Course Syllabus

Public Health 582
Women’s Health/Reproductive Health
Fall 2007
Thursday 4:00-6:30pm

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Course Overview
Women’s Health/Reproductive Health is a three credit hour course designed to explore, in an in-depth fashion, ethnographic and cross-cultural approaches to women’s reproductive health issues. In particular, we will explore the gendered, ethnic, culture and class dimensions that underlie the patterning of disease and illness, with special attention to the long-term health effects of racism, poverty, and sexism.

Course Goals
Students in this course will gain broad exposure to a number of women’s reproductive health issues and the interdisciplinary theorizing of feminist, medical social scientists, and public health scholars. Topics highlighted in some of these works include the social construction of social/health problems and the female body; the essentialization of women as reproducers; reproductive health rights and choices; the effects of racism, poverty, sexism, violence, and inhumane conditions on reproductive health; and how women make meaning of their health experiences.

Learning takes place at multiple levels in this course: theoretically and empirically, though the readings we will do for this class and through our class discussions; experientially, through the blog/diaries you will write for this class, through class presentations, as well as through the linkages we draw between our own life experiences and classroom activities. We will use what we learn about women’s reproductive health to critically explore the intersection of academia and reproductive rights activism. We will see that multiple levels of interrogation intersect in providing a better understanding behind the meanings of reproductive health issues for the women and their community, as well as for those in the academy researching and writing about them.

Course Objectives
Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:
• Analyze the reproductive health situation of women in different cultural and national contexts from an interdisciplinary perspective;
• Demonstrate understanding of the interactive nature of gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, class, and sexuality as they pertain to beliefs, behaviors, and outcomes of reproductive health;
• Be able to link global reproductive health issues with local concerns;
- Identify and deconstruct the patriarchal and racist bias in the historical and contemporary construction of medical knowledge and disciplinary areas of inquiry in connection with women’s reproductive health;
- Demonstrate enhanced critical thinking, reading, writing, and oral presentation skills.

Readings will be assigned and made available on the course website.

**Course Format and Requirements**

Given the interdisciplinary nature of women’s studies and public health, and the broad utility of a gendered analysis/consciousness, this course engages a broad range of information sources and presentation modalities, e.g., lecture/discussion, student presentations, interactive group exercises, scholarly texts, film/video, websites, and guest speakers. The course uses the notion of the classroom as a “community of learners” as its foundation. As such, each class member is expected to participate in both learning and teaching as the semester unfolds. This not only assumes pre-preparation, but also active engagement.

**Attendance policy:** Class attendance is imperative for effective class participation. You have registered for this course and I expect you to construct your daily schedules accordingly. As we meet only one time per week, time is precious—please do not miss class!

**Academic honesty:** Academic dishonesty includes but is not limited to submitting work that is not one's own, copying material from websites or blogs, not properly citing resources, and plagiarism. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated and will be dealt with in accordance with UMass policy.

**Cell phone policy:** Please turn your cell phones off during class. Ringing/vibrating cell phone disturb the flow of the class.

**Evaluation and Assessment**

Evaluation of class performance will be based on performance in three areas: active class engagement, blog/diaries, and group presentations. An “A” or evaluation of excellence in the course will be based on an exemplary performance in all of the following course components. Students are expected to read all assignments prior to the class for which they are assigned. This class will be primarily discussion based/seminar format. The course discussions are intended to supplement, not replace, the readings. That is, assigned readings are expected to be read, and at times responded to, despite the possibility that time will not permit us to discuss them all. Class participants may be asked to prepare questions and/or discussion points on aspects of the readings that are particularly interesting or difficult to understand.

**Assignments:** All students are required to complete the following assignments on time. Your final grade will be based on the following percentages as indicated below:

1. Active class engagement 40%
2. Blog/diaries 30%
3. Group presentation 20%
4. Contraception assignment 10%
Most course assignments will be graded on the following letter grade scale:

- A+ = 100
- B+ = 89
- C+ = 79
- D+ = 69
- < 60 = F
- A = 95
- B = 85
- C = 75
- D = 65
- A- = 90
- B- = 80
- C- = 70
- D- = 60

1. **Active class engagement**: Active class engagement comprises 40% of your final grade in the course. As you can see, this component of the course makes up the majority of your grade. Requirements in this area include regular class attendance; reading assigned readings on time and in a critical manner; and active participation in class discussions and group exercises.

2. **Blog/diaries**: Blog entries comprise 30% of your final grade. Over the course of the semester you will be writing blog entries on the course blog ([list course blog address here](#)). Each of you will choose a blog name, which will allow for your virtually anonymous posting on assigned topics. Your blog entries essentially serve as reaction papers to the readings. Make an effort to draw connections between the readings in your blog entries. Blog entries are due online the night before class (Wednesday). I would also like to encourage each of you to respond to others’ blog entries—the blog is a forum for creating a community conversation on the assigned topics.

3. **Group presentation**: A group presentation will count for 20% of your final grade. Over the course of the semester each of you will participate in a group class facilitation, in which you are responsible for presenting a particular day’s readings in order to guide class discussion. Your presentation will be evaluated on the quality and accuracy of its substantive content and the organization and creativity embodied in the form of the presentation. Your presentations should be gender knowledge-based, creative, and interactive (presentations will be assigned after the semester has begun, when I can gauge how many students are registered in this class).

4. **Evaluating methods of contraception assignment**: This assignment will count for 10% of your final grade. I will review this assignment in class; you will receive a handout describing the assignment. Due **October 4th** at the beginning of class.

**Course Outline**
(Subject to modification and revision as the semester unfolds. Readings are listed according to the date they are due to be read.)

**Week 1**

**September 6th**: Introductions
- *Emergent methods in social research*: “The personal is political: Using daily diaries to examine everyday prejudice-related experiences”
- “Getting started with blogs at UMass-Amherst”
- Class activity: Rotating conversation circles
- Assignment: *Sex and gender*: “Evaluating methods of contraception” (due **September 27th** at the beginning of class)
Week 2
September 13th: Introduction to Women’s Health, Reproductive Health
- *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*: “Defining women’s health: A dozen messages from more than 150 ethnographies”
- *Gender and anthropology*: “Discourses of the female body”
- *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*: “Gender, body, biomedicine: How some feminist concerns dragged reproduction to the center of social theory”
- *The Boston women’s health book*: “The politics of women’s health”

Week 3
September 20th: Contraceptives
- *Devices and desires*: “Searching for something better” (the IUD)
- *Examining reproductive technologies*: “Depo-Provera: Old concerns, new risks” and “Quinacrine sterilization in India: Women’s health and medical ethics still at risk”
- *Social Science and Medicine*: “Racial differences in Norplant use in the United States”
- *Off our backs*: “Implanon: A new and improved bullet?”
- *Medical anthropology quarterly*: “The social life of emergency contraception in the United States”
- *Medical Anthropology*: “Contraceptive methods: Do Hispanic adolescents and their family planning care providers think about contraceptive methods the same way?”

Week 4
September 27th: Birth Control as Population Control
**Guest lecture:** Dr. Betsy Hartmann, Hampshire College
- **Contraceptive Methods Assignment Due**
- *Reproductive rights and wrongs*: “Security and survival” and “The Malthusian orthodoxy”
- *Babies, burdens and threats*: “10 reasons to rethink ‘overpopulation’” and “From explosion to implosion: A call for population skepticism” and “Old roots, new shoots: Eugenics of the everyday” and “Population-environment programs: Problematic assumptions and contradictory approaches”
- *Woman’s body, woman’s right*: “Social purity and eugenics” and “Race suicide”
- *Medical apartheid*: “The Black stork: The eugenic control of African American reproduction”

Week 5: Contraceptives, continued
October 4th
- Film: The Pill (90 mins.)
Week 6
October 11th: Women’s reproduction as body politic
- “Hijacking global feminism: Feminists, the Catholic Church, and the family planning debacle in Peru”
- *Wake up little Susie*: “The making of ‘matriarchy’: The persistence of biological explanations for Black single pregnancy”
- *Peace and Change*: “Our women’/Their women’: Symbolic boundaries, territorial markers, and violence in the Balkans”
- Class activity: Groups rotating responding to questions posted around the room

Week 7
October 18th: Valuations of motherhood
Guest lecture: Dr. Kristen Luschen, Hampshire College
- Film: *A Doula’s Story: On the front lines of teen pregnancy* (mins. n/a)
- *Policing the national body*: “‘Better dead than pregnant’: The colonization of Native women’s reproductive health”
- *Off our backs*: “Immigrant rights are women’s rights”
- *Revisioning women, health, and healing*: “Will the ‘real’ mother please stand up?: The logic of eugenics and American National Family Planning”
- *Human Organization*: “A glass half empty: Latina reproduction and public discourse”
- *Sex, self, and society*: “Dubious conceptions: The controversy over teen pregnancy” and “Negotiating Lesbian motherhood: The dialectics of resistance and accommodation”
- *Social Science and Medicine*: “A better way of approaching adolescent pregnancy”
- *Prisoners of a hard life*: Women and their children

Week 8
October 25th: Abortion
- *Feminist anthropology*: “Procreation stories: Reproduction, nurturance, and procreation in life narratives of abortion activists”
- *Pregnancy and power*: “Revitalizing hierarchies: How the aftermath of Roe v. Wade affected fetuses, teenage girls, prisoners, and ordinary women, 1980 to the present”
- *Abortion under attack*: “Sex, unintended pregnancy, and poverty: One woman’s evolution from ‘choice’ to ‘reproductive justice’”
- *Women Images and Realities*: “Abortion in the U.S.: Barriers to Access”
Week 9
November 1st: Menstruation and Menopause: Beginning and End?
Guest lecture: Dr. Lynette Leidy Sievert
- Film: *Period: The end of menstruation?* (54 mins.)
- Feminist frontiers: “Hormonal hurricanes: Menstruation, menopause, and female behavior”
- *Gender and the social construction of illness*: “If a situation is defined as real: Premenstrual syndrome and menopause”
- *The Obstetrician Gynaecologist*: “To menstruate or not?”
- *Examining reproductive technologies*: “Beyond the hype: What you should know about the Seasonale birth control pill”
- *Menopause*: “Introduction”
- *Social Science and Medicine*: “Is there a menopausal syndrome? Menopausal status and symptoms across racial/ethnic groups”

Week 10
November 8th: Breast Feeding
- *Human Organization*: “Infant agency and its implication for breast-feeding promotion in Brazil”
- *Off our backs*: “Globalization and the politics of native breastfeeding”
- *Social Science and Medicine*: “Low-income mothers’ views on breastfeeding”
- *Topic*: “Sucker: Who in God’s name said breast is best?”
- *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*: “Maternal bodies, breast-feeding, and consumer desire in China”
- *Social Science and Medicine*: “Determinants of breastfeeding in the Phillipines: A survival analysis”

Week 11
November 15th: HIV/STIs/HPV
- Film: *Yesterday*
- *Social Science and Medicine*: “Syndemics, sex and the city: Understanding sexually transmitted diseases in social and cultural context”
- *Health Education & Behavior*: “A brief, low-cost, theory-based intervention to promote dual method use by Black and Latina female adolescents: A randomized clinical trial”
- “HPV Vaccine: A Call for Mandatory Vaccination”
- “Personal health: HPV vaccine: Few risks, many benefits”
- “Who’s Afraid of Gardasil?”
- “Human papillomavirus, vaccines and women’s health: questions and cautions”
- “HPV, vaccines, and gender: Policy considerations”
- *Sexual and reproductive health promotion in Latino populations*: “From focus groups to workshops: Developing a culturally appropriate cervical cancer prevention intervention for rural Latinas”
Week 12
November 22nd: No Class, Thanksgiving Break

Week 13
November 29th: Women’s Health Movement/Natural Family Planning (FAM)
- Into our own hands: “On their own: Women of color and the Women’s Health
  Movement” and “Into our own hands: Feminist health clinics as feminist practice”
- Women's health: “The gynecologic exam and the training of medical students: An
  opportunity for health education”
- Reproductive rights and wrongs: “Barrier methods, natural family planning, and
  future directions”
- Taking charge of your fertility: “Fertility awareness: What you should know and why
  you probably don’t” and “Taking control of your reproductive health” (p. 11-17) and
  “There’s more to your reproductive anatomy than your vagina” and “Finally making
  sense of your menstrual cycle”

Week 14
December 6th: Midwifery
Film: All my babies: A midwife’s own story (79 mins.)
- Women as healers: “Sisterhood and professionalization: A case study of the
  American lay midwife”
- Black women’s health book: “Thank you Jesus to myself: The life of a traditional
  Black midwife”
- Medical Anthropology Quarterly: “Gender expectations: Natural bodies and natural
  births in the new midwifery in Canada”
- Off our backs: “Midwives and Native tradition”
- Medical Anthropology Quarterly: “Claiming respectable American motherhood:
  Homebirth mothers, medical officials, and the state”

Week 15
December 13th: Reproductive Justice Movement and Reproductive Rights
- Film: Listen Up! New Voices for Reproductive Justice (21 mins.)
- Feminism is for everybody: Passionate politics: “Our bodies, ourselves: Reproductive
  rights”
- Women’s voices, feminist visions: “Women of color and their struggle for
  reproductive justice”
- Off our backs: “LGBT reproductive rights: An interview with Carmen Vazquez”
- Abortion under attack: “A new vision for advancing our movement for reproductive
  health, reproductive rights, and reproductive justice: Asian communities for
  reproductive justice”
- NWSA: “‘Hold your head up and stick out your chin’: Community health and
  women’s health in Mound Bayou, Mississippi”