COMM 850: Seminar in Gender and Communication  
Spring 2019 Syllabus

Contact Information
Professor Kristen Hoerl  
Office: Pound Hall 357
Office Hours: Wednesdays 2-3 and Thursdays from 1-2 or by appointment
Email: khoerl2@unl.edu
-I will respond to email within 24 hours (excluding weekends, holidays, and emergencies).

Class Meeting Time: W 5:00-7:40  
Class Location: Pound Hall 301

This course considers gender and communication studies through the lens of feminist theory. Since the emergence of the Second Wave feminist movement, communication scholars have drawn from a variety of feminist theorists including Patricia Hill Collins, Chandra Mohanty, and Judith Butler to explain how communication practices and media have perpetuated sexism and homophobia, promoted patriarchy, and contributed to the social construction of gender. This work has provided important contributions to subfields of communication, particularly in rhetoric, performance studies, critical communication, and media studies. (To a lesser extent has also influenced work in family studies, organizational communication, and health communication.)

Three central goals informed the structure and assignments of this course. I want students to:

1. gain deeper awareness of the multiple and diverse strands of feminist inquiry that have informed communication scholarship in recent decades. This includes understanding the differences across these strands and the debates among feminist scholars over the nature of women’s oppression and the solutions necessary to achieve justice, not just for women but for other groups who are marginalized and exploited by their social location (race, sexual identity, nationality, ability, etc.)

2. identify and explain how leading scholars in communication—mainly but not exclusively in rhetoric—have engaged and contributed to feminist theory and criticism.

3. develop their own feminist scholarly identity through the process of analyzing and evaluating both feminist theories and their application in communication scholarship.

By the end of the semester, students should have a broader knowledge of the diversity of feminist inquiry that informs contemporary gender and communication research, and a deeper understanding of the theoretical perspectives that will shape their own scholarly agendas and research in the future.

Reading Requirements:
Most of the course readings are in the form of book chapters or journal articles, and can be located on Canvas. In addition, I have assigned the following books:


**Assignments and Point-Value Breakdown**

1) Weekly Reading Response 100 points 25%
2) Response Paper 1 50 points 12.5%
3) Response Paper 2 50 points 12.5%
4) Book Report 100 points 25%
5) Research Proposal and Literature Review 100 points 25%

Grades are based on the following scale:

- A = 100%-94%
- A- = 93%-90%
- B+ = 89%-87%
- B = 86%-84%
- B- = 83%-80%
- C+ = 79%-77%
- C = 76%-74%
- C- = 73%-70%
- D+ = 69%-67%
- D = 66%-64%
- D- = 63%-60%
- F = 59%

Weekly reading responses are designed to encourage everyone to read the majority of the reading assignment each week. Each week I will post a handful of questions to our course Discussion page on Canvas. Please post a 1-2 paragraph response to the questions by the Tuesday evening before we discuss that unit. Once you have posted your response you will have access to the other class members’ responses. Feel free to engage one another as it moves you.

Instructions for the remaining assignments may be found on the last pages of this syllabus.

**Standard Stuff**

**Academic Dishonesty and Student Misconduct:** The Department of Communication Studies is committed to the highest standards of academic integrity. The Department adopts the campus definition of academic dishonesty in the Student Code of Conduct (Article 3, Section B-1) including cheating, fabrication or falsification, plagiarism (including self-plagiarism), abuse of academic materials, complicity in academic dishonesty, falsifying grade reports, impermissible collaboration, and misrepresentation. Should I suspect that someone is being not acting with integrity, I will meet with the student. If I have determined that academic dishonesty or misconduct has occurred, I will prepare a written account and file a “Misconduct Referral Form” with the Office of the Dean of Students. The full “Academic Dishonesty and Student Misconduct” policy is linked to the department’s website: [https://comm.unl.edu/forms-and-policies](https://comm.unl.edu/forms-and-policies).

**Grade Appeals:** The Department of Communication Studies “Grading and Grade Appeals” policy document is linked to the department’s website: [https://comm.unl.edu/forms-and-policies](https://comm.unl.edu/forms-and-policies)

**Inclusivity:** I value classroom experiences that both reflect and teach a diversity of experiences and ideas and I am committed to creating a campus environment in which everyone’s dignity is respected. Classroom discussion should welcome and consider the perspectives of a range of perspectives regardless of race, religion, national origin, gender, age, ability or sexual orientation. If at any instance you feel uncomfortable or believe that your voice has been
silenced, please do not hesitate to speak with me or schedule an appointment to meet me outside of class.

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:** Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact me for a confidential discussion of their individual needs for academic accommodation as determined by Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD). This includes students with mental health disabilities like depression and anxiety. It is the policy of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to provide individualized accommodations to students with documented disabilities that may affect their ability to fully participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. To receive accommodation services, students must be registered with SSD which is located in 232 Canfield Administration (472-3787).

**Mission of the Department of Communication Studies:** The mission of the faculty and students of the Department of Communication Studies is to examine human symbolic activity as it shapes and is shaped by relationships, institutions, technology, and culture. This work concerns the creation, analysis, and critique of messages ranging from face-to-face to digital media contexts. The department’s research and teaching devote particular attention to scholarly initiatives aimed at understanding and explaining the role of communication in (a) facilitating civic engagement, mediating public controversies, and organizing for social change, (b) constituting individual and family health, promoting healthy behaviors, and helping persons navigate relational challenges, and (c) creating, maintaining, and challenging personal, social, and community identity in a complex and diverse world.

**Daily Course Schedule**

**January 9:** **Introduction to Feminist Traditions and Approaches**
WSiC 2014 forum: McAlister, Wood, Griffin, Chávez and Griffin, Calafell Gill

**January 16:** **Liberal Feminism (and Some of Its Critics)**
Tong, Ch. 1 (C)
Campbell, “Stanton’s ‘Solitude of Self’”
Vasby Anderson
Kohrs Campbell and Biesecker debate in *Philosophy and Rhetoric*
Chavez, “Beyond Inclusion”

**January 23:** **Intersectionality and Women of Color Feminism**
Hill Collins & Bilge, Chs. 1, 3, and 5 (Book)
Basnyat
Johnson
Flores, “Toward an Insistent and Transformative . . .”
Hill Collins, “What’s in a Name”
Hester & Squires
Houston
Joseph

**January 30:** **Socialist and Marxist Feminism**
Tong, Ch. 3
Mohanty, Intro., Ch. 6 (book)
Fraser, “After the Family Wage”
Carby
Hoerl and Kelly
Mack
Goldman, Heath, & Smith

February 6: Psychoanalytic Feminism
Tong, Chapter 6
Cixous
Irigaray
Biesecker
Nautiyal
Myres
Bonstetter & Ott

February 13: Social Reproduction Theory
Bhattacharya
Fraser
Federici (book)
Thorburn
Response Paper 1 Due

February 20: Performativity and Subjectivity
Butler (book)
Shugart and Waggoner
Sloop

February 27: Queer and Quare Theory
Sedgwick
West (on Communication Studies)
Yep
Johnson
Cisneros and Gutierrez QED 2018
For More, See
West (on Critical/Cultural Studies)
Dunn
Bennett
Cloud
Rand
Byrd

March 6-13: Post/De/Settler Colonialism, Chicana Feminism, and Transnationalism
Spivak
Mohanty, Chs. 1 & 2 (book)
Shome
Harris & Hanchey
For March 13
Flores, “. . . Chicana Feminists Craft a Homeland”
Soto Vega and Chávez
Hall
Arvin, Tuck, & Morris
Response Paper 2 Due

Spring Break March 20, No Class

March 27: Structures of Visual Pleasure in Cinema
Chadhuri, Ch. 1 (book)
Mulvey
Gibson & Wolske
Cooper
Oppositional Gaze
hooks
Boylorn

April 3: Abjection
Chadhuri, Ch. 2 (book)
Kristeva
Creed
Hahner, Varda, and Wilson
Yam

April 10: Book Reports

April 17: Coalitional Possibilities
Rowe (book)
Mohanty, Ch. 9
Ghabra and Calafell

April 24: Last Class Day: Final Discussions

Book Review Options


Leandra Hinojosa Hernandez and Sarah De Los Santos Upton (2018). *Challenging Reproductive Control and Gendered Violence in the Americas: Intersectionality, Power and Struggles for Rights*. Lexington Books. *This one is pricey but received several awards at NCA. If you are interested in health communication and racial justice, it might be worth it.*


Speaking of books, you should also be aware of this one: Casey Ryan Kelly (2016). *Abstinence Cinema, Virginity and the Rhetoric of Sexual Purity in Contemporary Film*. Rutgers University Press. (If you are a grad student in the RPC program, you should be familiar with the scholarship of the members of your program, especially if this person is or might be your advisor.)
Formal Assignment Instructions

**Response Paper 1**: Due February 13. The goal of this assignment is to clarify your own position vis a vis Liberal, Black, and Socialist Feminism. Identify a specific current political, social, or legal controversy or social conflict that pertains to feminist concerns (re women’s rights, GLBTQ concerns, gendered forms of discrimination, or homophobia, etc), one that involves specific individuals or organizations over a specific issue or conflict. Describe this controversy in about 1-1½ pages and then explain how each strand of feminism might understand the issue. What is at stake in the controversy? How might each strand explain the root cause behind the problem? What specific responses, solutions, or recommendations might follow from each perspective? Finally, what are the limitations of each perspective for addressing this controversy or issue? Based on your analysis, what approach would you recommend for ethically responding to this issue and why? Is there an aspect of the controversy that none of these approaches can adequately address? I want to see that you can synthesize each of these positions and evaluate them from your own vantage point, so you should reference the names of key scholars we’ve read in class who inform your thinking, but you shouldn’t heavily quote other scholars. 5-7 double-spaced pages. Due February 13.

**Response Paper 2**: Due March 13. The goal of this assignment is to help you identify the possibilities and/or limitations afforded by postmodern approaches to gender studies by answering the following questions: To what extent is Butler’s approach to feminist criticism compatible or incompatible with other feminist approaches? (select from two of other approaches: liberal, socialist, intersectional, postcolonial, native, or transnational feminism). How does Butler’s work on performativity and the critique of the heterosexual matrix help to resist the injustices perpetuated by patriarchy, homophobia, and cisgender normativity? To what extent does quare theory help to resolve potential limitations of performativity? Or does it? To facilitate your answer, work from specific examples of instances of gendered oppression and/or marginalization in politics, social life, and/or culture. 4-5 pages. Due March 13.

**Book Review Presentation**: Due April 10. The goal of this assignment is to help you gain some deeper familiarity with the recent scholarship in feminist and gender studies in communication. It is also designed to help you clarify and refine your own scholarly commitments as a feminist and/or gender studies scholar. A great many interesting books have been published in recent years and I lament that we do not have time to read all of them in class. Just below the daily schedule on this syllabus, you will find a list of several new and innovative books that have received ample attention in the communication and rhetorical studies community. By January 16, identify 3-4 of the books you’re most interested in. After each of you have presented me with your preferences, I’ll assign you one of them. On April 10, you should be prepared to discuss and answer questions about this book in 10-15 minutes. Bring with you a 1-2 page handout that synthesizes your review in an outline form. On the first page, explain the author’s central argument, most interesting points, and scholarly contribution. On the second page, identify and evaluate the author’s specific feminist approach within the piece. Is the argument primarily rooted in one approach or does it integrate a variety of approaches? Do you find that this was the most appropriate approach to the subject? Would you have approached this topic any differently? Are the theories addressed compatible with one another? What other insights about the case, text, or topic might have been available had the author engaged a different approach? If you were to write a follow up to this article, what would
you do—Would you expand upon or revise the theoretical claims offered here?—Respond do the questions posed here that float your boat but don’t answer all of them if it doesn’t lead you to a critical point. I want to see how you use course material to think critically about how other scholars engage feminist theory. Use the handout to summarize your thoughts and be prepared to explain them in more depth in class.

A range of scholarly approaches are reflected in the different titles I’ve selected for this assignment, so I anticipate that we will have a lively discussion about the variety of ideas and arguments presented by many of these books. Due April 10.

Research Proposal and Literature Review: Due April 24 or during finals week. Let’s see how we feel. To follow UNL Law According to the Rules, I’m listing the deadline as the 24th for now. The goal of this assignment is for you to anticipate and prepare for how you might use this course material in your own scholarship. It also gives you an opportunity to create the foundation for a research project. Finally, it gives you an opportunity to explore a particular approach to feminist studies in more depth. Ultimately, I want you to draft a proposal in which you propose a research project AND present a first draft of a scholarly literature review that would be pertinent to your interests.

An advancing criticism approach: To lay the foundation for an essay based in media or rhetorical criticism, you might identify a text, event, or social controversy that interests, troubles, or inspires you. Be sure to explain what the problem is and why scholars in your chosen field of study should be concerned to learn more about it. From there, identify what scholarly approach or approaches would lead to valuable insights about the feminist implications of your topic. (Ideally, once you have analyzed your text, you will have identified some of the formal features of nuances of the text that provide new insight about the relationship between feminism and communication practice).

A theory building approach: Another way to approach this assignment is to think about a question or concern you have about a particular approach to feminist scholarship. Is there an angle on one of these approaches that has not been fully explored or discussed? Explain the limitations or gaps in the current literature on a specific approach to feminist research in your chosen subfield. Then, identify a case, example, or method of analysis that might help you either answer a research question (a social science approach) or illustrate your new approach, twist, or expansion to the literature.

Regardless of which approach you take, you should write a literature review that includes at least 10 additional scholarly sources that draw from and/or expand upon a particular approach to feminism and/or gender studies. Focus the literature review on the main points and/or conclusions offered by previous scholars, and organize it around the commonalities and differences across ideas. What have previous scholars established that provide the warrants for your study? What previous insights shed light on your study? What unique perspective do you think you can offer by bringing these insights to bear on your new case? How do you hope to contribute to this research?

Some other tips:
Be strategic and practical. Make decisions based on discrete research goals. Which journals might want to publish this work? Have they published work from this perspective? If so, this should be in your literature review!

Be focused. Rarely should a manuscript address all or most of the feminist approaches that appear on this syllabus. Usually they engage only one or two approaches that are compatible with one another. So, use this assignment as an opportunity to build your toolbox of specific scholars and ideas that you plan to engage over the long haul of your scholarly career. Who among recent and prolific scholars in your field do you feel most affinity with, who do you want to read and cite your scholarship? Imagine a paper that speaks to them and propose a project that cites and expands upon their ideas in a new way.

Review ideas, not authors. Summarize and paraphrase material and quote sparingly in short quotes under 40 words. Your lit review should have a clear purpose that helps to build up your rationale for your own research project. Use topic sentences at the beginning of your paragraphs that explain what ideas you are responding to and why. Readers shouldn’t have to guess as to why certain authors are being mentioned. (Often I read lit reviews in which each paragraph just summarizes the work of a different author, so it reads like an annotated bibliography. This isn’t an effective strategy because it draws attention away from the manuscript and its purpose.)

This proposal should be 10-14 double-spaced pages long. Include a Works Cited or Reference page and in-text citations. Use either MLA or APA style guides.