

Comparative Women's Studies*

Department Location

Camille O. Hanks Cosby Academic Center – Second Floor

Special Entry Requirements

None

Placement Examinations

None

Goals

The Comparative Women's Studies major[†] is characterized by a flexible, faculty-monitored interdisciplinary plan of study designed to meet the needs of individual students. It aims to expose students to a substantial body of knowledge about the social construction of gender in various cultural contexts from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. It also provides students with the analytical tools for understanding the lives and experiences of women in various cultural contexts. While providing conceptual models for a comparative analysis of the situation of women globally, especially women of African descent, the Comparative Women's Studies major provides opportunities to analyze the hierarchies of race, class and gender. The Department also exposes students to feminist critiques of traditional scholarship in the disciplines and masculine biases in the history of the acquisition of knowledge. The Comparative Women's Studies offerings provide the critical skills and background for students preparing for graduate study as well as professional careers.

Objectives

Upon completion of the Comparative Women's Studies major, the student will be able to

1. analyze in a systematic manner the situation of women in our own and other cultures from a variety of disciplinary perspectives.
2. analyze the ways in which gender, race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality construct the social, cultural, and biological experience of both men and women in all societies.
3. recognize the masculine bias in the history of knowledge.
4. research women's experiences in an unbiased manner.
5. analyze images of women in literary texts, the media, and the arts, and explore relationships between these images and societal attitudes toward women.

International/Comparative Women's Studies Requirement

Courses that satisfy the International/Women's Studies requirement are listed in the Course Sequence Booklet or on the Spelman Web page.

Departmental Honors

To qualify for departmental honors, a student must

1. have a 3.0 cumulative grade point average
2. have a 3.2 grade point average in the major
3. have no initial course grade in the major below a "C"
4. complete all core requirements for the major with no grade lower than a "B"

Major Requirements

Students may fulfill the requirements of the major by taking a minimum of 40 hours (10 courses). Three core courses are required: Introduction to Comparative Women's Studies, Feminist Theory, and Independent Study or Internship or Practicum. Students must select a focus from one of three areas: a Geographical focus (i.e., Africa, Caribbean, North America); a Disciplinary focus (i.e., Literature, History, the Fine Arts); or a Self-Designed Program (i.e., Women and Development, Comparative Slavery, Women and Health). Students must take four courses in the specialization options section of the major. Students are also required to take three elective or cognate courses (i.e., Racism and the Law, Race, Class and Gender, or African American History).

Comparative Women's Studies Minor Requirements

Students may fulfill the requirements of the minor by taking a minimum of 20 hours (five courses). Two courses are required: Introduction to Comparative Women's Studies (CWS 270) and Feminist Theory (CWS 471). One social science division course and one humanities or fine arts division course are also required. The minor, like the major, is a flexible, faculty monitored, interdisciplinary plan of study designed to meet the needs of individual students.

Comparative Women's Studies Courses

- CWS 270 Introduction to Comparative Women's Studies
- CWS 310 Documenting Women: Oral Narratives and Digital Media Production I
- CWS 311 Documenting Women: Oral Narratives and Digital Media Production II
- CWS 320 Cinemythic Journey: Black Woman as Hero in American Cinema
- CWS 330 Special Topics in Women's Studies:
- CWS 336 Feminist Qualitative Research Methods
- CWS 370 Women and Social Resistance Movements
- CWS 400 The Black Female Body in American Culture
- CWS 421 Independent Study/Internship/Practicum:
- 421A Practicum in Women's Activism Studies
- CWS 471 Feminist Theory and Thought
- CWS 491 Honors Thesis

The following courses are cross-listed and housed in other departments:

- CWS/ANTH 305 Gender and Sexuality in Cross Cultural Perspective
- CWS/ART 322 Issues in Women's Art
- CWS/DRA 305 Women in Theatre and Drama

* Major requirements under review. See the Program or the Spelman College webpage for the current requirements.

- CWS/DRA 377 Women in Dance: Sexuality, Sexism and Subversion
- CWS/ECON 320 Women in the Economy
- CWS/ENG 215 20th-Century Black Women Writers
- CWS/ENG 216 Images of Women in Non-Western Literature
- CWS/ENG 314 Representations of Women in Literature
- CWS/ENG 404 Woman as Writer
- CWS/ENG 409 Images of Women in the Media
- CWS/ENG 433 Postcolonial Women Writers
- CWS/FRE 302 African/Francophone Cinema
- CWS/SHIS 314 Women in the U.S.
- CWS/SHIS 344 Women in Modern China
- CWS/SHIS 358 European Women Toward Equality
- CWS/SHIS 371 Women in Latin-American History
- CWS/SHIS 421 In Our Own Words: African-American Women's Biography and Auto-Biography
- CWS/SHIS 452 Seminar in Gender and Family in Early Modern Europe
- CWS/SHIS 462 Seminar: Race, Class and Gender in the English-Speaking Caribbean
- CWS/SHIS 471 Seminar: Race, Class and Gender in Brazil
- CWS/MUS 130 Women in Music
- CWS/PHIL 221 Feminist Philosophy
- CWS/PSY 206 Psychology of Women
- CWS/SOC 210/JSC 210 Women in Japanese Society
- CWS/SOC 291 Race, Class and Gender
- CWS/SOC 336 Qualitative Research Methods
- CWS/SOC 370 Women and Social Resistance Movements
- CWS/SOC 405 Women, Values and the Law
- CWS/SOC 415 Sociology of Women
- CWS/SOC 430 Violence Against Women
- CWS/SPA 478 Special Topics: The Universe of the Women of Color in Afro-Hispanic Literature

Course Descriptions

CWS 270 – INTRODUCTION TO COMPARATIVE WOMEN'S STUDIES (4)

This course provides an introduction to women's studies, the interdisciplinary nature of this area of study, and the major issues involved in considering gender in intellectual inquiry. An exploration of disciplinary perspectives (especially those of sociology, anthropology, history and literature) on the study of women, as well as interdisciplinary perspectives. Cross-cultural analytic frameworks will be employed.

CWS 310 – DOCUMENTING WOMEN: ORAL NARRATIVES AND DIGITAL MEDIA PRODUCTION I (4)

The course is the first semester of a two-semester course that teaches students how to collect and use oral narratives, discussions, original and published and non-published text, and personal and media developed images to create digital video documentaries about changing social dynamics as they relate to issues of social justice for women. The context for our work is centered within exploring how historical and contemporary forms of oppression and privilege inform women's choices.

CWS 311 – DOCUMENTING WOMEN: ORAL NARRATIVES AND DIGITAL MEDIA PRODUCTION II (4)

The course is the second semester of a two-semester course that teaches students how to complete the productions started in Documenting Women: Oral Narratives and Digital Media Production I.

CWS 320 – CINEMATIC JOURNEY: BLACK WOMEN AS HERO IN AMERICAN CULTURE (4)

This course provides a critical analysis of how Black women have been constructed as "the Hero" in American cinema. Using the framework of archetypal images, students will view films to analyze and deconstruct how screenwriters and filmmakers are creating the journey of Black woman as hero and how this relates overall to creating popular media images of Black women. Open to juniors and seniors.

CWS 330 – SPECIAL TOPICS IN WOMEN'S STUDIES (4)

Topics of this advanced seminar in Comparative Women's Studies will vary and are announced in the semester in which the course is offered.

CWS 336 – FEMINIST QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS (4)

This seminar provides an introduction to the contributions that feminists and feminism have made to the knowledge production process through the development of alternative methodologies and/or adaptation of existing methodologies or social research. It examines the feminist critiques of positivistic social science research methodologies and the power relations that they often reinforce, e.g., systems of inequality on the basis of gender, race/ethnicity, class, sexuality and culture. Grounded in a global black feminist perspective, the course encourages the use of lived experience, reflexivity and standpoint knowledge in the research processes. It explores a variety of qualitative research methodologies including oral narratives, participant observation, archival analysis, and content analysis.

CWS 370 – WOMEN AND SOCIAL RESISTANCE MOVEMENTS (4)

This course explores the activism of women in a variety of historical and contemporary social movements for human equality and liberation internationally and cross-culturally. The participation of women in national liberation, civil rights/black power, women's equality, economic and social justice, and gay and lesbian rights will be considered. The emphasis of the course is on the complex and multi-layered experience of women in all aspects and phases of social movements: i.e., emergence, strategies and tactics, structures, and outcomes. It additionally explores the ways that gender interacts with race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and culture to both catalyze and restrict women's social movement activism.

CWS 400 – THE BLACK FEMALE BODY IN AMERICAN CULTURE (4)

This interdisciplinary course addresses the relationship between constructed corporeal representations of black women and American culture. It addresses the body as a system of symbols reproducing social categories and concerns. The black female body is analyzed in terms of the body itself as a text and as a site of political struggle. The course places black women at the center of this significant interdisciplinary discussion and acknowledges the profound importance of the story their bodies tell about historic and cultural realities.

CWS 421 – INDEPENDENT STUDY INTERNSHIP/PRACTICUM (4)

This course provides an in-depth exploration of an area of women's studies of special interest to the student which can either involve a formal research paper, an internship experience, or activist practicum. It usually involves prearranged meetings with a preselected faculty mentor and a student generated work plan. Prerequisite: Permission from the department faculty mentor with whom the independent study is arranged.

CWS 421 A – PRACTICUM IN WOMEN'S ACTIVISM STUDIES (4)

The Practicum in Women's Activism is an experiential elective that requires students to actively participate in a women's rights-related social movement campaign, network and/or organization. The activism component is accompanied by a scholarly dimension where students will conduct research on the social movement in which they are engaged. Prerequisite: CWS 270 Introduction to Comparative Women's Studies; CWS 370 Women and Social Resistance Movements and CWS471 Feminist Theory and Thought are highly recommended.

CWS 471 – FEMINIST THEORY (4)

The critical perspective of women's studies, out of which this examination of the development of feminist thought/theory emerges, establishes the social construction of gender as a focal point of analysis in a complex matrix with class, race, ethnicity, nationality, and sexuality as fundamental categories of social and cultural analysis. In an examination of the development of feminist thought, the course will consider the historical, social, intellectual and political contexts within which feminist theories developed, including the relationship between feminist theory and contemporary women's movements in the U.S. and around the globe.

CWS 491 – HONORS THESIS (4)

This course is an intensive junior/senior-year research experience in an area of Comparative Women's Studies which involves engaging and applying feminist theory, conducting primary or secondary research, analysis, and written and/or oral presentation.