Loyola University Chicago

Contemporary Viet Nam: Class, Family, and Gender

Professor Ngo Thi Ngan Binh

Email: bn37@cornell.edu or nganbihngo@yahoo.com.au
Mobile: 0902556675

Course Description

This is a course which, in addition to the required readings, participation in class discussion, and other assignments, requires students to volunteer at one of a number of Vietnamese community service projects for approximately 35 hours of service learning throughout the semester. Their primary task will be to conduct regular ‘English Club’ activities with clients of the non-profit and charitable organizations that otherwise would have no opportunity to improve their English. The ability to speak English well in Vietnam is a significant determinant in an individual’s ability to improve his lot in life. Upon their arrival, students will be given a three day crash course in how to prepare for and lead such English clubs by a well-known English language school. Partnerships between the Loyola program and local organizations serve those organizations’ requests for activities that improve the quality of life of their participants through enabling those participants to engage more fully in a rapidly evolving language environment for culture and employment.

The course will take students through an interdisciplinary, critical study of women’s and men’s lives in both contemporary Vietnamese society and society in other parts of Southeast Asia. Students will relate the course readings and class discussions to their observations of everyday life in Vietnam as lived out by its men and women. Of particular importance in this regard will be the awareness they gain from their individual experience in their service projects. Through a series of reflection papers the students will be asked to determine exactly what the content of the readings means in specific cultural contexts, and how different versions relate to one another and to the lives of ordinary women and men. Three of these reflection papers will require students to write about a significant aspect of their service experience, connecting it to the readings.

After grappling with these issues, students will apply their understandings to a variety of contemporary issues facing both Vietnamese women and men and shaping their lives. This will involve a critical investigation of the institutions, processes, value and belief systems associated with, for example, globalization, marriage, sexuality, family, kinship, gender, and social status. Students will also learn whether and how social norms in these various arenas are created, appropriated, and contested.

Students will read and discuss case studies from Viet Nam and other developing countries. They will also read scholarly journal articles that deal with specific gender-related topics in Viet Nam, and they will be expected to discuss the issues presented while drawing on everyday situations and experiences they encounter while living in Viet Nam. Assignments will draw on this out-of-class knowledge.

The course will conclude with a short guest speaker series. The stories these guest speakers will share will relate directly to the topics covered in class, and students will be expected to demonstrate their grasp of course content in the questions they ask during these sessions.
Among the speakers will be a representative from the organizations where the students are volunteering.

Students are expected to achieve the following learning outcomes:

- To understand how theory (generally) can be used to gain, understand and make use of meaning, and how feminist theory (specifically) often challenges mainstream theory
- To gain a cross-cultural understanding of gender theories, gender research and feminism
- To gain in-depth understandings of various institutions, norms, and practices shaping the lives of Vietnamese women and men, including romance, sexuality, marriage, parenthood, family, kinship, social relationship and status, and treatment of society’s less fortunate.
- Provide service at a not for profit or charitable organization through language tutoring or instruction.
- To explore the realities of the everyday lives of Vietnamese women and men and the challenges they face with regard to gender equality
- To understand the nature and extent of the Vietnamese state’s role in determining gender issues and expectations
- Develop and apply critical thinking skills, so that students understand the underlying dynamics of gender issues
- Develop an individual understanding of how the courses themes are played out at the charity where they are volunteering

Expectations and Grading

Students are expected to maintain regular attendance and to actively participate in classroom discussions. This will include active engagement during the speaker series, wherein students are expected to listen attentively and formulate questions. Grades will be assigned according to the following breakdown.

Additionally, students will be monitored to make sure they participate actively in their service projects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation in class</th>
<th>15%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation in service project</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five short reflection papers (three which relate service to the readings)</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Project</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Project</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Assignments

- **Participation**: Students’ participation grades will be determined in two ways. (1) Students will be assigned weekly tasks designed to show they have read and thought about the course readings. These tasks will vary week to week and will include such things as summaries, outlines or quotes from the readings to be turned in at the beginning of class. (2) The instructor will also evaluate students’ in-class participation, determining whether each student was regularly, actively and thoughtfully engaged in discussions and other activities.

- **Reflection papers**: For this type of assignment, students should reflect on their gender course readings (up to the week of the assignment), their own observation of, their
conversations, and interactions with people with regards to gender-related matters. Students are encouraged to pick something that has evoked their curiosity, and made them contemplate on gender relationships that they have had a chance to observe or discuss with their Vietnamese roommates and acquaintances. (Maximum length: 2 pages each). The students’ service learning experience will be a required theme for 2 of these reflections.

- **Service Learning**: Each student will offer approximately 35 hours of service in a local not for profit or charitable organization. Students will typically organize an English Language circle or club in which they help participants improve their language skills through conversation, instruction, and communication exercises.

- Interview project is important to gain some fieldwork experience. Students will learn tremendously from interviewing selected people for their final paper, from reflecting on their own position as the “researcher” on the outcome of the research. Students are encouraged to **think quite ahead** (from Week 4 on) of a topic and 4 possible people that they would select for their final course project.

- **Course Projects**: Student can choose a topic, design and methodology for this project, and a means of reporting the results. However, projects have to be approved by the instructor and must include interviews with at least 4 respondents. Interviews should be done according to a protocol that each student develops based on the issue (or set of related issues) explained in her/his project proposal. Interview protocols will be graded assignments due early in the semester and will be discussed in class. Students also will submit summaries of their interviews on multiple occasions during the course. These summaries will count toward the grade for the final project and will be shared in class. Projects are expected to be rigorous academic undertakings, and students must produce at least 10 pages of written work. (If writing the minimum, students must supplement with other forms of reporting, such as a Powerpoint presentation or a video component.) Further details and guidelines will be handed out and discussed in class.

**Schedule of Topics and Readings**

**WEEK 1: Orientation**

**WEEK 2: Trip to Cambodia**

**WEEK 3: Theoretical Perspectives**

**WEEK 4: Historical Overview of Gender Research in Vietnam**
- Pettus (2003). “Defining the New Vietnamese Woman” in *Between Sacrifice and Desire*

**WEEK 5: Romance and Courtship: Vietnamese Masculine and Feminine Ideals**

Week 6: Gender Paradoxes in Southeast Asia
- Ngo (forthcoming) “Women as Interior General and Men as Pillar of the Family” in Failed Intimacy: Disjuncture between Ideology and Practice of Vietnamese Middle-class Masculinity.

Week 7: Presentation of Preliminary Fieldwork
- (Students present the preliminary outcomes of their selected mini-ethnographic projects, reflect on their interviewing methods and fieldwork obstacles encountered. Suggestions for improvement in the second round of fieldwork/interview)

Week 8: Family and Kinship

Week 9: Family and Patriarchy
- Film: The Moon at the Bottom of the Well
- (discuss in relation with the previous readings)

Week 10: Pop Culture
- Film “Bar Girls” (Gai Nhay)

Week 11: Gender, Social Space, and Media

WEEK 11: Class and Consumption

WEEK 12: Taste and Class

**WEEK 13: Men and Social Mobility**
- Ngo (Forthcoming) “Social Drinking and Vietnamese Middle-class Masculinity” *Failed Intimacy: Disjuncture between Ideology and Practice of Vietnamese Middle-class Masculinity in Contemporary Vietnam*.

**WEEK 14: Transnational Marriages**

**WEEK 15: Sexuality, Desire, and Commodification**
- Martin (2010). These Days Virginity is just a Feeling: Heterosexuality and Change in Urban Vietnamese Men”
- Hoang (2010). Economies of Emotion, Familiarity, Fantasy, and Desire: Emotional Labor in Ho Chi Minh City’s Sex Industry

**Bibliography**

Truitt, A

Belanger and Pendakis

Brenner, S.

Bourdieu, P.

Drummond

Dutton, George.
Errington, S

Freire

Hamilton, Annette

Hoang, K

Hy V. Luong

Leshkowich, A. M

Marr, D.

Martin, P

Natalie Huynh Chau Nguyen

Ngo, Thi Ngan Binh.
- The Vietnamese pine-and-ivy Gender Formula and Its Mutual Gendered Attraction. In *Failed Intimacy: Disjuncture between Ideology and Practice of Vietnamese Middle-class Masculinity*
- Women as Interior General and Men as Pillar of the Family in *Failed Intimacy: Disjuncture between Ideology and Practice of Vietnamese Middle-class Masculinity in Contemporary Vietnam*
- Vietnamese Male Sexuality: The Cultural and Corporeal Sexual Selves
- “Diplomatic” Drinking among Vietnamese Middle-and Upper-Class Men: Male Success and Ngoai Giao Networks

Nguyen, A. P.

Nguyen-vo thu-huong

Ortner, S

Pashigian

Peletz, M

Pettus, A

Rydstrom, Helle
2006. “Sexual Desires and ‘Social Evils’: Young women in rural Vietnam” Gender, Place and Culture. 13(3): 283–301

Taylor, N

To, X. P

Thai Cam Hung

Truong, H. C