

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 details may be revised.

Course Information

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

Megan Blair

Email – **TBD**

Office Hours – **TBD**

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 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; all material to be used for assignments can be accessed through the library. 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. Participation could take the form of in-person discussions, written responses, or exit tickets during lectures, or online posts, polls, or quizzes. 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 their 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 long 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 fictional journalist covering a real topic relating to women, law, and social change. Students are required to use and cite three 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 (30%)

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

Weekly Themes and Assigned Readings

Week 1 – September 9, 2025	
Introduction to the Legal System Women & the Vote	
Week 2 - September 16, 2025	
Marriage & Divorce	
Week 3 – September 23, 2025	
Maternal & Family Law	
September 30, 2025 - National Day for Truth and Reconciliation – No Class	
Week 4 – October 7, 2025	
Morality	
Week 5 – October 14, 2025	
Employment	Reading Reflection Due
Week 6 – October 21, 2025	
Sexual Harassment & Sexual Assault	
October 28, 2025 - Reading Week – No Class	
Week 7 – November 4, 2025	
Contraceptives & Abortion	
Week 8 – November 11, 2025	
Childhood & Youth	Newspaper Article Due
Week 9 – November 18, 2025	
Sex Work	
Week 10 – November 25, 2025	
LGBTQ2IA+	Reading Reflection Due
Week 11 – December 2, 2025	
Transnational Legal Activism	
Week 12 – December 9, 2025	

Women in the Law	
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