

1/11/05

EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY  
DIVISION OF ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

**REQUEST FOR INCLUSION OF A COURSE IN THE  
GENERAL EDUCATION PROGRAM:  
EDUCATION FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY**

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DEPARTMENT/SCHOOL: History and Philosophy COLLEGE: ARTS & SCIENCES

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1. Subject Code, Number, and Title: PHIL/WMST 226 Feminist Theory

2. Credit Hours 3

3. Course Description

A consideration of philosophical issues concerning the nature and status of women. Readings from both traditional and contemporary sources. Topics may include scientific and religious views, the ideal society and women's place in it, varieties of feminism, views on sexuality, family and reproduction, work and the economy, and body image/aesthetic norms that women experience.

4. This course is (check one):

- an existing course with no revisions (need not go through the input system)
- an existing course with revisions (attach this form to Request for Course Revision form)
- a new course (attach this form to Request for New Course form)

5. Check the General Education requirement this course is intended to meet. If the course is to be proposed for more than one requirement, submit a separate form for each one.

- Effective Communication**
- Quantitative Reasoning (*QR designation*)**
- Writing Intensive (*WI designation*)**
- Perspectives on a Diverse World**
- Global Awareness
- U.S. Diversity
- Knowledge of the Disciplines**
- Arts  Humanities
- Science  Social Science
- Learning Beyond the Classroom (*LBC designation*)**

- Self and Well Being
- Community Service, Citizenship, and Leadership
- Cultural and Academic Activities and Events
- Career and Professional Development
- International and Multicultural Experience
- Undergraduate Research

6. Rationale. Provide a concise, clear, jargon-free explanation of why this is a General Education course and how it fits into this specific area of the program. (The rationale should explain to students why they are taking the course. It should address both why it is part of the General Education program and why it fits into the particular category.) This rationale should appear on the general course syllabus provided here and should be included in specific course syllabi given to students.

Gender is one of the principal characteristics determining identity and life experience for human beings. This course takes a philosophical approach to gender, examining beliefs about women and men from a wide variety of cultural and political perspectives. We consider both traditional justifications of the differential treatment of women and men in such institutions as marriage and family, as well as theories that challenge these traditional views. This course is a general education course in the knowledge of the disciplines because it provides an introduction to the discipline of philosophy through the concept of gender, its methodology, and its contribution to the body of human knowledge. Students will acquire skills of critical reasoning and develop skills for evaluating and creating substantive arguments to support philosophical positions. Developing such skills is central to the process of higher-education. Moreover, such skills will serve students throughout their educations across all disciplines, in their careers or in pursuing graduate or professional degrees, and in exercising their civic duties.

7. Clearly and concisely explain how this course meets each of the General Education outcomes for the requirement checked in number five (all outcomes should be addressed). To do this, (a) list the General Education outcomes for the requirement and explain how the course meets each outcome; and (b) explain, in general terms, the method(s) of evaluation to be used in the course and how these methods assess the degree to which students have met the General Education outcomes for this requirement.

This course is taught by different faculty using different methods of evaluation. Such methods may include reading worksheets, in-class writing assignments, oral presentations, essay examinations, and term papers.

#### **OUTCOMES:**

- 1. Recognize how the humanities cultivate aesthetic appreciation, imagination, and empathetic understanding of others.**
  - a. Aesthetic appreciation: Feminist theorizing addresses basic questions about the nature of values. Students will learn the distinction between descriptive claims and evaluative

claims. Aesthetic values are a subset within evaluative or normative inquiry. Students will learn the distinction between moral evaluation and aesthetic evaluation by way of examining the question of whether values are objective, subjective, or culturally relative. This is a central theme within feminist discourse, as women have experienced oppression in the name of objective values, and thus feminism takes a critical eye towards such claims. Thus, students will be introduced to positions that critique any strict separation between aesthetic and ethical values, as such critiques argue that often aesthetic values have operated as “ethical” values in contexts of social inequality and the exercise of male-power. In addition, students will also critically examine the ways in which aesthetic values (ideas about beauty, taste, and “appropriate” gender presentation) are culturally constructed, disseminated and reinforced. Further, in exploring the issue of pornography as it bears on women’s status, basic question of aesthetic value will be explored. For example, how might we draw the line between pornography and art?

- b. Imagination: The course teaches students how to distinguish between what is and what ought to be and this requires imagination. Also, imagination is required by the methodology of philosophy; students are required to critically evaluate arguments, theories, and positions by formulating objections and replies. This requires imagination. Moreover, one of the main tools of philosophical examination is the use of counter-examples. Counter-examples are often hypothetical examples that aim to expose flaws in a particular claim or concept. Conceiving of counter-examples as well as critically engaging with them requires imagination.
- c. Empathetic understanding of others: Another central concept within philosophical methodology is the principle of charity—that is, reading and interpreting the positions and claims of others in the most charitable light. This requires and develops ones ability to engage in empathetic understanding. Moreover, the content of the course, through examination of multiple group identities and the varying inequalities faced by members of such groups, will require and develop empathetic understanding of others. For example, students will be exposed to the different ways in which women across different races, cultures, classes, ethnicities experience oppression and limitation.

#### Assessment:

Objective examinations, essays, debates, as well as in class presentations might all test for this outcome. Students will show their recognition of the difference between aesthetic values and ethical values in any of the three, as well as their understanding of critiques of this distinction. They can show their recognition of how the humanities cultivate imagination in objective questions designed to test their understanding of the distinction between claims that aim to report “what is” verses claims that aim to explain “what ought to be.” Their ability to imagine objections and replies can be demonstrated through essays and essay examinations. Empathic understanding may be tested in objective test, essays requiring students to think from the perspective of others.

## **2. Demonstrate basic competency in reading and understanding literary, philosophical, or religious works both in their original historical context and as they inform debate and dialogue today.**

Students will be introduced (through readings and lectures) to origins of the ideas and philosophical writing about gender (in)equality. For example, students may read/have lectures presented on the work of Mary Wollstonecraft, J.S. Mill, and early writings of American suffragettes. Contemporary philosophical writing is required reading in the

course as well, for example as reflected in the work of contemporary feminist thinkers that adopt, adapt, and criticize the theories and practices reflected in the ideas of earlier thinkers and feminist activists.

Assessment:

b. Objective exams and essay exams will test for reading comprehension. Their degree of understanding will also be measured through class discussion, which forms a portion of their class participation grade. Understanding the historical context of texts, positions, and the work of feminist activists will also be tested by means of objective exams and essay exams, and in class presentations.

**3. Analyze and write about literary, philosophical, or religious works.**

a. The bulk of this course involves reading and discussion of philosophical texts about the condition of women, gender inequality—its sources and manifestations--, gender as a social and cultural construct and its relationship to sex, as a biological category. Students are guided in the analysis of these texts and positions contained therein, through close reading assignments and lectures. They are taught how to pick out arguments and how to evaluate them. They are required to construct their own philosophical arguments that engage with these texts.

Assessment:

b. In class discussion and assignments as well as essay examinations and papers will evaluate student's ability to analyze philosophical works. Paper assignments will provide an opportunity to develop and write about their own philosophical positions. Assignments are structured to build skills at analyzing and developing arguments in increasing levels of sophistication. Early assignments will focus on reconstructing arguments within the texts. The next level of assignment will build upon this and add critical evaluations of arguments that they are asked to reconstruct. The final level of assignment will ask them to develop their own positions and thus construct original arguments that address the substantive philosophical positions in the course.

**4. Demonstrate basic knowledge of the history of literary works, or religious or philosophical ideas.**

a. Students will be introduced to the historical development of feminist theorizing through lectures and readings. Thus, students will have a grounded understanding of the connection between philosophy of the past and the present. Lectures will add important historical details about cultural, scientific, and political circumstances in which texts were written, including dominant ideas about women and gender in a given context.

Assessment:

b. Knowledge of the specific views defended by historical authors will be evaluated through homework, essay examinations, and written papers. The connection with contemporary works will be similarly evaluated.

**5. Become familiar with the discursive practices particular to the study of the humanities.**

a. The humanities address the development of human thought (within their political and cultural contexts), on the one hand, and the content of ideas, on the other.

This course develops student's skills at articulating and identifying the content of ideas (for example, what does it mean to claim that gender is socially constructed?) as well as evaluating such content. Students will engage in both oral and written communication in discussing the content of such ideas. Moreover, they will be introduced to a particular example of philosophical discursive practice that runs through the history of feminist philosophy—that is, students will be able to come to see contemporary philosophers' work as engaged discursively with the work of philosophers from the past as well as with other contemporary philosophers. They will develop their own discursive skills as they become participants in the conversation, as it were.

- b. Students' familiarity with discursive practices of philosophy will be assessed through class participation, essay exams, and written papers. Success in all these requires careful conceptual analysis as well as an understanding of arguments and their evaluation.

**6. Begin to recognize how society influences humanistic thought and how the humanities transforms society**

- a. Since this is an introduction to philosophy as a discipline through feminist philosophy the connection between philosophical ideas—for example, ideas about how to understand gender, gender relations, power inequalities as manifest in social structures--and the actual functioning of societies both internally and between one another is central to the content of the course. Moreover, the topic of how to understand the relation between societies, as they function, and ideas, as they are generated, about how societies should function is a central theme of the course. For example, philosophical feminist methodology includes aiming to produce theories of gender that are grounded in actual functioning of gender as a structure within society. Moreover, feminist theorizing is a prime example of the way in which ideas and theory can transform social relationships.

Assessment:

- b. Student recognition of the dynamic relationship between ideas and actual functioning of societies will be evaluated through class participation, essay exams, and written papers. Students' will engage with, and be asked to, formulate positions of their own on the debates just mentioned.

**7. Become practiced in the interpretation and generation of ideas.**

- a. Students are required to read and interpret many texts and to formulate and articulate their own ideas about them. They must critique arguments, and well as formulate their own arguments. They defend their ideas against others, but they must do so without distorting the positions of others. A clear perspective that allows students to grasp the strengths and weaknesses of an argument without bias due to their own views is a central goal of the course.

Assessment:

- b. Students' ability to interpret ideas will be evaluated using essay exams, essays, and debates. All of the reading requires interpretation, and this can be tested by essay tests (i.e., reporting what a given philosopher claims) and papers. Students' ability to generate ideas will be tested though essays and debates. Success in the course requires students to go beyond what is in the reading or provided by the instructor to generate questions and critiques of their own.

8. Attach a syllabus (1-inch margins and 10-12 pt. font). The syllabus must include the rationale from #6 above and clearly reflect the outcomes and methods of evaluation detailed in #7 above.

**Please submit all materials in electronic form.**

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## Action of the Department/College

### 1. Department

Vote of department faculty: For 7 Against 0 Abstentions 0

\_\_\_\_\_  
Department Head

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

### 2. College

\_\_\_\_\_  
College Dean

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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## Action of General Education Advisory Committee

Vote of General Education Committee: For \_\_\_\_\_ Against \_\_\_\_\_ Abstentions \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Chairperson, General Education Advisory Committee

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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## Approval

\_\_\_\_\_  
Associate Vice-President for Undergraduate Studies and Curriculum

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date