Women and Gender Preliminary Exam
Spring 2016

Answer 3 of the 6 following questions.

Be sure each essay has a clear line of argument, addresses as many dimensions of the question as possible, and offers relevant, persuasive evidence from specific secondary sources wherever appropriate.

Good luck!

1. If gender is a category of historical analysis, what new histories of gender have the last 30 years of feminist scholarship produced? How do we understand the body, mobility, conjugality, labor – just to name a few subjects – differently than we did before Joan Scott, Kathleen Canning, Jean Allman and Terri Barnes? What other forces and systems is gender invariably entangled with in this work that makes an intersectional feminist history not just possible, but urgently necessary?

2. American feminist and political activist Gloria Steinem recently called religion the biggest problem facing feminism today. Historians of women and gender have shown that it is not that simple. Indeed, ample scholarship suggests that whereas on the one hand religion has long been used to oppress, persecute, and disempower the “second sex,” women have also used religion to wield power, acquire education, achieve autonomy, and create community. Write an essay in which you compare and contrast the ways in which Christianity and Islam have shaped women’s experience in modern Africa. Support your arguments with reference to at least six scholarly articles or monographs. Be sure to discuss questions of agency, public and private space, law, politics, and sexuality in your response.

3. What difference does it make to study women, gender, sexuality and cognate subjects as an Africanist? When gender pivots on the continent, how does it work and look differently than when it operates out of Euro-American locations? Focus on 3 germinal texts in African women’s history to think through this question of situated knowledge, politics and method.

4. You teach in the Department of Gender and Women’s Studies at a large midwestern research university that is facing dire budget cuts and fighting declining enrollments. Your chair, a scholar of transexuality, has decided that focusing on masculinity, queer theory, and the intersectional relationships between humans, non-humans, and the environment will attract a broader audience of undergraduates. The chair has suggested that your core course, HIST003: Women, Society, and Religion in African History, be either cancelled or entirely reconceived. Write a two-part response to this charge. In part one, produce a defense (minimum 3 pages) of your course as it currently stands. In this section, explain how you teach
the course and justify your major themes. In part two (minimum 3 pages), craft an explanation of how and why you would adapt your class to address new bodies of scholarship in the requested fields. Refer to specific methodologies, approaches, and materials that support these opposing positions.

5. You’ve been asked to teach a 200 level introduction to women’s and gender history in a public Midwestern university. Your department chair wants your course to serve as an elective for majors who have chosen a global studies focus. Develop a 4 page rationale for the course that addresses your approach to such a challenge in a 200 level course. In addition to a 3-page rationale for the syllabus, develop three broad subsections and provide 1-2 page abstracts of what each will cover and what readings will be used as well. Finally, describe an assignment, whether written, oral or digital, that advances your pedagogical aims for the course (1-2 pages). How will you assess the impact of your emphasis on women and gender? How will you convey to students the urgency of these optics for global studies today?

6. You’ve been asked to give an on-campus job talk for the first hire in global history in a history department at a small liberal arts college in the Pacific Northwest. This department currently consists of four male professors; no one works on Africa or empire, and no one specializes in the history of women and gender. Develop a job talk in which you make a case for your hire. What are your priorities and goals as a historian and pedagogue? Which topics, methodologies, and historiographies does your work draw on? Why is it important for twenty-first century American students—both female and male—to study with you?