

Department: WS

Course No: 104

Credits: 3

Title: Feminisms and the Arts

Contact: Marita McComiskey

Content Area: CA1 Arts and Humanities and CA4 Diversity and Multiculturalism

Diversity: CA4 Non-International

Catalog Copy: 104. Feminisms and the Arts Either semester. Three credits. D'Alleva
Interdisciplinary exploration of the work of women artists in drama, the visual arts, music, literature, and/or film. Key issues of feminist criticism in the arts are discussed.

Course Information: WS 104 focuses on interpreting the work of women artists in the visual arts, literature, music, and film in the United States, with an emphasis on multiculturalism and diversity. Students in this class will

- Increase their knowledge of women's artistic practices in a variety of media
- Think more deeply about the ways that gender, especially as it intersects with race/class/age/sexuality, shapes artistic practice as well as other social practices and experiences
- Learn to use feminist theory and methodology as tools of analysis in studying works of art in a variety of media
- Prepare to apply feminist tools of analysis across the arts and humanities

Readings: Each week students are responsible for a variety of reading and looking assignments. These include works of fiction, poetry and criticism (required books, course pack, and on reserve), the visual arts (available either through museum visits or web assignments) and films (on reserve). **Exams:** There are two in-term exams as well as a final exam. Each consists of four essay questions that addresses theoretical issues and works of art addressed in lecture, discussion section, and reading and looking assignments. **Writing assignment:** Each student completes a class journal, composed of eight one-page assignments. Each assignment requires the student to apply feminist tools of analysis in writing reviews of guest speakers on campus, autobiographical essays, pop-culture critiques, or exhibition and film reviews.

Major Themes:

The History of the Women's Movement

Breaking Silences: The Conditions of Artistic Production

Women in the Audience: The Oppositional Gaze Claiming the Body: Feminist Body Arts from the 1970s to the Present Rethinking Gender: The Social Construction of Gender The Arts of Social Justice History, Autobiography, and Identity The Power of Feminist Arts

Meets Goals of Gen Ed:

Articulate:

WS 104 requires students to apply feminist theory and methodology in the analysis of diverse art forms and social practices. In discussion, the class journal, and examinations, students must be able to articulate an analysis of artworks based in feminist theory. The emphasis is on students developing their own analyses and understandings of both works of art and feminist theory and methodology.

Intellectual breadth and versatility:

WS 104 introduces students to feminist theory and methodology as specialized tools of analysis that they can apply across the arts and humanities. The interdisciplinarity of the course – which requires students to study a variety of art forms and address the intersections between artistic representation and social critique – encourages critical thinking.

Moral Sensitivity:

Students learn about gender-based oppressions, and the ways that these can also be linked to sexuality, race, class, age, etc. They learn to identify and to critique such oppressions in their own experiences and in society at large.

Consciousness of the diversity of human culture and experience:

WS 104 focuses on the multicultural American experience, incorporating works by Asian American, African American, Native American, Chicana, and Cuban American women artists, as well as transgendered and lesbian artists. It introduces the work of artists addressing a diversity of issues about culture, sexuality, class, age, and gender identity.

CA1 Criteria and CA4 Criteria: 1. Investigations and historical/critical analyses of human experience;

WS 104 focuses on feminist works of art that recuperate and critique women's experiences in a multicultural American framework. For example, Cheryl Dunye's film *The Watermelon Woman* interrogates the absence of African-American lesbians in Hollywood history and creatively reimagines that history. Sandra Cisneros's book *The House on Mango Street* reclaims the voice of a child who struggles to be heard because she is a girl, Chicana, and poor. The public murals and posters of the Guerilla Girls fight sexism and racism in the art world.

2. Inquiries into philosophical and/or political theory;

WS 104 introduces students to feminist theory and feminist art criticism. It includes specific readings in feminist theory and criticism (e.g., Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, Linda Nochlin's "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?," bell hooks's "The Oppositional Gaze") and asks students to apply these ideas to the analysis of arts in a variety of media.

3. Investigations into the modes of symbolic representation;

WS 104 specifically investigates the representation of women's bodies in a variety of media – addressing the symbolic value attributed to women's bodies and also feminist critiques and re-interpretations of

such attributes (e.g., the work of visual artists Ana Mendieta and Hannah Wilke, Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues*).

4. Comprehension and appreciation of written, graphic and/or performance art forms; WS 104 asks students to engage in in-depth analysis of literature, film, visual arts, and music. It provides theoretical and methodological tools for doing so, both through readings (e.g., Alice Walker's "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens") and also through the analysis of specific works in lecture and discussion group.

Role of Grad Students: Graduate Assistants lead the weekly discussion sections and grade the examinations. The Graduate Students come from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds and each has expertise in the arts and humanities, feminist theory, and/or Women's Studies – most are pursuing the Graduate Certificate in Women's Studies. Professor D'Alleva supervises the Graduate Assistants, meeting with them as a group at the beginning of each week to plan the discussion sections and to address any problems that have arisen in the course. Professor D'Alleva also visits each Graduate Assistant's classes during the semester to evaluate her teaching practice and offer suggestions for improvement. Before Graduate Assistants begin grading the exams, they meet as a group with Professor D'Alleva to develop an answer key and criteria for grading. In addition, Graduate Assistants for the course have often also completed a WS Independent Study in feminist pedagogy with Professor D'Alleva; the readings for the independent study focus on theory and practice, and the student completes a project for the WS 104 discussion sections (e.g., designing a new discussion section on a particular topic) as well as a piece of theoretical writing.

Supplemental Information: WS 104 is an interdisciplinary course at all levels – in its syllabus, its staff, and in attracting students from all Colleges and Schools at the University. The graduate assistants, for example, have come from a variety of departments (English, Family Studies, Art, Music, Sociology), and part of their training is to learn to think across disciplines.

WS 104 is also a course for which there is a great demand, which Women's Studies cannot meet due to lack of funding. Each semester, Professor D'Alleva typically turns away 20-30 students who ask to overenroll (there is no way to track the number of students who see online that the sections are filled and do not attempt to overenroll). The size of the course could easily increase to 225, if funding were made available for additional Graduate Assistants.