

**WGS 490: Feminist Theories and Methodological Issues**  
**THEORIZING DIFFERENCE:**  
**U.S. BLACK AND LATINA FEMINIST THOUGHT**  
**SPRING 2015**

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Office hours: MW 4:15-4:45pm  
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**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** This course examines two important traditions in U.S. women of color's thinking about identity, politics, and complex systems of domination: intersectionality and borderland theorizing. Intersectionality (or the concept that different aspects of identity interconnect as do different social structures and systems of oppression) is a widely used and important concept in feminist theory. It is also a contested concept that is not always employed carefully: it is often used narrowly, instrumentalized in ways that flatten its complexity, or its alternative logics are misunderstood. Moreover, the concept's roots in 19<sup>th</sup> century Black women's writings is frequently erased, overlooked or ignored. This seminar looks closely at the origins and development of intersectionality as a concept and theoretical framework: the course approaches intersectionality as, simultaneously: an ontology of compound subjectivity; a "matric" (matrix) epistemological and methodological framework; and a political vision of solidarity. We will examine its 20th-century contexts in women of color feminist theories and its 19th-century origins in Black feminist thought. In addition, we will explore current debates about intersectionality as a feminist theory and method and think through its implications for feminist alliances and politics.

Borderland theorizing offers an alternative approach to understanding identity and complex systems of domination. While intersectional in spirit, borderland approaches have a distinct ontological, epistemic and political approach. They speak primarily to the experiences of ethno-racial discrimination experienced by peoples of Mexican descent in the southwestern U.S., but have been adopted more broadly to address questions of identity and oppression. The second part of this seminar traces the development of borderland theorizing from its early origins through the works of Gloria Anzaldúa and María Lugones and raises questions about the tensions and relationships between this approach and intersectionality.

**This course counts for the WGS Graduate Certificate:** The WGS graduate certificate in is an option for students interested in doing additional course work in WGS in concert with their M.A. or Ph.D. degree work. The **certificate requires a 12-hour course of study**. Students must complete WGS 490 or ENG 460, WGS 400, and two WGS electives. For more information please contact our WGS advisor Dr. Stacia Kock [skock@ilstu.edu](mailto:skock@ilstu.edu). Or, visit our webpage: <http://wgs.illinoisstate.edu/academics/graduate/>

**I. BOOKS and ARTICLES:** All articles are available on Milner Library Reserve unless otherwise noted. Readings from books will be noted parenthetically after the assigned readings on the

syllabus, and correspond to the bolded abbreviations following the titles below. I reserve the right to change readings to accommodate the pace of the class or the direction of the discussion.

- **Collins, Patricia Hill.** 1990. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition New York: Routledge.
- **Moraga, Cherríe and Gloria Anzaldúa.** 1983. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, New York: Kitchen Table Women of Color Press. Available as a pdf on ReggieNet.
- **Articles on ReggieNet** [marked in syllabus as RN].

## II. COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

**QUALITY CLASS PARTICIPATION and ATTENDANCE:** Attendance and active participation in class discussion is crucial to your success in meeting the formal course requirements. You are expected to have read all assigned readings before you attend class. You are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the readings and to ask informed questions. The course encourages the development of critical thinking skills through regular writing assignments and class discussions. You will be responsible for the material presented during the lectures and it will be a necessary part of our discussions and writing assignments.

**ATTENDANCE:** You are permitted three unexcused absences: please use them wisely. After your third absence your participation grade will be dropped by one letter. For example, if you are absent four times, then your participation grade will drop to a B. Five absences earn you a C, six a D, and so on. I will keep track of attendance with a daily sign in sheet at the beginning of class, so please make sure to sign in. **IF YOU HAVE MORE THAN SIX ABSENCES YOU CANNOT PASS THIS CLASS.**

**WRITTEN WORK:** Written work for this class will consist of written assignments, response papers and a short final project. I do not accept email submissions. All written work must be carefully proofed, have proper citations, and be free of errors. **YOU MUST COMPLETE ALL WRITTEN WORK TO RECEIVE A GRADE FOR THIS CLASS.**

**C. EVALUATIONS:** Your final letter grade will be based on the following.

7 Response Papers [I drop lowest]	60%
2 "Intersectional Intuitions" Assignments	10%
Class participation	05%
Final Project	25%

**LATE WORK:** All assignments must be turned at the end of class on the due date. Early work is always accepted. I will accept late work, but I reserve the right to deduct points for work handed in after the due date. I am willing to be flexible about due dates in cases of

illness, childcare issues, or family emergencies, but I would appreciate you letting me know about these issues in advance if possible.

**READING/ASSIGNMENTS:** Readings are to be prepared in advance of class lectures and discussions. Most of the material requires students to read selections more than once. Your first reading should be a comprehensive reading that charts the author's general argument structure. The second reading should be done with attention to filling in the details of the author's position.

**CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE:** Students are expected to behave in a manner consistent with being in a professional environment. Open discussion and disagreement are encouraged in a respectful manner. Please keep the following in mind.

- Talking to classmates during class, even if it's related to the class, disrupts the learning environment. If you have questions about something someone said please raise your hand and ask them directly.
- Inform the instructor when you may have to arrive late or leave early. If you arrive late to class, please sit down quietly near the entrance. If you have to leave early, please sit near the exit so that your departure does not disturb the class.
- Turn off your cell phone, pagers, and PLEASE do not answer your phone or send text messages during this class. I will ask you to leave. Seriously.
- Do not make audio or video recordings of class discussions or lectures without permission of the instructor or the office of disability concerns.
- Support your fellow students through the learning process. Make an effort to get to know your classmates, and help them out when you can. Share notes, share resources. Get to know at least three people you can rely on for notes if you miss the class.

**SPECIAL ACCOMODATIONS:**

**Students with Disabilities:** Any student needing to arrange a reasonable accommodation for a documented disability should contact Disability Concerns in 350 Fell Hall, 438-5853 (voice), 438-8620 (TTY). If you need materials translated into the braille alphabet please contact me immediately so we can make arrangements through disability concerns. They often need two weeks advanced notice. See: <http://disabilityconcerns.illinoisstate.edu/>

**Students with Children:** Children are welcome in class if they are not disruptive and can sit quietly. Keep in mind some of the material in this class is not for G audiences.

**Mental Health and Well-Being:** University life can get very complicated. Students sometimes feel overwhelmed, lost, experience anxiety or depression, struggle with relationship difficulties or diminished self-esteem. However, many of these issues can be effectively addressed with a little help. Student Counseling Services (SCS) helps students cope with difficult emotions and life

stressors. Student Counseling Services is staffed by experienced, professional psychologists and counselors, who are attuned to the needs of college students. The services are FREE and completely confidential. Find out more at [counseling.illinoisstate.edu](http://counseling.illinoisstate.edu) or by calling (309) 438-3655.

**Sexual Assault Survivor's Resources:** The University is committed to both supporting students' well-being and safety and acting to ensure the safety of our campus community. All university faculty and staff are mandated by Federal law to report acts of sexual violence/assault, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking and sexual harassment so the University can respond and investigate. Only Student Counseling Services staff and the university psychiatrist are not required to report. Victims of such incidents are free to choose their level of involvement in University and/or police investigations. There is an extensive network of support resources for survivors of such incidents; talking with someone about what happened aids recovery and adjustment.

- ✓ Reporting options: ISU Police 911 or (309) 438-8631.
- ✓ Non-criminal reporting options: Equal Opportunity Office (309) 438-3383. Or, [EqualOpportunity.IllinoisState.edu](http://EqualOpportunity.IllinoisState.edu)
- ✓ Sexual Assault Prevention and Survivor Services (Student Counseling Services): (309) 438-3655 or [counseling.illinoisstate.edu](http://counseling.illinoisstate.edu) (free and confidential).
- ✓ YWCA Stepping Stones, 24-hour sexual assault advocates hotline. 309.827-4005.

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:** Academic Integrity is expected in all classroom endeavors. Plagiarism and other forms of dishonesty will not be tolerated. Period. Students who have questions regarding issues of academic dishonesty should refer to the University regulations that outline unacceptable behaviors in academic matters. **Please read the Student Code of Conduct:** <http://deanofstudents.illinoisstate.edu/students/get-help/crr/code-of-conduct.shtml>

Students who violate university policy on academic honesty can expect me to pursue such matters to the full extent of ISU conduct codes (up to and including seeking expulsion from the university). **Any work submitted with evidence of cheating or plagiarism will automatically receive a failing grade for the assignment. If plagiarism continues will you fail the course. It is your responsibility to understand how to cite scholarly material properly.** Please consult: <http://english.illinoisstate.edu/kalmbach/351/oldwebs/Morton/DeprtInfo/Plag.html>

For the purposes of this class you don't need to use full citations for assigned readings, just for readings that you bring in from outside class. Please cite assigned readings thus: Frye defines oppression as "a system of barriers that reduce and immobilize" (Anzaldúa 1981, 8).

**READING SCHEDULE:** I recognize that this is an extremely ambitious syllabus. I expect that we will add and delete readings as needed. This is your class, so I'd like to be able to modify the syllabus in response to classroom discussions and student interest.

<b>DATE</b>	<b>I. STARTING IN OUR LIVES</b>	<b>PAPERS</b>
1/12 M	<i>This Bridge Called My Back</i> : Rushin, "Bridge Poem" and all essays in the sections "Children Passing in the Street" and "Entering into the Lives of Others" [RN]	<i>Open Discussion</i>
1/14 W	<i>This Bridge Called My Back</i> : All essays in the sections "And When You Leave Take Your Pictures with You," and "Between the Lines." [RN]	<i>Practice Reflection Paper</i>
1/19 M	<i>This Bridge Called My Back</i> : All essays in the sections "Speaking in Tongues" and "El Mundo Zurdo." [RN]	<i>Reflection Paper #1</i>
1/21 W	<i>MLK Holiday, NO CLASS</i>	
	<b>II. ANGER, SILENCE, AND VOICE</b>	
1/26 M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• bell hooks, "Killing Rage" [RN]</li> <li>• Lorde, "Eye-to-Eye: Black Women, Hatred and Anger"</li> <li>• Lorde, "The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism" [RN]</li> <li>• Lorde, "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action"</li> </ul>	<i>Reflection Paper #2</i>
	<b>III. THE WHITE PROBLEM</b>	
1/28 W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elizabeth V. Spelman, "Gender &amp; Race: The Ampersand Problem in Feminist Thought" (1988). [RN]</li> </ul>	
2/2 M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bailey, "'White Talk' as Barrier to Understanding the Problem of Whiteness" [RN]</li> </ul>	
2/4 W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sullivan, "The Hearts and Guts of White People" [RN]</li> </ul>	<i>Reflection Paper #3</i>
	<b>IV. WHAT DO FEMINISTS WANT IN A THEORY?</b>	
2/9 M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Barbara Christian, <i>The Race for Theory</i> (1990). [RN]</li> <li>• Norma Alarcón, <i>The Theoretical Subject(s) of This Bridge Called My Back</i> [RN]</li> <li>• Joy James, "Teaching Theory, Talking Community" [RN]</li> </ul>	
	<b>V. INTERSECTIONAL INTUITIONS- PART ONE</b>	
2/11 W	<p>Discussion on Street Harassment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional Readings Handout with instructions.</li> </ul>	<i>Assignment</i>
	<b>VI. "IN DEFENSE OF OUR RACE AND SEX": EARLY U.S. BLACK FEMINIST THOUGHT</b>	
2/16 M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beverly Guy-Sheftall, "The Evolution of Feminist Consciousness among African American Women." [RN]</li> <li>• Maria Stewart, "Lecture Delivered at Franklin Hall" (1832) [RN]</li> <li>• Sojourner Truth, "Aren't I A Woman?" (1851) [RN]</li> <li>• Mary Church Terrell, "The Progress of Colored Women" (1898) [RN]</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ida Wells Barnett, "Lynch Law in America" (1900). [RN]</li> <li>• Hazel Carby, "On the Threshold of a Woman's Era: Lynching,..) [RN, Optional]</li> </ul>	
2/18 W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vivian M. May, "By a Black Woman of the South": Race, Place, and Gender in the Work of Anna Julia Cooper." [RN]</li> <li>• Anna Julia Cooper, <i>A Voice From the South</i> (1892). Selections: Preface (Our Raison d'Étre), 'Woman vs. the Indian', 'The Status of Woman in America,' and 'Has America a Race Problem?' [RN]</li> </ul>	
	<b>VII. INTERSECTIONALITY AND BLACK FEMINIST THOUGHT</b>	
2/23 M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AAPF, "A Primer on Intersectionality" [RN]</li> <li>• May, "What Is Intersectionality?" [RN]</li> </ul>	
2/25 W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collins, <i>Black Feminist Thought</i>, Chapter 3-4 [BFT]</li> </ul>	<i>Reflection Paper #4</i>
3/2 M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collins, <i>Black Feminist Thought</i>, Chapters 5-6 [BFT]</li> </ul>	
3/4 W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collins, <i>Black Feminist Thought</i>, Chapters 7-8 [BFT]</li> </ul>	
3/7-15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>SPRING BREAK (NO CLASS)</b></li> </ul>	
3/16 M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collins, <i>Black Feminist Thought</i>, Chapters 9-10 [BFT]</li> </ul>	
3/18 W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collins, <i>Black Feminist Thought</i>, Chapters 11-12 [BFT]</li> </ul>	<i>Reflection Paper #5</i>
	<b>VIII. BORDERLANDS, BORDER SUBJECTS, MESTIZAJE</b>	
3/23 M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hurtado, "Sitios y Lenguas: Chicanas Theorize Feminism" [RN]</li> </ul>	
3/25 W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Garcia, <i>Chicana Feminist Thought</i>, selections, TBA</li> </ul>	
3/29 M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entrevista1: "Turning Points" (Interview w/ Linda Smucker)</li> <li>• Entrevista2: "Within the Crossroads" (Interview w/ Christine Weiland)</li> <li>• Anzaldúa Dictionary [Handout]</li> </ul>	
3/31 W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anzaldúa, <i>Borderlands/La Frontera</i>, Chapters 1-2.</li> </ul>	
4/6 M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anzaldúa, Chapters 3-4.</li> </ul>	<i>Reflection Paper #6</i>
4/8 W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anzaldúa, Chapter 5 and 7, and selected poetry.</li> </ul>	
	<b>IX. INTERSECTIONAL INTUITIONS- PART TWO</b>	
4/13 M	<b>Discussion:</b> Police violence against women and men of color	<i>Assignment</i>
4/15 W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jennifer Lisa Vest, Guest Speaker and Discussion Leader</li> <li>Read: Essays and Poetry Selections (TBA)</li> </ul>	
4/17 F	<i>Please attend Dr. Vest's Keynote, 1pm in Bone Ctr.</i>	
	<b>X. WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?</b>	
4/20 M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lugones "Playfulness, "World"-Travel" ...Loving Perception" [RN]</li> </ul>	

4/22 W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ortega, "Being Knowingly, Lovingly Ignorant..."</li></ul>	<i>Reflection Paper #7</i>
4/27 M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• TBA</li></ul>	
4/29 W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• TBA</li></ul>	