UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA, RENO,
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
Spring 2014

Course Number/Title: SW467: Women: Biographies and Issues
Instructor: Susan Chandler, MSW, PhD
Contact Information: 682-8718, chandler@unr.edu
Office Hours: By appointment
Day and Time: Wednesdays, 4:00-6:45
Location: FH207
Credits: 3 credits

Course Description
SW467 uses narrative to explore the relationship between women’s personal biographies and the social, historic, and economic context of their lives. To this end we enter—via poetry, art, literature, film, music, and personal narrative—the lives of a wide range of women, both US and international, whose stories help us explore issues of poverty, war, health, migration, religion, and sexual orientation. We pay particular attention to women (and men) who—in Marge Piercy’s words—“strain in the mud and the muck to move things forward” and use their lives to struggle for justice and dignity. We also explore narrative—the telling and hearing of stories—as a practice tool for social workers, psychologists, counselors, and others; and as a tool for finding our common humanity and the strengths we need to heal ourselves and together build a better world. A major focus of the course is the development of students’ own narratives, especially during the final assignment, “The Dinner Party,” which is based on Judy Chicago’s historic art installation of the same name.

Context
SW467 is an upper-level capstone and diversity course which also serves as a social work elective. Capstone courses, which are limited to 35 students, are “intensive experiences in critical analysis, designed to broaden students’ perspectives beyond their culture or discipline and provide an opportunity for integration of previous courses in the major and in the core curriculum.” They require students to examine complex issues in substantial pieces of writing. Diversity courses, which also include a rigorous writing requirement, must have as their central focus or theme (not as a peripheral interest) a topic pertaining to non-western culture or to excluded groups within western culture.

Student Learning Outcomes
By the conclusion of this class, students will:
- Analyze the centrality of gender in order to map women’s consciousness, illuminate women’s experience, and explore women’s culture;
- Articulate a wide range of women’s (and men’s) experience across class, race, religion, age, country of origin, immigration status, ability and disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and political belief;
• Analyze how women’s experience has been socially constructed;
• Identify women who have contributed to human progress through their work as social workers, activists, writers, artists, scientists, etc.
• Articulate how narrative can be used in therapy, group work, and social movements, particularly in relation to gender.

Course Policies and Requirements

- **Disabilities**: Students who have documented disabilities that may affect their learning or performance in this class should contact the UNR Disability Services Office (Thompson Student Services Building, Suite 100; (775) 784-6000; mzabel@unr.edu). The instructor will make those accommodations that are requested in writing by the aforementioned office.

- **Academic Success Services**: Your student fees cover usage of the Math Center (784-4433 or www.unr.edu/mathcenter/), Tutoring Center (784-6801 or www.unr.edu/tutoring/), and University Writing Center (784-6030 or www.unr.edu/writing_center). These centers support your classroom learning; it is your responsibility to take advantage of their services. Keep in mind that seeking help outside of class is the sign of a responsible and successful student.

- **UNR Counseling Services**: helps students make the most of their university experience, both personally and academically. It is the primary facility on campus for addressing personal, psychological, and mental health and substance abuse treatment needs of both undergraduate and graduate students. The goal in counseling is to help students overcome difficulties they may encounter during their educational experience. For more information visit: http://www.unr.edu/counseling or call (775) 784-4648.

- **Academic Dishonesty**: “Cheating, plagiarism or otherwise obtaining grades under false pretenses” constitute academic dishonesty according to the code of this university. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated and penalties can include canceling a student’s enrollment without a grade, giving an F for the course, or giving an F for the assignment. For more details, see the UNR General Catalog.

- **Audio or Video Recordings**: Surreptitious or covert video-taping of class or unauthorized audio recording of class is prohibited by law and by Board of Regents’ policy. This class may be videotaped or audio recorded only with the written permission of the instructor. In order to accommodate students with disabilities, some students may have been given permission to record class lectures and discussions. Therefore, students should understand that their comments during class may be recorded.

### SW467: Women’s Narratives

#### Course Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dec 30</td>
<td>Introductions Class Overview</td>
<td></td>
<td>Documentary: The People Speak</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Text</td>
<td>Assignments</td>
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<td>Jan 1</td>
<td>No Class. Happy New Year.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan 6</td>
<td>Childhood and Adolescence, Boys’ Lives</td>
<td>W. Pollack, <em>Real Boys Voices</em></td>
<td>Guest Panel: Growing up male in the foster care system</td>
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<td>Jan 7</td>
<td>International Perspectives</td>
<td>Kristof &amp; WuDunn, <em>Half the Sky</em>, Introduction, Chapters 1-5 and Chapters 6, 13, and 14</td>
<td>Written Asst 3: Kristof &amp; WuDunn</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan 8</td>
<td>International Perspectives</td>
<td></td>
<td>Documentary: <em>When the Bough Breaks</em> (from the series, <em>Unnatural Causes</em>)</td>
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<td>Jan 13</td>
<td>Adulthood: Work, cont’d</td>
<td>Chandler &amp; Jones, Chapters 6-7 and Chapter 10</td>
<td>Book Report Documentary: <em>One Day Longer</em></td>
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<td>Jan 14</td>
<td>Adulthood: War and Peace</td>
<td>T. O’Brien, <em>The Things They Carried</em></td>
<td>Written Assignment 5: War Documentary: <em>Regret to Inform</em></td>
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<td>Jan 15</td>
<td>The Dinner Party: Student Presentations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan 16</td>
<td>The Dinner Party: Student Presentations</td>
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Assignments and Evaluation

Class attendance and participation (10 points):
Collectively we bring a rich body of experience, knowledge, intellectual energy, and ability to the course, and through dialogue will create learning that no one of us could achieve on our own. The readings are an important basis of class participation and each class meeting students will be asked to discuss them.

Written Assignment 1: Prologue—(Due Dec 31)
15 points. A 3-4 page paper, graded on a pass/fail basis. Please bring an extra copy to share. Read Ueland, *If You Want to Write*, and **FOUR** of the six short readings for week 2 (Olsen, Cisneros, Sears, Yezierska, Mandava, Williams). Listen closely to the women – imagine them at your kitchen table – as they talk about *themselves* (personal biography) and the *world in which they live* (social context). Choose a passage in one (**only one**) of the stories that moves you or strikes you as particularly important. Identify it and write about something in your own life that is related to that passage. Be sure to include the social context. Remember Ueland’s conviction that “everyone is talented, original and has something important to say.” Use her advice, “Be careless, Reckless! Be a Lion! Be a Pirate! when you write.”

STUDENTS SHOULD COMPLETE THREE OF THE FOLLOWING FIVE ASSIGNMENTS:

*Written Assignment 2: Childhood (Due Jan 2)
15 points. A 3-4 page paper, graded on a regular basis. Re-read Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*. Using it as inspiration, draw a picture in words of one of the houses and/or neighborhoods you lived in as a child. Be sure to include information about the times and about the race and social and economic status of your family and neighbors. Let us know how as a girl or boy in that home and neighborhood you learned about gender.

*Written Assignment 3: Kristof & WuDunn (Due Jan 7)
15 points, a 3-4 page paper, graded on a regular basis. Read Kristof & WuDunn, *Half the Sky*. Choose two programs that Kristof and WuDunn discuss in Half the Sky (your favorites). Using the internet and other sources find out all you can about them. Where are they located? What problems do they address? Who do they serve and how? Present all this in as lively a manner as you can, using pictures, figures, research, etc. (one page per program). Then in a final two pages, imagine what you might do to lend your hand. Let your heart open and your imagination soar.

*Written Assignment 4: Adulthood—Work (Due Jan 9)
5 points. A 3-4 page paper, graded on a regular basis. Read Chandler & Jones, *Casino Women*, and complete one of the following papers:
- Imagine a conversation between a young social worker and a Nevada woman casino worker. Taking the voice of the woman casino worker, tell the social worker the realities of your life; what motivates you; and if there are ways that the profession or s/he as a social worker might be helpful. Be very specific in your description of your work and life situation. Be creative and imaginative. Bring the characters alive. OR
- Drawing on *Casino Women*, describe your or your family’s experience with casino work.
*Written Assignment 5: Adulthood—War (Due Jan 14)
15 points. A 3-4 page paper, graded on a regular basis. Read Pollack and O’Brien. Pollack describes how boys grow up with all-too-few opportunities to express or talk about their feelings of love, fear, etc. – especially if those feelings run counter to what the society labels manly. Tim O’Brien in a painful essay remembers how young men “carry things” in order to deal with the terrors of war. Using the readings and your own or others’ experience, explore your thoughts re boys’ and young men’s experience in this regard.

*Written Assignment 6: Book Report (Due Jan 13)
15 points, a 3-4 page paper, graded on a regular basis. There are many wonderful books that contain women’s narratives—both fiction and non-fiction. You may want to read one of them (I will provide some suggestions in class). Imagine that you are speaking to a friend and write an engaging account of what you learned from the book and how it impacted your life.

The Dinner Party
30 points. The Dinner Party project is inspired by Judy Chicago’s Dinner Party, an example of feminist art that integrates personal biography and social history. This installation created by the artist and a collective of women is a tribute to 1,038 women who over the course of history have contributed to the recognition, validation, and well-being of women. This tribute took the form of a grand (both in size and in spirit) dinner party. Its main focus was a massive dinner table with 39 individualized place settings each created to honor a particular woman, significant for her historic, cultural, or literary achievements. The table itself was located on the Heritage Floor on which were written the names of an additional 999 women. The Dinner Party was first exhibited in the San Francisco Museum in 1975 and attracted the largest number of visitors in the Museum’s history. The Dinner Party is noteworthy not only for its monumental tribute to women, but for the controversy it has generated. It is considered a major contribution to 20th century women’s art and now has found a permanent home in the Brooklyn Museum of Art.

Our Dinner Party Project will be developed over the course of the semester and will culminate in presentations and a real Dinner Party. Each student will create an individualized place setting which represents her/his personal biography in its social context, and present her/his place setting to the class on Jan 14, 15, and 16 in 15-minute presentations. We will also celebrate those days with food and music from our own traditions (class members will bring food on a day that they are not presenting).

Details and guidelines for the Dinner Party Project will be addressed as the project develops. Class discussion about the project will be on-going.

Alternate Assignment: Community Event/Speaker (15 points)
Occasionally students have the opportunity to participate in events or lectures related to the topics of the class. You may substitute one of these events with prior consent of the instructor for assignments 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6. Please turn in a 1-2 page reflection on the event. I will regularly announce such events/lectures in class; students are encouraged to bring in announcements as well.

SW467: Women’s Narratives
Reading List

(Listed in the order in which the readings appear in the syllabus)


Distribution of grades:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>94-100</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-93.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83-86.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80-82.9</td>
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<tr>
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<td>70-72.9</td>
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<tr>
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<td>67-69.9</td>
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<td>D</td>
<td>63-66.9</td>
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