

MA in Gender Studies

Details for applicants

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Images by Todd Huffman (top) and Bekah Richards (bottom)



Aims and objectives

The MA in Gender Studies provides students with advanced grounding in feminist theories and methodologies and the opportunity to specialise through a range of options and individually chosen dissertation topics. The programme is intrinsically interdisciplinary: contributing colleagues come from departments such as Sociology, Media & Film, Anthropology, Law, English Literature and International Relations. The student cohort is diverse, including women and men seconded from international NGOs, recent home and international graduates, and mature students keen to return to academic study. A large number of Sussex faculty are engaged in research on a variety of gender-related topics, including sexualities and sexual violence, nationalism and citizenship, women's history and literature, education and work, and reproductive politics. This gives the programme broad optionality and expert supervision for student dissertations.

On successfully completing the MA, students will be able to:

- Critically explore gender structures, discourses, practices and identities in different economic, social, political and cultural contexts
- Understand and evaluate key gender theories and the latest research at the forefront of the discipline
- Display a practical understanding of how conceptual frameworks can be applied to policy problems and lived experience
- Critically assess the merits of different epistemological and methodological approaches
- Think creatively in developing and executing their own original research project
- Think across intellectual boundaries, relating ideas from different disciplines through common themes
- Achieve independence in their learning, exercising initiative in planning and implementing intellectual tasks
- Present complex ideas clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences

Why US?



Image by Uri Baruchin

Sussex University is a top teaching and research institution in the vibrant and cosmopolitan coastal city of Brighton. It has a reputation for political radicalism and innovative teaching and learning. The campus is located in the South Downs, an area of outstanding natural beauty, and London is just an hour away.

12th in the UK
31st in Europe
99th in the World

**Times Higher Education World
University Rankings 2011-12**

Programme structure

The Gender Studies MA is taken full-time over a calendar year which lasts from October to September. It consists of 5 units: two core courses, two options and a dissertation. Part-time study is available for home and EU students, who can spread the programme over two calendar years.

Core courses

These two courses, taught by key faculty, are compulsory for all Gender MA students and provide the theoretical and methodological backbone of the curriculum.

Gender Politics and Social Research

This course approaches feminist theory and methodology at advanced levels, critically exploring feminist research on a number of different issues and engaging with the politics of the research process itself. It is intended to prepare students for conducting independent research and producing their dissertation. The first half of the course introduces different methodologies and methods, encouraging students to reflect critically on their strengths and weaknesses and how feminists have used them in the service of political projects. In the second half of the course, students design research projects on two case-study issues and attempt to operationalise key feminist theories.

Gender and Representation

This course addresses the gendered nature of both mainstream and minority discourses and representations in history and popular culture. It introduces the conceptual and theoretical frameworks which facilitate understanding of the production and reception of powerful representations of masculinities, femininities and sexualities, and how gendered discourses operate in different spheres. The first part of the course concentrates on key issues in feminist and queer theories, focussing specifically on the concepts of gender, representation, and constructions of masculinities, femininities and sexualities. The second part of the course considers these theoretical constructs within the frame of various media-centred case studies.

Options

Students must choose two of these. Options change each year due to the high level of specialisation: each course is anchored to a key faculty member, so faculty availability determines the portfolio of options offered. However, students receive a wide choice of options each year. Examples of possible options are listed below.

The Body: Sex, Gender, Power, Politics

The body has recently become a key focus for sociological theorising and research. The body is also highly politically charged; a key site at which oppression is meted out and a focus of regulation and governance at individual, group, national and international levels. Bodies, and particularly women's bodies, are also at the nexus of some of the most controversial debates of our time. This course develops a political sociology of the body, exploring themes of embodiment and power through a variety of controversial issues such as HIV/AIDS, sexual violence, sex work, childbirth and breastfeeding, and body modification in cross-cultural context.

The Cinematic Body

This course examines the interplay between body and cinema. This includes not only the representation of the body in films but also how the body of the spectator and cultural formations of the body influence and shape cinema itself. It draws on a wide range of theoretical frames (including film studies, psychoanalysis, gender studies, philosophy, feminism and cultural theory) to consider a variety of themes including: the body as resistance and force; notions of beauty and the sublime; the hysterical body; discipline and punishment; the body as desire. The course will also consider recent developments in film, including the idea of cyber-cinema and its impact on the body.

Critical Perspectives in Global Public Health

This course provides theoretical, conceptual, historical and critical understandings of public health practices and health promotion initiatives, with a focus on gender in cross-cultural context. It begins with a critical analysis of the concept of wellbeing (as defined by WHO in 1948) and the role of health promotion in national and global health care systems. Using case studies of emotional health, sexual health, healthy eating and positive ageing, the course will address historical and conceptual developments, as well as policy and strategic initiatives.

Embodiment and institutionalisation of violence, conflict and conciliation

This course explores links between violence and conflict in society and its inscription into the body, memory and habit. It considers the establishment of such connections within social institutional orders and within disorder, questioning the salience of such distinctions. It juxtaposes the 'ordinary' violence of everyday life against sudden eruptions of 'extraordinary' violence (for instance, genocide, state terror, terrorism and civil wars). It considers gender and violence in all these contexts, and explores links between them. It also looks at women's involvement in violence, conflict and conciliation and at violence committed against and by children.

Families, Healthcare and the Law

This course will start by examining three theoretical perspectives from which to analyse issues concerning families, healthcare and the law: personhood and the value of life; individual/family autonomy (including dignity and human rights); and justice and care. It considers the role of the state, the allocation of resources for healthcare and the distinction between health and social care. It then explores responsibilities for healthcare within families across the life course, such as to the unborn, parental/professional responsibilities for the health of young children, negotiating the health and well-being of teenagers, responsibilities for healthcare within families, and where the responsibility for the healthcare of the elderly lies.

Feminism and Film

The course begins with an exploration of the relationship between feminism, feminist theory and film theory, and feminist filmmaking. It traces a history, firstly of feminist film theory and criticism, and secondly of feminist film making. In the first part, it explores issues of representation, asking what kinds of representations of women mainstream film constructs, how these representations function within wider social discourses and power structures, and how film, through its representations, works to construct particular subject positions for its viewers. In terms of a feminist film practice, it asks how far feminist film makers can intervene in film practices, and what such an intervention might/should look like.

Gender, Inclusion and Educational Development

This course begins by examining the ways in which educational structures and processes are gendered and the impact that these have on the educational opportunities and achievements of males and females. Different theoretical frameworks used to understand the interaction between gender and different forms of exclusion are assessed, with consideration of how these might be adopted to analyse disadvantage associated with education in developing countries. Having explored problems associated with gender and inclusion in education, the course assesses critically strategies adopted, including with respect to mainstreaming of gender within education policies and plans.

Gender, Sexuality and Family Law

This course examines the role of gender and sexuality in setting the parameters of family life in society and, as a consequence, in the rules of family law. It explores the extent to which gender and sexuality inform the rules of family law so as to foster or undermine gender and sexuality inequalities in society. In exploring the contours of family law as they are informed by gender and sexuality considerations, it considers the relationship between law and society in the construction of gendered and sexualised identities. The course is informed by developments in the politics of gender and sexuality and by changes in feminist and queer theory.

Queering Popular Culture

This option offers students the chance to explore lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer contributions to, and perspectives on, the key fields of popular culture. Topics for detailed study include lesbian representation in mainstream television; cinematic homosexualities and their historical context; lesbian and gay magazines and newspapers; queer pop; sexuality and style politics; and the pleasures and problematics of camp. It investigates issues of representation, consumption and interpretation; unravels debates over stereotyping, subcultures and sensibilities; and asks whether a specifically 'queered' critique of existing Cultural Studies discourses is conceptually feasible and/or politically desirable.

Race Critical Theory

Race Critical Theory is based on the premise that the conceptualisation of race from a political perspective is vital for a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of the politics of states and the nature of sociality in the modern era. The course is grounded in a political sociological, theoretical and historical sociological reading of race, racism and responses, from the outset of modernity to the present day. It will interest students committed to furthering their understanding of the social and political theory of modernity, as well as those with a specific interest in themes related to race such as gender, migration, (post)colonialism, multiculturalism, human rights, "terrorism" and identity politics.

Women and Human Rights

The course is divided into two halves. The first half consists of core topics providing a theoretical framework for the study of women's human rights. It draws on feminist legal theory, human rights theory, anthropological and historical materials and international and national rights instruments and documentation. The second half of the course consists of 5 topics. Each will focus on the conception, implementation, adherence and breach of a specific right or rights instrument.

Additional options

Students may also take options offered on other MA programmes which have an emphasis on gender, with the agreement of the course tutor and the Director of Gender Studies. Options students may be able to take include (but are not restricted to):

- The Renaissance Body
- The Cinema of the Domestic
- Sexuality and Creative Writing
- Querying the Unconscious
- Feminist Criticisms and Contemporary Women's Writing
- Contemporary Post-Colonial Women's Writing
- Writing by Women: the Politics of Gender

Dissertation

The summer period is reserved for researching and writing a dissertation. Workshops are offered to guide students through the process of selecting a topic and approaching a supervisor, and students are entitled to four individual tutorials. Sussex is home to a large group of faculty who work on gender, which means there is broad scope for specialist supervision. Students have historically worked on a fascinating range of topics, including:

- Feminism between the World Wars
- Honour crimes in Turkey
- Homophobic hate speech
- Women in the military
- Gender identity and women's football
- The women's movement in Japan
- Men's attitudes towards abortion
- Sex trafficking and tourism
- Young women and binge drinking
- The representation of sadomasochism in popular culture



"The MA in Gender Studies not only provided me with an opportunity to learn about feminist theories, it also allowed me to explore queer theory, and issues relating to sexuality studies and LGBT studies. Coming from a country such as Sri Lanka where sexuality studies is still at a nascent stage, this was a fantastic opportunity for me to learn about the ways in which non-heteronormative sexual identities negotiate a space within the society that we live in. It goes without saying that completing a Master's Degree from the University of Sussex has boosted my career opportunities tremendously."

Jayanthi Kuru Utumpala, MA Gender Studies class of 2010

Ways of learning

Most core courses and options are taught through intensive seminar and workshop sessions, seen as a space in which students can receive input from tutors and discuss ideas and questions they have encountered during their reading. Students are also entitled to individual supervision on their term papers and dissertations, and can see their tutors in open office hours to talk through concepts and debates covered in seminars.

A large amount of students' time is set aside to read widely within current and past Gender Studies literature, with which the library is well stocked. Students are also required to keep up to date with relevant social and political issues in their own and other countries. Critical reading skills are built into many of the taught courses, and students often organise small reading groups themselves.

There are many other opportunities for learning: students can attend lectures by faculty and guest speakers held in a variety of departments throughout the year. There are over 100 PhD students working on gender-related topics in different disciplines in the University, and they have their own seminar series which MA students are welcome to attend. Students are also encouraged to audit lectures on undergraduate courses, in order to gain broad overviews of specific topics.

Student support

The School and University provide a variety of avenues of support for students experiencing difficulties. The Director of Gender Studies can give students general help with their academic development and refer them on for specific intellectual or personal queries. There is also a student representative for the MA, elected every year, who can liaise between students and faculty. The University's Student Life Centre houses advisors who give students assistance with personal or welfare issues which are having a negative impact on their academic work, including arranging special educational needs support. The Students' Union Welfare Officer can help with personal issues and provide advocacy if needed. The University Psychological and Counselling Service may be able to offer free counselling. International students can register for a range of courses in academic English provided by the Sussex Language Institute and can also access individual tutoring if necessary. Specialist welfare support for international students is provided by the International and Study Abroad Office.

"One of the great strengths of the Gender Studies MA was the interdisciplinary nature of the programme. I was able to write papers on topics as varied as the relationship between the LGBT community and the UK police force, to a feminist analysis of gay pornography to a dissection of gender in contemporary horror films. The content of courses such as 'Gender Politics and Social Research' and 'Gender and Representation' has proved relevant to me in my career, as my job incorporates work on sexual health and supporting LGBT students, and I also do voluntary work with Brighton LGBT youth group Allsorts."

Danny Weddup, MA Gender Studies class of 2008



General reading

Students who have successfully applied for the MA in Gender Studies may wish to engage in some broad reading before commencing their programme of study. The following books are useful introductions.

- Beasley, C (2005) *Gender & Sexuality: Critical Theories, Critical Thinkers*. London: Sage
Bryson, V (2003) *Feminist Political Theory: An Introduction*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan
Bulbeck, C (1998) *Re-Orienting Western Feminisms: Women's Diversity in a Postcolonial World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
Butler, J (2004) *Undoing Gender*. London: Routledge
Hollows, J., and Moseley, R (2006) *Feminism in Popular Culture*. Oxford: Berg
Holmes, M (2007) *What is Gender: Sociological Approaches*. London: Sage
Mac an Ghaill, M., and Haywood, C (2007) *Gender, Culture and Society: Contemporary Masculinities and Femininities*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan
Marchbank, J., and Letherby, G (2007) *Introduction to Gender: Social Science Perspectives*. Essex: Pearson Education Ltd
Pilcher, J., and Whelehan, I (2004) *Fifty Key Concepts in Gender Studies*. London: Sage
Weitz, R (2003) *The Politics of Women's Bodies: Sexuality, Appearance and Behavior*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Funding

Sussex University offers various scholarships for postgraduate students – applicants should visit <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/study/pg/feesandfunding> for the most up-to-date information. Applicants can also check for lists of scholarships and funders, as well as finding general funding advice, at the following pages:

- <http://www.egas-online.org/>
- <http://www.ukcosa.org.uk/>
- <http://www.prospects.ac.uk/>
- <http://www.scholarship-search.org.uk/>
- <http://www.postgraduatestudentships.co.uk/organization/general>
- <http://www.hotcourses.com/postgraduate-scholarships-funding/>
- <http://www.iefaf.org/>
- <http://www.trustfunding.org.uk/>
- <http://www.funderfinder.org.uk/personalsupport.php>

The British Council provides a small number of grants, and also has links to a number of other funding bodies. There are many small organisations offering funding for postgraduates, although these awards rarely exceed £500. Lists can be found in The Charities Digest, The Grants Register, The Educational Grants Directory and The Directory of Grant-Making Trusts. Home students can pick up copies of these publications from their careers services and public libraries; international students may be able to access them in a public library, or may need to order them online. UK Applicants can visit the online register of charities at <http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk>. International applicants should check for local charities and councils, who may offer small awards.

Further information and applications

General enquiries are very welcome: prospective students can write to

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Applications for the programme are accepted online. Prospective students should apply at: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/study/pg/applying>

They will be required to submit a range of material including degree certificates and transcripts, evidence of IELTS or TOEFL scores if required, details of relevant professional experience, a statement of their academic interests, details of how they will fund their studies, and two academic references. Applications are processed quickly once all the necessary information has been received. Candidates are normally expected to possess an upper second-class (or in some cases, a lower second-class) undergraduate degree or equivalent, but applications from candidates with varied qualifications and backgrounds are strongly encouraged.

Good luck!