

# PHL 360

## Feminist Metaphysics

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Instructor: Aaron Griffith  
E-Mail: amgriffith@wm.edu  
Time: MW 5pm – 6:20pm  
Office Hours: TTH 11:30am – 12:30pm

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### Overview

This course focuses on the metaphysical issues arising in feminist philosophy. Specific topics include social construction, the nature of sex and gender categories, the nature of gender identity, essentialism and gender, and the role that truth and objectivity in the pursuit of justice and equality for women. The course will be of interest to those studying contemporary metaphysics and its social/political applications, as well as to those in gender and women's studies wanting to have rigorous accounts of key concepts in feminist thinking. The course is cross listed in the GSWS program and satisfies the COLL 200 and COLL 300 curriculum requirements.

### Requirements

1. Attendance and Participation (10%)
2. Reflection Essay (10%)
3. Gender in Pop Culture (10%)
4. Essay 1 (15%)
5. Essay 2 (20%)
6. Final Project (35%)

Descriptions of all assignments can be found on the course Black Board page.

### Schedule

The following schedule is may be *amended* during the course of the semester. All readings come from required course books. Additional/optional readings can be found on the course Black Board page. Special thanks to Jake Beardsley and Neil Going for their help constructing this syllabus.

#### Week 1: Introduction

Wednesday 1/27: Syllabus; Haslanger and Ásta, "Feminist Metaphysics" and Ásta, "Social Construction"  
Optional: Griffith, "Metaphysics and Social Justice"

### Materials

The following materials are required for this course:

- PDF readings (available on Black Board)

### Grading Scale

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- A: 90-100 (90-93.5: A-, 94- 100: A)
- B: 80-89 (80-83.5: B-, 84-86.5: B, 87-89: B+)
- C: 70-79 (70-73.5: C-, 74-76.5: C, 77-79: C+)
- D: 60-69 (60-63.5: D-, 64-66.5: D, 67-69: D+)
- F: 0-59

## **Week 2: The Metaphysics of Gender**

Monday 2/01: Haslanger, "Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?"  
Wednesday 2/03: Jenkins, "Amelioration and Inclusion: Gender Identity and the Concept of Woman"

**Add/Drop Ends Fri 2/05**

## **Week 3: The Metaphysics of Gender**

Monday 2/08: Bogardus, "Some Internal Problems with Revisionary Gender Concepts"  
Wednesday 2/10: Mikkola, "Ontological Commitments, Sex, and Gender"

## **Week 4: The Metaphysics of Gender**

Monday 2/15: Ásta, "The Construction of Human Kinds"  
Wednesday 2/17: Logue, "Gender Fictionalism"

**Essay 1 Due Friday 2/19 @ 11:59pm on Bb**

## **Week 5: Gender Kinds and Gender Terms**

Monday 2/22: Dembroff, "Real Talk About the Metaphysics of Gender"  
Wednesday 2/24: Barnes, "Gender and Gender Terms"

## **Week 6: Gender Essentialism**

Monday 3/01: Stoljar, "Essence, Identity, and the Concept of Woman"  
Wednesday 3/03: Witt, "What is Gender Essentialism?"

## **Week 7: Trans and Non-binary Gender Kind/Identity**

Monday 3/08: Bettcher, "Trans Women and the Meaning of 'Woman'" and Chappell, "Trans Women/Men and Adoptive Parents: An Analogy"  
Wednesday 3/10: Dembroff, "Beyond binary: Genderqueer as a Critical Gender Kind"

## **Week 8:**

Monday 3/15: micha cárdenas, "Bodies That Matter":

<https://wmedu.hosted.panopto.com/Panopto/Pages/Embed.aspx?id=57ffb64f-abf1-4d5d-a82c-a97d00c99bff&v=1>

Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, "Me Hijra, Me Laxmi: Trans Activism and Performance":

<https://www.wm.edu/as/center-liberal-arts/campus-coll300/coll300-visitor/past-visitors/coll300-laxmi-narayan-tripathi.php>

Wednesday 3/17: **Spring Break Day**

**Reflection Essay Friday 3/19 @ 11:59pm on Bb**

## **Week 9: Sex, Gender, and Biology**

Monday 3/22: Karkazis, "The Misuses of 'Biological Sex'" and Fausto-Sterling, "Should There be Only Two Sexes?" in *Sexing the Body*  
Optional: *Gonads* from Radiolab  
Wednesday 3/24: Fine, selections from *Delusions of Gender*

## **Week 10: Sex, Gender, and Biology**

Monday 3/29: Bryne, "Are Women Adult Human Females?"  
Wednesday 3/31: Dembroff, "Escaping the Natural Attitude About Gender"

## **Week 11: Social Structure**

Monday 4/05: Haslanger, "What is a Social Structural Explanation?"  
Optional: Barnes, "Realism and Social Structure"  
Wednesday 4/07: **Spring Break Day**

**Essay 2 Due Friday 4/09 @ 11:59pm on Bb**

**Week 12: Intersectionality**

Monday 4/12: Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex”  
Wednesday 4/14: Payton, “Analytic Black Feminist Philosophy”

**Week 13: Intersectionality**

Monday 4/19: Bernstein, “The Metaphysics of Intersectionality”  
Wednesday 4/21: Zack, “Beyond Intersectionality”

**Week 14: Intersectionality**

Monday 4/26: **Spring Break Day**  
Wednesday 4/28: Tuvel, “In Defense of Transracialism” and Dembroff and Payton, “Why We Shouldn’t Compare Transracial to Transgender Identity”

**Week 15: Review**

Monday 5/03: TBA  
Wednesday 5/05: TBA

**Week 16: Finals Week**

**Final Project  
Due Thursday May 13  
at 5pm**

## Of Special Note

### Course Delivery

This course is designated as a Remote/Synchronous/On Campus course. This means our meetings on Mondays and Wednesdays will be on Zoom at 2pm these days. Here is the Zoom link for the course:

All course content, e.g., lectures, handouts, notes, slides, readings, etc. will be available online via Black Board.

### Office Hours

I will hold standing office hours on Thursdays from 11:30am to 12:30pm. I am also happy to meet outside of those times if they are not convenient for students. All office hours meetings will be held by Zoom unless the student requests to meet in person.

### Attendance

Attendance is *mandatory*. Attendance will be taken at arbitrary points during the semester. You get 3 free documented absences during the semester. For each documented absence after your 4th you will lose 1% off of your final grade. Please be on time to class. But if you are late to class, please enter the room quietly and unobtrusively. Absences may be excused for the following reasons only: (a) a serious medical issue (i.e., one requiring hospitalization or confinement in the infirmary), (b) a family emergency (i.e., death or emergency hospitalization of an immediate family member), (c) conflicting University-related events, (d) religious observances, or (e) jury duty.

## Missed Tests

Make up or alternative tests will not be granted without documented proof of either (a) a serious medical issue (i.e., one requiring hospitalization or confinement in the infirmary), (b) a family emergency (i.e., death or emergency hospitalization of an immediate family member), (c) conflicting University-related events, (d) religious observances, or (e) jury duty. If you miss a test and do not have documented proof of these cases, you will receive a 0 (zero) as your score. (Alternate tests should be scheduled ahead of time for reasons (c) through (e).)

## Papers

*Papers will be marked down 1/3 of a letter grade for each day they are late.* I am happy to help you get an early start on your written assignments. You are responsible for backing up texts composed on a computer, and failures of software or hardware are not acceptable reasons for a late assignment. I highly recommend using Dropbox to back up your files: <http://www.dropbox.com/>

If you do not understand why you received the grade you did, please come see me. Under no conditions will your grade be lowered if you do come see me to discuss a grade you received. *However, if you do want clarification you must submit to me in writing your question or concern before we meet in person.*

I also encourage you to take advantage of the writing resources on campus. The *Writing Resources Center* in Swem Library offers free feedback on your written work, including help with drafting, organizing, and editing your assignments. Find the writing center online at <http://www.wm.edu/as/wrc/>.

## Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a serious matter and will be handled by the appropriate authorities. According to official William & Mary policy, plagiarism is “the presentation, with intent to deceive, or with disregard for proper scholarly procedures of a significant scope, of any information, ideas or phrasing of another as if they were one’s own without giving appropriate credit to the original source” (Section IV, C: Honor Code Violations). Turning in any work which is not your own and not properly acknowledged as such will result in a recommendation for failure in the course and subject you to further action by the university. Please review the university policy on academic dishonesty and speak to me if you have questions. See:

[https://www.wm.edu/offices/deanofstudents/services/communityvalues/studenthandbook/honor\\_system/section\\_VI/index.php](https://www.wm.edu/offices/deanofstudents/services/communityvalues/studenthandbook/honor_system/section_VI/index.php)

## Honor Code

"William & Mary has had an honor code since at least 1779. Academic integrity is at the heart of the university, and we all are responsible for upholding the ideals of honor and integrity. The student-led honor system is responsible for resolving any suspected violations of the Honor Code, and I will report all suspected instances of academic dishonesty to the honor system. The *Student Handbook* ([www.wm.edu/studenthandbook](http://www.wm.edu/studenthandbook)) includes your responsibilities as a student and the full Code. Your full participation and observance of the Honor Code is expected. To read the Honor Code, see [www.wm.edu/honor](http://www.wm.edu/honor)"

## Writing Resources Center

The Writing Resources Center, located on the first floor of Swem Library, is a free service provided to W&M students. Trained consultants offer individual assistance with writing, presentation, and other communication assignments across disciplines and at any stage, from generating ideas to polishing a final product. To make an appointment, visit the WRC webpage [www.wm.edu/wrc](http://www.wm.edu/wrc).

## Class Behavior

You are responsible for being prepared for each class session, which means having carefully read the assignment for each day of class and thought of questions you would like to discuss. You are responsible for all material covered in both lecture and the required readings.

I ask that all members of the class conduct themselves in a respectful manner. Respect for others takes a number of forms in this class, and in academic life generally. In the first place, it means that we need to be sensitive to how our behavior in class affects others. For example, I ask that students be conscientious about how your use of technology affects others in class. Take conversations and phone calls outside. Please do not text, chat online, or surf the net in class. If your behavior becomes problematic or disruptive, I will ask you to leave. I ask that you have intellectual respect for others, as well. This means that if you disagree with a position that someone holds, you should assume that the person is at least as smart as you are, and that the person probably has good reasons for thinking as he or she does. Your job is to be a good listener and exchange ideas, not to attack and degrade others.

## Students with Disabilities

It is the policy of The College of William & Mary to accommodate students with disabilities and qualifying diagnosed conditions in accordance with federal and state laws. Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a learning, psychiatric, physical, or chronic health diagnosis should contact me privately to discuss your specific needs. Students will also need to contact Student Accessibility Services staff at 757-221-2509 or at [sas@wm.edu](mailto:sas@wm.edu) to determine if accommodations are warranted and to obtain an official letter of accommodation. For more information, please see [www.wm.edu/sas](http://www.wm.edu/sas).

## Additional Resources

Not all resources (especially those online) are created equal! You will not need to read or research any other material than the required readings to succeed in this course. However, you may be interested in pursuing our topics further. In addition to the optional readings I will provide on our course website, I recommend two websites in particular:

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: [www.plato.stanford.edu/](http://www.plato.stanford.edu/)

The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: [www.iep.utm.edu/](http://www.iep.utm.edu/)

Philosophy Compass: [http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/\(ISSN\)1747-9991](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/(ISSN)1747-9991)