Week One: Introduction to Our Class and Our Goals for the Semester

Welcome to Our Class!

Students who take classes or who pursue a major or minor in the Gender & Women’s Studies Program in the University of Wyoming’s School of Culture, Gender and Social Justice have numerous opportunities for intellectual growth and professional preparation. Please visit the Program website for more information about our work, at: http://www.uwyo.edu/gwst/. As noted on the website,

“Gender and Women’s Studies (GWST) is a dynamic field of inquiry that offers students the opportunity to explore issues of gender and sexuality. As a student in our program, you will develop a set of valuable critical thinking and analytical skills that will give you a solid academic foundation as well as prepare you for a career that values skills such as critical thinking, oral and written communication, research and problem solving, and client advocacy. Our graduates have succeeded in medical and law school, as well as excelled in careers in health, human rights, business, politics, and administration of community service agencies.

We offer a major and minor for undergraduates and a graduate minor in Gender and Women’s Studies and an undergraduate and graduate minor in Queer Studies. We have several opportunities for students, including internships, travel abroad, and graduation with Honors. Many of our students (as well as faculty) are active leaders on campus and in the community. Come join us!”

Our class will provide you with an introduction to this dynamic field of inquiry by providing you with the vocabularies, theories, and methods necessary to understand how gender and power intersect in the course of individuals’ everyday lived experience cross-culturally. Each week is organized around a central theme with relevant assigned readings by leaders whose research, activism, and intellectual contributions to society have shaped the field of Gender & Women’s Studies as we know it today.

To help you navigate our exciting introduction to this field of inquiry, each week has a companion course packet labeled with the corresponding week number as noted in the syllabus. These review materials feature an average of five to seven pages containing a wealth of information relevant to each week’s subject matter.

Information featured in each set of Review Materials is divided into four subheadings that I encourage you to review after completing the assigned readings.
1. **Readings for this Week**: This section lists the assigned readings you should engage with before coming to class by visiting the WyoCourse site, where you can download them to read on a screen or print or, in some cases, by consulting the course guide. Please consider developing your ability to engage with and synthesize information as you read assigned texts by writing critical reading notes using the instructions provided below under the header “Instructions for Compiling Critical Reading Notes.” I have provided a URL that links to the original source whenever an assigned text is available in open access format online under the header reading “You may access these sources online in open access format at: ____.” Please be aware that the open access format will differ from the WyoCourse readings because I have carefully selected sections of assigned work for you to read from much longer texts, and so it is always preferable to read materials posted in WyoCourse and then consult the open access version if you are interested in reading more. In other words, the URL will take you to the full text of books and other documents published before 1922 (when copyright expires and published work enters the public domain) or that are otherwise available in the public domain, rather than the selected pages of the text you are required to read for class.

2. **Context and Relevance**: Interdisciplinary research and analysis is a key feature of Gender & Women’s Studies and assigned readings in our class accordingly come from a wide variety of academic fields and philosophical perspectives. Enduringly influential ideas never emerge in a vacuum, and this section of the course guide for each week accordingly provides a concise introduction to some of the major social questions and political events assigned authors were contending with and responding to in their work. Reading this section of the review materials will help you to understand why I have assigned each author and how each author’s work is relevant to class because of their perspectives, contributions to the human condition, activism, and overall contribution to the field of Gender & Women’s Studies. This section also provides links to authoritative online and open access sources about assigned authors and the era in which they were writing.

3. **Reading Questions**: This section provides three to five questions that pertain to all readings assigned for the week. I designed these reading questions as a starting point to help foster your critical engagement with assigned readings and engaging in critical reading, using the instructions provided below under the header “Instructions for Compiling Critical Reading Notes,” will provide you with additional questions to raise during Friday discussion groups or in class on Mondays and Wednesdays.

4. **Additional Resources**: This section of the course guide features online, open access links to a variety of primary and otherwise authoritative sources related to each week’s theme, which may include some or all of the following: museum collections, archives, organizational websites, speeches by assigned authors, and videos of speeches or significant events.

**Instructions for Compiling Critical Reading Notes**

It is especially important in this era of “information overload” that we learn to critically engage with and evaluate primary sources in order to be well-informed about the world.

Critical reading is a big part of understanding argument. Although some of the material you read will be very persuasive, do not fall under the spell of the printed word as authority. Very
few of your professors think of the texts they assign as the last word on the subject. Remember that the author of every text has an agenda, something that s/he wants you to believe. This is fine — everything is written from someone’s perspective — but you should remain attuned to this fact as you read. Part of your goal as a reader should be to put the author’s ideas in your own words; then you can stop thinking of these ideas as facts and start envisioning them as arguments. When you read, ask yourself questions like, “what is this author trying to prove?” “what is the author assuming I agree or disagree with?” “do I agree with the author?” “does the author adequately defend her argument?” “what kind of proof does she use?” “is there something she leaves out that I would put in?” As you become more accustomed to reading critically, you will start to see the sometimes hidden agendas of other writers, and you can use this skill to improve your own ability to craft effective arguments. Critical reading notes will help you develop confidence in class conversations and prevent you from overloading yourself with information and spending too much time sifting through information. The following methods will enable you to read your sources with understanding and take good notes:

Pre-Reading: A well-written piece usually makes a single main point and supports that point with a discussion of a series of subtopics related to it. Before you being writing notes, scan the complete piece of writing to determine the main point, subtopics discussed, and how the author discusses each of the subtopics. An effective method of scanning is to read the first several paragraphs of a section and then read the first (topic) sentence of each remaining paragraph. When you get to the concluding paragraph, read all of it. If your source is a book, the table of contents may help guide you to information that can help you to determine the argument and evidence used to support it. At this stage, you may consider taking the following steps:

- Preliminary examination: study the length, title, and preview the introduction and conclusion of the reading
- Classification: categorize the subject in one simple sentence
- Seeing the skeleton: jot down a brief outline of the reading and think about how parts of the outline relate to the whole, then define the basic problem the author discusses and create a few questions about the reading prior to engaging with it

Critical Reading: After scanning the entire piece, write your understanding of the author’s argument, in your own words. It is a good idea at this point to read the section in the text that contains the author’s first subtopic. The length of this segment will vary, but in the average book or substantial academic article, it will usually feature for one to five pages; after reading this, scan the section again to make sure that you understand the most significant points in it. Next, write your understanding of the subtopics in that section; of course, you also need to do this in your own words. Paraphrasing will help you to better understand the author’s ideas rather than just mechanically copying them. When you take notes, be as concise as possible, omitting unnecessary details and digressions. Write complete sentences as much as possible and use abbreviation sparingly. If you consider that the author’s words are necessary to clarify a point, copy them exactly and put them in quotation marks, recording the page number(s) in the text or article that corresponds to your notes. In addition, make sure that you have all bibliographical information recorded for each source. At this stage, you may consider taking the following steps:
• State the author’s purpose in one simple sentence
• State the author’s argument, thesis, claim, or question (there may be one major claim with several sub-claims)
• Identify the counter-argument
• Describe three pieces of evidence the author used that most persuaded you to see the issue analyzed from the author’s perspective

Post-Reading and Reading Notes- This is the stage that concludes the process of critical reading by creating a conclusion to all previous work. Always try to review the piece after note-taking to make sure your notes are accurate and complete. When post-reading, you may do the following things:

• Review & double-check: review the notes you took while reading to ensure that you have answered all the questions and responded to the prompts during pre-reading and critical reading. Attempt to resolve any unanswered questions before completing this task
• Summarize: Restate the reading’s main argument and the conclusion in a single sentence. As advertising agents sometimes say, “if you can’t write down the idea on the back of a business card, you probably don’t have a clear idea.” In other words, if you find yourself unable to summarize the author’s argument in a single sentence, go back and reread the chapter
• Assess your reaction: what convinced you and what did not? Why? How did you respond to the chapter as a whole? Why?
• Explain, in your own words, how the author reached her conclusion. Explain why you found it convincing or not. Explain how this argument (and the work more generally) matches or does not match what other writers have to say on the same topic.

Readings for this Week

Available on WyoCourse as:

1. 1080SyllabusFall18
2. 8.31UNWomenAnnualReport

You may access these sources online in open access format at:


Context and Relevance

UN Women is the United Nations organization focused specifically on the advancement of gender equality and the rights of women and girls. Every year UN Women compiles a concise yet comprehensive report on global progress toward achieving these goals. Gender equality is the fifth goal of the United Nations Sustainable Development, which in 2015 built upon the Millennium Development Goals agenda to end poverty by further advancing this agenda through the year 2050. The 2017 report summarizes UN Women’s activities throughout the
calendar year while also highlighting successes and challenges faced both globally and in specific world regions and countries.

**Reading Questions**

1. This report highlights some of the work that activists are doing all over the world to advance gender equality from a wide range of individual backgrounds, professional qualifications, and perspectives. In addition to providing statistical data and country-specific accounts of ongoing work, the report also includes brief biographies of these activists juxtaposed with their photos. This strategy is inspiring and also personalizes the somewhat abstract work of striving for global gender equality yet it can only focus on a small group of individuals doing inspiring work. What insight does critical thinking about this strategy provide to us regarding the challenges facing those at UN Women tasked with compiling this report or others like it?

2. The universal human rights principles enshrined in the mandate of UN Women and all other United Nations organizations are indisputably admirable in their goal to improve standards of living and equality for all people, irrespective of who or where they are. Based on what you read in the report, what are some of the most pressing challenges facing UN Women in its goals to achieve global gender equality?

3. Writing a report like this one is a massive undertaking requiring the collaboration of partners all over the world. What most impressed or surprised you about the scope, scale, and content of this report and the work of UN Women that it reports?

**Additional Resources**

UN Women’s website offers a comprehensive and multimedia overview of the organization, accomplishments, and future goals. See: http://www.unwomen.org/en

Introduction to Our Class and Our Goals for the Semester

Week One

How can I succeed in 1080?

- Dedicate at least two hours to each reading
- Make an appointment to see me if anything is unclear
- Read assignment prompts very carefully
- Keep track of points earned using syllabus guidelines
- Compose weekly critical reading notes
Our goals

- Improve critical thinking and reading skills
- Develop the ability to conduct interdisciplinary analysis
- Become familiar with the vocabulary and major tenets of feminist theories and methods
- Gain a basic understanding of gender as a culturally and historically constructed category

Weeks 3-11: Key Concepts in “The Waves”

- First wave: equal legal rights
- Second wave: equal socioeconomic rights
- Third wave: intersectionality and identities
- Fourth wave: increased breadth and online activism
Getting started with critical reading

- Remember that every author has an agenda
- Agendas are something the author wants you to believe
- Every text comes from a perspective
- All “facts” can be supported with “evidence”

Questions to ask

- What is the author trying to prove?
- With what ideas does the author assume I agree?
- Does the author adequately support the argument?
- What kind of evidence does the author use to do so?
- Is there something the author leaves out?
- How would including that information substantiate the argument?
Pre-reading

- Preliminary examination: Length, title, introduction, conclusion
- Classification: Describe the subject in one simple sentence
- Seeing the skeleton: Briefly outline the chapter to map the article’s trajectory
- Define the argument: Define the basic problem the author discusses and identify a few related questions

Reading critically

- State the author’s purpose in one simple sentence
- State the author’s argument, thesis, claim, or question
- Identify the counter-argument
- Note three pieces of evidence the author used to persuade you to see things from the author’s perspective
Post-reading & reading notes

- Review and double check: Have you answered all the questions and responded to the notes and queries you recorded during pre-reading and critical reading?
- Summarize: Restate the author’s argument in a single sentence
- Assess your reaction: What convinced you and what did not?
- Explain, in your own words, how the author reached a particular conclusion

Formatting CRN

- Write the author, title, place of publication, publisher, and year of publication at the top of the page for each source
- Make notes in the middle of the page, leaving wide margins
- In the right-hand margin, record the page numbers from the source that corresponds to your notes
UN Women Annual Report

- **Descriptive statement of purpose**: To document progress toward, and ongoing challenges to, achieving the SDG of gender equality.

- **Argument**: Activist movements to promote gender equality were widespread in 2017 but significant work remains to be done to achieve the SDG of gender equality.

- **Evidence presented**: The document profiles activists, recalls results of the UN Commission on the Status of Women; provides examples of issues related to women and politics, labor, violence, crisis; reports financial donations to the organization; and provides a map of UN Women offices worldwide.