

**History of the Body**  
LAH/EUH 5934 / Spring 2025  
Keene Flint Library 229  
Thursday, 4:05-7:05 pm / Periods 9-11

Dr. Heather Vrana  
Office: 364 Grinter  
Office hours: Tuesday 10:45-11:45am, 2-4pm, Thursdays 11:50am-12:50pm, and by  
appointment  
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What is history of the body? How do historians “do” history of the body? This seminar introduces graduate students to some of the key issues and challenges involved in reading, researching, and writing histories related to the body, bodies, and historical embodiment at the professional level. We will read roughly one monograph or its equivalent each week, striking a balance between foundational and more recent texts. We will think about human and non-human bodies as historical texts, discuss how bodies appear in the archive, understand embodiment in terms of historical contingency, and read histories about all kinds of bodies across time and place.

The books for this course will focus on cultural and intellectual history, histories of gender and sexuality, disability history, and more, and we will cover a range of methodologies and themes within these broad subfields. By the end of the semester, students will have a basic grasp of the field within and beyond their geographical and chronological focus.

You will:

- learn and assess new directions and foundational works in the field;
- discuss several major schools of history writing and the theoretical debates that inform them;
- prepare for your qualifying exams;
- consider how the many approaches of “histories of the body” can inform your research.

Each week, we will read the assigned book/article and then discuss the reading. The format of the class will be largely discussion-based, with regular student presentations and occasional lectures. Each week, every student will be responsible for leading one part of the discussion. These presentations will review the previous class material and discussion and present the current week’s material.

Students are expected to attend and participate actively in every seminar. Unexcused absences are unacceptable and will count against your final grade.

**Cell phone usage during class is distracting for everyone, as are online shopping and checking email. In our class, please enjoy three hours of distraction-free thinking.**

## Assignments

### 1. Attendance and Participation (20%)

You are expected to come to class each week and participate actively in discussion. Additionally, each week, you will be responsible for reprising the previous week's discussion, summarizing a chapter of the week's book, or posing discussion questions. This structure will be the basis of each class.

### 2. Weekly Response Papers (20%)

These papers will be around 600 words in length. These papers should help you to prepare for class and can be useful study tools for your qualifying exams—make them work for you. You will complete 10 of them across the course of the semester (you get one week “off” and another week you will submit a book review essay instead of a response paper). They are **due by midnight on Tuesday** (by email) before our class meeting. We will discuss this assignment at greater length in class.

### 3. Syllabus (20%)

1. You will write a syllabus for undergraduates on a theme related to the history of the body and your research. It should have a sensible progression of readings and appropriate assignments for an undergraduate course. We will discuss this assignment at greater length in class. It will be **due on Week 11**.

### 4. Archives of the Body Essay (10%)

1. **Due Week 9**, this two-part assignment asks you to a) assemble a list of primary sources that will form the archival basis for your short research essay related the history of the body and b) reflect on the types of sources you have found in terms of what they can reveal about the body in the past (and their limitations), drawing on our class discussions and readings.

### 5. Short Research Essay (30%)

1. This paper will be a focused research essay based on your field and interests. You must meet with me **no later than Week 6** to discuss your topic. It should be at least 4500 words in length. It will be due on May 1, 2025.

## **Readings**

In general, each week's readings pair a classic or new monograph with an article that takes up a similar question, topic, or methodology. The monographs should be purchased; the articles are available through UF Libraries' databases. As should be clear, the course covers many different places and times. Texts reflect many major historiographical schools and trends in the modern practice of the profession. By the end of the course, you should have a clear understanding of the major questions shaping the subfield, how these questions have changed, and how your research interests might contribute to them.

How to read and prepare for class (AKA the “three yeses”)

1. Acquire the correct edition of each text and a notebook or laptop on which to take notes (the first yes)

2. Read the text, on its own terms—that is, figure out what the author says they are going to do and read the book by those criteria—ask do they do the thing they said they would? (the second yes)
3. Commit to providing constructive comment/critique—what might the author have done differently/what did they do well, to achieve the goal of their text as they named it (the third yes)
4. Focus on the key questions or disagreements that emerge across the assigned readings: where do the authors agree or disagree? What seems to be the primary focus or research question? Do they use similar sources? Do they come to similar conclusions? If so, why? If not, well, why?

### **Accessibility**

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565 OR [www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/)) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter, which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

(Graduate students tend to utilize it less than undergrads, but the DRC is for you, too!)

Accessibility extends beyond DRC accommodations. We can work together to create a classroom environment that is accessible for everyone. Please let me know about your individual access needs.

### **University Policies:**

#### **Honor Code**

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge, which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Honor Code (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honorcode/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor.

**\*\*Uncited use of AI, including ChatGPT and other LLMs, is a violation of the Honor Pledge\*\***

#### **Class Conduct**

We may disagree at times, but together we will learn to discuss respectfully topics that are important to us. Please treat one another with care. The success of our class relies on you.

### **Schedule of Readings and Discussion**

Week 1: What is History of the Body? – January 16

- Joan W. Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (Summer 1991) 17, no. 4 (Summer 1991): 773-797.

Week 2: The Body as Evidence, Part I – January 23

- Sylvia Sellers-García, *The Woman on the Windowsill: A Tale of Mystery in Several Parts*. Yale University Press, 2020.
- María Elena Martínez, “Archives, Bodies, and Imagination: The Case of Juana Aguilar and Queer Approaches to History, Sexuality, and Politics,” *Radical History Review* no. 120 (2014): 159-182.

Week 3: The Body as Evidence, Part II – January 30

- Rebecca Earle, *The Body of the Conquistador: Food, Race, and the Colonial Experience in Spanish America, 1492-1700*. Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Week 4: The Body as Knowledge – February 6

- Pablo F. Gómez, *The Experiential Caribbean: Creating Knowledge and Healing in the Early Modern Atlantic*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017.

Week 5: The Body in Pain – February 13

- Sowande’ M. Mustakeem, *Slavery at Sea: Terror, Sex, and Sickness in the Middle Passage*. University of Illinois Press, 2016.
- Jessica Marie Johnson, “Markup Bodies: Black [Life] Studies and Slavery [Death] Studies at the Digital Crossroads.” *Social Text* 36, no. 4 (2018): 57-79.

Week 6: Disciplinary Bodies – February 20\*\*

- Julie Livingston, *Debility and the Moral Imagination in Botswana*. Indiana University Press, 2005.
- Beth Linker, “On the Borderland of Medical and Disability History: A Survey of the Fields.” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 87, no. 4 (Winter 2013): 499-535.
- Daniel J. Wilson, “Comment: On the Borderland of Medical and Disability History.” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 87, no.4 (Winter 2013): 536-539.
- Catherine Kudlick, “Comment: On the Borderland of Medical and Disability History.” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 87, no.4 (Winter 2013): 540-559.

\*\*Meet with Prof. Vrana to discuss final paper no later than this week

Week 7: The Body as a Weapon – February 27

- Salih Can Açıksöz, *Sacrificial Limbs: Masculinity, Disability, and Political Violence in Turkey*. University of California Press, 2019.
- Jay Winter, “War and Martyrdom in the Twentieth Century and After,” *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society* 1, no. 2 (2015): 217-256.

Week 8: The Body as Evidence, Part III – March 6

- Adria Imada, *Archive of Skin, Archive of Kin: Disability and Life-Making During Medical Incarceration*. University of California Press, 2022.

SPRING BREAK

Week 9: The Mutable Body – March 20\*\*

- Dorothy Ko, *Cinderella's Sisters: A Revisionist History of Footbinding*. University of California Press, 2005.

\*\* Archives of the Body Essay due

Week 10: The Political Body, Part I – March 27

- Alexandra Minna Stern, *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America*. University of California Press, 2016.
- Stefan Pohl-Valero, "La raza entra por la boca': Energy, Diet, and Eugenics in Colombia, 1890-1940." *Hispanic American Historical Review* 94, no. 3 (2014): 455-486.

Week 11: The Beautiful Body – April 3\*\*

- Peter Stearns, *Fat History: Bodies and Beauty in the Modern West*. NYU Press, 2002. [NB. This is a "new" edition]
- Alexander Edmonds, "'The Poor Have a Right to Be Beautiful': Cosmetic Surgery in Neoliberal Brazil." *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 13, no. 2 (Jun. 2007): 363-381.

\*\* Syllabus due

Week 12: The Body at Work – April 10

- Rocío Gómez, *Silver Veins, Dusty Lungs: Mining, Water, and Public Health in Zacatecas, 1835-1946*. University of Nebraska Press, 2020.
- Jeff D. Grischow, "Kwame Nkrumah, Disability, and Rehabilitation in Ghana, 1957-1966," *Journal of African History* 52, no. 2 (July 2011): 179-199.

Week 13: The Political Body, Part II – April 17

- Elizabeth B. Schwall, *Dancing with the Revolution: Power, Politics, and Privilege in Cuba*. University of North Carolina Press, 2021.

\*\* Final Papers are due on May 1, 2025