

## **WST 171: Introduction to Women's Studies**

**Block 3—November 2006**

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**Classroom: 300, South Hall**

**Class meets: 1-3 and some mornings**

### **Course Description**

This interdisciplinary core course in Women's Studies explores a wide range of subjects relevant to women's lives. It provides the analytical framework for the social construction of gender and the study of gender-defining institutions and its impacts on women. In this course, we will explore numerous issues, themes, and debates that have animated feminist scholarship across the globe, making it a rich and vibrant area of intellectual inquiry. Rather than seeing women as a singular entity, we will seek to understand the complex and varied locations of women as political and social actors/subjects over time and space.

Through the assigned readings, lectures, class discussions, and films, this course will introduce us to current debates within the field of women's studies on issues of reproductive health, violence, family, sexuality, women's roles in the workplace, and politics. The course will broaden our understanding and appreciation of gender issues and how they differently impact women and men's lives across race, class, ethnic, national, and religious locations. The thematic foci and readings in this course will provide students an opportunity to familiarize themselves with current theoretical and ethical debates among feminists. We will conclude the course with imagining future goals and objectives for feminist politics and theory. The course is also designed to enhance critical thinking, reading and writing skills.

### **Course Objectives**

- To examine the field of Women's Studies—its issues, themes, theories and applications
- To develop feminist, interdisciplinary, multicultural perspectives on women and on society's construction of gender and gender roles.
- To explore the extent to which gender (as well as race, sexual orientation, social class, and physical disability) affects access to opportunity, power, and resources.
- To examine the contributions of women, especially in areas in which women have been neglected or devalued.
- To analyze gender as a theoretical concept and its relationship to various social, cultural and political domains.
- To develop critical reading and reasoning skills. By applying these skills relevant to Women's Studies you will expand your understanding of the various dimensions of political and social inquiry.

### **Readings**

Three books are required for this course. The students are expected to keep up with all the required readings and be prepared to participate in class discussions. The required books are:

- Ruth, Sheila. *Issues in Feminism: An Introduction to Women's Studies* (Fifth Edition). Mountain View, CA., Mayfield Publishing, 2001.
- Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. *Herland*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1979
- Atwood, Margaret. *The Handmaid's Tale*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986.

## Course Assignments and Requirements

1. **Two Examinations:** There will be two exams in this course. The exams will include both essay and short answer/identification questions. The exams will cover the readings, class discussions, and videos. Make-up exams will not be given unless in the case of emergencies.
2. **Response Papers:** You will be required to write 2 papers, 2-3 pages each, based on the novels: *Herland* and *The Handmaid's Tale*. The papers should be analytical. In other words, they should be a response to the novels and not just a summary.
3. **Term Paper and Presentation:** Students are required to write a research paper of 5-7 pages. The paper will investigate a topic we have covered in class. The detail requirements are given on page 3 of the syllabus. *All students need to get their term paper topics approved by the instructor. Unapproved paper topics may not be accepted.* You should write a one-page description of your topic and bring it to the instructor on the day of your appointment. The paper is due on November 22, by noon. We will have paper presentations from November 20-22. Sign up sheets will be distributed. No late papers will be accepted, unless you get my consent in advance.
4. **Attendance and Participation:** The class meets 2-4 hours daily. Students are expected to attend all scheduled classes. Students will be expected to participate actively in sharing their ideas on various classroom discussions. I will take attendance throughout the block. Students who fail to maintain a regular attendance cannot expect to score well on classroom participation. More than 1 unexcused absence will result in lowering the attendance and participation grade by 1/2 grade. In case of repeated absences, I reserve the right to lower the final grade. Attendance is required for all presentations. No shows will automatically get a zero for the participation grade.
5. **Grades Breakdown:**
  - Exam 1- 20%
  - Exam 2- 20%
  - Short Papers- 20%
  - Term Paper and Presentation- 20%
  - Attendance and Participation- 20%

## Academic Honesty

The following section is reprinted from Compass, the Cornell Student Handbook. Please see me if you have any questions.

A student is expected to explicitly acknowledge ideas, claims, observations, or data of others, unless generally known. When a piece of work is submitted for credit, a student is asserting that the submission is her or his work unless there is a citation of a specific source. If there is no appropriate acknowledgement of sources, whether intended or not, this may constitute a violation of the College's requirement for honesty in academic work and may be treated as a case of academic dishonesty.

Dishonesty in academic work includes both cheating and plagiarism. Please refer to the Cornell Student Handbook for more details or come and talk to me.

A safe guide is to provide a full citation for every source consulted. Sources may include, but are not limited to, published books, articles, reviews, Internet sites, archival material, visual images, oral presentations, or personal

correspondence. In addition, students should always keep previous drafts of their work in order to provide documentation of their original work. Finally, due to disciplinary differences, students should consult their professor, a librarian, and/or the Writing Studio for specific instructions on properly providing citations for sources.

### **How to get the most out of class discussions**

Classroom participation is a key requirement in this course. The most important policy is to be polite and respectful. Consider other people's feelings. Every person in this class is equally responsible for the success of the course. Here are some tips to make most of your experience in this class:

1. Enter into class activities with enthusiasm
2. Openly share related experiences
3. Respect the views of your classmates
4. Be patient with others
5. Be honest and sincere about your thoughts and feelings
6. Restrict discussions to relevant topics
7. Try not to monopolize discussions

### **A Few Basic Ground Rules**

One of the premises of Women's Studies is that living and learning are inseparable, that there is a relationship between our experiences as women and men and how we see the world. It is essential in this course that we discuss our personal experiences as they relate to issues we are addressing in class. Therefore, we have established three fundamental understandings:

1. You are under no pressure to share personal experiences on a particular topic if you don't want to.
2. You will not share the personal experiences revealed by other members of this class to anyone outside of class. Please do not violate this expectation of trust and confidentiality.
3. Many of the issues we will discuss involve our personal and political philosophies. There is no reward and no penalty for having a particular set of beliefs. It is only important that we be clear about what we believe and why.

### **Term Paper and Presentation**

In the course of this semester each student will be involved in a substantial research project. The paper should utilize several sources (4 as a minimum) that contain different views on the selected topic. It should be 5-7 pages long (excluding bibliography). Students are required to present the paper in class. The presentations will be 10-15 minutes each.

You are required to select your topic by Monday, November 6. The written statement of your selected topic must be submitted in class. Each student is required to meet with me individually to finalize the paper topic. A sign up sheet will be distributed in class. Only topics relevant to this course are acceptable.

An excellent research paper and oral presentation must conform to the following criteria:

- good, clear and complete description of the problem
- clear thesis statement on the selected problem (your own argument) developed out of empirical evidence or theoretical perspective
- theoretical framework(s) that explain your problem the best
- empirical evidence and/or plausible examples to support your argument

- your own contribution to the problem -- e.g., unique arguments supported by evidence that others missed, synthesis of previous findings or new empirical updates of previous findings that prove one side to be correct
- possible predictions
- few errors in grammar, punctuation, excellent spelling and writing style as well as proper citation
- complete and appropriate bibliography

### **Schedule and Reading Assignments**

**Note: The contents in this syllabus may be changed during the term to reflect the progress of the course. I will announce the changes in the classroom. All readings should be completed before class.**

#### **Week 1—October 30- November 3**

**Monday, October 30 – Course Introduction**

**Tuesday, October 31- PM CLASS**  
**Women’s Studies, Feminism and the Women’s Movement**  
**Ruth, Ch 1, 2**

**Wednesday, November 1- AM & PM CLASS**  
**9 a.m: Meeting with Tonnie Haas, Library**

**Thursday, November 2- PM CLASS**  
**Gender Defining Institutions and Images of Women in Patriarchy**  
**Ruth Ch 2, 3**

**Friday, November 3- AM CLASS**  
**Discussion of Herland**  
**Response Paper Due in Class!!**

#### **Week 2- November 6-10**

**Monday, November 6- PM CLASS**  
**Consciousness Raising and Feminist Responses**  
**Ruth Ch 4**

**Paper Topics Due in Class**

**Tuesday, November 7- PM CLASS**  
**Women’s Personal Lives**  
**Ruth Ch 6**

**Wednesday, November 8- AM CLASS**  
**Exam 1**

**Thursday, November 9- PM CLASS**  
**Women and the Economy**  
**Ruth Ch 7**

**Friday, November 10- AM CLASS**  
**To be announced**

**Week 3- November 13-17**

**Monday, November 13- AM & PM CLASS**  
**Women and the Media**  
**Ruth, Ch 8**

**Tuesday, November 14- PM CLASS**  
**Women and Violence**  
**Ruth, Ch 5**

**Wednesday, November 15- PM CLASS**  
**The Handmaid's Tale Discussion**  
**Response Paper Due in Class**

**Thursday, November 16- PM CLASS**  
**Feminist Activism: Past, Present and Future**  
**Ruth: Ch 9**

**Friday, November 17- AM CLASS**  
**Exam 2**

**Week 4- November 20-22**

**Monday, November 20- Paper Presentations**

**Tuesday, November 21- Paper Presentations**

**Wednesday, November 22- Paper due by noon!!**