

Feminist Political Thought
POLSCI 401/WS 422
Monday and Wednesdays, 4:00-5:30pm
Mason Hall 1427

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DESCRIPTION:

This course introduces students to issues and approaches in contemporary feminist political thought, with a particular emphasis on the connection between feminism as a political movement (or, rather, *movements*) and feminist theory. Taking up some of the central concerns within political theory—among them, justice, equality, freedom, domination, and the mechanisms of social and political change—we will consider how these issues and concepts are fortified, destabilized, or transformed through the adoption of feminist perspectives. Many, if not all, of these enduring concerns are at play in recent debates over reproductive rights and justice, particularly in the wake of *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, in which the U.S. Supreme Court held that the constitution does not grant a right to abortion. But if the “end of *Roe*” has provoked no small amount of handwringing about the failures of feminism, it also offers the opportunity to imagine feminist politics and feminist futures beyond the strictures imposed by what reproductive justice activist Loretta Ross refers to as the “choice/privacy framework” (2006, 15). This course is not meant as a reproductive politics class; rather, we will use contemporary debates over reproductive rights and justice as a lens through which to consider some of the concepts and approaches central to feminist political thought.

FORMAT:

Due to the size of the course, I will typically lecture for the first 30-40 minutes of class before opening the discussion for questions, comments, and smaller group activities. Lectures will be recorded and made available on Canvas, as will lecture slides (typically after the end of class).

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

By the end of the term, you should be able to:

1. Identify and evaluate the significance of key concepts in feminist thought, including: gender, citizenship, intersectionality, reproductive justice, autonomy, freedom, the public/private divide, class, and race.
2. Interpret and engage with complex and often contested ideas and thinkers within feminist political thought and related disciplines.

3. Closely read a text, focusing on the careful reconstruction of authors' arguments. Close reading will be discussed and modelled in lecture before being developed in conceptual analysis papers (see below), reading responses, and argumentative essays.
4. Approach, plan, write, and revise argumentative essays, employing complex, analytical, and evidence-based arguments.
5. Effectively respond to, engage with, and incorporate feedback from your peers.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING POLICY

As an upper-level writing course (ULWR), this course is designed to enhance your writing skills and help you grow as a writer and thinker. As such, it will familiarize you with a range of different writing techniques and styles—from shorter response papers and conceptual analyses to longer argumentative essays. Shorter assignments are geared toward building close reading skills by helping you to identify and assess key points and concepts, argumentative structure, potential implications, as well as points of agreement, disagreement, or confusion. Close reading of assigned texts will also be modeled in lectures and discussions. Assignments—along with due dates—are as follows:

Initial Assessment (10 points, due Wednesday, January 11th by 8pm): A short questionnaire to assess prior exposure to feminist thought (including previous coursework), and to allow you to communicate expectations and goals for the semester.

Conceptual Analysis (2-3 pages, 25 pts, by the end of January): This exercise asks you to identify and describe a core concept from the reading, assess what the author is seeking to accomplish with this concept, and evaluate the effectiveness of its use. The conceptual analysis assignment must be completed before writing a response paper.

3 Response Papers (2-3 pages, 30 pts each, due over the course of the semester): Though you can choose when you write your response papers, they must be turned in within a week of the readings to which they are responding.

Argumentative Papers: You will write two, 6-8 page (1,500-2,000 words), argumentative essays over the course of the term. You will be given at least 2 prompts, of which you are to respond to one, utilizing the readings and discussions we've had thus far. Papers will be evaluated on their strength, originality, clarity, organization, inclusion and discussion of relevant textual evidence and examples, and quality of writing (see attached rubric). The emphasis will be on the process of writing, including initial planning and outlining, drafting, peer review, and revision.

To this end, both papers will require that you complete a pre-writing exercise to help you organize your thoughts, marshal textual evidence, craft a thesis, and put together an outline. You will then compose a first draft, followed by a guided in-class peer review session, when you will exchange papers with an assigned partner (I will distribute a questionnaire to focus and guide the review process). The final draft will be accompanied by this questionnaire and a short report on how you incorporated and responded to feedback.

Papers should meet length requirements, be double-spaced, and submitted with standard 1" margins in Times New Roman, 12-point font. You are required to discuss your ideas with me or Prof. Peterson in office hours before drafting your first analytic essay (see "Office Hours"). Where possible, we will set up additional office hours to accommodate your schedule before paper

deadlines. Typically, you will not be permitted to devise your own writing prompt. Once a paper has been handed back, you are welcome clarify any questions you may have for me. *All papers must be turned in and must receive a passing grade to pass the course. Papers more than ten days late will not be accepted, unless exceptional circumstances apply.*

Paper 1:

Pre-writing exercise and essay outline [20 pts, due Monday, February 6th]

First draft of paper [40 pts, Wednesday, February 15th]

In-class peer review [20 points, Wednesday, February 15th]

Final draft, including a report on how you incorporated feedback from your classmate and instructor [50 points, due Friday, March 10th]

Paper 2:

Pre-writing exercise and essay outline [20 points, due Monday, March 27th]

First drafts [40 points, due Wednesday, April 5th]

In-class peer review [20 points, Wednesday, April 5th]

Final draft, including a report on how you incorporated feedback from your classmate and instructor [50 points, due Friday, April 21st]

Finally, students are encouraged to utilize Sweetland services, which include both one-on one-consultation, peer tutoring, and writing guides. More information is available [here](#).

Participation and Attendance [75 points]: I view this class as a collaborative enterprise grounded in engaged discussion and open debate. I understand participation to include not only comments or questions, but the ability to actively listen to your colleagues and thoughtfully and respectfully engage with—and challenge—their ideas.

Finally, the topics discussed in this class can be fraught and highly charged. Differences in perspective and experience will lead to different reactions and responses. Attentive, respectful, and patient engagement with one another in discussion—small group and open class—is crucial. If issues arise for you concerning violations of respectful engagement in our classroom, please speak with the course instructors.

OTHER POLICIES AND INFORMATION:

Illness and Absences: While complete attendance in the class is encouraged, I recognize that the pandemic will likely make this impossible. Most importantly, *please* stay home if you feel sick (no need to get a doctor’s note or go into detail). Testing is available around campus (sign up [here](#)).

Late Policy: While I generally do not grant extensions on written assignments (barring illness or emergency), you are allowed two 48-hour extension to be used at your discretion. Late assignments will be graded down 1/3 of a letter grade per day late (an A- would become a B+, etc.).

Accessibility: If you have a physical, sensory, cognitive, or psychological disability and require accommodations, please let me know if I can do more to make the class (and class materials) more accessible. You do not have to disclose your disability status to request accommodations from me. I do want to know about what kinds of accommodations will make our classroom a productive learning environment for you, but I also want you to know that disclosure is a choice. Disclosure

isn't limited to disability status, either: it may come up with respect to past trauma, gender identity, sexuality, etc.

Formal requests for accommodations may be made by contacting the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) Office located at G664 Haven Hall. Once your eligibility for an accommodation has been determined you will be issued a verified individual services accommodation (VISA) form. While I do not require you to have completed a formal request with the SSD Office, it can be helpful for accessing resources (OCR PDFs, for example).

Student Well-Being: Students may experience stressors that can impact both their academic experience and their personal well-being (especially this year). These may include academic pressure and challenges associated with relationships, mental health, alcohol or other drugs, identities, finances, etc.

If you are experiencing any issues, seeking help is a courageous thing to do for yourself and those who care about you. If the source of your stressors is academic, please contact me so that we can find solutions together. For personal concerns, U-M offers many resources, some of which are listed at [Resources for Student Well-being](#) on the Well-being for U-M Students website. You can also search for additional resources on that website.

Academic Honesty and Integrity: The University of Michigan community functions best when its members treat one another with honesty, fairness, respect, and trust. The college promotes the assumption of personal responsibility and integrity and prohibits all forms of academic dishonesty and misconduct. For more information, including examples of behaviors that are considered academic misconduct and potential sanctions, please see lsa.umich.edu/lsa/academics/academic-integrity.html

Laptops and Other Electronic Devices: Active listening and engaged discussion are central to this course. While I do allow computers and other note-taking devices, I will intervene if they disrupt class discussion.

Office Hours and Contacting Us: Your instructors are here to be a resource for you. **Do** take advantage of our office hours, and feel free to email Instructors Heffernan or Peterson at any point with questions or concerns. We will try to reply to emails within 48 hours. However, we do not answer emails over the weekend, and will not answer last minute emails about an assignment. If you are unable to attend the scheduled office hours, please email Prof. Heffernan (akheff@umich.edu) or Prof. Peterson (lupeters@umich.edu) and we'll figure out a workable time.

Note on texts: All readings are available on Canvas under the "Modules" tab. While there are no books required for purchase, you may wish to have the following on hand (I would strongly recommend it, partly for convenience, partly because it's just that good).

Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*, 2nd ed. (Vintage Books, 2017).

COURSE SCHEDULE

Wednesday, January 4th: Introduction and Syllabus Overview

Part I: Mapping the Terrain

Monday, January 9th: Finding Feminism, Becoming Feminist

- Sarah Ahmed, "Feminism is Sensational," in *Living a Feminist Life* (Duke University Press, 2017): 21-42.
- Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser, *Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto* (Verso Books, 2019): 2-20.

Wednesday, January 11th: Reframing Reproductive Politics, Part I

- Laura Briggs, *How All Politics Became Reproductive Politics: From Welfare Reform to Foreclosure to Trump* (University of California Press, 2017), Introduction (pp. 1-18).
- Judith Levine, "Abortion is a Public Good," *Boston Review*, October 6th, 2020.
- Amy Littlefield, "How Does Reproductive Justice Win?" *New Republic*, September 28, 2022.

Monday, January 16th: No Class, Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Part II: Approaching the Canon

Wednesday, January 18th: Feminist Theory and the Canon of Political Thought: An Overview

- Linda Zerilli, "Feminist Theory and the Canon of Political Thought," in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory*, eds. John S. Dryzek, Bonnie Honig, and Anne Phillips (Oxford University Press, 2008): 106-124.

Monday, January 23rd: The Family and/in the State

- Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. C. D. C. Reeve (Hackett Publishing, 1998), Book I (pp. 1-25).

Wednesday, January 25th: Conjugal, not Political

- John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge University Press, 1988), selections.

*** Prompts for Argumentative Paper 1 Distributed***

Monday, January 30th: Natural and Artificial Inequality

- Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* in *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge University Press, 1997), selections.
- Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on Political Economy* in *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*, ed. And trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge University Press, 1997), selections.

Wednesday, February 1st: "Woman is Worth More as a Woman and Less as a Man"

- Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, in *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge University Press, 1997), selections.

- Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile or On Education*, trans. Allan Bloom (Basic Books, 1979), selections.

*****Argumentative Paper 1 Pre-writing Exercise and Outline Due Monday, February 6*****

Part III: Marxist Feminism and the Problem(s) of Social Reproduction

Monday, February 6th: “A Mere Instrument of Production”

- Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “Manifesto of the Communist Party,” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (Norton, 1978), 473-491.

Wednesday, February 8th: Capitalism and the Patriarchy of the Wage

- Heidi Hartmann, “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union,” in *Women and Revolution*, ed. Lydia Sargent (Black Rose Books, 1981), 1-41.

Part IV: Intersectionality as Method

Monday, February 13th: The Deformed Equality of Equal Oppression

Wednesday, February 15th: In-class peer review session (no reading)

*****First Draft of Argumentative Paper 1 Due In-Class on Wednesday, February 15*****

Monday, February 20th: “The Deformed Equality of Equal Oppression”

- Angela Davis, “Reflections on the Black Woman’s Role in the Community of Slaves,” in *The Angela Davis Reader* (Blackwell, 1998), 111-128.
- Dorothy Roberts, “Reproduction in Bondage: in *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (Pantheon Books, 1997), 22-55.

Wednesday, February 22nd: “To Be Recognized as Human...is Enough”

- The Combahee River Collective, “A Black Feminist Statement” (1977).
- Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, “Until Black Women are Free, None of Us Will Be Free,” *New Yorker*, July 20, 2020.

Optional: Marian Jones, “If Black Women Were Free: An Oral History of the Combahee River Collective,” *The Nation*, October 29, 2021.

Saturday, February 25th to Sunday, March 5th: No Class (Spring Break)

Part V: Reproductive Rights and Regulations

Monday, March 6th: “A Means of Solving Social Problems”

- Dorothy Roberts, “The Dark Side of Birth Control,” in *Killing the Black Body* (Vintage Books, 2017), 56-103.

Wednesday, March 8th: “Three Generations of Imbeciles are Enough”

- *Buck v. Bell*, 274 U.S. 200 (1927), Majority Opinion.

- Eli Clare, "Yearning Toward Carrie Buck," *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies* 8, no. 3 (2014): 335-344.
- Villarosa, Linda. "The Long Shadow of Eugenics in America." *The New York Times Magazine*, June 8, 2022.

*****Final Draft of Argumentative Paper 1 Due on Friday, March 10th*****

Monday, March 13th: "The Sanctity of a Man's Home and the Privacies of Life"

- *Griswold v. Connecticut*, 381 U.S. 479, Majority Opinion and Goldberg Concurrence
- Anita Allen, "Privacy," in *A Companion to Feminist Philosophy*, eds. Alison M. Jaggar and Iris Marion Young (Blackwell Publishing, 1998), 456-465.
- Melissa Murray, "Overlooking Equality on the Road to Griswold," 2015, *Yale Law Journal Forum* 124 (2015), <https://www.yalelawjournal.org/forum/overlooking-equality-on-the-road-to-griswold>

Wednesday, March 15th: "The Woman and her Responsible Physician"

- *Roe v. Wade*, 410 U.S. 113 (1973), Majority Opinion (selections).
- Catherine A. MacKinnon, "Privacy v Equality: Beyond *Roe v. Wade*," in *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law*, pp 93-102.

*****Prompts for Argumentative Paper 2 Distributed by Monday, March 20th*****

Monday, March 20th: Whose Liberty?

- Dorothy Roberts, "The Meaning of Liberty," in *Killing the Black Body* (Vintage Books, 2017), 294-312.
- Andrea Smith, "Beyond Pro-Choice versus Pro-Life: Women of Color and Reproductive Justice," *NWSA Journal* 17, no. 1 (Spring 2005), pp. 119-140.

Wednesday, March 22nd: The "Good Abortion" and Other Rhetorical Strategies

- *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pa. v. Casey*, 505 U.S. 833 (1992), Majority Opinion (selections).
- Claire McKinney, "A Good Abortion is a Tragic Abortion: Fit Motherhood and Disability Stigma," *Hyppatia* 34, no. 2 (Spring 2019): 266-285.

*****Argumentative Paper 2 Pre-writing Exercise and Outline Due Monday, March 27*****

Monday, March 27th: "What the Constitution and the Rule of Law Demand"

- *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, 597 U.S. __ (2022), Majority Opinion (selections), Thomas Concurrence (selections), Kagan Dissent (selections).
- Read or listen: Leah Litman, Melissa Murray, and Kate Shaw, "Roe Is Dead. Now What?," *Strict Scrutiny* (podcast), season 3, ep. 56 (2022), <https://crooked.com/podcast/roe-is-dead-now-what/>.

Part VI: Thinking Beyond the State

Wednesday, March 29th: Feminism and the Politics of Protection

- Wendy Brown, "Finding the Man in the State," in *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton, 1995): 166-196.

Monday, April 3rd: Sex Publics and Queer Worldbuilding

- Melissa Murray, "Americans are Losing Their Right to Not Conform," *New York Times*, July 6, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/06/opinion/dobbs-griswold-abortion-rights-conformity.html>
- Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, "Sex in Public," *Critical Inquiry* 24 (Winter 1998): 547-566.

Wednesday, April 5th: In-class peer review session (Prof. Heffernan at WPSA Conference)

*****First Draft of Argumentative Paper 2 Due in Class on April 5*****

Monday, April 10th: Nonnormative and Marginal Politics

- Cathy J. Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian & Gay Studies* 3 (1997): 437-465.

Wednesday, April 12th: Toward a "Scaled-up" Feminism

- Kathi Weeks, "Abolition of the Family: The Most Infamous Feminist Proposal," *Feminist Theory*, OnlineFirst.

Monday, April 17th: Concluding Thoughts and Reflection

*****Final Draft of Argumentative Paper 1 Due on Friday, April 21st*****