WGSS 414: *Systems of Oppression in Women’s Lives*

Lecture – 4 Credits – 4 Hours/Week

[TERM] [DAY/TIME] [ROOM]

[INSTRUCTOR]
[OFFICE AND CONTACT INFO.]
[OFFICE HOURS]

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

We will explore the ways interlocking systems of oppression impact women’s lives by examining experiences of diverse groups of women and the personal and social effects of oppression, processes of internalization of oppression, identity politics, and resistance. We will study the way various forms of oppression, such as sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism, ableism, etc. manifest themselves in social institutions. In particular, we will pay attention to the ways forms of oppressions intersect in women’s lives.

This course involves reading the personal narratives and theoretical accounts of women’s lives in a domestic (U.S.) context through a transnational lens. As we explore their stories, we will also explore our own engagement with power, oppression and acts of resistance. Together we will forge a collective knowledge and wisdom as we name oppressions and suggest creative and positive ways to challenge and resist oppressive systems. This process requires dialogue and welcomes differences of opinion. It also demands respect and active engagement and listening. Many issues we explore will be controversial, personal, and potentially painful. Therefore, we must work together to create a relatively safe place where we can hear, support, and challenge one another as we search for ways to change ourselves and our society. To reach our course goals, we may use a variety of pedagogical strategies, including having discussions, watching films, analyzing current events, and regular reflection through journaling.

WGSS 414 is a Difference, Power, and Discrimination (DPD) course in the baccalaureate core. As such, the course focuses on the unequal distribution of social, economic, and political power in the U.S. This course should engage you in an intellectual examination of the complexity of the structures, systems, and ideologies that sustain discrimination and the unequal distribution of power and resources in society. In this course you will develop critical skills that will allow you to understand, analyze, and synthesize readings, ideas, processes, and events related to systems of oppression. Additionally, the course will help you examine your own values related to diversity.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

Students in Difference, Power and Discrimination courses shall:

1. Explain how difference is socially constructed
2. Using historical and contemporary examples, describe how perceived differences, combined with unequal distribution of power across economic, social, and political institutions, result in discrimination
3. Analyze ways in which the interactions of social categories, such as race, ethnicity, social class, gender, religion, sexual orientation, disability, and age, are related to difference, power, and discrimination in the United States.
Additionally, as a result of having taken this course, students will be able to:

- Explain how difference is socially constructed and how these social constructions are used to maintain systems of oppression
- Explain the role of intersectionality in systems of oppression
- Explain the ways systems of oppression work to maintain social inequality
- Offer historical and contemporary examples of oppression and resistance
- Analyze the ways systems of oppression are manifest in and maintained by social institutions
- Synthesize course readings and activities into a comprehensive theoretical framework about social inequality
- Evaluate social institutions, trends, and events through a lens of gender (along with the intersecting lenses of race, social class, sexual identity, age, ability, religion)
- Explain the role of resistance in challenging systems of oppression
- Examine and understand their own values around diversity

These objectives will be assessed through each student’s participation in class discussions and completion of writing assignments.

**REQUIRED TEXTS**

A women’s memoir or fictional text of your choice that explores systems of oppression in women’s lives. Your selection must be approved by the instructor, and I will provide a list of suggestions that might be helpful.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND ASSIGNMENTS:**

1. **Participation (20%)**
   In the feminist classroom, we understand knowledge as a product constructed by the knowers. This means your participation and input into our collective knowledge-making is valuable. As a student in a feminist classroom, you are responsible to your classmates as well as to yourself for the success of our joint teaching and learning. Therefore your active participation is required. You demonstrate your commitment to the class by arriving on time, being prepared, staying for the entire class, listening actively, contributing to discussions, and engaging enthusiastically in learning activities. If you must miss a class, you are responsible for making sure your work is still turned in on time and for finding out from your classmates what you missed. If you know in advance that you will miss a class, please inform the professor. If you miss a substantial amount of a class period, or if you sleep during class, read, or work on unrelated materials, you will be marked absent for that day. Completion of weekly in-class activities, assignments, peer review activities, and regular self-assessments will be factored into the participation grade.

   *Note about absences: Students may miss no more than two class sessions. Following the allotted number of absences, a letter grade per absence will be deducted from students’ final grades.*

2. **Reading Discussion Papers (15%)**
   You are expected to respond to questions related to the readings (provided in the course schedule). Your responses should be typed, double-spaced and are due [DAY] at the start of class for the week the reading is scheduled to be discussed. Generally, thoughtful and appropriate responses to each question will require a minimum of 100 words. Your responses to reading questions will be instrumental in facilitating useful and lively discussions. You are expected to respond to questions related to five readings each week; however, during the
week you are scheduled for your class presentation (see below) you must only respond to three readings. Late assignments will not be accepted.

3. Class Presentation (10%)
Once during the term, you will be required to make a short presentation (8-10 minutes maximum). On the day of your scheduled presentation, you will bring a news story or popular culture piece in a format of your choice (e.g., print, audio, video, etc.) that relates to that day’s assigned class readings. Your presentation should briefly summarize the facts of your chosen news event and, most importantly, explain how the article reflects concepts from the course readings. You will submit a 250-word typed, double-spaced summary of your presentation, which must include specific references to at least three course readings. In addition to the summary, you are expected to facilitate a class discussion of your presentation and provide your classmates with three discussion questions that help them make connections between the article and the course readings for the day. Presentations cannot be rescheduled. If you fail to attend your presentation, you will receive a zero for this assignment.

4. Literature Discussion Paper (20%)
Write a 4-5 page typed, double-spaced analysis of one of the characters from memoir or novel you chose to read for the course in terms of systems of oppression. Assignment details will follow as we discuss the narratives you selected for this assignment. You must integrate specific references to at least five course readings, including proper in-text citation and a works cited page (not included in total page count).

5. Blog Project (15%)
Throughout the term you will be challenged to observe, reflect on, and critique systems of oppression in the world around you that relate to your life. This will require you to step away from your desk and go out on campus and into the city. You will keep a blog to record your reflections. The advantage of using an online platform is that you can incorporate images, videos, music, and other media. You will be graded on your level of critical reflection, engagement, and creativity as well as on the time and thought you put into your blog. You must post to your blog at least six times during the term. (See Blackboard for deadlines.) You must share the blog with the instructor and your classmates, but whether you decide to make the blog public is up to you.

6. Memoir Project (20%)
Write a 10 page typed, double-spaced autobiographical essay reflecting on your own understanding of your relationship (experiences, successes, and struggles) to power, privilege, and oppression. The following questions may be helpful in assisting you to think about this assignment: What have been your experiences of sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism, ethnocentrism, ageism, ableism, etc.? How have these experiences shaped your views, values, and identity? How have you benefited from privilege in systems where you are not the target of oppression? What have been your experiences of resisting oppression? How have you internalized oppression and dominance? How have you acted in complicity with oppressive systems? Where are you now in your journey toward justice and equality? Be sure to analyze your experiences in terms of class discussions and readings. You must integrate specific references to at least eight course readings, including proper in-text citation and a works cited page (not included in total page count).

If you prefer, you may also choose to approach this assignment in terms of an interview and biographical discussion of a woman in your life. Assignment details will be posted on Blackboard.

Completion of this assignment involves producing a first draft and participating in a writing workshop with your colleagues to offer feedback in preparation for a final draft of this project (due during exam week).

GRADING
A Excellent work. Of the highest quality. Exhibits openness and unusually sharp insight into many sides of an issue. Shows considerable critical thought. Written work is virtually flawless in terms of grammar, spelling, cogency, and content. Performs far above minimum requirements. Exceptionally articulate.
B  Above average. Speaks and writes well. Performs above the minimum requirements. Demonstrates very good understanding of ideas.
C  Speaks and writes in an acceptable manner. Work is satisfactory, average. Meets minimum requirements.
D  Below average work. Minimally acceptable, but unacceptable if this course is required.
F  Unacceptable work. Does not meet minimum requirements.

A  95%  B  85%  C  75%  D  65%  
A-  90%  B-  80%  C-  70%  D-  60%  
B+  88%  C+  78%  D+  68%  F  below 60%

IMPORTANT STATEMENTS
Students with Disabilities
Accommodations are collaborative efforts between students, faculty, and Disability Access Services (DAS). Students with accommodations approved through DAS are responsible for contacting the faculty member in charge of the course prior to or during the first week of the term to discuss accommodations. Students who believe they are eligible for accommodations but who have not yet obtained approval through DAS should contact DAS immediately at 541-737-4098.

Academic Dishonesty
Many students do not understand what academic dishonesty is. It is important to become familiar with its different forms and the University's definitions. At Oregon State University academic dishonesty is defined by the Oregon Administrative Rules 576-015-0020.1.a-c as: An intentional act of deception in which a student seeks to claim credit for the work or effort of another person or uses unauthorized materials or fabricated information in any academic work. Academic dishonesty includes:

• CHEATING - use or attempted use of unauthorized materials, information or study aids or an act of deceit by which a student attempts to misrepresent mastery of academic effort or information. This includes unauthorized copying or collaboration on a test or assignment or using prohibited materials and texts.
• FABRICATION - falsification or invention of any information (including falsifying research, inventing or exaggerating data and listing incorrect or fictitious references.
• ASSISTING - helping another commit an act of academic dishonesty. This includes paying or bribing someone to acquire a test or assignment, changing someone's grades or academic records, or taking a test/doing an assignment for someone else (or allowing someone to do these things for you). It is a violation of Oregon state law to create and offer to sell part or all of an education assignment to another person (ORS 165.114).
• TAMPERING - altering or interfering with evaluation instruments and documents.
• PLAGIARISM - representing the word or ideas of another person as one's own OR presenting someone else's words, ideas, artistry or data as one's own. This includes copying another person's work (including unpublished material) without appropriate referencing, presenting someone else's opinions and theories as one's own, or working jointly on a project, then submitting it as one's own.

Academic dishonesty cases are handled initially by the academic units (collection of evidence and documentation of incident, meeting with student regarding the situation, determination of responsibility and academic penalty) but will also be referred to the Student Conduct Coordinator for action under the rules. For more information on expectations for student conduct, see http://oregonstate.edu/studentconduct/offenses.
| Week 1 | **Introduction to the class**  
**Sign up for Presentations** |
|--------|-----------------------------------|
| Week 2 | **Reading**  
**Discussion**  
**Paper Due (Tuesday)**  
**Conceptual Frameworks: Understanding Oppression and Privilege**  
- What does it mean to be an “other” in our society? How does Tatum define dominant and subordinate groups?  
- How is identity understood at the micro, meso, and macro/global levels?  
Allan Johnson, “The Social Construction of Difference” (15-20)  
- What is privilege? What is oppression? How are they socially constructed and maintained within our society?  
Lee Anne Belle, “Theoretical Foundations” (21-26)  
- What are the defining features of oppression, and how do they work?  
Rita Hardiman, et. al., “Conceptual Foundations” (26-35)  
- How are forms of oppression interconnected? Why is it not useful to rank forms of oppression?  
Iris Young, “Five Faces of Oppression” (35-45)  
- What are the five categories of structural oppression discussed by Young? Explain.  
Bobbie Harro, “The Cycle of Socialization” (45-51)  
- How are we socialized into systems of oppression?  
Bobbie Harro, “The Cycle of Liberation” (52-58)  
- What are the steps to liberation discussed by Harro? |
| Week 3 | **Reading**  
**Discussion**  
**Paper Due (Tuesday)**  
**Analyzing Racism as a System of Oppression**  
Beverly Daniel Tatum, “Defining Racism: Can We Talk?” (66-69)  
- How does the idea of racism as a system undermine American notions of meritocracy?  
Ronald Takaki, “A Different Mirror” (70-74)  
- What similar experiences of racism have people of color had in the U.S.? How have their experiences varied depending on their race or ethnicity?  
Kimberly Ropollo, “Symbolic Racism, History, and Reality: The Real Problem with Indian Mascots” (74-78)  
- What is “dysconcious racism” and how is it different from conscious forms of racism?  
George Lipsitz, “The Possessive Investment in Whiteness” (79-87)  
- What is the possessive investment in whiteness? How is racism structural and systemic (rather than simply individual manifestations of prejudice)?  
Andrea Smith, “Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy: Rethinking Women of Color Organizing” (88-93)  
- What are the three pillars of white supremacy, and how does Smith’s framework contribute to a new organizing principle for women of color?  
Maria P. P. Root, “50 Experiences of Racially Mixed People” (98-99)  
- How do mixed-race identities and politics challenge conventional racial discourse?  
- How do current immigration laws constitute human rights violations against immigrants and refugees in the U.S.?  
- How do white standards of beauty affect women of color? |
| Week 4 | Analyzing Sexism as a System of Oppression  
Judith Lorber, “‘Night to His Day’: The Social Construction of Gender” (321-326)  
- How and why is gender socially constructed?  
Michael Kimmel, “Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity” (326-332)  
- How is homophobia a central organizing principle of masculinity?  
Allan Johnson, “Patriarchy, the System: An It, Not a He, a Them, or An Us” (332-337)  
- What is patriarchy? Why is it important to distinguish between the system of patriarchy and actual men?  
bell hooks, “Feminism: A Movement to End Sexist Oppression” (337-339)  
- What are some of the problems with defining feminism?  
Jackson Katz, “Violence Against Women is a Men’s Issue” (340-343)  
- How/why is violence against women a men's issue, according to Katz?  
- How does self-objectification affect women in our society?  
Aaron Bernstein, “Women’s Pay: Why the Gap Remains a Chasm” (347-349)  
- What accounts for the gap in men’s and women’s earnings in the U.S.?  
Gwyn Kirk and Margo Okazawa-Rey, “He Works, She Works, but What Different Impressions They Make” (353)  
- What are some of the double standards that affect men and women in the workplace?  
Ann Russo and Melanie Spatz, “Stop the False Race/Gender Divide: A Call to Action” (364-366)  
- How does the race/gender divide manifest in our society, and how, as these authors say, is it a false divide? |

| Week 5 | Analyzing Classism as a System of Oppression  
Gregory Mantsios, “Class in America – 2006” (148-155)  
- What are the myths and realities about class in America, as discussed by Mantsios?  
Chuck Collins, et. al., “The Dangerous Consequences of Growing Inequality” (155-162)  
- What are some of the consequences of class stratification in the U.S.?  
Melvin Oliver and Thomas Shapiro, “Race, Wealth, and Equality” (162-169)  
- How do race and class intersect?  
Jose Garcia, et. al., “The Debt-for-Diploma System” (174-178)  
- How does the current financial aid system affects students’ access to education?  
- What particular barriers do students with disabilities face?  
Michael Eric Dyson, “Unnatural Disasters: Race and Poverty” (186-189)  
- How do disasters like Hurricane Katrina contribute to racial and class oppression?  
Mary Romero, “Bonds of Sisterhood – Bonds of Oppression” (195-201)  
- What are the specific attributes of domestic work that contribute to the oppression of women of color hired to perform such work?  
bell hooks, “White Poverty: The Politics of Invisibility” (201-205)  
- How does the invisibility of poor white people serve to mask white supremacist capitalist patriarchal ruling class interests, according to hooks?  
Betsy Leondar-Wright, “Classism from Our Mouths” and “Tips from Working-Class Activists” (214-218)  
- What does it mean to be an ally to poor and working-class communities?  
- How is class privilege about more than simply money? Explain. |

| Week 6 | Analyzing Religious Oppression  
Charles Lippy, “Christian Nation or Pluralistic Culture: Religion on American Life” (234-240) |
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<th>Reading Discussion Paper Due (Tuesday)</th>
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| • What is the history of religious diversity in the U.S.?  
Diana Eck, “Afraid of Ourselves” and “Working it Out” (240-245)  
• What forms of discrimination do religious minorities face in the U.S.?  
Lewis Schlosser, “Christian Privilege: Breaking a Sacred Taboo” (246-247)  
• What are some of the privileges associated with Christianity?  
Warren Blumenfeld, “Christian Privilege and the Promotion of ‘Secular’ and Not-So ‘Secular’ Mainline Christianity in Public Schooling and in the Larger Society” (247-253)  
• What are the five categories of religious oppression, and how are they maintained?  
Khyati Joshi, “Religious Oppression of Indian Americans in the Contemporary United States” (254-258)  
• What forms of religious oppression do Indian Americans experience?  
• How have coercive educational policies and genocidal practices affected indigenous culture?  
Melanie Kay/Kantrowitz, “Jews in the U.S.: The Rising Costs of Whiteness” (290-295)  
• What has been the cost for Jews to be constructed as white?  
Na’ilih Suad Nasir and Jasiyah Al-Amin, “Creating Identity-Safe Spaces on College Campuses for Muslim Students” (298-302)  
• What are some of the issues that Muslim students experience on college campuses in the U.S.?  
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<th>Week 7 Literature Discussion Paper Due (Thursday)</th>
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| Women’s Narratives of Resistance  
• Harlow, *Resistance Literature* excerpt  
• Student Selected literary text due AND Literature Discussion Paper  
(NO Reading Discussion Paper due this week)  
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<th>Week 8 Reading Discussion Paper Due (Tuesday)</th>
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| Analyzing Ableism as a System of Oppression  
Willie Bryan, “Struggle for Freedom: Disability Rights Movement” (464-469)  
• What are some of the central issues of the disability rights movement?  
Susan Pliner and Julia Johnson, “Historical, Theoretical, and Foundational Principles of Universal Instructional Design in Higher Education” (474-476)  
• How can higher education be more accessible to students with disabilities?  
Susan Wendell, “The Social Construction of Disability” (477-481)  
• How is disability socially constructed?  
Lennard Davis, “Go to the Margins of the Class: Disability and Hate Crimes” (481-484)  
• How is harassment of and violence against persons with disabilities a systematic form of oppression?  
Sumi Colligan, “Why the Intersexed Shouldn’t Be Fixed: Insights from Queer Theory and Disability Studies” (485-489)  
• How and why have disabled and intersexed bodies been increasingly medicalized?  
• What is Gulf War syndrome? How does war contribute to disabilities?  
Nirmala Erevelles, “Disability in the New World Order” (492-495)  
• How do structural adjustment programs exacerbate poverty and disability in many parts of the world?  
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<th>Week 9 Draft 1 of Memoir Project Due; Student Workshops (Thursday)</th>
<th>Analyzing Heterosexism, Homophobia, and Transphobia as Systems of Oppression</th>
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<td>Warren Blumenfeld, “How Homophobia Hurts Everyone” (376-385)</td>
<td>• What is homophobia? How does it hurt everyone, according to Blumenfeld?</td>
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<td>Marcia Deihl and Robyn Ochs, “Biphobia” (385-389)</td>
<td>• Why/how do both heterosexuals and LGBTQ people exhibit biphobia?</td>
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<td>Deepali Gokhale, “The InterSEXion: A Vision for a Queer Progressive Agenda” (389-393)</td>
<td>• What is Gokhale’s vision for liberation within the queer community?</td>
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<td>Devon Carbado, “Privilege” (393-399)</td>
<td>• What are heterosexual privileges, and how can they be resisted?</td>
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<td>Pat Griffin, “Sport: Where Men Are Men and Women Are Trespassers” (399-404)</td>
<td>• How do institutionalized sports reinforce both masculinity and heterosexuality? How are women often excluded or discriminated against?</td>
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<td>Anna Quindlan, “The Loving Decision” (404-405)</td>
<td>• Why is there so much controversy around same-sex marriage?</td>
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<td>Susan Stryker, “Transgender Liberation” (432-435)</td>
<td>• What forms of discrimination and violence have transgender people faced in the U.S.?</td>
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<td>Julia Serano, “Trans Woman Manifesto” (441-444)</td>
<td>• What is transphobia, and how is it often related to sexism and misogyny?</td>
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<td>Jamison Green, “Look! No, Don’t! The Invisibility Dilemma for Transsexual Men” (451-452)</td>
<td>• How does transgender experience demonstrate the construction of masculinity and femininity?</td>
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<th>Week 10 Reading Discussion Paper Due (Tuesday)</th>
<th>Working for Social Justice</th>
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<tr>
<td>Suzanne Pharr, “Reflections on Liberation” (591-598)</td>
<td>• What are connections between liberation and organizing?</td>
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<td>Barbara Love, “Developing a Liberatory Consciousness” (599-603)</td>
<td>• What are elements of a liberatory consciousness?</td>
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<td>Patricia Hill Collins, “Toward a New Vision: Race, Class, and Gender” (604-609)</td>
<td>• How do we build relationships and connections that bring about social change?</td>
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<td>Allan Johnson, “What Can We Do?” (610-616)</td>
<td>• What are concrete strategies for resisting oppression?</td>
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<td>Gloria Anzaldúa, “Allies” (617-619)</td>
<td>• What makes a good ally?</td>
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<td>Andrea Ayvazian, “Interrupting the Cycle of Oppression: The Role of Allies…” (625-628)</td>
<td>• Why is interrupting oppressive behavior important? What are effective strategies?</td>
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<td>Ximena Zuniga, “Bridging Differences Through Dialogue” (628-631)</td>
<td>• What is the intergroup dialogue approach, and how does it provide a framework for justice?</td>
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<td>Elizabeth Martinez, “Unite and Rebel! Challenges and Strategies in Building Alliances” (632-635)</td>
<td>• Why is it crucial to build alliances?</td>
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EXAM WEEK:
Final Memoir Project Due
(Complete “Final Thoughts” cover sheet)
GUIDELINES FOR CREATING A SAFE SPACE IN THE CLASSROOM

1. Make a personal commitment to learning about, understanding, and supporting women.
2. Assume the best of others in the class and expect the best from them.
3. Acknowledge the impact of sexism, racism, ethnocentrism, classism, heterosexism, ageism, antisemitism, and ableism on the lives of class members.
4. Recognize and value the experiences, abilities, and knowledge each person brings to class. Value the diversity of the class.
5. Participate in discussion forums after having completed the readings and thought about the issues.
6. Listen actively. This involves paying close attention to what each member of the class writes. It may also involve asking clarifying questions. These questions are meant to probe and shed new light, not to minimize or devalue comments.
7. Think through your comments before you make them.
8. Make comments to the entire group and not to individuals.
9. Never make derogatory comments toward another person in the class.
10. Do not make sexist, racist, homophobic, or victim-blaming comments at all.
11. Disagree with ideas, but do not make personal attacks.
12. Be open to be challenged or confronted on your ideas or prejudices.
13. Challenge and confront others with the intent of facilitating growth. Do not demean or embarrass others.
14. Encourage others to contribute to our discussions. Be especially encouraging of people who are working through their prejudices and attempting to grow as feminists.
15. Be willing to change.

Adapted from guidelines created by Dr. Susan M. Shaw
Oregon State University
September 2000