



*Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks and
Urmi Engineer Willoughby*

A PRIMER FOR
TEACHING
WOMEN, GENDER,
& SEXUALITY IN
WORLD HISTORY

Ten Design Principles

←— A Primer for Teaching Women, Gender,
and Sexuality in World History —→

DESIGN PRINCIPLES
FOR TEACHING HISTORY
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A PRIMER FOR TEACHING
WOMEN, GENDER, AND SEXUALITY
IN WORLD HISTORY

← Ten Design Principles →

*Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks and
Urmí Engineer Willoughby*

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←— *Preface* —→

THIS BOOK AND HOW TO USE IT

Courses in women’s history began to be offered in the 1960s in response to the women’s liberation movement, and courses on the history of sexuality in the 1970s in response to the gay and lesbian rights movement. They have changed shape since then as new perspectives developed—gender, cultural studies, queer theory, intersectionality, transfeminism—but remain a common part of the array offered by history departments, women’s and gender studies programs, and sometimes by LGBTQ programs. Departments reorganizing their undergraduate program to move away from a nation-based curriculum to one that is more thematic often include gender and sexuality as one of their themes. Thus historians hired in positions defined geographically and chronologically may be asked to teach a general course in gender or sexuality, or one about women or gender in “their” area or time period, whether or not they have training or background in gender studies. Women’s and gender studies faculty may be expected to teach a course in history, even though their women’s studies graduate training featured little or no history, or their graduate training was actually in literature, philosophy, sociology, or some other field. Faculty hired as lecturers, visiting professors, ad hoc instructors, or in the other types of contingent positions that now make up more than half the teaching staff at many colleges and

universities may be asked or required to teach anything the department needs.

This primer is designed to assist new and veteran instructors in all these situations to develop more coherent and thoughtful courses in the history of women, gender, and/or sexuality from a global perspective, in today's teaching environment for today's students. It is also designed for those who want to integrate gender and sexuality more fully into general world history courses. In teaching these topics there is no canon of what absolutely must be taught, leaving much up to the instructor, which is both liberating and terrifying. At the same time, instructors are often restricted by various institutional requirements about "shared learning goals," "course objectives," "learning outcomes," or similar schema that impose a set template, often with little regard for history as a discipline. This primer provides guidance for navigating within these two extremes to create meaningful courses. It aims to present ten general design principles, incorporated into the chapter titles, beginning with setting goals in chapter 1 and ending with connecting with the community in chapter 10. Each chapter includes a few detailed examples of best practices and practical strategies. These examples range widely in time and space, as appropriate for designing courses with a global perspective, but the issues and examples are also pertinent to courses that focus on a single region or even a single country. The ten chapters of the primer are organized into three sections. The first section discusses designing a course from the ground up, the second is about modifying existing courses because of changes in the field or in modes of instruction, and the third reviews common challenges and opportunities. Whatever your specific aims, however, we urge you to read the whole book, as suggestions about materials and assignments are threaded throughout. Each chapter can help you choose from the richness of available published and online materials, and most present ideas about possible course activities based on these.

We represent two different generations of historians, with very different training and experiences in the field, which have shaped our perspectives.

Merry: I have never actually taken a course in women's, gender, or sexuality history, or in world/global history. My first experience with wom-

en's history courses was as a graduate teaching assistant in the late 1970s, for a course in medieval women's history taught by an ad hoc instructor at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. I was writing a dissertation on working women in sixteenth-century Nuremberg, and a few other graduate students were also writing dissertations about women, but none of the sixty-plus tenured or tenure-track members of the history department (two of them women) were interested in teaching women's history, nor did they know much about it. In my first teaching position, for which I was hired to teach all of European history, I occasionally taught a European women's history course, but more often a course in U.S. women's history, although I had taken no U.S. history at all in graduate school. I got ideas from asking people who did know what they were doing, many of whom I had met at the Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, for their suggestions, materials, and syllabi, which they sent me as mimeographed or dittoed sheets of paper, now quaint artifacts from olden times. When I moved to a larger department my colleagues who were U.S. historians handled that course (thankfully), but my European women's history course evolved into a course on women and gender as I tried to keep up with an exploding field. In the 1990s I became the director of the Center for Women's Studies and developed a course in interdisciplinary feminist theory, though I had never taken a course with any of those three words in its title. Again help from my friends and colleagues, now in many departments, was essential. Somewhat later different friends and colleagues taught me—and other doubters in women's studies—how to combine feminist pedagogy and online teaching.

I moved into world/global history in much the same way. About 2000, a colleague who specialized in modern Chinese history and I decided that our separate survey courses in Eastern civilization and Western civilization did not reflect the world that we or our students lived in. We designed an introductory world history sequence, for which there were splendid models elsewhere, now available on screens as well as on pieces of paper. We brought in several experienced instructors and world/global scholars as consultants, as the department was "going global" in other undergraduate and graduate courses as well. My very first world history survey class was

on September 4, 2001, and included an explanation of why the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee was now teaching world history. Exactly one week later my explanation no longer seemed quite so necessary. I have been teaching the first semester of this ever since, along with upper-level thematic and graduate courses with a global perspective. My European women's and gender history course still has Europe in the title, but as a result of moving into global history in other courses and in my own research, this is a Europe that is bigger and more connected to the rest of the world than it was when I started teaching the course. Materials available in published form or online for teaching this course or my other courses are now so plentiful that it is hard even to get an overview, so my requests for help are generally for guidance through the riches rather than for sharing a rare treasure, though sometimes I still get the latter.

Urmi: Unlike Merry, I started college and graduate school when studies of world/global history and women, gender, and sexuality were fairly common in many programs. As an undergraduate in the late 1990s, I took courses in women's history, feminist studies, and human sexuality. I completed my graduate coursework in the early 2000s at the University of California, Santa Cruz. The university had been a pioneer in women's, gender, and LGBT studies since the 1970s, and I was fortunate to work alongside numerous scholars in the field. My primary training in graduate school was in world history, and I worked closely with Edmund Burke III at the Centre for World History. I continued my training as a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Pittsburgh's World History Center. When I narrowed my interests to write a dissertation, I grew increasingly interested in environmental history as a broad way to frame my research on health and disease in the nineteenth-century Atlantic world.

My broad and somewhat random interests in seemingly unconnected histories led me to pursue world history. I have had experience teaching world history at several institutions, ranging from a small liberal arts college to large state universities. I have enjoyed the opportunity to design various versions of world history surveys at different scales. Along with conventional periodizations, I designed courses that focused on the long nineteenth century and courses that approached human history as a whole.

At the University of Pittsburgh, I became interested in exploring thematic world history courses, such as courses on the environment, food, slavery, and women, gender, and sexuality.

My interest in women, gender, and sexuality has always been present, but not always at the forefront of my research and teaching interests. I became concerned with the separation of women's studies and feminist studies from world history, especially in the classroom. Because issues of women, gender, and sexuality form an essential part of any history, I found ways to incorporate them into my world history and other thematic courses. I have found that virtually any course could be transformed to focus on issues of women, gender, and sexuality. A thematic course on food, or a regionally focused course, can be turned to focus on the experiences of women, or to use gender as an analytical frame in understanding dynamics of power and culture in shaping history.

I taught my first course on women and gender, titled “Gender in World History,” at the University of Pittsburgh in the spring of 2015, and I found it to be one of the most intellectually challenging and stimulating experiences of my career. When I began designing the course, I started by looking through my syllabi and pulling out lessons and readings on relevant topics. It was instructive to see the ways that I had been incorporating women, gender, and sexuality into my courses, and what themes dominated. I found it difficult to avoid essentializing the experiences of women, or framing courses as narratives of progress. I became very aware of the challenges of balancing narratives of women's agency and oppression. Like Merry, I turned to my colleagues for assistance in areas outside of my fields of specialization. I became interested in including as many perspectives as possible into my approach. I grew especially interested in learning how scholars of China, South Asia, and the Islamic world approached issues of women and gender compared with historians of Europe and North America. Conversations with my colleagues were integral to finding ways to structure a course that considered women, gender, and sexuality studies from a global historical perspective. I have continued to develop this course at Murray State University, and I look forward to improving it by working with colleagues with different research specialties than mine. Next on my

agenda is to collaborate with colleagues to team-teach the course. This would serve as a practical way for educators to integrate wider perspectives into their own syllabi.

Returning to our joint voice: Despite the growth of both world/global history and women, gender, and sexuality history over the last several decades, challenges in teaching these remain, and the advice in this primer grows out of our own experiences facing them. Voice is a key issue in both these fields, as both have sought to give voice to individuals and groups that have been silenced, ignored, or muted, so we thought it important to explain how voice works in this book. We have pooled our experiences within this joint writing project, so most of the time “we” means the two of us, though occasionally “we” is the larger group of “we historians of women, gender, and sexuality” or the even larger group “we teachers of history.” Where we write about the premodern, Merry’s expertise is the most evident, and where we write about the modern, Urmī’s, though both of us teach across a long span of time so our knowledge is interwoven. Occasionally we speak in a singular voice to describe specific examples and classroom strategies, signaling this with “I (Merry)” or “I (Urmī).” “You” is always our envisioned reader.

We have conceived this primer in the spirit of all those who have helped us conceptualize, structure, and improve our courses, as a first hand of assistance, though certainly not a substitute for developing your own network for advice and support. Designing a new course or revising an existing one to keep up with developments in research and theory, or with changes in our students or the world, is challenging, but it is also fun.