In the first section of the course, we will study some basic concepts, controversies and methods in Women’s Studies research. In the second section, we will discuss students’ presentations of examples of research methods employed in their major areas of interest.

Topics for the first half will include:

1. Differences among Women. How should Women’s Studies research reflect differences among women and take full account of not only gender, but age, class, race, sexual identity, (dis)ability, ethnicity, religion and other aspects of a person’s identity? Is gender a meaningful category of analysis?

2. Ethics. What is involved in the ethical treatment of people (and other living beings,) communities and cultural products during research? What standards of ethics have been developed/adopted by feminist researchers? What ethical controversies should researchers consider and take into account? Can researchers avoid exploitation and appropriation? If so, how? If not, how can they minimize them?

3. Quantitative and Qualitative Methods. Why is there controversy among feminist researchers over the ethics and politics of quantitative versus qualitative methods? What are the strengths and weaknesses of each?

4. Writing with and from One’s Own Experience. Can a feminist researcher use her own experience in creating knowledge without placing herself at the centre of everything she contemplates? What are the ethics of writing and criticism?

5. The Practical Politics of Academia. Caplan’s book presents an overview of academic life for women in Canada. In the seminar, we will also discuss practical strategies for submitting and revising papers, presenting at conferences, publishing, getting recommendations, applying to Ph.D. programmes, job searching, tenure, etc.

6. Work-problems. It is my belief that every person doing creative work encounters work-problems, such as writer’s block, petrifying fear of failure (or success), procrastination, post-partum depression, terror or self-doubt in the face of criticism, and fallow periods in which it seems that the brain has been emptied of all potential. Successful academics rarely speak of their work-problems; their silence tends to isolate students and professors who are having trouble working. What kinds of work-problems typically arise for academics, and for graduate students in particular? How do people cope with and overcome them?
In the second section of the course, students will make critical presentations to the seminar of studies/articles/essays that they particularly admire in their own areas of interest, and the seminar will discuss the methods employed by these examples of research. The purpose will be to help each student begin to find a method for her/her research and to identify and answer the major methodological questions s/he is likely to encounter.

Required Reading:


4. Additional articles of assigned reading will be placed on reserve in the library or supplied by the instructor.

Course Requirements:

All students will be required to write and present to the seminar one short critical essay (5-6 pages at 250 words/page) on exemplary research in their fields of special interest (for 30% of the final mark), to prepare discussion questions for classes in the first section of the course (for 15% of the final mark), and to attend class regularly and participate (for 10% of the final mark). Students will also be required to write a 15-20 page (at 250 words/page) essay discussing the major methodological issues they expect to be involved in the research for their theses (for 45% of the final mark).