Women's Health Activism

Website: http://ic.ucsc.edu/~nancys/cmmu148.

Instructor: Nancy E. Stoller
Office: College 8-314
Phone: 459-3104
nancys@cats.ucsc.edu
Office hours: Tuesdays 2-4 p.m. and by appt.

Graduate Teaching Assistant: Sadie Reynolds
Office: College 8-201
sadie@cats.ucsc.edu

Course Assistants:
Shannon Jeffrey: slanted13@hotmail.com
Nela Hadzic: bella_nela@yahoo.com or 831-595-4756
Dawn Kedar: DawnKe@aol.com
Natasha Ott: natasha_ott@hotmail.com

Course assistants will facilitate sections of approximately 15 students.

Section Leader Book (for authors, see below)
A. Tues 4-5:10 @ Porter 241. Shannon Bastard Out of Carolina
B. Thurs 6-7:10 @ Cowell 222 Dawn Because I Remember Terror, Father, I Remember You
C. Wed 9:30-10:40 @ Porter 250 Nela What Night Brings
D. Wed 5-6:10 @ Cowell 222 Natasha Soldier

Course description and work requirements:

Community Studies 148 is designed for students interested in a feminist approach to women's health. Our goal is to encourage your appreciation and understanding of the complex struggles involved in creating conditions of health for girls and women.

Because half the world is women and we all have some relationship to health and illness, “women’s health” constitutes a potentially enormous field. It has been argued that all women share some biological commonalities, while our nationalities, social positions, cultural backgrounds, occupations, and personal choices create unique situations for each of us. Thus many of us are familiar with the notion that the category “female” is social constructed, varying enormously in terms of what we think of as “appropriate” or “normal” female behavior or disease patterns. Contemporary transgender theory challenges even the biological category of female. Thus we begin with the recognition that even the term “women” in the phrase “women’s health activism” is a site of struggle — and activism.

In this course, the emphasis is on activism—making change, especially from the grass roots. We will begin in a somewhat historical manner, with the emergence of the contemporary women’s health movement of the 1970s and advance to the present. We will include racial, class, and sexual critiques of the American women’s health movement, as well as its major organizing themes: reproductive and sexual rights, intimate and state violence against women, cultural diversity, the impacts of poverty and racism, and several diseases that especially threaten and involve women.

An important activity within the course will be education about and experimentation with strategies of education and activism developed by various women’s health movements: alternative clinics,
consciousness raising, self-examination, confrontations, public education, demonstrations, rallies, lobbying, litigation, and global activism.

Course organization:

Tuesday class meetings will be divided into two halves with a 15-minute break, during which we will have a food and socializing/networking opportunity. Both large class and section attendance are required. Because we meet only once a week as a full group and once in section, each session is crucial. You are allowed only one unexcused absence during the quarter. All reading is due at the start of the Tuesday meeting, unless otherwise indicated by your TA. Each Tuesday session will begin with questions and announcements, and we will have a short period at the end of the class for written questions and critiques, so that the next lecture (and sections) will reflect concerns brought up in the previous class.

Required Texts (available at the Baytree Bookstore):

3. The Boston Women’s Health Book Collective, *Our Bodies, Ourselves: For the New Century* [OBOS]
4. Women’s Health Activism Reader [R]

Section specific readings:

It is only necessary to buy one of these books! Check which book is for your section.


Website: Our website URL is [http://ic.ucsc.edu/~nancys/cmmu148](http://ic.ucsc.edu/~nancys/cmmu148). The website is linked to the Community Studies Home Page, the library, and various other women’s health research and resource links. Check weekly for updates.

Assignments and evaluation:

Participation

1. Participation in Tuesday’s class. Attendance required. (10%):
   Even though this will be a large gathering, my goal is to make it as interactive as possible. Speak up, ask questions, and share your experience.

   In addition, there are structured ways to participate.
   Food and cleanup for break—to be done twice by each section
   Special events, e.g. *Vagina Monologues* reading, dramatic presentations

   Everyone is expected to volunteer for at least one activity that contributes to the full class. Everyone’s contributions will help make the class work better and humanize it.

   There is a sign-in sheet for lecture each week. Sign-in sheets are organized by section. Be sure to sign in.

2. Participation in section (20%). Section attendance is required. Your section leader will be your primary evaluator, so it also makes sense to be there. In addition, each section will arrange food and cleanup for two Tuesday evening classes and will make a dramatic presentation based on the section’s book on sexual or physical violence in the home. We also hope to have one field trip, with your
section, during your section meeting time if possible, to a feminist activist site in Santa Cruz County during the quarter.

**Writing and Research**

3. **Personal Journal:** covering
   a. Your experience with the self-examination assignment;
   b. Your discussion with a woman different from you, in terms of class, race, age, disability, culture, or sexuality about her experiences with the health care system; and
   c. Personal reflections on one experience with the health care system as seen through the lens of one reading assignment.

   Your journal is due at the section meeting closest to 2/3. Minimum length: 10 pages. Creativity is fine (drawings, poetry, etc...). (15%) 

4. **Reaction papers:** 1-2 page papers on the reading due in section during the 4th, 7th, and 10th week of the course (1/27; 2/17; and 3/9). (30%)

5. **Final Project:** This can be an individual project or a group project developed within your section, involving from 2-4 people. You are strongly encouraged to work with others on this project. It’s more fun, more stimulating, and usually results in better projects. There are two ways to meet this assignment, either via a research paper or through an activism project. (25%) 

   **Research paper option:** 
   (10-20 tightly written pages including endnotes and bibliography)
   Research papers must be focused on activism. They are not to be about an illness per se or a theoretical analysis of a problem. They must focus on organizing by women (and men, if appropriate) concerning a threat to women’s health.
   Examples of acceptable topics:
   • A critical history of a specific women’s health movement, organization, or campaign
   • Cross national comparison of feminist activism concerning a specific feminist health challenge (e.g. domestic violence, war, sterilization abuse, safe birth);
   • Profile of a currently active California feminist health organization—a paper about a currently active organization should include some field work in the form of interviews and/or observation, as well as research on the history of the organization.

   **Activism option:**
   All activist projects require a minimum time commitment of 20 hours during the quarter. Documentation must include a journal and a critical paper of 5 –10 pages.
   Examples of acceptable projects:
   • Work with a community organization on a specific project and document that project.
   • Develop a website (which can be linked to the class website), or an artistic or dramatic project. If you choose a creative project, it must address the themes of the course, and must be directly linked to a larger movement and to the work of a community organization. All projects must be documented in writing, regardless of format.

   Our website has a list of organizations you might work with in the Santa Cruz area. Organizational internships need to be approved by your section leader.

   **Schedule for Final Project:**
   Proposals (2 copies—one for your section leader and one for Nancy) are due in Tuesday’s class on 1/27, with an update (2 copies) on 2/17. Final projects due at the exam meeting on Tuesday, Wednesday, March 17 at 4 p.m. Presentations to section or full class are appropriate and encouraged.

---

**Course Outline**

**Week One**

*1/6 Introduction*
Opening of course—Women's health in the nineteen fifties and sixties—reproductive rights and access to abortion; current issues

**Film:** “Danger to Dignity” — about changing access to abortion

**Reproductive rights update:** Shannon Jeffrey

**Details:** pick your section

**Suggested Reading** (to do during the week....):

**OBOS:** ch. 25: “The Politics of Women’s Health and Medical Care”

---

**Week Two  1/13  Structural inequalities and reproductive rights priorities**

**Required Reading:**

- Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*, Intro and chs 1, 2, 4, 5 and 7;

**From Reader:**

- Focus on Health, from Dominican Hospital: “County health gets annual checkup,” pp. 8-9.
- “Abortion in the United States and Canada: A timeline of major events”
- “Bush signs ban on a procedure for abortion,” *NY Times*, Nov. 6, 2003
- “For GOP it’s a moment.” *NY Times*, Nov. 6, 2003.
- “Latinas for reproductive choice,” and “Empowerment through dialog,” from *Women’s Health*

**Assignment due today:** skim The Vagina Monologues to select a piece you would like to perform in class next week. Sign up to read/perform. Be prepared with the title of the section you will read. (10-15 people to present on 1/20)

**Film:** “La Operacion” — sterilization in Puerto Rico in the 1980s

**Special Details:** Sections start this week.

---

**The Seventies: Control of our Bodies**

**Week Three  1/20**

The Boston Women’s Health Collective forms and invents OBOS; activism at the grass roots; self-exam; self-help; abortion rights; sterilization abuse; seventies women’s health activism in Santa Cruz; alternatives to the medical system: collectives, clinics, and midwives.

**Details:** Distribution of specula

**Film:** “Viva la Vulva” at the Media Center, McHenry Library

**Required Reading:**

- Eve Ensler, *The Vagina Monologues* (all, including the section on V-Day);
- **OBOS** ch 12: “Understanding our bodies…,” pp. 269-287 and “Self-Examination” p. 593

**From Reader:**

- “Exposed at last: The truth about your clitoris,” from *Women’s Health*, ch 8:1, pp. 347-349
Suggested Reading:
OBOS, Section Four, “Child-bearing,” pp. 433-543 to get a sense of physiology and politics of childbirth.

“The selling of pre-menstrual syndrome,” from Women’s Health [R]

Special Event: Performances from The Vagina Monologues

Assignments:
Begin Self-examination assignment—Get a speculum and instructions.
Begin your health journal
Write about your self-examination experience.
Now is also a good time to think about your interview. One idea: Interview a woman who was your age in the 1950s or 60s or 70s and compare your current views and hers on menstruation, pregnancy, birth control, going to a doctor about a health issue. What does she think of your self-examination assignment? Comment on this in your journal.

The Eighties, Differences within the category “woman”

Week Four 1/27 Culture, language, alternative and traditional health care

Reading:
On cultural diversity:
From Reader:
“Age, race, class and sex,” and “There is no hierarchy of oppression,” by Audre Lorde
“Unlearning racism,” by Ricky Sherover Marcuse
“Health of baby reflects health of community,” by Sherrol Benton Ojibwe
“Under the shadow of Tuskegee,” by Vanessa Northington Gamble
“Latina women: access to health care,” by Aida Giachello
“Angry women are building,” by Paula Gunn Allen
“On being an outreach group,” by Marsha Saxton
“White privilege,” by Peggy McIntosh

On alternatives to allopathic medicine:
OBOS, ch.5: “Holistic Health and Healing,” pp.101-121

From Reader:
NY Times, Thurs., Dec. 4, 2003, Business Page #1 ff.: “Breastfeeding ads delayed by a dispute over content,” by Melody Peterson
“Midwives’ time has come—again,” Judy Foreman

Guest speaker: local midwife

Assignments due: Reaction paper #1.
Final project proposal—1 page

Week Five 2/3 Diversity and visibility:

a. Sexualities, genders, body image (including weight
**Reading:** On sexuality, gender and body:


**From Reader:**
- “Invisible women: lesbians and health care”
- “Shift the spotlight to government policies, industry practices,” by Sarah E. Samuels
- “Just say no to the ‘war on obesity’,” by Pat Lyons

**Panel and discussion**

b. **Age, ageism, health**

**Reading:** On aging:

**OBOS,** ch. 23, “Women growing older”

**From Reader:**
- “Women and aging: the dreaded old woman fights back,” by Madge Sceriha
- “An open letter to the women’s movement,” by Barbara Macdonald

**Film:** “Maggie Growls”

**Assignment due:** Personal journal

---

**21st century issues of violence, sexuality, danger**

**Week Six**  
2/10  **Domestic violence and rape**

**Reading:**

Section-specific book:

You will be reading one of the following, depending on your section:

**OBOS:** ch. 8, “Violence against women,” pp. 158-178.

**From Reader:**
- Cycle of violence charts, from *Women’s Health*, pp. 528-30

**Assignment due:** Reaction paper #2

**Tuesday Presentations:** a dramatic presentation to the class, based on your book

---

**Weeks 7 and 8: The state and violence against women**

**Week Seven**  
2/17  
a. **How the state responds to violence against women**

**Reading:**

**From Reader:**
Film: “Senorita Extraviada”

b. Incarceration: state sponsored violence against women

Reading:

Film: “Speaking Truth to Power,”—women prisoners testify about their health

Week Eight  2/24 War and Feminist Responses to It

Reading:
To be assigned…

Panel and discussion
Assignment due: Final project update
For research papers, please turn in a bibliography and an outline or summary of 2-5 pages. For other projects, consult your TA for advice on appropriate documentation.

Weeks 9 and 10: Accomplishments and Challenges of Feminist Activism in Health

Week Nine  3/2 Environment, Work, and Technology

Reading:
Environment and work:
From Reader:
  Two reports from the San Francisco Women’s Foundation: 1. Executive summary of Confronting toxic contamination in our communities: women’s health and California’s future, and 2. Using our power: Communities confronting toxins in the Bay area

Reproductive technology
Killing the Black Body, chs 3, 6, 7.
OBOS: ch. 18, “Assisted low-tech and high-tech reproductive technologies,” ch 25.

General issues of women’s health organizing in the U.S.
OBOS, ch. 25, “The politics of women’s health and medical care”; and ch. 27, “Organizing for change: USA”

Week Ten  3/9 Going Global

a. Women’s Health and HIV

Reading:
From Reader:
  GMHC treatment ISSUES, Sept., 2003, articles on women and microbicides for HIV prevention, pp. 1–10

b. Global organizing

Reading:
OBOS, ch. 26, “The global politics of women and health”
From Reader:

Assignment due: Reaction paper #3

Final Exam 3/17 4-7 p.m. Porter 14

Class will meet as a group from 4-7p.m.

Presentations: to be arranged

Assignments due: Final project
Portfolio of work done in class.