GWS 720: Feminist Communication & Philosophy

Fall 2021

Instructor:
Professor Christine Garlough
clgarlough@wisc.edu
3406 Sterling Hall

Office Hours: Thursday 9-10 and by app.

Class time and location: Tuesdays 2:30pm-5pm, Vilas Hall

3-Credit Graduate Course: This course meets face-to-face once a week for two-and-a-half hours.

Canvas Course URL

Requisite: Graduate or professional standing.

Course Description
Provides an introduction to Feminist Communication and Philosophy. Focuses upon: (1) the historical importance and development of feminist communication and philosophy studies in the foundation of GWS and (2) a hands-on experience with developing feminist research projects. Organized around three main sections: (1) approaches to feminist communication and philosophy, (2) feminist interventions in communication and philosophy, and (3) pressing and timely feminist communications and philosophical topics.

Considers the ways that feminist approaches to communication studies and philosophy reconsider and challenge aspects of traditional disciplinary practices and training. Uses a range of pedagogical models for discussion to synthesize and deepen understandings of gender-related issues through intensive reading, writing and discussion. Engages with theories, conceptual developments, debates, as well as epistemological and methodological issues, which chart the development of feminist thought and interrogates the different intellectual traditions that have shaped debates and issues within feminist politics and practices. Examines these traditions from an explicitly interdisciplinary perspective, highlighting contributions made by feminist scholars from different disciplinary backgrounds.

Course Learning Outcomes
In this course, students will:
1. Understand and apply a variety of approaches to Feminist Communication Studies and Philosophy.
2. Design a research project suited to their particular interests and knowledge.

Course Readings

Books: (Available at Room of One’s Own Bookstore located on 315 Gorham Street, Madison WI – 608.257.7888).

Additional reading available electronically via Canvas.

Assignments and Evaluation

**Individual Participation:** (50 points)
Attendance and active participation is mandatory. You may miss the course twice without it directly affecting your grade (save your absences for illness or emergency). You are expected to respond to course material, lecture content, and general class discussion. Please note that attendance and participation are not equivalent. These points are earned through your active engagement; not simply through perfunctory remarks made each class. To facilitate class discussion, you should read the class material for that lecture with questions in mind and come prepared to discuss them in class. If you are inclined to remain quiet in class discussions, please come to see me early in the semester. Together, we will formulate a plan that will help you to participate at increasing levels of comfort.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Points</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of contribution</td>
<td>Always well-prepared for class; shows critical thought; poses questions; moves dialogue forward; stays on topic; engages with both instructor and classmates</td>
<td>Well-prepared for class most of the time; shows effort in critical thinking; poses questions; helps move dialogue forward; often stays on topic; shows effort to engage with both instructor and classmates</td>
<td>Sometimes well-prepared for class; makes attempts to engage in critical thought; makes attempts to move dialogue forward; sometimes goes off topic; shows some effort to engage with instructor and classmates</td>
<td>Rarely prepared for class; few attempts to engage in critical thought; seldom moves dialogue forward; often goes off topic; shows little effort to engage with instructor and classmates</td>
<td>Almost never prepared for class; does not attempt to engage in critical thinking; does not move dialogue forward; purposes goes off topic; does not engage with instructor or classmates</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frequency of contribution</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Most of the time</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>Never</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Respect of ground rules | Always | Most of the time | Sometimes | Rarely | Never
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**Small Group Participation and Discussion Moderation:** (275 points)
Rather than simply considering theories or methodologies in the abstract, we may examine their pragmatic value through small group discussion. The purpose of these groups is three-fold. First, they provide an immediate means to discuss issues raised in lecture. Second, when groups share their insights with the rest of the class, it will facilitate the exchange of ideas. Third, these groups will provide another means through which students can experience aspects of persuasion, communication, and deliberation.

Each small group will be responsible for leading two class discussions on the weeks of their choice. In the week you lead discussion, you will be required to provide 5-7 discussion questions. I strongly urge students to meet with me ahead of class to discuss their class plan and organization of the class period for the week they choose to lead the discussion.

**Reading Requirements & Reading Responses:** (175 points)
Five times over the course of the semester, students will compose a 1-2 page, double spaced reading response that engages with the week’s readings. On some occasions, I will post an issue or question and ask you to respond; while on other occasions, I will ask you to engage the readings in any way that you see fit. These exercises are designed to: 1) help focus your thinking about the readings; 2) give you practice in identifying and articulating the thesis of a book or article and describing briefly how that argument is developed; 3) encourage you to examine and analyze different forms of scholarly evidence; 4) ask you to identify and explore the larger conversation that these articles and books contribute to; and 5) enable you to engage and critique feminist scholarship in a variety of fields and disciplines. These will not be graded but are due at the beginning of the class period.

Any changes to the course will be communicated in class and through email notifications. It is your responsibility to check these notices on a regular basis. I expect students to have read the assigned material and come to class prepared to discuss the readings.

**Final Research Project:** (500 points, due during the final exam time)
In creating this project, you will draw on content, theory, and methodology you have encountered in this course, as well as in your research concentration. It should help you reflect on your research interests and goals as you plan for conference presentations and journal submissions.

**Deadlines**

*Outline*: due Week 7 (ungraded and checked off)
Peer-review: due Week 11 (ungraded and checked off)

Oral presentation of project: due last two class sessions

Final project: due during the scheduled final exam

The “Adopt a Scholar” Program:
This semester you will have the opportunity to “adopt” a scholar. Throughout the coming weeks you will read at least two pieces of their work. These could be journal articles, book chapters, or whole books. You also should use your research skills to uncover background information about this scholar’s academic, professional, and personal life. During discussion, you will be responsible for bringing their voice into the classroom, contrasting their ideas against the primary reading. In short, you will become the class expert on that intellectual figure.

It is important to note that you do not have to like or agree with your adopted scholar, but it is wise to choose someone whom you find provocative. Here is a very short list of candidates - please feel free to choose someone who is not on the list. Please discuss your choice with me as soon as possible.

Chandra Mohanty        Audre Lorde
Jaspir Puar            Sara Ahmed
Elizabeth Grosz        Sylvia Wynter
Judith Butler          bell hooks
Gloria Anzaldua        Virginia Woolf
Nancy Fraser           Dean Spade
Sidonie Smith          Gayatri Spivak
Patricia Hill Collins  Trinh Minh-ha
Julia Kristeva         Jack Halberstam
Luce Irigaray          Judith Butler
Donna Harway           Drucilla Cornell
Helene Cixous          Kimberle Crenshaw
Lauren Berlant         Talia Mae Bettcher
Hannah Arendt          Eve Sedgwick
Patricia Hill Collins  Angela Davis
Simone de Beauvior     Kumari Jayawardena
Seyla Benhabib         Richa Nagar
Anne Fausto-Sterling   Susan Stryker

Final Grades
Final grades will be determined according to the following official UW grading scale:

A 93-100%    AB 88-92%    B 83-87%
If you have questions about this course generally, or a grade specifically, speak to the me. If the question is still not resolved, speak with the Gender & Women’s Studies Chair, Judy Houck. She will attempt to resolve the issue informally and inform you of the Appeals Procedures if no resolution is reached informally.

Good Things To Know

**Attendance Policy:** Attendance matters a great deal.

One of the skills we will work to develop this semester is respectful and active discussion. To be successful you should the following:

- Bring your readings and notes to class.
- Be ready to engage with the readings and your classmates. This involves being both an active listener and contributor to the course. Make your point succinctly. Allow others an opportunity to add to the discussion.
- Be respectful of the differing perspectives your student colleagues may hold. They will offer you the same respect.
- Ask for clarification of any term or point you do not understand or are unfamiliar with.
- Remember that discussion is meant to expand each other’s understandings; but not necessarily to convince others to our own point of view.
- Be willing to change your mind.
- Acknowledge that one remark may be understood multiple ways.
- When you disagree with others, be specific, support it with evidence.

**Lecture Etiquette & Electronic Devices:** Arrive on time and turn off your cell phone. Texting or talking on your phone or other handheld device is a distraction to the students around you, and to me.

**Institutional statement on diversity:** Diversity is a source of strength, creativity, and innovation for UW-Madison. We value the contributions of each person and respect the profound ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion enrich the university community. We commit ourselves to the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, outreach, and diversity as inextricably linked goals. The University of Wisconsin-Madison fulfills its public mission by creating a welcoming and inclusive community for people from every background – people who as students, faculty, and staff serve Wisconsin and the world.

[https://diversity.wisc.edu/](https://diversity.wisc.edu/)

**Help:** This course may require you to think and write in ways that are unfamiliar to you. I encourage you to utilize my office hours to talk about assignments. Also, I encourage all students to use the Writing Center resources.
Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy (Faculty Document 1071) require that students with disabilities be reasonably accommodated in instruction and campus life. Reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities is a shared faculty and student responsibility. Students are expected to inform faculty [me] of their need for instructional accommodations by the end of the third week of the semester, or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. Faculty [I], will work either directly with the student [you] or in coordination with the McBurney Center to identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA. https://mcburney.wisc.edu/instructor/

Illnesses and Other Personal Emergencies: If you experience an unavoidable personal situation that prevents you from completing work on time, you must take responsibility for informing me prior to the date the work is due. A failure to contact me prior to the due date will result in the application of the late assignment policy described above. Extensions will be granted for substantiated emergencies.

Religious Holidays: If you plan to miss class for religious holidays, state in writing the days you will be absent and submit that information to me by the third week of class.

Incompletes: As per University policy, incompletes are reserved for students who are earning a passing grade, but are unable to complete the course due to illness or conditions beyond the control of the student.

Academic Misconduct: Students sometimes take desperate measures to complete a paper, especially if they feel overwhelmed by the demands of an assignment. Please do not do this. Instances of academic misconduct will be penalized to the fullest extent in all cases. If you find yourself unable to complete an assignment and considering acts such as plagiarism, please seek help with the assignment.

Course Website: I will use Canvas to post Power Point slides (posted either just before lecture or after the lecture) and handouts distributed in class in case you miss class, including paper writing guidelines and exam review sheets.

Writing Center: For additional help with papers, visit the Writing Center at any stage during the writing process. Stop by 6171 Helen C. White, call for an appointment (263-1992), or consult the Center’s resources online at www.wisc.edu/writing/.

Communication: I am here to help you succeed in this course. The best way to reach is by email. Over the weekends, it may be 48 hours until I respond.
# Course Schedule

## Week 1

(9/14)

Introductions, “Wonder and Communication as a Caring Struggle”

*This course is designed to stimulate intellectual exploration, build skill in engaging with feminist thought, and consider crucial issues of our time. The end goal is the development of a research project that is of significant importance to you and may be used in a thesis, conference presentation, journal submission or activist publication. What communication and philosophical issues are at the forefront of your mind? What keeps you up at night?*

*In our current moment, given the struggles at hand, what conditions exist for wonder, active questioning, and communication as a caring struggle? Wonder – an essential aspect of human existence – has been a core concept of interest for feminist philosophers like Ahmed, Butler, Arendt, Irigaray, and Mann. How can communicating wonder productively stir up trouble and alter the ways we perceive ourselves and others? And what is the role of listening in these struggles?*

No readings for this class.

Sidebar - Related Readings for Another Time


## Approaches to Feminist Communication and Philosophy

## Week 2

(9/21)

Many Feminisms: Communication, Philosophy and Culture
“Feminism” has many different uses and its meanings are often contested. Moreover, how we conceptualize gender matters—particularly: (1) its relationship to ways of being, (2) the nature and classification of values and what kinds of things have value and (3) knowledge production. These issues influence not only the creation of theory but the methods we employ, as we engage in research in humanities and social science disciplines, as well as activism and modes of communication in our communities.

**Required Readings**


**Sidebar - Related Readings for Another Time**


Ontology: Theories of the Human, Posthuman and Scenes of Politics

How has “humanness” or human relationality been conceptualized and interrogated by feminist communication scholars? How have feminists engaged with ethics in order to: (1) help human societies flourish, (2) ameliorate human suffering, and (3) resolve conflicts of interest. What might it mean to engage in what Foucault called “fearless speech” in the face of injustice?

Required Readings


A Focus on Sylvia Wynter (Sonia)


Week 4 (10/5)  

Vulnerability, Precarity and Mourning

When, why, and for whom do we grieve? The events of the last year have fueled BLM, MMIW and other anti-racism discourses, COVID-19 and #MeToo deliberation, and migration/immigration debates -- centering questions about death and democracy in the public sphere and political praxis. Through essays by Saidiya Hartman, Judith Hooker, Athena Athanasiou, Judith Butler, and Hannah Arendt, we will take a deep dive into these communication and philosophical concerns.

Required Readings


Week 5 (10/12)  

Activism, Critical Rhetorical Discourses and Radical Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics addresses how we read, understand and critique texts, particularly those written in another time or context of life different from ours. In a myriad of ways, feminist hermeneutics challenges mainstream interpretations and raises social, critical and philosophical questions about how vested interests related to gender, class, race, ability, etc. may influence how we read public texts – from government documents, to religious materials, to social media posts and more.
Required Reading


Sidebar - Related Readings for Another Time


Week 6 Feminist Aesthetics - Expressive Culture, Epistemology, and Storytelling for Activism

(10/19)

Feminist aesthetics addresses questions of art and expressive culture. Feminist perspectives in aesthetics explore cultural influences that exert power over subjectivity. How does art and storytelling both reflect and perpetuate the social formation of gender, sexuality, and identity? To what the extent are all of these framed by factors such as race, national origin, social position, and historical situation?

Required Readings


8. Halberstam, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yH1aR5I2oXo. (Kai)

**Sidebar - Related Readings for Another Time**


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**Pressing and Timely Feminist Communications and Philosophical Topics**

**Week 7 (10/26)**

**Witnessing, Acknowledgment and Recognition**

*Communication practices of witnessing, acknowledgment and recognition have been at the center of studies by feminist scholars exploring South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Movements, Holocaust Studies and BML activism. What do these communication practices*
entail? What are their limitations? How have they been used differently in various cultural, social and historical contexts?

Required Readings


5. Gordon, “Your Fat Friend”
   https://www.yourfatfriend.com/ (Rae)

Feminist Ethics of Care

Placing feminist care ethicists, like Joan Tronto, Sara Ruddick, and Sophie Bourgault, in conversation with democratic communication scholars like Pavarti Ranghuram, Simone Weil, and Iris Marion Young, we will explore the centrality of listening and deliberation for social justice communications practices.

Required Readings


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**Week 9**  
**(11/9)**  
**Mutual Aid**

**Required Reading**


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**Week 10**  
**(11/16)**

**The Potential of Speaking and Listening Together Across Difference**

*Speaking together, especially in times of crisis, is difficult. Are there ways to communicate despite difference? What are limitations to these endeavors? What is at stake in this moment? How might we conceptualize communication as a gift?*

**Required Reading**


**Sidebar - Related Readings for Another Time**


Week 11  
(11/23)

Ethics, Film and Social Media

Social media research - in digital humanities and communications studies - has significantly contributed to conversations about feminist ethics and online engagements based upon collectivity. Drawing from feminist ethics of care scholarship, Haraway’s notions of “situated knowledge” and Arendt’s concept of “action,” we will reflect on social media interventions by activists and explore practical questions about practices of care in social media research, pointing toward future research directions.

Required Readings


Sidebar - Related Readings for Another Time


**Week 12**  
(11/30)  
**Difficult Dialogue and the Gift**

*Speaking together, especially in times of crisis, is difficult. Are there ways to communicate despite difference? What are limitations to these endeavors? What is at stake in this moment? How might we conceptualize communication as a gift?*

**Required Readings**


**Week 13**  
(12/7)  
**Class Presentations**

**Week 14**  
(12/7)  
**Class Presentations**

* Final project due (scheduled final exam time)