

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICS

POLI 31381 CONTEMPORARY FEMINIST THOUGHT: DEBATES AND ISSUES

Weeks 1-12 2007-2008

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THE UNIT

This unit will consist of a weekly 2-hour seminar (weeks 1-10). It examines debates and issues in contemporary feminist thought as they relate to the central concerns of politics. Eschewing traditional typologies of feminism (liberal, socialist and radical feminism) it explores the ways in which very different theorists theorize feminism, and conceptualize sex, gender and sexuality. It also considers feminist epistemology and methodology and addresses debates such as equality and difference, and citizenship and democracy. Students will be encouraged to bring current political issues and structured personal views into seminar discussions, and the lecturer will present a challenging range of examples from media and academic sources.

METHODS

- Philosophical analysis
- Textual interpretation
- Seminar discussion
- Using images in political analysis
- Developing ideas in an original way

OBJECTIVES

- To introduce students to contemporary feminist thought
- To introduce students to concepts of sex, gender and sexuality
- To apply feminist theory to 'real world' political concerns and questions
- To enable students to work collectively and to make PowerPoint presentations to their peers
- To permit students to write clearly and analytically, making use of relevant material, in both non-examination and examination settings

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- An understanding of the main approaches to politics involving feminism, gender and sexuality studies
- An ability to appraise the links between different feminist thinkers
- An understanding of key issues in contemporary feminism as they pertain to politics
- An ability to apply feminist theoretical perspectives to 'real' world political questions and issues
- An ability to engage constructively in critical deliberation on theoretical issues
- An ability to give effective oral presentations to peers
- An ability to write clearly and analytically
- An ability to find relevant material independently using electronic and other resources

TEACHING ARRANGEMENTS

Seminars

There is one 2-hour seminar per week for weeks 1-10. The time and the place will be posted on the final year noticeboard. There are ten seminars in the unit (weeks 1-10). See below for attendance requirements.

Remember: you will not get much out of any seminar if you do not prepare for it, and no one else will get much out of you!

Web Site

You will find this unit on Blackboard www.ole.bris.ac.uk

You need to register with Blackboard to get a log-in, and then you can self-register for this unit. The website contains all the printed and printable materials for the unit, as well as web-links and other features.

LEARNING HOW TO LEARN

Beyond seminars, you can practise learning skills related to this unit when you:

- consider the political uses to which feminist theories and ideas are put
- think about similarity and difference in the way that feminist concepts are used in different cultures at different times
- examine newspapers, TV, websites, other media for visual representations of political messages
- think imaginatively about how different people perceive and present political issues and events

COURSEPACK

This will be available from the Department's main office, 10 Priory Road. It contains all REQUIRED reading for ALL seminars. The Library will NOT keep coursepacks.

INTRODUCTORY AND SUPPLEMENTARY READING

- For an excellent introduction to feminist thinking, you can read Cynthia Enloe, *The Curious Feminist* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press paperback, 2004), ISBN 0-520-24381-1, currently £8.54 and up new on amazon.co.uk, cheaper used. On order at UoB Library. Read especially the Introduction, 'Being Curious about our Lack of Feminist Curiosity', pp. 1-10.

There is a very large literature on all the subjects raised in the unit. Our focus is on **your** reading of the **primary** required source. You will miss the point of the unit if you do not read the **primary sources at least twice**. Always bring the coursepack to a seminar. **You can expect to write in it and to use a highlighter to help with the textual aspect of essays.**

Remember that MOST textbooks, particularly in feminist thought, categorise, synthesise and homogenise, and WE WILL NOT BE DOING THIS.

INSTEAD, you will be working on the primary sources in the coursepack in the following way:

- Read the arguments carefully and understand them thoroughly
- 'Chase up' the author's references for your 'supplementary reading'
- Use GoogleScholar to find the most recent citations and use of the author's work in journals such as *Political Studies*, *Contemporary Political Theory*, *Political Theory*, *American Political Science Review*, *American Journal of Political Science*, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, *Signs*, *Feminist Review*, *Politics & Gender*, *Gender and Society*, *Journal of Gender Studies*, *International Journal of Sexuality and Gender Studies*, *Men and Masculinities*, *Feminist Theory* and others. All these are available electronically in the Library, and remember to FOCUS ON THE MOST RECENT ISSUES!

- This is an interdisciplinary area of study, so you are free to browse, say, media studies, cultural studies, sex research, sociology, International Relations, economics, legal studies, 'queer theory', GLBT (gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender/transsexual) studies etc. etc.
- Also bear in mind that sex/gender/sexuality are co-constitutive with race/ethnicity and class and numerous other 'markers' of similarity/difference and advantage/disadvantage; also 'gender is not a synonym for women', so remember that men and masculinity are part of the feminist picture of sex/gender/sexuality ... for sure.
- You will be practising these methods in both your pieces of 'assessed work' described below, particularly the 'Report'

Remember that all seminar sessions - besides the structured activities - include a chance to ask about anything that puzzles you. Additionally, the lecturer has office hours and is willing to help.

RECOMMENDED FILM AND RELATED READING

'Some Like It Hot', dir. Billy Wilder (1959), easily available to rent or buy, and available in the Library DVD PN1997.S5672

All the themes, concepts and issues in this unit can be found in, or read into, this film, which bears very careful watching. You may enjoy reading this current paper, presented at the American Political Science Association meeting in August/September 2007, now posted on the Blackboard site for this unit:

Terrell Carver, 'Sex, Gender and Heteronormativity: Seeing "Some Like it Hot" as a Heterosexual Dystopia'.

RESEARCHING CONTEMPORARY POLITICS

You should be reading the quality press in hardcopy or on-line form, e.g. *Guardian*, *Independent*, *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, and many other newspapers in other languages you may have access to. Some will have useful archives of text and images. Internet sites such as the BBC will provide similar materials, as will any number of governmental and non-governmental organisations all over the world. As with printed sources, you need to be aware of the politics of your information-provider and be able to defend your (referenced) use of their material.

REQUIRED WORK

- **Completion of a 'PAIRED' PowerPoint seminar presentation. This must introduce the seminar topic for the week. It must include VISUAL MATERIAL, not just text. BOTH students must speak to the group and respond to questions. Maximum 8 slides and 15 minutes, plus up to 15 minutes to respond to questions. Remember that you are introducing CONCEPTS and ISSUES in a way that will stimulate discussion. Consult the Departmental guidelines on student seminar presentations in Appendix 4 of the Undergraduate Handbook, and note particularly the requirement to keep to time. This is a REQUIREMENT for credit points, and you will receive a feedback sheet with comments (but not a mark). Your slides must reference your source material (visual or textual) as BRIEFLY as possible, and slide 8 must be a LIST OF REFERENCES. Consult the Department's guide <http://www.bris.ac.uk/politics/current-ug/bibliographies.html> for requirements and advice.**
- **Completion of an individually written and non-plagiarised 'Report' (NOT an essay) on a feminist from the list below. Maximum 2000 words, 'Harvard' author/date referencing (consult the Departmental Guidelines <http://www.bris.ac.uk/politics/current-ug/bibliographies.html>). This is due on Friday 18 January 2008, which is the general deadline for submission of assessed work from Teaching Block 1. You will need to follow the same rules/regulations/procedures as with electronic submission of essays. You will be submitting ONE electronic Word file ANONYMOUSLY:**

Late submission (or non-submission) will incur penalties and WILL AFFECT YOUR OVERALL MARK FOR THE UNIT, WHICH CONTRIBUTES YOUR DEGREE CLASSIFICATION.

Method:

1. Choose a feminist thinker from the list below.
2. Construct a report addressing the following:
 - (a) *Main ideas* of that person (NOT a survey that goes work-by-work)
 - (b) *Controversies* in and around their work
 - (c) *Illustrations* from current politics where, in your opinion, the thinker's ideas are analytically relevant
3. Remember that your REFERENCES must contain BOTH academic work AND news reports or other media/factual material related to contemporary politics.
4. The List (if you have someone else in mind, the choice must be approved by the lecturer). Note that you can track these people quickly through GoogleScholar, amazon.co.uk, wikipedia (just for browsing to get the idea), and usual internet searches – bearing in mind the quality and reliability of the source material (i.e. some sources may be useful just to get a quick idea, but not suitable for academic use in your 'Report').

Anzaldúa, Gloria
Beauvoir, Simone de
Benhabib, Seyla
Butler, Judith
Coole, Diana
Cornell, Drucilla
Daly, Mary
Disch, Lisa
Eisenstein, Zillah
Elshtain, Jean Bethke
Enloe, Cynthia
Fausto-Sterling, Anne
Harding, Sandra
Hawkesworth, Mary

Hearn, Jeff
hooks, bell
Irigaray, Luce
Jackson, Stevi
Keller, Evelyn Fox
Kristeva, Julia
Lauretis, Teresa di
Lister, Ruth
Lloyd, Moya
Millet, Kate
Mitchell, Juliet
Mulvey, Laura
Okin, Susan
Petchesky, Rosalind

Phelan, Shane
Phillips, Anne
Rich, Adrienne
Rowbotham, Sheila
Rubin, Gayle
Segal, Lynn
Shanley, Mary Lyndon
Squires, Judith
Steinem, Gloria
Tronto, Joan
Wittig, Monique
Wolf, Naomi
Woolf, Virginia
Young, Iris Marion

You may seek 'formative' advice on plans, drafts, ideas etc. about either or both of the above requirements with me in person (only) in my regularly weekly office hours. If these are over-subscribed, I will schedule additional time. If you have a serious conflict with my scheduled office hours, please contact me by email (t.carver@bristol.ac.uk).

YOU ARE ALSO REQUIRED TO SIT A 'SEEN EXAMINATION'

- This will be a conventional examination paper, 2 questions in 2 hours, but you will be required to use BOTH academic material AND material from contemporary politics in EQUAL measure for EACH ANSWER.
- The paper will be posted onto the Blackboard website for this unit on Friday 16 May 2008. You will thus have time to choose your questions, consider your answers, and practise writing to time. The paper will be available again at the conventional examination session, for which all the usual rules and procedures apply.

Note that your overall unit mark for degree classification will be a strict average of your TWO 'summative' assessment marks, i.e. the Report and the 'seen' examination.

SEMINAR SCHEDULE

Format: Seminars will be student-centred. Students will be responsible for the assigned reading for each seminar. The lecturer will ensure that all students participate. Each week (after week 1) a pair of students will introduce discussion and respond to questions using PowerPoint as described above. The remainder of the seminar will focus on (a) ideas and concepts, (b) illustrations and issues from contemporary politics. This unit emphasises in-depth reading of primary, theoretical and argumentative sources; you will need to read each piece at least twice, and you should think about the ideas as you read. For further reading, see the 'Method' section above.

Week 1: Introduction and 'paired' Presentation assignments.

Consideration of issues and concepts relating to women and feminism, sex/gender/sexuality, using newspaper material circulated by the lecturer.

Learning outcome: Understand the rationale and mechanics of the unit; understand the pertinence of feminist thinking and activism today. Do some feminist thinking on the spot already.

Week 2: The Woman Question

Gayle Rubin, 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of "Sex"', in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. R. Reiter, pp. 157-210 (Monthly Review Press, 1975). (also UoB GN479.7 TOW)

Learning outcome: Understand why the historical conceptualisation of sex/gender/procreation/desire is a political and politicising question. You should pay careful attention to the ways that these phenomena are co-constitutive, yet distinguishable, and distinguishable in different ways for different reasons.

Week 3: Women in Politics

Mary Hawkesworth, 'Feminists Go Global: Reclaiming a History', chapter 2 of *Globalization and Feminist Activism*, pp. 29-65, 174-6, 183-202 (Rowman & Littlefield, 2006). (on order UoB)

Learning outcome: Understand the distinctions between women in politics, women's movements, feminist movements, and the ways that these are and are not represented in conventional histories. You should pay careful attention to who writes conventional histories and how commonplace understandings are reinforced (look at Enloe on feminist curiosity!).

Week 4: 'Feminist Revolution'

Shulamith Firestone, 'The Ultimate Revolution: Demands and Speculations', chapter 10 of *The Dialectic of Sex*, pp. 183-224 (Women's Press, 1979 [first published 1970]). (also UoB HQ1160 FIR)

Learning outcome: Understand the way that a 'positive manifesto' poses critical questions about current practices. Rather than focus on 'practicality' or otherwise (anything is 'practical'), pick out the 'problems' (rather than the 'solutions') and consider your own critical perspective on these things.

Week 5: Questioning Woman

Judith Grant, 'Solutions: A Basic Outline of the Issues', chapter 6 of *Fundamental Feminism* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 153-91, 217-18. (also UoB HQ1190 GRA)

Learning Outcome: Understand why and in what ways 'woman' has become a problematic concept, and how this is politically significant. Pay close attention to gender and heterosexuality as power structures, how 'woman' figures in this, and what this says about individuals.

Week 6: Undoing Gender

Judith Butler, 'Gender Regulations' and 'Doing Justice to Someone', chapters 2 and 3 in *Undoing Gender*, pp. 40-56, 57-74, 252-3, (Routledge, 2004). (also UoB HQ1075 BUT)

Learning outcome: Understand gender as a regulatory norm through which individuals are said to have 'identity'. Consider the relationship between how we understand things, and what they 'are'; also how personal the political is.

Week 7: Sexing the Body

Anne Fausto-Sterling, 'Should There Be Only Two Sexes', chapter 4 in *Sexing the Body*, pp. 78-114, 295-307 (Basic Books, 2000). [See the lecturer if you wish to chase up references – the bibliography is too long to include in the course pack.] (on order UoB)

Learning outcome: Understand that sex assignment as 'woman' (or 'man') is a social decision. Pay close attention to the critique of science as a gendered and political activity.

Week 8: Masculinity without Men

Judith Halberstam, 'An Introduction to Female Masculinity', and 'Raging Bull Dyke', chapters 1 and 8 of *Female Masculinity*, pp. 1-43, 267-77, 279-82, 304-6, 307-21 (Duke University Press, 1998). (also UoB HQ75.5 HAL)

Learning outcome: Understand gender as a semiotic pastiche repetitiously enacted by bodies. Consider how much we know about this already via popular culture generally and films in particular.

Week 9: The Marriage Question

Jacqueline Stevens, 'Preface' and 'Compensatory Kinship Rules', preface and chapter 5 of *Reproducing the State*, pp. ix-xv, 209-35, 281-97 (Princeton University Press, 1999). (on order UoB)

Learning outcome: Understand the political consequences of state 'family' policies. Pay close attention to how these political issues are rooted in histories and 'factualities' based on sex/gender/sexuality.

Week 10: Equalities/Differences

Judith Squires, 'Is [Gender] Mainstreaming Transformative? Theorizing Mainstreaming in the Context of Diversity and Deliberation', *Social Politics*, 12:3 (2005), pp. 366-88. (also electronic journals UoB, special issue on gender mainstreaming)

Learning Outcome: Understand the way 'gender' functions in the contemporary politics through which equalities are negotiated. Consider carefully what 'equality' means, what 'diversity' is valued, and how 'democracy' makes a difference.

REQUIREMENTS FOR CREDIT POINTS

Students must:

- ◆ complete all required work, whether written or not
- ◆ have no more than 20% unexcused absences from seminars
- ◆ complete the assessment(s) relevant to each unit. This is the mark that will be recorded on the transcript as the unit mark.

Please note you will be required to submit coursework electronically using Blackboard, the University of Bristol's Online Learning Environment.

For further information on failure to complete work, poor attendance, resits and reassessment, students should consult their Faculty Handbook. Penalties for late or overlength essays are set out in the Politics Undergraduate Handbook.

For Erasmus and Study Abroad students:

Where students are unable to sit an examination in May/June (for example those who plan to attend during Teaching Block 1 only), extra coursework may be set.

DEADLINES

- Report due Friday 18th January (week 12) before 12 noon

Without an extension late work is subject to penalties. A report that is handed in AFTER 12 noon but BEFORE midnight on the due date will have 5 marks deducted from the total. A report that is submitted AFTER midnight on the due date will be awarded a maximum mark of 40 and may not be given feedback. A report submitted more than two weeks after the due date will receive a mark of zero.

REQUIREMENTS

The report must be between 1500-2000 words. This includes footnotes but does not include the bibliography. A report that is over length (more than 2000 words) will have 5 marks deducted for every 100 words (or part thereof) exceeding the word limit. For example, a report of 2001 words will have 5 marks deducted from the total. A report of 2101 will have 10 marks deducted from the total. A report that is under length (less than 1500 words) will not be considered acceptable, and will be required to be rewritten for a maximum mark of 40.

Reports that either do not contain a bibliography, or fail to cite sources, or do not reference the material used will be penalised. A report with no referencing will be marked no higher than 40. Inadequate referencing will result in marks being deducted. Students who are uncertain about the standards of adequate referencing should consult the Departmental Handbook.

Plagiarised work will be marked at 0 and students will be required to resubmit, usually for a capped mark. Further penalties may be imposed (see the Departmental Handbook, Examination Regulations and Student Disciplinary Regulations).

Work that is not word processed will be awarded a mark no higher than 39.

EXTENSIONS

Extensions will only be granted by the Undergraduate Coordinator, Beth Hammond. Requests should be made directly to her. Extensions will only be allowed in exceptional circumstances and they should be accompanied with supporting documentation, for example medical certificates.

Note: Corrupt computer disks and exhausted printer cartridges do NOT qualify as exceptional circumstances. Remember to back up your work and give yourself time to cope with last minute problems.

EXAMINATION

The unit will be examined in one two hour paper in May/June. You will be required to answer two questions drawn from a choice of eight questions. It is a 'seen' examination; see above for details.

FEEDBACK

You will have feedback from your lecturer as follows:

- Feedback sheet returned to you regarding your completed 'paired' PowerPoint assignment
- Feedback sheet returned to you regarding your completed and marked REPORT
- Note that there is no feedback on the 'seen' examination

Written work and seminar participation will be assessed according to the criteria laid out in the Departmental Handbook. You should study them carefully.

You are encouraged to go and see the lecturer to discuss your work and feedback on it. All lecturers have office hours, in part, for this purpose.

OFFICE HOURS

All academic tutors, including teaching assistants and staff not based at the University of Bristol, have at least one office hour a week during the teaching year, weeks 1-24. The office hour is an opportunity for students to raise both specific issues about a unit and more general matters as appropriate. Students who wish either to discuss their performance on a unit or to receive more feedback should make use of this office hour.

Members of staff who are Personal Tutors have two office hours per week during the teaching year. Those who are not Personal Tutors have one office hour per week during the teaching year.

Office hours are advertised near staff offices and on the main notice boards on the ground floor of the Department of Politics.