**PHIL 3773: Topics in Feminist Philosophy**

**Sections 001 and H01 CR# 63559 (Honors CR# 63739)**

**HSS 4123**

**TR 2-3:15**

Instructor: Michele Merritt, Ph.D.

Office: HSS 4172

Office Hours: TR 12:45-1:45, or by appointment

Email: [mmerritt@astate.edu](mailto:mmerritt@astate.edu)

Web: [www.michelemerritt.com](http://www.michelemerritt.com)

**Course Description:** The connection between feminism and philosophy is an evolving and unfolding process. While it is undoubtedly the case that philosophy has long suffered from a univocal focus and ought to be more inclusive of underrepresented voices from women, members of the LGBTQ+ community, non-white persons, and disabled persons, it is not so clear how this inclusion ought to look. Should we, for example, offer courses that are entirely devoted to feminist thought, or is it better to include a feminist perspective in every philosophy course – or both? In terms of content, we will examine questions as they arise both in the ‘mainstream’ philosophical canon and among feminist theorists. For instance, mainstream Philosophy of Mind, has witnessed a surge of interest in the embodied and interpersonal aspect of cognition. Feminists, on the other hand, have been discussing the body and its connection to sex, gender, society, and performativity for decades. Would it be beneficial to engage in a 'Feminist Philosophy of Mind'? What would that look like? And what about the connection between theory and practice? What is the ideal discourse between feminist theory and the real, lived experiences of transgender persons? What about between feminism and race? Politics? Technology? Science? These are just a few of the many questions we will explore in this course. We will proceed topically, which means the standard philosophical categories by which one might envision a course unfolding — metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, etc.— will not necessarily guide our inquiry. Instead, as we work through these aforementioned questions, we will see various philosophical frameworks emerge, get questioned, or even outright rejected. Our task, by the end of the course, is to determine how to better approach "Feminist Philosophy" within the larger discipline of philosophy in the future.

**Program Outcomes:**This course contributes to the following program-level outcomes:  
  
1) Students will understand central issues and theories in philosophy (from among the major areas of metaphysics, epistemology, and value theory).  
2) Students will be able to analyze and explain complicated ideas.  
3) Students will be able to analyze arguments.  
4) Students will be able to evaluate arguments.

**Course-Specific Learning Outcomes:**

1) Students will understand and appreciate issues central to Feminist Philosophy – its history and current debates

2) Students will be able analyze, explain, and evaluate arguments in Feminist Philosophy, both in their writing and in discussion

3) Students will be better prepared for graduate coursework in areas related to Feminist Philosophy.

**Course Materials**

No required textbook. All readings will be available on my website. (Honors students are required to read an additional book for their extra assignment and in most cases, I have the book to loan you or you can purchase it on Amazon.)

**Grading Scale**

90-100 = A

80-89 = B

70-79 = C

60-69 = D

Below 60 = F

**Grade Distribution:**

Workbook Homework 20%

Papers (2 @ 20% each) 40%

Social ‘Experiment’ 20%

Participation/Attendance 20%

*Homework*

One of our required materials is the album, “Capture the Flag,” by the band, *War on Women* (You can listen to the album for free on Spotify or on their website: <https://waronwomen.bandcamp.com/album/capture-the-flag)>.It comes with a workbook (which will be available in PDF on my website) and throughout the semester, you will be asked to write answers to various parts of that workbook, as those questions pertain to a song and a relevant part of the class. Each homework assignment will have a specific due date and once this date has passed, no late homework will be accepted, for any reason. I will drop your lowest homework grade from your overall average (so, if you happen to get a ‘zero’ for a homework you failed to turn in, I will drop that).

*Papers*

There will be two longer papers (6-8 pages) assigned on topics relevant to the course material at that time. More detailed information will be provided at least a week before the paper(s) is due, and a rubric will be available on Blackboard.

*Social ‘Experiment’*

Working in small groups (we will determine those early in the semester), you will design a study in which you seek to answer a research question that your group has developed (for example, “To what extent is benevolent sexism experienced on Astate’s campus?”). The research question will relate to one or more aspects of our course insofar as you will attempt to further elucidate something we have read or discussed in class by means of testing a hypothesis. This is not intended to be a scientific experiment – hence, there should be no studies designed such that IRB approval is needed (though if you design such a study and think you need to go through the proper ethics channels, we can discuss how to do so). Instead, your task is to collect data based on observation, anonymous questionnaires, surveys, etc. At the end of the semester, your group will present your findings to the class. More specific details about this assignment will be discussed in class within the first three weeks.

*Participation/Attendance*

Attending class regularly and participating in discussions is vital to a successful learning environment. I will take attendance daily and track your participation, both in class and during any online assignments we might have. After three unexcused absences, I will begin deducting points from the total possible points in this category.

**The “Fine Print”**

Students are expected to adhere to all guidelines in the Student Bulletin and Student Handbook (found online at astate.edu). In addition to all the guidelines therein, students in this class are expected to comply with the following:

* + Arrive to class on time and stay for the entirety of the class. If not, I reserve the right to mark you as absent for the day
  + Attendance Policy: The only excused absences will be documented and will pertain to university-sanctioned events, illness, family emergency, or inclement weather. (Attending a routine dental appointment during my class is NOT an excused absence, e.g.).
  + Inclement Weather Policy: Information on campus closure can be found on the ASU web page, KASU, and local radio and television stations. If inclement weather prevents you from being able to come to class and campus is not closed, please call the main office of the philosophy department.
  + Cell phones, laptops, iPads, etc: are to be used *strictly* for academic purposes. Texting, facebooking, running out of the room to take a call, or any other distractions will not be tolerated. You will be asked to leave class or will be given a zero for participation for the day if I deem your electronic/technology use to be inappropriate or disruptive.
  + Cheating: Just Don't Do It! If you are unsure about what constitutes plagiarism, just ask. Better to be safe than sorry. Here is the official statement from the Handbook:
  + *Arkansas State University enthusiastically promotes academic integrity and professional ethics among all members of the ASU academic community. Violations of this policy are considered as* *serious academic misconduct and may result in severe penalties. Sanctions for Academic* *Misconduct may be imposed by the faculty member or instructor discovering the Academic* *Misconduct except in the case of dismissal from a particular program which shall be made by the* *department chair or program director, or suspension or expulsion from the university, which shall* *be made by the dean. A Student may not avoid academic sanctions by withdrawing from a class, a* *program, or the university. A student disagreeing with the sanction issued based on Academic* *Misconduct should follow the Academic Grievance Procedure. It is the student’s responsibility to have read and understood the topics under Academic Misconduct section of the Student Handbook*
  + Policy on Missed Assignments/Make up work: The only reasons I will accept late or missed assignments are documented emergencies, illnesses, deaths in the family, or weather related issues.
  + If you have a disability that might make it difficult for you to succeed in this course, please contact me as soon as possible. Your privacy will be respected and every effort will be made to meet your needs. All students requesting accommodations for disabilities should be registered through ASU’s Disability Services (870 972 3964). If Disabilities Services determines you should be able to take tests in their office, it is your responsibility to schedule the test for the same time and date as the exam is administered to other students.
  + Extra Credit: As a rule, I do not offer extra credit on assignments. If an opportunity, such as a lecture or a philosophy club event arises, and I deem it suitable for students to attend and write a short paper pertaining to it, then I might consider offering extra credit in this case. Please be advised that this is entirely up to me as the instructor. Do not ask for extra credit. Do not ask, at the end of the semester, if there is anything you can do to raise your grade. The answer will always be ‘no.’
  + Email Policy: I will do my best to respond to emails in a timely manner. In order to get a quick response from me, it is imperative that you 1. List the course in which you are enrolled, 2. State your name somewhere in the body of the email, and 3. Be specific about what it is you are asking. I simply will not answer emails that read like text messages to your friends.
  + And finally: While I am all for learning from my students just as much as they learn from me and being a team-player, at the end of the day, I am the instructor. As such, I make the final call on assignments, the way the class is run, etc. Thus, any behavior during class that I deem disrespectful can result in you being asked to leave. Likewise, comments left on assignments, such as you don’t think the questions are fair or you don’t like the class, are unacceptable. I reserve the right to give you negative points on assignments if you choose to show disrespect in this or any other way.

**Course Schedule (subject to modification)**

Week 1 (August 21 + 23) – Introductions + Feminist Foundations

***-* Wollstonecraft*: Chapter 2 from "A Vindication of the Rights of Women"***

***-* Video*: "We Should All be Feminists”, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie***

Week 2 (August 28 + 30) – Metaphysics of Sex and Gender

***-* Beauvoir*, from "The Second Sex"***

***-* Haslange*r, “Gender and Race: (What) are they and (What) do we want them to be?*** -

Homework Due: “YDTMHTL”

Week 3 (September 4 + 6) – Metaphysics of Sex and Gender, cont’d

***-* Foucault*, Introduction to "Herculine Barbin”***

***-* Fausto-Sterling*, from "Sexing the Body”***

Homework Due: “Capture the Flag”

Week 4 (September 11 + 13) – Performing Gender

***-* Butler*, from "Gender Trouble"***

***-* Young*, "Throwing Like a Girl"***

Week 5 (September 18 + 20) – Stereotyping, Sports, and Space

**- Lorber*, "Believing is Seeing: Biology as Ideology”***

***-* Merritt, Yap, Comley & Diehl*: “Stereotype Threat and the Female Athlete”***

Homework Due: “Pleasure and the Beast”

Week 6 (September 25 + 27) – Speech Acts and Injustice

**- Kukla*, “Performative Force, Convention, and Discursive Injustice”***

**- Fricker, *“Hermeneutical Injustice”***

***­***

Homework Due: “Silence is the Gift”

-

Week 7 (October 2 + 4) - Feminist Epistemology and Intersectionality

***-* Dotson *“Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing”***

**- Hill-Collins*, from “Black Feminist Thought”***

Week 8 (October 9 + 11) - Feminist Epistemology and Intersectionality, cont’d

**- Narayan*, “Cross-Cultural Connections, Border Crossings, and Death by Culture”***

Homework Due: “Anarcha”

***\*\*\*First Paper Due***

Week 9 (October 16 + 18) Rape Culture

**- Card, *“Rape as a Terrorist Institution”***

**- Davis, *“Rape, Racism, and the Myth of the Black Rapist”***

Homework Due: “Dick Pics” and “Say It”

Week 10 (October 23 + 25) – Motherhood and Reproductive Justice

**- Bordo*, “Are Mothers Persons”***

***-* Thomson*, “A Defense of Abortion”***

Homework Due: “Childbirth” and **“**Pro-life?”

Week 11 (Octoboer 30 + November 1) – Trans\* Studies and Feminism

**- Stryker*, "Desubjuguted Knowledges: An Introduction to Transgender Studies"***

**- Spade*, "Mutilating Gender"***

Week 13 (November 6 + 8) – Masculinity

**- hooks, “Feminist Manhood,” from *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity and Love***

**- Green*, "Look! No Don 't! The Visibility Dilemma for Transsexual Men”***

- Homework Due: “Lone Wolves” and “Effemimania”

Week 12 (November 13 + 15) – Feminist Issues in Science

***- Fine, from “Delusions of Gender”***

***- Longino, “Taking Gender Seriously in Philosophy of Science”***

***\*\* Social Experiment Presentations***

Week 14 (November 20 + 22) \*\*

**\*\* NO CLASS – Thanksgiving Break \*\***

Week 15 (November 27 + November 29) – The Future of Feminist Philosophy

***- Baumgardner, “Is there a Fourth Wave? Does it Matter?”***

***\*\*Social Experiment Presentations***

Homework Due: “Divisive Shit”

\*\*All Social Experiment Write-ups Due by December 1

\*\*Final Papers Due on Final Exam day

**Honors Addendum:**

In addition to all of the above, Honors students must complete an additional assignment as described below. A revised grade distribution is also listed below.

***Book Review and Analysis***

Pick one of the books below, read it in its entirety, and write a 4-5 page analysis of the book that includes 1. A synopsis of the story/plotline/historical moments in the text, 2. How the story exemplifies one or more of the themes/arguments/theories we have discussed in the class, 3. How the story problematizes something(s) we have discussed.

The paper will be due before the end of the semester and you are also required to present your book analysis to the class (10 min or so).

Choose from the following books (Dr. Merritt owns most of these, so you are welcome to borrow a copy):

*Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity,* by Julia Serano

*The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks,* by Rebecca Skloot

*Making My Pitch,* by Ila Jane Borders

*Shrill,* by Lindy West

*The Destruction of Hilary Clinton,* by Susan Bordo

*Medical Bondage: Race, Gender, and the Origins of American Gynecology,* by Deirdre Cooper Owens

*Hidden Figures,* by Margot Shetterly

*Grandma Gatewood’s Walk,* by Ben Montgomery

*Hunger: A Memoir of my Body,* by Roxanne Gay

*Ada’s Algorithm,* by James Essinger

*Rosalind Franklin: The Dark Lady of DNA,* by Brenda Maddox