

Department: History/ Womens Studies

CourseNo: 1203/1121 [121]

Credits: 3

Title: Women in History

Contact: Nancy Shoemaker

Content Area: CA1-Arts and Humanities

Diversity: CA4 International

Catalog Copy: HIST 121. Women in History. Either semester. Three credits. The historical roots of challenges faced by contemporary women as revealed in the Western and/or non-Western experience: the political, economic, legal, religious, intellectual, and family life of women.

Course Information: a. This course provides students with the opportunity to study the experience of women in specific historical settings, whether Western and/or non-Western. Through a combination of lectures and discussions, it will examine both how and why women's lives have changed over time as well as male--and female--attitudes and assumptions about women. It will focus on the position and roles of women in society from many vantage points: law and politics, the economy, the family, education, religion, and morality. Though the specific time frame may vary somewhat depending on the instructor, the course will focus on women's history from ancient times to the modern era.

b. Requirements will vary somewhat by instructor but will usually consist of five books (a primary source reader, monographs, memoirs or letters, plays or novels, and a course packet of articles). Written assignments will consist of a quiz, a midterm and a final exam, both with short answer and essay questions, as well as 6-8 additional pages of writing in either a single essay or shorter essay assignments.

c. Topics will vary somewhat by instructor but will include an examination of women in given historical contexts: for example, lives of women in various classical civilizations and formation of attitudes/assumptions about women's subordination and inferiority; lives of women in pre-modern

societies, including the role of religion, politics, and economy in shaping gender ideologies; continuity and change in attitudes towards women under the impact of historical shifts in the pre-modern and early modern eras; impact of the Enlightenment and French Revolution on issues of women's equality, status, and function; impact of industrialization; impact of Western colonialism and ideas of gender, race, and empire in non-Western societies; growth of feminism and movements for the emancipation of women in 19th and 20th century Western and/or non-Western societies.

Meets Goals of Gen Ed: (1) Through class discussions of the course's primary and secondary readings, and through their essay writing, students will develop and practice skills to help them become more articulate. They will practice how to construct an argument, use evidence persuasively and more generally learn to communicate effectively, both orally and in writing.

(2) The course readings and lectures cover diverse political, social, economic, and cultural issues looked at from a variety of perspectives and forms of presentation (contemporary memoirs and letters, law and medicine, philosophy and theology, visual images, fiction, documents from the time period representing different points of view, etc.).

(3) Throughout the course, students will encounter a variety of informational sources and will learn to read critically as well as in other ways evaluate the reliability, inherent prejudices and purposes in and behind the information.

(4) In dealing with women's history, the course addresses throughout a key issue of moral sensitivity: attitudes and assumptions about female subordination and inferiority, how they influenced the shape of women's lives, and how these ideas have been challenged. In addition, the course frequently deals with the morally sensitive issue of how various peoples have treated foreigners and colonized people.

(5) By focusing on women's position, roles, and opportunities across time and place, the course offers students material with which to compare women's lives in the past with their lives today and thereby enhance their understanding of our own era and society. Students will be better able to compare their own perspectives about women with those of past societies and/or other cultures.

(6) By studying the history of women over a span of centuries, students will be exposed to diverse attitudes and assumptions about women as well as to diverse cultures, values, and experiences.

(7) This course will give students knowledge about the past, but even more importantly, it intends to help acquaint them with the lifelong process of acquiring new knowledge. They learn to ask questions, refine questions, seek outside sources that can provide answers to the questions, evaluate the outside information, and then develop yet more questions.

CA1 Criteria: This course satisfies activities #1 and #2. This course encompasses a broad-ranging investigation into the lives of women across a variety of eras and societies. It analyzes attitudes and assumptions about women over time by both men and women, as well as their changing roles and position in societies over time. It also addresses activity #2 because in order to understand social attitudes

and assumptions about women, we need to look at their foundations in philosophy and political theory. Throughout the course students become familiar with some of the philosophical and political theories of Western thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, St. Paul, St. Thomas Aquinas, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Mary Wollstonecraft, etc., and/or with the philosophical and religious traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam.

CA4 Criteria: (1) Traditionally men have been the primary record-keepers of civilization. They have largely determined what was important in their societies and what should be remembered by later generations, in most cases ignoring the activities and accomplishments of women. This course broadens our understanding of human experience by focusing on the varied experiences of women across time and place, and on the diverse perceptions about them and their place in society.

(2) The course emphasizes that social structures are cultural creations. It does this by its recurring examination of the connections between a society's ideas about women and its broader values and the roles which women play politically, economically, socially, and culturally.

(3) In most societies women have at least in theory been generally viewed as subordinate to men, if not openly inferior. The course examines the similarities of condition that exist among women of all classes in all societies even as it recognizes the differences as well.

(4) Students develop sensitivity to issues involving human rights because throughout the course they learn about women's lack of rights across time and place. They also focus on women's efforts, through the growth of feminism in the 19th and 20th centuries, to win greater social, political, and economic rights. They learn to understand the initiatives taken for women's liberation. Students develop sensitivity to issues involving not only gender rights but also those of colonized peoples.

(5) Throughout the course, students develop an awareness of the dynamics of social, political, and economic power as they study women's roles and position in society. Changing social, political, and economic conditions affected opportunities for women, at times worsening their opportunities and at other times increasing them.

International: The course meets criteria #2 because of the emphasis on women's lives changing over time and place. The course shows both how some cultural attitudes and assumptions have remained in force in Western and non-Western civilization but also how a number of social and political transformations have also occurred affecting women's lives. The course also meets criteria #1 when it focuses on either European or Indian civilization because of its emphases on issues of diversity/multiculturalism outside the United States.

Role of Grad Students: Advanced graduate students (ABD) specializing in Women's History may serve as instructors of the course, and if so would fall under the supervision of the History Department's Teaching Officer, which is a rotating position for one member of the department's Graduate Committee.

Supplemental Information: HIST 121 is an existing course, which is in the process of being cross-listed. History and Women's Studies have both approved the cross-listing, but CLAS C&C does not meet until Sept. 21 and GEOC course proposals are due Sept. 20. As soon as CLAS C&C approves the cross-listing, Nancy Shoemaker will notify GEOC. At a minimum, we would like HIST 121 to go ahead, and if GEOC could please also consider the pending WS1** since that will likely be approved by CLAS C&C sometime in October.