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# New course at U of W takes on tough questions of sex trade

## Laws and implications of prostitution investigated

By: **Carol Sanders**

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It's a subject that riles everyone from feminists to fundamentalists and affects women and children around the world. Now a new course on the world's oldest and perhaps the most dangerous profession wants to take the discussion to a whole new level.

"Sex trafficking: global to local" starts today at University of Winnipeg's Global College.

It's being taught by Gunilla Ekberg, a human rights lawyer who helped draft Sweden's 1999 prostitution legislation.

In Canada, momentum is building for a new prostitution law based on the "Swedish model." A new law was made necessary late last year when the Supreme Court of Canada struck down key

elements of Canada's patchwork of anti-prostitution rules. The move sparked a low-grade national debate over how to regulate the sex trade. New legislation is expected before MPs break for the summer.

"I'm teaching this course because I think it's important with the current state of affairs in Canada," Ekberg said Friday.

**“We have significant issues in Canada’**

**-- Marilou McPhedran**

Ekberg has studied the impact of legalized prostitution in the Netherlands, which is now reconsidering that legislation.

"It's been incredibly destructive to women in prostitution and all women in that society," said Ekberg, who studied law in

British Columbia.

"It normalizes male privilege... Men have a right to pay money and use women as a commodity." That affects other women in clear and creepy ways, she said.

"You have a boss who's just been away on his lunch hour to buy a woman and he tells you that. That impacts on your situation in that job."

The Swedish model bans the buying of sex. It criminalizes johns but not the prostitutes themselves or the selling of sex. In Canada, it's been heralded by Conservative MP Joy Smith and favoured by Manitoba's NDP government.

The sex- trafficking course at the Global College looks at the legal and policy implications of domestic and cross-border human trafficking.

It will hone in on local and national prevention, protection and enforcement responses and strategies, and what impacts they've had on vulnerable populations such as sexually exploited children and youth in Manitoba.

Guest lecturers with a range of perspectives and expertise are being brought in, including present and former sex-trade workers.

The course looks back at the last 40 years of judicial, governmental and social responses to human trafficking. It delves into definitions and distinctions in policy, legislation and practice, and different victim-protection initiatives, human-trafficking prevention and reduction strategies that have been tried.

"Manitoba has a good record of doing things preventing and working against prostitution and sexual discrimination," said Ekberg.

Manitoba spends more than any other province to counter sex trafficking, said Prof. Marilou



Marilou McPhedran (MELISSA RAE GRABOWSKY/ WINNIPEG FREE PRESS) [Photo Store](#)

## Public welcome at forums

Two evening forums open to the public:

May 6 at 6 p.m., Room 2M70 at U of W, with guest lecturer Family Services Minister Kerri Irvin-Ross with officials.

May 13 at 6 p.m. -- Chief Devon Clunis and officers of the Winnipeg Police Service, as well as service providers and community-based advocates.

McPhedran, who set up the course.

It's still a big problem. In Manitoba, the majority of sexually exploited and trafficked youth are of aboriginal origin, said McPhedran, director of the Institute for International Women's Rights at the Global College.

"We have significant issues in Canada." Learning how those issues have been dealt with or not is key to addressing them, and students recognized that, she said.

"This course came directly from a request from students in the Global College's human rights program."

[carol.sanders@freepress.mb.ca](mailto:carol.sanders@freepress.mb.ca)

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