WOMEN’S, GENDER AND SEXUALITY STUDIES (Div II)

Chair: Professor Alison Case


On leave Fall/Spring: Professor V. Ford.

Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies can be defined as the study of how gender is constructed, how it is inflected by differences of race, ethnicity, sexuality, class, and so on, how gender affects the experiences and situations of men and women, and how assumptions about gender influence the construction of knowledge and experience. Scholarship in Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies has brought neglected material into established fields and raised important methodological questions that cross disciplinary boundaries and challenge established intellectual frameworks. The program in Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies thus includes courses from a wide variety of disciplines that focus in a coherent way on gender issues and/or sexuality issues, as well as core courses that acquaint students with the interdisciplinarity of the field.

THE MAJOR

The Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies major encourages students’ exposure to the interdisciplinary character of feminist and sexuality-focused scholarship. In addition, majors are required to gain some knowledge of methods within a field or discipline (3 courses in one of the categories listed below), to appreciate the importance of diversity (racial, sexual, class, ethnic, national, etc.) in scholarship on gender and sexuality, to gain exposure to feminist and/or queer theory, and to pursue work at an advanced level (3 courses at the 300-level).

In order to ensure that students reflect about the paths that they choose through the major, each major will be assigned to an advisor in the spring of the sophomore year. With the advisor, the student will establish a revisable course of study for the following two years. Students interested in declaring a major should contact the Chair of the Program.

Required Courses

The major consists of at least 9 courses. The following are required:

WGSS 101 Introduction to Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies

WGSS 202 Foundations in Sexuality Studies

WGSS 400-level Junior/Senior Seminar in Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies. The seminar explores topics in Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies, and varies from year to year. Majors may take more than one seminar, space permitting.

In addition to these three required courses, students are required to take six electives. In consultation with their major advisor and with approval from the chair, these six elective courses should include:

Courses from at least 3 different disciplinary traditions.

At least 3 courses at the 300-level.

At least 1 course that emphasizes feminist/queer theories and/or methodologies.

At least 1 course that emphasizes a diversity of racial, sexual, religious, and/or cultural identities and practices.

In the final semester of their senior year, all majors will be required to write a reflective intellectual autobiography of their WGSS major, in which they explain how their courses meet the goals of the major, and analyze the relationship among the courses they have taken, the papers they have written, and the research projects undertaken.

THE DEGREE WITH HONORS

Honors in Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies may be granted to majors after an approved candidate completes an honors project, delivers a public presentation of the work, and is awarded honors by the Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies Committee. The honors project may be fall semester (plus winter study) or a year-long project. It may consist of a conventional research thesis of 40-70 pages or of other modes of presentation (e.g., art, music, poetry, theater, fiction). Proposals for non-thesis projects should include evidence of experience and competence in the chosen mode.

A student may become a candidate for honors in Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies after the following criteria are
met:

In April of the junior year, submission and Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies Committee approval of a 4- to 6-page project proposal, in which the ideas, aim, general methodology, and preliminary bibliography for the project are outlined and a faculty advisor is named; prior to submission of this proposal, students must consult with a reference librarian.

At the end of the junior year, cumulative grade point average of 3.5 from courses taken in the major;

In the first week of classes of the senior year, submission and approval by the faculty advisor and second reader of a 5- to 10-page “Plan of Action” (an overview of what has already been completed and a schedule of what needs to be accomplished to finish the project). Where appropriate, students pursuing honors will continue to consult with the second reader over the course of the semester(s).

All honors work, including the public presentation, will be evaluated by the Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies Committee. It will decide on the awarding of honors; the advisor will award the grade(s).

STUDY ABROAD

The Williams College Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies Program encourages potential majors to study abroad in order to enhance their education and gain international perspectives on gender and women’s issues and feminism. There are many excellent study abroad opportunities offering students a variety of possible experiences: among them cultural immersion, field work, intensive language learning, independent study, participation in another educational system. There are several semester-long programs with a specific focus on women and/or gender administered by other U.S. Colleges that would especially enrich the educational experience of our majors:

- Antioch College: Comparative Women’s Studies in Europe fall semester
- Augsburg College, Center for Global Education: Crossing Borders: Gender and Social Change in Mesoamerica fall semester; and Social and Environmental Justice in Latin America spring semester
- School for International Training: The Balkans: Women and Democratization, fall or spring semester
- Jamaica: Gender and Development, fall or spring semester
- Mali: Gender and Development, fall or spring semester
- The Netherlands: Identity, Gender and Sexuality, fall or spring semester

FAQ

Students MUST contact departments/programs BEFORE assuming study away credit will be granted toward the major or concentration.

Can your department or program typically pre-approve courses for major/concentration credit?

Yes, in some cases, if appropriate course information is available in advance (e.g. syllabi and/or course descriptions), though students should be sure to contact the department.

What criteria will typically be used/required to determine whether a student may receive major/concentration credit for a course taken while on study away?

Course title and description, complete syllabus, including readings/assignments, and exams or other written work. Depends on the level for which the student is seeking major credit (200- vs 300-).

Does your department/program place restrictions on the number of major/concentration credits that a student might earn through study away?

No.

Does your department/program place restrictions on the types of courses that can be awarded credit towards your major?

No.

Are there specific major requirements that cannot be fulfilled while on study away?

Yes. 101 and 402 cannot be fulfilled abroad.

Are there specific major requirements in your department/program that students should be particularly aware of when weighing study away options? (Some examples might include a required course that is always taught in one semester, laboratory requirements.)

No.

Give examples in which students thought or assumed that courses taken away would count toward the major or concentration and then learned they wouldn’t:
WGSS 11 (W)  Queer Russia
Crosslistings: RUSS11 / WGSS11 / COMP11

Secondary Crosslisting

A 2013 law banning "homosexual propaganda" represents the latest in a long series of efforts by the Russian state to erase the existence and experience of its LGBTQ citizens. This course will explore Russia's suppressed queer archive from the imperial, Soviet, and post-Soviet eras, focusing on the vibrant literature, art, and film about LGBTQ Russians. We will examine works produced by and about queer Russians in an attempt to understand distinctly Russian notions of gender and sexual identity, as well as how LGBTQ Russians have formed their own identity within the country's evolving gender regime. Our survey will include works of fiction, poetry, visual art, and film from before and after the Bolshevik revolution, Stalinism and its aftermath, and the post-Soviet era. Throughout our discussions, we will work towards an alternative cultural history of Russia that will allow us to determine how and why the country's queer citizens have become the despised Other under Putin. Knowledge of Russian is not required. All readings will be in English, and all films will include English subtitles.

Class Format: afternoons
Requirements/Evaluation: completion of reading and viewing assignments, attendance in class, active participation in discussions, and completion of a collaborative project with other members of the class
Prerequisites: none
Enrollment Limit: 16
Enrollment Preferences: preference to Comparative Literature, Russian, and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies majors
Materials/Lab Fee: $10 plus cost of books

Winter 2019
LEC Section: 01    MTR 1:00 pm - 2:50 pm     Julie A. Cassiday

WGSS 15 (W)  Plato's Symposium and Its Afterlife
Crosslistings: CLAS15 / PHIL15 / WGSS15 / COMP15

Secondary Crosslisting

Plato's Symposium commemorates a gathering held at the home of the poet Agathon of Athens, in 416 BCE, shortly after his first victory in the tragedy contest. The attendees of Agathon's drinking party agree to dedicate their evening to delivering speeches in praise of love (eros/Eros). This dialogue has long been one of Plato's most widely appreciated works and its influence has ranged far beyond the purview of academic philosophy. We will read and analyze the dialogue itself, then turn to an eclectic array of works inspired by the Symposium to study its artistic and philosophical "afterlife."

Class Format: mornings
Requirements/Evaluation: 5-page paper and an in-class presentation of independent research
Prerequisites: none
Enrollment Limit: 8
Enrollment Preferences: preference given to majors or intending majors in Classics, Comparative Literature, WGSS, or Philosophy
Materials/Lab Fee: cost of books

Winter 2019
LEC Section: 01    MTWR 10:00 am - 11:50 am     Amanda R. Wilcox

WGSS 17 (W)  Girl Meets World: Films from 5 Continents
Crosslistings: WGSS17 / PSCI18

Secondary Crosslisting
This course brings together a selection of films that challenge the narrative of girl-meets-boy as the privileged formula for representing the growth and development of young women around the world. Sometimes girl does meet boy, but the challenge that these films put to us is to re-imagine the path to womanhood as mediated by other factors as well: girls' own curiosity and ambition, their resourcefulness in the face of poverty and exploitation, resistance against being gendered in conventional ways, their friendships and romantic ties with one another, and their many creative ways of defining how one becomes a woman. To support our analysis of the films, we will also consider how some transnational feminist movements have responded to the challenges and creative energies of girlhood. Special attention will be given to the difficulty of securing girls' rights through international conventions that implicitly treat all children (ages 0-18) as male, and all women as adults. Films and film-makers will likely be selected from the following countries: Korea, India, Great Britain, Belgium, Senegal, France, Australia, Colombia, Argentina, and the United States. Readings to be completed outside of class time include children's books, young adult fiction, and international human rights documents.

Class Format: afternoons
Requirements/Evaluation: active class participation and either 3 policy memos (3-4 pages each) or one 10-page final paper
Prerequisites: none
Enrollment Limit: 20
Enrollment Preferences: preference to Political Science and WGSS majors
Materials/Lab Fee: cost of books

Winter 2019
LEC Section: 01    MTW 1:00 pm - 3:50 pm     Nimu  Njoya

WGSS 18 (W) "The Transformation of Silence": Exploring Campus Sexual Violence Prevention and Response
Crosslistings: PHLH18 / WGSS18

Primary Crosslisting
Since 2011, student activism and federal guidance of dramatically changed how campuses address sexual violence. This class will explore response to and prevention of sexual violence on college campuses and more broadly, across topics related to gender and sexuality, race, constructs of accountability, and public health and social justice approaches to prevention. Class will be heavily comprised of interactive activities, along with reading, films, and reflective writing. Course will meet 3 days per week for 2 hours. Some outside of class work in the form of film viewing and attendance at talks. Adjunct Instructor Bio: Meg Bossong '05 is the Director of Sexual Assault Prevention and Response. Prior to returning to Williams, she was the Manager of Community Engagement for the Boston Area Rape Crisis Center, where she worked with community stakeholders in education, faith communities, medical and mental health care, law enforcement, and beyond on response and prevention initiatives.

Requirements/Evaluation: a 10-page final paper, along with Glo reflections
Prerequisites: none
Enrollment Limit: 20
Enrollment Preferences: submission of a few sentence description indicating interest level in the course, preference to first years and sophomores
Materials/Lab Fee: none

Winter 2019
LEC Section: 01    MW 10:00 am - 12:50 pm     Meg  Bossong

WGSS 20 (W) Performing Self-Portraiture in the Age of Instagram
Crosslistings: THEA20 / WGSS20 / ARTS20

Secondary Crosslisting
What does it mean to represent your own body? How do we craft compelling performances of self in a social media marketplace that treats our bodies as currency? In this studio course, we look at the lineage of the self-portrait and the role it plays in the creation of our personal mythologies. We will consider the work of Frida Kahlo, Cindy Sherman, Carrie Mae Weems, Jacobly Satterwhite, Kim Kardashian West and others. How have artists, now and in the past, turned the camera on themselves? Is it possible to subvert the gendered and racialized gaze? Students will create their own kinetic self-portraits, exploring forms such as looping video, gifs, stop-motion, and animation. Adjunct Instructor Bio: Kameron Neal is a queer Black video artist and performance-maker based in NYC. His work has been seen and developed at Ars Nova, BAM, La MaMa, New York Theatre Workshop,
WGSS 25 (W) Community Mobilization in Senegal for Public Health and Economic Empowerment

This class will take a group of 6 students to Senegal to learn about successes and challenges in grassroots organizing, with a focus on the interrelated areas of public health--especially HIV and AIDS--women's rights, and economic empowerment, including through cooperatives. We will build on established relationships in Senegal, where the instructor has taken several groups of students since 2006. That country has many lessons to teach, as a majority Muslim culture with a female Prime Minister where women have created and continue to build cooperatively owned enterprises, a West African country that has consistently kept the rate of HIV prevalence under 1%, and a diverse culture with a democratic tradition of tolerance, even celebration of ethnic difference. Our hosts, ACI's Baobab Center, have a strong record of working with visiting scholars and students to teach them local languages and orient them to Senegalese culture, as well as a deep and well-respected history of capacity-building work with local groups working on HIV, public health, women's rights, and LGBTQ issues. We will spend our first week in Dakar, the capital, with students doing homestays with Senegalese families. We will attend Wolof classes and lectures on local issues as well as visiting NGOs. In our second week we will move inland to the town of Kaolack, where we will be hosted by the Association pour la Promotion de la Femme Sénégalaise, a 30-year-old group with an extensive record of empowerment of village women through strategies ranging from small-scale credit to popular education and theater.

Requirements: Before we leave campus, each student will choose a particular focus for the trip, and do preliminary research to inform their visit--including comparative material about the US. Upon our return to campus we will meet to discuss our findings, and students will write 10-page papers drawing upon existing research as well as our conversations and experiences in Senegal.

Class Format: travel

Requirements/Evaluation: 10-page paper

Prerequisites: none; not open to first-year students

Enrollment Limit: 6

Enrollment Preferences: preference will be given to students with skills in French and a demonstrated interest in public health and/or women's economic empowerment

Materials/Lab Fee: $3,892

Attributes: EXPE Experiential Education Courses; TRVL Winter Study Travel Course
Open to upperclass students. Students interested in doing an independent project (99) during Winter Study must make prior arrangements with a faculty sponsor. The student and professor then complete the independent study proposal form available online. The deadline is typically in late September. Proposals are reviewed by the pertinent department and the Winter Study Committee. Students will be notified if their proposal is approved prior to the Winter Study registration period.

**Class Format:** independent study

**Distributions:** (D2)

Winter 2019

IND Section: 01   TBA   Alison A. Case