

An Exploration of Global Women's Health: Findings from a Pilot Online Course Elective

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ABSTRACT

In 1995, 189 countries endorsed the *Platform for Action*, designed to address issues of gender equality, including health. Despite this 23 year old initiative, women's health issues continue to be a global crisis (WHO, 2015). The SMHS piloted an 8-week online 1-credit course in Fall 2017 to educate GW students on the top ten issues for women's health delineated by the World Health Organization (WHO). Each of the eight weeks covered a core women's health WHO issue while tying in a global human rights perspective. This course was designed to address two key gaps at GWU: 1) there is currently no other undergraduate course at GW focused on Global Women's Health, and 2) this is the first 1 credit hybrid elective course, in Health Sciences, to be offered to undergraduate residency students. The teaching platform adopted for this course attracted an "inter-school" student body. Our findings showed that approximately half of the students who took this course indicated they would enroll in the course regardless of the delivery platform; face-to-face, blended or online. This course is consistent with the University mission to provide a rigorous undergraduate course designed to raise student awareness of women's health issues worldwide. In doing so, the GW student body is better prepared to be a part of the commitment to achieve gender equality, a commitment outlined at the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action.

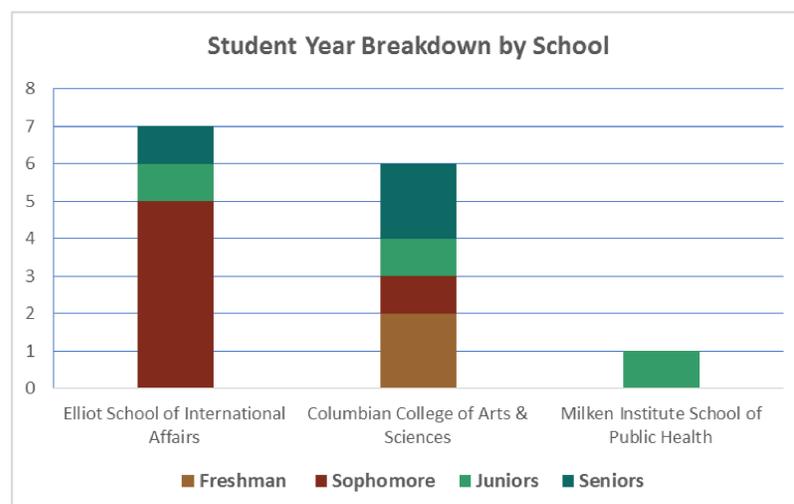
COURSE OBJECTIVES/TOPICS

Upon completion of this course students will:

1. Identify key geopolitical factors shaping women's health around the globe.
2. Discuss the ten core women's health issues that have been outlined by the World Health Organization.
3. Articulate health initiatives that have been developed to target women's health concerns.

LEARNERS

There were 14 students enrolled in this pilot course. They were all women, undergraduates, and residential students.



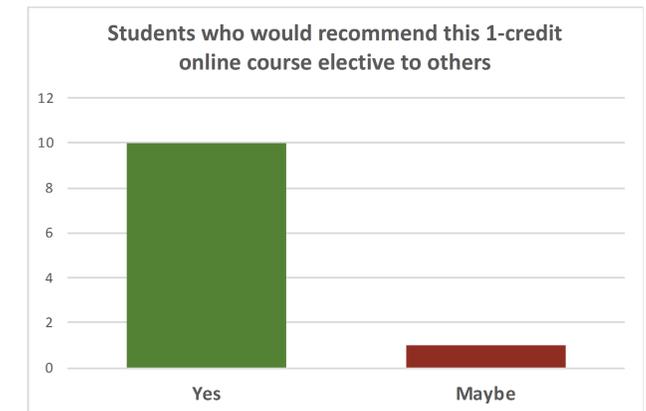
PEDAGOGY: Hybrid Course, Online for 8 Weeks and 1 Face-to-Face Class for Final Presentations

Week 1: Why Women's Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Phenomenal Woman</i> Poem (Angelou, 1995) • VoiceThread presentation to show personal reflections on womanhood
Week 2: Framing Women's Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TED talk (Johnson, 2013) on sexual differences experienced by women within health care • National Geographic's video (2016) showing children's varied gender experiences • Discussion board post to show understanding of women's health as a social and biological construct
Week 3: Gender-Based Violence & Discrimination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Original podcast titled "EquityMatters" (Ward, 2017) in which students could listen to her perspectives on structural gender-based violence • Video: "The Human Cost of the Global Gag Rule: A Kenyan Story" (IWHC, 2017) • VoiceThread presentation on the Global Impact of Violence
Week 4: STIs & AIDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course textbook reading on the connections between the AIDS pandemic and Women's Rights (Murthy and Smith, 2010) • Infographic to display the relationship between the economic and social factors that contribute to how AIDS remains a structural form of violence against women
Week 5: Sexual, Reproductive, & Maternal Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spoken-word video: "The Period Poem" (Dominique Christina, 2014) and a clip from the film "For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow is Enuf" (Perry, 2010) to explore the topics of sexual and reproductive health • Discussion board post to explore the cross cultural perspectives on reproductive choice and access to quality services in different developing countries
Week 6: Being differently-abled	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two videos and one web article in which people with disabilities discuss how they perceive themselves and are perceived by others • Students chose from suggested publications that covered the rights of women and girls who are differently-abled and drafted a "letter to the editor" detailing why it is important to recognize disability rights as a worthy topic for coverage
Week 7: Adolescent Girls' Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spoken-word piece by U.S. adolescents on the impact of policies and social norms on their health (Brave New Voices, 2014); TED talk of a girl from Malawi sharing why and how she escaped child marriage (Banda, 2015) • Readings about: adolescent girls as targets for human trafficking, the gendered drivers of poor adolescent mental health, and girls' empowerment • VoiceThread Public Service Announcement to craft a message about policies and practices that would support the healthy development of adolescent girls
Week 8: Women & Aging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UN infographic showing the considerable portion the aging population constitutes globally • Discussion board post on older women's access to health and human rights • Oral presentation on any women's health topic covered in the course, presentations took place during the only live session of the semester

Course Content	Methods of Content Delivery	Student Learning Activities/Outcome Metrics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foundation of Women's Health • Range of Topics • Perspective of Topic Discussions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online learning environment • Online readings • Online course resources (videos, podcasts, lectures) • Textbook: "Women's Global Health and Human Rights" (Murthy and Smith, 2010) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course Assignments • Engaging with Peers and Faculty in an Online Space

RESULTS

Course evaluations revealed that students wanted to delve deeper into covered topic areas and expand to additional topics. Majority of students said they would recommend this course to others.



Qualitative feedback was categorized to indicate that students enjoyed the types of course assignments, the range of topics that were covered throughout the course, as well as the online resources that were provided to supplement the reading material of the course textbook. Students indicated the variety of teaching methods and learning activities enhanced course outcomes.

1. Students gained both depth and breath of a topic in a one credit course.
2. Students indicated the knowledge acquired through the course was transferable to "real life."
3. Students demonstrate an interest in developed and developing nations.

"I knew nothing about women's global health and after just a few weeks I can honestly say I know much more and am very passionate about it." –GW Student

"I think it would be great to expand more on the topics covered and give more of an in-depth look into them. It would be a great opportunity to learn more! On top of this, it could be preached to other schools i.e. Elliott and Columbian to count for credit!" –GW Student

CONCLUSIONS

Findings from the pilot course assessment suggest that this course could be expanded into a 3-credit course, could be taught in person, and could be offered as an elective that could count for credit towards other majors within different departments in order to increase its reach.

