

**Womyn's Studies (WS 3000)**  
**Spring 2000**

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**Texts:** Feminist Issues: Race, Class and Sexuality (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). Edited by Nancy Mandell.

Thinking Critically about Research on Sex and Gender (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). By Paula J. Caplan and Jeremy B. Caplan.

**Course Description:** Feminism and how it engages questions of identity, difference, sexuality, agency, and community will be explored. The focus of the course will be on practical discussion of how feminist theorizing can inform day-to-day challenges of living with what postmodernism calls 'the current crisis of representation'. The course will introduce students to the basic concepts, theories and major debates within feminism. Through class lectures, projects and discussion, students will have an opportunity to explore the shared and diverse aspects of womyn's experiences. The primary focus of the course surrounds issues of gender as a social, cultural and political construct and how Womyn's Studies as an academic discipline challenges the methods, theories and knowledge of traditional disciplines.

The specific topics covered in this course are: Feminist theory; Sexism in language; Silenced and forgotten womyn (race, poverty and disability); Lesbian and queer theory; Beauty, status and aging; Womyn's response to pornography; Psychology of womyn; Violence against womyn; Sexual harassment; Men in feminism; Feminism and the law; Womyn's herstory; Womyn's work and family lives; Womyn in the educational system; Womyn in art, music and literature; Womyn and health; Womyn and spirituality; Feminist critique of science especially research on sex and gender; Political activism.

**Course Objectives:** It is hoped you will find this course interesting, challenging and fun. As we explore current issues in Womyn's Studies we will also be developing our reflection and communication skills so that we can better express and defend our views on issues we care about. Discussion will play a central role in our learning together and the course therefore requires your active commitment and participation. You will be expected to attend class regularly and to take an active part in our learning together. Your final mark will reflect your participation in terms of attendance, preparedness, and contributions to the discussion. Each week you will need to complete a set of readings and develop questions and responses that will guide our discussion in class. You will also take responsibility for introducing and leading discussion on a topic.

Because the issues we will be discussing are complex and controversial, there are bound to be many different opinions about them. An important ground rule for the course, then, is a commitment from all participants to help build a respectful learning environment where we are comfortable expressing our views and can learn from one another. You are encouraged to keep an open mind, allow for the exchange of views, and respect opposing viewpoints. Such an attitude is critical to maintaining a conducive learning environment.

One of the difficult aspects of this course is that we will be acknowledging that one of the mechanisms of structural inequality (whether it is sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism or ableism) is that we are all systematically taught misinformation about others and ourselves. Thus, be aware that the issues confronted in the course will affect some of us deeply and personally.

**Evaluation:**

Exam #1	May 8	15%
Exam #2	May 15	20%
Exam #3	May 23	20%
Journal #1	May 4	5%
Journal #2	May 11	5%
Journal #3	May 18	5%
Class participation	Daily	10%
Reading presentations	As assigned	10%
Quilt assignment	May 10	5%
Outrageous act	May 16, 17, 18	5%

Exams will consist of take home short answer/short essay questions pertaining to that week's topics and discussion items. Responses should not be more than 5 pages in length and preferably typed and double-spaced. I am most familiar with APA format but you may use any format you wish (if it is required) as long as it is consistently used. You may choose to use sources other than the textbooks for this course. The exams are meant to be both scholarly and personal in the sense that it should contain your own viewpoint as well as indicate an understanding of course concepts and theories. All materials covered in class, readings, videos and guest lectures are subject to examination.

Journal entries should be made everyday there is a class or more often if you desire. In your journal entry I would like you to do some personal reflection on the days class discussion as well as personal reflection on the assigned readings for the next day's class. There is no right or wrong way to answer but I am looking for some evidence that you have considered how the topic at hand relates to your personal life in some way. Remember that a key concept in this course is that the 'personal is political'. On occasion I may also present some questions for you to consider and reflect on in your journaling. To give you some guideline spend at least 20 minutes but no more than 30 minutes just doing some free-form reflection on the day's topic. Grammar, sentence structure etc. will not be graded. You may type your journal submissions but neatly written submissions will also be accepted. As most of the issues are highly personal, consider the types of responses you are willing to share with me. I can assure you that I consider your journals confidential material and no eyes will read your responses other than mine. At the same time, I do not want to force you to share experiences you would rather not disclose. Please feel free to ask me to share my experiences as they relate to any of the assignments. I would not expect you to consider any topic that I am not willing to discuss. Don't be afraid to carefully examine what you believe and why you believe what you believe. Most important, remember the journals are really for your benefit, not mine, so use them to meet your needs. You can also use the journal activity to help you prepare for the next day's discussion by coming up with focus questions or comments on the assigned readings.

The quilt assignment is designed to help us remember or learn about and honor our historical foremothers. You will be asked to find a womyn from history (either from your own personal history or from our shared public history) that you admire. For this assignment you will be given a square blank piece of paper or quilt block on which you should put the womyn's name, some description of who she was and what she means to you or why you chose her. Please have fun with this project and make it as colorful and creative as you like using symbols that represent who she was and what she means to you. We will be creating a giant quilt on the wall of the classroom to honor and remember these special foremothers. Come prepared to discuss your chosen foremother. The quilt metaphor was chosen to remind us how our foremothers expressed their creativity and artistic natures by making practical items beautiful. The metaphor of the quilt block or patch also serves to remind us how our knowledge of womyn's historical lives is often sketchy and incomplete. Thus, every scrap of information is a precious part of our shared heritage.

The Outrageous act is designed to reflect the spirit of Gloria Steinem's essay "Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions. You are asked here to perform a positive, 'pro-womyn' act that represents for you something you might not have done prior to this course. You will be required to submit a short (1 - 2 page) paper and do a short 5 minute class presentation describing the act, explaining why it was 'liberating' for you, analyzing your feelings afterward and the reactions of people affected by it. Your outrageous act must not be harmful to yourself or to others and it must be legal! You may choose to do your liberating act with other class members if you like but each of you must submit an individual paper and each must contribute to the class presentation.

Penalties for late items will be one stanine score off the grade for each day it is late. For example, if the assignment grades a 7 your grade will be a 6 for one day late. Academic misconduct and plagiarism are taken very seriously and are punishable in a variety of ways. For more information on the penalties that can be imposed please see page 33 of the current college calendar.

#### **Guidelines for Required Readings and Class Presentations:**

Each of you will take responsibility for the presentation and leading of discussion of a couple of readings throughout the course. You will read the assigned reading for that day, synthesize the arguments and ideas and present your findings to the class to provide us with an overview of the issue, the nature of the debate and what feminist analysis brings to the topic. As there are many of us in the class you will be sharing that responsibility with each other. It is hoped that this will allow you to develop your knowledge about a particular topic and will also give you experience in communicating your ideas. You may also refer to outside sources if you wish. The library currently has many good books on womyn's studies and we also have the journal *Canadian Woman Studies*. The following are some general guidelines you may wish to consider in preparing your presentation.

1. **Description:** What is the story here? What is this article/book talking about? Give a brief description of the contents of the material.
2. **Interesting Observations:** Are there any insights of personal interest to you? Why?
3. **Central Arguments:** Some articles focus mainly on a detailed description of issues and events. Many will go beyond description, taking a position or outlining the various positions (and critiques of them) taken by others. In most cases, writers tend to identify with a particular position which they consider to carry the most persuasive argument(s). You should try and identify the positions taken and the arguments behind them.
4. **Strengths of Analysis:** What are the main points that give persuasion to the writer's analysis? Often, these points may include (or be supported by) critiques of other positions, evidence, examples and suggestions. You should be able to identify these points.
5. **Weaknesses of Analysis:** You should be able to 'weigh' what is presented before you: how realistic are the arguments, evidence or examples? Are the issues identified sufficiently addressed? When writers present their ideas, they do not often cover 'all the bases.' What do you think may have been left out?

6. **Your Position:** In many cases, your inquiry may end with #5, but a critical reading of some issues may challenge you to take a position. You do not have to take a position but you should consider how the topic and theory relates to your own life.

**Course Schedule:**

**Week 1**

- May 1            Feminist Theories  
                    Mandell Chapter 1  
                    Caplan Chapter 1
- May 2            Silenced and Forgotten Womyn  
                    Mandell Chapter 2  
                    Caplan Chapter 2
- May 3            Lesbian and Queer Theory  
                    Mandell Chapter 3  
                    Caplan Chapter 3
- May 4            Beauty, Status and Aging  
                    Mandell Chapter 4  
                    Caplan Chapter 4  
                    • Journal #1 due

**Week 2**

- May 8            Psychology of Womyn  
                    Mandell Chapter 5  
                    Caplan Chapter 5  
                    • Exam #1 due
- May 9            Men in Feminism  
                    Mandell Chapter 7  
                    Caplan Chapter 6
- May 10           Feminism and Law  
                    Mandell Chapter 8  
                    Caplan Chapter 7  
                    • Quilt assignment due
- May 11           Womyn's Work and Family Lives  
                    Mandell Chapter 9  
                    Caplan Chapter 8  
                    • Journal #2 due

**Week 3**

- May 15      Violence against Womyn  
                 Mandell Chapter 6  
                 Caplan Chapter 9  
                 • Exam #2 due
- May 16      Womyn and Education  
                 Mandell Chapter 10  
                 Caplan Chapter 10  
                 • Outrageous acts due
- May 17      Womyn and Health  
                 Mandell Chapter 11  
                 Caplan Chapter 11  
                 • Outrageous acts due
- May 18      Womyn and Spirituality  
                 Mandell Chapter 12  
                 Caplan Chapter 12  
                 • Journal #3 due  
                 • Outrageous acts due

**Week 4**

- May 23      • Exam #3 due

**Grade Schedule:**

9	90-100
8	80-89
7	72-79
6	65-71
5	57-64
4	50-56
3	45-49
2	26-44
1	0-25

Any changes to the course outline will be made in consultation with the students during class time. Should you not be present in class when such a consultation is made it is your responsibility to acquire the changed information. Also be advised that being unable to meet the expectations of reliability, respect for and cooperation with the class will mean you will be asked to leave the classroom in the interest of preserving the learning opportunities of other students.