What I propose, therefore, is very simple: it is nothing more than to think what we are doing.
—Arendt, *The Human Condition*

Whose sciences? Whose knowledge? The answers to these questions are up to us.

Three themes continue to intrigue and to puzzle: nature, objectivity and authority. --Laslett, Kohlstedt, Longino, and Hammonds, *Gender and Scientific Authority*

The argument that women’s relationship to technology is a contradictory one . . . opens up fresh possibilities for feminist scholarship and action.
—Wajcman, *Feminism Confronts Technology*

**Course Description:**

Responding to Hannah Arendt’s call to “think what we are doing,” “Feminist Critiques of Science and Technology” traces social, political, and cultural issues that have emerged in science and technology studies as a result of feminist examinations of gender, class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and the physical body.

The course begins with a review of selected historical readings intended to counter descriptions of feminist work as linear, unified, pure, and complete, and to
propose, instead, that it is fluid, plural, contradictory, and ongoing. The course then takes up classical and contemporary texts that define scientific and technological knowledge, identify distinctions between the two, and suggest how both have been used to marginalize and silence particular groups, or “types,” of people. The course next turns to an examination of scholars who suggest theoretical frameworks for research that probe the twin dangers of essentialism and determinism and offer more productive ways to think about scientific and technical knowledge, as well as how it might be used. The course concludes with your seminar papers—your answers to the question, “Whose knowledge?” since, as Sandra Harding suggests, the answers “are up to us.”

Course Goals:

• Read feminist texts with the goal of seeing “feminism” as plural, contradictory, and ongoing
• Understand the philosophical foundations informing scientific (episteme) and technical (technē) knowledge
• Appreciate how these distinctions contribute to rhetorics of science and technology, as well as attitudes about “the natural,” “the objective,” and “the authoritative”
• Interrogate the twin dangers of essentialism and technological determinism
• Consider feminist calls for research that critique and counter these definitions and attitudes
• Speculate about how you might—or not—locate yourself as a feminist in your own scholarship, research, and teaching

Course Projects:

Discussion lead
Once during the semester, select a reading from the calendar and prepare to facilitate a discussion of it. The purpose is to give you practice in understanding a text thoroughly enough to help others understand it—that is, to teach.

1. Let me know, as soon as you can, your choice of reading. I’ll post you to the calendar.
2. Decide on what you want people to take away from the discussion—your purpose.
3. Prepare question(s) that advance your purpose and offer pathways into the text. Questions, for instance, might focus on a text’s argument, methods, successes, and shortfalls. They might also take up how a text conforms to, or resists, our emerging and ongoing understandings of feminist scholarship as it intersects with critiques of technology and science.
4. Two days before you facilitate (Sunday, if on Tuesday; Tuesday if on Thursday), email the list the title of the text, your purpose, and the questions.
5. I encourage you to use the technology in the seminar room to supplement your discussion. Ted Talks, YouTube, documentary excerpts, and newspaper and magazine articles can be interesting ways to begin, organize, or conclude a discussion.

**Position paper**

This 5-6-page position paper could grow out of the discussion you lead on the text you choose from our calendar (see “Discussion lead” above). Whatever the case, the purpose of this assignment is to give you practice in close reading, critique, and academic argument, as well as to prepare you to write your seminar paper.

A position paper, or critique, is a careful analysis of an argument to determine what is said, how well the points are made, what assumptions underlie the argument, what issues are overlooked, and what implications can be drawn from such observations.

To move a critique beyond a personal opinion, you need to develop systematic reading practices.

Keeping in mind that a critique involves your asking and coming to grips with the particular questions raised by a particular piece, following are seven broad questions to guide you:

1. What is the nature of the piece? Who wrote it and what are her/his qualifications? Why was the piece written?
2. What is the significance of the piece? What relation does it bear to other material on the same subject?
3. What are the objectives? What material is presented to achieve the objectives? How well are the objectives achieved?
4. What is the method of the piece?
5. What is the appeal—or lack of appeal? What are its most striking or illuminating qualities? What are its shortfalls?
6. What assumptions underlie the piece? Are they explicit or implicit? What biases pervade the piece? Are they obvious or do they lurk behind objectivity or neutrality?
7. How do the assumptions and biases affect the argument? How do the author’s assumptions compare with your own assumptions? Do your knowledge and experience allow you to support the author’s position? How would you assess the author’s judgments and conclusions?

**Seminar paper or research proposal**

You are encouraged to advance your own scholarly interests and research agendas, which include writing a seminar paper or research proposal in light of feminist epistemologies and/or research methodologies (10-12 pages). A statement of topic and purpose, an outline, and a working bibliography are also required.
Participation, attendance, and late work:
The success of this seminar depends on careful preparation and engaged participation. Attendance is expected. In case of emergency or unforeseen conflict, or if you know in advance that you must miss a class, let me know as soon as possible. I will not accept late or incomplete work.

Grading Criteria

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<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Discussion lead</td>
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<td>Position paper</td>
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<td>Seminar paper</td>
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<td>Participation</td>
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MTU’s Policy on Discrimination and Harassment:
MTU complies with all federal and state laws and regulations regarding discrimination, including the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. If you have a disability and need reasonable accommodation for equal access to education and services at MTU, please call Dr. Bonnie Gorman, Dean of Students (7.2212). For other concerns about discrimination, you may contact Dr. Jill Hodges, Director, Office of Institutional Equity (7.3310), your advisor, or your department chair.

Safe Place:
I am a member of Safe Place. Its mission statement: "The GLBT Safe Place Program strives to reduce homophobia and heterosexism on Michigan Tech’s campus. Through education, advocacy, and awareness, the program contributes to an open campus climate that is safe and accepting to all members of the University community.”