

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 are identified as female-typical (most of which are related to the reproductive system and/or hormones) and which play a major role in lives of individuals who identify as female whether or not the systems are active in their bodies. The course deals not only with the ways in which physiology affects behavior but also with the 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 culturally associated with 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 reproductive anatomy, physiology and endocrinology; 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 on one or more cultural groupings such as 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 female-identified bodies and the lives of people who identify as female, 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 individuals from any number of differing bio-socio-cultural backgrounds.

Assignments Related to Service-Learning

Students use a journal in which they reflect upon the relationship between course material and its meaning for the lives of the clients served by their placement site. 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. Additional difficulties arise due to the life-span nature of the course in contrast to the typical restricted age range of people served by most organizations. Here too, a clear understanding of the individuals served by the organization can help the student to imagine how information covered in the course applied or will apply to the clients at other times in their lives. 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. These meetings also allow students to share information about their service site with other students in the class.

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