



Women and Gender Studies

### Professor

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Office Hours: T/H, 1:30-2:45 p.m.; W 1:00-2:15 p.m., & by appt.

### WGS Program

<http://www.usu.edu/womenstu>

**Rebecca West** (Irish journalist, novelist & critic): *"I myself have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is: I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat, or a prostitute."* (1913)

**Karen Blixen/Isak Dinesen** (Danish author): *"I do not think there is any alternative to equality, including moral equality, for men and women..."* (1924)

**Laurel Thatcher Ulrich** (LDS, feminist, history scholar & researcher, Pulitzer-prize winning author, Harvard University). *"Well-behaved women seldom make history."* (1976).

**John Lennon** (songwriter, musician, activist): *"Isn't it time we destroyed the macho ethic? . . . Where has it gotten us all these thousands of years? Are we still going to have to be clubbing each other to death? Do I have to arm wrestle you to have a relationship with you as another male? Do I have to seduce her—just because she's a female? Can we not have a relationship on some other level? . . . I don't want to go through life pretending to be James Dean or Marlon Brando."* (1980)

**Ani DiFranco** (songwriter, musician, activist): *"My idea of feminism is self-determination, and it's very open-ended: every woman has the right to become herself, and do whatever she needs to do."* (1990s)

**Ann Coulter** (syndicated columnist & author): *"If we took away women's right to vote, we'd never have to worry about another Democratic president. It's kind of a pipe dream; it's a personal fantasy of mine."* (2007)

### Materials to help you learn

Peril, L. (2002). *Think pink: Becoming a woman in many uneasy lessons*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.

Hosseini, K. (2007). *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. NY: Riverhead Books. (Available at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) or at Border's in Logan).

• Required on-line readings & course handouts posted on class blog: <http://navigatinggender1010.blogspot.com/>

• **E-mail:** Every student is *required* to open and regularly use a USU e-mail account. Class assignments and information will be posted to you via e-mail, and it is your responsibility to check your e-mail and class blog daily.

**USU Disability Accommodations Policy:** If a student has a disability that will likely require some accommodation by the instructor, the student must contact the instructor and document the disability through the Disability Resource Center (7-2444), preferably during the first week of the course. Any requests for special considerations relating to attendance, pedagogy, taking of exams, etc. must be discussed with and approved by the instructor.

### Course Objectives-What you will learn

- A critical perspective toward understanding and examining gender and its role in all levels of society as well as in our everyday lives
- An awareness and understanding of the socially constructed gender ideals and differences for women and men
- A recognition of the subtle forms of gender discrimination that work to limit and constrain both women and men
- An appreciation for the importance of gender awareness and equality in society
- A basic understanding of theories and principles of feminism
- The critical skills to evaluate written and visual narratives related to gender

### Course Overview

Teaching any women & gender studies course raises a number of issues for students. Your opinions related to gender issues may be emotionally and historically charged for many of you. You have strong feelings about your beliefs. Now—I have no intention of trying to change your beliefs or opinions, rather, my goal is to help you reflect on your ideas about gender with a certain critical distance. Inevitably, the course will include some of my own biases and preferences, but I will be open about my preferences. I also want you to keep an open mind and be willing to consider opinions and perspectives that may differ from your own. I encourage you to challenge my preferences or those found in your readings, but with sound, thoughtful reasons, having critically considered the issues raised.

At the beginning of a women & gender class, students may not be aware of the numerous ways gender ideals and expectations are communicated to us, both explicitly and implicitly throughout our lives. Part of the goal of this course is to help you understand how the dominant understandings of gender affect every aspect of our lives. I want you to consider the interdependence of female and male gender ideals and the consequences of these ideals for both women and men. I hope to provide you with new ways to think about gender that will provide you with the skills to consider the ways you understand gender and where those understandings originated. I want each of us to explore—with a critical eye—the processes and events that led to our personal opinions about gender. Our opinions regarding gender come from somewhere—they don't show up to us delivered by FedEx or in an email message. So we'll all be seeking to understand why we hold certain opinions about gender and reject other opinions. In other words, you'll learn how to “read” and explore gender and how the social construction of gender influences how we see the world and everyone around us.

Now that I've reviewed what WGS 1010 is about, I want to emphasize what the class is *not* about. “Introduction to Women & Gender Studies” is *not* about male-bashing—a term often used to refer to representations of men as egotistical, selfish, macho jerks who do not value women. While there are some men who undoubtedly fit these generalized stereotypes, there are also some women who are egotistical and selfish and don't value men. Sexism affects both women and men and we'll explore these consequences for both sexes.

Finally, many of the topics we cover this semester will be examined through documentary and Hollywood films. We'll consider how media have represented various gender issues and explore how to critique such films. In addition, we will also have several guest speakers who will discuss their expertise in different areas of gender.

### **Class Format**

Our class is “student driven”—a pedagogical approach to teaching and learning that encourages students' ownership of their learning process. What this means is that your assignments are designed to provide you with the opportunities to take leadership roles in the class, including writing discussion questions and leading class discussions. As part of our class focus, my job is not to lecture, but rather, to provide you with the skills you need to think critically about gender issues and to evaluate how gender norms operate on individual and societal levels.

**How To Demonstrate What You Learn & Earn Your Course Grade.** Your final grade will be based on the following assignments, subject to modifications as necessary:

1. Weekly blog reaction entries	15%
2. Team “Reinvent Barbie” project	15%
3. Team class lecture assignment	20%
4. Book report: <i>A Thousand Splendid Suns</i>	10%
5. Team “Gender, Hollywood & History” project & presentation	20%
6. Final exam (optional)	10%
7. Participation & attendance	<u>10%</u>
	100%

• *Please note: In order to receive a passing grade for WGS 1010, you must complete all of the course assignments.*

### **Description of Individual Assignments:**

1. **Weekly blog reaction entries:** Each week, you will submit responses to the assigned class readings. Your blog responses are one of the most important parts of this class, and one of the primary ways to demonstrate to me that you are reading and understanding the gender concepts and issues from class. You must write them and submit them on time to pass the class. Your responses need to illustrate to me that you have read the material for that week, and that you have spent time thinking critically about the issues we cover in class and in your readings. When discussing your personal opinions, avoid simple writing that—“I like this reading” or “This reading was boring” — rather, focus your responses on statements that more

critically discuss the arguments/issues presented. You may also include personal entries that demonstrate how you are able to relate the concepts, etc. from class to your everyday experiences. As you formulate your comments, ask yourself what personal opinions you hold that influence your reactions of our readings, and what your opinions are based on. **Blog responses are due each Monday before noon** (one per week).

2. **Book reports:** Everyone is reading and writing a critical response to *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, a novel about women in Afghanistan, and their marginalized status under Islam and the Taliban. Your report will identify the major gender issues in the novel's narrative, and relate to gender concepts and theories from class readings.
3. **Optional final exam:** If you are satisfied with the grade you earned for journals (15%), you may opt not to take the final exam. If you take this option, the grade you earn for the journal entries is 25% of your grade for the course.
4. **Participation & attendance:** The primary way I evaluate whether you are reading and understanding the gender issues discussed in our readings is through your participation in class. Please come to class prepared to take an active role in class discussions. Since WGS 1010 is student driven, daily attendance and participation are essential and required.

### **Description of Team Assignments**

5. **Team "Reinvent Barbie" project:** As part of participating in the WGS Women's History Month celebration, teams will "reinvent" Barbie or other popular fashion dolls (e.g., Bratz) or action figure dolls such as GI Joe, in ways that challenge the stereotyped "Think Pink" gender roles these dolls perpetuate. Doll/sculptures are multi-media recreations with an attitude, that make use of actual dolls (Barbie/Ken/Skipper, Bratz, G.I. Joe or others) and remake them in ways that offer commentary on issues including (but not limited to): gender/race/ethnic roles, individualization, stereotypes, identity, societal norms/mores/ expectations, media portrayals, commercialization, tradition, sports, politics, business, etc.
6. **Team class lecture assignment:** During the semester, you will work in teams to write study guides and lead class discussions of the assigned readings, etc. Your team discussion questions, study guides and class discussions need to reflect critical assessment of the readings. As you read these articles/chapters, think of how your team assessment of the readings will help us better understand the issues discussed in the articles and/or push us to think in new directions. Your reactions/responses to the articles will form the basis for our class discussions.
7. **Team "Gender, Hollywood & History" project & presentation:** Here you'll work in teams to analyze how mainstream Hollywood films have depicted women or men who challenge their respective gender norms and compare to historical accounts. Teams will present their results to the class, and submit an extensive outline.

### **Grading Criteria (Yes, I'm a fan of the *Harry Potter* books☺)**

**Grade A: Outstanding** (A=95% & above; A-=90-94). *In addition to meeting the criteria for grades B & C:*

1. Demonstrates superior skill and thought, skillful use of language to represent your ideas as a probable, believable and fair interpretation of the specific media issues.
2. Provides insights and demonstrates in-depth understanding of the topic, issues, etc.
3. Arguments and conclusions are exceptionally well developed, coherent, well-organized.

**Grade B: Exceeds expectations** (B+=88-89%; B=85-86%; B-=80-84%): *In addition to meeting the criteria for grade C:*

1. Exhibits a thoughtful and thorough understanding of the media issues being examined.
2. Shows some insight, critical reflection and creativity in the analysis
3. Arguments/conclusions are organized clearly & very well supported with examples and evidence.
4. Fine writing skills.

**Grade C: Acceptable** (C+=78-79%, C=75-77%; C-=70-74%) *Meets all of the minimum criteria for assignment.*

1. Writing errors are minor and language is used correctly.
2. Arguments and conclusions are adequately supported with specific examples.
3. Work is completed by the deadlines and conforms to page requirements.
4. Sources (if required) are cited correctly.
5. Demonstrates some insight or critical reflection. Interpretation relies mostly on description. In other words, states the obvious or simply re-states points already made in class/texts/videos, etc.

**Grade D+: Poor (D+=68-69); Grade D: Dreadful (D=60-67%); Grade F: Troll (59% & below):** Does not fulfill minimum criteria for a grade of C. Overall, below average work that may have one or more of the following problems:

1. Excessive writing and/or language errors.
2. Work is based primarily on unsupported opinions; fails to use specific examples and evidence.
3. Misses the point of the assignment; lacks depth — demonstrates minimal effort.
4. Demonstrates minimal insight, interpretation or critical reflection.
5. Work is plagiarized.

**Grade Negotiations.** In order to be fair to everyone in the class, I do not negotiate grades. Please don't ask to be an exception to this policy. I also do not give incomplete grades except for reasons stated in university policy. In other words, your grades are final. The grades you earn are based on your performance, not your effort. I recognize your efforts and commitment to the class through your participation grade for the course.

**Grading Questions—The 48 Hour Policy.** I am happy to meet with you in my office to discuss any questions you have regarding a grade you earn for an assignment. I will not answer grading questions by email. If you have a grading question, please schedule an appointment with me at least 48 hours after I return the assignment and bring the following to our meeting: (1) the original assignment (2) one page, typed & double-spaced, in which you explain your questions. This will help facilitate our meeting and help me to more effectively answer your questions.

### Course Policies

- **Attendance:** This course is about reading, thinking, viewing, listening and talking. Everyone is expected to attend every session of the class and to participate in discussions in class and in their teams. Please don't be late or leave early—both will count as absences. Please inform me ahead of time if you have to miss class for a university-excused absence. If you miss more than two days of classes, your final grade may be reduced accordingly.

If you miss any of your meetings for your team assignments, you will receive a zero for that assignment (F). No excuses—period. For example, showing up at the wrong place for your team meeting is not an excuse. It's your responsibility to know where and when your team is meeting and then be there on time with your work for the meeting completed.

- **Electronic stuff:** Please remember to turn off cell phones and laptops at the beginning of class. It is rude to me and to your classmates to have your cell phones ringing, are text-messaging friends, or answering emails during class.

- **Assignments:** In order to receive a passing grade for WGS 1010, you must complete all of the course assignments.

- **Deadlines:** Are final. That's why they call them *deadlines*. No make-ups, no exceptions. Computer-related problems do not count as excuses for submitting late assignments. It's your responsibility to back up your work to avoid such problems.

- **Decorum:** We're all in this together. That means that we will need each other to succeed. And that means that everyone is expected to treat everyone else with fairness, courtesy and honesty. Please apply the Golden Rule—Don't whisper in class. Don't bring your lunch. Don't sleep in class.

Your attitude toward the course and the material we cover is also an important part of the class. Every class has its norms, and an important norm is our class is a willingness to be open to and considerate of the thoughts and ideas of your classmates. The course content and assignments are not emphasizing *what* to think, rather, *how* to think critically about gender. Let's say we have 25 people in our class—that means we will have at least 25 different perspectives toward the readings, etc., based on our individual life experiences. Although you may disagree with the thoughts and perspectives of others, including your professor, it is essential that we all respect each others' views and beliefs. All viewpoints are valid and important—one view is not more valuable than another.

Other norms for WGS 1010 are: consideration, respect, non-judgment, courtesy and attentiveness. In addition to regular attendance, your final grade will reflect how closely you choose to adhere to these norms. Finally, if your behavior is disruptive to the class, your final grade may be reduced. I am the final arbiter about these matters.

### OTHER STUFF

- **Conferences:** Please make an appointment with me to discuss your progress and any problems or concerns you may be having in the course.

• **Academic Honesty:** The University expects students and faculty alike to maintain the highest standards of academic honesty (for a complete definition, see University Catalogue or the Code of Policies and Procedures for Students at Utah State University, Article V, Section 3). The policy states: "[C]heating, falsification or plagiarism can result in warning, grade reduction, probation, suspension, expulsion, payment of damages, withholding of transcripts, withholding of degrees, removal a class, performance of community service, referral to appropriate counseling" or other penalties as the university judiciary may deem appropriate. Students who hand in similar or identical work will receive an "F" regardless of who copied from whom. If you have any questions about what's acceptable work under strict codes of academic honesty, see the USU Code of Policies and Procedures for Students, or consult your professor. Any suspicious work may be submitted to a database that compares student papers to other student and published work in a web database. (FYI: Plagiarism and how to avoid it: <http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/plagiarism.shtml>)

• **A Disclaimer:** I have no desire to offend anyone's personal or cultural beliefs, and apologize if I do so inadvertently. As part of our course requirements, however, we will be viewing several documentaries and films that deal with gender issues in American society over time. Some of that may occasionally contain content that includes profanity, violence, sexuality or other matter that some students may find uncomfortable. FYI: Approximately 70-80% of Hollywood films are R-rated.

### **GUIDELINES FOR WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS**

1. Typed, 12 pt. font, double-spaced papers (APA or MLA style) are required for all assignments.
2. Grades you earn are based on thoroughness, clarity and insight. Use specific examples to support your ideas and conclusions.
3. Avoid extended quotations. Most can be cut down and paraphrased. I'm looking for your original thought and synthesis of information/data, not just regurgitation of what others have said.
4. Do not use Wikipedia as a source. This online dictionary is unreliable and prone to errors.
5. Spelling/syntax/grammar/punctuation/style errors lower your score. Errors of fact may result in failure for the assignment. So proofread carefully. And then proofread a second time! FYI: Proofreading tips for common writing errors: <http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets.shtml> AND <http://jdwritingctr.iweb.bsu.edu/>.
6. English Department Writing Center: You may schedule an appointment with the Writing Center by phone (797-2712) or on-line (<http://writingcenter.usu.edu/>). The Writing Center is located at RBWest 104. There is a small fee for this service.
7. Information/data or quotation or opinion or statement of fact taken from any other source must be attributed using APA or MLA style. You may paraphrase statements of others, but must cite the source; if the material is quoted (i.e., from newspapers, books, TV, etc.), it must be placed in quotes, cited with complete accuracy, and cited completely. Failure to give full credit to your sources of information may be considered plagiarism