

English 490/590: Enacted Feminist Theory  
Section 102  
Syllabus & Policy Statement

*Surely you must have realized, if only by the way I conduct them, that these sessions are not analogous to so-called scientific meetings. It is in this sense that I ask you to take careful note of the following, that in these open sessions, you aren't by any means on display, despite the fact that we have outside guests, sympathizers and others. You mustn't try to say elegant things, aimed at putting you in the limelight and increasing the esteem in which you are already held. You are here to be receptive to things you haven't as yet seen, and which are in principle unexpected. So, why not make the most of this opportunity by raising questions at the deepest level you can, even if that comes out in a way that is a bit hesitant, vague, even baroque.*

*--Jacques Lacan, Seminars (III "The Symbolic Universe")*

T/R: 12:30 – 1:45  
HUMB 144

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**Office Hours:** T/R 9:00 – 11:00a. I set aside these office hours for you – please feel free to drop during office hours or make an appointment to see me during these hours. It is probably best that you let me know you're coming by, or that you'd like to make an appointment to see me ahead of time, in case of conflicts. If these times do not suit your schedule, I will make an appointment with you for a mutually convenient time.

**Texts:** EFT 2006 Custom Coursepack

**Course Goals:** To provide a broad base for exploration of the ideas and theories that have come to define the body of work often understood as feminist, and perhaps more broadly understood as “liberatory” or “postcolonial.” To suggest that the best way to understand a set of theories that have some claim to cohesion is to demonstrate its fragmentary and heterogeneous nature. To examine some of the ways that feminist theory is manifest in the work of the university across disciplines: to inform pedagogy and service, determine research agendas, and interrogate and invigorate research methodologies. This same exploration will also address the impact feminist theory has on civic and other professional work when the university education is understood as job/life training.

**Course History:** Although this is only the second time a course like this has been taught at the University of South Alabama, it is the result of a natural progression of work and commitment over the past 40 years. I would not have been able to imagine or design this course were it not for the fact that many scholars across this campus are using feminist theory to inform both their teaching and their scholarship. Two years ago, some of my students, newly sensitive to the institutional and ideological pressures that act to determine disciplinary jargon and research agendas, wondered why, then, if feminist theory is alive and well on this campus, so few, *if any*, courses actually used the word “feminism” in their course titles. If a course ever did make explicit its commitment to feminist theory, it tended to refer to either the history

of a movement or it was issue based. In fact, we found only one (regularly offered) course title containing the f-word, and this was a “Special Topics” course (as the present course is currently offered as well).

Given my students’ and my interest in the ways that language not only reflects, but also *determines* reality (specifically, the way language embeds the ideologies and power structures necessary to maintain the status quo), these students asked for a course which declared itself baldly as a study in *feminist theory*. We believed it important to use the word “feminist” or “feminism” in the title of a course in the same way that many scholars argue that it is important to maintain Women’s Studies Programs: it is an acknowledgement that regardless of the object of study, regardless of how theory is adopted and adapted for use, and regardless of the identity of the theorist, power structures built upon the idea of sexual exploitation *only move in one direction*. That is, we study (and write) feminist theory because women’s scholarly response to their own subjugation is unique, *and* we study it (and write it) because, as Luce Irigaray reminds us, man’s exploitation of woman is the root of all human exploitation.

The claims presented above may be thought of as generalizations; and as any good postmodern knows, we can only use generalizations to consider specifics. To that end, as I considered the challenge of devising a course in feminist theory, I quickly understood that I would not be comfortable taking sole responsible for such a course’s content. Were I to do so, the course would be some attempt at full coverage (already doomed to failure), an issue based attempt to define a large idea via a more locatable venue (suffrage, say, or contraception, or political representation), a review of the major movements and/or camps (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> wave feminism, girrrrl culture; the conflicts between American and French feminists), and/or a reflection of my own particular training and interests. These possibilities are all good, but certainly better covered by the brilliant anthologies already available for introducing these ideas.

Perhaps most problematically, I believed that if I were to define all of the content for a course in feminist theory myself, then students would be, at least to some extent, confined to those works and theorists that I personally find most helpful and to which I, personally, have been most deeply exposed. This will be partially true, in any case, but I hoped to mitigate that effect as much as possible. It is also true that there are certain core texts with which anyone wishing to pursue feminist theory should be familiar, and we’ll cover some of those here. So, instead of taking the “anthology route,” I made two related decisions about course content. First, if I were to teach a university course in feminist theory, then it would necessarily cull from the knowledge of various disciplines and practitioners. Second, the investigations would be based in questions of what scholars and other practitioners *do* with feminist theory—how they *enact* theory.

**Course Description:** This course is a profoundly interdisciplinary investigation into some of the main threads of primary feminist theory and the manner in which such theory is put to use to accomplish the three requirements of academic life: teaching, scholarship, and service. These divisions of responsibility are in some ways unique to the university scholar. However, it is easy to see that most professions defined by a university education do, or could, contain elements of these three important aspects of professional life. That is, although these elements formally define the life of the scholar, they also, in many ways, should and do define the work and personal lives of all responsible university-educated adults. The day-to-day work of this course will consist of discussion of assigned readings and the preparation for, presentation of, and engagement with a series of guest lecturers/scholars.

When I invited colleagues from across campus to participate in this inquiry with us, I asked the person to recommend the *one article or chapter* that s/he found absolutely indispensable to the practice of feminist theory in their own research, their pedagogy, and/or their service. Of course, this request was silly in a way. No piece of scholarship actually stands on its own, and if a scholar appreciates a particular theoretical work it usually has something to do with how that work answers to, or interacts with, or prompts something else. But, as an exercise, as a *thought experiment*, the question was useful. Your

coursepack is a sufficient and distilled collection of theory used to inform feminist practice (I continue to refine this collection each semester and encourage your feedback). Our reading list consists of work that I consider indispensable to our contextualized understanding and to a general study of “feminist theory,” along with a few pieces that individual guest speakers have recommended for the purpose of preparing for their specific talk. In addition to your custom coursepack, I will provide several additional articles as either electronic files or as handouts.

You will also find a full working bibliography of readings at the end of your coursepack.

Nearly every week we will host a scholar from one of the disciplines, and before their visit, you will have read the “Pre-texts” for their visit—work that is considered central to feminist theory, that has helped to define “feminism/s,” and/or that are indispensable to scholars as they struggle to enact feminist theory into their practice. I’ll assign these readings week-by-week and you should be ready and willing to participate in active listening, responsible Question and Answer sessions, and lively discussion with our speakers. Although I’ll have more to say about my expectations for your successful accomplishment of this work in the following sections, you should understand immediately that listening to a scholar speak is *not* a passive activity.

Up to this point, I’ve merely described why the course you’ve signed up for is unique, and therefore why each of you may consider yourselves pioneers in a new venture. Now we’ll consider how we ourselves, as student-teachers and teacher-students, will enact this complicated study.

**Organization of the course:** The course is designed as a seminar, and our central work will be the discussion of assigned readings. Significant reading will be due for discussion at each class meeting. The order of speakers and readings will be announced in class in plenty of time for preparation, and dates and required reading assignments are subject to change depending upon availability of speakers.

We have commitments from twelve guest speakers this semester. Ideally, the first two weeks of class will be used to introduce some key ideas that are central to our study. After that, we’ll host six speakers, then pause to catch up (and catch our collective breath) in the ninth week, and then host six more guests. The last days of class I hope to use for wrap-up and synthesis. This plan is bound to go awry in some way, so *be sure to keep a record of assigned reading dates, additions and deletions, due dates, and any and all other amendments on your “Skeleton Syllabus” found at the end of this document.*

Reading will be due on both Tuesdays and Thursdays. I hope to have most guest speakers visit on Tuesdays, with Thursdays reserved for full class discussion of the week’s readings, the scholar’s talk, and a full consideration of the way the current work speaks to other things we’ve read and heard.

*You must, in this class, remain vigilant about keeping up with our reading schedule.* If you do not, you will quickly fall behind and find it difficult catch-up. The best way to do this is to make absolutely sure what the reading assignments for the week will be, to record these reading assignments on your working schedule, and to read for this class at least a little every day.

In addition to keeping up with assigned readings and participating in the work of hosting and interacting with guest speakers, students will have four other major curricular requirements: 1) writing weekly Reading Responses, 2) preparing two researched essays, 3) acting as Discussion Leader for a week, and 4) submitting a Final Portfolio (including a short cover letter or reflective/synthesis essay). Graduate students should see me about additional requirements.

**Description of Assignments and Grade Calculation:** Insofar as each of the major curricular requirements should be a natural outcome of your thinking about our readings and classroom work, they

are not four separate and discrete assignments. That is, assignments should enrich each other: your interests during class time should suggest Reading Responses, the musings in your responses should be reviewed to inform the larger written assignments, and each of the written assignments should lead you to thoughts you'll introduce as Discussion Leader.

The sequence has been designed in the hope that you will take the opportunity to link tasks, to build ideas, and to create something bigger than the sum of its parts by the end of the semester. You may also wish to explore completely different angles, questions, and ideas, in each written assignment; this is valuable as well and can also lead to a larger, cumulative, and cohesive project by the end of the course. Content from your other classes may be used to inform these assignments and vice versa, and, of course, experiences from your "other life" and with your other communities should feed into all of it. Be creative. Be smart. Think large. Make Connections. Synthesize.

Credit for the course will be assigned as follows. Graduate students should see me about curricular requirements for graduate credit.

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|---------------|---|
| 10 points     | <u>Attendance and Participation</u> : See relevant sections throughout this syllabus.   |
| 20 points     | <u>Reading Responses</u> : Exactly as they sound. This is a standard-issue assignment, and I hope that most, if not all of you, have had some exposure to short writing assignments that are responses to readings. You will write one response for a week's readings. You may decide the readings to which you would like to respond, but in all, you'll need to have 10 completed by the end of the semester. At least half of these are due by mid-term, and I will not collect any reading responses after week fourteen. Please be sure to date <i>and title</i> these entries. This writing work is part and parcel of being a member of an academic community. Relax about them, have fun with them. The entries should be <i>substantive and thoughtful</i> even though they may also be rambling, associative, and personal. <b>No spiral notebooks for this work, please.</b> I will apply an advisory "grade" (check, check-plus, check-minus) to each response. This mark is both to give you a sense of how I think you're doing and to assist my grading process when it comes time for final evaluation. You'll do fine if you engage with class material, take responsibility in your own learning process, and write out your thoughts with care and intent. There's a bit of a Velveteen Rabbit effect here—some say that a feeling only becomes a genuine thought, <i>a real idea</i> , when it is committed clearly to writing. |
| 15 points/ea. | <u>Essays (two papers)</u> : These are mid-length, speculative, and researched formal papers dealing with the materials we've covered in class. Sometimes an essay is used as an exploration to think through topics and ideas; these sorts of essays are used to build a larger thesis or argument. A "seminar paper" is a way to talk about a larger work that draws together ideas from a full semester of reading and thinking in an upper-level seminar course. You will write one of each type of paper for this class. Note that at this level of university study, one really doesn't write a "paper" without having researched it in some way. You will be responsible for choosing your research topics, determining helpful sources, and making claims based on your reading, research, and experiences. I will be available to help you work through paper ideas.<br><br>It is possible to suggest that you submit work of a more creative nature for one of these assignments, but you should always check with me first. Your original, formal, written work can take the form of a letter, a proposal, an original artistic text, a reflective synthesis, a narrative, a formal book review, a review of book reviews, a speculative essay, a political response, a proposal, an   |

examination of a literary troupe, an historical investigation, a personal response essay, a critical essay, an academic article, among many other possibilities. I would be very receptive to ideas involving building bibliographies of feminist theories (and/or postcolonial theory, race theory, queer theory, and other postmodern “identity” driven concerns) for submission to a feminist theory Web site which is under construction for support of this class and other scholarly endeavors.

10 points      Discussion Leader: Each week, one or two people will be assigned to act as our Student Discussion Leader. You may wish to volunteer to be a Discussion Leader more than one week. In general, as a Discussion Leader, one assumes responsibility for responding cardinally to a speaker or an academic topic and drawing other participants into the discussion. More specifically, Discussion Leaders may summarize the speaker’s talk and/or readings, synthesize a new contribution into a larger body of knowledge, make connections between topics, comment on the application of ideas, and make other scholarly comments intended to increase understanding and interaction with the “texts.”

30 points      Portfolio: The portfolio is an *organized and synthesized* collection of the work you completed for this class over the course of the semester. Because it is a collection or edited collection, it should be organized in a manner that would demonstrate what you have learned to someone unfamiliar with our work during the semester. The portfolio will include an original cover letter or cover essay. The process of writing a synthesis essay is helped along greatly if students keep a list of and take notes about each of the elements of the classroom situation (texts, lecture style, specific course content, classroom exercises, guest speakers, handouts, discussions, electronic supports, etc).

\*Note: You will always be welcome to structure an assignment for this class as one that could also be used for credit in another class as well. You must receive approval from me for a project of this sort, and you must also get approval from the other invested instructor/s before going ahead with such a plan.

**Participation:** In a Nutshell—*You must come to class and you must participate in class discussion. If you don’t, you can’t pass the course.*

Because the central work of this class is the discussion of assigned readings and engagement with speaker’s presentations, I will assign a part of your final grade to attendance and participation. A big part of being a scholar is learning how to rap about new ideas with your peers. Now is the time to throw off any remaining anxieties and take risks by asking off-the-wall questions and trying out new ideas. Remember, too, that it is a compliment when folks engage in, critically analyze, and make suggestions about your thinking and your work. It’s important that even as we voice our own concerns and interpretations, we work together to create a classroom environment that encourages and supports all viewpoints. This does not mean that either you or I have to 1) agree with everyone, or 2) keep silent when you don’t. In fact, it’s only through deep exchange and dialogue that we actually grow as thinkers. Let’s create a community of inquiry that makes this course worth the effort.

It is absolutely essential that you come to each class meeting prepared.

It’s no coincidence, nor personal preference on the part of the instructor/evaluator, that folks who participate during class time tend to get better grades.

*Your enthusiasm for contributing to class discussions should be surpassed only by demonstrations of actual familiarity with the assigned readings.*

**Attendance:** Note that the University's general attendance policy defines excessive absences as missing "two or more consecutive class meetings," and that the University does not recognize any absences as "excused" except for those that are a result of the student being removed from class for attending a university-authorized off-campus function (see *Academic Bulletin*). These "excusable" functions must be cleared by the sponsoring faculty member through the Office of Academic Affairs.

My attendance policy is as follows: You are granted three absences without them counting against your grade. You do not owe me *any explanation* whatsoever for these absences; it's not my job to determine whether your life circumstances constitute "good reasons" or not. Beyond the three absences and those covered by permission from the Office of Academic Affairs, your grade can suffer. If for any reason you miss four or more class meetings (that's two week's worth of class meetings), you may not pass the class. More than six absences will constitute automatic failure of the course. Even students who excel in all other areas are subject to this policy. Use your three absences wisely because you may need them in the event of an emergency.

Please advise me in writing during the first two weeks of the course if you will be missing class in deference to religious obligations.

If you do miss a class, you are expected to turn up prepared for the next class meeting. If this means visiting with me about what you missed, you'll need to make an appointment before the next class meeting. Please don't expect me or anyone else to fill you in during class time.

**Manuscript Presentation:** The style, or presentation of the work you submit for evaluation should be appropriate to its task. The various types of writing we do are obviously of different degrees of formality. But, in general, university work at this level is turned in on substantial paper, double-spaced with one-inch margins, and in 12-point font. It is possible that you hand write your notebook/reading response entries, but that only works if your writing is legible and you don't "let yourself off the hook" a bit with this informal method. Work of a more creative nature may also be submitted for credit, but be sure and check with me about such a project beforehand, to be sure we agree about curricular expectations and evaluation. English scholars prepare their work in accordance with the *MLA Style Guide*, so that's the style we'll be adhering to in this course.

**Conferences:** I encourage you to make appointment/s for at least one individual conference at or before mid-term. Mandatory individual conferences will be scheduled during the last week of class. At your request, I will provide you an advisory grade in any private conference.

**Academic Misconduct / Plagiarism:** This is serious business. Issues of Academic Misconduct will be handled according to the University's policy as described by the Student Academic Conduct Policy. Academic misconduct will result in failing this course and possibly other sanctions. Academic misconduct includes, but is not limited to, submitting someone else's work as your own (that person is also subject to sanctions), failing to give appropriate credit to all sources used in your work, submitting a paper of your own for credit in more than one course without the prior consent of both instructors, or in any way distributing drafts of a class member's work without the permission of the author. I will not tolerate any form of plagiarism in this class. I want to read only your work.

**Listserv/Web forum:** Our class may have its own online discussion list or Web forum. I imagine such a forum as a way of continuing our class discussions. Although I'll "moderate" this area, think of it as your own space as students – an extension of the classroom. You should think of it as a place where you can begin and continue discussion about issues of interest to class readings, writing, and discussions. I'll occasionally use it to post messages of class-wide interest (and you can do the same), contribute to

discussions, and, of course, answer any questions specifically directed to me. Because this space is an extension of the classroom, and each of us is an equal member of such an electronic space, please remember that rules of respectful interaction apply here as they do in the physical classroom. Students sometimes find digital “spaces” helpful to classroom work; I’d love to have your thoughts on the matter.

**Students with Disabilities:** If you have or believe you have a disability, you may wish to self identify. You can ascertain the steps involved in documenting a disability by contacting the Office of Special Student Services and by providing the required documentation to that office. Appropriate accommodations may then be provided for you. I’m glad to help you in any way I can with that process. You should also call the OSSS if you have general questions about the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The phone numbers for the OSSS are 460-7212/7213. If you have a condition which may affect your ability to exit safely from the premises in an emergency or which may cause an emergency during class, you are encouraged to discuss this in confidence with me and/or the OSSS.

**And, Finally:** You are responsible for abiding by the terms set forth in this Policy Statement and any subsequent additions and amendments; consider it a contract. As such, it is to your distinct advantage to fully comprehend this and other documents. To this end, if anything about course policies, procedures, and/or scheduling seems fuzzy, or disturbing, or confusing, please ask me to clarify.

### **Tentative List of Guest Speakers—2006**

Dr. Nicole Amare, English – Sexist Language on “sexist language” Web sites

Dr. Julie Biskner, Political Science –

Dr. Martha Jane Brazy, History – Sears and the sex discrimination law suit

Dr. Isabel Z. Brown, Foreign Languages and Literatures, Spanish –

Dr. John Coker, Philosophy – a primer on “hegemony”

Dr. Nicole Flynn, Sociology – Prisons as gendered organizations

Dr. Ellen Harrington, English – “The Women’s Movement” in the 19<sup>th</sup> century

Dr. Jennie Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Psychology – Feminism and science

Dr. Steve Morris, Political Science, International Studies Program – a primer on “andocentricism”

Dr. Linda Payne, English – Julia Kristeva’s “abject”

Dr. Asad Sheik, School of Medicine – Alabama Initiative for Breastfeeding

Dr. Lois Wims, Criminal Justice and Associate Dean Arts and Sciences – Feminism and leadership

Rachel Wright, Visual Arts – Is there an art “herstory”?

EH490/590 Enacted Feminist Theory  
University of South Alabama  
Fall 2006  
Dr. Moira Amado Miller

Skeleton Day-by-Day Syllabus

Week 1

Tuesday 22 August

Introductions, Review of syllabus and coursepack

Thursday 24

Irigaray handout (from *Thinking the Difference* or *I Love to You*)  
Kolodny, "Dancing Through the Minefield"

Week 2

T 29 August

Fox Keller, "Feminism and Science"

R 31 August

Week 3

T 5 September

[M 4 September: Labor Day Holiday]

R 7 September

Week 4

T 12 September

R 14 September

Week 5

T 19 September

R 21 September

Week 6

T 26 September

R 28 September

Week 7

T 3 October

R 5 October

**EXPLORATORY ESSAYS DUE**

Week 8

T 10 October

R 12 October

Week 9

T 17 October



R 19 October

Week 10

T 24 October

R 26 October

Week 11

T 31 October

R 2 November

Week 12

T 7 November

R 9 November

Week 13

T 14 November

R 16 November

Week 14

T 21 November

R 23 November

[Thanksgiving Holiday]

Week 15

T 28 November

R 30 November

**SEMINAR PAPERS DUE**

Week 16

T 5 December

**Last Day of Classes  
PORTFOLIOS DUE**

R 7 December

Final Exams Begin

SCHEDULE FINAL CONFERENCE FOR THIS WEEK

Saturday 9 December

Commencement

Week 17

T 12 December

Final Day of Exams Week

F 15 December

Final Grade Web Entry due by 10:00a