

# CONTEMPORARY FEMINIST DEBATES

GWSS 3004W \* Spring 2011 \* Mon/Wed 4-5:15 \* Ford

3 Credits

CLE Requirement: Civic Life and Ethics

Spring 2011

Mon/Wed: 4:00-5:15

**Instructor:** Dr. Sara Puotinen

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**Blog Address:** <http://blog.lib.umn.edu/puot0002/fd2011>

**Twitter:** [www.twitter.com/gwssprof](http://www.twitter.com/gwssprof) (hashtag: #femd2011)

## COURSE DESCRIPTION:

I approach feminism with the presumption that no undisputed premises are to be agreed upon in the global context. And so, for practical and political reasons, there is no value to be derived in silencing disputes. The questions are: how best to have them, how most productively to stage them, and how to act in ways that acknowledge the irreversible complexity of who we are?

Judith Butler, "The End of Sexual Difference?"

As a democratic enterprise, feminism has had to forfeit the presumption that at base we can all agree about some things or, equivalently, to embrace the notion that each of our most treasured values are under contestation and that they will remain contested zones of politics.

Judith Butler, "The End of Sexual Difference?"

Fundamentally, U.S. feminisms involve difference, dissensus and, as Judith Butler suggests, irreversible complexity. Debates over who counts as a feminist and what the feminist agenda should be have existed since the beginning of modern U.S. feminist movement in the late nineteenth century. Far from weakening feminism, public and private debates among feminists about feminist goals have helped to energize feminisms and to ensure that they are democratic.

Taking as our premise that debate is essential for the success of feminism as a democratic movement (or collection of movements), the goal of this course is to explore how feminists have energized their theoretical/political projects through an engagement with each other's differences and through productive debates on key issues and "treasured values" within the movement.

We will begin with a brief introduction to feminism and feminist debate. Then, the remainder of the course will be devoted to an in-depth exploration of three key issues/values within U.S. feminisms: (1) Reproductive Rights/Justice, (2) Work/Liberation and (3)

Feminist Values/Family. Through the process of exploring these key issues/values, we will engage in our own ethical and political deliberation on feminisms and its various agendas for social justice and transformation.

Some questions that we will explore this semester include:

- What is feminism?
- How much should feminists compromise their ideals in order to get their goals realized?
- Is pro-choice the dividing line between feminist and anti-feminist?
- Should (queer) feminists marry?
- Is marriage an institution worth promoting or saving?
- What is the meaning of “choice” in pro-choice?
- What kind of equality should feminists be working for? Is equality possible?
- Are feminist values family values?
- How can feminists work with other social justice movements to challenge oppression in its many forms?

### **GOALS FOR THE GWSS DEPARTMENT**

- To study interdisciplinary scholarship on women and gender
- To focus on multicultural and cross-cultural studies both in the United States and globally
- To develop critical, analytical and interdisciplinary problem-solving skills
- To enhance research skills and creative talents
- To develop new ideas and theories about women and gender that challenges assumptions and contribute to social change.

### **GOALS FOR THIS COURSE**

- To explore the value of debate for feminists’ ethical and political projects
- To trace the ways in which a diversity of opinions and agendas has been present since the beginning of modern feminisms
- To learn various strategies for how best to have debates effectively and responsibly
- To apply the concepts discussed in class to contemporary culture, and your own lives.
- To engage in a critical exploration of several contentious issues within feminism
- To foster a sense of community in which we all can critically explore a wide range of perspectives in respectful and productive ways
- To brainstorm strategies for addressing key issues of concern for feminists
- To develop, defend and challenge your own personal values and beliefs on feminism and its “treasured values”

## **HOW COURSE FULFILLS THE CIVIC LIFE AND ETHICS REQUIREMENT:**

This course focuses on critically examining the ethical and political choices that feminists and feminist communities have made as they develop, defend and challenge each other's solutions to some central problems within contemporary feminism. The connection between ethics and civic life is central to the course in two key ways. This course requires that you critically reflect on the *ethics* of civic engagement (what principles are at stake in feminists' developments of their agendas), and it allows you to collectively debate the value of these ethical principles in your own thinking about how feminists should work for social justice.

## **WRITING INTENSIVE COMPONENT OF COURSE:**

Writing is a central part of this course. In addition to informal writing assignments (such as blog posts and in-class free writing), you are required to write two brief position papers and a reflection paper on feminism. We will work all semester on your feminist reflection papers and you will have many opportunities to get feedback from the instructors and other students.

## **COURSE EXPECTATIONS**

**Attend Class Regularly:** You are allowed to have **two** unexcused absence during this semester. You are responsible for contacting other students to get any notes, handouts or information on assignments that you might have missed. **Please do not contact me requesting missed notes or assignments.** Instead, I would encourage you to exchange email addresses or phone numbers with several other students. You can also tweet questions to our class.

**Let me know if you have any questions or concerns:** You are always welcome to visit me during my office hours (offline: Wed, 12-1 or online via twitter: Mon, 2-3). If you can't make my office hours, you can email me ([puot0002@umn.edu](mailto:puot0002@umn.edu)) or tweet me (@gwssprof) with your questions or to set up another time.

**Be an active and respectful participant in class:** Your participation is crucial to the success of the class. To that end, you are responsible for coming to class fully prepared, actively and respectfully contributing to discussions, listening attentively to others' ideas and experiences, asking questions when you don't understand the material and giving me feedback on what is working and not working in the class. You can also post questions/comments on our course blog or twitter feed.

**Hand in all assignments on time:** Complete all work on time. "On time" means at the beginning of the class period on the particular due date. **Due dates are final and non-negotiable.** Exceptions will only be granted in extreme circumstances. All due dates will be posted on our course blog on the assignments page (<http://>

[blog.lib.umn.edu/puot0002/fd2011/assignments.html](http://blog.lib.umn.edu/puot0002/fd2011/assignments.html)). **All assigned work must be completed in order to pass the class.**

**Check the blog several times a week:** We will be using our course blog a lot in this class. If possible, make sure to bookmark it on your computer. You should check it regularly to read what other students in the course have to say about the readings, topics, and the politics of sex. You should also check it to read any announcements from class (like revised assignments) or to download handouts. I will also occasionally post my notes or reflections on the topic/readings.

**Don't procrastinate:** At the end of every semester, I ask students to give advice to future students. One of the most popular suggestions is: don't procrastinate. The readings, papers, and blog assignments always take more time than you think so don't wait until the last minute to do them.

### **MY TEACHING PHILOSOPHY**

As a teacher two of my primary goals are to empower students to claim their own education and to inspire them to be curious and critically aware of their world/s. I will emphasize discussion and student participation and limit the number (and length) of my lectures. This discussion/participation-based format means that you, along with your classmates, bear a lot of responsibility for the success of the class. You must hold each other accountable for the claims that you make and the ideas you express. And you must make sure that you come to class prepared with some thoughts and questions so that we can have respectful and productive discussions about the material/topics.

### **SOME THOUGHTS ON BLOGGING AND TWITTER**

Our course **blog** (<http://blog.lib.umn.edu/puot0002/fd2011>) will play a central role in our class. I will use it to post announcements, class summaries, assignments, and handouts. You will be using it to complete several of your assignments and to engage and develop connections with your class members and instructors. To help you become familiar with the blog, I will provide training sessions on how to use the blog in the Rachel Raimist Feminist Media Center (Ford 468) during the second week of class and post an online tutorial. We will also devote time to reading about/discussing the value of blogs and twitter for feminist activist projects. Throughout the semester, I will include more blog training and discussion during class time and I will be available for blog training sessions upon request. Finally, I hope to enlist some class members to serve as technology mentors to other students. If you are familiar with blogging at the U (on UThink) and are willing to help others, please let me know.

We will also be using **twitter** ([www.twitter.com/gwssprof](http://www.twitter.com/gwssprof)). I will be using it to post announcements and hold virtual office hours. And you will be using it to post links, ask questions and connect with other students. I will provide a brief tutorial (in person and online) on how to sign up for twitter and use it for class engagement.

### **OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION**

### **Academic Dishonesty**

Academic integrity is essential to a positive teaching and learning environment. All students enrolled in University courses are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness and honesty. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else's work as your own, can result in disciplinary action. The University Student Conduct Code defines scholastic dishonesty as follows:

**SCHOLASTIC DISHONESTY:** submission of false records of academic achievement; cheating on assignments or examinations; plagiarizing; altering, forging, or misusing a University academic record; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement. Within this course, a student responsible for scholastic dishonesty can be assigned a penalty up to an including an "F" or "N" for the course. If you have any questions regarding the expectations for a specific assignment or exam, ask. - University of Minnesota

### **Disability Services**

Students with disabilities who require accommodations in meeting course requirements should meet with me as early as possible in the term. Class materials, including this syllabus, can be made available in alternative formats upon request. It is your responsibility to provide documentation from Disability Services to receive accommodations.

### **Non-native English Speakers and Writers**

If you need some extra assistance with the reading and writing assignments, please contact me early in the term.

### **U of M Harassment Policy**

The University of Minnesota is committed to the policy that all persons shall have equal access to its programs, facilities, and employment without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, age, marital status, disability, public assistance status, veteran status, or sexual orientation. For further information, call the University Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, 418 Morrill Hall, 624-9547.

### **GRADE BREAKDOWN**

Paper #1: Reflection paper	<b>50 points</b>
Paper #2: State of the Issue paper	<b>100 points</b>
Paper #3: State of the Issue paper	<b>100 points</b>
Paper #4: Revised paper	<b>100 points</b>
General Blog Assignments	<b>150 points</b>
Online Group Dialogue	<b>150 points</b>
Group Resources Project	<b>200 points</b>
Attendance and Participation	<b>150 points</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1000 points</b>

**Paper #1: Critical Reflection Paper****5%**

In the preface to *Feminism is for Everybody*, bell hooks' explains that she wrote the book in order to provide her friends and family with a brief and accessible explanation of what feminism is and why it is important. The goal of this assignment is to write a **3-4 page/ double-spaced/ 11 or 12 point font** paper in which you offer your own clear and compelling definition of feminism and why it is/is not important.

In completing this paper, imagine you are writing it to a family member (your mom or dad, for example) or a close friend in order to answer their question: So what is feminism and why are you studying it? Your emphasis should not be on "converting" your audience to feminism or defending feminism against the many charges leveled against it (although you can defend feminism in your paper), but on communicating your own understanding of feminism and why it is/isn't still important. While you should draw upon other sources (class discussion, readings, etc) to support your points, the goal of this paper is for you to develop your personal definition of feminism and to be able to express that clearly and effectively to others.

Here are some questions to get you started. You should answer at least some of these in your paper, but you do not have to answer all of them.

- What kind of impact has the feminist movement/feminist ideas had on your own life or the lives of others? On local, national, transnational, global culture and/or politics?
- Has the feminist movement been a success?
- Is feminism still necessary? Why? Why is it important to study feminism?
- What is a feminist issue?
- What kinds of issues should feminists be focusing on?
- Who embodies your definition of feminism?
- Would you call yourself a feminist?

**DUE:** feb 2

**Papers #2 and #3: State of the Issue****20%**

You are required to write "state of the issue" essays on 2 (out of the 3) main topics for our class. For each essay, pick one of the contentious issues related to your chosen topic (reproductive rights/choice, work/liberation, feminist values/family). Then write a 2-3 page (600-900 words) in-depth exploration that includes summaries of at least three different positions (within feminism) and your own assessment of how to respond to/address/engage with the issue. More details about this assignment and a sign-up sheet will be distributed on Monday, January 31st. The due dates are as follows:

**Topic/Date Due**

Reproductive Rights/feb 28

Labor/march 30

Feminist values/april 20

**Revision Paper** **10%**

In this 5-7 page paper, you should do a substantial revision of your first paper on feminism and whether or not it is necessary. Taking into consideration my comments on your first draft and our discussion of feminism (its histories, key issues, debates), this paper should reflect a more informed vision of feminism and its importance (or lack of importance).

**DUE:** may 4

**General Blog and Twitter Assignments** **15%**

You are required to be an active participant on our course blog. I will distribute and discuss a handout detailing this assignment on January 26.

**Group Online Dialogue/Diablog** **15%**

To foster connections between our online and offline engagements, to help us to cultivate our class community, and to give you even more opportunity to shape the class, you and 4 classmates will lead us in a **mini diablog about the readings**. More details about this assignment and a sign-up sheet will be distributed on February 2. Diablogs will begin the week of February 14/16.

**Note:** Dialogue + blog = **diablog** (noun) A collaboration involving two (or more) people who exchange ideas with others via posts and comments on their shared blog. A diablog requires an explicit commitment to engaging with blog-writing partners through reading and commenting on their posts and referring to/incorporating ideas into your posts.

**Group Resources Project:** **20%**

You and 3 other class members are required to put together an online resource (a virtual pamphlet or media kit) about one of the three course topics. While not required, you are encouraged to select a topic that you also wrote a “state of the issue” essay on. More details about this assignment and a sign-up sheet will be distributed on February 7.

**Attendance and Participation** **15%**

You are required to attend class regularly and contribute to class discussions. **More than two unexcused absences will lower your class participation grade.** For each class, you must be prepared, with fully read text in hand. Included in this grade are any in-class assignments (such as free-writing assignments, small group work, film worksheets).

**CLA GRADING CRITERIA**

- A *outstanding* achievement (900-1000 points)
- B achievement *significantly above* necessary level (800-899 points)
- C achievement meeting the *basic* course requirements (700-799 points)
- D achievement *worthy of credit* (600-699 points)

- F performance *failing* to meet the basic course requirements (500-599 points)  
 S equivalent to a grade of C or better

## **COURSE READINGS**

Course packets will be available for purchase soon at Paradigm copies on the East Bank. You will be notified when they are available. For address, see: <http://www.paradigmcopies.com/Map.aspx>

All readings are also available as downloadable pdfs on our WebVista\* site. Access WebVista through [MyU](#). Click on MyCourses and then GWSS 3004. Log in and then click on our class again. The readings will be organized under the week we will be reading and discussing them.

## **COURSE SCHEDULE (subject to change)**

### **jan 19 Introduction to Class**

Discussion of feminist reflection paper assignment.

### **jan 24 Introduction to Blogging and Digital Media**

**Training Workshop on how to blog and tweet in the Rachel Raimist Feminist Media Center (Ford 468).**

#### **Reading:**

- Review my blog entry for class: How to blog, a primer!
- Browse through our course blog and the course blog for last year's class
- [Twitter Tips](#)

### **jan 26 More on Blogging and Digital Media**

#### **Reading:**

- Puotinen, Sara. [Using Blogs in the Feminist Classroom](#)
- Puotinen, Sara and Kandace Creel Falcón. "Teaching with Blogs and Blogging While Teaching"
- Puotinen, Sara. [Why Blog?](#)

**Distribute and discuss Blog Assignments.**

### **jan 31 Feminism, Mass-based Education and Social Media**

#### **Readings:**

- hooks, bell. Excerpts from *Feminism is for Everybody*
- hooks, bell. Watch youtube clips from bell hooks

- Browse [Incite! Women of Color Against Violence Website and Blog](#)
- Browse [Tweeting Feminists](#) (if time, try listening to some podcasts here too)
- Gladwell, Malcolm. [Why the Revolution Won't Be Tweeted](#)

**Optional:**

Digiactive guide for Twitter

[http://www.digiactive.org/2009/04/13/twitter\\_guide](http://www.digiactive.org/2009/04/13/twitter_guide)

Distribute and discuss "State of the Issue" essay assignment. Sign-up for topics.

**feb 2 Feminisms and Curiosity**

**Readings:**

- Enloe, Cynthia. "Being Curious about our Lack of Feminist Curiosity"
- Puotinen, Sara. "Why did we stop asking questions?" (<http://trouble.room34.com/archives/3182>)
- Overview of category: This is a feminist issue because...
- First entry/explanation: (<http://blog.lib.umn.edu/puot0002/3004/2010/01/this-is-a-feminist-issue-becausehaiti-earthquake.html>)
- Browse category: (<http://blog.lib.umn.edu/puot0002/3004/this-is-a-feminist-issue-because>)

**DUE:** Feminist reflection paper

**feb 7 Feminisms and Discord**

**Readings:**

- Jagger, Alison. "Living with Contradictions"
- Castro, Joy. "On Becoming Educated"
- Nash, Jennifer C. "On Difficulty: Intersectionality as Feminist Labor"
- Ahmed, Sara. "Feminist Killjoys (and other willful subjects)"

**feb 9 Ruth Wilson Gilmore**

**Readings:**

- Gilmore, Ruth Wilson. Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California (Introduction, The Prison Fix, What is to be Done)

**ISSUE ONE: REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS AND CHOICE**

**feb 14 Reproductive Rights: Some Background**

**Readings:**

- Sanger, Margaret. "Birth Control--A Parents' Problem or Woman's? from Women and the New Race"

- PBS website for The pill: (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/pill/index.html>)

**FILM:** The Pill

**feb 16            Fighting for rights, but at what cost?**

**Readings:**

- Roberts, Dorothy. Excerpt from "The Dark Side of Birth Control"
- Briggs, Laura. Excerpt from "Discourses of 'Forced Sterilizations' in Puerto Rico"

**feb 21            Class cancelled due to snow**

**feb 23            Reproductive Rights: What is choice? Who gets to choose?  
What choices?**

**Readings:**

- Ross, Loretta J. "The Color of Choice"
- Crews, Allison. "And So I Chose" also available on WebVista
- Sayce, Liz and Rachel Perkins. "They should not breed: Feminism, disability and reproductive rights"
- "Language: On choice"
- Smith, Andrea. "Beyond Pro-Choice Versus Pro-Life: Women of Color and Reproductive Justice"

**feb 28            On Choice, continued...**

**Readings:**

- Mingus, Mia. "On Claiming my Movement: Disability and Reproductive Justice"
- The Crunk Feminist Collective. "What's Love Got to Do with it? Attacks on Reproductive Justice"
- Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice. "A new vision for advancing our movement for reproductive health, reproductive rights, and reproductive justice"
- Native Youth Sexual Health Resources Website

**march 2        Peer Review/(almost) midterm check-in**

**ISSUE TWO: LABOR AND LIBERATION**

**march 7            Liberation from Housework?**

**Readings:**

- Friedan, Betty. "The Problem That Has No Name"
- Syfers, Judy. "Why I Want a Wife" (<http://www.verge.demon.co.uk/kerb/wantwife.htm>)
- Ehrenreich, Barbara. Excerpt from "Maid to Order"
- Bose, Christine E. "The Interconnections of Paid and Unpaid Domestic Work" ([http://www.barnard.edu/sfonline/work/bose\\_01.htm](http://www.barnard.edu/sfonline/work/bose_01.htm))

**march 9                    The Nanny Problem**

**Readings:**

- Tronto, Joan. "The Nanny Problem"

**march 14/16            SPRING BREAK**

**march 21                Workers continued...**

**Readings:**

- Hothschild, Arlie. "Love and Gold"
- 2010 Feminist Debates Course Blog. "Who are...Undocumented Workers?"

**march 23                Domestic workers and invisible labor**

**film:** Maid in America

**march 28                Workers as agents, not victims**

**Readings:**

- Various articles/videos on Domestic Worker Safety and Dignity Project
- Handagneu-Sotelo. "Cleaning Up a Dirty Business"
- Focus on the La Colectiva Campaign: (<http://www.lacolectivasf.org>)

**march 30                Wrap up, reflection, strategizing**

**ISSUE THREE: FAMILIES, VALUES AND FEMINIST MOVEMENT**

**april 4                    Family Values: Some Background**

**Readings:**

- Collins, Patricia Hill. "It's All in the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race and Nation"

STATE OF THE ISSUE PAPERS FOR WORK/LABOR DUE TODAY.

**april 6                    Feminist and Queer Family Values**

**Readings:**

- Selections from Feminist Family Values Forum
- Pardo, Mary.
- Browse Queers for Economic Justice website

**april 11                 Youth/Children and Values**

**Readings:**

- Martin, Karin. "William Wants a Doll"
- Berstein, Susan David. "Transparent"

**film clips:** Free to be...you and me and Tomboy

**april 13                      Blog Day**

**Readings:  
TBA**

**april 18                      Families, Unvalued**

**Readings:**

- Chávez, Karma. "Border (In)Securities: Normative and Differential Belonging in LGBTQ and Immigrant Rights Discourse
- Immigration Equality. Family, Unvalued 7-18, 135-144, closely skim 46-91

SPECIAL EVENT: Karma Chávez with Daniel C. Brouwer and Charles E. Morris III. News from our Families: At the Borders

April 18th 7pm

Cowles Auditorium

**20      Wrap-up, reflection, strategizing**

**25      Discussing Final Assignments**

STATE OF THE ISSUE PAPERS FOR FEMINIST FAMILY VALUES DUE TODAY

**27      Discussing Final Assignments**

**May**

**2      Presentations**

GROUP RESOURCE PROJECTS MUST BE POSTED BY TODAY

**4      Presentations/Final Wrap-up**