

WST 135I-01
Introduction to Women's and Gender Studies

Jim Messerschmidt
Spring 2008

OFFICE: 1 Chamberlain
PHONE: 780-4753/ e-mail: mschmidt@usm.maine.edu
Women's Studies Office: 780-4289
OFFICE HOURS: By appointment

CLASS: Wednesday 4:10-6:40pm/PS 208
Wednesday 7:00-8:30pm/Portland Library, Events Room, 7th Floor

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course explores from a variety of perspectives the following inter-related themes and topics: the economic, political, and social status of women and men and in discrete cultural contexts; the politics of gender representation, or how ideas of femininity and masculinity are promoted throughout the media and other vehicles of culture; the construction of "consciousness," both through the media and through feminist tactics; women, men, and collective action in the past, present, and future.

II. COURSE OBJECTIVES

Students successfully completing Introduction to Women's Studies will be able to demonstrate the following competencies both orally and in writing:

- Students can identify key historical and political events affecting women, key texts of/by women, and key figures in the emergence of feminist scholarship in the U.S. and the world;
- Students can define, discuss, and explain key concepts in feminist scholarship including: patriarchy, misogyny, sex/gender, difference, essentialism, social construction, and agency;
- Students can give examples of erasures and affirmations of women's voices/subjectivities in western and non-western cultures;
- Students can distinguish among contrasting perspectives on feminism in the U.S. and in other regions;
- Students can critique cultural representations of women, femininity, men, and masculinity.

III. REQUIRED READINGS

Books

Taylor, Whittier, and Rupp *Feminist Frontiers*
Pascoe, *Dude, You're a Fag*

IV. COURSE WORK

We will be engaged in a variety of tasks in this course: reading the two texts; class participation; taking exams; and writing "reflection" papers. Let's look closer at each of these so you will know what I expect of you in this course.

Reading Assignments

You will find the reading schedule further below in this syllabus. However, do not just read the assignments—react to them, write comments and questions, and list what you consider to be the main points. Do not take everything the authors say at face value. I have purposely chosen materials to challenge you, make the authors prove what they say. All of this will help you prepare for class, for the exams, and for your “reflection” papers. You will be expected to read the assignments before coming to class (reading assignments are clearly indicated in the course outline), and come prepared to engage in discussion. This class preparation will make everything easier and more interesting for you, other students, and me.

Class Participation

All students are responsible for active class participation. Do not just listen to others talk! Class participation refers to physical attendance, asking questions, reacting to what others say (including me!), and expressing your own opinions. Evaluation of class participation is based on attendance and consistency and quality (not quantity) of engagement in class discussions. I will lower or raise your grade (e.g. "B+" to "C+") based on your class participation.

Exams (75 points)

An exam will be given on February 13th, March 19th, and April 30th. These exams (which may consist of any combination of essay, multiple choice and true/false questions) will cover all class discussions and assigned reading material up to the time of each particular exam. Each exam will be worth 25 points for a maximum number of combined exam points of 75.

Make-ups

Only documented emergencies or approved arrangements made with me well in advance of an exam or class attendance will be accepted. Students who do not show up for class without prior approval or documentation of an emergency will receive 0 points for the exam.

Reflection Papers (25 points)

Each member of the class will write eight “reflection papers” (each paper is worth 3 points except for the final paper, which is worth 4 points) that critically examine the Wednesday evening sessions listed below. The reflection papers are intended to help you synthesize and integrate ideas from different course readings, your personal experiences, and the Wednesday evening presentations. Each paper should be no longer than two typed pages (double-spaced, in a standard font size). Reflection papers are due at the time of class on the Wednesday immediately following an evening session. This is a strict deadline and no excuses, such as a computer malfunction, will be allowed. The papers must be properly referenced (with a bibliography) and be structured in the following way:

- I. **Summary:** Thoroughly summarize the evening presentation, discussing specifically what you consider to be its main points and conclusions. Show me that you actually attended the presentation!
- II. **Your Reflection:** A presentation of your ideas about the presentation in light of your personal experiences and the required readings for the class. How do the readings, your personal experiences, and the presentation compare? How are they

similar/different? Do the readings, your personal experiences, and the presentation contradict or complement each other? In other words, construct a dialogue between the readings, your personal experiences, and the presentation.

- III. **Conclusion:** A summarization of what was presented in the paper and any conclusions you can draw from it.

To receive the maximum number of points, you must write all eight papers and each “reflection” must be clear, persuasive, well-documented, and imaginative. There should be no misspelled words or grammatical errors.

Letter Grade

Your letter grade for the course will be determined by the number of points you have accumulated by the end of the semester and your class participation. The total number of possible points are:

Exams	75 points
Reflection Papers	<u>25 points</u>
TOTAL	100 points

The following scale is the approximate number of points necessary for each letter grade.

- A - 90-100 points
- B - 80- 89 points
- C - 70- 79 points
- D - 60- 69 points
- F - < 60 points

Incompletes If you need to obtain an incomplete for the course, simply let me know as soon as possible.

I look forward to a challenging and stimulating semester. Get involved, express your opinions, and do your work.

MINIMUM GRADE REQUIREMENT: A grade of C or better is required in order to use this course for Women’s Studies major/minor credit.

ACADEMIC SUPPORT INFORMATION: If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible. At any point in the semester, if you encounter difficulty with the course or feel you could be performing at a higher level, consult with me. Students experience difficulty in courses for a variety of reasons. For problems with writing skills or time management, make an appointment to see a student tutor at the Academic Support Center, 242 Luther Bonney (780-4470). Help is also available through the Counseling Center, 106 Payson Smith (780-4050) and the Disabled Student Services, 237 Luther Bonney Hall. (780-4706).

V. COURSE OUTLINE

January 16 – Introduction

January 23 – Diversity and Difference

Readings:

Section One

Evening Presentation 1: “The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter.”

January 30 – Theoretical Perspectives

Readings:

Section Two

February 6 – Representation, Language, and Culture

Readings:

Section Three

Pascoe, Chapters 1 and 2

Evening Presentation 2: “CUT: Teens and Self Injury.”

February 13 – Exam #1

February 20 – Winter Break

February 27 – Socialization

Readings:

Section Four

Pascoe, Chapter 3

March 5 – Work

Readings:

Section Five

Evening Presentation 3: “Race and Gender in New England’s Past: Remembering Harriet Wilson.”

March 12 – Families

Readings:

Section Six

Evening Presentation 4: “Labor Feminism and the Future of Women’s Rights.”

March 19 – Exam #2

Evening Presentation 5: “Telling Somalis’ Stories: Where We Come From, Why We’re Here.”

March 26 – Spring Break

April 2 – Sexualities

Readings:

Section Seven

Pascoe, Chapter 4

Evening Presentation 6: “By Invitation Only.”

April 9 – Bodies

Readings:

Section Eight

Pascoe, Chapter 5

Evening Presentation 7: “The Life and Traditions of the Red Man: History as Told by Native Peoples.”

April 16 – Violence Against Women

Readings:

Section Nine

Pascoe, Chapter 6

Evening Presentation 8: “Singing and Swinging with Del Rey.”

April 23 – Global Politics, the State and Social Protest

Readings:

Sections Ten and Eleven

April 30 – Exam #3

