

GSWS 2270A
Women, Law, and Social Change
Fall 2025
Western University
Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies
DRAFT

This is a draft syllabus and content is subject to change.

The department would like to recognize that we are located on the traditional land of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Lenape and Attawandaron peoples.

Course Information

Date & Time: DRAFT

Location: DRAFT

This course is an introduction to various areas of law which affect women in specific ways. It will examine laws relating to sex discrimination, employment, sexual harassment, rape and sexual assault, abortion, marriage, divorce, child custody, inheritance, pornography and prostitution. It will explore topical debates in these various areas of law and how law can be used as a strategy for bringing about social change. No prerequisites. Antirequisite: GSWS 2260.

Instructor Information

Dr. Megan Blair

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Office: TBD

Office Hours: Tuesday, 2:15-4:15pm or by appointment

I will respond to emails within 24 hours, excluding weekends.

TA Information

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Course Objectives

Through engagement with course materials, students will:

- Understand the ways in which the law has shaped women's experiences over time
- Consider the intersectional experiences of women's interactions with the law based on their class, race, ethnicity, and sexual identity
- Assess how the law has brought about social change and how social movements have encouraged changes to the law
- Consider how women have used both formal and informal avenues to initiate social change
- Critically analyze a variety of academic and non-academic sources

- Evaluate the ways in which various forms of media have presented issues regarding women and the law

Required Text

There is no textbook for this class. All readings are available through the Western University Library. Links for online material will be posted to OWL. There is no requirement to purchase additional material for the purpose of assignments. There is no cost associated with required materials for this class.

Course Requirements and Assessments

Participation	20%	Ongoing
Reading Reflection	20% (2 x 10%)	October 14, 2025 November 25, 2025
Newspaper Article	25%	November 11, 2025
Final Exam	35%	TBD

Participation (20%)

Participation in this course will take the form of a variety of in-person and online activities. Each week's participation will be outlined during the weekly in-person lecture and if online, further details will be provided on OWL. Participation could take the form of in-person discussions, written responses, or exit tickets during lectures, or online discussion posts or polls. It is essential that you attend each class to ensure that you receive full marks for participation. Failure to attend class could result in a grade of 0 for that week's participation mark. Students' two lowest participation marks will be dropped before calculating the final grade.

Reading Reflection (2 x 10% = 20%)

Students are required to reflect on two of the assigned course readings. Reading reflections due on October 14 must consider a reading that was assigned between September 16 and October 7. Reading reflections due on November 25 will consider a reading that was assigned between October 14 and November 18.

Reading reflections should be 3 pages in length and should cite directly from the assigned reading you have chosen. It is not necessary to include any additional sources. Questions to consider in your reading reflection include:

- What topic in women, law, and social change is the author considering?
- What is the author's argument?
- What types of sources does the author use? Are they using court cases, interviews, newspaper accounts?
- What questions are you left with after reading the article?
- Does the author include any personal reflections or experiences relating to the topic?
- What future areas of research could develop from the article?

The reading reflection should be more than a summary of the article and should include an analysis of the author's argument and answers to the above questions.

Newspaper Article (25%)

Students will write a 6-page newspaper article or series of articles from the perspective of a journalist covering a real topic relating to women, law, and social change. Students are required to use and cite 3 peer-reviewed academic sources. Your newspaper could be one 6-page investigative report, or several smaller articles compiling 6-pages that detail the progression of a case. The topic that you choose can be one that was detailed in class and while you can use an assigned course reading to contribute to your newspaper article, it cannot count as one of your three sources. Throughout your newspaper article, you must also consider the significance of the topic to the overall theme of women, law, and social change. While detailing the events of your topic is important for contextual detail, your article must go beyond a description of events to consider the social change the topic has initiated.

Further instructions and a list of potential topics will be provided in class.

Final Exam (35%)

The final exam will be a series of short and long answer questions. Further details will be provided in class.

Weekly Themes and Assigned Readings

Week 1 – September 9, 2025	
Introduction to the Legal System Women & the Vote	No assigned reading
Week 2 – September 16, 2025	
Indigenous Women, Gender, and the Law	Sharon McIvor, "Aboriginal Women Unmasked: Using equality litigation to advance women's rights," <i>Canadian Journal of Women and the Law</i> 16, 1 (2004): 106-136.
Week 3 - September 23, 2025	
Marriage & Divorce	Franca Iacovetta, "'In the case of a woman' or 'the headache': married women's nationality and Canada's Citizenship Act at home and Europe, 1946-50," <i>Women's History Review</i> 28, 3 (2019): 396-420.
September 30, 2025 - National Day for Truth and Reconciliation – No Class	
Week 4 – October 7, 2025	
Maternal & Family Law	Lori Chambers, "Mothers and the Meaning of Consent in Adoption," in <i>A Legal History of Adoption in Ontario, 1921-201</i> , 26-41 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016).

Week 5 – October 14, 2025	
Immigration & Ethnicity	Enakshi Dua, "Exclusion through Inclusion: Female Asian Migration in the Making of Canada as a White Settler Nation," <i>Gender, Place & Culture</i> 14, 4 (2007): 445-466. Reading Reflection Due
Week 6 – October 21, 2025	
Employment & Labour Law	Joan Sangster and Julia Smith, "Beards and Bloomers: Flight Attendants, Grievances and Embodied Labour in the Canadian Airline Industry, 1960s-1980s," <i>Gender, Work and Organization</i> 23, 2 (2016): 183-199.
Week 7 – October 28, 2025	
Sexual Harassment & Sexual Assault	Bailey Gerrits, Nadia Verrelli, and Lori Chambers, "From Pride to Lies: English-Language Print Media Coverage of Supreme Court of Canada Decisions on Women's Defensive Violence," <i>Journal of Canadian Studies</i> 57, 2 (2023): 155-180.
November 4, 2025 – Reading Week – No Class	
Week 8 – November 11, 2025	
Contraceptives & Abortion	Rebecca Beausaert, "Not Guilty but Guilty? Race, Rumour, and Respectability in the 1882 Abortion Trial of Letitia Munson," in <i>Abortion: History, Politics and Reproductive Justice after Morgentaler</i> , 55-73, eds., Travis Hay, Shannon Stettner, and Kristin Burnett (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017). Newspaper Article Due
Week 9 – November 18, 2025	
Childhood & Youth	Franca Iacovetta, "Parents, Daughters, and Family Court Intrusions into Working-Class Life," in <i>On the Case: Explorations in Social History</i> , 312-337, eds. Franca Iacovetta and Wendy Mitchinson, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998).
Week 10 – November 25, 2025	
Sex Work	Becki Ross, "Sex and (Evacuation from) the City: The Moral and Legal Regulation of Sex Workers in Vancouver's West End, 1975-1985," <i>Sexualities</i> 13, 2 (2010): 197-218. Reading Reflection Due
Week 11 – December 2, 2025	

LGBTQ2IA+ Laws	Sarah Lamble, "Unknowable Bodies, Unthinkable Sexualities: Lesbian and Transgender Legal Invisibility in the Toronto Women's Bathhouse Raid," <i>Social and Legal Studies</i> 18, 1 (2009): 111-130.
Week 12 – December 9, 2025	
Women in the Law	Constance Backhouse, "Gender and Race in the Construction of 'Legal Professionalism'", in <i>In Search of the Ethical Lawyer: Stories from the Canadian Legal Profession</i> , 126-149, eds. Allan Hutchinson, Adam Dodek and Alice Woolley (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016).

Course Policies

Accommodations, Participation, and Late Assignments

All requests for extensions should be made through email **at least one week** prior to the due date of an assignment. All extensions on assignments are at the professor's discretion. Assignments submitted after the due date will be penalized at 2% per day, including weekends, to a maximum of 20%. Students are encouraged to speak with the professor regarding any concerns with completing their assignments and reasonable accommodations will be made.

Participation makes up 20% of the final grade for this course. Students are encouraged to attend class to complete the required participation activities. If students are unable to attend class, they are encouraged to speak to the professor as soon as possible to arrange alternate accommodations for participation.

Students must familiarize themselves with the *University Policy on Academic Consideration – Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs* posted on the Academic Calendar:

<https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academicpolicies/appeals/academicconsiderationSep24.pdf>

This policy does not apply to requests for academic consideration submitted for **attempted or completed work**, whether online or in person. The policy also does not apply to students experiencing longer-term impacts on their academic responsibilities. These students should consult: [Accessible Education](#).

For procedures on how to submit Academic Consideration requests, please see the information posted on the Office of the Registrar's webpage:

<https://registrar.uwo.ca/academics/academicconsiderations/>

All requests for Academic Consideration must be made within 48 hours after the assessment date or submission deadline.

All academic consideration requests must include supporting documentation; however, recognizing that formal documentation may not be available in some extenuating circumstances, the policy allows students to make one Academic Consideration request **without**

supporting documentation in this course. However, the following assessments are excluded from this, and therefore always require formal supporting documentation:

- Examinations scheduled during the official examination periods.

When a student misses the **Final Exam** and their Academic Consideration has been granted, they will be allowed to write the Special Examination (the name given by the University to a makeup Final Exam). See the Academic Calendar ([Special Examinations](#)), especially for those who miss multiple final exams within one examination period.

[Accessible Education](#) provides support to students with disabilities who require accommodations.

Please see [Western's Policy on Academic Consideration](#) and the [Registrar's Office information on the Student Absence Portal](#).

Submission of Assignments

All assignments will be submitted to the Dropbox on OWL. Assignments should be double spaced, 12pt, Times New Roman font. Citations must be used in all assignments. The citation form that is used is at the discretion of the student, as long as their form remains consistent and thorough.

Classroom Environment

Students are expected to contribute to a respectful and collegial classroom environment. Students are encouraged to engage in course content in thoughtful, meaningful ways. Any disrespectful, harmful, or threatening behaviour will not be tolerated. Similarly, online discussion posts should reflect a respectful, positive learning environment and must be free from discriminatory statements.

Students must abide by Western University's [Student Code of Conduct](#) and [Anti-Harassment and Non-Discrimination policies](#).

Use of Electronic Devices

In Class: Electronic devices can be distracting for students. You are welcome to use a computer or other electronic device to type notes during class. Lectures and discussions may not be recorded or taped. Nothing from this course may be posted online. Please do not use your device for personal reasons during class, and please be respectful of your classmates' learning experience.

During Exams: The use of any electronic device during the exam is prohibited with the exception of those who have received an academic accommodation.

Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The use of AI (such as ChatGPT) is prohibited in this course. If it is suspected that a student has used AI, the professor may request research notes, outlines, or drafts used in the preparation of

the assignment. Students should retain these materials until after their final grade has been released.

Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following website: https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_offences.pdf.

Use of Turnitin

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement currently between the University and Turnitin.com

Accommodation for Religious Holidays

Students should review the [policy for Accommodation for Religious Holidays](#). Where a student will be unable to write examinations and term tests due to a conflicting religious holiday, they should inform their instructors as soon as possible but **not later than two weeks** prior to writing the examination/term test. In the case of conflict with a midterm test, students should inform their instructor as soon as possible but not later than one week prior to the midterm.

Religious Accommodation requests for final exams should be submitted via the Student Absence Portal.

Student Resources

Mental Health Support

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western (<https://uwo.ca/health/>) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Gender Based and Sexual Violence

Western University [is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence](#) (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website:

<https://www.uwo.ca/health/studentsupport/survivorsupport/get-help.html>. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

Writing Support Centre

Students are encouraged to contact the [Writing Support Centre](#) for resources on writing, communication, and study skills.

