



WSGS 101: Introduction to Women's Studies & Gender Studies

Fall 2019

Wednesdays | 9:00-11:30 a.m.

Dr. Mena Mitrano

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Office Hours: Wednesdays, 11:30 a.m-12:30 & by appointment

Course Description

This course provides students with a solid foundation in the feminist tradition of critical thought. It introduces students to Women's and Gender Studies as an interdisciplinary academic field that asks questions about the meanings of sex and gender in culture and society, encouraging reflection on intersections of gender with race, ethnicity, power, identity, and resistance. The aim of the course is to give students effective theoretical tools to assess and appreciate the shaping influence of feminist thought on a variety of disciplinary fields, including language, literature, psychoanalysis, philosophy, visual studies, and media studies. In order to familiarize students with key issues, questions and debates in Women's and Gender Studies, both historical and contemporary, and offer a clear sense of the field's development and of its transformations, this survey of core concepts is organized around influential thinkers and emphasizes major critical turns in the field, from second wave women's rights activism to Queer Theory and beyond. Ultimately, students are encouraged to consider how the investigation of the meaning of sex, gender, and sexuality might enhance our capacity to "read" the present and deal with its challenges. Required readings include the writings of Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, Judith Butler, Carla Lonzi, Eve K. Sedgwick, Maggie Nelson, and one of the special features of the course is the use of archival material, especially feminist photography, from the Sophia Smith Collection at Smith College, one of the best internationally renowned archives of women's history.

The course is divided into three parts: Feminist Genealogies; Gender/sexuality/bodies; Queer Theory. In part one, students will encounter first-hand the powerful work of Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde and Gloria Anzaldúa, activists, thinkers, feminist philosophers who, because of their innovative output and their experimental lives have left an indelible mark on the field, and may be considered as its founders. Part II deals with the critical turn after identity politics, with feminist philosopher Judith Butler and the notion performativity, which resulted from her questioning of the unified subject "women" and of the sex/gender boundary. One of the unique features of the course is that students have the opportunity to study Butler in conjunction with lesser studied but internationally renowned work of Italian feminist theorist Carla Lonzi (*Let's Spit on Hegel*). Making the most of our campus location in Rome, students will have the opportunity to visit Carla Lonzi's archive, recently established at Galleria d'Arte Moderna. If Part I and II help us understand how gendered structures of power and authority operate, building on this work Part III introduces the critical turn toward Queer Theory as an example of the formation and success of movements that envision gender and sexuality in more expansive, fluid or egalitarian ways. We examine the

challenge of these movement to the notion of identity and their call for a revised lexicon of modernity. Through the pioneering work of Eve K. Sedgwick, this section examines Queer Theory not only in relation to practices of reading and pedagogy but also in connection with empathy and psychoanalysis. Finally, Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts*, a moving, genre-defying work introduces discussion of transgender identity and ultimately raises the radical question and the inadequacy of the notion of identity itself, opening up new meanings of love and family.

Each class meeting comprises a lecture part followed by an active learning session.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Eve K. Sedgwick, *A Dialogue on Love* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000) ISBN: 978-0807029237

Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 2016. Reprint.
ISBN: 978-1555977351

"Introduction to Women's Studies & Gender Studies: A Reader ": a collection of materials especially selected by Prof. Mitrano for the students of the John Felice Rome Center. A copy will be made available in print version in the library; materials will also be available on Sakai.

COURSE OBJECTIVES/LEARNING OUTCOMES:

Upon successful completion of this course, students should be able to:

1. Understand and engage with central debates in the field of Women's and Gender Studies.
2. Have a clear grasp of the general development of the field and of its transformative moments.
3. Define and apply basic terms and concepts central to this field.
4. Discuss gender issues effectively, in both writing and speech, drawing upon both primary and secondary sources in Women's and Gender Studies scholarship and addressing a public audience.
5. Apply concepts and theories of Women's and Gender Studies to illuminate the key concerns of contemporary culture.

REQUIREMENTS:

Midterm exam, final exam, a final research paper, and a power point presentation on the research

paper (5-7). MLA Stylesheet. Print version; typed; spacing: 1,5. Paper topics to be discussed with the instructor.

ATTENDANCE POLICY:

Please note that course attendance is based on prompt class attendance, preparation and active participation in class discussions.

In accordance with the JFRC mission to promote a higher level of academic rigor, all courses adhere to the following absence policy. Prompt attendance, preparation and active participation in course discussions are expected from every student.

- For all classes meeting once a week, students cannot incur more than one unexcused absence.
- For all classes meeting twice a week, students cannot incur more than two unexcused absences.
- For all classes meeting three times a week, students cannot incur more than two unexcused absences.

This course meets once a week, thus a total of one unexcused absence will be permitted. **Unexcused absences beyond these will result in 1% lowering of the final course grade, for every absence after the “approved limit”.**

EVALUATION:

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| • Participation and oral presentation | 30 % |
| • Midterm and Final exam | 30 % |
| • Final Project | 40 % |

GRADING:

94-100: A

90-93: A-

87-89: B+

84-86: B

80-83: B-

77-79: C+

74-76: C

70-73: C-

67-69: D+

60-66: D

59 or lower: F

Late work: minus one grade.

ACADEMIC HONESTY:



Sept. 18

Week 4 Sept. 25	Audre Lorde	Gloria Anzaldúa, from <i>This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color</i> (2015, 4th edition), "Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers"; from <i>Borderlands/La Frontera. The New Mestiza</i> (1987), chapters 1 (The Homeland), 2 (Movimientos de rebeldía y las culturas que traicionan/My Rebellion), 5 (How to Tame a Wild Tongue)
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Week 5 Oct. 2	Gloria Anzaldúa	Teresa de Lauretis. "The Technology of Gender"(pp. 1-30), from <i>Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction</i> (1987)
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Week 6 Oct. 9	Mid-term	Judith Butler, from <i>Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity</i> (1990): ch. 1 (Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire), ch. 3 (Subversive Bodily Acts)
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PART II: GENDER/SEXUALITY/BODIES

Week 7 Oct. 16	Judith Butler I	Judith Butler, from <i>Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'</i> (1993), "Bodies that Matter" pp. 23-55); from <i>The Psychic Life of Power: Theories of Subjection</i> (1997), "Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification"
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Week 8 Oct. 23	Judith Butler II	Carla Lonzi, <i>Let's Spit on Hegel</i> (1977)
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Week 9 Oct. 30	Judith Butler/Carla Lonzi	Eve K. Sedgwick, <i>Paranoid reading and reparative reading, or, you're so paranoid, you probably think this essay is about you</i> (1997) Eve K. Sedgwick, <i>A Dialogue on Love</i> (2000), first half
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PART III: QUEER THEORY

Week 10 Nov. 6	Eve K. Sedgwick	Sedgwick, <i>A Dialogue on Love</i> (2000), second half
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Week 11 Nov. 13	Maggie Nelson	Maggie Nelson, <i>The Argonauts</i> (2015), first half
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Week 12 Nov. 20	Student Presentations on final project	Maggie Nelson, <i>The Argonauts</i> (2015) second half
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Week 13 Nov. 27	Student Presentations on final project	Work on your final project
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Week 14 Dec. 3	Final research project Due. Pre-final review	Final exam preview
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Week 15 Dec. 11	Final Exam.	
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