

ILAS 530: RESEARCH IN WOMEN'S STUDIES
Northern Illinois University
Women's Studies Program

SYLLABUS

Spring
2002

Prof. Kristen Myers

Thursdays, 6-8:40

p.m.

Office: 806 Zulauf

Reavis 101 (Women's

Studies

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Reading

Room)

Office Hours: by appt.

E-mail:

Last taught: Spring 2002

COURSE GOALS:

To examine feminist critiques of traditional research, knowledge, academic disciplines, and the boundaries between them.

To familiarize students with key theoretical and methodological issues and concerns in feminist scholarship and interdisciplinary research.

To enable each student to assess the status of women and of feminist research in her or his fields of interest and academic discipline.

To assist students in developing research and analytic skills appropriate for exploring the vast literature of Women's Studies and to relate it to research in traditional disciplines.

If you enjoy this class and would like to know more about the Women's Studies Program and its graduate certificate, please come to Reavis 103 or call 753-1038 for additional information.

REQUIRED READINGS:

****Acker, Joan; Kate Barry; and Johanna Esseveld. 1991. "Objectivity and Truth: Problems in Doing Feminist Research." In Mary Margaret Fonow and Judith A. Cook's Beyond Methodology: Feminist Scholarship as Lived Research. Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Press.**

****Addelson, Kathryn Pyne. 1991. "The Man of Professional Wisdom." In Mary Margaret Fonow and Judith A. Cook's Beyond Methodology: Feminist Scholarship as Lived Research. Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Press.**

**Cannon, Lynn Weber; Elizabeth Higginbotham; and Marianne Leung. 1991. "Race & Class Bias in Qualitative Research on Women." In Mary Margaret Fonow and Judith A. Cook's *Beyond Methodology: Feminist Scholarship as Lived Research*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Press.

Collins, Patricia Hill. 2000. *Black Feminist Thought*. New York: Routledge.

**Jayaratne, Toby Epstein; and Abigail Stewart. 1991. "Quantitative and Qualitative Methods in the Social Sciences: Current Feminist Issues and Practical Strategies." In Mary Margaret Fonow and Judith A. Cook's *Beyond Methodology: Feminist Scholarship as Lived Research*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Press.

Kirsch, Gesa E. 1999. *Ethical Dilemmas in Feminist Research*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

**Levinson, Bradley A. 1998. "(How) Can a Man Do Feminist Ethnography of Education?" *Qualitative Inquiry* 4: 337-368.

**McCorkel, Jill and Kristen Myers. "What Difference Does Difference Make? Position and Privilege in the Field." Revised and resubmitted to *Qualitative Sociology*, December 2001.

**Mies, Maria. 1991. "Women's Research or Feminist Research? The Debate Surrounding Feminist Science and Methodology." In Mary Margaret Fonow and Judith A. Cook's *Beyond Methodology: Feminist Scholarship as Lived Research*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Press.

Reinharz, Shulamit. 1992. *Feminist Methods in Social Research*. New York: Oxford University Press.

*Romero, Mary and Abigail Stewart. 1999. *Women's Untold Stories*. New York: Routledge.

**Shahidian, Hammed. 2001. "'To be recorded in history:' Researching Iranian underground political activists in exile." *Qualitative Sociology* 24: 55-81.

Smith, Dorothy. 1990. *The Conceptual Practices of Power*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.

**Soble, Alan. 1999. "Bad apples: Feminist politics and feminist scholarship." *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*. 29: 354-388.

?Sprague, Joey, and Mary Zimmerman. 1989. "Quality and quantity: Reconstructing feminist methodology." *The American Sociologist*. 20: 71-86.

*Book must be purchased on-line.

**Required book chapters and articles are on course reserve in the Women's Studies office.

??Article not yet available.

Note: The work load for the seminar is substantial, so it is imperative that students learn to budget their time. Not every article or assignment deserves the same amount of time and attention. One goal of this seminar is to help students learn to make those distinctions and act upon them accordingly-a crucial research skill!

SEMINAR FORMAT:

This seminar shall consist of weekly in-depth discussions of the central issues in the readings, in which we will analyze and critique them. Some weeks will center on theoretical issues, others on formulating a methodological tool box, and others dealing with political issues surrounding different methods. You will be expected to work independently outside of class and to share the fruits of your labor with the rest of us in class.

SEMINAR REQUIREMENTS:

1. Preparation and Participation (35%)

This course is based on extensive reading and discussion of a wide variety of material. It is imperative that students come to class prepared to discuss and analyze the material assigned for that week. This means you should have read all of the materials, taken notes on them (including noting areas where you have questions or would like clarification), and devised your own questions to stimulate group discussion. Your notes should enable you to discuss each author (by name), her/his central points, and specific examples you want to mention from her/his work. If you are making a presentation, you should have an organized plan, a sense of timing, and any appropriate handouts.

Occasionally, you will be asked to write a short paper (2-3 pages) based on the day's work (for example, you will be asked to apply readings to a film for the second day of class). These homework grades will be added into this segment of your total grade.

Asking Questions: Part of your preparation/participation grade will be tied to your role in leading discussion into areas that interest you. Thus, each class period, you must bring to class a written question relating to the reading material for that day. You will bring a printed copy of your question (with your name on it) for each member of the class including me. Part of class time will be spent asking and discussing questions that you provide. The goals of this are these: 1) to involve each of you in discussion; 2) to force you to critically interact with the material; 3) to personally invest each of you in the content of the course. You will turn in your questions at the end of each period. I will give you feedback on forming questions and credit for writing them. You will also get

credit for your level of participation in class discussion. Students will be assessed on how their comments and questions reflect careful reading, comprehension of the material, thoughtful critique, and original analysis. Simply talking in class does not necessarily constitute informed participation. You will also be expected to guide conversations toward your issues so that we can cover everyone's ideas.

Writing Abstracts: You have a great deal of reading in this class, and I want to make sure that you sufficiently process the ideas therein. Thus, you are required to write analytical abstracts of most of your readings. Each abstract should be 2-4 typed pages long (regardless of the length of the reading). You should succinctly summarize the major points of the reading (in about a page), and then critically analyze the major insights of each piece. You will be assessed on how well you pull out the main ideas of each reading, how clearly you present each idea in your writing, and how thoughtfully (yet concisely) you critique or analyze the major points. Writers benefit from abstracting in that they must thoroughly digest the main points and write them down. Once you have abstracted a piece, you usually never have to go back to the original—you can rely on your abstract for key information. They are invaluable resources, and constructing them is a valuable skill. You must write abstracts for all five books, but you may choose to write abstracts for 7 out of 10 of the assigned articles and chapters. You will write a total of 12 abstracts throughout the semester. Abstracts are due on the days we complete the reading.

2. Assessment and Critique of your "traditional" discipline (15%)

Students are required to write a short paper (5-6 pages) which provides an assessment and critique of your discipline (especially epistemology and methodology) as traditionally defined. You will need to seek out professors in your own discipline and interview them about the state of research in your field. When collecting information and writing this paper you should address the following issues: What counts as knowledge? Who or what comprises appropriate objects of study? What are the accepted methods and goals of research? What are the accepted criteria for analysis and assessing the validity of results/findings? What is the appropriate relationship between the researcher and the research(ed)? Be sure to discern whether there are methodological rifts in your discipline (such as the common qualitative/quantitative split), and find out why these exist and their current status. You should draw upon relevant readings, field or survey courses you have taken, your previous research and/or coursework, and your own experience in the discipline. (Hint: this paper should require more critical thinking than research.) Each student will also make a five minute presentation of her/his discipline assessment to the seminar.

3) Research Design Project (RDP) (40%)

Rather than writing an actual research paper, each student will produce a detailed research design in this seminar. This will enable you - and the group as a whole - to focus on the process of research rather than the final product. The final research design should

be 15-18 pages in length (typed, double spaced). It should include the following elements: a statement of the central research problem or question, a review of relevant literature, a discussion of the importance, relevance, and contribution of this research, a discussion of and justification for the specific method(s) to be employed, a presentation of expected findings, and a statement of their relevance to feminist scholarship and to your "traditional" academic field.

Ideally, the design should be for a project you intend to undertake or are already undertaking. It could be for a master's or doctoral thesis, a starred or scholarly paper, or "just" a seminar paper. The specific topic must be relevant to Women's Studies generally, and to issues discussed in this course, specifically. The topic must be approved by the professor. Students are required to arrange an individual meeting with the professor to discuss potential topics in the fifth week of the semester. You can contact me by e-mail before that. (Note: if the design is for a paper you are writing for another course, please get the permission of that professor too.)

Each student must write a project proposal that describes your topic, its relationship to existing scholarship, how you are approaching it, and your progress to date. Students will provide copies of a draft of this proposal for all members of the seminar group. We will conduct a semi-blind review process of these initial drafts. I will assign each student to read and critique, using a feminist style of evaluation, another student's work. You will be graded on your feminist critique of a peer's work. You will also be required to revise your own proposal based on the critique you receive of your own work. The idea is for you to use this early, feedback to refine your own work—as well as learning how to provide thoughtful, constructive feedback to others. There is also much to be learned from observing how others conduct their research. At the end of the semester, each student will present her/his finalized research design orally in class.

4) Final exam: Take home cumulative exam (10%)

5) Miscellaneous (but really important) items:

a) Students are expected to attend all seminar sessions and to have completed the reading and written assignments before the class meeting. Students are expected to arrive on time.

b) To receive full credit, written assignments must be turned in at the beginning of class. Written work turned in late will be penalized one third of a grade increment for each 24 hour period.

c) All written work should be either typed or word processed. Pages should be numbered and stapled together.

d) This type of course requires that all participants be respectful of others' perspectives and opinions. Students who are unwilling to expand their own understandings or challenge traditional research assumptions should not take this course.

e) Correct citation and bibliographic information should be provided any time you use the words or thoughts of another, regardless of the formality of the writing assignment. Plagiarism of any sort will result in an automatic "0" for the assignment and, possibly, for the course.

TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE:

All readings are to be done by class time on the day they are due.

January 17 Introduction. Watch film "The Crucible"

Assignment: use the readings assigned for Jan 24 to analyze the politics of Truth in "The Crucible." Write a 2-3 page analysis of the "research" used by the characters to establish truth claims.

January 24 What are Feminist Methods? Read: Introduction and Chapter 1 in Kirsch; Mies; Levinson; and Introduction in Reinharz.

Analysis of "The Crucible" due. Plan to present and discuss the points you make.

Discussion question due.

January 31 No class-use the time to set up meetings with professors in your discipline to begin your analysis.

February 7 Dr. Amy Levin will guest lecture on research on women and mathematics.

Need to have read all materials on the bibliography handed out in class.

Discussion question due.

No abstracts due.

February 14 How do you do it? Read Chapters 2-7 in Reinharz.

Discussion question due.

Need to have discussed proposal topic with me by now.

February 21 Read the rest of Reinharz.

Discussion question due.

Abstract of Reinharz due.

Assessment of you discipline due.

The Politics of Feminist Research

February 28 Power: Read Chapters 1-4 in Smith; Addelson.

Discussion question due.

March 7 Read the rest of Smith; Soble

Discussion question due.

Abstract of Smith due.

March 21 Qualitative vs. quantitative: Read Sprague and Zimmerman; Acker et al; Jaynarante & Stewart; Chapter 2 of Kirsch.
Discussion question due.

March 28 Omitted Voices: Read Chapters 1-6 in Collins; Chapter 3 in Kirsch
Drafts of project proposals due-bring two copies. Begin review of peer's work.
Discussion question due.

April 4 Read the rest of Collins; Cannon et al.
Abstract of Collins due.
Discussion question due.

April 11 Ethics: Read the rest of Kirsch.
Abstract of Kirsch due.
Peer review due.
Discussion question due.

April 18 Exemplars: Read Intro & chaps 1-8 in Romero and Stewart.
Discussion question due.

April 25 Read the rest of Romero and Stewart; Shahidian.
Abstract of Romero and Stewart due
Discussion question due.

May 2 Best Intentions?: Read McCorkel and Myers
Discussion question due.
Final draft of Proposal due-presentations.

Final Exam-take home questions to be turned in during exam period.