

PHILOSOPHIES OF FEMINISM
PHIL 206 / WS 206 / POLS 212
SPRING 2012

ESSAY ASSIGNMENTS
30% of the final grade

The goal of the two short essays assigned for this class – a concept application essay and an event or service learning based essay – is to put the philosophical concepts discussed in the readings to work in analysis of concrete examples of feminist issues, activism, or scholarship.

These essays should be **two pages long (500 words)**, including references and notes. They should be submitted through the online Collect It drop box for your section (you'll find these links on the course website). Please use the following naming convention for the file you upload:

[your surname & initial]_[Concept or Event]_[your section].doc

So, for example, if I were submitting a "concept application" essay as a member of Section AA, I would upload an essay titled: WylieA_Concept_AA.doc

I. Concept application essay

In the first sections of the course we will be discussing diverse ways in which feminists have conceptualized sex/gender identity and sex/gender based forms of oppression and privilege – usually in relation to a range of other types of social differentiation that underpin intersecting systems of oppression. For this essay **identify one of these theories** and **choose an example of media representation or public debate in which sex/gender identities are at issue**, either overtly or implicitly. Use your example to illustrate and to assess the author's central thesis about the nature of sex/gender identity.

The principle here is that theorizing of all kinds, especially feminist theorizing, is best done in engagement with the experience, practice, realities that the theory is meant to illuminate. So use the theoretical account you focus on as a framework for interrogating the example you choose of media representation and, conversely, treat the example as a basis for critically and constructively appraising the theory. Good sources of examples include:

- Popular debate about or representations of sex/gender identity (print media, television, radio, billboards, posters, the internet, etc): what is presupposed about sex/gender norms, and do the reading(s) you focus on provide the resources necessary to put these in context and assess their implications?
- Biographies of public figures or activists known for their work on feminist issues: what does their practice presuppose about sex/gender identities, and how does it illuminate or problematize the theoretical position you draw from the assigned readings?
- Your experience in a Service Learning placement: how is the work of the agency, organization or community group informed or affected by specific assumptions about the nature of sex/gender identities and identity-based oppression?

If you have any questions about appropriate examples and their relevance for analysis of the philosophical thesis you want to analyze, be sure to check with your section instructor.

Essay Plans Check-in: in the Friday sections on April 13th

Essay Workshop: in the Friday sections on April 20th

Essay due: Friday, April 27th at 5:00 pm.

II. Event or Service Learning essay

The general goals and guidelines for this essay are the same as for the concept application essay, except that in this case:

- you may draw on readings from any section of the course;
- the anchor for your analysis should be either an event on campus in which feminist issues are central, or your service learning experience.

As for the concept application essay, work back and forth between the specifics of the event you choose or your service learning experience and the feminist theory you discuss; use each component of the essay to illuminate and assess the other. Here are more details on the two options for this essay.

Event commentary essay: Develop an analysis of how the positions and arguments presented in the event you choose illustrate key concepts or arguments in the readings on which you focus, and use the theoretical resources of these readings as a basis for analysis of the presuppositions about sex/gender identities, gender-based oppression, politics of knowledge, or ethical and political ideals that are at issue in – or that inform – the event you discuss. Confirm your choice of an event and the theoretical analysis you propose with your section instructor.

Service learning commentary essay: Essentially the same guidelines apply here as for the event commentary, but that you should use the resources of the course readings and discussions as a lens for analyzing some aspect of the work you're involved in through your service learning placement. What presuppositions about sex/gender identities, gender-based oppression, politics of knowledge, or ethical and political ideals inform the work of the agency or organization you work with? What are the implications of these assumptions? How do they play out in practice?

Whichever option you choose, we encourage everyone to attend events that address or that raise feminist issues. Even if you don't base your second essay on analysis of an event you can incorporate reflection on feminist issues raised by events you've attended into your reading response postings and draw on them in class discussion. You'll find a list of event calendars on the course website; do please help us expand this list, and post notices of events that feature feminist speakers and topics on the Events GoPost:

<https://catalyst.uw.edu/gopost/board/aw26/27273/>

Essay due: Friday, May 25th at 5:00 pm.

Note: you are encouraged to submit this essay earlier in the quarter and if you submit it by **May 11**, you have the option of revising and resubmitting it by the final due date, May 25.