WGSS 330: Feminist Theories
Spring 2025 MWF 10 -11:15 a.m. OM21
Jane Simonsen

Course Description
It's a troubling, even dangerous time for many right now. Reproductive justice, health care for trans people, environmental quality, and basic safety threaten the rights and bodies of many of us and of those we love. It is a difficult time and many feel silenced and don't know how to take change.

Historically, however, oppression gives rise to movements for justice. Whether you are a seasoned activist or just attempting to learn your own mind, this course is designed to help you gain confidence in your ability to define problems, understand theories of power and oppression, consider solutions, and work for change. The course consists of both feminist theory and feminist practice.

Through readings and discussion, we will explore how feminist (broadly defined) groups and individuals have explained the processes (economic, political, social, psychological, etc.) through which gender differences give rise to and maintain systems of oppression and privilege, power and marginalization. We will consider the concerns, questions, assumptions, debates, and silences in feminist theories, with a focus on the modern/postmodern era. We will not attempt to "cover" all feminist theories, which are diverse and evolving. Instead, we will analyze the approaches that various feminist thinkers past and present have used to explain and question the normative gender order. The course is focused primarily on feminisms originating in or with substantial impact on the U.S., including liberal, radical, women-of-color, and indigenous feminisms, and the challenges and possibilities these differences raise.

Because theory emerges from lived experience and ideally results in action, this course will focus on applying feminist theory to real concerns through collaborative social action to change policy. Social action has been integral to feminist theorizing, as thinking about gender and sexuality in terms of power (political, economic, biological, psychological) gives rise to movement for change. In other words, we will not just learn about social action, but engage in it by creating a campaign for change. Students will have the opportunity to learn about and define a problem, build support, and create a set of demands to create or change a policy or practice on campus or in the community.

All students in the class will be involved in social action. This will require at least 1.5 to 2 hours per week of work on your campaign and will include research and writing (understanding problems and power, developing plans), activities (tabling, distributing information, creating media) and action (rallies, street theater, sit-ins). Not all students will be equally comfortable with all aspects of the work; as part of your collaboration, you will consider existing strengths and help each other to develop new ones. For your campaign, you must have at least three people on your team, focus on an inequity that operates intersectionally with gender and/or sexuality, and try to address that inequity through policy change. The problem you choose may be obviously related to gender/sexuality (support for trans students, family leave policy, reproductive rights), but part of theory is also understanding how seemingly fair policies may affect diverse individuals differently (incarceration, disability policies, housing inequities, etc.). My role as teacher is to act as your guide and consultant as you develop plans that stem from your own experience and concerns and apply theory to consider problems and solutions.

Learning Perspectives & Outcomes:
This course offers a perspective on human values and existence (PH) and a diversity perspective (D). At the end of the course, you should be able to:

1) Understanding: Identify, explain, and analyze the major assumptions and differences undergirding various feminist theories. This includes understanding how theories emerge from specific experiences and subject positions and how these have been used to answer fundamental questions about the origins, forms, and current structures of gender and gendered oppression (Disciplinary Knowledge)
2) Application: Consider and reflect on the usefulness of particular feminist frameworks in order to frame problems and develop solutions (Critical Thinking)
3) Creation: Collaborate with others to create and execute a feminist social action campaign. This includes issue development, building power, implementing strategies and tactics, conducting research (historical analysis, power map, target analysis), communicating with stakeholders and media, and evaluating and reflecting on plans (Collaborative Leadership, Communication Competence)

Required Texts: There are two required textbooks. Please let me know if you have trouble acquiring them.
Myers-Lipton, *Change! A Student Guide to Social Action,* 2nd edition (Routledge, 2023) ISBN 9781032418025, $37
Carruthers, *Unapologetic: A Black, Queer, and Feminist Mandate for Radical Movements* ISBN 9780807039823 (Beacon, 2019), $16

Note on Content: Thinking deeply and talking about gender and sexuality means confronting difficult topics: physical and sexual violence, racism in institutional and intimate forms, labor exploitation, homophobia, sex work, and abortion. It will involve confronting the different lived realities and historical traumas of people in the room with us, being willing to share these, learn from each other, and respond to differences with understanding and a growth mindset. Comments made in this room are protected, do not need to be reported, and should not be shared outside of class in person or electronically. While these conversations can be difficult, reading and talking about these concerns is crucial to critical thinking, intercultural understanding, applied activism, and cultivating empathy. If there is anything I can do to make these topics more manageable, please let me know as soon as possible.

Assignments:
Storytelling (20%): Storytelling is critical to social movements, and essential to feminist thinking. Sociologist Marshall Ganz developed what he calls the "Public Narrative framework," which we will adapt in this course, but personal and collective storytelling has been used by activists for change long before Ganz: formerly enslaved women such as Harriet Jacobs and Sojourner Truth, mid-twentieth century activists like Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldua, and Shulamith Firestone, and groups from the Cohambee River Collective, WITCH, and Redstockings to #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo rely on the power of individual and collective storytelling. You will write a three-part story based on Ganz's model: a Story of Self, Story of Us and a Story of Now, and, at the end of the term, a Story of Action. More details on each of these, including how I will evaluate this assignment, are on Moodle.
Portfolio (50%): Part journal, part participation log, your portfolio is where you will record, reflect on, and demonstrate your understanding of the connections between feminist theory and feminist action. Portfolios are an ongoing record with updates due each Monday (in general). I will give you

prompts each week to guide your thinking about the readings and theories we are discussing, to consider how they are shaping your thinking about your campaign, and to reflect on class discussions. Your portfolio will also include the record of your contributions to the project (time spent, activities completed, roles played in groups) and a place to record any concerns you have about the project or your team. Your portfolio will be a Google Drive folder that you'll create and share with me. You can deposit your weekly work in it as separate docs, as an ongoing blog/reflection, add links to other materials, annotate previous entries, etc. More details on the portfolio and how I'll evaluate it are on Moodle.

Campaign (30%): Your group will keep a digital repository of campaign materials, including meeting records, research and strategy development, fliers, media releases, event materials, etc. This portion of your grade will also include your organizational rap, a group presentation at the end of the semester, and peer evaluation. Note: the campaign will NOT be evaluated on whether or not you are successful in achieving your goals, but on quality of your materials and efforts and the degree to which these reflect feminist theorizing and strategies. More details on how I'll evaluate the campaign are on Moodle.

PART ONE: What is Theory For?

Week 1: Feminist Theory as Feminist Action

Date	M	W	F
Prepare	Read: Course information, policies, scan syllabus Complete: Feedback	Read: bell hooks, "Theory as Liberatory Practice" & "Feminism: A Movement to End Sexist Oppression"	Read: • From Beautiful Trouble website: Theory: Feminism; • From *Change!*, "Student Victories (xi-xii) Preface (XIII-XVII), & Ch. 1, pp. 1-16 Respond: Brainstorm issues; pick two and start theorizing using model
In class		Introductions, about this class, discussion Discuss: What is feminist theory for? Consider: what does it mean to "fight sexism'? What is the demand?	Guest speakers Choosing a campaign

Week 2: Issue Development & Change Theory

Date	M	W	F
Prepare	• Skim: Lesbian Avenger Handbook • Read: Augustana WGSS documents • Watch: Feminist Street Party Walks • WITCH	Read: *Change!* Ch. 2, pp. 20-25; • Carruthers, preface, Ch. 1, "All of Us or None of Us", Ch. 5 pp. 87-96 • Light, "How to Tell your Story of Self"	Change Theory • *Change!* Ch. 3, 28-40 • *Beautiful Trouble* • JASS "Change Theory" • Prevention Collaborative Theory of Change

	Complete: High 5 Strengths Test **Due: Portfolio 1**		• Systems Sanctuary "Feminist Systems Change" Due: story of self draft to share
In class	Discussion	Meet in groups Due at end of hour: Group dynamic commitments	Discussion Group work – sharing our stories, theorizing for change

Week 3: Change Theory/Building Power

Date	M	W	F
Prepare	Read: *Change!* Ch. 4, pp. 43-59 View: Art of Hosting Four-Fold Practice video (5 mins) **Due: Portfolio 2**	*Carruthers,* Ch. 6, "The Chicago Model" **Due: Story of Self**	**Read**: *Change!* Ch. 3, 43-56 Liu, "How to Understand Power"
In class	Lecture/discussion	Discussion/group work Choose target	Discussion/group work: Organizational rap

PART TWO: Theorizing for Change

Week 4: Liberal/Neoliberal Feminisms

Date	M	W	F
Prepare	Liberal Feminism	Read: Manifestos	**Read:** *Change! Ch. 4,* pp. 60-68 Due: Stakeholder interviews
In class	Lecture/Discussion **Due: Portfolio 3**	Discussion Organizational Raps	Group work: Start target analysis & power map

Week 5: Radical Feminisms

Date	M	W	F
Prepare	Radical Feminisms **Due: Portfolio 4**	Read: selections from CWLU archives	**Read**: *Change!* Ch. 6, pp. pp. 72-79; Carruthers Ch. 2, pp. 19-41
In class	Lecture/discussion	Organizational Raps Discussion	Group work: recruitment plan/tools

Week 6: Socialist Feminisms

Date	M	W	F
Prepare	**Read:** Carruthers, pp. 96-104 **Due: Portfolio 5**	**Read:** Manifestos	**Read:** *Change!* Ch. 7, pp. 81-97; Carruthers Ch. 4, pp. 63-85

In class	Lecture/discussion	Organizational Raps Discussion	Group work: Demands & tactics

Week 7: Transnational Feminisms

Date	M	W	F
Prepare	**Due: Portfolio 6**	**Read:** Manifestos	**Due: Story of Us**
In class	Lecture/discussion	Organizational Rap(s) Discussion	Group work: Recruitment update, campaign message

****SPRING BREAK****SPRING BREAK****SPRING BREAK****SPRING BREAK*****

Week 8: Psychoanalytic Feminisms

Date	M	W	F
Prepare	**Due: Portfolio 7**	**Read: Manifestos**	*Change!* Ch. 8, pp. 99-113, Carruthers pp. 105-110
In class	Lecture/discussion	Discussion	Group work: Research

Week 9: Care-focused Feminisms

Date	M	W	F
Prepare	**Due: Portfolio 8**	**Read: Manifestos**	**Read***: Change!* Ch. 9, pp. 114-120 **Due: Story of Now**
In class	Lecture/discussion	Discussion	Group work: Research, kickoff plans

Week 10 Poststructuralist/Queer Feminisms

Date	M	W	F
Prepare	**Due: Portfolio 9**	**Read: Manifestos**	NO CLASS
In class	Lecture/discussion	Discussion	EASTER BREAK

PART THREE: Action & Activists

Week 11 * CAMPAIGN KICKOFFS THIS WEEK*****

Date	M	W	F
Prepare		Guest Speaker **Due: Portfolio 10**	**Read:** Gotto, "Legislative Terror"
In class	Group work Campaign		

Week 12

Date	M	W	F
Prepare	From Ahmed, *On Being Included*	Guest speaker **Due: Portfolio 11**	
In class	Discussion		Group work: Assessing action

Week 13

Date	M	W	F
Prepare	**Read:** From *Unruly Souls*	Celebration of Learning	Guest speakers **Due: Portfolio 12**
In class	Discussion	No class – please attend presentations	

Week 14

Date	M	W	F
Prepare			Due: Campaign materials
In class	Group work	Presentations	Presentations

Finals Week

Peer assessment & Story of Action due Monday, 5 p.m.