

# GWSS/PSYCH 357: Psychobiology of Women

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## **Overview**

Psychobiology of women is the study of the way in which physiology and behavior interact in women's lives. This course concentrates on those aspects of physiology which delineate women from men (mostly reproductive endocrinology) and which play a major role in women's lives. It deals not only with the ways in which physiology affects behavior but also with the often less thought about ways in which behavior affects physiology. The course first establishes a basic foundation in anatomy, physiology, and endocrinology. It then goes on to explore the physiological and behavioral changes associated with major events or experiences in women's lives including puberty, the monthly cycle, sexuality, contraception, wanted and unwanted pregnancy and menopause. My goals in teaching this course are threefold: 1. To help both women and men understand the wondrous workings of the female body; 2. To provide a foundation from which students can evaluate future findings in biology, psychobiology and medicine; and 3. To convince students who might be leery of the study of science that science is great fun and readily understandable.

## **Role of Service-Learning in the Course**

While all students will be able to place course concepts in the context of their own lives and those of their immediate friends and family, students selecting the service learning option will have opportunities to consider course concepts as they are experienced in a much broader "real world" context. In order to get the most out of this experience, students are encouraged to select a site where they will interact with, serve, or assist an organization that serves individuals who differ from themselves in age, socio-economic class, race/ethnicity and/or country of origin. The hope is that they can come to understand how basic biological events affect different people in different ways. In short, while the classroom course emphasizes learning the facts about women's bodies and lives, the service learning option is intended to help students realize that socio-cultural circumstances play a major role in how those events are experienced by individual women.

## **Assignments Related to Service-Learning**

Students are expected to keep a journal detailing the relationship between the course material and their service placement throughout the quarter. The first journal entries emphasize the service organization itself, its structure, mission, clientele and staff. As the course continues, the students are asked to evaluate the relationship of the course material to the lives of the people served by their placement site. This is often a difficult step because of the limited contact some volunteers have with specific clients. Thus it is important that the students have a clear picture of the type(s) of individuals served by their organization even if they do not have regular direct contact with the people being served. Students meet with other service learning students and with their assigned service learning tutor (a student with experience with both the course material and service learning) throughout the quarter to discuss their experiences.

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