This course explores women’s health issues in American history from the eighteenth through the twentieth century. It emphasizes how women have dealt with sickness and health both as participants and caregivers. We will examine how ideas about gender have shaped biomedical theories and practices. We also will look at the ways women coped with illness and life-cycle events like menstruation, childbirth, and menopause and discuss women’s evolving roles as health care providers and health activists.

The course is divided into three units. Unit I covers women’s sexuality and reproduction. Unit II features women as domestic caregivers, midwives, nurses, and physicians. Unit III investigates the gendered experience of disease and illness through the lens of tuberculosis, mental illness, breast cancer, and AIDS.

Course Format:
The format of this course is that of lecture and discussion. It will require readings of primary historical sources along with secondary ones. Lecture will provide historical context for the readings, but students should expect to participate by discussing their readings in a meaningful way at every class meeting.

REQUIRED COURSE TEXTS:
(Ordered at Room of One’s Own)


531 Reader [in the form of PDF files on the 531 website]

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING:

Participation and reading responses: 25%
Research Paper: 25%
Midterm: 25%
Final: 25%

1) Participation:
I structure this course around active participation. This means that I expect you to attend every class session fully prepared to engage with the readings and my lectures. In addition, you will assign your own participation grade daily on a 10-point scale (although I reserve the right to alter that grade if I disagree with your evaluation).

To help you prepare to take part in a meaningful way at most meetings I will provide reading guides that you respond to in writing. Complete these guides before you come to class. Turn them in at the end of class, along with your evaluation of your own participation. [If you don’t come to class, you get an automatic 0 from me unless you have a valid excuse. Then and only then, a written response might suffice as a substitution for verbal}
participation.] For days I do not provide reading guides, I have attached a few general guidelines (Appendix II) to help you think about the texts.

This exercise is meant to help you approach the reading, provide a starting point for class discussion, and guide your study before the exams. This approach asks that you engage fully with the material and explore your own beliefs about historical events and processes. Evaluate your own participation by how well you talk about your ideas, listen and respond to others’ ideas, remain sensitive to the feelings of other class members, and take responsibility for moving class discussion forward. Expressing one’s ideas and getting reactions from others can help you analyze your own opinions and ultimately sharpen your thinking. (Again, remember that I reserve the right to revise the grades.) Please note that the most valuable participation does not necessarily come from the student who speaks the most. Students who do not listen to their classmates, who do not make room for various viewpoints and speakers, should not earn the highest participation.

2) Research Paper:
Choose a health issue (fitness, dress, pregnancy, menopause, menstruation, sexuality, diet, beauty, abortion, work, etc.) or a disease (HIV, STDs, TB, maternal mortality, etc.). Identify and analyze how it has changed (or not changed) over time. Use primary sources (texts, memoirs, oral histories, documents generated by participants) as well as secondary sources (texts written by historians). Look for literature like medical journal articles or health advice books, guides, pamphlets, magazine articles, or even advertising selected from at least two, maybe three periods of time. Note that this is not merely a paper that compares and contrasts several texts. Your task is to create an argument about the comparison. Can you, for example, generalize from these examples about the changing nature of medical advice to women? Can you make a claim about the changing assessment of women’s bodies? Can you make a claim about the changing assessment of women’s sexuality? Can you explain the origins of the change you see? When appropriate, use the course materials to provide context for your discussion. (Aim for at least 8 printed (12-point font) doubled-spaced pages with footnotes. Fifteen pages are too many.)

First draft due Tuesday, November 22 before Thanksgiving. If you do not turn in a draft, your final paper grade will be docked 20 points. Final draft due Thursday, December 15, the last day of class.

3) Examinations:
The midterm and the final will be take-home essays. These essays must be typed and printed out. I will provide the questions for the midterm on Thursday, October 20. It will be due on Thursday, October 27. I will provide the questions for the final on Thursday, December 15. It will be due on Thursday, December 22 at 12:00 noon.

Late Paper Policy:
Assignments that are late, for whatever reason, will be docked 5 points per day unless I have granted prior approval. This applies to all final assignments, including the take-home exams. Assignments a week or more late will not be accepted. Late drafts will be accepted only in extraordinary cases and only with my prior approval. If you do not turn in a draft, your final paper will be lowered by a minimum of 20 points. Keep me informed!

GRADING SCALE
93-100  A
88-92   AB
83-87   B
78-82   BC
70-77   C
60-69   D
0-59    F
If you have questions about a grade, speak first to me. If we can’t resolve the issue, speak with the chair of Women’s Studies (Jane Collins) or the associate chair (Judith Houck). They will attempt to resolve the issue informally and inform you of the Appeals Procedures if no resolution is reached informally.

I wish to include fully any students with special needs in this course. Please let me know if you need any special accommodations in the instruction or evaluation procedures in order to enable you to participate fully. The McBurney Center will provide useful assistance and documentation.

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<td>Introduction to Women and Health in American History</td>
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<td>Thursday, September 8</td>
<td>Approaches to Women and Health</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday, September 13</td>
<td>Menstruation in the Nineteenth Century: An Affliction</td>
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<td>Thursday, September 15</td>
<td>Menstruation in the Twentieth Century</td>
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<td>Tuesday, September 20</td>
<td>Nineteenth-Century Sexuality</td>
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<td>Twentieth-Century Sexuality: Pathology and Social Control</td>
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<td>Birth Control in the Nineteenth Century: Just Say No</td>
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<td>Birth Control: Twentieth Century</td>
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<td>Tuesday, October 4</td>
<td>Abortion: Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century</td>
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<td>Thursday, October 6</td>
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<td>Tuesday, October 11</td>
<td>Infertility</td>
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<td>Thursday, October 13</td>
<td>Childbirth, Nineteenth Century</td>
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<td>Tuesday, October 18</td>
<td>Childbirth, Twentieth Century</td>
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<td>Fitness and Body Image</td>
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<td>Tuesday, October 25</td>
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<td>Tuesday, November 1</td>
<td>White Women as Physicians</td>
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<td>Black Women as Physicians: Dual Oppression?</td>
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<td>Tuesday, November 8</td>
<td>Not a Suitable Job for Ladies: White Women as Nurses</td>
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<td>Thursday, November 10</td>
<td>Black Women as Nurses</td>
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<td>Tuesday, November 15</td>
<td>Midwives in the Eighteenth Century</td>
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<td>Thursday, November 17</td>
<td>African-American Midwives</td>
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<td>Tuesday, November 22</td>
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<td><strong>(1st Draft of research paper due)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Thanksgiving</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Gendered Aspects of Disease</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>(Return of drafts with comments)</strong></td>
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<td>Tuesday, November 29</td>
<td>Tuberculosis</td>
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<td>Thursday, December 1</td>
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<td>Tuesday, December 13</td>
<td>Wrap-up and Evaluations—<strong>Final Exam Questions Posted</strong></td>
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<td>Thursday, December 15</td>
<td><strong>(Final draft of research paper due)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Finals Week</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday, December 22</td>
<td>Final Exam Due at 12 noon</td>
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Tuesday, September 6

Introduction to Women and Health in American History

UNIT I: WOMEN AND THEIR BODIES

Thursday, September 8

Approaches to Women and Health


Sarah Pratt’s Diary, 1846-7 (excerpts).


Tuesday, September 13

Menstruation in the Nineteenth Century: An Affliction
Carroll Smith-Rosenberg and Charles Rosenberg, “The Female Animal: Medical and Biological Views of Woman and Her Role in Nineteenth-Century America,” in *Women and Health*, 111-130.


Thursday, September 15

Menstruation in the Twentieth Century: The Need for “Sanitary Protection”


Tuesday, September 20

Nineteenth-Century Sexuality


Thursday, September 22

Twentieth-Century Sexuality: Pathology and Social Control


Tuesday, September 27

**Birth Control in the Nineteenth Century: Just Say No**


Letters from Women to the *Birth Control Review* 1917-1918.

Thursday, September 29

**Birth Control: Twentieth Century**

Andrea Tone, “Contraceptive Consumers: Gender and the Political Economy of Birth Control in the 1930s,” in *Women and Health*, 306-325.


Tuesday, October 4

**Abortion: Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century**


Accounts of an 1862 abortion in the *Chicago Tribune*.

Thursday, October 6

**Abortion: Twentieth Century**


Tuesday, October 11

**Infertility**


Thursday, October 13

**Childbirth, Nineteenth Century**

Letters from Nettie Fowler McCormack to Anita McComick Blaine, from Anita to Nettie, and from Miss. Hammond to Mrs. McCormick, 1890 (McCormick papers).

Letters from Jane Savine to Elizabeth Gordon, 1846.

Tuesday, October 18

**Childbirth, Twentieth Century**


Thursday, October 20

**Fitness and Body Image**


Margaret A. Lowe, “From Robust Appetites to Calorie Counting: The Emergence of Dieting Among Smith College Students in the 1920s,” in *Women and Health*, 172-189.

**Midterm Exam Questions Handed Out**

Tuesday, October 25

**Hot Flashes and Mood Swings: Menopause**


Letter from Mrs. Blindt to the American Medical Association, November 9, 1970.

Survey responses re menopause c. 1950, Dorothy Brush Papers.

Letters and questionnaire responses to Women in Midstream, c. 1975.


Thursday, October 27

**Midterm Exam Due**

**UNIT II: WOMEN AS HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS**

Tuesday, November 1

**White Women as Physicians**


Emily Black well Diary excerpts, 1852-3.

“Dear Mrs. _____,” September 2, 1964 letter from unnamed medical school.


Thursday, November 3

**Black Women as Physicians: Dual Oppression?**


“Can a Colored Woman Be a Physician,” *The Crisis*, February 1933, 33-34.

Tuesday, November 8

**Not a Suitable Job for Ladies: White Women as Nurses**


Thursday, November 10

**Black Women as Nurses**


Darlene Clark Hine, “‘They Shall Mount Up With Wings as Eagles’: Historical Images of Black Nurses, 1890-1950,” in Women and Health, 475-488.

Tuesday, November 15

**Midwives in the Eighteenth Century**

Charles Nash, The History of Augusta, First Settlement and Early Days as a Town, including the Diary of Mrs. Martha Moore Ballard (1785-1812) (Augusta, ME: Charles Nash and Sons, 1904), 260-283.


Thursday, November 17

**African-American Midwives**


Tuesday, November 22

**Women’s Health Activists**


**First Draft of Research Paper Due**

Thanksgiving Recess

**UNIT III: GENDER AND DISEASE**

Tuesday, November 29

**Gendered Aspects of Disease**

Thursday, December 1  
**Tuberculosis**  

Tuesday, December 6  
**Mental Illness**  
Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper.*  

Thursday, December 8  
**Breast Cancer**  

Tuesday, December 13  
**AIDS**  

Tuesday, December 15  
**Wrap-up and Evaluation**  
**Final Draft Due**  
**Final Exam Questions Handed Out**
Appendix I: How to Grade Your Participation
Each class, you can earn up to 10 points.

1) Attendance  +3
   If you show up on time and stay the whole class period, you earn full credit.
   (If you are more than five minutes late: -1)

2) Attention  +2
   If you pay attention to the conversation, give yourself full credit.
   (If you read a magazine, do a crossword puzzle, or nap: -1)

3) Preparation and reading guides  +2
   If you read all the readings and have written your responses
   (No reading guide responses: -2)
   (Half-hearted reading guide writing: -1)

4) Participation
Participation points gauge several aspects of course involvement. They reflect whether you
have understood the basic issues, engaged with the material, volunteered your opinions, and listened to your
classmates. Choose the category (and the point assignment) that best fits your situation.

Category A–no participation  -3
(Did not participate in discussion)

Category B–minimal participation  -1
(Answered a question when directly asked or volunteered an item for a board list)

Category C–good participation  +3
(Asked a question, participated in small groups discussion, voluntarily offered an interpretation
of an event or reading, responded to classmates comments, offered analysis or summary.)

The discussion format is based upon the notion that students can and do learn from each other. To acknowledge
this, one discussion point will be assigned by your peers. After every discussion, you will indicate which three
people you believe contributed most valuably to discussion that day. Please note that this is not a reward for
sheer quantity. Instead, perhaps someone asked one question that you made you rethink an issue. Perhaps
somebody brought two disparate strains together in a way that enlivened discussion. So carefully consider
which of your classmates helped you engage and analyze the material.
Appendix II: Approaching Texts
As you read:
Decide whether the source is a primary source or a secondary source. In general, a primary source is a text generated at the time of the event or issue or person discussed. A secondary source is a document that analyzes that event, issue, or person from a historical perspective. If the topic of discussion is tuberculosis in the early 19th century, primary sources might include medical literature, newspaper articles, journal entries, short stories, domestic health guides, and personal letters from the early 19th century. Secondary sources might include a historian’s account of tuberculosis in the early 19th century that was written in the 20th century. There are cases where the differences are more fuzzy, but start from this rough distinction.

If the source is a primary source:

a) Note the date. What else happened at the same time? Make sure you understand the chronology of the sources for any given topic.

b) What perspective does it illuminate? Was it written by a middle-class woman facing childbirth? Was it written by a physician advising women how to cope with childbirth?

c) What is the author’s goal? Is she trying to persuade? Inform? Seduce? Scold?

d) Who is the intended audience for the piece?

e) Look up words and phrases you don’t know.

f) Can you identify a take-home message?

If the source is a secondary source:

a) Figure out the author’s argument. Every article has a main point. Make sure you know what it is. (Knowing the argument is different than knowing what the article is about).

b) What kind of evidence does the author use? (Prescriptive literature, diary entries, medical journals?) Is the evidence appropriate for the argument?

c) Is the argument persuasive? Has the author proven his or her claim?

d) Keep track of the chronology. In other words, if the author is describing change over time, make sure you understand how, when, and why things change.

e) Look up words and phrases you don’t know.
Appendix III: Paper Grading Criteria

The paper will be evaluated on the specificity of its thesis, the soundness of its organization, the strength of its analysis, the effectiveness of its evidence, the originality of its ideas, and the grace of its style.

Thesis: A thesis is the reason a paper exists; it is the point you are trying to make. A thesis should not merely describe what the paper does (“This paper examines the validity of the biological understandings of gendered behaviors”). Instead, your thesis statement establishes your claim (“The efforts to link gendered behavior and biology always rely on culturally and historically specific notions of gender. The failure to recognize the culture-bound definitions of gender weakens the claims that gendered behaviors--such as playing with truck--are biologically based.”)

Organization: The organization of your paper should revolve around your thesis. Each paragraph should build an argument in support of the thesis. Consider every paragraph a mini-argument. It should have one main idea (presented in the topic sentence) and three to five sentences (or so) that clearly support the topic sentence. Each paragraph should be connected to the one above it by a transition. End with a conclusion that explains how your paper contributes to the history of the women and women’s health.

Evidence: For the critical reaction paper, your evidence will come from the course reader. For the research project, you will need to track down the evidence yourself. In both cases, I will evaluate the appropriateness of the evidence for the claims you are trying to make.

Analysis: Your paper should analyze and interpret the evidence to support your claim. It is not enough to merely describe the evidence: you must use it to make a point. In other words, evidence does not speak for itself: your analysis gives evidence meaning. Analyze your sources, or interpret them for your reader to make a convincing case. Explain the significance of your sources for your argument.

Originality: A first-rate paper will not just reiterate the claims made in the readings or the ideas raised in discussion. Instead, the best essays will use the readings and discussions as the starting point to explore and create your own interpretations of a topic.

Style: The best ideas can fail to impress if packaged carelessly or imprecisely. Vague or messy prose tends to leave the reader puzzled and frustrated rather than persuaded and enlightened. Take care that your prose illuminates your ideas rather than obscures them. Take your work seriously enough to pay attention to the way it is packaged.

Some particular items to keep in mind.

Strive for clarity
If a reader must read a sentence three times to understand it, your writing does not convey your meaning. Sometimes confused prose reflects hazy thinking. Make sure you know exactly what you are trying to say before you say it.

Strive for precision
Avoid vague generalizations and pronouns. Don’t use pronouns like “this” or “that” without a noun.

Avoid baggy sentences
Good prose is direct prose. As a result, good writers rid their sentences of all extraneous words. For example, I could advise you that if there is any way at all to get rid of extra words in your sentences that
are not absolutely necessary, they should be gotten rid of if you can. Or in the words of Strunck and White, “Omit needless words.”

Use active voice

Instead of saying “The study was conducted,” try “Mr. Smith conducted the study.” This is desirable for several reasons. 1) It often allows you to omit needless words. 2) It forces you to identify the historical actors. “It was generally believed...” is a dead giveaway that you only have a vague ideas who believed. 3) Active voice forces you to use punchy verbs rather than the drab unhelpful form of the verb “to be.” (See next point.)

Use vigorous verbs

Verbs provide the foundation of good writing. Unfortunately we often use verbs that provide no action such as forms of the verb “to be” or its helper verbs (am, is, was, were, are, be, been, being, have, has, had, do, does, did). These are perfectly fine, but try replacing them with something jazzier or omit them altogether. “She was a good student,” provides basic but bland information. “She excelled in math and science,” adds verve and specificity. Further, “he laughed” can usually replace “he was laughing.” Finally, avoid turning perfectly good verbs into nouns. Consider the following: “The mirror had a reflection of the lake on it.” “The mirror reflected the lake,” is stronger.

Avoid careless stuff

Run a spell check. Check for run-on sentences and sentence fragments. Proof-read.

What do grades mean?

A (93-100)
This grade is reserved for outstanding papers only. Thesis and argument are clear, thought-provoking, and persuasive; research is thorough, appropriate, and creative; relationships drawn between evidence and ideas are sophisticated, subtle, and/or original. The paper also connects to larger trends addressed by the course. Writing is grammatically correct and succinct. The argument flows well from point to point, without any puffery or wasted words.

AB (88-92)
For very good papers that for some reason fall short of the criteria listed above. For example, the argument may be murky in one place; information may be presented that doesn’t directly or clearly contribute to the argument; writing style may be awkward here and there, or flawed by one or two consistent (if minor) grammatical errors.

B (83-87)
A basic good grade. The paper may pursue a straightforward but not especially deep or sophisticated argument; it is okay as far as it goes, but it doesn’t penetrate the material very far. It may lack enough primary research to make the argument completely persuasive. It may have a flash of brilliance that is unfulfilled, counterbalanced by minor grammatical problems, a weakness in argumentation, and/or a significant misunderstanding of events or chronology.

BC (78-82)
The paper shows some of the basics of the ideal paper, but is weakened by a lack of serious think-work, evidence gathering, or writing problems. It may make superficial connections without offering sufficient evidence to make the connections plausible or persuasive, or it may have what is in principle a good argument supported by incorrect facts or chronology. Alternatively, it may provide a fairly solid argument with minor flaws, from which the reader is repeatedly distracted by awkward or ungrammatical prose.

C (70-77)
This grade signifies some serious problems in paper design, expository writing, or primary research. It may deliver facts without a recognizable thesis or argument; it may wander away from the point; or it may be a thoughtful attempt so weakened by writing problems (grammar, punctuation, word choice) that it is difficult for
the reader to understand a crucial point you are trying to make. Alternatively, it may offer a strong thesis without providing sufficient primary evidence. Also used for papers that do not ask historical questions.

D (60-69)
This grade indicates marginal work, a paper that does not meet the requirements of the assignment in two or more ways. The paper does not ask a historical question, lacks an original thesis, and/or relies almost exclusively on secondary sources. There may be some evidence of reading in the secondary literature, but the paper indicates no effort at synthesis or critical engagement. Also used for barely coherent essays.

F (0-59)
This grade is assigned to unacceptable essays. An essay may be judged unacceptable if it contains plagiarism; if it fails to meet three of the major requirements for the paper; if it consists primarily of content inappropriate to the themes of the course; or if the writing fails to meet standard college-level requirements of basic communication in English.