Overview

Majors, including joint majors, are required to complete senior work that is scaffolded by insights from previous GSFS courses. The project may be either a one-semester senior essay or other creative work (GSFS 0700), or a two-semester senior thesis or creative project (GSFS 0710).

GSFS majors (including joint and double majors) will submit the senior work proposal form by March 1. Immediately after spring break, the program chair will notify you of your thesis advisor and will clarify whether you will undertake a one-semester or two-semester project. Please note, senior work advisors are assigned by the program to ensure an even distribution of advisees (and faculty workload). However, this should not prevent you from consulting your advisor or any other faculty member as you work on your project. In conjunction with your advisor you will select a second reader.

Senior work must contain new research, reflect a synthesis of the ideas about gender and/or sexuality developed over a variety of courses, and offer an articulate understanding of how feminist-queer theories have informed the arguments developed. The GSFS senior project provides students the flexibility to produce a formal written document, produce a multi-media project such as a podcast or a movie which is supplemented by an explanatory essay.

The GSFS major is designed to provide students competency in critical race and transnational/national feminisms. Senior work should demonstrate an engagement with these concerns and the ability to communicate complex ideas effectively and persuasively. In addition, senior work should showcase your critical thinking skills as well as your awareness of interdisciplinary knowledge production and methodologies.

All majors will present their findings in a public forum, Senior Work Presentations. The forum provides students with one more opportunity to mobilize the connections between the experiential and theoretical aspects of feminist-queer studies.

Prerequisites for all Senior Work:
All students are expected to have completed GSFS 0320 (theory) and GSFS 0435 (engaged research).

One-Semester Senior Work
The one-semester project is designed to demonstrate your capacity to synthesize and think critically about a topic in a sustained manner. Choose a topic that interests you and that will continue to interest you over the course of the semester. We advise you to consider a topic which has been addressed in at least one of your classes. You can choose to take up a completely new topic, such as sex ed in Zimbabwe, but be aware that you will need to undertake considerable research on your own to familiarize yourself with the topic, scholarship, and the context – all of this work before you start to write a single word.
Think of the one-semester project primarily as all-but data collection. Most students adopt a thematic approach, say studying media images, or focus on a theorist or a person. The single semester project requires you to conduct research, map out the terrain of existing scholarship, consider methodological issues, and above all situate your ideas through a feminist-queer studies lens. Think of your senior essay as engaging in an ongoing conversation with published work done on your topic as well as ideas generated in the broader field of feminist-queer studies in your GSFS classes.

Portfolio
A key element of feminist knowledge production is to think reflexively and reflectively about your ideas. Toward this end, all senior work will include a portfolio review. The course work in Feminist Engaged Research (GSFS 0435) will include a draft of the portfolio review. Students will assess all the GSFS courses they have taken, scan the syllabi, read essays submitted and think through how the senior work topic has been shaped by and grounded in prior course work. The portfolio review should comprise at least two pages of writing which knits together theories, concerns, insights from various courses and develops how they shape your senior work. This writing could be incorporated in the formal document, either in its entirety or elements used throughout the work to support arguments.


Two-semester Senior Project
The two-semester project is designed to conduct new and original research and situate it within existing scholarship. It is designed to demonstrate your capacity to synthesize and think critically about a topic in a sustained manner. Be ambitious but wise in choosing your topic and approach to this project. Choose a topic that interests you and that will continue to interest you over the course of two semesters. We advise you to consider a topic which has been addressed in at least one of your classes. You can choose to take up a completely new topic, such as sex ed in Zimbabwe, but be aware that you will need to undertake considerable research on your own to familiarize yourself with the topic, scholarship, and the context – all of this work before you start to write a single word.

Most students adopt a thematic approach, say studying media images, or focus on a theorist or a person. The two-semester project requires you to conduct original research. In the final product you will map out the terrain of existing scholarship, consider methodological issues, and above all situate your ideas through a feminist-queer studies lens.

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Length: Formal document 35-40 pages; creative project, please consult your advisor.
Defense:

Once you have submitted your senior project, you will work with your advisor and second reader to schedule your oral defense. This is a friendly, professional conversation that lasts about 45 minutes. The conversation centers on your project and provides you an opportunity to reflect on what worked and did not work, to make connections with ideas and concepts that help link your project to the broader arena of feminism and queer activism. Based on the suggestions made at the defense, you may have the opportunity to make one final set of revisions. Keep this in mind as you schedule your defense date.

Following the defense, your faculty readers will write an evaluative letter.

Criteria for Evaluation of Senior Work

1. Bibliography: how well has the student researched the topic? Does the student use appropriate primary and secondary sources? Does the student know where their argument fits into the conversation about the topic?
2. Scope and thoroughness: is the topic appropriately focused and thoroughly considered?
3. Thesis: is the argument clear and persuasive? Is it well supported by evidence?
4. Feminist-queer knowledge production: is the project attentive to interdisciplinary modes of knowledge production? Is the analysis simultaneously attentive to race, class, and other vectors of difference as well as location (local, global, national-rural)?
5. Style: are the ideas in the project well developed, clearly, and without distracting errors?
6. Validity: does the project make a defensible, convincing and illuminating contribution to the study of its topic? Are the interpretations valid?
7. Originality: does the project offer something new, original, creative?
8. Public presentation: how well does the student explain and elaborate their research in public.

Honors

Honors will be awarded to students with a GPA of 3.5 and a thesis grade of B+, high honors to students with a GPA of 3.7 and a thesis grade of A- or A, and highest honors to students with a GPA of 3.8 and a thesis grade of A.