Course Description

Democracy has largely become accepted as the “only respectable way of legitimating government”. This democratic principle has encouraged a dismissal of traditional ideals of hierarchy and privilege. But despite great strides in attitudes towards equality and self rule, half the population of the world are still vastly underrepresented in mainstream political activity. This course will examine this fundamental fact and encourage the student to question it from historical, cultural, economic and feminist perspectives.

Although feminist theory and feminist political writings often highlight women’s roles in extra-governmental or alternative political activities, this course will focus on the gap in women’s participation in national-level elected office. This will include feminist political theory in the broader context of government representation.

This course will also examine several arguments that arise in support of the status quo, including the supply/demand argument and the validity of gender neutrality. We will look at how political science, media, and even feminist theorists often fail to incorporate gender balance into their analysis. Although the course will focus on western democracies, there will be some discussion of other cultures and systems of government.

The aim is to give the student the foundations to understand and question the role of women in the political process.

Text

Stokes, Wendy (2005) *Women in Contemporary Politics*

Other possible readings

Sojourner Truth “Ain’t I a Woman” and “Keep Things Stirring” in *Women at the Podium*

Sheila Rowbotham *A Century of Women*

Anna Howard Shaw “Emotionalism in Politics” in *Women at the Podium*

Hillary Rodham Clinton in *Women at the Podium* and *Living History*
Carol Hanish “The Personal Is Political”

Margaret Conrad “Women in Politics in Atlantic Canada”


Elizabeth Powley “Rwanda: Women hold up half of Parliament”

**Evaluation**

Class Participation – 10%
Research Paper– 40%
Final Exam – 50%

A) Class Participation will be graded with the following criteria in mind:
- Willingness to engage in discussion topics
- Ability to refer to reading material during discussions
- Willingness to learn
- Demonstrated effort to understand concepts, terms and theories
- Ability to compare and contrast concepts discussed in class with reading materials and personal experiences.

B) The Research Paper may be based on any one of the following topics:
- Discuss three arguments for the equitable inclusion of women in elected office, and their relevance to equality goals both past and present.
- Compare and contrast the media coverage of a male and female candidate in a recent federal election. Are there significant differences in the type or quantity of coverage? Do your findings support any existing theories?
- Discuss the term “gender-neutral” and its implications for women’s political participation, both as potential candidate and elected leader.

The report will be graded on the following criteria:
- Writing skills and presentation of document
- Use of references
- Clarity and development of argument
- Quality of analysis and research

**Course Timeline**

Week 1, Monday Sept 10: Course Introduction. Generally cover the topics to be discussed. Some basic information on current levels of participation will be covered. Aims, objectives and expectations will be discussed. Some discussion on definitions and terms.
Week 2, Monday Sept 17: Feminist Theory and Feminisms. Overview of some feminist approaches to politics. Discussion of the validity, importance and challenges of some of these theories.

Week 3, Monday Sept 24: Feminist Theory and Feminisms. Overview of some of the questions and assumptions that political feminism has raised. Discussion on the significance of women’s representation in government and the concept of critical mass. Assignment: Research Paper assigned

Week 4, Monday Oct 1: Women’s Political Activism. The goals of the suffrage movement. Women’s political involvement pre-suffrage. Discussion of democratic significance of women as voters.

Week 5, Wednesday Oct 10: Women’s Political Activism. Further discussion of women’s role as voter following achievement of the vote.


Week 8, Monday Oct 29: Women and Media. Overview of traditional representations of women in media, including camera angle and “the male gaze”. Overview of performativity in gender and politics. Discussion of presentation of women in political and non-political coverage.

Week 9, Monday Nov 5: Women and Media. Content and goals of political media coverage. Discussion of role of women journalists, voter responsibility, demographics in disseminating information.

Week 10, Friday Nov 16: Women in Government. Overview of models of women’s participation including quotas and comparison with other country models. Discussion of Rwanda case study.


Week 12, Monday Nov 26: Conclusion and overview for exam.