Performing Gender Across Cultures

“Gender is so much the routine ground of everyday activities that questioning its taken-for-granted assumptions…is like thinking about whether the sun will come up… Yet gender, like culture, is a human production that depends on everyone constantly ‘doing gender’.”1

This course explores how different cultures “do gender” by looking closely at our everyday lives, from the language in our text messages to the latest movie we watched to our personal and professional dreams for the future. How are ideas about femininity and masculinity being constructed in the magazines we skim, the websites we browse, the music we hear, and how do these gender concepts shape our lives? We will track our daily observations in weekly blogs, while reading what scholars have written about the huge cultural diversity regarding gender ideals and the definitions of masculinity and femininity across our planet. Each student will choose a particular area of interest, (such as politics, health, fashion, music, etc.) and learn to argue and support a deeper analysis in a multi-drafted research project. We then will collaborate on a class script based upon these projects and personal blogs, to be performed for the DKU community. Writing will become a safe space to question our gender assumptions and offer our original perspectives in the context of other scholars Ensemble performance becomes a way to make our discoveries public. No previous performance experience is necessary and no one is required to perform, as many backstage roles are needed as well.

Course Goals / Objectives

• Developing the power of close reading, deep listening, and keen observation of everyday life.
• Question assumptions and traditions. Consider multiple cultural perspectives on complex issues.
• Develop original ideas and consider actual evidence to support your ideas.
• Explore your experience and perspectives in the context of other cultures, writers and thinkers.
• Express your idea through writing and multi-media performance. Increase your confidence speaking publically.
• Learn to negotiate creative collaboration.

Required Text(s)/Resources


Additional Materials

A small notebook, smart phone or I pad is needed for field notes. A larger notebook or laptop is recommended for in-class writing.

Writing Assignments

- Personal Essay on “Gender in my Family and Childhood” – Approximately 300-600 words.
- Class Blog weekly entries (approximately 200 words): Readings Reactions and observations on gender issues on campus, in Kushan, in China, in other countries, in media, theater, music, and film, on the Web, etc.
- Individual Research and Writing project – 3 drafts – Final Draft Approximately 2000 words – You may choose any area of study and one specific culture in which to explore ways gender is “performed.” For example, if you are interested in the recent racial policies in South Africa, you could analyze the gendered language of a recent political speech on the subject Or you could analyze a music video of a favorite singer from China or the US or Russia or anywhere!
- Research Project Presentation: after your first draft you will present your topic to the class in an innovative, creative way (not reading from text.)
- Monologue or scene: You will adapt any of your writing for class into dramatic form: either monologue or scene.
- Class Performance Collaboration – Rehearsal and performance – Taking excerpts of your personal and research projects we will write, organize, rehearse, and perform a theatrical, multi-media piece on “Gender Across Cultures.”
- In-class writing exercises, performance and production workshops.

Assessment Information / Grading Procedures

- 1/3 Individual Research Project & Presentation
- 1/3 Blogs, Personal Essay, Reading Responses, and Class Participation
- 1/3 Collaborative Performance Piece & Monologue

Diversity and Intercultural Learning (see Principles of DKU Liberal Arts Education)

This course begins with a personal essay and discussion exploring how gender ideals, rules, or restrictions have affected you and your family/friends to kick off our examination of the diverse ideas and practices different cultures hold regarding masculinity and femininity. Once we are comfortable discussing these differences without judgment or prejudice, we can venture into narratives from a wide variety of cultures and discuss some of the extreme differences in gender performances. Our own theatrical production will creatively juxtapose these intercultural explorations.
Course Policies and Guidelines

Attendance

Attendance will be taken every class. It is recommended that no more than one absence be incurred over the course of the semester as much of a student’s grade is based on in-class participation and cannot be made up later. Students are to notify their instructors and their academic deans by means of a Short-Term Illness Notification Form (STINF): [http://trinity.duke.edu/academic-requirements?p=policy-short-term-illness-notification](http://trinity.duke.edu/academic-requirements?p=policy-short-term-illness-notification) when they are temporarily incapacitated and hence are unable to attend class or complete an assignment on time. **More than one short term illness requires a letter from the Dean.** Students absent from class due to observance of a religious holiday are expected to submit a Religious Observance Notification Form to instructors of the courses affected **no later than one week prior to the date of the holiday**

Assignments

All work is due on the specified deadlines. It is important for you to complete and submit your work punctually so the course moves forward as intended. If at any point you have difficulty meeting a deadline, contact me beforehand to discuss the situation. Late work will be handled according to the following guidelines: Writing projects and response papers, excepting emergencies, are subject to late penalties of one letter grade per day late (i.e., A (one day late) → A-; B+ (two days late) → B-) Any work more than 5 days late will not be accepted. In addition to conferences that I will hold during the semester I encourage you to come by my office to discuss particular writing projects, your writing in general, and/or your progress in the course. Feel free to email me any time to set up an appointment.

I highly recommend using e-tutor for help with your drafts. You can make an appointment at [http://twp.duke.edu/writing-studio/appointments](http://twp.duke.edu/writing-studio/appointments)

**Cell phones** may be used ONLY to take photographs on our “gender in the field” trips. Any other use is prohibited and yes, we *can* tell when you are texting under your desk! Laptops will be allowed but used only for in-class writing and and research.

The Duke Community Standard and Plagiarism

Just as you will trust me to structure an intellectually exciting course and supportive creative environment, I also place my trust in you to be honest and uphold what is referred to as The Duke Community Standard: “I will not lie, cheat, or steal in my academic endeavors; I will conduct myself honorably in all my endeavors; and I will act if the Standard is compromised.” **Avoid Plagiarism:** To knowingly present someone else’s work as your own is to plagiarize. When you draw on, quote, or respond to the work of others in your writing—as you will surely do in this course—you need to acknowledge that you are doing so. This is the case whether your sources are published authors, fellow students, teachers, parents, or friends. The penalty for plagiarism is failure of the course in addition to whatever sanctions are determined by the Undergraduate Judicial Board. We will devote an entire class to discussing citation, but since the rules of citation can often be tricky, play it safe and be sure to ask me if you have any questions about how or if to document a certain source, phrase, excerpt, or idea. Here are some websites that may be helpful: [http://library.duke.edu/research/citing/](http://library.duke.edu/research/citing/) & [http://library.duke.edu/research/plagiarism/](http://library.duke.edu/research/plagiarism/)
Course Outline or Schedule

March 2/3: Defining Gender, Video Discussion, Syllabus Overview, and Theater Games: Homework for next class: Read and answer 5 questions from handout on each of the last 3 readings: *RCG in US* pgs 1-12, 55-65, 292-294, 455-460.

March 4/6: Gender Projects and Discussion, Wordpress Blogs, Argument and Evidence, Evaluating Writing: Homework for next class in *RCG in US*: 82-93, 235-237, 426-427, 448-451. Write 1-3 page (double-spaced, 12 font) personal essay on Gender Influence in My Life, Family, and/or Childhood.

Complete Schedule for the next week will be posted each Thursday.

**Elements of Academic Writing**

An *introduction* that should not only draw the reader in but foreshadows or lead them to the argument.

A clearly stated, concise, compelling, and contestable *argument* that should seek to prove a point.

Primary source *evidence* that supports the argument.

A broader *context* that helps the reader understand the argument and evidence.

A *scholarly context* that shows how this argument and its ideas/research build onto, extend/expand, or confront/disprove other writers’ ideas/research.

**Organization** that is reader-friendly and builds the writer’s case logically with fluid transitions from one point to the next.

**Sentence structure and word choice** that clarify your ideas for the reader, offer rich description, and engaging prose.

A *counter-argument* that recognizes any weaknesses in the evidence.

A *conclusion* that indicates or emphasizes the larger significance of the research and argument.

**Elements of the Personal Essay or Creative Writing**

An engaging *Introduction* that pulls the reader in to the project.

An *Intention, Message, or Argument* that may or may not be overtly stated.

A *narrative* or some element of beginning, middle, and end storytelling.

An *organization or form* that reflects and supports the content of the writing.
A clear **Voice** effectively using first, second, or third person.

*Sentence structure and word choice* that reflect and support the content of the writing, as well as elicit an emotional response from the reader.

A **conclusion** brings the writing to a deeper, perhaps hidden, meaning/message.

---

**Questions Writers Ask While Reading**

1) What parts of this project did I find most engaging? Why?

2) What parts bored or confused me? Did I want to skim it?

3) Did the Introduction make me want to read further? Why?

4) Was the argument clearly stated in a sentence? Was it convincing?

5) Did the evidence support the argument? Was it clear? Was there enough or too much?

6) Did the writer place the message in a broader context, perhaps with support from other scholars that made the argument more compelling?

7) Did it need a counter argument?

8) Did the piece evoke an emotional response in me? How or Why?

9) Were the words and sentences fluid, descriptive and clear?

10) Was there a personal style or voice that made the project more effective?

11) Was there a particularly creative approach to the narrative that made the writing effective?