification of your disability, and will recommend appropriate accommodations (http://www.albany.edu/studentlife/dss/Accommodation.html).”

If you wish to discuss academic accommodations for this course please also inform the instructor as soon as possible. In addition, the instructor will make every effort to accommodate difficulties arising from religious observance. You are asked to bring any possible conflicts to the instructor’s attention as soon as possible. Reasonable accommodations are generally established well in advance and are rarely granted after retroactively.

Cheating and Plagiarism
You will be required to complete the library’s on-line tutorial on plagiarism for this course. Cheating on an exam or plagiarizing written work will result in failure in the course and referral of the case to a university committee. For more information, please see the undergraduate bulletin: http://www.albany.edu/undergraduate_bulletin/regulations.html

Improvement
In cases where you have shown marked improvement over the term, I will take this into consideration in computing final course grades.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments
** This schedule is subject to change. All changes will be announced in class. **

I. Introduction

Jan 19 What is Feminist Theory? Why does it matter for democracy?
Jan 24 What is feminism?
  • Sara Evans, Tidal Wave, ch. 1
II. The Subject of Rights

Jan. 26: The Universal Rights of Man
- John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (selections) **

Jan 31: *Declarations of the Rights of Man* **
*Declarations of Independence* **

Feb 2 The Universal Rights of Woman
- Olympe de Gouges, *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and Citizen(ess)* **
- Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *Declaration of Sentiments* **
- Sojourner Truth, “Aren’t I a Woman?” **

Recommended:
- Joan Scott, “Rereading the History of Feminism,” *Only Paradoxes to Offer: Women and the Rights of Man*


Feb 9 Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ch. 3

Feb 14 J. S. Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (selections) **

Feb 16 Exam #1

III. Feminism’s Claims of Experience

Feb 21 Women, Class, and the Family

Feb 23 Feminists Challenge the State
- Emma Goldman, “Woman Suffrage” **
- Emma Goldman, “A New Declaration of Independence”**

Feb 28 Emma Goldman, “The Traffic in Women” **

Recommended:
- Kathy Ferguson, *Emma Goldman: Political Thinking in the Streets*
- Kristin Bumiller, *In an Abusive State*

Mar 1 Film: *Made in Dagenham*
** Short Paper #1 due **
Mar 6  What is a woman?
  • Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*

Mar 8  Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*

Mar 13, 15:  No Class (Spring break)

Mar 20  Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*

Mar 22  Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (No Class Meeting)

Mar 27:  Feminists Take Action: The Second Wave
  • Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex* (excerpt) **
  • Sara Evans, *Tidal Wave*, ch. 2

  *Blood, Bread and Poetry* **
  Sara Evans, *Tidal Wave*, ch. 3-4

Apr 3  Feminisms in the Plural
  • bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (selections) **
  • Combahee River Collective: A Black Feminist Statement **

Recommended:
  • Melissa V. Perry-Harris, *Sister Citizen*

Apr 5  **Exam #2**

IV.  **Uprooting the Subject of Feminism**

Apr 10  Gloria Anzaldúa, “La Conciencia de La Mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness”
  *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* **
  Monique Wittig, “One is Not Born a Woman” *The Straight Mind* **

Apr 12  Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, pp. 171-190 **
  Butler *Undoing Gender*, Introduction, ch. 10
  Recommended: Joan Scott, “Experience,” *Feminists Theorize the Political*

Apr 17  Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*, chs. 2 and 9

Apr 19  Feminism and the Politics of the Family
  • Cheshire Calhoun, “Constructing Lesbians and Gay Men as Family’s Outlaws,”
    *Feminism, the Family, and the Politics of the Closet*

Recommended:
  • Lori Jo Marso, “Marriage and Bourgeois Respectability,” *Politics and Gender*
### V. The Politics of Universalism

**Apr 24**  
Decolonizing Feminism  

**Apr 26**  
Uma Narayan, “Restoring History and Politics to ‘Third World Traditions,”  
*Dislocating Cultures*, 43-80**

**May 1**  
Feminism and American Empire  
- Michaele Ferguson and Lori Jo Marso, *W Stands for Women*

**May 3**  
Michaele Ferguson and Lori Jo Marso, *W Stands for Women*

**May 8**  
**Short Paper #2 due**

**Final Exam: Wednesday, May 16, 1:00 – 3:00**