

COURSE OUTLINE
PHIL 242A INTRODUCTION TO FEMINIST THEORY
Fall term 2010: MW 13:30 – 14:30 plus conference TBA

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This course is an introduction to feminist political theory. The aims of the course are to acquaint students with the diversity of feminist theories, to introduce certain concepts basic to feminist theory (e.g. feminist consciousness, oppression, and social construction), and to indicate some of the issues on which feminists differ. The first part of the course will consider liberal feminism, Marxist and socialist feminism, and radical feminism. These theories all provide some account of the practices that maintain the inequality between men and women. The various feminist theories differ, however, both in their analyses of these practices, and in their recommendations for political change. Some of the questions we will address are: If we could ensure that women had opportunities equal to those of men, would we thereby ensure the equality of women with men? Can the unequal status of women be analyzed as an instance of, or a function of, some other political or economic inequality? How are we to understand equality? Does radical feminism offer a viable political strategy? In the first part of the course we will also consider feminist theory that is critical of the main schools of feminist thought, in order to see how such criticisms have provoked a recognition of differences within feminism.

In the second part of the course we will consider three issues of concern to feminists: (1) whether there is an important distinction between sex as a natural category and gender, or whether most, if not all, of what we attribute to sex is in fact gender; (2) whether some form of feminism can reasonably aspire to international effectiveness, and whether the traditions of feminism in North America and western Europe have anything to offer women in developing countries; (3) whether feminists should support restrictions on pornography.

Students should note that while they will not be expected to have any prior knowledge of feminist theory or political theory, they should be prepared to read a substantial amount, and to learn how to read, write and discuss philosophy. Note also that this course is an introduction to feminist theory and not an introduction to the circumstances that have given rise to feminist theory. We will begin with two assumptions: that women do not now enjoy equality with men, and that this is neither a natural nor a necessary state of affairs.

TEXT: A required course-pack will be available at the Word Bookstore, 469 Milton Street.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS: One exercise in defining terms (30%), one exercise in analysis (30%), one take-home exam (40%).

POLICY ON EXTENSIONS: No extensions will be granted without an appropriate medical note. Late work will be penalized at the rate of a third of a grade per calendar day past the due date. For example, a paper that is evaluated as a B, if one day late, will be assigned a grade of B-; the same paper, if two days late, would receive a C+.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the [Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures](http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity) (see www.mcgill.ca/integrity for more information).

LANGUAGE: In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

