Feminisms: History, Theory and Practice

Instructor: Keridwen N. Luis  
keridwen.luis@gmail.com
Office Hours: Mon, Wed, 12-1:45, and by appointment
Office: Raab 106
Time: Tues/Fri 11-12:30
Location: Golding 109
Class Site: https://moodle2.brandeis.edu/course/view.php?id=18496

Course Description
This course seeks to understand how sex, gender, sexuality, and gender-based oppressions influence human lives and cultures, as well as how feminist movements have addressed these and related issues. This class is focused primarily on the West and especially on the United States, but many of the themes of the class apply globally. In this course we ask interdisciplinary questions about gender, sex, politics, and social change in contemporary context and in historical hindsight. The goal of this course is for students to build and fill a conceptual toolbox of ideas and techniques that will allow them to confidently and critically read, think, talk, and write about sex, gender, and sexuality in multiple contexts on and off campus.

Required Readings:
There are NO Required Books for this course. All the readings are available either via reserve (at the library or on our course site) or online. Reserve and Online readings are essential and must be accessed and read prior to class.

Course Requirements:
- Syllabus Quiz: 5%
- Attendance/Short Assignments: 20%
- Poetry Presentation: 20%
- Argumentative Essay: 25%
- Final Project: 30%

General Requirements: Class attendance and participation are both essential to this class. For this reason, unexcused absences will impact your grade; the discussion we do in class cannot be replicated by simply doing the reading. Also, this is a seminar class, and so it is necessary to do the reading beforehand to participate in the discussion. It also makes the class more engaging if we have things to talk about. Although this is not a writing intensive course, the papers are another vehicle for you to reflect on the reading topics and to introduce your own ideas; creativity, critical thinking, and good analysis are all highly encouraged. Please note that reading must be completed before class.

No cell phones, pagers, or other communication devices (including instant messaging via laptop) will be permitted in class, unless you are an EMT or other medical professional on call. Laptops will also not be permitted without my prior consent. Students observed using cell phones will be marked absent; this will have an effect on the final course grade. Laptops may be used during discussion to look up material relevant to the discussion only!
PLEASE NOTE: I do not use LATTE to calculate final grades, as it is inaccurate (the rounding does not agree with my grade schema) and does not take participation, presentations, or attendance into account. I strongly recommend that you ignore the website’s grade calculation.

Specific Assignments: Please note that more detailed assignment sheets will be available on our website in the folder marked “Class Assignments.”

  Syllabus Quiz: This will be accessible via LATTE and should be completed within the first two weeks of class.

  Attendance/Short Assignments: Attendance will be taken for lecture and non-excused absences will impact your grade. There will be other short assignments, such as in-class writing exercises. Assignment sheets will be provided for any out-of-class assignments.

  Poetry Presentation: Students will present the class with a memorized 15-line poem from a feminist woman of color who does not appear on the syllabus, along with a brief argument for why the poem is feminist. If you will not be available on the day these presentations are scheduled, you must schedule an earlier presentation.

  Midterm Essay: Students will write a 1000-1,250 word essay responding to an online article, blog post, discussion, hashtag, or event using some of the theoretical material we have been reading as a lens.

  Final Project: Students will attend an event (for example: a public talk/lecture, press conference, museum exhibit, movie/documentary screening) and then analyze the content of the event though texts/theory presented in class. This paper is expected to be about 1,500 words long.

IMPORTANT NOTE: These descriptions are for your information only. In all cases the assignment sheets will supersede the syllabus in matters of assignment detail. Be sure to read the assignment sheet before doing the assignment.

Email Policy: Emails will be answered within 24 hours, except for weekend days (when I cannot guarantee to check my email as regularly). I do not check email between the hours of 9 pm and 8 am. Please keep emails short and to the point; longer commentary may be better discussed during office hours.

Written Work: Assignment sheets will be made available on the class website, and due dates are specified in the syllabus. Written work submitted later than fifteen minutes after the beginning of class on the due date will be lowered by a third of a grade for each day late, except in cases of illness or emergency. All sources MUST be cited. Please use in-text citation. For example:

  American teenage girls seem to be in a liminal state, for "as a society, we discarded the Victorian moral umbrella over girls before we agreed on useful strategies and programs—a kind of 'social Gore-Tex' to help them stay dry" (Brumberg 1997, 201).

  Works Cited:


    NOTE. Proper anthropological citation utilizes the LAST NAME of the author, the YEAR of the publication date, and the PAGE number, in that order (Chicago in-text citation). I will also accept MLA and APA citation. I will not accept footnote or endnote citation.
EVEN MORE IMPORTANT NOTE: NO FORM OF CITATION ALLOWS YOU TO OMIT PAGE NUMBERS ENTIRELY. PERIOD. If page numbers exist, you must include them for direct quotes and specific summary material.

Be sure to include the works cited page. All papers must be word-processed, spellchecked, double-spaced, and possess reasonable margins and page numbers. I highly encourage you to proofread as grammar and punctuation are essential parts of writing well, and writing is one of the main tools of the social sciences. Clear and readable prose is also highly esteemed! **We will be using our course site to turn in papers this semester.**

**Important Policies on Written Work:**

I will grade a paper down by an amount of my choosing for omitting any of the above (Works Cited page, name, title, etc.). I will lower a grade by **4 points (from an A to an A-, and so on)** for any paper that refers to men and women as “males” or “females” (noun use; of course it is okay to use “male” or “female” as an adjective!). It is objectifying and dehumanizing to refer to human beings this way and I will not encourage it. We are not lab rats.

**Latedays/Extension Days:** I use a system with my upper-level classes that works like this: You are granted **one week (seven days) of extension** at the beginning of the semester. You do not have to ask ahead of time to use these days, you may simply exercise this privilege of being a little flexible about due dates. You may divide them up however you wish -- turn one paper in a week late, or three papers in each two days late. Please note the following rules:

1. You may divide your days up however you wish.
2. When you turn in any paper that uses latedays/extension days, you MUST note at the top of the paper that "X extension days" or "Y latedays" were used. Otherwise I will mark your paper as late, assuming that you do NOT wish to use your latedays. You may not retroactively use latedays.
3. Papers must be turned in electronically to the class website; this will timestamp your papers automatically. Email may only be used in the event you cannot reach the class website.
4. **Weekend days count.** For example, if you turned your paper in on a Monday after it was due on a Tuesday, you would need to use six latedays, not four.

**Rules for Papers:**

All papers must be in PDF, RTF, or Microsoft Word (DOC or DOCX) format. **No exceptions.** I cannot accept links of any kind (to your work), nor will I follow them; I cannot look at GoogleDocs while they are on Google (you will need to export your document and upload it to our course site). This is for your legal protection as well as mine (regrettfully). I cannot look at or share documents using any shared document platform (this is not because you and I do not understand the technical aspects thereof; it has to do with the problems of tracking document changes).

Papers must be turned into/posted to our course site, unless you have technical difficulties, in which case you may email them directly to me.

Academic course turnins tend to be very picky about time -- even if you are 30 seconds late, it will mark the paper late. **I am less picky and capable of looking at the timestamp; DO NOT PANIC.** If you turned in your paper within a reasonable timeframe (half an hour of the due date), you are fine.
I am happy to look at and comment on no more than 2 paragraphs of your paper via email (you may also ask whatever specific questions you have!). If you would like to discuss a full draft with me, please come to my office hours or make an appointment (I can give you more complete advice; also comments on a whole draft via email are "pre-grading" which I feel is unfair to your fellow students). You do not have to print out your paper to come to office hours unless you prefer to work that way; I have a computer and you may bring one too if you wish.

Class Participation and Courtesy:

We require and expect all students to treat each other with courtesy. Courtesy includes being prepared, being on time, and being respectful of the material and your colleagues' work with it. Honor the labor of the author and your colleagues, don't just dismiss work; analysis before critique.

Harassment, whether physical, sexual, or verbal, will not be tolerated in this class. We may be discussing some sensitive and sometimes upsetting topics; I expect this classroom to be a space for growth for students to express their views.

Respect confidentiality, for both our discussion and your own experience. What we share in this room is confidential. If you want to adduce examples which do not come from the texts, don't give names: we will be discussing sensitive subjects (this goes as well for your papers, if you are giving personal experiences or doing fieldwork). A friend gave me this excellent advice for talking about issues, and not individuals: "plots, not characters."

It is possible to disagree respectfully: rather than telling people that they are wrong, do what is called "reflecting" before responding. For example, "You seem to be saying that X is Y," (reflection) "however, I have a different opinion, which is that X is Z, because of A." Also, be sure not to disagree with people (i.e. "you are wrong,") but with their actual statements ("I do not agree with X equalling Y").

Don't be afraid to speak up, as everyone has something to contribute. We are all learning. Not every student must volunteer an opinion in every class, but your opinions count -- be sure to share them. As an adjunct to this, share the floor! Let others speak (and if you are afraid that you will forget your point, write it down). We also don't have to share our insights with the whole group -- let's also do smaller discussions in class, and one on one discussions as well. We can also use the forum for discussion and students are welcome to email the professor with questions or discussion points, even anonymously.

Use "I statements" for your opinions rather than assuming that what you think should be universal. This can also be helpful for distinguishing between personal opinion and facts which can be backed up by documented scholarly evidence.

Expressions of bias are hurtful even if unintended. Even if you did not mean to step on my foot, it's best if you move when I tell you that it hurts. Similarly, when someone says something that another person finds biased and hurtful, it's best to cease and apologize, even if that's not what the first person intended. Intent is not magic and will not prevent bias from happening; we all carry around unconscious misogyny, transphobia, homophobia, ableism, racism, and a host of other prejudices because of how society is. I encourage all students to try to be graceful about listening when their bias is brought up (and I promise to do my best, myself).

If you have any problems or questions, I encourage you to bring them to me, or to the Office of the Dean of Students.

These class courtesy rules were created with the help of my 2017 Graduate Feminist Theory class at Brandeis University, and Hanne Blank.

Regrade Requests: In the event of a grade dispute, I will re-evaluate the entire work according to my grading rubric. A higher grade is not guaranteed; a lower grade may result.
Academic Integrity: Academic integrity is expected of all students. All work turned in must be the work of the student whose name appears at the top of the paper, except where you have specifically requested and received permission for a collaborative effort. All students are expected to cite their sources fully (whether from texts, interviews, or online). If you have any questions on when or whether to cite, please do not hesitate to ask. You may not turn in work for this class which you have previously turned in for other classes; you may not turn in work which has been prepared for any other use. (If you wish to use some of your previous work, you may cite it.) Plagiarism will be dealt with according to the Academic Honesty Policy; plagiarized work will result in a failure of the class and further sanctions, at the discretion of Brandeis University, may result.

If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately with your letter from the Accessible Education Office. All communications will be kept confidential.

Background Reading: For students interested in why I have made certain choices on this syllabus.

On Why There Are Trigger Warnings:

On the Laptop Rule:

On Emailing Your Professor Asking Whether You Missed Anything of Importance After You Missed Class for Whatever Reason:

On What Is Really Going On:

***************

Schedule of Readings and Due Dates

How to Use This Syllabus (PLEASE READ):
Readings are presented in order of topics and in order of importance; any readings after the first four can be skimmed.

Please note that not all readings are the same length. If there ARE four readings listed, probably one or two of them are pretty short.

Readings marked RECOMMENDED do NOT need to be read but are included in case you want more resources on the topic (for writing papers or your own information).

So don't be intimidated by the length of the syllabus!

Week 1: Introduction to the Class
8/30: Introduction to feminist analysis, gender studies, queer studies, and a brief discussion of history.

Week 2: What is feminism?
Ellis, Becky. 2007 "Why Feminism Isn't For Everybody." *Briarpatch* (March/April): 8-10.


**Week 3: What is gender?**


**Week 4: The politics of identity and race**


Week 5: The problems of history and colonialism

Warnings: detailed descriptions of violence in Smith; detailed discussions of homophobia and homophobic violence in God Loves Uganda.


10/1 No Class: Rosh Hashanah

Week 6: Continuing Colonialism, Introducing Intersectionality


Week 7: Sexuality


Midterm Essay Due

**Week 8: Dis/Ability and Feminist Theory**

**Warnings:** discussion of pain and medical procedures: all readings.

10/15 No Class: Brandeis Monday


**In-class film:** New Day Films. 2013. *Sins Invalid: An Unshamed Claim to Beauty*. Kanopy Streaming. Documentary Film. (33 min)

**Week 9: Image and Stereotype**


**Recommended:** Kilbourne, Jean. 2014. *Killing Us Softly 4: Advertising’s Image of Women*. Media Education Foundation/Kanopy Streaming. Documentary Film. reserve/LATTE video


**Recommended:** Newsom, Jennifer Siebel. 2011. *Miss Representation*. The Representation Project/Kanopy Streaming. Documentary Film. reserve/LATTE video

**In-class film:** Newsom, Jennifer Siebel. 2015. *The Mask You Live In*. The Representation Project/Kanopy Streaming. Documentary Film.

**Week 10: Reproductive Justice**


**Recommended:** Lawrence, Jane. 2000. "The Indian Health Service and the Sterilization of Native American Women." *The American Indian Quarterly* 24 (3): 400-419. reserve


**Week 11: Biopower and Body Politics**

**Warnings:** Discussion of body image disorders and eating disorders: Bordo. Discussion of fat phobia: Campos and Lebesco.


**Week 12: Gender and Violence**

**Warnings:** Discussion of violence: all readings. Please be especially careful about detailed discussions in Ritchie and Deer.


**Recommended:** Penny, Laurie. 5/25/2014 "Let's Call the Isla Vista Killings What They Were: Misogynistic Extremism," in *Common Dreams* (Originally at *The New Statesman*). <https://www.commondreams.org/views/2014/05/26/lets-call-isla-vista-killings-what-they-were-misogynist-extremism> > reserve/links


**Recommended (used in “Meet the Predators”):** Lisak, David and Paul M. Miller. 2002. “Repeat Rape and Multiple Offending Among Undetected Rapists.” *Violence and Victims* 17(1).


**Week 13: Global Capitalism and Neoliberal Capitalist Culture**


**Recommended:** Russ, Joanna. 1998. "Seeing Red: My Life is Harder Because Your Life is Easier," in her *What Are We Fighting For? Sex, Race, Class, and the Future of Feminism.* New York: St. Martin's Press. reserve


**Week 14: Labor Organizing, Feminism (and Sex Work?)**


11/27 - 11/29 Thanksgiving Break

**Feminist Women Poets of Color Presentations**

12/3  Class presentations

**Final Week: Topic Chosen by Class**

12/6  TBD

12/10  TBD

**Final Project due**