

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

Dr. Kathy E. Ferguson  
Spring, 2014  
Email: [kferguso@hawaii.edu](mailto:kferguso@hawaii.edu)  
Ph: 956-6933

Office: 640E Saunders Hall  
Hours: T and Th 10:30-11:30  
and by appointment

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

1. The tension between claims to articulate women's voice versus arguments that deconstruct identity categories. We explore hermeneutic and genealogical approaches to the category "woman": how do we generalize about women without projecting one set of experiences onto all of us, and without recreating the categories that enable patriarchy in the first place? What do we mean when we articulate or critique "women's voice"? We will consider debates between those who want to specify such a voice, and those who resist generalizing about "women" and "men."
2. The relation between narrativity and materiality 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 hierarchies. The relation between narrative and materiality 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?"
3. The relation of feminism, variously understood, 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?

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:** The following books are required for the course:

1. Nancy Fraser, *Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis*. Verso: 2013.

2. Alaimo, Stacy and Susan Hekman, *Material Feminisms*. University of Indiana Press: 2008.
3. Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Duke University Press: 2007.
4. Wendy Brown, *Edgework*. Princeton University Press: 2005.
5. Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory*. Duke University Press: 2011.

There are also several essays available on our Laulima website.

**Notice:** We will reschedule our May 6 class to a mutually agreed-upon time. The “floating class” will address: **Writing and Representation**.

Reading:

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

### **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 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,
- 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. 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 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, use 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 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. 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 5/6.**

- 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 May 6.

**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. 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.

**Jan 14: 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)

### **Jan 21: 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)

**Paper #1: Select any two of the essays for 1/14 and 1/21; due 2/11.**

### **Jan 28: What are we doing when we do feminist theory?**

Reading:

- Wendy Brown, *Edgework*, "Preface," and chapters 1, 2 and 3

### **Feb 4: (con)**

- Wendy Brown, *Edgework*, chapters 4, 5, 6 & 7

### **Feb 11: 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)

**Paper #2: Select any two of the essays for 1/28 - 2/11: due 2/25.**

### **Feb 18: Story-telling**

Reading:

- Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory*, Introduction and Part I

### **Feb 25: (Con)**

Reading:

- Hemmings Part II

### **Mar 4: Materiality, nature, culture**

Reading:

- Alaimo and Heckman, *Material Feminisms*, introduction, ch 4, 5, 6

### **Mar 11 (con)**

- Alaimo and Heckman, ch 8, 9, 10

### **Mar 18: (con)**

- Alaimo and Heckman, ch 11, 12, 13, 14

**Paper #3: select a chapter from Hemmings (or an idea that runs across multiple chapters) and an essay from Alaimo and Heckman; due 4/8.**

**Mar 25:** spring break

**April 1: 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)

**April 8: Feminism, patriarchy, white privilege, and neo-liberalism**

Reading: Nancy Fraser, *Fortunes of Feminism*, prologue and Part I

**April 15 (con)**

Reading: Fraser, Part III

**April 22: Queer theorizing of states and security**

Reading:

- Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, preface, introduction, and ch 1 & 2

**April 29: (con). Guest: Nicole Grove**

Reading:

- Puar, ch 3, 4, & conclusion

**Paper #4: a significant idea or argument from Fraser and one from Puar; due 5/6.**