In the 1960s, feminist historians, inspired by a social movement, inaugurated their own revolution within the discipline of history by mobilizing against the almost total omission of women as subjects of historical research. Beginning with studies of private life, the scope of their inquiry gradually expanded until it changed the way the entire discipline thought about its work: “Was the Renaissance really a Renaissance for women?,” was one classic example of the paradigm-shattering questions that historians of women asked during these heady years. More broadly, they asked if history looked different when women were placed at the center of analysis. Decades later, those once radical questions are mainstream, and what was once called “women’s history” has expanded and shifted form to encompass much broader issues of gender and sexuality. This seminar focuses on the wide-ranging and vibrant questions that historians of women, gender, and sexuality are still wrestling with: questions about the history of feminism and social movements; about women and work; reproduction and its limitation; sexual violence; gender and the law; gender and nation; men and masculinity; sexual identity; the formation of gay communities and subcultures; the history of the body; heterosexuality as a historical construct; and many others.

During the course of this seminar you will write a 25-30 page junior paper, based on original research, on a selected topic in the history of women, gender, and sexuality. That paper will:

   a) Ask a good historical question.
   b) Be based on primary sources.
   c) Explain how its interpretation connects to previous work by other historians.
   d) Offer a persuasive thesis of its own.
   e) Be a polished piece of writing.

This is, of course, a lot to achieve in a semester, and the pace is unavoidably intense. We will proceed through a close examination of published works in the field that are models for us as researchers and writers. In addition, the course is structured around a series of small, building block assignments that will help you write your final paper. A willingness to hit the ground running, to attend all course meetings, and to participate in and help foster a mutually supportive environment are all essential.