

**WGST 590—Special Topics in Women’s and Gender Studies:
Feminist Theory—Knowledge, Norms, and Praxis
Spring 2020**

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Office Hours: W 3-4pm, T and Th 9-10am, and by appointment when schedules conflict.

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WGST 590 Special Topics in Women’s and Gender Studies (3 credits): This course covers readings and research on selected Women’s and Gender Studies subjects. The course may be repeated for up to nine credits under different topics.

In this iteration of the course, students read feminist accounts and critiques of how we know what we know, as well as how and what we value, and why. We consider how and why we act, and, in light of what we know and value as feminists, how we should act. As a broad overview of feminist theory, the course includes classic works and topics in feminist epistemology (theory of knowledge) and feminist theory / feminism (feminism’s value commitments, as well as its approaches and calls to action).

The course has some content-oriented and skill-oriented **objectives**—namely, to increase participants’

- understanding of key concepts and normative and theoretical commitments employed in feminist theories
- awareness of the relevance of feminist theories for understanding and acting in various spheres of the world, including social relationships, organizations, politics, and the academies
- ability to critically appreciate and constructively criticize texts, structures, processes, and ideas
- ability to articulate and convey ideas clearly and effectively in oral discussion and writing for a variety of audiences

Learning **Outcomes**:

- Employ central concepts from Women’s and Gender Studies to analyze how culture and social institutions shape possibilities for justice in everyday life;
- Evaluate central questions, arguments, theories, and movements in connection to contemporary feminist theories;
- Articulate how intersectionality facilitates an analysis of experiences and cultures and shapes feminist approaches to community action and service;
- Apply research skills and methodologies shaped by the discipline of Women’s and Gender Studies to undertake an original and substantial theoretical or empirical research project.

REQUIREMENTS AND ACTIVITIES

All Readings will be available on Moodle.

Discussion Participation (10%):

Graduate study means learning to learn from every possible source – from your readings, your peers, your life experience, your professors, and your research. Participating in discussions is one of the best ways to learn. You are expected to contribute your questions and insights to the class. I cannot help you learn if you don't participate in discussion, however. Treat your colleagues' contributions with respect (which means taking them seriously and challenging them as well as extending basic courtesies).

Brief Concept Identifications (30%):

Five times over the course of the semester, before the course meeting post on Moodle a Concept Identification (ID) of about 350 words. In these brief but formal writing assignments, you will identify and give the significance of a concept featured in the reading for that class session. A Concept ID answers two questions: *What is it? What of it?* Use these two questions to define the concept and explain why it is important in the theoretical project at hand and in feminist theories more generally. In particular, explain *what the concept helps the theorist and reader to see, say, or show* about the central topic(s) of the reading, and about feminist epistemology, ethics, praxis, or theory more generally.

These Concept IDs will not only help you organize and record your engagement with the readings in preparation for class participation but will also serve as a guide for collective discussions. You should read all the posted Concept IDs each week and provide peer feedback on the post immediately below your own (the last person to post before the deadline should give feedback to the very first poster).

Concept Clarification Essays & Group Presentations (30%):

For two of the sessions, one in the first segment of the course and the other in either of the two other segments of the course, each student must write a somewhat longer (as few as 750 words and absolutely not to exceed 900 words) concept clarification essay on the theme or topic for that week. In addition to identifying and giving the significance of two or more concepts featured in the reading for that class session (along the lines described immediately above), these essays should provide relevant interpretive background or context, evaluate the concepts in terms of the contribution they make to the theorist's project, and comment succinctly on what you found most interesting, important, puzzling, infuriating, controversial, fundamental, exasperating, inspiring, etc., about the concept and its theoretical deployment in the reading.

For most of the sessions, a small group of course participants (the people who chose that week as one of the two sessions for which to prepare a concept clarification essay) will be *collectively* responsible for presenting and facilitating discussion of salient background/context, key concepts, and controversies from the readings. The presentations will formally occupy the first hour of the appropriate session, should stimulate discussion, and may, of course, run longer than

60 minutes. Groups will receive a collective grade for the presentation. The criteria for evaluation (peers and instructors will evaluate) are effectiveness of the presentation in conveying important points from the reading and stimulating useful discussion, and apparent equity in preparation among the group members.

Presentations may be in any format. Especially strong presentations

- incorporate the written comments from other students,
- structure small-group interaction around a set of discussion questions, topics, or specific texts,
- very briefly present background on the theorist(s) and the central debate(s) the theorist(s) address (with a tight focus on connections between biography or historical background and central theoretical concepts or developments),
- and/or otherwise build on the assumption that everyone has completed the readings.

Final Theoretical Essay (20%):

In the last few weeks of the semester, we will dedicate some time in each session to developing final essays. Final essays, which are due the last week of the semester, should demonstrate your engagement with the topic, themes, and skills of the seminar. The essay is a substantial piece of scholarly work (2500-3000 words) that revises and extends your earlier Concept IDs, essays, and presentations into an essay that clarifies two or three central concepts from theories of sexuality and gender in order to articulate or contribute to a disciplinary or interdisciplinary theoretical puzzle, problem, or debate that is especially interesting or relevant to your own research.

Your final essay should fulfill one of the purposes of theory (we will identify and discuss these throughout the semester). You may focus on social diagnosis of some vexed aspect society susceptible to analysis using feminist theory. Or you can clarify concepts, propositions, and frameworks in the interest of guiding and framing empirical inquiry (think of this as the theory section of a proposal, manuscript, or doctoral qualifying examination question response). Or you can contribute to the exegetical theoretical tradition in feminist theory, especially with a focus on the issues of epistemology, ethics, and praxis that form the three substantive segments of the course. Whatever purpose of feminist theory you aim to fulfill, you should choose two or at most three concepts you find particularly intriguing, potentially useful, puzzling, or important (explain which concept you pick and why in the introduction to your essay). Carefully describe, explain, contextualize, and assess the ways at least two of the theorists we read this semester define and use it. Bring the ideas of feminist theorists into dialog with each other and with your intrigue, confusion, or need, and work to clarify the concept (what it means, why there are debates about it, what good it might do for disciplinary and interdisciplinary feminist endeavors) for a peer audience.

Peer Review (10%):

For 5 of the weeks in which you are not presenting (this may or may not include the 5 sessions for which you post a brief Concept ID), you will download, comment on, and bring to class (in hard copy) the Concept ID posted after you (if you are the last person to post before the deadline, comment on whoever posted first).

In addition, each participant will be responsible for reading and providing written and oral comments on the draft project of at least one fellow participant. This will be your opportunity to provide supportive-yet-critical feedback to your colleagues at a crucial stage in the development of their projects. Hand in your colleague's comments with the final version of your own project.

The grading scale is:

(A) 90-100: Exceptional quality of work meets assignment requirements and demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of class concepts and arguments in the assigned texts. Regular attendance and actively engaged presence in the classroom.

(B+) 87-89; (B) 80-86: Very strong quality of work conforming to assignment requirements and demonstrating a solid grasp of class concepts and arguments in assigned readings, though there is room for improvement. Regular attendance and engaged presence in the classroom.

(C+) 77-79; (C) 70-76: Work meets assignment requirements and demonstrates basic understanding of class concepts and assigned readings. Regular attendance though not fully engaged with class.

(D+) 67-69; (D) 60-66: Work does not meet assignment requirements or engage with class concepts or readings. Sporadic attendance with limited class engagement. Typically, missing assignments.

(F) Below 60: Fails to meet minimum course requirements: i.e. does not attend class or submit assignments.

GUIDELINES AND GROUND RULES

1. Attendance and Participation

Attendance and participation are required. You may miss 2 class sessions without any questions asked. Each additional unexcused absence will move your final grade down by 1%. If you are absent for more than 25% of the scheduled class sessions, you will automatically fail this class per CCU policy. If you have to miss a class, it is your responsibility to talk with a classmate and share notes. You will be able to find all assignments on Moodle. I only accept late work that has received my prior approval. Work that is handed in late will have 1/3 of a letter deducted for each day that it is late. Conferences with me count as class meetings; missing a conference is like missing a class.

2. Time

All of our time is valuable. Excessive or continuous lateness will not be tolerated; if you are more than 15 minutes late on three separate occasions, I will count them as one absence.

3. Academic Integrity and Honesty

Plagiarism or cheating will not be tolerated and will be reported to the Academic Integrity Office. The penalty for academic dishonesty will be automatic failure for the assignment and possibly immediate failure of the class. Examples of plagiarism and cheating include: Using sources without proper citations, submitting another person's work as your own, submitting the same assignment for multiple classes. For more information, see the Student Code of Conduct.

4. Electronic Devices

Please turn off (NOT on vibrate) all cell phones and other electronic devices that might distract you before class. Texting during our session will not be tolerated as it shows disrespect to your instructor and your classmates.

5. Title IX

It is CCU policy to prohibit discrimination on the basis of age, color, disability, gender, national origin, race, religion, sex or veteran's status in regard to the administration of all campus programs, services and activities including intercollegiate athletics, and the admission of students, employment actions, or other sponsored activities. CCU faculty, staff, and students with inquiries concerning Title IX broadly or regarding allegations of discrimination or grievances concerning Title IX are encouraged to contact email titleix@coastal.edu or call 843-349-2382. Please be aware that the instructor is required by law to report any mentioning of sexual violence to the Title IX coordinator.

6. Students with Special Needs and Disability Services

In recognition that people learn in a variety of ways and that learning is influenced by multiple resources to support student success are available on campus. CCU is committed to equitable access and inclusion of individuals with disabilities in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Individuals seeking reasonable accommodations should contact Accessibility & Disability Services (843-349-2503 or disability@coastal.edu). If you have other personal, health, or family issues/needs that could affect your performance in class, please see me so that we are in communication about these issues before adverse circumstances arise.

7. Single Stop Resources for Students

Coastal Carolina University cares about your success and well-being. The following resources may help you navigate a challenging situation and get the help you need to continue your studies and, ultimately, to graduate: <https://www.coastal.edu/sai/singlestop/>.

8. Course Content Disclaimer

In this course, students may be required to read texts or view materials that they may consider offensive. All ideas are to be examined in the context of intellectual inquiry of the sort encountered at the university level. Course materials are selected for their relevance to Women's and Gender Studies.

9. Feedback

I am interested in hearing from you. Don't hesitate to e-mail me, leave a note in my box, or see me during office hours to talk about what works and what doesn't.

A Note on Reading:

Active reading is essential to your success (and enjoyment) in this course. You should be reading with a pen in hand, taking notes in the margins and underlining words as you read. Your comments will provide you with a record of your own initial response to the reading, which is invaluable as you prepare for discussion and your reflections. Be sure to read when your

concentration is at its peak. Read and re-read. Take note of any phrases/passages that confused you – chances are that if you didn't understand, someone else in the class didn't, either! So don't be shy about asking for help.

SEMINAR SESSIONS: TOPICS AND READINGS

(Note: This schedule is preliminary and may be subject to modifications)

Session 1: Introduction to each other and the course, some discussion of approaches, objectives, expectations, and ideas

KNOWING

Experiencing, knowing, speaking—construction of knowledge and knowers, reading of texts—occupying a standpoint, speaking for self and others

Session 2: Intersectionality and its discontents, part I

- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color, *Stanford Law Review*, 1991; 43(6): 1241-1299.
- Choo, Hae Yeon & Ferree, Myra Marx. Practicing Intersectionality in Sociological Research: A Critical Analysis of Inclusions, Interactions, and Institutions in the Study of Inequalities, *Sociological Theory*, 2010; 28(2): 129-149.
- Cho, Sumi, Crenshaw, Kimberlé Williams, & McCall, Leslie. Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis, *Signs*, 2013; 38(4): 785-810.

Session 3: Intersectionality, part II

- McCall, Leslie. The complexity of intersectionality, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 2005; 30(3): 1771-1800.
- Davis, Kathy. Intersectionality as Buzzword: A sociology of science perspective on what makes a feminist theory successful, *Feminist Theory*, 2008; 9(1): 67–85.
- Bilge, Sirma. Intersectionality Undone: Saving Intersectionality from Feminist Intersectionality Studies, *Du Bois Review*, 2013; 10(2): 405–424.

Session 4: Standpoint theory

- Collins, Patricia Hill. Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 1989; 14(4): 745-773.
- Hartsock, Nancy. The Feminist Standpoint: Toward a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism, *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives*, Eds. C.R. McCann.
- Narayan, Uma. The Project of Feminist Epistemology: Perspectives from a Nonwestern Feminist, *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*, New York: Routledge, 2004, 213-224.

Resources and recommendations

- Thomas, Kendall. Strange Fruit, *Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality*, Ed. T. Morrison, New York:

Pantheon Books, 1992, 364-389.

- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. Whose Story is It, Anyway? Feminist and Antiracist Appropriations of Anita Hill, *Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality*, Ed. T. Morrison, New York: Pantheon Books, 1992, 402-40.
- Young, Iris Marion. Breasted Experience, *Throwing Like a Girl: And Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990, 189-209.

Session 5: Intersectionality and its discontents, part III

- Nash, Jennifer C. Feminist originalism: Intersectionality and the politics of reading, *Feminist Theory*, 2016; 17(1) 3–20.
- Puar, Jasbir. I'd Rather be a Cyborg Than A Goddess. 2011. Available at <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0811/puar/en>

Session 6: Reason, impartiality, power, hierarchy, and dyadic reasoning

- Young, Iris Marion. The Ideal of Impartiality, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990, 96-105.
- Jaggar, Alison M. Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology, *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing*, Eds. A. Jaggar, S. Bordo, Rutgers University Press, 1989, 145-171.

Session 7: Speaking for others

- Alcoff, Linda. The Problem of Speaking for Others, *Cultural Critique* Winter 1991-1992; 5-32.
- Narayan, Uma. Essence of Culture and a Sense of History, *Decentering the Center: Philosophy for a Multicultural, Postcolonial, and Feminist World*, Eds. U. Narayan, S. Harding, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000, 80-100.
- Butler, Judith. Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory, *Theatre Journal*, 1988; 40(4): 519-531.
- Lloyd, Moya. *Judith Butler: From Norms to Politics*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007, 1-48.

Resources and recommendations

- West, Candace, Zimmerman, Don H. Doing Gender, *Gender and Society*, 1987; 1(2): 125-151.
- Haslanger, Sally. *On Being Objective and Being Objectified, Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2012, 35-82.

Session 8: Autonomy, agency, and identity

- Lloyd, Moya. *Judith Butler: From Norms to Politics*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007, 49-77 (esp. 54-66).
- Young, Iris Marion. Five Faces of Oppression, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990, 39-65.
- Wong (Lau), Kathleen. Working Through Identity: Understanding Class in the Context of Race, Ethnicity, and Gender, *Our Voices: Essays in Culture, Ethnicity, and Communication*,

4th ed., Eds. A. Gonzalez, M Houston, V. Chen, New York: Oxford University Press, 256-263.

VALUING

Caring in the context of justice and injustice, and within chosen and “found” relationships

Session 9: Ethics of care, autonomy, responsibility, and ethical structures for ethical action

- Tronto, Joan C. *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*, New York: Routledge, 1993, 61-156.
- Peterson, Karin E., Weldon, Alice A. Motherhood Status and the Limits of Flexibility: Recognition and Invisibility among Women Faculty at a Public Liberal Arts University *Feminist Activism in Academia: Essays on Personal, Political and Professional Change*, Eds. E. Mayock, D. Radulescu, Jefferson NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2010, 160-175.

Resources and recommendations

- Gilligan, Carol. *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, reissue edition 1993.
- Benhabib, Seyla. The Generalized and the Concrete Other, *Feminism As Critique: On the Politics of Gender (Exxon Lecture Series)*, Eds. S. Benhabib, D. Cornell, University of Minnesota Press, 1987, 148-171.

SPRING BREAK No class session

Session 10: Conceptualizing and seeking justice: What we care about when we care about justice

- Young, Iris Marion. Displacing the Distributive Paradigm, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990, 15-38.
- Young, Iris Marion. The Ideal of Impartiality, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990, 106-121.
- Fraser, Nancy. From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a ‘Post-Socialist’ Age *New Left Review*, 1995; 212(July/August): 68-93.
- Smith, Anna Marie. Missing Poststructuralism, Missing Foucault: Butler and Fraser on Capitalism and the Regulation of Sexuality, *Precarious Politics: Critical Encounters*, New York: Routledge, 2008, 79-91.

Resources and recommendations

- Okin, Susan Moller. Justice and Gender, *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 1987; 16(1): 42-72.
- Okin, Susan Moller. Reason and Feeling in Thinking about Justice, *Ethics*, 1989; 99(2): 229-249.

Session 11: Relationships of intimacy: structural constraints, structures and acts of resistance

- Clarke, Cheryl. An Act of Resistance, *This Bridge Called My Back*, Eds. C. Moraga & G. Anzaldwa, New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1981, 128-137.
- Richardson, Diane. Constructing Lesbian Sexualities, *Modern Homosexualities*, Ed. K. Plummer, London: Routledge, 1992, 187-199.
- Calhoun, Cheshire. Separating Lesbian Theory from Feminist Theory, *Ethics*, 1994; 104(3): 558-581.

Resources and recommendations

- Collins, Patricia Hill. Black Women's Love Relationships, *Black Feminist Thought*, 2nd ed., New York: Routledge, 2000, 161-186.
- Okin, Susan Moller. Vulnerability by Marriage, *Justice, Gender, and the Family*, New York: Basic Books, 1989, 134-169.

Session 12: Equality, difference, and human rights

- Young, Iris Marion. Social Movements and the Politics of Difference, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990, 156-191.
- Nussbaum, Martha C. Human Capabilities, Female Human Beings, *Women Culture, and Development: A Study of Human Capabilities*, Eds. MC Nussbaum & J Glover, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, 61-104.
- Okin, Susan Moller. Feminism, Women's Human Rights, and Cultural Differences, *Hypatia*, 1998; 13(2): 32-52.

Session 13: Privilege and what to do about it

- Young, Iris Marion. The Myth of Merit, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990, 192-225, read pages 192-206.
- Bailey, Alison. Locating Traitorous Identities, *Decentering the Center: Philosophy for a Multicultural, Postcolonial, and Feminist World*, Eds. U. Narayan, S. Harding, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000, 283-298.

Session 14: Feminist approaches and activism in the disciplines and classroom

- LeBlanc, Robin M. Teaching to Spite Your Body. *Feminist Activism in Academia: Essays on Personal, Political and Professional Change*, Eds. E. Mayock, D. Radulescu, Jefferson, NC:McFarland Press, 2010, 45-60.
- Boisvert, Jennifer A. Feminist Mentorship in the Academy. *Feminist Activism in Academia: Essays on Personal, Political and Professional Change*, Eds. E. Mayock, D. Radulescu, Jefferson, NC:McFarland Press, 2010, 78-97.
- Warner, Sara. The Tender Track. *Feminist Activism in Academia: Essays on Personal, Political and Professional Change*, Eds. E. Mayock, D. Radulescu, Jefferson, NC:McFarland Press, 2010, 176-190.

Resources and recommendations

- Christian, Barbara. *The Race for Theory. Feminist Studies*, 1988; 14(1): 67-79.
- Haraway, Donna. *Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Natural Science. New York: Routledge, 1989.*

Last day of class:

DRAFT ESSAYS DUE to peer reviewer. We will spend the class working on peer comments.

Final Exam Day:

Final version of essay due in class.