PROPOSAL FOR A JUNIOR-SENIOR CLUSTER COURSE

Title: Women of Color in the United States

When will this course be offered: Fall 1997

Title of cluster: Women's Studies

Name of cluster proposal coordinator: Johanna Brenner

A. Description

Exploration of the historical and contemporary experience of women of color in the United States with an emphasis on discovering the similarities and differences in how women of different races/ethnicities have been effected by institutionalized racism. Particular topics will include: the social construction of race and ethnicity; representations of women of color in U.S. popular culture; immigration and inter-generational struggles; work and family; women as community organizers.

B. Course Development

This is a new course.

C. General Education Goals

I. Inquiry and Critical Thinking. The course will challenge students to think critically about race and racism, while at the same time going beyond moralistic approaches to the issue. By framing the exploration of women's historical and contemporary experiences comparatively, the course will challenge essentialist thinking.

II. Communication. Students will do short papers, based on the course reading, approximately four times during the term. They will read and respond to each other's papers furthering their ability to respect and listen to other people's ideas. The students will also be required to do a term project on a topic of interest to them and will be expected to present their conclusions to the class in an oral presentation. This presentation will include graphic display and discussion of statistical data.

III. Human Experience. In a political world where groups compete for resources on the basis of race and ethnic identities, it seems especially useful to create a curricular space where the
students can investigate the historical as well as contemporary social dynamics through which these identities are created and reproduced.

IV. Ethical Issues and Social Responsibility. There are very few courses which directly focus on the experience of minorities in the U.S. This course will give students an opportunity to gain information about that experience across a wide range of groups and, at the same time, by taking the question of race up in a scholarly way, hopefully give students more intellectual tools for coping with racism as a social and political issue.

Relationship to cluster: The course will allow students to explore the "intersection" of race and gender. One of the main goals of the cluster is to expand students' ability to think analytically about how different dimensions of inequality relate to each other.

IV. Course Outline

The course will be structured to draw on women from the community as well as students. A core theoretical framework will provide the basis for comparative exploration.

Weeks one-three: Introduction of concepts, including how the distinction between race and ethnicity arose historically and how that distinction is applied today; discussion of the relationship of race, ethnicity and gender to biological difference; dynamics of group formation in relation to political economy.

Weeks four-five: representations of women of color in U.S. popular culture: comparative exploration using film, advertising, magazines, and other media

Weeks five-six: work and family as issues for women of color; students will design a set of questions to use as a basis for exploring similarities and differences; they will be divided into working groups which will each take responsibility for gathering information about women of a particular race/ethnicity.

Weeks seven-eight: immigration and inter-generational struggles; will draw on interviews conducted by students

Week nine: women as community organizers. The class will develop a common set of questions to ask invited speakers who are community activists.

Week ten: presentations of term projects