Gender and Race, Spring 2025

Lecture Location
PAM 1008

Class Time
Tuesday, Thursday

12:30pm – 1:45 pm

Professor
Zach Thornton (he/him)

Email
zthornton@vt.edu

Office Hours
Mon. & Wed.: 1:30pm – 2:30pm, War

Course Overview
This course is an introduction to philosophical issues regarding the social and political categories of gender and race, as well as the racism, sexism, and society. We will learn about important issues such as the natures of gender, race and oppression, racial and political solidarity, resistance, allyship, and accountability for past racial and gendered harms. In addressing these issues, we will investigate questions such as: What is it to be gendered? What is it to be racialized? What does it mean to say race and gender are socially constructed? What are the aspects of racial and gendered oppression? How do issues of gender intersect with race? What does it mean to be gender queer or non-binary? What does it mean to be trans? And, what, if anything, can individuals do to make society more socially just?

This course will focus on studying gender, race and oppression in the United States through the works of Black American and feminist philosophers.

The philosophers we will read will be highly critical of aspects of the social and political systems of the United States. Many are self-described radical feminists and critical race theorists. These terms carry significant baggage in mainstream portrayals of feminists and Black intellectuals. We will be studying these thinkers to better understand what they actually believe, rather than what they are portrayed as believing. We will not be assuming that they are right, and you are not expected to agree with them. It is possible that some students might find some of the ideas defended in these works discomforting or upsetting. This class unavoidably requires close, careful, and charitable engagement with such controversial works.

Students will learn about this material by engaging with their peers in class discussions, online forums, and sharing/receiving peer feedback. No particular background in philosophy is presupposed, though we will presuppose basic normative commitments about the wrongfulness of racism and sexism. Claims about the nature of racism and how to oppose it will be up for debate. Intellectual curiosity and ability to engage with your peers in open and respectful dialogue are required.

Discussion norms for Philosophy of Race and Gender, VT Spring 2025

1. We must be willing to be vulnerable in this class in order to have open conversations about these topics and how we may be perpetuating these issues
2. Differentiate empathy from experience
3. Recognize and acknowledge advantages given to you by society (by race, gender, sexuality, etc.)
4. Feel empowered to say things, take risks, try out ideas
5. Prioritize saving time and space to hear everyone's or as many people's thoughts even if it means not getting to say everything on your mind. (We only have **2 ½** hours a week)
6. Remember that our intention is to learn and understand
7. Approach topics from many perspectives to challenge beliefs and explore ideas

    a. Be empowered to present ideas even if you aren't sure if you agree with them
    a. Shouldn't assume people are committed to the ideas they propose in class
2. Free to leave discussion, and don't assume why people might be leaving. It's okay to take a break.
    a. Freedom to opt out.
2. Emotions are okay
3. Try not to make assumptions, and don't assume or act like you know everything.
4. Come from a place of curiosity

Required Texts

All texts will be provided on Canvas

Class Expectations and Policies

1. **Class Discussions:** Philosophy classes are only as good as the discussions that happen in them. As such, you will be expected to come to class having completed the readings and prepared to talk. You will also be expected to treat your peers with respect. **Attendance and participation is required and a core learning experience of this course.**
2. **Accessibility**: I am committed to making this course accessible to everyone. If there is something that I can do to make this course more accessible for you, please come and speak to me. If you need disability-related accommodations, please contact VT's Services for Students with Disabilities (https://www.ssd.vt.edu/index.html). Note, however, that you do not need to have an officially recognized or diagnosed disability to seek accommodations: you just have to come speak with me.
3. **Changes to the Syllabus**: The reading list on the syllabus is not a contract, and may change according to student interests or time constraints. I will announce any changes via email, and will update Canvas accordingly.

Assignments

Assessment	**Percent of Final Grade**	**Description**
Participation	20%	See attendance and participation policy below.
Forum Posts	19% (3% each)	There will be one discussion forum every two weeks, with seven in total. Six will be graded, one will be dropped. You will earn a point for your initial post and a point each for two comments on other people's posts.
Quizzes	10% (2% each)	Each quiz will have 4 questions, each worth .5% of your final grade. There will be seven quizzes total, two will be dropped.
Mini papers	6 % (3% each)	There will be two mini four sentence philosophy papers.
Midterm pt. 1	10 %	You will take an exam in class that involves multiple choice and essay questions. A midterm study guide will be posted at least a week before the exam

Peer Feedback	5%	You will take the essay you wrote for your midterm, revise it, and submit it for peer review. You will fill out a peer review sheet on another person's essay.
Midterm pt. 2	10%	You will develop your essay from your midterm into a longer paper based on peer feedback.
Group Project	5%	You will work with a group to create an informative poster or slide show to teach others about a concept from the semester.
Final Exam	15%	The final exam will cover material we have learned after the midterm. It will involve multiple choice and essay questions. A study guide will be posted at least a week before the exam. Final Exam time: May 10, 7:45am – 9:45am
Extra Credit	Max 2%	There will be at least two extra credit opportunities. Each will be worth 1% with a maximum extra credit amount of 2%. Extra credit will be assigned early in the semester. Plan ahead and take advantage of them.

Attendance and Participation Policy

Attendance and Participation Policy

Your presence in class is mandatory. We are all dedicating an hour and a half twice a week to work through these texts together, and your lack of presence takes away learning opportunities from other students. Being present in class requires more than merely attending class. You must be actively contributing in large group discussions.

For full credit, students are expected to engage with their peers at least 2 times per week. Since this is a discussion-based class, your contributions are incredibly important. The questions you ask and insights you share are very important for you and your peer's learning. I recognize that participating in class is sometimes difficult. I am hoping to push everyone to share their thoughts while also giving you room for have days where you just want to listen.

To grade engagement, I will mark each time you talk in a week or attends office hours. I will then assign you a score at the end of the week. All these contributions can happen in the same day or spread out throughout the week. At the end of the course, I will average each student's weekly scores, and that will determine their in-class participation grade. The rubric for determining these scores is as follows:

2 = 10

1 = 7.5

0 = 0

Notice that your grade for engagement is not relative to the amount other students participate – it depends solely on your engagement. Also notice that there is a big jump in score between participating 0 times a week and participating once.

(Grading example: Suppose a student got the following weekly scores: Week 1: 10, Week 2: 7.5, Week 3: 10, Week 4: 10, Week 5: 7.5. Their final in-class participation score would be 9.3 which is a 90%.)

Grading Policies

1. **Assignment Submission:** All assignments are due by 11:59 pm on CANVAS unless otherwise specified. Due dates for assignments are firm, and you will be docked 5% of the assignment grade for every 24-hour period it is overdue. Your GTAs and I are, however, very generous about granting extensions so long as you request them to your GTA at least 24 hours in advance of the deadline.

2. **Anonymous Grading**: To best avoid bias in grading, all papers will be graded anonymously. *Please do not put your name on your papers—just write your student number.*

3. **Papers will not be regraded:** The papers are graded anonymously to avoid bias. Once you name is revealed, we cannot assign another grade without the possibility of bias. To ensure fair grading, papers cannot be regraded.

4. **Fake/Incorrect Submission:** In recent years, I've noticed an uptick in the number of students submitting blank pages, corrupted files, or the wrong documents in lieu of assignments. As of this semester, it is up to you to make sure that you've submitted the right file. If I receive any fake or incorrect documents, I'll count the assignment as late.

5. **Citations**: Citations are absolutely required for all assignments. I don't care what style you use, but you must include page numbers. A bibliography is not necessary unless you have more than three sources. Any paper with missing or inadequate citations **will be docked 15%.**

6. **Instructors will meet to calibrate grades between sections:** To best ensure fairness in grading, all instructors will meet to calibrate grades on your papers.

7. **Academic Integrity:**
   The Undergraduate Honor Code pledge that each member of the university community agrees to abide by states: "As a Hokie, I will conduct myself with honor and integrity at all times. I will not lie, cheat, or steal, nor will I accept the actions of those who do."

   Students enrolled in this course are responsible for abiding by the Honor Code. A student who has doubts about how the Honor Code applies to any assignment is responsible for obtaining specific guidance from the course instructor before submitting the assignment for evaluation. Students are strongly discouraged from misusing sites such as Chegg and CourseHero, as well as misusing ChatGPT and other Generative Artificial Intelligence. Students are strongly encouraged to consult their faculty members regarding the use of such outside materials as the misuse of these sources may constitute a violation of the Honor Code. Ignorance of the rules does not exclude any member of the University community from the requirements and expectations of the Honor Code.

   For additional information about the Honor Code, please visit: https://www.honorsystem.vt.edu/

8. **AI use policy:** Only the following uses of generative AI tools are permitted in this course: *peer review* (asking for feedback on a complete draft of a paper). *AI may <u>not</u> be used on developing a first draft (unless specified in the assignment prompt) or rewriting portions of previously written text.*

9. **Grade bumps**: I round final grades up to the nearest percent—so an 89.5% will be a 90%, but an 89.4% will not. If you are unsatisfied with your final grade, please know that I do not grant 'grade bumps' (beyond that half percent). I may, however, provide opportunities for bonus points throughout the semester. No bonus points will be awarded after the end of classes.

Grading Scale

A grade in the 'A' range (90-93=A-, 94-96=A, 97-100=A+) demonstrates a mastery of and insightful engagement with the course material. In written work, the A student is able to reconstruct philosophical arguments with precision and accuracy, develop criticisms that are original, persuasive, and well-developed. In class, the A student attends all or almost all classes having completed the readings, and always or almost always makes exceptionally thoughtful and respectful contributions to class discussions.

A grade in the 'B' range (80-83=B-, 84-86=B, 87-89=B+) denotes competence with and reasonable insight into the course material. The B student is able to reconstruct philosophical arguments accurately and develop criticisms that are reasonably persuasive and well-developed. In class, the B student typically completes the readings, and often makes thoughtful and respectful contributions to class discussions.

A grade in the 'C' range (70-73=C-, 74-76=C, 77-79=C+) denotes inadequate comprehension and engagement with the course material. The C student is able to reconstruct philosophical arguments with some errors and develop criticisms that are generally relevant to the course material, if not convincing. In class, the C student does not regularly do the readings, and sometimes makes thoughtful and respectful contributions to class discussions.

A grade in the 'D' range (60-63=D-, 64-66=D, 67-69) denotes a lack of comprehension of and engagement with the course material. The 'D' student is unable to accurately reconstruct philosophical positions or develop critiques relevant to the course material. In class, the D student struggles with attendance, shows little evidence of having completed the readings, and rarely makes thoughtful and respectful contributions to class discussions.

Course Schedule

Note: this schedule may change throughout the semester

Dates	Topic	Assignments and Assessments
	Week 1: Introduction	
Tuesday, Aug 26	How do we talk about race?	Ijeoma Oluo (2018) "What if I talk about race wrong?" (search for "So you want to talk about race", go to e-book, and select chapter 3.)
Thursday, Aug 28	Radical feminism for everyone	bell hooks, *Feminism is for Everyone* intro & ch. 1
	Week 2: Is Race an Illusion?	
Tuesday, Jan 28	The Illusion of Race	Video (2003): "Race: The Power of Illusion – Ep. 1 'The Difference Between Us'" (58 mins)

Thursday, Jan 30		Video (2003): "Race: The Power of Illusion – Ep. 1 'The Difference Between Us'" (58 mins) Forum #1 Opens
	Week 3: Social Groups and Oppression	
Tuesday, Feb 4	White ignorance	Charles Mills (2007) "White Ignorance"
Thursday, Feb 6	Social groups	Iris Marion Young, "Five Faces of Oppression" Quiz #1 Four sentence paper in class
	Week 4: Intersectionality	
Tuesday, Feb 11	Kinds of oppression	Iris Marion Young, "Five Faces of Oppression"
Thursday, Feb 13	Intersectionality	Iris Marion Young, "Five Faces of Oppression"[22] Forum #1 closes Quiz #2
	Week 5: What is Race?	
Tuesday, Feb 18		Combahee River Collective, "How We Get Free"
Thursday, Feb 21		W.E.B. DuBois "The Conservation of Races"
	Week 6: What is Race?	
Tuesday, Feb 25		W.E.B. DuBois "The Conservation of Races" Forum #2 opens
Thursday, Feb 27		Charles Mills "But What Are You Really?"

		Quiz #3 Four sentence paper #2 assigned
	Week 7: What is Racism	
Tuesday, Mar 4		J.L.A. Garcia (1996) "The Heart of Racism" Forum #3 opens Midterm study guide posted
Thursday, Mar 6		Shelby – "Is Racism in the Heart?" Four sentence paper #2 due
	Week 8: **Spring Break**	
Tuesday, Mar 11	Spring break	
Thursday, Mar 13	Spring break	
	Week 9: What is sexism?	
Tuesday, Mar 18		Midterm in class Forum #2 closes Forum #3 closes Forum #4 opens
Thursday, Mar 20		Sally Haslanger, "Gender and Social Construction" Quiz #4
	Week 10: Sexism and being an outsider	
Tuesday, Mar 25		Class canceled
Thursday, Mar 27		Marilyn Frye "Sexism" Midterm essay revisions assigned
	Week 11: Objectification	
Tuesday, Apr 1		Patricia Hill Collins (1986) "Learning from the Outsider Within: The

	Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought” Forum #4 closes Forum #5 opens
Thursday, Apr 3	Sally Haslanger, “On being objective and being objectified.” Sect. 1-3 Quiz #5 Midterm essay revisions **due** and peer feedback assigned
Week 12:	
Tuesday, Apr 8	Sally Haslanger, “On being objective and being objectified.” Sects. 4 – 6 (end) Peer feedback due
Thursday, Apr 10	Robin Dembroff, “Beyond Binary: Gender Queer as a Critical Gender Kind”
Week 13:	
Tuesday, Apr 15	Talia Mae Bettcher, "What is Trans Philosophy?" Forum #5 closes Forum #6 opens Essay revisions due
Thursday, Apr 17	E.M. Hernandez “Gender Affirmation and Loving Attention” Quiz #6
Week 14: Ignorance and Accountability	
Tuesday, Apr 22	Tilton, “That’s Above My Paygrade: Woke Excuses for Ignorance”

Thursday, Apr 24	Robin Jheng (2018) "What is my Role in Changing the System?"
Week 15: Living and Resisting	
Tuesday, April 29	Audre Lorde "Uses of Anger" Forum #6 closes Forum #7 opens
Thursday, May 1	Bernard Boxill (1976) "Self-Respect and Protest" Quiz #7 Final exam study guide posted
Week 16:	
Tuesday, May 4	Video (2012): "Free Angela and All Political Prisoners" (102 mins) https://thoughtmaybe.com/free-angela-and-all-political-prisoners/ Forum #7 closes Group project
Thursday, May 6	Wrap Up
FINAL EXAM PERIOD: **May 10, 7:45am – 9:45am**	The final must be done in person.