WOMEN'S, GENDER, AND SEXUALITY STUDIES

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Genders and sexualities are powerful organizing forces: they shape identities and institutions, nations and economies, cultures and political systems. Careful study of gender and sexuality thus explains crucial aspects of our everyday lives on both intimate and global scales. Scholarship in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies is interdisciplinary and wide ranging, drawing on history, literature, cultural studies, social sciences, and natural science to study genders and sexualities as they intersect with race, ethnicity, class, nationality, transnational processes, disability, and religion.

Students majoring in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies take a series of core courses, develop an individual area of concentration, and write a yearlong or single-term senior essay. The program encourages work that is interdisciplinary, intersectonal, international, and transnational. Individual concentrations evolve along with students' intellectual growth and academic expertise. Recent examples of concentrations include literature and queer aesthetics; transnational feminist practices; the intellectual history of civil rights activism; AIDS health policies; gender, religion, and international NGOs; women's health; food, sexuality, and lesbian community; and gender and sexuality in early education.

REQUIREMENTS OF THE MAJOR

The major for the Class of 2020

With approval from the director of undergraduate studies (DUS), the following changes to the requirements of the major may be fulfilled by students who declared their major under previous requirements.

The major for the Class of 2021 and subsequent classes

Twelve term courses are required and this major may be taken either as a primary major or as one of two majors. Requirements include two intermediate courses selected from WGSS 205, 206, 207, or 340. Majors are strongly encouraged to take these intermediate courses during their first two years. The major also requires two methodology courses, five courses in an area of concentration, the junior research seminar (WGSS 398), and a two-course senior requirement. The area of concentration consists of at least five courses, the majority of which should be drawn from program offerings. Substitutions to the major requirements may be made only with the written permission of the DUS.

Methodology courses

Given its interdisciplinary nature, Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies necessarily relies on a wide range of methodologies: literary criticism, ethnography, visual analysis, historiography, and quantitative data analysis, among others. Each student is expected to acquire competence in at least two methodologies relevant to their own concentration and planned senior essay. Students are advised to take the first of these courses during their first two years and to complete the two-course methods requirement in the junior year, in preparation for the senior essay.

Junior research seminar

All students in the major must take WGSS 398, Junior Research Seminar, which provides majors opportunity to examine, synthesize and apply the interdisciplinary theory and methods to which they have been exposed while completing the intermediate course sequence and methodology requirement. (Individualized alternatives are found for students who study abroad during the junior year.)

SENIOR REQUIREMENT

The yearlong senior essay

The two-term senior sequence consists of WGSS 490, Senior Colloquium, in which students begin researching and writing a senior essay, followed by WGSS 491, Senior Essay, in which students complete the essay. The senior essay is developed and written under the guidance and supervision of a WGSS-affiliated faculty member with expertise in the area of concentration. Students are expected to meet with their essay advisers on a regular basis.

The single-term senior essay

Majors may opt to complete the senior essay requirement in an approved upper-level WGSS seminar in the fall or spring term, with the approval of the instructor, by writing a senior essay of twenty-five to forty-five pages in lieu of the course's normal writing requirements. Students who choose the single-term senior essay take one additional WGSS course of their choosing to fulfill the twelve-term-course requirement.

REQUIREMENTS OF THE MAJOR

Prerequisites

None

Number of courses

12 term courses (incl senior requirement)

Specific courses required

WGSS 398

Distribution of courses

2 intermediate courses; 2 methodology courses; 5 electives in area of concentration

Senior requirement

Senior colloquium and senior essay (WGSS 490, 491); or single-term senior essay in an upper-level seminar and one additional elective

FACULTY ASSOCIATED WITH THE PROGRAM OF WOMEN’S, GENDER, AND SEXUALITY STUDIES

Professors

Roderick Ferguson (Chair, Spring), Inderpal Grewal (American Studies), Margaret Homans (Chair, Fall) (English), Marianne LaFrance (Psychology), Laura Wexler (American Studies), Ana Ramos-Zayas (American Studies, Ethnicity, Race & Migration)

Associate Professors

Joseph Fischel, Susan Stryker (Visiting)
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This seminar engages cultural analyses of embodiment, its pleasures—and by extension its pains—to interrogate sex, sexuality, and desires are produced and discourses incited, and how the particular moralization of economic behavior has implications for a range of issues including reproductive justice, definitions of kinship, sexual liberation movements, and contemporary states of war and emergency. Thinking of sexuality as a field of power that is predicated on notions of normality and abnormality enables us to see what other “undesirable” subjects are produced under conditions of neoliberal capitalist modernity with whom sexual others are always in kinship. Enrollment limited to first-year students. Preregistration required; see under First-Year Seminar Program.

First-Year Seminars

* WGSS 030a, Neoliberalism and Sexuality Evren Savci

Sexuality is often imagined as a private and intimate affair, experienced individually, marked by personal histories and preferences. This course argues otherwise. Specifically, we consider the intersections between the current dominant political economic mode, referred to as neoliberal capitalism, and sexuality as a field of power. We analyze how subjectivities are formed under this current system, how desires are produced and discourses incited, and how the particular moralization of economic behavior has implications for a range of issues including reproductive justice, definitions of kinship, sexual liberation movements, and contemporary states of war and emergency. Thinking of sexuality as a field of power that is predicated on notions of normality and abnormality enables us to see what other “undesirable” subjects are produced under conditions of neoliberal capitalist modernity with whom sexual others are always in kinship. Enrollment limited to first-year students. Preregistration required; see under First-Year Seminar Program.

* WGSS 032b, History of Sexuality Maria Trumpler

Exploration of scientific and medical writings on sexuality over the past century. Focus on the tension between nature and culture in shaping theories, the construction of heterosexuality and homosexuality, the role of scientific studies in moral discourse, and the rise of sexology as a scientific discipline. Enrollment limited to first-year students. Preregistration required; see under First-Year Seminar Program.

Gateway Courses

* WGSS 222b / AMST 206b / ER&M 221b, Introduction to Critical Refugee Studies Quan Tran

Reconfiguring refugees as fluid subjects and sites of social, political, and cultural critiques. Departing from dominant understandings of refugees as victims, consideration instead of refugees as complex historical actors, made visible through processes of colonization, imperialism, war, displacement, state violence, and globalization, as well as ethical, social, legal, and political transformations. Focus on second-half of the twentieth century.

Intermediate Courses

* WGSS 205a, Bodies and Pleasures, Sex and Genders Joseph Fischel

This seminar engages cultural analyses of embodiment, its pleasures—and by extension its pains—to interrogate sex, sexuality, and gender as analytical categories. Its aim is to critically evaluate formative concepts and theories that have been subject to debates within gender studies, psychoanalysis, philosophy, anthropology, critical race studies, and history. Readings by Freud, Foucault, Berlant, Butler, Rubin, and others help explain how terms like “women” and “men,” “femininity” and “masculinity,” as well as “homosexuality” and “heterosexuality,” “gender” and “transgender” have structured people’s experiences and their perceptions of their bodies. The potential our bodies have for “hanging on to ourselves” occupies a central position within scholarly canons, revealing also how these canons are always already imbricated in racialized hierarchies.
* WGSS 206b, Transnational Approaches to Gender & Sexuality  Evren Savci
Examination of transnational debates about gender and sexuality as they unfold in specific contexts. Gender as a category that can or cannot travel; feminist critiques of liberal rights paradigms; globalization of particular models of gender/queer advocacy; the role of NGOs in global debates about gender and sexuality.  WR

WGSS 207b, Gender, Justice, Power, Institutions  Joseph Fischel
Examination of how inequalities based on gender, race, caste, class, sexuality as well as a host of other identities are embedded in institutions that make up our social world. From the family and the home to the workplace, from the University, and the Corporation, to the Military and Media, we track how inequalities emerge and are sustained by power and institutional structures. We also see how they are challenged and what sorts of instruments are needed to challenge them. In particular, we focus on sexual politics and sexual violence as a key issue to understanding the gendered workings of institutions, in order to examine structures that sustain inequality. Through the semester, we hope to consider many domains of life—bedrooms and boardrooms, international borders and feminist movements—to understand the stubborn and sticky forms and hierarchies of power that are challenged and contested by activists, scholars, and communities.  TR

* WGSS 340a / ENGL 291a, Feminist and Queer Theory  Evren Savci
Historical survey of feminist and queer theory from the Enlightenment to the present, with readings from key British, French, and American works. Focus on the foundations and development of contemporary theory. Shared intellectual origins and concepts, as well as divergences and conflicts, among different ways of approaching gender and sexuality.  WR, HU

Junior Seminars

* WGSS 398a, Junior Research Seminar  Andrew Dowe
An interdisciplinary approach to studying gender and sexuality. Exploration of a range of relevant theoretical frameworks and methodologies. Prepares students for the senior essay.  WR, SO

Senior Courses

* WGSS 490a or b, The Senior Colloquium  Andrew Dowe
A research seminar taken during the senior year. Students with diverse research interests and experience discuss common problems and tactics in doing independent research.

* WGSS 491a or b, The Senior Essay  Andrew Dowe
Independent research on, and writing of, the senior essay.

Electives

* WGSS 033a / HIST 033a, Fashion in London and Paris, 1750 to the Present  Becky Coneken
Introduction to the history of Western fashion from the mid-eighteenth century to the present, with a focus on Paris and London. Approaches, methods, and theories scholars have historically employed to study fashion and dress. Enrollment limited to first-year students. Preregistration required; see under First-Year Seminar Program.  WR, HU

* WGSS 171b / ENGL 202b / LITR 176b, Medieval Women Writers and Readers  Jessica Brantley
This course explores writings by and for women in medieval Britain, with attention to questions of authorship, authority, and audience. Readings include the Lais of Marie de France, Ancrene Wisse, The Life of Christina of Markyate, the Showings of Julian of Norwich, The Book of Margery Kempe, the Digby Mary Magdalene play, and the Paston letters.  WR, HU

WGSS 207b, Gender, Justice, Power, Institutions  Joseph Fischel
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* WGSS 209a / CLCV 216a / LITR 230a / MGRK 216a, Dionysus in Modernity  George Syrimis
Modernity’s fascination with the myth of Dionysus. Questions of agency, identity and community, and psychological integrity and the modern constitution of the self. Manifestations of Dionysus in literature, anthropology, and music; the Apollonian-Dionysiac dichotomy; twentieth-century variations of these themes in psychoanalysis, surrealism, and magical realism.  HU

WGSS 210a / AFAM 231a / AST 231a / ANTH 211a / WGSS 436, Sex and Gender in the Black Diaspora  Riché Barnes
A critical survey of images, rhetorics, experiences, and practices of gender and sexuality formation of black subjects in Africa, the Caribbean, western Europe, and the United States. Construction of class, nationality, race, color, sexuality, and gender.  SO
* WGSS 220a / PLSC 220a / PLSC S220, Gender Politics Andrea Aldrich
Exploration of theoretical and empirical work in political science to study the relationship between gender and politics in the United States and around the world. Topics include women’s representative in legislative and executive branch politics in democratic regimes; the impact of gender stereotypes on elections and public opinion; conditions that impact the supply and demand of candidates across genders; and the underrepresentation of women in political institutions. WR, SO

* WGSS 245a / FILM 245a / MGRK 218a, Family in Greek Literature and Film George Syrimis
The structure and multiple appropriations of the family unit, with a focus on the Greek tradition. The influence of aesthetic forms, including folk literature; short stories, novels, and film; and of political ideologies such as nationalism, Marxism, and totalitarianism. Issues related to gender, sibling rivalry, dowries and other economic factors, political allegories, feminism, and sexual and social violence both within and beyond the family. WR, TR

* WGSS 251a / ENGL 251a, Experiments in the Novel: The Eighteenth Century Jill Campbell
The course provides an introduction to long English-language novels of the long eighteenth century (1688–1818), the period in which the novel has traditionally been understood to have “risen.” Emphasizing the experimental nature of novel-writing in this early period of its history, the course foregrounds persistent questions about the genre as well as a literary-historical survey: What is the status of fictional characters? How does narrative sequence impart political or moral implications? How do conventions of the novel form shape our experience of gender? What kind of being is a narrator? Likely authors include Aphra Behn, Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, Laurence Sterne, Maria Edgeworth, Jane Austen, Jennifer Egan, Colson Whitehead, and Richard Powers. WR, HU

* WGSS 260a, Food, Identity and Desire Maria Trumpler
Exploration of how food—ingredients, cooking practices, and appetites—can intersect with gender, ethnicity, class, and national origin to produce profound experiences of identity and desire. Sources include memoir, cookbooks, movies, and fiction.

* WGSS 282b / HSAR 282b / HSHM 237b, Renaissance Bodies: Art, Magic, Science Marisa Bass
An introduction to issues surrounding the representation of the body in both art and science, spanning from the late Middle Ages to the seventeenth century, and with a particular focus on the Northern Renaissance. Topics include medicine, reproduction, witchcraft, the gender spectrum, torture, race, disability, desire, dreams, and theories of imagination and invention. Sections and assignments will make ample use of the Yale collections. Previous experience with art history welcome but not required. HU

* WGSS 291b / HIST 287b / RLST 347b / SOCY 331b, Sexual Minorities from Plato to the Enlightenment Igor De Souza
This interdisciplinary course surveys the history of homosexuality from a cross-cultural, comparative perspective. Students study contexts where homosexuality and sodomy were categorized, regulated, and persecuted and examine ancient and medieval constructions of same-sex desire in light of post-modern developments, challenging ideas around what is considered normal and/or natural. Ultimately, we ask: what has changed, and what has remained the same, in the history of homosexuality? What do gays and lesbians today have in common with pre-modern sodomites? Can this history help us ground or rethink our sexual selves and identities? Primary and secondary historical sources, some legal and religious sources, and texts in intellectual history are studied. Among the case studies for the course are ancient attitudes among Jews, early Christians, and Greeks; Christian theologians of the Middle Ages; Renaissance Florence; the Inquisition in Iberia; colonial Latin America; and the Enlightenment’s condemnation of sodomy by Montesquieu and Voltaire, and its defense by Bentham. HU

* WGSS 293b / CLCV 319b / HIST 242Jb / MGRK 300b, The Olympic Games, Ancient and Modern George Syrimis
Introduction to the history of the Olympic Games from antiquity to the present. The mythology of athletic events in ancient Greece and the ritual, political, and social ramifications of the actual competitions. The revival of the modern Olympic movement in 1896, the political investment of the Greek state at the time, and specific games as they illustrate the convergence of athletic cultures and sociopolitical transformations in the twentieth century. HU

* WGSS 316a / LITR 332 / RLST 317a, Sexy, Saintsly and Subdued: Women in Global Medieval Literature Caroline Gruenbaum
This course explores medieval texts by women and about women in the "global" Middle Ages, tracing commonalities and differences through selections from Europe, the Middle East, and East Asia. The course is divided into two categories: "Saints and Warriors" and "Lovers, Mothers and Wives," which are dominant themes in the selected texts despite their religious, lingual and cultural differences. The first part of the course examines the depictions of women (by themselves or others) as saintly, pious figures. Several of these women are martyred for their beliefs or commit violent acts in the name of their faith. The second section confronts women presented as sexualized or objectified, and/or lauded for their feminine attributes. These contradictions allow us to grapple with the complexities of understanding women and femininity in medieval literature, and understanding the separations (if any) between piety, gender and literature. HU

* WGSS 321b / ANTH 321b / MMES 321b, Middle East Gender Studies Marcia Inhorn
The lives of women and men in the contemporary Middle East explored through a series of anthropological studies and documentary films. Competing discourses surrounding gender and politics, and the relation of such discourse to actual practices of everyday life. Feminism, Islamism, activism, and human rights; fertility, family, marriage, and sexuality. SO

* WGSS 347b / HIST 455Jb / HUMS 287b, The Theory and Practice of Resistance Terence Renaud
Exploration of the histories and theories of resistance in the modern world. How liberation movements, guerrillas, and oppressed groups appeal to resistance as an organizational strategy and as moral justification. Readings include Kant, Thoreau, Nietzsche, Luxemburg,
Lenin, Gandhi, Fanon, Arendt, Marcuse, Foucault, A. Lorde, Said, and J. Butler. Themes include antifascism to terrorism; violence to nonviolence, the New Left to Black Lives Matter.  

* WGSS 354a / HIST 101Ja, Women, Gender, and Grassroots Politics in the United States after World War II  Jennifer Klein
American politics and grassroots social movements from 1945 to the present explored through women’s activism and through gender politics more broadly. Ideas about gender identities, gender roles, and family in the shaping of social movements; strategies used on the local, regional, national, and international levels. Connections between organizing and policy, public and private, state and family, and migration, immigration, and empire.  

* WGSS 372b, Theory and Politics of Sexual Consent  Joseph Fischel
Political, legal, and feminist theory and critiques of the concept of sexual consent. Topics such as sex work, nonnormative sex, and sex across age differences explored through film, autobiography, literature, queer commentary, and legal theory. U.S. and Connecticut legal cases regarding sexual violence and assault.  

* WGSS 378b / ANTH 381b, Sex and Global Politics  Graeme Reid

* WGSS 387b, Gender, Sexuality, and Islam  Evren Savci
The use of critical texts that span a wide range of disciplines to examine gender and sexuality in the context of predominantly Muslim countries and cultures, as well as the larger transnational discourses that shape the ways in which Islam is imagined in relationship to gender and sexuality. By putting gender and sexuality at the center of our analysis, we are able to tease out the complex relationships between religion, culture, nation-states, and racialization, and think about how particular constructions of gender and sexuality have been central to the production and reproduction of each of these social structures. A critical knowledge of Orientalism, colonialism, and global inequalities is crucial for a careful and nuanced understanding of the different roles gender and sexuality have played, and continue to play in representations of Islam, and Muslims. This also underlines the current place of Islam not only as a world religion, or a set of beliefs and practices, but also as a "signifier." Students develop a historical understanding of many contemporary discussions around Islam and what gets referred to as "Muslim cultures" and should be able to critically engage with and complicate the terms and issues such as "cultural difference," "women's and LGBT rights," and "modernity/civilization" that are widely and easily deployed in current political and moral discourses around the Middle East and Islam.  

* WGSS 388b / AFAM 340b / AMST 326b / HIST 115Jb, Civil Rights and Women’s Liberation  Lauren Meyer
The dynamic relationship between the civil rights movement and the women’s liberation movement from 1940 to the present. When and how the two movements overlapped, intersected, and diverged. The variety of ways in which African Americans and women campaigned for equal rights. Topics include World War II, freedom summer, black power, the Equal Rights Amendment, feminism, abortion, affirmative action, and gay rights.  

WGSS 405a / EALL 211a / EAST 241a / LITR 174a, Women and Literature in Traditional China  Kang-i Sun Chang
A study of major women writers in traditional China, as well as representations of women by male authors. The power of women’s writing; women and material culture; women in exile; courtesans; Taoist and Buddhist nuns; widow poets; cross-dressing women; the female body and its metaphors; footbinding; notions of love and death; the aesthetics of illness; women and revolution; poetry clubs; the function of memory in women’s literature; problems of gender and genre. All readings in translation; no knowledge of Chinese required. Some Chinese texts provided for students who read Chinese. Formerly CHNS 201.  

* WGSS 408a / AMST 345a / ER&M 409a, Latinx Ethnography  Ana Ramos-Zayas
Consideration of ethnography within the genealogy and intellectual traditions of Latinx Studies. Topics include: questions of knowledge production and epistemological traditions in Latin America and U.S. Latino communities; conceptions of migration, transnationalism, and space; perspectives on “(il)legality” and criminalization; labor, wealth, and class identities; contextual understandings of gender and sexuality; theorizations of affect and intimate lives; and the politics of race and inequality under white liberalism and conservatism in the United States.  

* WGSS 409a / AMST 410a / HIST 166Ja, Asian American Women and Gender, 1830 to the Present  Mary Lui
Asian American women as key historical actors. Gender analysis is used to reexamine themes in Asian American history: immigration, labor, community, cultural representations, political organizing, sexuality, and marriage and family life.  

* WGSS 410b / AFAM 410b / AMST 326b / HSHM 433b, Gender and Science  Deborah Coen
Exploration of the dual potential of the sciences to reinforce received ideas about gender or to challenge existing sexual and racial hierarchies; the rise of the ideas and institutions of the modern sciences as they have reflected and shaped new notions of femininity and masculinity.
WGSS 429a / GLBL 353a / PLSC 427a, Sex, Markets, and Power  Frances Rosenbluth
Consideration of how women's socioeconomic status and political power have varied across time and place. Three analytical lenses are used: biology, markets, and power.  

* WGSS 463a / AMST 462a / ER&M 462a, The Study of Privilege in the Americas  Ana Ramos-Zayas
Examination of inequality, not only through experiences of the poor and marginal, but also through institutions, beliefs, social norms, and everyday practices of the privileged. Topics include: critical examination of key concepts like “studying up,” “elite,” and “privilege,” as well as variations in forms of capital; institutional sites of privilege (elite prep schools, Wall Street); living spaces and social networks (gated communities, private clubs); privilege in intersectional contexts (privilege and race, class, and gender); and everyday practices of intimacy and affect that characterize, solidify, and promote privilege.  

* WGSS 471a or b, Independent Directed Study  Andrew Dowe
For students who wish to explore an aspect of women’s, gender, and sexuality studies not covered by existing courses. The course may be used for research or directed readings and should include one lengthy or several short essays. Students meet with their adviser regularly. To apply for admission, students present a prospectus to the director of undergraduate studies along with a letter of support from the adviser. The prospectus must include a description of the research area, a core bibliography, and the expected sequence and scope of written assignments.