

WGST 2301-001: Intro to Women & Gender Studies

Tuesdays & Thursdays, Spring 2026

Professor Contact

Dr. Alexandria Castillo

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Office Hours: CAB 318A, (in person) Tues/Thurs 10:40am-12:00pm
(via Zoom) by appointment

Course Description

This course examines the role of culturally constructed concepts like gender in the Americas from before the initial contact between Europeans and indigenous Mesoamericans through the modern period. While women's experiences will be a major focus of the course, it will also use gender as an analytical framework to discuss how these notions influenced American colonialism and the societies that were created from this process. For example, it will pay particular attention to instances when cultural concepts were confronted and negotiated. It will also consider how these experiences changed over time and the factors that sparked this evolution.

Course Objectives

The main objective of this course is for you to practice skills that are key to scholarly research (**critical thinking, analytical reading, writing, effective communication, and collaboration**) while also introducing you to methods of analysis. Therefore, this course is designed to help you develop reading, analytical, and communication skills. Written assignments will help you improve your writing and research skills, while in-class discussion activities and presentations will help you learn to communicate effectively and collaborate with your peers.

Required Texts

(All weekly readings will be provided on the course Blackboard page.)

Grades

Attendance and Class Participation.....	20%
Student Lecture Topic Post.....	10%
Student Lecture Abstract.....	10%
Student Lecture Source Annotations.....	10%
Student Lecture Outline.....	20%
Student Lecture.....	30%

Course Assignments

Attendance and Class Participation are required in this course. Some class time will be devoted to lecture, but one of the benefits of smaller classes is the opportunity for more one-on-one interactions between instructor and student and between students; therefore, time will be set aside each class for discussions of the material. The aim is to facilitate a collaborative learning environment where concepts and events can be openly discussed and placed within broader contexts. Discussions will focus on the week's lecture material and assigned readings.

Each student must post the topic for their future Student Lecture, aka the *Student Lecture Topic Post*, on the related Blackboard Discussion Board **by the end of the day Thursday, Feb. 12**. No two students can give lectures on the same topic, so post early to reserve your chosen topic! (Detailed instructions posted on Blackboard.)

The *Student Lecture Abstract* is a short (200-300 word) paragraph that introduces your chosen topic for the Student Lecture. The abstract should include basic information such as the name (if a particular historical figure/group), time period, and region. The abstract should explain why you chose this particular topic; why you feel it is important to study that topic; and how it relates to the larger themes/concepts of the course. This assignment is **due Thursday, Feb. 19**. (Detailed instructions posted on Blackboard.)

The *Student Lecture Source Annotations* assignment requires each student to write annotations for one primary source document and one secondary source document that they plan to use in creating their Lectures. An annotation is a short (400-500 word, double-spaced) paragraph about a specific source. Along with a full Chicago Style citation of the source, your annotation should include: a short description of the document (author, date, content summary, etc.), how it relates to your chosen Lecture topic, and how you could utilize it in your future Lecture. This assignment is **due Thursday, Feb. 26**. (Detailed instructions posted on Blackboard.)

The *Student Lecture Outline* is a formal outline that uses bullet points to convey the content and progression of the future Lecture (at least 3 pages single-spaced, 12pt Times New Roman, standard margins). It should include key contextual material your group plans to include about your chosen topics, as well as how you plan to utilize primary source documents and any other secondary source material via footnote citations. This assignment is **due Thursday, March 19**. (Detailed instructions posted on Blackboard.)

The *Student Lecture* is the final project/assignment in this course and will be given **during the final weeks of class**. Groups will create and give a 25-30 minute lecture on their chosen topic. This assignment is an opportunity to illustrate student development of course skills via a medium different from a formal paper, as well as consider their chosen topics within broader course themes and concepts. (Detailed instructions posted on Blackboard.)

Late Submission Policy

This policy governs the submission of all assignments, projects, and papers for this course. Please read it carefully.

All assignments are due on the date and time specified in the course syllabus and/or on the learning management system (Blackboard). Timely submission is a fundamental professional expectation and a critical component of success in this course. To maintain fairness and ensure the timely progression of the course and grading, you are expected to plan your time accordingly and submit all work by the designated deadline.

Late assignment submissions will not be accepted.

A late submission will **only** be considered in **rare, exceptional, and unavoidable circumstances** that are beyond the student's control. (Example: documented medical emergencies, bereavement, etc.)

Technical issues (e.g., a computer crash, internet failure, or poor time management) are **not** considered rare or exceptional circumstances and will not warrant an extension.

Blackboard

Students access Blackboard through the [JagWire Portal](#). You will then use your Student User ID and network password to login. Once logged in, click on the Blackboard link. The course card will appear on your Dashboard. Blackboard is where you will access the syllabus, course readings, other relevant course materials, and course grades, so make sure to login to Blackboard early and often!

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory and will be taken each in-person class meeting. You are expected to arrive on-time. Documentation (doctor's notes, coaches' notes for athletic events, instructors' notes for school-related events, etc.) will be required for an absence to be considered an "excused absence." Mental attendance is also required. You cannot effectively participate if you are asleep, texting, listening to music, etc. Also, you must come to class prepared, specifically regarding the assigned readings. Assigned readings must be completed prior to class time (see

the weekly reading schedule included below). If this becomes an issue, you will be marked absent and be ineligible for any class participation/attendance points for the day. The “Attendance and Class Participation” grade is the easiest way to get points in this course, do not waste this opportunity!

Academic Misconduct & Plagiarism

The written assignments will require you to work with primary and secondary sources, and you will need to specify where you’re getting your information. **When in doubt, cite!** Turning in someone else’s work/ideas as your own will not be tolerated and will result in an F on that particular assignment, as well as a report to the Department Chair, Dean of the College, and the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities. We will go over how to properly cite sources early in the course, but if you have any questions about how to cite your sources, please ask me! If you are unsure if your behavior is academically dishonest, ask! If you have any questions concerning the definition of “academic misconduct” at TAMU-SA, please review the Student Handbook: <https://www.tamusa.edu/studentengagementsuccess/documents/studenthandbook2021-2022.pdf>.

Also, as stated on Page 1 of the syllabus, writing and critical thinking are key learning outcomes of this course, therefore all written assignments should be prepared and created by you! Developing these skills is an important step in your professional development and vital for an increasingly competitive workplace. All work submitted by students will be generated by the students themselves, working individually or in groups. Students should not have another person/entity do the writing of any portion of an assignment for them, which includes hiring a person or a company to write assignments and/or using artificial intelligence (AI) tools like ChatGPT. **Use of any AI-generated content is not allowed in this course.**

Important Student Services

- The Writing, Language, and Digital Composing Center: The Writing Center offers a variety of free appointment-based support sessions to help you with your writing such as real-time online sessions, assignment reviews, in-person tutoring, and presentation/speech help. In-person sessions will be held in either CAB 208 or Classroom Hall 304. Make appointments either by email (WLDCC@tamusa.edu) or online via the Student Services tab in JagWire.
- The Office of Disability Support Services (DSS): If you have a documented disability or chronic illness that could impact your participation in this course, you are strongly encouraged to contact DSS to ensure you are provided the necessary accommodations. You can contact DSS by phone (210-784-1335), email (dss@tamusa.edu), or in-person (CAB Suite 210) to schedule an appointment.
- Student Counseling Center (SCC): This center provides free, confidential counseling services to enrolled students by trained and licensed staff. This includes individual therapy, group therapy, and/or utilization of the Virtual Relaxation Room, or a referral to a community provider. Walk-in appointments are accepted any time Monday – Friday,

8:00 AM – 5:00 PM (Modular C, Room 166). Call (210-784-1331) or email (stucounseling@tamusa.edu) to schedule an initial appointment.

WEEKLY CLASS SCHEDULE

Week 1: Course Introduction & First Reading Discussion

Introductions, Syllabus, Schedules, & Course Requirements

Considering Gender as “A Useful Category of Historical Analysis”

Reading(s): Sherry Ortner, “Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?”

Week 2: Cultural Traditions in the “Old” World and the “New:” Pre-Columbian Empires and Medieval Iberia

The Cultural Legacy of the Spanish *Reconquista*

Pre-Columbian Mexica Society

Reading(s): The *Periculoso* & Susan Kellogg, “The Woman’s Room”

Week 3: European “Discovery” & Expansion in the New World

European Discovery of American “others”

Conflicting Concepts of Gender in European-Native Relations

Reading(s): no readings, *Student Lecture Group Matching Day!*

Week 4: Conquest and Colonization in the Americas: The Spanish Example

The Cortes Expedition and the Fall of Tenochtitlan

Establishing the Viceroyalty of New Spain

Reading(s): *Bernal Diaz The Conquest of Mexico*

****SL Topic Post & Partner Choice due in Discussion Board by Thurs, Feb. 12****

Week 5: Conquest and Colonization in the Americas: The British Example

Establishing British Colonies: American Solutions to English Problems

English-Native Relations During the Seventeenth Century

Reading(s): *Edward Waterhouse Declaration & Roger Williams Observations of New England Indians*

****SL Abstract due Thurs, Feb. 19****

Week 6: Constructing Spanish Colonial Identity: Gender, Sexuality, and Honor

Calidad in Spanish America: Caste, Class, and *Limpieza de Sangre*

The Value of “Honor,” a Highly Gendered Concept

Reading(s): *Don Manuel Protests His Daughter’s Marriage*

****SL Source Annotations due Thurs, Feb. 26****

Week 7: “Protecting” Women and Protecting Orthodoxy: Spanish America

Building Churches and Holy Houses in the Spanish Viceroyalties

The Spanish Inquisition as a Sociocultural Tool

Reading(s): *Marina de San Miguel’s Confession*

Week 8: SPRING BREAK (MARCH 9-14)

Week 9: “Protecting” Women and Protecting Orthodoxy: British America

Building Churches and Holy Houses in the British Colonies

The Vulnerability of the “City on a Hill”

Reading(s): *The Trial of Anne Hutchinson*

****Student Lecture Outline due Thurs, March 19****

Week 10: Considering *Powerful* Women in Colonial Society

Symbols of Subservience or Powerful Religious Figures?

Gendered Definitions of Heretics, Witches, & Spiritual Healers

Reading(s): *Maria de la Candelaria Accusation of Michaela de Molina & Testimony Against Bridget Bishop*

Week 11: The Atlantic Slave Trade & African Experiences in the Americas

African Experiences in the Americas

Slave Societies or Societies with Slaves?

Reading(s): *Excerpts from Former American Slaves’ Autobiographies*

Week 12: Constructing Citizens: Gender & Identity in the Early United States

The Impact of Enlightened Ideas

Constructing Citizens—the Limits of American Democracy

Reading(s): no assigned readings, *Lecture Writing Group Time!*

Week 13: Student Lectures (4/14 & 4/16)

Week 14: Student Lectures (4/21 & 4/23)

Week 15: Student Lectures (4/28 & 4/30)

Tues. May 5: University Study Day—NO CLASSES

Week 16: Final Exam Period (TBA, if necessary)