

SWG 300: U.S. Abortion History, Law and Politics

Spring 2024

Class Time: Thursdays, 1:20-4 p.m.

Class Location: Neilson 209

Professor: Carrie N. Baker

Email: cbaker@smith.edu

Office Hours: [Tuesdays 2-4 or by appt.](#)

Office Location: Wright 221

Office Phone: 413-585-3606

Credits: 4

Course Description:

On June 24, 2022, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, reversing a half-century-long precedent of constitutional abortion rights. This seminar will explore the history, law and politics of abortion in the U.S. before, during and after *Roe*. We will examine ideologies, strategies and tactics of the abortion rights movement as well as the anti-abortion movement, focusing in particular on the gender and racial politics of these movements. Topics examined include abortion access, anti-abortion violence, “crisis pregnancy centers,” fetal personhood campaigns, the criminalization of pregnancy, abortion pills, telemedicine abortion and self-managed abortion.



Course Texts:

1. Leslie Reagan, [*When Abortion Was a Crime: Women, Medicine, and Law in the United States, 1867-1973*](#) (University of California Press, 2022)
2. Jennifer Nelson, [*Women of Color and the Reproductive Rights Movement*](#) (NYU, 2003)
3. Kathryn Kolbert and Julie Kay, *Controlling Women: What We Must Do Now to Save Reproductive Freedom* (Hachette Books, 2024)
4. Merle Hoffman, *Choices: A Post-Roe Abortion Rights Manifesto* (Skyhorse, 2023)
5. Diane Greene Foster, [*The Turnaway Study: The Cost of Denying Women Access to Abortion*](#) (Scribner, 2020)
6. David Cohen and Krysten Connon, [*Living in the Crosshairs: The Untold Stories of Anti-Abortion Terrorism*](#) (Oxford, 2015)
7. Carol Mason, [*Killing for Life: The Apocalyptic Narrative of Pro-Life Politics*](#) (Cornell University Press, 2002)
8. Other course readings and films are available on Moodle.

Course Expectations:

1. **Class Participation** (20%): Preparation, prompt attendance at all class meetings, and active participation in class discussions are required. You are expected to attend every session, complete readings and watch films by the day they are listed in the syllabus, prepare to discuss the assigned material, and participate in class discussion. I encourage you to watch the films with your classmates and discuss them with each other before our in-class discussions of them.

Students will choose **discussion partners** with whom they will meet for at least 30 minutes outside of class before our class meeting each week to discuss the course materials for the week. We will alternate discussion partners every 3-4 weeks.

The class participation grade will be based on attendance, preparation, and contributions you make to class discussion, including your leadership of class discussion. You will receive a mid-semester evaluation of your participation and will be asked at the end of the semester to evaluate your own class participation.

2. **Class Presentations** (10%): Once you will co-lead class discussion for one hour of class. You and your co-presenter will introduce the readings/films (20 minutes) and lead class discussion on them (40 minutes). When you lead discussion, you and your co-leader will meet in advance to discuss the readings/films, develop discussion questions, then meet with me (preferably on the Wednesday before class) to review your discussion questions. You will then email your discussion questions to your classmates by 7 p.m. the evening before class. On days that you do not lead discussion, please be sure to read and think about your classmates' discussion questions *before class*.
3. **Short Essays** (25%): Four times during the semester, you will complete an essay of at least 500 words responding to the assigned materials for the day. Please submit your essays to Moodle before the start of class. *Essays should incorporate concepts from the class, cite specific readings for the week, and relate current and past readings.* Cite course readings with the author's name and page number. One purpose of the essays is for me to see that you are completing the course readings in a timely manner and to prepare you for class discussions, so late papers will not count. A second purpose is to see how you are synthesizing class concepts and readings. Essays will be evaluated based on depth of analysis and integration of ideas from the readings and class meetings.
4. **Research Paper** (50%): You will write a 12-15 page research paper (typed, double-spaced, with one-inch margins) exploring an issue *of your choice* related to abortion. A 250-word description of your topic and an annotated bibliography with at least seven sources are due by 5 p.m. on March 29 (5%). Drafts (10 pages minimum) are due by 5 p.m. on April 19 (5%). Drafts will be graded based on timely completion, quality and completeness of the draft. Twenty minute oral presentations on your research topics will occur during the last two class meetings on April 25 and May 2 (5%). Final papers are due on May 9 at noon (35%).

Course Evaluation: Grading for this course will be based on successful completion of the required assignments. Final grades will be based on a 1000-point scale in the following manner: A = 934-1000; A- = 900-933; B+ = 867-899; B = 834-866; B- = 800-833; C+ = 767-799; C = 734-766 with the following possible points per assignment:

Class Participation	= 150 points
Class Presentation	= 100 points
Short Essays	= 250 points
Annotated Bibliography	= 50 points
Research Paper Draft	= 50 points
Oral Presentation of Research	= 50 points
Final Research Paper	= 350 points

Attendance Policy: Regular, punctual attendance is necessary to achieve a passing grade in this course. Any student missing a class meeting without a written medical, athletic, or academic excuse is subject to having points deducted from their final grade in the class. You will sign the class attendance sheet at the beginning

of class each day. If you miss a class, you are fully responsible for finding out about and making up whatever you missed.

Academic Integrity: Everyone should always abide by [Smith College's Academic Honor Code](#). All assignments should be written entirely and only by you and should not include language generated by artificial intelligence.

Accommodation Statement: If you have a disability and need accommodations in this course, please contact the [Office of Disability Services](#) in College Hall 104 or at ods@smith.edu as soon as possible to ensure that we can implement accommodations in a timely manner. If you already have an accommodation letter, please share it with me as soon as possible. If you need accommodations for religious observances, please reach out to me right away so we can arrange that.

Content Warning: This class contains information about sexual assault and violence.

Devices: You are welcome to use your laptop in class for taking notes and/or accessing electronic readings. Please do not use any device for activities not related to the work in class.

Bibliography: Further readings are available on Moodle.

Schedule of Classes

*Readings are to be completed and films viewed before class on the date they are listed below.
Please note: The syllabus is subject to change, with notice.*

- January 25** **Introductions, Course Overview**
In-Class Film Screening: [Leona's Sister Gerri](#) (1995) (56 min.)
- February 1** **Before Roe**
Reagan, [When Abortion Was a Crime](#) (2022), Intro, Chapters 6, 7, 8 & Epilogue
[19th-Century Classified Ads for Abortifacients and Contraceptives](#)
Film: [It Happens to Us](#) (1972) (33 min.)
Archives Visit, 3-4 p.m., Neilson 304
- February 8** **Winning Roe**
Nelson, [Women of Color and the Reproductive Rights Movement](#) (2003),
Intro, Chapters 1, 2 & 4
[Roe v. Wade, 410 U.S. 113 \(1973\)](#)
Film: [Jane: An Abortion Service \(1996\) \(57 min.\)](#)
Archives Visit, 3-4 p.m., Neilson 304
- February 15** **Defending Roe**
Kolbert and Kay, *Controlling Women* (2024), Intro and Chapters 1-7
[Planned Parenthood v. Casey, 505 U.S. 832 \(1992\)](#)
Film: [Abortion: Stories Women Tell \(2017\) \(91 min.\)](#)
Guest speaker: [Julie F. Kay, Abortion Coalition for Telemedicine](#)
- February 22** *Rally Day*
- February 29** **Impact of Abortion Restrictions**
Foster, [The Turnaway Study](#) (2020) (select four chapters to read)
Ted Talk: Foster, ["What Happens When We Deny People Abortions?"](#)

- Paltrow, [Roe v. Wade and the New Jane Crow](#) (2013)
Film: [62 Days](#) (2017) (29 min.)
- March 7** **Losing Roe**
[Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization, 597 U.S. ____ \(2022\)](#)
Hoffman, *Choices: A Post-Roe Abortion Rights Manifesto* (2023), Chapters 2-6
Guest Speaker: Merle Hoffman, founder of Choices Women's Medical Center
- March 14** **Anti-Abortion Movement**
Mason, [Killing for Life](#) (2002)
Ross, *Trust Black Women* (2017)
[Replacing Myths with Facts: Sex Selective Abortion Laws in the U.S. \(2014\)](#)
Film: [Unborn in the USA](#) (2007) (105 min.)
Guest Speaker: Professor Loretta Ross, Smith College
- March 21 *Spring Break*
- March 28** **Anti-Abortion Violence**
Cohen & Connon, [Living in the Crosshairs](#) (2015), Intro, Chapters 1, 7 & 8
[NAF, 2022 Violence and Disruption Statistics](#) (2023)
[FMF, 2022 National Clinic Violence Survey](#) (2023)
Film: [Murder on Abortion Row](#) (1996) (106 min.)
Guest Speaker: Amy Hagstrom Miller, founder of Whole Women's Health
- March 29 *Topic Descriptions and Annotated Bibliographies Due, 5 p.m., Moodle*
- April 4** **Abortion Storytelling as Strategy**
Film: [I Had an Abortion](#) (2005)
Baumgardner, *Abortion & Life* (2008) (pp. 141-144, 168)
Baumgardner, *Timeline* (2022)
Guest Speaker: [Jennifer Baumgardner](#), feminist activist and writer
- April 11** **Crisis Pregnancy Centers**
[Designed to Deceive: A Study of Crisis Pregnancy Centers in Nine States](#)
[Global, National, Regional Anti-Abortion Organizations Supporting CPCs](#)
[Montoya et al, The Problem with Crisis Pregnancy Centers \(2022\)](#)
[Resnick, How to Make a State Abortion Ban Go National \(2023\)](#)
Film: *Preconceived* (2023)
Guest Speaker: Jenifer McKenna, Researcher and Advocate
- April 18** **Abortion Pills, Telemedicine Abortion and Self-Managed Abortion**
Baker, *Abortion Pills in the United States* (forthcoming)
Film: [Plan C](#) (2022)
- April 19 *Research Paper Drafts Due, 5 p.m., Moodle*
- April 25** **Research Paper Presentations**
- May 2** **Research Paper Presentations**
- May 9 *Final Research Papers Due, Noon, Moodle*