

**Feminist Theory**  
(WS 615/ PoliSci 615C)

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This course explores several central debates and concerns within contemporary feminist theory, including the following:

1. What is the relation between narrativity, materiality and ecology in feminist theory? Narrativity, or story telling, is crucial for creating women's voice or any subaltern point of view. Materiality, or thingness, is central to creating cross-species, cross-being connections and displacing old ontological orders. Ecological thinking is necessary to think in terms of fluid accumulations and assemblages rather than stable hierarchies. The relation between narrative, materiality, and ecology also emerges in the practices of representation, constructions of meaning, and visions of nature in feminist thinking. We will ask questions about modes of representation in language and in politics, asking both "who gets to speak?" and "what can be said?"
2. What is all this "post" stuff: post-feminism, post-modernism, post-structuralism, post-humanism, post-colonialism, post-race, post-work? When theorists talk about the anthropocene as an era, what has been left behind and what appears to be emergent? How are these various "posts" gendered, racialized, and colonized and what openings are there to think back?
3. How do we think of and enact relations between theory and practice, or scholarship and activism? How do we theorize our practices? Is our theorizing itself a form of practice? To think about these political problems we need to explore the relation of feminism to contemporary global politics, including neoliberalism, securitization, and state formations. How are sex and gender, race and class, imbricated within global capitalism and local/global war-making machines? How does feminism contest and/or cooperate with the hegemonic arrangements of capital, patriarchy, heteronormativity, and racism? Where should feminist theory be going?

An overarching question of the class concerns the possibilities of constructive political action in a time when the familiar metanarratives sustaining such action have come under fire.

## **Required reading:**

Maria Tamboukou, *Sewing, Fighting and Writing: Radical Practices in Work, Politics and Culture* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2015).

Angela Davis, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement* (Haymarket Books: 2016)

Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Harvard University Press, 2015).

Hilary Klein, *Compañeras: Zapatista Women's Stories* (Seven Stories Press, 2015)

Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries*. Durham: Duke University Press 2011).

Carol Adams and Lori Gruen, eds. *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals and the Earth* (NY: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014).

There are also several essays available on our Laulima website.

## **Requirements:**

### **1. Participation.**

Please complete the reading on time, attend class each week, and come to class prepared to discuss the assignments. Class discussions entail active and thoughtful interactions with the material you have read and with others in the class. You are expected to use class discussions, email and other venues to listen respectfully, to show that you have read and thought about the material, and to develop your ideas.

Please bring the reading assignment to class each day. These readings are often quite challenging and you will need to read them more than once. It is important to have your own printed copies of the reading so that you can underline, write questions in the margins, and make notes that can help you write your papers and contribute to class discussion.

**2. Presentations:** Please select one of the assigned readings for “launching.” A sign-up sheet for selecting your topics will be available early in the semester.

Your job is to launch our discussion by doing the following:

- a. Reminding us of 2 or 3 of the most salient points in that reading. What is the author trying to accomplish? Why is it important?
- b. Raising questions worthy of discussion, including your own responses, agreements, disagreements, or confusions about the reading, and
- c. Suggesting links to other readings that will help us see what the author is up to, what job the text is doing. Each launch should take about 10 minutes, no more than 15 minutes.

Please treat this as an opportunity to do a mini-professional presentation. You need to practice your presentation and time yourself to make sure that you are clear and succinct. There is no need for power point, prezi, etc., but if you do one, keep it simple and useful. Sometimes we will group several presentations together, to introduce that day's reading; other times we will intersperse presentations and discussions.

- 3. Papers:** Please turn in *electronic copies of your essays* to me as Word documents in our Laulima drop box. Please label your papers with your name and the title of your paper.

Please select **either option A or option B:**

- A. Research paper:** You may choose to write a research paper which takes a significant topic in feminist theory and pursues it by combining some of the texts we are reading in the class with relevant outside research. By "some" of the texts I mean at least 2 or 3 of them, used robustly (not simply mentioned in passing). This paper is an opportunity for you to select a topic that compels you and use some texts from feminist theory to engage and critique your topic. If you are at the proposal, capstone, or thesis stages of your graduate work, you can submit a proposal or chapter as your research paper, providing it makes considerable use of feminist theory. In other words, do not take a proposal or chapter on a different topic and just stick a few feminist ideas in. The idea is to engage deeply with a few texts and make use of them to explore a topic that matters to you.

Please speak with me about topics and research materials. The paper should be in the neighborhood of 20-25 pages. You are encouraged to submit a rough draft for comments and suggestions.

**Research papers are due on the Wednesday of exam week.**

- B. Reflection papers:** You can write 4 short papers (5-6 pages each) that draw the materials we are reading into conversation with one another and with your own perspectives and concerns. These papers are aimed at digesting the reading, at putting the readings into conversation with one another, and at continually rethinking and rewriting your ideas as you encounter new materials. These papers do not require further research outside of the common class reading.

Each paper will address 2 of the assigned books or articles, asking what they are up to, what they accomplish, what they lack, how they might be used. You can bring in other readings as needed to develop your analysis, but you should have two primary readings that are the focus of your reflections.

These papers are opportunities for you to really make your way through an argument, make it your own, figure out what you think of it, listen for its silences, ask what you can do with it. You will not be able to represent or respond to an entire

book or even article in a relatively short paper, so select one or two central themes that grab your interest.

By taking more than one book or essay per paper, you are able to put the readings into conversation with one another, looking for ways that each argument puts pressure on the others. These are not research papers; they are more like critical book reviews; this is the kind of encounter with a body of literature that may precede and make possible later utilization of texts and arguments in other work.

- C. On Re-writing:** If I feel that your paper is not appropriate for the class, I will return it to you with suggestions for improvement. In my grading universe, an “A” means excellent work. A “B” means good but not yet excellent work. Anything else is not graduate level work.

After you receive a grade and feedback, you are welcome to re-write your papers (except the last one) if you are dissatisfied with your grade or wish to respond to comments. All re-writes must be turned in by the last day of class.

**A few things that should go without saying...but in case they don't:**

- Plagiarism or academic dishonesty of any kind will earn an F in the class. No negotiating. Plagiarism is taking another person's words or ideas as your own without crediting them properly. Anything cut and pasted from a website without quotation marks and proper citation is plagiarism. Copying anything from a book or journal or another person without putting it in quotation marks and citing your source is plagiarism. Paraphrasing someone else's work so closely that the two passages are nearly identical is plagiarism. Plagiarism is cheating. There is no excuse for cheating. It is disrespectful to the intellectual enterprise in which we are participating. Using the same paper for more than one class without explicit permission from the instructors is also a form of academic dishonesty.

**Source:** Graduate Student Guide, Department of Political Science, University of Hawaii at Manoa. Accessible at: <http://www.politicalscience.hawaii.edu/3-working/grad-documents/gradguide12011.pdf> p. 28.

- Please come to class having done the assigned reading, thought about it, and prepared to discuss it. It is fine to come in with questions, confusions, and general discombobulation to share. But come ready to share.
- Take your “launches” seriously. One of the main complaints students have about their seminars is directed at fellow students' presentations, either for being too long and wandering or too undeveloped and uninformative.
- Please turn off your cell phones during class; please do not use class time to check email, chat on Facebook, or do the reading you were supposed to have done for that day. Respect the class.
- Please turn in your best work: revise, edit, spellcheck, etc. You are welcome to rewrite your papers, but please make each one your best effort.

**Week 1: Introductions:** Read and discuss the syllabus. We will look at the most common conventions or frames for approaching feminist theory, including:

- a. ideological parentage - liberal, socialist, radical, conservative, anarchist
- b. identity politics – lesbian, women of color, third world, working class
- c. historical epoch – first, second and third waves
- d. political strategies – reform and revolution
- e. epistemology – interpretation and genealogy
- f. ontology - narrative and materiality

We will introduce concepts such as language, discourse, difference, and deconstruction within feminist theory:

Reading:

- Joan Scott, “Deconstructing Equality vs. Difference,” (on Laulima)
- “Clearing Ground and Making Connections: Modernism, Postmodernism, Feminism,” with Carolyn DiPalma, in Kathy Davis, Mary Edwards, and Judith Lorber, eds., *Handbook of Gender and Women’s Studies* (London: Sage Publications: 2006) pp. 127-145 (on Laulima).

### **Week 2: Locating Voice, Narrating Self**

Reading:

- Cherie Moraga, “From a Long Line of Vendidas” (on Laulima)
- Adrienne Rich, “The Politics of Location” (on Laulima)
- Combahee River Collective, “The Combahee River Collective Statement”(on Laulima)
- Kathy Davis, “Intersectionality as Buzzword,” *Feminist Theory*, vol 9, no 1 (2008): 67-85.  
[http://www.kathydavis.info/articles/Intersectionality\\_as\\_buzzword.pdf](http://www.kathydavis.info/articles/Intersectionality_as_buzzword.pdf)

### **Week 3: Thinking About Knowing**

Reading: Reading:

- Ferguson, “Bush in Drag: Sarah Palin and Endless War,” *Borderlands* vol 8 no 3 (2009) at  
[http://www.borderlands.net.au/vol8no3\\_2009/ferguson\\_palin.htm](http://www.borderlands.net.au/vol8no3_2009/ferguson_palin.htm)
- Donna Haraway, "Teddy Bear Patriarchy" (on Laulima)
- In class viewing and discussion of Haraway's, 'Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene: Staying with the Trouble,' May, 9 2014. Available at <https://vimeo.com/97663518>
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### **Week 4: Sexualities and Bodies Politic**

- Judith Butler, “Imitation and Gender Insubordination” (on Laulima)
- In-class film: “Juggling Gender” by Tami Gold with Jennifer Miller (video number 9189, 117 minutes)

**Paper #1:** Select any two of the essays from weeks 1-4; due on week 5.

### **Week 5 and 6: Capitalism, work and representation**

Reading:

- Tamboukou, *Sewing, Fighting and Writing*

### **Week 7 and 8: Capitalism, work and representation (con)**

Reading:

- Weeks, *The Problem with Work*

**Paper #2:** select related themes from Maria Tamboukou and from Kathi Weeks. Due on week 9.

### **Week 9 and 10: Materiality, nature, culture**

Reading:

- Alaimo and Heckman, *Material Feminisms*, selections (Laulima)
- Adams and Gruen, *Ecofeminism*
- Discussion of Anna Tsing's lecture, 'A Feminist Approach to the Anthropocene: Earth Stalked by Man'. November 10, 2015. Available at <http://bit.ly/1MahKk0>

**Paper #3:** select related themes from material feminisms and ecofeminisms. Due on week 11.

### **Week 11 and 12:**

Reading:

- Davis, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle*
- Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*

### **Week 13:**

- Klein, *Compañeras: Zapatista Women's Stories*

**Paper #4:** select related themes from Davis and/or Butler and/or Klein. Due on week 14.

### **Week 14: Writing and Representation.**

Reading:

- Toni Morrison's Nobel prize acceptance speech (on Laulima)
- In class: audio tape of Morrison's speech