Feminist Political Theories

Political Science 265  
Winter, 2011  
T-R 8:30-10:20am  
Upjohn Library 305

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Office Hours: M1-4; Th2:30-4

Course Description and Goals

In this course, we will engage critically with a variety of feminist theories that have emerged as women have struggled for social and political change. In the first part of the course we will explore the history and development of feminist thought, touching briefly on first-wave feminism and then concentrating on second-wave feminism. What have been some of the issues over which different groups of feminists have diverged, and what new theoretical dilemmas have begun to emerge? Currently, how do different groups of feminists conceptualize power, freedom, and equality, and how do they envision the just society? In the second half of the course, using various feminist theoretical approaches, we will explore such issues as women’s embodiment and beauty norms, abortion, pornography, violence against women, and the role of the state in advancing feminist goals.

In working through this subject matter, we will learn to identify and evaluate differing theoretical approaches to (gendered) political problems; to examine our own hidden assumptions and form conscious, critical judgments regarding women’s issues; to engage in critical thinking in a collaborative setting; and to perform critical analysis in the written format.

Course Requirements

This course will be demanding. The readings are quite challenging, and you will complete a number of writing assignments over the course of the quarter. Moreover, this is not a lecture course—it is expected that your participation in class will be consistent and thoughtful. Success in this course will require commitment and dedication on your part. If you are not able to make this commitment, I strongly urge you to reconsider taking this course at this time.

- Reading, Class Participation, and Presentations (15%)
You are required to thoughtfully read every assignment. When I say that you are required to read, I do not mean that you should mechanically scan every page, but that you should grapple with the ideas. Make use of the reading questions, mark up your text and read with a pen and paper, and write down ideas, questions, quotations, and points of confusion or contention. Read for comprehension rather than completion. This means that you may need to read a section, think about it, read it again, write about it, discuss it, and then read it again.

To keep on top of the reading, and to fully digest the material, plan for a sufficient amount of time to complete the assignment; also, come to office hours or form reading groups with your classmates. Reading aggressively will assist you in the second requirement: regular attendance, careful preparation, and active participation. Come prepared for participation by doing the reading, reflecting upon the course material, and bringing to class issues, questions, and passages for discussion.

In addition, once or twice during the quarter, in pairs or small groups, you will be responsible for presenting the day’s material to the class and leading class discussion. Detailed instructions will be distributed separately, and your presentation dates will be decided shortly.
- Short Papers (taken together, 20%)
You will turn in 5 short, critical response papers, **each no more than two pages in length.** Excluding Weeks One and Ten, with three additional weeks of your choice excepted, you will turn in a paper every week on *either* Tuesday or Thursday (your choice). The papers will address the readings assigned for that day, and are due at the *beginning* of class. No late papers will be accepted.

In these short papers, you are to engage critically with the day’s reading material. **You must respond to at least two of the day’s readings.** In addition to briefly summarizing what you take to be the main arguments of the articles, you should work toward identifying points of comparison and tension between the readings you’re addressing. Additionally, work toward drawing connections between the day’s readings and other course texts or wider course themes. (Some readings will be very theoretically complex and perhaps the best you can do is provide a summary and a brief comparison; that’s okay. Do the best you can.)

Whatever you do, these papers are not to be thrown together at the last minute, but should reflect your thoughtfulness and commitment to the course. All the best papers follow the rules of grammar and punctuation and are organized well, but in grading the short papers, I will also be looking for evidence that you are keeping up with and struggling to make sense of the readings; that you are trying to think about this course as a unified whole rather than as a series of unrelated topics; and that you are (on some level) taking responsibility for your own education in feminist theory.

- **Long Papers (2 @ 20% each)**

  The two longer papers, each not less than 6 pages in length, provide you with an opportunity to synthesize course material. The first paper will be due Tuesday, February 1. I will distribute the essay question approximately one week before the paper is due. The second paper will address one of the topics addressed in the second half of the course. This paper should begin to answer some set of questions raised in an earlier response paper or during class discussion, and it should offer a critical analysis and synthesis of the readings assigned for that issue. **You will choose which issue you will address at the beginning of the term; your paper will be due one week after we have discussed that topic in class.** For example, if you choose to write on the issue of weight preoccupation, your paper will be due on February 15. Use this flexibility to your advantage by planning ahead! I urge you to pick a due date for yourself that allows you to address a topic you find interesting at a time that is (relatively) convenient for you.

In terms of evaluation, “A” papers stand out—they are clearly superior in form and content. Papers in the “A” range demonstrate an ability to write elegant prose and have virtually no typographical errors; they contain an easily discernible, interesting, original, clearly-stated argument; they are consistent and logical in content; they make superior use of textual support; they engage the subtleties of difficult arguments through coherent textual analysis; and their organization lends flow and structure to the paper. “A” papers demonstrate a clear and imaginative grasp of the material, draw connections between non-obvious points, and go beyond what has been covered in class.

Papers falling into the “B” range have many of the qualities of an “A” paper, but do not stand out from the crowd in the same way. They are “average” in the sense that they contain a developed and coherent argument, and demonstrate an ability to write decent prose. They are organized logically, and while they may contain some writing errors, they still follow the rules of grammar and punctuation. Additionally, a “B” paper might be superior in form but not in content, or vice versa.

Papers falling into the “C” range have some serious flaw in either form or content. For example, they might display significant errors in grammar, punctuation, or organization, impeding your ability to express your thoughts clearly; or, the central argument might be very difficult or impossible to identify; or the basic claims of the argument are left unsupported; or the thesis merely summarizes the material. I will rarely assign a grade lower than a C-. Such a grade indicates that the paper is in some way unacceptable, in which case you should come see me as soon as possible.
• Final Exercise (25%)
The final will be a take-home essay, 6-8 pages in length. The topic is open ended, but it should 1) address a unifying theme of the course 2) synthesize material from throughout the course, 3) address some ongoing theoretical puzzle 4) address a new and interesting questions that has emerged for you from throughout the course. Further details will follow.

Course Policies

• Academic Integrity & the Honor System
Kalamazoo College follows an Honor System, and we will follow those guidelines in this class. All work produced in this course must be your own. The use of sources (ideas, quotations, and paraphrases) must be properly acknowledged and documented. Any violation of academic integrity will result in the automatic failure of the assignment in question, and your violation will be reported to the Dean of Students. You will also be expected to behave with honor. You are an important contributing member of a collective academic enterprise, and you owe it to yourself, your classmates, and your instructor to conduct yourself accordingly. We will strive to be curious, open to new ideas, respectful and cooperative, and committed to scholarship.
To review the Kalamazoo College honor system in full, see http://www.kzoo.edu/studev/honorsystem.htm

• Attendance and Timeliness
Attendance does not formally comprise a portion of your final grade. However, in determining your participation grade, I will take into account your overall contribution to the vitality of the course. Obviously, if you are absent, you cannot participate. Likewise, I expect that you will arrive on time (and I will make every effort to do the same). Arriving late is disruptive and disrespectful, and it will adversely affect your participation grade.

• Accommodations for Students with Disabilities
Any student with a disability who needs an accommodation or other assistance in this course should make an appointment to speak with me as soon as possible.

• Late Assignments & Extensions
You must make arrangements with me ahead of time if you need to turn in an assignment late. No other late assignments will be accepted. If you are experiencing exceptional circumstances (serious illness or crisis, etc.), please contact me before the assignment is due. I do not accept papers via email. All of your assignments must be type-written and STAPLED—seriously.

Required Texts

• Linda Nicholson, The Second Wave
• Lisa Brush, Gender and Governance, optional
• Course Pack, to be purchased at the bookstore. Marked “*” in syllabus.
• Online journal articles/internet sources. Using a college connection, search for the journal title under “online journals at K,” or look for a url or pdf in your email. Marked “E” in syllabus.
• Handouts, distributed occasionally. Marked “***” in the syllabus.

PART I: FEMINIST THEORIES IN POLITICAL and HISTORICAL CONTEXT
Week One: Introduction and The First Wave

Jan. 2 ➤ Re-read syllabus carefully after class!

Jan. 4

The First Wave and “Liberal” Feminism


Week Two: The Second Wave: Early Statements and Marxist Feminism

Jan. 11

Early and Early “Radical” Feminism

E “The Redstockings Manifesto”

Jan. 13

Marxist Feminism

Heidi Hartmann, “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism,” in The Second Wave, 97-122.
Linda Nicholson, “Feminism and Marx,” in The Second Wave, 131-145. OPTIONAL

Week Three: Oppression, Privilege, and Intersectionality

Jan. 18

Oppression and Privilege

E Marilyn Frye, “Oppression”
E Peggy McIntosh, “Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack”

Jan. 20

Black Feminist Thought and Intersectionality


HHHH
**Week Four: Identity and Subjectivity**

**Jan. 25**  
*Psychoanalytic Feminism/Object Relations Theory*


**Jan. 27**  
*Postmodern Feminism*


**PART II: THE POLITICS OF THE BODY to THE BODY POLITIC**

**Week Five: Embodiment and Sexuality**

**Feb. 1**  
*Sex/Gender and the Body*

* Iris Marion Young, “Breasted Experience,” in *Throwing Like a Girl* (Indiana, 1990) 189-208.  
* Iris Marion Young, “Pregnant Embodiment,” in *Throwing Like a Girl*, 160-174.  
* Luce Irigaray, “This Sex Which is Not One,” in *The Second Wave*, 323-329.  
⇒ **First long paper due**

**Feb. 3**  
*The Woman-identified Woman*


**Week Six: Disordered Embodiment**

**Feb. 8**  
*Weight Preoccupation*

Feb. 10  Practices of “Beauty” and Relations of Power


Week Seven: Reproduction

Feb. 15  Pregnancy


Feb. 17  Abortion and Reproductive Freedom


Week Eight: Sex and Violence

Feb. 22  Pornography and Violence against Women


Feb. 24  Rape

* Camille Paglia, “It’s a Jungle Out There, So Get Used to It!,” Utne Reader (Jan./Feb. 1993) 61-65.
Week Nine: Women and the State

Mar. 1  
*Feminism, Power, and the State*


Mar. 3  
*Women and International Human Rights*

Readings TBA

Week Ten: Feminist Futures

Mar. 8  
*A Third Wave?*


Mar. 10  
TBA