

COURSE OUTLINE
PHIL 242 INTRODUCTION TO FEMINIST THEORY

Fall term 2017: MW 10:30-11:30 (plus a mandatory discussion conference, for which you must register separately on Minerva)

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This course is an introduction to feminist theory, with an emphasis on political theory. The aims of the course are to acquaint students with the diversity of feminist theories, to introduce certain concepts basic to feminist theory (e.g. feminist consciousness, oppression, and social construction), and to indicate some of the issues on which feminists differ. The first part of the course will consider liberal feminism, Marxist and socialist feminism, and radical feminism. These theories all provide some account of the practices that maintain the inequality between men and women. The various feminist theories differ, however, both in their analyses of these practices, and in their recommendations for political change. Some of the questions we will address are: If we could ensure that women had opportunities equal to those of men, would we thereby ensure the equality of women with men? Can the unequal status of women be analyzed as an instance of, or a function of, some other political or economic inequality? How are we to understand equality? Does radical feminism offer a viable political strategy? In the first part of the course we will also consider criticisms of the history of exclusion in feminist theory and practice with respect to class, race, and sexuality. In the second part of the course we will consider two sets of issues of concern to feminists: (1) sexual difference, gender and sexuality and (2) feminism, multiculturalism, and postcolonialism.

Students should note that while they will not be expected to have any prior knowledge of feminist theory or political theory, they should be prepared to read a substantial amount, and to learn how to read, write and discuss philosophy. Note also that this course is an introduction to feminist theory and not an introduction to the circumstances that have given rise to feminist theory. We will begin with two assumptions: that women do not now enjoy equality with men, and that this is neither a natural nor a necessary state of affairs.

Text:

A required course-pack will be available in hard copy at the Word Bookstore, 469 Milton Street. You may also obtain it as an electronic course-pack through McGill's on-line bookstore <https://leames.ca/textbooks>. I will post the table of contents on the MyCourses page for the course so that if you prefer you can track down individual readings yourself.

Course requirements:

- (i) Reading: come to class having read the reading assigned for that day, and prepared to discuss the material.
- (ii) Conferences: you are required to attend conferences, led by your Teaching Assistant, where you will have an opportunity to raise any questions you may have, and review, explore, and discuss the material with other students. Participation in these conferences will be assessed according to your attendance and the thoughtfulness of your interventions and class work (10%).
- (iii) Two assignments: you will be required to analyze a concept, argument, question, or problem drawn from the reading in 2 brief papers (600 words each) (25% each). Instructions for each assignment will be distributed 2 weeks in advance of the due date.

(iv) Final exam: one take-home exam (40%), covering material from the entire course. Possible exam questions will be distributed 2 weeks in advance of the last day of class, when the exam will be distributed. During those 2 weeks you will have an opportunity to flag anything unclear or otherwise problematic in the possible questions, and also to express your preferences.

Be advised that written work for this course may be submitted to text-matching software.

Grading criteria: To do excellent work in this course you need to be able to do more than just reiterate what various authors have said in your reading or what was said in class. An "A" indicates that you not only understand and comprehend the material, but that you have thought critically about it, fully fleshing out its subtleties and implications so that you can creatively apply the material at many levels. A "B" reflects an above-average understanding of the material without any major errors; however, "B" work does not capture the complexity of the issues and tends toward accurate summary rather than independent analysis. A "C" suggests a struggle with the material that manages an average, basic comprehension of it but is flawed by some significant misunderstandings or errors. A "D" indicates only a rudimentary comprehension of part of the material with much of the material being misunderstood. An "F" indicates no understanding of the material.

Policy on the use of technology in the classroom:

Pursuant to McGill University's policy regarding electronics in the classroom, **the use of electronic devices (computers, iPads, cell phones, etc.) is not permitted in lectures or conferences.**

All electronic devices must be turned off and stored during the class period. **The recording of lectures and conferences is not permitted and is illegal without the consent of the instructor/T.A.** If you believe you have exceptional circumstances that make the use of an electronic device beneficial to your learning, you may request permission by e-mail from the instructor to use it.

Policy on extensions:

No extensions will be granted without an appropriate medical note. Requests for extensions must be directed to your teaching assistant (Prof. Deslauriers does not handle such requests) and supported by appropriate medical documentation. Late work will be penalized at the rate of a third of a grade **per calendar day** past the due date. For example, a paper that is evaluated as a B, if one day late, will be assigned a grade of B-; the same paper, if two days late, would receive a C+.

Content warning:

Many of the readings for the course raise issues of sexual violence and coercion, racism, homo- and trans- phobia, sometimes in non-academic language. Lectures may include discussion of these issues, students in the class may pose questions about them, and conferences may extend these discussions. We will talk about how we can engage with one another in open and respectful ways. Students should feel free to contact the instructor with any concerns or questions.

Required syllabus statements:

McGill University values academic integrity. All students must, therefore, understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information).

In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

