

Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Course Descriptions
Fall 2026

Selected Graduate Courses*

Course Number/Title: 16:988:515 – Feminism: Theory and Practice

Instructor: Zakia Salime

Course Delivery: Face-to-Face

Course Description: This seminar is designed to understand the connections of feminist theory and practice. We will cover feminist theories from multiple perspectives including postcolonial, decolonial, intersectional, queer, and transnational. We will examine the way feminist theory was implemented as practice, and how practice has informed feminist theory. This seminar is interdisciplinary, reflecting the history of feminist theorizing in multiple fields, and feminist practice as it informs pedagogy, politics, movements, and solidarity. In addition, the course will offer students the opportunity to work on their own projects based on the insights of feminist theory and practice. We will examine how these theories can help students develop their individual projects, in a peer review process by students along with the instructor's feedback. Students will get the chance to develop their own projects including 1) a term paper 2) an article 3) part of their practicum, or their master's thesis proposal. Each class will consist of two-to-three student-led presentations and discussions of the assigned readings. We will devote one week to read and review a package of United Nations Conventions and Agreement as a group project.

Course Number/Title: 16:988:520 – Agency, Subjectivity, and Social Change

Instructor: Asli Zengin

Course Delivery: Face-to-Face

Course Description: This graduate seminar will explore agency and social change in various social contexts locally, globally, and historically. We will trace the intellectual history of agency, and debate how different cultural, social, and political worlds shape its understanding, interpretation, and practice. Some of the questions we will discuss are: What is agency? How do social structures and relations of power shape its meaning and practice? How do people recreate themselves while accommodating, contesting, and transforming the conditions of their lives and worlds? How do feminist, queer, trans, anti-colonial, indigenous, abolitionist, socialist, ecological, and disability movements theorize and practice agency and subjectivity? What kind of meanings does it gain in post- or non-human worlds of animals, plants, bacteria, viruses, technology, objects, and ghosts? How to think about subjectivity and social change in these human, post-, and non-human worlds?

Course Number/Title: 16:988:561 – Black Feminist Theory

Instructor: Brittney Cooper

Course Delivery: Face-to-Face

Course Description: Black women's relationship to the politics of gender identity has been a subject of both interrogation and theorization since the 19 century when Black women began widely publishing on matters of both race and gender. Beginning here, this graduate seminar

traces the long history of Black feminist thought, arguing primarily for Black women as theorists of their own experience. We will approach Black feminisms, as a plurality, as a site of contestation, and as what Hazel Carby once called “a locus of contradiction,” which is to say there is no one-size fits all approach to Black women’s experience of or thinking about gender. After grounding ourselves in the 19 century, we will move forward to focus more specifically on the last fifty years of Black feminist knowledge production considering how Black women have theorized intersectionality, epistemology, affect, sexuality, hip hop, social movements, queer and trans theory, and abolition. We will also consider how Black feminist thought developed disparately in the disciplines including sociology, history, literary studies, and more.

Course Number/Title: 16:988:582 – Feminist Genealogies

Instructor: Ed Cohen

Course Delivery: Face-to-Face

Course Description: This course examines a deceptively simple question: “Is feminism a *modern* problematic?” Historically, the answer is obviously yes. Before modernity feminism as such (or even as a word) had no meaning. But more critically, construing “the modern” itself as central to the question, we might ask: to what extent does what we now call “feminism” lean upon a series of “modern” antinomies, paradoxes, and contradictions that not only radically transformed, but indeed may have actually created “Europe,” simultaneously in relation to itself and to the rest of the world? Moreover, does this particular geo-political legacy inform the domain “contemporary feminist theory”? And, if so, how? In order to meditate upon these questions, we will consider an archive of mostly European texts, written over the last three hundred years, which actively inform “modern personhood.” Our readings of these texts will try to glean how “gender,” “sex,” and “sexuality” emerge throughout this period as salient “differences” that cut across and inflect these powerful new incarnations of “the human.”

The project of this class is at once historical and philosophical; or, to be more precise, it is “genealogical.” Genealogy refers to an interpretive process inaugurated by Friedrich Nietzsche and adapted by Michel Foucault, which Foucault famously described as a “history of the present.” For Foucault, genealogy considers the past as an immediacy whose immanence in the present derives neither from its inevitability nor its determinacy. Rather genealogy understands that the presentation of the past (i.e., the actualization of “past-ness” in and as “present-ness”) emerges from fragmentary and often random convergences whose accreted effects nonetheless confront us as “true,” if not “real.” Such genealogical endeavors seek to uncover the chance combinations and conjunctions, intersections and collisions, productive coalescings and violent rendings, that give rise to the ways we live now.

Genealogy’s basic premise holds that the world is much more virtual and much more mutable than it often (re)presents itself. In genealogy we seek to disclose contingencies secreted within phenomena which offer themselves to us as essential dimensions of our world. Through this disclosure, genealogy hopes that we might glimpse instabilities where we all too often see inevitabilities, that we might imagine possibilities where we resign ourselves to necessities, and thus that we might learn to think and live otherwise than we imagined possible heretofore. This course’s genealogical undertaking, then, will attempt to divulge some of the contingent ways of thinking and knowing embedded both in “feminism” and “feminist theory”.