



WGST101/QS290 Issues in Feminism:
Introduction to Women's and Gender Studies

Spring 2025 | Knapp 301 | Professor Yao
MWF 11:30am-12:20pm

Professor: Dr. Man Yao (she/her)

Preferred name: Dr. Yao or Professor Yao

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Office hours: Weds 2:30PM-3:30PM; Thurs: 2:00PM-3:30PM; or by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

An introduction to the field of Women's and Gender Studies, this interdisciplinary course considers the socio-political meanings and practices of gender in our lives. It examines whether gender is biologically or socially constructed and how notions of femininity and masculinity are (re)produced. Students will analyze the workings of power and the social production of inequality in institutions such as the family, the workplace, and the state, taking into account the intersections among gender, race, class, ethnicity, nationality, and sexuality. Topics will include sexual and gender violence, equal rights, reproductive technologies, body image, and transnational feminist issues. A central aim of the course is to develop critical reading and thinking about the plurality of women's experiences and about the ways in which women have resisted inequalities and engaged in local/global politics for social transformation and change.

This course fulfills the Interdivisional (I), Power and Justice (P), and Oral Communication (R) GE requirements and is required for WGST majors/minors.

COURSE GOALS

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. Understand Women's and Gender Studies as an interdisciplinary field of study with its major concepts and debates;

2. Understand the complexity of individuals' experiences shaped by the intersection between gender, race, class, sexuality, age, ability, nationality, etc.;
3. Understand how key social institutions like family, state, school, and media perpetuate power and patriarchy;
4. Gain more insights about their own positions and identities within the social structure;
5. Apply authors' ideas and concepts to identify, observe, and analyze real-life events related to Women's and Gender Studies;
6. Practice drawing academic resources to develop and support arguments in their own writing and thinking;
7. Communicate complex ideas effectively and clearly through verbal, written, and visual methods.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

L. Ayu Saraswati, Barbara Shaw, and Heather Rellihan, eds. Introduction to Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies, second edition. (Please note this is the SECOND EDITION.) Oxford University Press. 2020. ISBN 9780190084806. Available via Denison Bookstore. Other materials will be available on Canvas (<https://courses.denison.edu/>).

ABOUT OFFICE HOURS

Office hours is a scheduled time for you and me to have 1-on-1 interactions, beyond regular class time. I hope it would be a comfortable space for you to discuss topics that you are interested in. If you cannot find a time slot that works for you during regular office hours, feel free to send me an email with your availability and we could figure out an alternative time which works for both of us.

TECHNOLOGY

Readings and many assignments require [MyDenison](#) and [Canvas](#) access. Denison also offers many [free software](#) for students to use in their learning (e.g., Office365). Contact [ITS Service Desk](#) for technology questions. During class time, laptops, iPads, and iPhones are only allowed for taking notes, referencing the readings and personal reading notes, and participating in class activities. However, **make sure to stay engaged with the class discussions** and refrain from using them to explore the wonders of the internet or work on assignments for other classes during our class time. Lack of focus and engagement during class will impact your participation grades.

GRADED ASSIGNMENTS

COMPONENTS	Percentage (%)
1. Class Participation	10
2. Reading Summaries and Guides	20
3. Gender Essays	25
4. Concept Question Sets	25
5. Gender in the News Presentation	5
6. Final Group Presentation	15
[optional] Extra credit opportunities to be announced on Canvas	

Class Participation 10%

Your presence and participation in each class is expected and valued. I will record your participation grade after each class according to the following criteria¹:

- **Preparation:** Reading and reviewing any assigned materials before each class.
- **Engagement:** Being verbally and nonverbally engaged during class.
- **Focus:** Avoiding distractions during class. No surprises expressed when I direct the class discussions to you.
- **Classwork:** Most class sessions will include in-class worksheets or brief quizzes based on the readings. They are designed to be simple, not high-stakes testing. You should easily answer them, if you have done the readings.
- **Collaborations:** We will frequently work and discuss with partners or small groups in class sessions. I expect everyone to be a team collaborator during these sessions.
- **Specificity:** Referring to specific ideas from readings and prior class discussions when contributing to class discussion and/or in conversations during office hours.

Reading Summaries and Guides 20%

Readings are essential in this class. To motivate you carefully to engage with the readings, you will be required to write summary essays of materials and guide reading discussions.

- Summary essays(3): Each student will select materials of *three* class days and write three summary essays (one page, single space for each) for these three days. You should submit your summary essay before the start of the class in which the materials will be discussed. Each summary essay should respond to the three questions:
 - What are the three most important aspects of the materials selected (e.g., concepts, issues, evidence etc.)?
 - What are some initial reactions would you like to share for the selected readings?

¹ Adapted from [Dr. Lauren Klein](#) at Emory University and [Dr. Sarah Supp](#) at Denison.

- Write at least one substantial question we could discuss as a group during the class time. You should elaborate in the essay how you develop this question based on the materials.
- Reading guide(1): In addition to the summary essays, you are also required to guide the reading discussions on one class day. You should start with introducing the “Big Ideas” in the readings and propose 1-2 questions to the class to discuss. Presentation slides are not required in the reading guide, but you need to provide specific page numbers if you are referring to specific quotes from the readings.

Gender Essays (3) 25%

During the semester, you will complete three written assignments that ask you to conduct different outside-of-class activities and then reflect on your experience and findings. These three activities are designed to help you apply what we learn in the class to real life and deepen understanding of how gender matters in everyday life. The first essay will ask you to hold a **feminism dinner party**², where you and your friends talk about your current understandings of feminism and gender inequality, before you learn substantially in this course. The second essay will focus on a one-day **gender transgression activity**, where you behave in ways that are considered as “not appropriate” for your current gender identity. You will reflect on how this experience informs you how gender is socially constructed and maintained, and how your other identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, social class etc.) impact this transgression experience. In the third essay, you will be asked to conduct **a feminist critique of a pop culture product** (e.g., a song, a movie, a Tik Tok video/account etc.) and analyze how gender is presented and/or deconstructed in this work, paying particular attention to the intersectionality between gender and other social identities.

Concept Question Sets³ (3) 25%

Throughout this course, you will complete three Concept Question Sets, which are designed to deepen your understanding of the key concepts, terms, and discussions from the assigned readings. Each set will include 3–4 essay-style questions and will be completed during a 50-minute in-class session (you should allocate your time for each question wisely). To help you prepare, I will provide question banks for each set in advance. You may bring a one-page, A4 note card to use as a reference during the session. Please ensure your handwriting is legible; any text that cannot be clearly read within three seconds will not be graded.

² Ideas of the first two activities are adapted from [Dr. Clare Jen](#)'s class of Issues in Feminism (SP 21).

³ I also borrowed this name from [Dr. Clare Jen](#) at Denison.

Gender in the News Presentation⁴ 5%

Presentation time! These assignments are designed to help you to practice public communication skills. Each student will prepare a five-minute presentation introducing the class to a recent news story about gender issues that interests them. In this short presentation, you should clearly summarize the news piece and draw meaningful connections to the topics, concepts, or readings covered in this course. Any relevant international perspectives are highly encouraged. I will provide a sign-up sheet after the introductory unit of the class.

Final Group Presentation 15%

In this group project, you and your group mates are expected to introduce *two* different academic articles on a similar topic to the class and compare and evaluate how they conduct the research differently. This assignment is designed to help you develop the ability to understand recent primary research related to women's and gender studies. I will provide a list of academic journals for you to pick research from. Detailed instructions will be provided on Canvas.

According to Denison's catalog,

A+: 97%+	A: 93-96.9%	A-: 90-92.9%
B+: 87-89.9%	B: 83-86.9%	B-: 80-82.9%
C+: 77-79.9%	C: 73-76.9%	C-: 70-72.9%
D+: 67-69.9%	D: 63-66.9%	D-: 60-62.9%
F: below 60		

COURSE POLICIES AND EXPECTATIONS

Attendance Policy

Attendance in every class is mandatory and my personal expectation for each of you. You are allowed to miss *three* classes throughout the semester without penalty. To have a missed class without penalty, you must email me **in advance of the class**; otherwise, penalty would apply. For any missed classes, you are responsible for reviewing the material covered and completing the assigned work. Beyond the three allowed absences, each additional absence will result in a 2% deduction from your final grade. For allowed absences, documentation must be submitted via email prior to the start of class. Allowed absences may include illness or other legitimate conflicts as outlined in the Denison catalog. Such activities might include course-related field trips, fine arts performances (but not rehearsals), and varsity sports contests (both regular season and all postseason contests, but not scrimmages or practices).

⁴ I borrowed this name from [Dr. Min Ji Kang](#) at Denison.

You are also expected to be in class on time. If you are more than 10 minutes late to class without prior notice to me, you will receive one unexcused tardiness. Each unexcused tardiness will result in 1% deduction of your final grade.

Preparation & Assigned Readings

A four-credit course requires 12 hours of work per week (four hours of classroom or direct faculty instruction and eight hours of out-of-class student work) over a period of 14 weeks of instruction plus one week of exams. Please complete the readings before each class. I also highly encourage you to take reading notes as you go through them. They can be very helpful for you to concentrate during reading. Digital notes are quite popular now, and there is plenty of note-taking software you could choose. OneNote which is free through Denison student accounts is recommended. I use Notion, a flexible note-taking and project management software.

Participation

Participation in class activities and contributions to class discussions are part of your grade and crucial for your success in this class. Generally, effort is far more valuable than finding the correct answers, especially when dealing with complex issues where clear solutions may not always exist. Participation is not limited to speaking up in class. In order to get a high grade for class participation, refer to the six criteria I listed under the Graded Assignments.

Make sure to bring the required text and related notes to the class to facilitate the participation. Also bring your digital devices to the class to participate in certain in-class activities. Using digital devices for activities unrelated to the class are not allowed. Participation outside of regular class time is also expected. Significant feedback on assignments is a core component of this course. Students are expected to review instructor feedback and incorporate that into their future work.

Discussion and Communication Guidelines

This course deals with a variety of complex issues, and you might encounter differences or even conflicts in opinions either with me or with other classmates in this course. I hope everyone in this class feels safe to express their opinions. We will also have a short workshop to work on making our own community norms in the first class.

Please keep in mind that your classmates and professor come from diverse backgrounds. Each of us should contribute to building a supportive learning community by respecting other people's opinions. Listening is always the priority. Being open-minded and willing to accept new ways of thinking are also encouraged. If you disagree with or have a different perspective with me or a classmate, please do so in an informed and respectful way.

Late Assignments

Assignments will be penalized 10% for each day that has passed since the due date (e.g., If you turn in an assignment one day late, you can only receive up to 90% of the original points. If it is two days late, you can receive up to 80% of the original points.) Assignments received after the deadline, even on the day it is due, will be considered late. Late assignments will not be accepted after the last day of classes.

Content Warning

Some content in this course may include descriptions or scenes depicting violence, war, or sexual violence, which could be triggering for some students. Please take care of yourself in these cases and prioritize your wellbeing. If needed, feel free to leave the classroom, contact Counseling and Consultation Services, or contact the professor.

Email Communication

When emailing me and sending me a Canvas message, add “WGST101” or “QS290” in the subject line. Properly address the message (e.g., “Dr. Yao” or “Professor Yao”) and sign your name at the end of the message. I try my best to reply to your emails within 48 hours on days when the class is in session.

Generative AI Tools

The recent emergence of generative AI tools will change the process of teaching and learning in an unprecedented way, and the whole society is still figuring out the directions of these changes. I am highly aware of and understand the amount of uncertainties, confusions, and dilemmas you are facing on a daily basis under today’s technological changes. As a teacher, an AI researcher, and a frequent user of these tools myself, I am also in the process of learning how we can better incorporate these tools into teaching to facilitate effective learning processes. Thus I will try my best to offer guidance on this matter based on my current knowledge and will design this course in a way that equips students with capabilities to navigate the new social and technological environment. As a starting point, here are a few reminders you should keep in mind whenever you consider using one generative AI tool throughout this course:

- Consult and reflect on [*Bloom’s Learning Taxonomy*](#) and specific course goals to identify how the usage of AI tools help you achieve your learning goals. Lots of assignments designed in this course, including reading, writing, and presenting, will help you to achieve these learning goals. If you are only using AI to increase your speed of finishing assignments, you are not working towards these goals.
- *AI generates average work.* Current research in educational technologies shows that the AI-generated work typically can only receive an average grade in a number of different

assignment types.⁵ To achieve excellence, substantial human knowledge and decisions are still required, which means that AI will not learn for you! To gain the knowledge and taste required to distinguish between good and bad contents, you should follow the expectations of this course to engage with the materials and make them your own knowledge.

- *AI makes mistakes and gives stupid solutions.* Related to the last point, human knowledge and experience are required to assess the credibility of AI-generated content. For example, AI is known to offer factually-wrong answers without proper sources noted. Therefore, **you should never use AI to produce your final work.** Substantial thinking and assessment are needed before you could decide whether to trust the AI-generated content.

With these reminders in mind, here are the policies regarding AI tools in this course:

- **Submit a formal disclosure statement about GenAI usage**, for each assignment that has been informed by AI tools. This statement should include 1) how the AI tools were used (e.g., to generate ideas, editing language, outlining, providing summaries); 2) how the AI tools help or do not help improve the quality of the work.
- Occasionally, I will use AI tools to facilitate class activities and prepare class materials. In these cases, I will let you know and provide a model for how to appropriately credit AI contributions in our daily work. I encourage us to exchange experiences of using AI and explore the best practices for transparency and ethical use together.
- Suspected cases of unauthorized use will be considered as a violation to **Academic Integrity** and reported.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES AND RESOURCES

Academic Credit Policy

This course adheres to Denison's Academic Credit Policy. Direct Faculty Instruction includes lecture, class discussion, library sessions outside of regular class time, use of Discussion Board (Canvas), faculty-recorded lectures or laboratory engagements, required outside speakers, detailed feedback on student writing and oral presentations, and one-on-one meetings with student.

Academic Integrity

Proposed and developed by Denison students, passed unanimously by DCGA and Denison's faculty, the Code of Academic Integrity requires that instructors notify the Associate Provost of cases of academic dishonesty. Cases are typically heard by the Academic Integrity Board which determines whether a violation has occurred, and, if so, its severity and the sanctions. In some circumstances the case may be handled through an Administrative Resolution Procedure. Further, the code makes students responsible for promoting a culture of integrity on campus and acting in instances in which

⁵ Bowen, José Antonio, and C. Edward Watson. *Teaching with AI: A Practical Guide to A New Era of Human Learning*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2024.

integrity is violated. Academic honesty, the cornerstone of teaching and learning, lays the foundation for lifelong integrity.

Academic dishonesty is intellectual theft. It includes, but is not limited to, providing or receiving assistance in a manner not authorized by the instructor in the creation of work to be submitted for evaluation. This standard applies to all work ranging from daily homework assignments to major exams. Students must clearly cite any sources consulted—not only for quoted phrases but also for ideas and information that are not common knowledge. Neither ignorance nor carelessness is an acceptable defense in cases of plagiarism. It is the student's responsibility to follow the appropriate format for citations. Students should ask their instructors for assistance in determining what sorts of materials and assistance are appropriate for assignments and for guidance in citing such materials clearly.

Note on Technology: Unauthorized use of technology (including, but not limited to, artificial intelligence sites and translation programs) in the preparation or submission of academic work can be considered a form of cheating and/or plagiarism. Instructors may at their discretion create assignments that incorporate the use of supporting technologies and will inform students of acceptable uses of technology in their courses. It is the responsibility of the student to ask the instructor for clarification whenever they are unclear about the parameters of a specific assignment and to understand that presenting the work of artificial intelligence as your own constitutes a violation of Denison's Code. Cases of suspected inappropriate use of technology may be submitted to the Academic Integrity Board to initiate an investigation of academic dishonesty.

For further information about the Code of Academic Integrity, see <http://denison.edu/academics/curriculum/integrity>.

Student Accommodations

Students with a documented disability should complete a Semester Request for Accommodations through their [My Accommodations app](#) on [MyDenison](#). It is the student's responsibility to contact me privately as soon as possible to discuss specific needs related to your learning in the classroom and studying. I rely on the [Academic Resource Center \(ARC\)](#) located in 020 Higley Hall, to verify the need for reasonable accommodation based on the documentation on file in that office. Reasonable accommodation cannot be applied retroactively and therefore ideally should be enacted early in the semester as they are not automatically carried forward from a previous term and must be requested every semester.

Logistic arrangements for testing-related accommodations should be made *at least* a week in advance of an evaluation and follow the [Exam Accommodation Policy](#).

Reporting Sexual Assault

Essays, journals, and other coursework submitted for this class are generally considered confidential pursuant to the University's student record policies. However, students should be aware that University employees are required by University policy to report allegations of discrimination based on sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, or pregnancy to the Title IX Coordinator. This includes reporting all incidents of sexual misconduct, sexual assault, and suspected abuse/neglect of a minor. Further, employees are to report these incidents that occur on campus and/or that involve students at Denison University whenever the employee becomes aware of a possible incident in the course of their employment, including via coursework or advising conversations. There are others on campus to whom you may speak in confidence, including clergy and medical staff and counselors at the Wellness Center. More information on Title IX and the University's Policy prohibiting sex discrimination, including sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, stalking and retaliation, including support resources, how to report, and prevention and education efforts, can be found at: <https://denison.edu/campus/title-ix>.

Multilingual Learning

Students who use English in addition to other languages are welcome to use the resources available at the Multilingual Learning Office (MLO). The MLO includes Morayo Akinkugbe, PhD, the Assistant Director of Multilingual Programming and Support; Anna Adams, the English Language Support Specialist; and the student consultants who work with them. They are all trained and experienced in helping students address the different issues that arise when working in more than one language. If English is not your first or only language, please consider utilizing this resource, which is available to ALL Denison students. Dr. Akinkugbe, Ms. Adams, and the student consultants offer a variety of support for L2 students, including consulting with you about your written language (grammar, syntax, word-choices), developing strategies to manage your reading assignments, assisting with class conversation and presentations, and helping to devise ways to develop and effectively use all your skills in English. You can set up an appointment via <https://denisonuappointments.as.me/mlo>, or by emailing the Multilingual Learning Office directly at englishhelp@denison.edu.

Writing Center

Every writer—no matter the course or their experience level—needs a reader and benefits from deep conversation about their work! At the Writing Center, student consultants are eager to support you at any stage of the writing process including (but not limited to): deciphering assignment instructions,




brainstorming, developing an argument, organizing your ideas, integrating research and sources, working with faculty feedback, and/or polishing a draft. Consultants, who are themselves experienced writers from a range of areas of study, are specially trained to support writing for any course or purpose from lab reports, research papers, and informal writing assignments to cover letters, personal statements, and other application materials. The Center welcomes writers from all backgrounds and levels of college preparation. Appointments can be scheduled for 25 or 50 minutes at <https://denison.mywconline.com/> and take place in-person in the Atrium level of the Library (A22).


COURSE SCHEDULE


* The schedule is subject to change. Make sure to check Canvas about the updated schedule *

** Readings are due before each class. All page numbers refer to our textbook **

Week	Date	Topic	Readings	Milestones
1	Wed, Jan 22	Introduction and course overview		
Section One Mapping the Field: An Introduction to Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies				
1	Fri, Jan 24	What is WGST? What is Feminism?	p1-12	Syllabus quiz
2	Mon, Jan 27	Oppression and Privilege	p13-20	Reading guides & Gender News sign-up
2	Wed, Jan 29	Feminist Politics: Where We Stand	p23-25	
2	Fri, Jan 31	Towards New Consciousness	p75, p80-81	
3	Mon, Feb 3	Social Constructions of Gender	P40-53	Reading guides begin; Gender News Presentations begin;
3	Wed, Feb 5	Social Constructions of Sex	p35-40	
3	Fri, Feb 7	Patriarchy, the System	p26-34	Gender Essay #1 due
Section Two Historical Perspectives in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies				
4	Mon, Feb 10	Historical Perspectives	p88-97	Set #1 review Sheet available
4	Wed, Feb 12	Declaration of Sentiments	p114-117	
4	Fri, Feb 14	Personal is Political	p98-104	

5	Mon, Feb 17	Housework and Reproductive Choice	p126-135	
5	Wed, Feb 19	Queer Movements	p124-126, p171-174	
5	Fri, Feb 21	The Combahee River Collection	p104-109, P141-146	
6	Mon, Feb 24	#MeToo Movement & Women's March	p174-182	
6 	Wed, Feb 26	Concept Question Set #1		
Section Three Sociopolitical Issues in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies				
6	Fri, Feb 28	Rethinking the Family	p183-190	[optional podcast] Queering family values
7	Mon, Mar 3	Reproductive Politics	p199-204, p279-290	
7	Wed, Mar 5	Pop Culture and Media Representation	p209-212, p324-p328	
7	Fri, Mar 7	Gendering the Labor Market	p191-197	
8	Mon, Mar 10	The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism	p257-269	
8	Wed, Mar 12	Gendering the Labor Market cont.	p239-244	
Section Four Epistemologies of Bodies: Ways of Knowing and Experiencing the World				
8	Fri, Mar 14	Epistemologies and Essentialism	p337-340, 368-374	
3/17-3/21 SPRING BREAK!  				
9	Mon, Mar 24	Knowing and Experiencing Bodies	p340-342, p375-387	Gender Essay #2 due Set #2 review sheet available

9	Wed, Mar 26	Knowing and Experiencing Bodies cont.	p387-391, p423-427	
9	Fri, Mar 28	Medicalization of Bodies	p342-344, p393-399	
10	Mon, Mar 31	Bodies in a Neoliberal Age	p345-352, p406-415	
10 	Wed, Apr 2	Concept Question Set #2		
Section Five Science, Technology, and the Digital World				
10	Fri, Apr 4	Social Constructions of Science	p429-433	Final group project workshop
11	Mon, Apr 7	Social Constructions of Science cont.	p447-452, p459-p464	
11	Wed, Apr 9	Technology as Gendered Practices	p433-p438	
11	Fri, Apr 11	Digital Media and cyber space	p438-445	
12	Mon, Apr.14	Digital Media and Inequality	p483-490	
Section Six Activist Frontiers: Agency and Resistance				
12	Wed, Apr.16	Intersectionality and Activism	p506-507, p530-540	Set #3 review sheet available
12	Fri, Apr.18	Differences and Coalitions	p546-553	
13	Mon, Apr.21	Engaging in Political Process	p508-516, p567-572	
13	Wed, Apr.23	Nonviolent Direct Action	P517-519, p572-574	
13	Fri, Apr.25	How Many Forms of Activism?	p519-526, p581	

14	Mon, Apr 28	Class presentation	
14	Wed, Apr 30	Class presentation	
14	Fri, May 2	Class presentation	
15	Mon, May 5	Course Wrap-up	Gender Essay #3 due
Final 	Sat, May 10	Concept question set #3	