

ENGL 437
Women Writers
Dr. Hammond
Fall 2005
Response Paper 1

Surveying Women Writers

To begin to fully understand the status of women writers in the academy, you need to have a more formal measure of the representation of women writers in the classroom.

Part I: A (sort of) systematic survey

So first, you'll need to locate syllabi online for literature courses (isn't the internet wonderful!? You can find anything!). You need examples from several different universities, rather than locating a pile of them all in one place:

- 10 syllabi for American literature survey courses (these can be all American lit, American lit to 1865 or 1865-present, or whatever, as long as it's a survey course).
- 10 syllabi for course focusing on women writers (these can be broad courses like our titled women's literature, or more focused courses like nineteenth-century women novelists)

You can search for these using a search engine like Google, which is my favorite, or you can browse through English departments looking for syllabi too. Mitsuharu Matsuoka at Nagoya University in Japan has put together [a good beginning listing of large English Departments](#); we'll be annoying and American-centric (is that a word?) and look just at American literature and universities.

Once you've collected your syllabi, you need to click in the location bar or address window, highlight the full address or URL for that syllabi, and then paste it into a Microsoft Word document (if you don't have Word, please see Blackboard Help). Do not try to retype the addresses; be sure to copy and paste (ctrl c to copy, ctrl v to paste). Above the URL, please write a brief description of the syllabus, including the name of the professor, university, and the course, and the date; please label the two sections of different syllabi. Your entries should look like this (don't worry if your word processing program turns these into links):

Women's Literature Courses
Women Writers
Professor Ann Woodlief, Virginia Commonwealth University
Fall 2001
<http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/eng384/384syl.htm>

Engl 381 American Survey I
Professor Dean Hall, Kansas State University
Spring 2004
<http://www-personal.ksu.edu/~deanhall/381/index.html>

To locate this information for each syllabus, you may have to look a little beyond the first page that pops up. In the example below, from the original URL (mostly what you get when you search using

Google, for instance), you can't tell for sure the professor's name or the school. So delete everything from the last slash and hit enter—see what your browser gives you. Sometimes it'll be a message saying that you don't have access to the page, sometimes you'll get a little more info. Each time you delete a little more information, until generally you get everything you need:

<http://www-personal.ksu.edu/~deanhall/381/>
<http://www-personal.ksu.edu/~deanhall/>
<http://www-personal.ksu.edu/>

I call this little trick backing up the URL and it's worked wonders for me.

Part II: Write your first response paper

Next, I'd like you to read these syllabi carefully, particularly in light of the discussion going on in Discussion Board 2 right now. In the survey courses, what percentage of the authors being read are women? Do any of the courses not study women at all? If a class reads six authors in a week, and one is a woman, does it appear that her work is covered fully? Or is it just squeezed in there at the end? In courses that do have a good representation of women writers, what observations can you make about the courses? How do those differ from the more traditional courses that tend to emphasize more canonical (and often male) writers more heavily? In the women's literature courses, what women are consistently taught? What periods seem to be more studied in terms of women's contributions to the literature?

Next, review the ongoing discussion board. How do your own initial perceptions of the questions there fit into what you observed in the syllabi you studied? How does your past experience of studying women writers in school fit with the observations you can begin to make now?

Once you've thought about the syllabi and participated the discussion, it's time to write your first response paper. Here are general directions for the short response papers, but these directions really are geared more towards our readings of criticism (which we'll start next week) and literature, so you'll have to be flexible in how you write this paper. The rules for this specific assignment:

- The response should be at least 750-1000 words, but no more than 1500.
- You must make observations about how women writers are taught today based on the syllabi you located.
- You must make some comment about the conversations taking place in Discussion Board 2 (feel free to copy and paste an excerpt if you wish).
- At the end of your response, create a page break and paste all the URL for the 20 syllabi you surveyed.
- Name your file "Your Last Name Your first name response 1.doc" (mine would be "Hammond Lisa response 2.doc").
- **Turn your response in using the Digital Drop Box in Blackboard by 9:00 a.m. on Tuesday, 6 September.** Please reread Posting Finished Papers in Blackboard if you need your memory jogged.

If you need help as you're working on this, please let me know—I know it's a lot of little steps!