

## **Cultural and Ethnic Studies 109: Introduction to Women's Studies**

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### **Required Texts:**

- **Red Tent**, Anita Diamant
- **Like Water for Chocolate**, Laura Esquivel
- **Woman: An Intimate Geography**, Nathalie Angier
- **The Vagina Monologues**, Eve Ensler
- **The Silence of the Trees**, Valya Dudycz Lupescu
- **Kindred**, Octavia Butler

### **Course Description:**

This course will employ a feminist analysis of the construction and enforcement of gender differences and gender inequalities in various contexts. Emphasis will be placed on the intersection of race, class, sexuality and nationality in the lives of women. Topics include feminist theory, motherhood, popular culture, sexual autonomy, racism, and activism in the United States.

This course is designed to explore the role that gender, plays in our social, economic and political structure. Through readings from sociology and literature, will look at how this master construct forms culture.

### **Instructor's Philosophy:**

I strongly believe that each of us is responsible for what happens in this classroom. Students are just as capable of making a class great as the instructor. We are studying communities and cultures, and in the process we are also creating a new community in our own classroom. We are all still striving, still learning. The key to a successful class is mutual responsibility. We all have a myriad of valuable insights to offer. I will expect each of you to be committed to the course, just as you will expect commitment from me. I am excited to learn with you. It is my hope that we can have a fun, enriching quarter. Therefore, expect to do a good bit of work, and plan on participating fully in class.

## **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

- To develop interdisciplinary connections while exploring the sources of identity and intercultural conflict.
- To develop teamwork and collaborative skills while cooperating in an intellectual endeavor; to investigate ideas together, respect others' insights and opinions, and develop areas of consensus and agreement.
- To develop self-reliance and responsibility for one's own learning: taking initiative, following up ideas and intuitions, evaluating one's own progress, and developing learning goals.
- To learn methods of discussion and discourse of a controversial and complex topic.
- To develop critical reading skills; to be able to understand, and weigh the strength and weakness of, an author's argument.

### **Tests, Projects and Papers:**

- Each student will create a five (5) item annotated bibliography on a choice of topics outlined on the assignment sheet. This will be due at midterm.
- Each student will also turn in 1 page Reflection paper on the readings, films and discussions of the week every Friday. There will be a total of 10 weekly papers. I will randomly grade five (5) of those papers for a single Reflection Paper grade, which will be assessed at the end of the quarter.

## **Hints for Class Success**

### **Disclaimer:**

This is a heavily dialogue-based class and you will be graded upon your participation. There will be few if any lectures and you will not be required to memorize things as much as to analyze the many aspects of the issues discussed. Many of these issues will be controversial and do not have one correct answer. Often class dialogues will begin with open-ended questions meant to get at a deeper understanding of the content being discussed. Don't be discouraged if a classmate or even the professor raises another question or theory that may point out the flaws of your own argument, this is all part of the process. The more we question ourselves the more we can understand. In order to be successful in this class you must complete all assigned readings and be willing to participate respectfully. If you cannot come to class regularly, or are simply looking to "coast" this is not the class for you.

### **Dialogue vs. Discussion/Debate**

Dialogues require the use of logical arguments and concrete facts instead of personal opinions or experiences. Valid arguments are based on premises (much like the scientific “if-then” method of reasoning).

For Example: If the secession of the southern states in 1860 was intended to protect those states from the economic oppression of the northern states, then it follows that the issue of slavery during the American civil war was not one of morals but one of economics. And if the economic backbone of the southern states was the system of slavery and, many of the southern states were part of the economic backbone of the country as a whole, it makes sense to say that our nation’s earliest economic system was based on the oppression of people based on the color of their skin.

**During class dialogues you will be expected to:**

- Be prepared. This is not a bull session. If you aren’t prepared, please don’t participate.
- Articulate the concepts and principles of the issue(s) in question
- Refer to the text when needed during the dialogue
- Reframe from relying on personal anecdotes
- Ask for clarification when confused
- Stick to the point under discussion. You can make notes about ideas you want to bring up later.
- Speak clearly and loud enough for everyone to hear
- Listen carefully and respectfully
- Engage your classmates in the dialogue, not jut the teacher

Remember, class dialogues are not a test of memory and you are not simply “learning a subject.” Here your goal should be to broaden your understanding of social issues we all face.

Want to check on your success in this class? Here’s a cheat-sheet of things to consider during class dialogues

**Did I...**

- Come to class?
- Prepare?
- Speak clearly and loudly?
- Cite reasons and evidence for my statements?
- Listen respectfully?
- Stay on point?
- Talk to my classmates and not just the professor?

- Paraphrase accurately?
- Ask questions to clear up confusion?
- Support my classmates?
- Avoid hostile exchanges?
- Raise questions in a civil manner?

**One last thing:**

There are going to be times in this class when you feel uncomfortable. That's okay; a certain amount of discomfort can be conducive to learning. However, if you ever feel unsafe or threatened please let me know so we can try to work it out. The classroom should be a safe place for everybody.

If you have a documented disability that will require some type of accommodation, please contact me as soon as possible so that we can make whatever arrangements necessary.

My office hours are for your use. Come and see me any time you have a question or a problem with the course or your work.

I am looking forward to this quarter, and hope that we can do good things together.