

**PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION FOR M.ST. IN
WOMEN'S STUDIES**

1. Awarding institution/body	University of Oxford
2. Teaching institution	University of Oxford
3. Programme accredited by	n/a
4. Final award	M. St. in Women's Studies
5. Programme	Women's Studies
6. UCAS code	n/a
7. Relevant subject benchmark statement	Modern Languages, Classics, English, Philosophy, Modern History
8. Date of programme specification	Sept 2014
<p>9. Educational aims of the programme</p> <p>The programme aims to enable its students to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - acquire knowledge and understanding of a wide range of theoretical issues raised by women's studies; - develop the ability to identify, understand and apply critically key concepts and principles in women's studies; - reflect on humanities research methodology and ethics, and on the challenges of interdisciplinary work, and to acquire practical research skills which draw creatively on the practice of those academic disciplines relevant to their own interests; - gain a critical knowledge of the scholarly literature relevant to their particular options and research projects; - develop skills in written and oral communication, and in the presentation of academic work, displaying sustained argument, independent thought and lucid structure and content; - pursue further research informed by the approaches and theoretical questions raised by women's studies, or to apply these theories and approaches to other fields of activity. 	
<p>10. Programme outcomes</p> <p>A. Knowledge and understanding</p> <p>On completion of the course, students will have</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • acquired a general understanding of the theoretical and methodological issues raised by women's studies; 	

- acquired some specialist knowledge of relevant primary and secondary literature;
- developed greater intellectual flexibility in drawing constructively on approaches and material from different disciplines;
- developed an intellectual depth and grasp of profounder issues.

Teaching/learning methods and strategies

The course is taught by a variety of means. In the first term, the Theory course is taught through 8 lectures given by specialists from a range of disciplines who all have research experience in the field of women's studies, and a weekly two-hour seminar, chaired by two academics. The Methods course which runs in parallel is taught by means of a weekly one and a half hour seminar, in which students are introduced to a wide variety of disciplinary approaches. In the first and second terms, an option course (from a range of courses offered by tutors predominantly in the participating faculties of Modern Languages, Modern History, English, Classics and Philosophy) is taught through weekly or fortnightly tutorials or small classes (for which students prepare a number of written papers). Students work throughout the year with a dissertation supervisor, who will work particularly closely with them in the third term.

Assessment

Formative assessment is provided by seminar and tutorial feedback, by interaction with the supervisor, and by the supervisor's and option tutors' termly reports, which are discussed with the student. In the first term, students make presentations to both the Theory and Methods seminars, and in the third term they have the opportunity to present summaries of their dissertation projects for collective discussion and feedback. Summative assessment is provided by the grading of submitted written work. The option courses are examined by 6,000-7,000-word essays. The third examined element is a dissertation of up to 12,000 words, and not less than 10,000 words.

B. Skills and other attributes

I. Intellectual skills

On completion of the course, students will have:

- acquired intellectual sophistication in handling theoretical and methodological issues
- proved able to apply conceptual tools and questions suggested by a range of disciplines to their own particular projects in women's studies
- gained a grounding in relevant research methods and have written a dissertation, which may constitute a basis for proceeding to a future research degree.

Teaching/learning methods and strategies

The course is taught by a variety of methods: lectures, seminars with peers and senior academics at which students make oral presentations, tutorials/classes and supervisions for

which they prepare written work. A close interrelationship between lectures and seminars, both of which are focused on primary texts, in the first term enables students to build up confidence in reading and debating critically as a group. Both the first and second terms offer the opportunity to work closely with a specialist in a particular field, and to work further on conceptual and writing skills. Individual guidance both in the option courses and in dissertation supervision gives students training and expertise in rigorous scholarly practice. Skill in using research materials is developed through work on the dissertation, where the supervisor provides guidance and bibliographical help but the student is expected to work independently. The effective use of libraries, essential throughout the course, requires and develops IT skills and the ability to use databases.

Assessment

Formative assessment is provided by seminar and tutorial feedback, by interaction with the supervisor and by the supervisor's and option tutors' termly reports, which are discussed with the student. Students make presentations to seminars in the first term, and produce regular written work for the option courses in the first and second terms, where small group teaching ensures close attention to and constructive feedback on the detail of students' work. The course is summatively examined by the grading of two submitted essays (of 6,000-7,000 words) and of a dissertation of up to 12,000 words.

II. Practical skills (where relevant)

N/a; all practical skills acquired are also transferable skills.

III. Transferable skills

On completion of the course, students will be able to:

- (i) find information, organise and deploy it, including through the use of libraries and information technology;
- (ii) use such information critically and analytically;
- (iii) consider and solve complex problems;
- (iv) work well independently and in co-operation with others;
- (v) effectively structure and communicate their ideas in a variety of written and oral formats;
- (vi) plan and organise the use of time effectively.

Teaching/learning methods and strategies

The skills identified above are all essential elements of the programme. Seminar, tutorial and independent study develop these skills. Tutors and supervisors provide regular feedback on progress in addition to the varying forms of formal feedback provided to students throughout the course. At the beginning of the course, students are given

guidance on use of libraries and of IT resources, and are encouraged to think critically about the construction of bibliographies.

Assessment

Formative assessment is provided by seminar and tutorial feedback, by interaction with the supervisor, and by the supervisor's and option tutors' termly reports, which are discussed with the student. Students make presentations to seminars in the first and third terms, and in the first and second term produce regular written work for discussion in small group situations. Summative assessment is provided by the grading of three pieces of submitted work: two essays of 6,000-7,000 words and a 10,000-12,000-word dissertation. Students are given guidance on the scholarly presentation of material, and are expected to reach high standards of form and content.

11. Programme Structures and Features

The course is studied over three terms.

Term 1:

1. Theory:

8 lectures (at which attendance is compulsory) given by lecturers drawn from different faculties;

8 two-hour seminars in which texts and issues raised in the lecture for the relevant week are explored (and in which students take turns to give oral presentations)

2. Methods:

8 one and a half hour seminars which address humanities research methodology and ethics (in which the students also have the opportunity to make oral presentations).

3. Option course:

Option course chosen from a list of up to thirty options, from a variety of disciplines and a wide range of periods of focus. Students meet with their option tutors for weekly or fortnightly tutorials or small seminars, and produce a number of pieces of written work, one of which is then worked up to be examined.

Term 2:

Option course chosen from a list of up to thirty options, from a variety of disciplines and a wide range of periods of focus. Students meet with their option tutors for weekly or fortnightly tutorials or small seminars, and produce a number of pieces of written work, one of which is then worked up to be examined.

Term 3:

Close work on the dissertation, the planning of which begins as early as possible in the academic year.

12. Support for Students and their learning

A. Admission and Induction Arrangements

Details of the course and the admissions procedures are published in the University's *Graduate Prospectus* and are available via the University web site. The current course guide is available via the Women's Studies page of the Modern Languages website (http://grad.mml.ox.ac.uk/womens_studies). Graduate admissions are received by the University Graduate Admissions Office; the Modern Languages Faculty Graduate Studies Committee administers the processing of applications, which are passed to the Course Directors as Co-Chairs of the Standing Committee for Women's Studies. Each application is assessed by the Chair and by a specialist reader involved in the Women's Studies programme, and written reports and recommendations for decision are returned for formal endorsement by the Faculty Board, which accepts applications subject to admission to a college. An induction programme for new postgraduates is provided at the start of the academic year, introducing academic, administrative and pastoral resources, the library and IT resources of the different participating faculties (Modern Languages, Modern History, English, Classics and Philosophy), the Bodleian, and Oxford University IT Services. The University Language Centre provides courses on English for academic purposes for 'non-native' speakers.

B. Academic Guidance and Support

All students on arrival receive the *University Decrees and Regulations* and a copy of the course guide for the M. St. programme. Lectures and seminars each term are advertised on the lecture lists of all the participating faculties and on their web sites.

Academic guidance for graduates is provided by the Course Director, and more specifically by the relevant options tutors and dissertation supervisor. The Course Director directs students to lectures and classes, arranges option teaching and specialist dissertation supervision (as appropriate), monitors their progress and compiles a termly report.

C. Library resources

Women's Studies students at Oxford have access to:

- the major holdings of the Bodleian and its associated central libraries;
- the designated Women's Studies section of the Taylor Institution Library;
- relevant faculty and college libraries.

The University Library Service also provides a converged service of IT materials across the Humanities.

D. IT resources

All colleges provide IT facilities and have access to an IT Officer to support students. In addition Oxford University IT Services provide a wide range of training courses and excellent resources, and each faculty has IT support staff and facilities.

E. Pastoral and Welfare support

The Course Directors are available to assist graduate students in all aspects of their studies. In addition, graduate students have access in their college to many officers with responsibility for pastoral and welfare support. These include the college tutor for graduates, a designated college adviser for each student, the Chaplain, and the college nurse and doctor. In addition there is peer support from the Middle Common Room (MCR), which elects student officers with special responsibility for welfare. These will liaise with the central Oxford University Students Union. Both colleges and faculties have appointed Harassment Advisers within a network of such advisers organised centrally. The University provides support services for disabled students and students with children. There is a central University Counselling Service, and colleges have different college-based welfare structures within which non-professional counselling is provided by student peers or designated tutors. Financial support is available from central university and college hardship funds. The University has an excellent Careers Service.

13. Criteria for Admission

Applicants should have a good first degree (at least 2.1 or equivalent). There is no restriction on the subject of the first degree, but candidates should be able to demonstrate a clear and well-reasoned commitment to women's studies in the humanities. Admission is on the basis of previous academic record, references, and written work.

14. Methods for evaluating and improving the quality and standards of learning

The responsible bodies for monitoring the quality and standards of learning are the Educational Policy and Standards Committee of Council through the Standing Committee for Women's Studies, which reports to the Faculty Boards of Modern Languages, Modern History, English, Classics and Philosophy and the Humanities Division. Colleges also monitor the quality of their students' learning experiences through various feedback mechanisms, such as student self-assessment, termly discussion of reports and regular meetings between students and their college adviser.

The Standing Committee for Women's Studies monitors and evaluates the standard of lecturing and seminar teaching through:

- student feedback mechanisms
- peer review

The Committee evaluates and improves the standard of the course as a whole through:

- an annual appraisal of examination performance through internal and external examination reports
- an annual review of the student guide and of lecture, seminar and library provision
- periodic review and revalidation

Any changes to the curriculum agreed by the Standing Committee are passed to the five participating Faculty Boards for approval, and must then be approved by the Humanities

Divisional Board and by the Educational Policy and Standards Committee of Council.
The Women's Studies M. St. is subject to internal review by the Educational Policy and Standards Committee of Council every six years.

15. Regulation of assessment

Details of the assessment criteria for each component of the course are provided to students in the course guide. The examining conventions and the marking scale for classification are also published in the course guide.

The Standing Committee for Women's Studies, through the Faculty Boards of Modern Languages, Modern History, English, Classics and Philosophy is responsible for:

- agreeing and publishing the marking conventions and classification scale to be used in examinations;
- the appointment of internal examiners and the nominating of external examiners who are invited to serve with the examination boards by the Vice-Chancellor;

Boards of Examiners are responsible for marking the submitted essays and dissertations. They may appoint assessors to assist with the marking of submissions that fall outside the expertise of the Board, but it is felt to be especially desirable in such an interdisciplinary course that the Board of Examiners should have a good overview of the whole year group. All submitted work is double-marked.

Role of External Examiner

- to sample a range of written work in order to monitor standards;
- to arbitrate where internal examiners cannot agree a mark;
- to report annually to the University.

Conventions

- There is no classification, although examiners may award a distinction.
- To pass the M. St. examination, candidates must achieve an average of 60 or more across the three elements (the Options submissions and the Dissertation), AND neither BOTH Options submissions nor the Dissertation must be awarded a fail mark;
- For a distinction in the M. St., candidates must achieve an average mark of 70 or above across the three elements, with marks of 70 or above in at least two elements, one of which will normally be the dissertation (the mark for which must not in any case fall below 68).

16. Indicators of quality and standards

- Annual reports from the external examiner discuss the Oxford M. St. in Women's

Studies very favourably in relation to comparable Masters courses in other universities;

- numbers of applicants are high – on average more than 60 applicants for c.12 – 15 places;
- an average of six or more distinctions per year are awarded, and the pass level is generally high;
- feedback from students has been very good, and many graduates of the M.St. programme have gone on successfully to do doctoral work in women's studies in a range of disciplinary contexts, or to follow professional pathways in the field in a variety of sectors (e.g. NGOs, journalism, public policy, etc.).