WGSS Senior Seminar: Linking Theory and Practice

Spring 2014
M 7:00-10:00 pm
Old Main, #9

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Office Hours: T/R 3:00 to 4:30 or by appointment

Course Description
This seminar serves as the capstone for WGSS majors at Macalester. As the course title suggests, this course is designed to link theory and practice through the completion of an original research project. This project is social scientific in design, meaning you will collect original data for this project. Thus, this course will be one of constant reflection, wherein we continue to link fields of knowledge/theoretical frameworks to the issue you have chosen to explore in this course. This research project will also draw from the knowledge you have gained in the completion of this program, and is thus an opportunity to:

Integrate the range of feminist methodologies and theoretical perspectives you have learned
Reflect on your own position within the discipline
Position yourself as a critical thinker who WILL make a contribution to the discipline
Reflect and review the various feminist genealogies you have learned and be able to think through these in a way where cogent syntheses are possible

In short, your capstone is: a reflection of your knowledge, a careful consideration and (re)contextualization of feminist frameworks and intellectual acumen.

In some ways this course will be one of the easiest courses you have taken here at Macalester: students are “only” responsible for writing one paper and much of the course content is a review of previous material. Yet, at the same time, as gleaned in the expectations above, this is in many respects the MOST important course you will take: you are positioning yourself (in your own way) as a critical thinker and scholar.

Above all, this is a time to showcase something YOU have created. Although these are individual projects, this course is collaborative in design. This seminar is a research workshop that, to work effectively, demands that students do the following: share their ideas and participate in classroom discussions, review other student’s work and provide
feedback, and support your classmates in this journey. Indeed, part of your grade revolves around this review of other student’s work and the feedback you provide. To repeat: this is a forum where information is meant to be shared and support is expected! Given these expectations and the critical reflection this course demands, you should walk away from this course feeling accomplished and empowered!

Course Design and Expectations
In this seminar students will develop and write a senior thesis. This involves several steps:
1) Choosing a topic and developing a focused inquiry into your object of study
2) Constructing a research question that can be situated within the existing literature
3) Developing a project that is methodologically appropriate and theoretically informed
4) Creating a final product appropriate for an academic audience
5) An in-class oral presentation to be conducted at the end of the semester

Readings
Although the amount of assigned readings for this course is minimal, much of your time will be spent reading for your own research project. In short, you will be reading a large number of articles and books that are specifically related to your topic of interest.

Required readings for this course will come from the required texts (see below) and articles that have been placed on Moodle (these are indicated as “ER” on the syllabus schedule).

Required Texts:
1) Feminist Methodology: Challenges and Choices, edited by Ramazanoglu and Holland (FM)
2) Feminist Research Practice: A Primer, by Hesse-Biber and Leavy (FRP)

Classroom Sessions
Classroom sessions will revolve around 1) the crafting of your research design, 2) the writing components of your research project, 3) discussion of in-class reading assignments and their integration with previous class material, and 4) feedback and peer review on student papers, discussion points and oral presentations.

If possible, I will be inviting feminist scholars on campus to come talk about their research. My goal is to invite individuals from a number of fields in order to expose students to an array of methodological approaches and theoretical tools. This is an excellent opportunity to see “up close” the various ways in which scholars “do” feminist work and engage the field.

Research Project/Paper
There is ONE paper due at the end of the semester. This paper is a minimum of 30
Pages (not including the bibliography and other appendices). Papers must be in Chicago style format, be typed, double-spaced with prescribed margins. Four drafts of your paper are due throughout the semester—this does NOT include the final draft. Each draft should reflect real progress on your project—a progression of ideas (from the earlier draft) up to that point. This is a work-in-progress and should reflect as much. Please choose your topic carefully—once you decide what you want your project to be you will not be able to change it!

Paper Presentation
Each student will present their research projects toward the end of the semester. The total time allotted is 45 minutes—25-30 minute presentation, with 15 to 20 minutes allotted for questions/discussion. This will be your “practice talk” before the annual WGSS Research Presentation Event.

There will be an annual WGSS Research Presentation Event, which is scheduled for late April. You are expected to present at this event, which will be open to the public. This is a wonderful opportunity to share your knowledge, present your scholarship and discuss the ways in which your work contributes to the field of WGSS.

Classroom Discussions
Students should come to class having read that day’s assigned readings. Students should thus be prepared to lead class discussion. I will randomly select a student for that day to lead class discussion on a particular reading/set of readings. Students should come to class prepared to:

1) Discuss the methodologies/methods, and be able to situate them within the field of feminist studies and your own research project
2) Be able to outline the particular themes/main arguments/ideas of the text
3) Be able to contextualize how these texts/readings fit in with the feminist canon
4) A few words on how these readings apply to your own research project

Course Breakdown and Grade Distribution
Four drafts—each draft will be part of your class participation grade

1) The Final draft—40% of your grade
2) Class Assignments—10% of your grade
3) Oral Presentations—20% of your grade
4) Class Participation (feedback, peer review, drafts of research paper etc.)—30% of your grade
GRADING
A  95-100
A- 90-94
B+ 86-89
B  84-85
B- 80-83
C+ 76-79
C  74-75
C- 70-73
D+ 66-69
D  64-65
D- 60-63
F  < 6

Other Expectations

Late Paper/Exam Policy:
Late papers will NOT be accepted. Papers are due at the beginning of class. Because I do not accept any late assignments I suggest you make final corrections/amendments/drafts the day before the assignment is due. I do not recommend doing things at the last minute.

Cell phones/Gadgets:
Turn off your cell phone and all other devices/gadgets before coming to class. If a student repeatedly fails to turn off their cell phone during the semester they will be asked to leave class. I do NOT allow laptops in my class.

Email Policy:
I do not accept any assignments emailed to me unless otherwise specified. All documents (papers, essays, exams) should be in word document, stapled, and handed to me in class. Please do not email me questions regarding an assignment if you have failed to come to class. Additionally, do not email me questions/concerns the night before an assignment. Email communication should be a secondary vehicle for communication. Please talk to me either before or after class or during my office hours.

Attendance:
Attendance is mandatory. I will keep a record of your attendance. Daily attendance will positively affect the outcome of your grade. Class discussion is an extremely important aspect of this course as is indicated in the grade distribution. Additionally, there will be unannounced quizzes and in-class assignments given throughout the semester.

Other expectations: Please be on time! Chronic tardiness (3 per semester) may result in a failing grade. Please do NOT interrupt class if you are more than 15 minutes late.
Tentative Schedule (Meaning: the schedule is subject to change)

January:

27 Introduction to Course

February:

3 What is Feminist Research?

Readings: FRP: Chapter 1
          FM: Chapters 1-3

Readings: The Craft of Research, Part II—Asking Questions, Finding Answers,
          (Dewitt Wallace Library—Q180.55.M4 B66 1995)

Hand out Instructions for Preliminary Topic of Interest/Research Question

10 Is there a Feminist Method/ology?; Discuss the IRB

Readings: ER: “Is there a Feminist Method?,” by Harding
          FM: Chapter 4 (“From Truth/Reality…”)
          FRP: Chapter 3, Feminist Standpoint Epistemology

Hand out IRB Forms
Preliminary Topic of Interest/Research Question Due!

17 “Experience” as a Source of Knowledge?; Feminist Postmodernism

Readings: ER: “The Evidence of Experience,” by Scott
FRP: Chapter 4 (“Feminist Postmodernism and Poststructuralism”)

IRB Proposals Due!
Discuss 1st Draft
Discuss Next Week’s Assignment (“Good Models”)

24  The “Doing” of “Good” Feminist Research, Finding Models

Readings: *The Craft of Research*, Chapter 12 (“Planning and Drafting”)
FM: Chapter 8 (“Choices and Decisions”)

1st Draft Due! (bring copies to class)
Workshop Session

March:

3  The Ethics of Feminist Research

Readings: FM: Chapter 6 (“Researching ‘others’”)
ER: Unraveling Ethics, by Halse and Honey

10 Ethical Dilemmas cont’d

ER: “Negotiating Power and Narrative in Research,” by Presser
ER: “Friendship, Friendliness, and Feminist Research,” by Kirsch

Engaging the Tools of Feminist Research

FRP: Chapters 5 (in-Depth Interviewing) & 6 (Focus Group Interviews)

2nd Draft Due! (bring copies to class)
Workshop Session & Practicing our Interview Technique

17  No Class—Spring Break
24    Review and Putting It Together: Feminist Praxis

Readings: *The Craft of Research*, Re-Read Chapters 13 & 14
         FRP: Chapter 11 ("Putting It Together")

31    Library Session

April:

7     Presenting Your Work Effectively

Readings: *The Craft of Research*, Chapter 15

* 3rd Draft Due! (bring copies to class)!

14    No Class!

21    Presentations

28    Final Workshop

* 4th Draft Due! (bring copies to class!)

May:

5     Final Draft Due!