INTRODUCTION TO WOMEN’S STUDIES

The Concept of Gender

More than a biological distinction, gender is a cultural construct that shapes divisions of labor, family organization, social identity, sexual mores, civil codes, and political rights. Gender is constructed differently across cultures and across time; encoded within gender systems are power relations. Thus gender is not only central to our sense of self as women or men; it also reflects our changing relationship to the larger society.

Gender is a category of analysis vital to scholarly inquiry in the Social Sciences, Humanities, Fine Arts, and Sciences. Through research from each of these disciplines, we will explore the roles that gender and its construction play in historical and contemporary human experience.

Course Structure

The course is organized thematically, in seminar format. Class time will include both discussion of readings and discussion of service learning projects. The goal is to integrate academic content with hands-on experience, for a richer understanding of gender and society. Periodically, guest speakers will break routine and add further dimension.

Writing assignments will include analytical essays based on the readings, and reflective essays based on the service learning project. In addition, students will keep informal journals, from which they can share self-selected entries during group discussion.

Service Learning Component

The concept of gender as a cultural construct will be amplified through service learning projects with the Memphis Y.W.C.A. Women’s Shelter. There are three volunteer options:

1) On-Site Work at the Shelter:
Onsite volunteers may choose between work in the Children’s Program, work as Court Advocates, or work as Transition Advisors. These options require a commitment of 2 hours per week, for at least 6 weeks, plus one 8-hour Saturday training session.

2) Academic Research on a Topic requested by the Shelter:
Research volunteers will gather information for use in YWCA planning, education, and outreach. Students will work in small groups with each group choosing one research topic. Each group will write up their findings in professional form, and present their findings to the class. This work takes the place of one written assignment in the course, and requires a commitment of 1 hour per week for 6 weeks, plus one 8-hour Saturday training session.
3) **On-site Art Project:**
Art volunteers will work with two YWCA Women’s Support Groups to make a life history quilt, depicting participants’ pasts, presents, and futures. This project, in collaboration with Professor Stewart’s art students, aims to create the opportunity for participants to reflect on their life experience, come to terms with major transitions in their lives, and envision their futures. The quilt project requires a commitment of 2 art-trainings for method and materials, once-a-week workshops with the YWCA groups for 6 weeks, and one 8-hour Saturday training session.
**Course Requirements**

1) Consistent attendance and participation. Over three absences will lower your average by one grade.

2) Completion of assigned work, on time. Late papers will be averaged a grade lower than their content.

3) All work, unless otherwise indicated, is assumed to be pledged under the Honor Code.

**Required Texts:**


Supplemental Readings: This packet will be handed out on the first day of class.

**Class Discussion:**

Consider it a standing assignment that you come to class prepared; that is, having done the reading listed for that day. On one page, bring to class a concise summary of each article, plus one question generated by the day’s readings. I will collect these; they will count toward your class participation grade. *Good discussion depends on your preparation.*

**Service Learning Project:**

Consider the hours spent volunteering as comparable to hours spent in lab; that is, it is required. This means 1-2 hours per week, for 6-8 weeks, in one of the volunteer options. Completion of a service learning project will be factored into your final course grade.

**Journal:**

Write one journal entry a week, of at least one paragraph, in which you reflect on your service learning experience. Each week, submit one journal entry of your choice to the Garceau folder in the Academic Volume. Do this only for the 6-8 week period during which you volunteer. This will create an online record we can share. Journaling will also generate insights you can bring to class discussion. Journals will be factored into your class participation grade.

**Written assignments:**

1) A 5-6 page take-home exam on gender and socialization. This essay will address the assigned readings. Outside research will not be necessary. This essay must be typed, footnoted and proofread.

2) A 5-6 page take-home exam on gender, economic structure, and occupational identity. This essay, like the first one, will address the assigned readings; and must be typed, footnoted and proofread.
3) An 8-10 page reflective essay relating onsite volunteer experience to major themes in the course; typed, footnoted, and proofread. Or a group research project for the YWCA on a topic they have identified; typed, footnoted, and proofread.
COURSE OUTLINE

Th Aug 27  Introduction to the Course

T Sept 1  Gender as a Form of Social Organization


Judith Lorber, “Night to His Day: The Social


Th Sept 3  Concepts of Oppression: External and Internal


Fanny Fern, “Sober Husbands, Women, and Money,”

Marabel Morgan, “The Total Woman,” (1973), pp.100-03. [Handout]


UNIT I: CONSTRUCTING GENDER: BODIES AND BIOLOGY

T Sept 8  Lecture: Changing Concepts of Female Physiology
Discussion: Critiques of Biological Determinism

** For readings, see next page.
T Sept 8  Critiques of Biological Determinism


Th Sept 10  Bodies, Space, and Power


T Sept 15  Boundaries of Female Physiology


Th Sept 17  Challenging the Boundaries


UNIT II: SOCIALIZATION

T Sept 22  Public Education and Popular Literature

Reading: Barrie Thorne, “Girls and Boys Together...But Mostly Apart”,

Th Sept 24  Language and Power Relations

Reading: Laurel Richardson, “Gender Stereotyping in the
Agnes Smedley, “My Cell Mate: No 1,” and “My Cell
Mate: No.2,” American Women Writers, pp.355-60.

Sat Sept 26  YWCA Training (8:30am-3:30pm)

T Sept 29  Theories of Female Psychology

Reading: Nancy Chodorow, “Family Structure and Feminine
Personality,”
Elizabeth Spelman, “Gender in the Context of Race
and Class: Notes on Chodorow’s ‘Reproduction of
Carol Gilligan, “Women’s Psychological Development:
Implications for Psychotherapy,” Feminist Frontiers,
pp.187-94.

Th Oct 1  Religion and Patriarchy

Guest Lecture: Professor Gail Streete, “I Permit No Women
to Speak or I

T Oct 6  Patterns of Intimidation

Reading: Patricia Williams, “Hate Radio: Why We Need to
Tune in to L
Cheryl Bernard, “The Man in the Street: Why He
Patricia Martin & Robert Hummer, “Fraternities and
Rape on Campus,” Feminist Frontiers, pp.398-408.

**FIRST ESSAY ASSIGNMENT HANDED OUT**
Th Oct 8   The Politics of Coercion: Violence Against Women
Reading: Margo Wilson & Martin Daly, “Till Death Do Us Part,” Politics of Women’s Bodies.


T Oct 13  Service Learning Discussion

**FIRST ESSAY ASSIGNMENT DUE**

Th Oct 15  No class. Professor Garceau at conference in Sacramento.

T Oct 20  Fall Break

Th Oct 22  Service Learning Discussion

UNIT III: RACE, CLASS, AGE, AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION AS VARIABLES

T Oct 27  Race and Class as Variables in Women’s Experience


Paula Gunn Allen, “Where I Come From is Like This,” Feminist Frontiers, pp.18-21.

Bell Hooks, “Representations of Black Female Sexuality in the Cultural Marketplace,” Politics of Women’s Bodies, 112-

Th Oct 29  Race and Identity


Age and Identity


**FIRST ESSAY ASSIGNMENT DUE**

Th Nov 5  The Politics of Sexual Orientation

Reading: Adrienne Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Exis-
p.585-619.


UNIT IV: WOMEN’S WORK

T Nov 10  Guest Lecture: Katharine Zirbel, “Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Women’s Work”

Th Nov 12  Service Learning Discussion

T Nov 17  Divisions of Labor and the Meanings of Work

Reading: Alice Kessler-Harris, “The Wage Conceived: Value and Need as


**SECOND ESSAY ASSIGNMENT HANDED OUT**
Th Nov 19  Work Cultures
Reading: Maya Angelou, “A Job on the Streetcars,” American Women Writing...

Beverly Jones, “Race, Sex, and Class: Black Female


UNIT V: FEMINISM TODAY: CRITIQUES AND SOLUTIONS

T Nov 24 Persistent Struggles


Patricia Collins, “The Social Construction of Black

Becky Wangsgaard Thompson, “Eating Problems

**SECOND ESSAY ASSIGNMENT DUE**

Nov.25-29 Thanksgiving Break

T Dec 1 Intimacy: When the Personal is Political


Th Dec 3    Shaping Our Future
Reading: Verta Taylor & Nancy Whittier, “The New Feminist Movement,”
Judith Stacey, “Post-Industrial Conditions and Post-

**FINAL PAPER ASSIGNMENT HANDED OUT**

T Dec 8 Service Learning Discussion: Student Reports & Reflection

Friday, Dec 11 **FINAL PAPER DUE**
Please bring to my office, Clough 301, by 5pm.