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## **HIST 399 (A)**

### **Women and Gender in World History before 1500**

T/Th 4-5:20 208 DEA

The first part of a two-term survey, this course introduces students to diverse histories of women and gender in the ancient and medieval world. Students will gain knowledge about women's lives while learning how to apply some of the key analytic approaches that distinguish women's and gender history. Lectures and readings revolve around gender-related questions, rather than attempting to cover all of human history. We will compare the answers found in diverse societies and proceed in roughly chronological order in order to observe changes and continuities over time.

The word "gender" structures the class in three ways. First, gender indicates social roles and expectations. Therefore, in addition to learning about women's lives in the past, we will identify divergent ideas about femininity, masculinity, and gender variance. Second, gender describes a power relation. Our course will account for the ancient emergence of gender hierarchies such as patriarchy and normativity. It will also consider various understandings of power itself, including sacred power and social complementarity. Third, gender functions as a kind of language—a code of symbols and concepts. Ancient people understood their world in gendered terms, and gender continues to influence scholarly approaches to the past. After analyzing some examples of gendered interpretations of prehistory, we will interpret the role of gender in major historical developments ranging from the agricultural revolution to the rise of major world religions.

### **Required Reading**

1. Textbook: Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Gender in History: Global Perspectives*, Second ed., (Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).
2. R.K. Narayan, *The Ramayana: a shortened modern prose version of the Indian epic* (Penguin, 2006).
3. Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies* (Penguin USA edition, 1999).
4. Additional primary and secondary sources for discussion will be posted on blackboard.

## Assignments and Grading

15%	Participation
20%	Midterm exam
5%	Primary source interpretation #1
10%	Primary source interpretation #2
20%	Essay
30%	Final exam

My grading practices adhere to the History Department's standards, as follows. I do not change grades retroactively.

A+: Work of unusual distinction. Therefore, in the History Department, this grade is rarely awarded.

A: Work that distinguishes itself by the excellence of its grasp of the material and the precision and insight of its argument, in addition to being well executed and reasonably free of errors.

B: Work that satisfies main criteria of the assignment, and demonstrates command of the material, but does not achieve the level of excellence that characterizes work of A quality.

C: Work that demonstrates a rudimentary grasp of the material and satisfies at least some of the assigned criteria reasonably well.

D: Work that demonstrates a poor grasp of the material and/or is executed with little regard for college standards, but which exhibits some engagement with the material.

F: Work that is weak in every aspect, demonstrating a basic misunderstanding of the material and/or disregard for the assigned question.

## Structure

### Participation

The small size of our class gives us a wonderful opportunity for group discussions, independent inquiry, and applying historical skills. Each week, one of our meetings (usually Tuesday) will be devoted to lecture and the other (usually Thursday) will be devoted to discussion.

Your participation grade will evaluate your ability to verbally engage in historical analysis based on the material presented in this class. Prior to each discussion, please write at least three open-ended, analytical questions based on the assigned readings. Bring them to class and pose them to the group. I will collect the discussion questions at the end of the discussion. Do your best to answer—or at least consider—the questions posed by classmates, as well. This will require bringing a print-out of primary sources

and the textbook to each class. If the document is longer than five pages, you may bring written notes instead of a print-out.

Lectures are designed to provide information that will help you interpret the readings and give your analysis a historical foundation. More than half of the exam material will be drawn from lectures.

Lecture attendance is optional, and I will not take attendance. When you choose to attend lecture, please be prepared to focus on the subject at hand. Show respect by listening to and acknowledging what others say; don't leave abruptly or talk while others are speaking. Come on time, stay awake, silence your phone, and don't touch it during class. Texting, web-browsing, and other side conversations are distracting and disrespectful. Whether they occur during lectures or discussions, these behaviors will damage your participation grade.

### **Assignments**

Written assignments are intended to encourage independent, critical thought. Primary source interpretations will be based on the two required books. Essays will be based on independent secondary research on a particular theme or topic within women's and gender history before 1500. When writing both assignments, remember to make gender a central category of analysis. More specific instructions and a list of potential essay topics will be given in class and posted on blackboard.

Please submit all papers via blackboard (safeassign) prior to class on the due-date, unless otherwise directed. Uploaded papers should use size 12 font and format pages with standard margins.

All work should be completed independently. Plagiarized assignments will fail, and I will report all instances of plagiarism. By plagiarism, I mean representing the words or ideas of another writer as your own. For more details, go to:

<http://studentlife.uoregon.edu/StudentConductandCommunityStandards/tabid/68/Default.aspx>

### **Access**

Although I am not constantly online, I will return emails within 24 hours. I am also committed to meeting the needs of students with disabilities who are registered with Disability Services and who may need individual arrangements.

Over the course of the semester, I look forward to meeting individually with all of the students in this course, either during my regular office hours or by appointment. Office visits can help you understand and digest information covered in class, provide additional resources for pursuing independent work, and, ideally, spark intellectual curiosity. Please do not attend office hours in order to ask me to repeat a lecture that you did not attend.

## Tentative Schedule

### Week 1. Where to begin?

- T. Sep. 25 Course introduction  
Th. Sep. 27 “Since the dawn of time”: gender in stories of human origins
- Read: *Invisible Sex*, p. 1-26; Wiesner-Hanks, 83-104.

### Week 2. Does patriarchy define civilization?

- T. Oct. 2 What is patriarchy, and where did it come from?  
Th. Oct. 4 Discussion: patriarchy, matriarchy, and complementarity
- Read: Wiesner-Hanks, p. 1-36; Peggy Reeves Sanday, “The Divine Queens of Minangkabau Lore” and primary sources on blackboard

### Week 3. Which women do we study?

- T. Oct. 9 Goddesses, queens, and everyone else  
Th. Oct. 11 Discussion: “representative” and “exceptional” women
- Read: Wiesner-Hanks, p. 57-72 and 137-158; primary sources on blackboard

### Week 4. How did gender ideals take shape?

- T. Oct. 16 Gender ideals in Vedic and Gupta India  
Th. Oct. 18 Discussion: *The Ramayana*
- Read: *The Ramayana*
  - Primary source interpretation #1 due

### Week 5. What did sexuality have to do with gender?

- T. Oct. 23 Wives, concubines, and half-eaten peaches
- Read: Wiesner-Hanks, 195-223; primary documents on blackboard
  - Midterm review to be distributed & posted on blackboard
  - Bring two greenbooks to class
- Th. Oct. 25 Midterm

### Week 6. How did the rise of world religions affect gender relations?

- T. Oct. 30 Women in early Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam  
Th. Nov. 1 Discussion: Women’s religious agency and constraint
- Read: Wiesner-Hanks, 109-136; primary sources on blackboard
  - Statement of essay topic due

### Week 7. How did gender shape empires?

- T. Nov. 6 Women in Asian, African, and American empires, 618-1500  
Th. Nov. 8 Discussion: your essays
- Essay bibliography and outline due

### Week 8. How separate were men and women’s spheres?

- T. Nov. 13 Gendered spaces: a comparative analysis  
Th. Nov. 15 Discussion: seclusion, mobility, and “women’s culture”

- Essay due; discussion documents will be distributed and read in class

**Week 9. How did women conceptualize their world?**

T. Nov. 20 Women's education before 1500

- Read: Wiesner-Hanks, 170-194; begin *The Book of the City of Ladies*.

Th. Nov. 22 Holiday: no class

**Week 10. Course conclusion**

T. Nov. 27 Discussion: The *querelle des femmes* and beyond

- Read: *The Book of the City of Ladies*, all.

Th. Nov. 29 Course conclusion and final review

- Primary source interpretation #2 due

**Final exam**—open book, open note, but *independent* work (i.e., no sharing answers, no discussing content after our last meeting. Don't make the same mistake that those cheating Harvard students made!) Due via blackboard safeassign no later than 4 p.m. December 6, 2012.