WST 6936: Politics of Motherhood

Wednesdays, 5:30—8:15 PM (CRN 88240) with Michelle Hughes Miller, Ph.D.

“All human life on the planet is born of woman” (Rich, 1986)

What are the politics of motherhood? How do we negotiate contested understandings of what it means to be a mother or to engage in mothering? Who are mothers, and what are the parameters of mothering that conscribe and envelope this role/identity?

Let’s take Rich’s quote, above. What Rich stated so powerfully and poignantly in her treatise Of Woman Born we now know is not true, thanks to transmen who have given birth and shared their experiences with us. And, we know from surrogate mothering that having the womb that nurtured a fetus until birth is insufficient to always grant one the status of “mother” in the eyes of the law. We also know the travails some women of color experience asserting themselves as mothers, as good mothers, and as valued mothers. From all this we understand that who mothers are is problematized (made political). At the same time there is increasing evidence that what mothers do is being discussed, analyzed, critiqued, negotiated, surveilled and punished more broadly and more forcefully within the public and cultural worlds. The iconic occupation of motherhood is in flux.

In this course we will approach the topic of motherhood by emphasizing its contested and political nature. We will consider research on mothering from maternal studies, and relate these academic discourses to historical and contemporary narratives as mothers articulate their own lives. We’ll be sorting our way through the experiences, identities, policies and agency of mothers and those who seek to manage them. We’ll debate feminist considerations of motherhood, from the critical to the fawning. We’ll read calls to action and complaints of inaction about, by and for mothers. We’ll debate responsibilities, mythologies, and guilt. We’ll embrace non-motherhood as potentiality within compulsory motherhood and confront the inadequacies of absent language as we struggle with the concept of “choice.” We’ll even query the relationship between motherhood and fatherhood in contemporary policy and discourse. At the end of our journey, I hope we’ll understand more about the shadow/light of motherhood that insinuates itself into our social (and sometimes personal) worlds.

To request a permit to register for this course, visit http://bit.ly/F19wgsgrad.
WST 6003: Feminist Scholarship and Pedagogy

Tuesdays, 3:30—6:00 PM (CRN 88240) with Michelle Hughes Miller, Ph.D.

WST 6003, Feminist Scholarship and Pedagogy, according to the graduate catalog:

Introduces students to techniques of Feminist teaching and scholarly writing. Covers issues of professionalism, an overview of contemporary scholarly issues in feminist studies, and basic feminist pedagogy.

We’re going to start the semester by thinking and talking about WGS and reading about the current experiences of women’s studies, its faculty, and its students, within the academy. What is WGS? How are we doing, as a discipline? How might we envision our future within the neoliberal university? These conversations are ones we need to have to ensure our integrity and viability as an academic endeavor.

Then we are going to dive into discussing strategies for academic writing, a task we will weave throughout the semester. None of us would successfully manage graduate school (or academe!) if we did not practice articulating our thoughts in progressively intricate, well-researched ways. Thus, we will explore some strategies to help our writing be more effective and efficient, as we accomplish various writing styles and enhance our utilization of the scholarship of WGS.

Finally, we will spend the rest of the semester unpacking pedagogy- specifically, feminist pedagogy and best practices for teaching. What does it mean to say we are using feminist pedagogy when we teach? What expectations for our students, ourselves, our interactions, and for our courses does feminist pedagogy hold? This is an immense topic, one worthy of a semester in and of itself. We’ll alternate between classic theoretical discussions of the challenges of feminist teaching and contemporary considerations of applied feminist principles in the classroom. Collectively, we will explore how to teach and why to teach, both with an eye toward the particular challenges embodied by feminist praxis.

Though we have much to discuss this semester and many goals to accomplish, I hope you enjoy the journey we will take together in this introduction to feminist scholarship and pedagogy.

To request a permit to register for this course, visit http://bit.ly/F19wgsgrad.
WST 6560: Advanced Feminist Theory

Thursdays, 3:30—6 PM (CRN 86287) with Diane Price Herndl, Ph.D.

Need to know more about feminist theory for your thesis, portfolio or dissertation? Just confused in general about issues of feminist performance theory, intersectionality, or feminist epistemology and ethics? Want to examine how gender critique works with and / or against race-, anti-colonial-, or disability critique? Then this is the class you need!

To request a permit to register for this course, visit http://bit.ly/F19wgsgrad.