

Feminism in Action
WGST 3850.01/ WGST 3850.H01/ POLS 3850.01
Women's and Gender Studies
Saint Louis University
M/ W 3:10-4:25 pm
Brouster 040

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COURSE DESCRIPTION This course addresses feminist activism on a wide range of issues (including domestic violence, rape, education and health care), and in a variety of forms (including writing, theater, public protests and coalition building). It gives students the opportunity to study the scholarship of activism and to participate in feminist action.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

By coming to class *prepared, curious, open-minded, and prepared to contribute to our classroom community*, you will, by the end of the semester, achieve the learning objectives:

- *Understand the range of issues feminists address through activism;*
- *Identify and draw from examples of feminist-friendly strategies for effecting change;*
- *Engage in an activist project, analyzing a problem well and developing appropriate, effective forms of activism, thinking both practically and creatively;*
- *Engage your classmates (and their knowledge and skills, of course) in devising and carrying out your project, and, in turn, contribute your feedback and skills to their projects;*
- *Read more thoughtfully, speak more confidently, and write more comfortably, in a variety of formats; and*
- *Better envision yourself as an empowered, effective feminist/ activist: one who knows their strengths and weaknesses, and can assess and use available resources to contribute to the building of a better, more just, more feminist world.*

REQUIRED MATERIALS & CANVAS

There is no required textbook for this class, but students are expected to print articles/ bring assigned materials to class.

This course has a Canvas site that is available through MySLU. Canvas will be used in the following ways:

- Required readings: Articles will be posted, usually as PDF files or web links. Students should print articles and bring them to class.
- All handouts and assignments, including a copy of this syllabus, are available on Canvas.
- Written assignments will be submitted through Canvas.
- Announcements and important links will be posted on Canvas.

GRADING

PARTICIPATION (10%)

POST-IT ACTION (5%)

SIDEWALK CHALK ACTION

DISCUSSION LEADS

REFLECTIONS (25%)

ACTIVIST PROJECT (40%)

PEER SUPPORT PROJECT (10%)

COMMUNITY SUPPORT PROJECT

Attendance: Attendance is necessary in this class. Students can miss 3 classes throughout the course of the semester, without penalty. Additional absences will lower your participation grade. Students who are having difficulty with attendance are encouraged to contact the instructor as soon as possible and remain in active communication to determine reasonable accommodations.

Participation: Attendance is key, but participation goes beyond your presence in the room. Participation means reading materials in advance, bringing them to class, listening to your classmates, and making your own contributions to discussions. It means listening with curiosity and keeping an open mind, taking notes, and asking questions of your peers. Participation is about making this class different than it would be if you, specifically, were not a part of it.

Discussion Leads: Throughout the semester, students will rotate leading the discussion on the case study assigned for that day. Two students will be assigned per day, each responsible for half of the required components, as well as one discussion question (two discussion questions total). Students will be expected to provide an overview of the activist/ action, including information about 1) the *vision and values*, 2) the *people* involved, 3) the *tactics* used, 4) the *scale* of the action (individual, interpersonal, institutional, etc), and its 5) *impact*, as well as to offer 6) at least one *discussion question*. Each student will be responsible for leading discussion **two times** during the semester.

Personal Reflections: Personal reflections are short, written reflections that invite you to reflect on your own experience as a feminist/ activist. These short, written reflections ask you to consider your own experience in conversation with assigned sources and larger themes related to feminism in action. You are required to complete **3 of the 5** assigned personal reflections.

Mini-Actions: Mini-actions offer creative opportunities to take feminist action inspired by a particular case study. For example, you might [x, y, or z]. Students are also welcome to propose an

alternative mini-action in advance of the deadline. Students are required to complete **4, one in each unit.**

Post-It Action: The post-it action is an informal, low-stakes opportunity to engage in feminist activism. Each student will be given 10 post-it notes and be asked to

- 1) Do some feminist activism! Use them creatively, politically, and in a way that reflects your own feminist commitments.
- 2) Take pictures or make a short video that shows how you used the post-its.
- 3) Get some feedback from 2 or more people who saw your post-its. What did they think? What was their takeaway?
- 4) Write a reflection about what you did, in approximately 2 substantial paragraphs. How and why did you choose to use the post-its as you did? What impact were you hoping for? What impact did they have? What mini-lessons a) about feminist activism, and b) about yourself as an activist, can you gather from this little exercise?
- 5) Submit your written reflection and your pictures/ video through Canvas before class on Sep. 7th.
- 6) Share briefly about your experience in class on Sep. 7th.

Community Support: Each student is expected to spend 5 hours engaging in feminist action (broadly defined) outside of SLU. This could include community service/ volunteering, event support, participant observation, or other activities. You might opt to volunteer at a festival, attend a protest, visit a museum exhibit, or otherwise engage the broader community. Later in the semester, you will engage the community through an action of your own. The community support hours are an opportunity to participate in events planned by others, show up, and offer support. [Initial deadline at time of learning from others]

Activist Project: This semester, you are invited to take what you have learned in class, in previous courses, and through personal experiences, and use that knowledge to design a feminist action. The shape of your action is entirely up to you. You can stage a protest, create an art installation, curate an archival collection, write a social justice anthem, jumpstart a support group... or truly anything else you can imagine. The idea is to take your intellectual work—learning theory, history, etc—and put it into practice.

Your activist project must

- Demonstrate at least 10 hours of work
- Include a public-facing element (i.e. engage an audience or invite interaction)
- Provide opportunities for peer support
- Engage with the community beyond SLU
 - Of your 10 hours, at least 5 need to be spent engaging beyond campus. (These 5 hours, in addition to your 5 hours of peer support, and 5 hours of [community action], total 15 hours of off-campus action for the course).

The project is divided into stages to scaffold your work and to give you maximum feedback on your project as it develops. A full assignment sheet with details on the project will be given out early in the semester. The stages and deadlines are as follows:

- **Stage 1: The Problem** [~2 page paper] (Due Oct 3) – 5%
- ~~Stage 2: Imagining Alternatives~~ [~2 page paper] (Due Oct 17) – 5%
- **Stage 3: Learning from Others** [~2 page paper] (Due Oct 31) – 5%
 - [Add an element of community action]
- **Stage 4: The Action** (Due Nov 21) – 5%
- **Stage 5: The Final Paper** [6-8 pages] (Due Dec 5) – 10%
- **Stage 6: Presentation** (Due Date TBD)
 - Each student will present their project in a showcase of Feminism in Action presentations that will be open to the WGS community and friends. Presentation times will vary based on the number of students, but will be announced in advance (likely about 6 minutes per person.)

Peer Support Project (10%): This assignment gives you an opportunity to earn credit for work you do in support of classmates’ or other community members’ activism. This could include doing graphics or photography for someone, helping set up an event, participating in a brainstorming meeting, editing a brochure, etc. The total amount of time on your ally project(s) should be **5 hours** and the support you provide **must support action off-campus**. You can support one person for five hours, or a number of people/ projects for five hours total. A form will be provided for you to log your hours. You will also submit a reflection of at least 500 words on your peer support project, due [date].

COURSE POLICIES AND EXPECTATIONS:

Late work: The post-it action, personal reflections, and first 3 stages for the activist project can be submitted within one week of the deadline, for credit minus a 10% late penalty. The *action* reflections and the last two stages of the activist project (action and paper/ presentation) need to be submitted by the deadline in order to earn credit. Students with concerns about submitting work on time are encouraged to contact the instructor in advance of the deadline.

Community Care Policies:

- Please prepare in advance of class. Review the assigned material, reflect on it, and bring specific thoughts and questions to create a fruitful discussion.
- Please learn and use the names of classmates, particularly when you do not know or remember their pronouns.
- Keep in mind that this course covers a variety of topics, which may elicit strong opinions or personal feelings for you and/or your classmates. Please listen closely and display respect for everyone in our community, as we explore these ideas together. You can use “ouch/ oops” or other methods to bring attention to comments that are mistaken or harmful.
- You have the right to request content warnings for specific subject matter, the use of an alternate name or personal pronouns, or other accommodations from the instructor, to improve your ability to participate in the course. You also have the right to remove yourself from class discussions when necessary and to follow-up with the instructor afterward.

- You are encouraged to use any necessary accommodations provided through Disability Services. If you have disability accommodations you plan to use, please bring them to the instructor's attention in advance.
- Please arrive prior to class start time and wait to “pack up” until class is completed.
- On certain occasions, we will use electronic devices (laptops, cell phones, tablets) as part of our course work. For all other meetings, please silence and store electronic devices (laptops, cell phones, tablets, etc) outside of your work space for the duration of the class.
- Whenever possible, students are asked to remain in class for the duration of the period, but please feel encouraged to stand, stretch, etc, as necessary.

WGS Portfolio: Portfolio entries of work from this course are required of WGS majors and encouraged for WGS minors. WGS has an online portfolio program that is easy to set up and use. Jenni Semsar (WGS Administrative Assistant) or I will provide you with all the information you need to do so. WGS majors (and minors, hopefully) will add their paper from this course to their portfolio. You may also want to use the portfolio at this time to organize material from your other courses, but that is optional.

Information on academic integrity and plagiarism, disability accommodations, Title IX (equity and sexual harassment protections), the Student Success Center, University Writing Services, COVID-19 policies, Basic Needs Security (help securing food, etc) and the University Counseling Center are available by scanning the QR code below. For additional information or help accessing these resources, please reach out to the instructor.



WHEN YOU HAVE QUESTIONS . . .

- You can bring them to class.
- You can ask me via email. (I check my email twice a day Mon-Fri, and occasionally on weekends. If you have not received a response within 24 hours during the week, or within 48 hours over the weekend, please reach out again.)

- You can come to regularly-scheduled office hours in person or set up a an appointment for another time.

... YOU DESERVE RESPONSES.

COURSE SCHEDULE

All readings/ assignments should be completed ahead of class for the day they are listed. This schedule is subject to change. Any changes will be announced in-class and on Canvas.

Personal Reflections: 3 (of 5) required.

Action Reflections: 12 (of 17) required.

UNIT 1: FOUNDATIONS

W Aug 24 Intro to Class/ Each Other/ Community Guidelines

M Aug 29 Feminism/s: What is it? What “counts”?

- Readings: “Defining Feminism” (Offen)
- Assignments:
 - Bring something to class that you consider “feminist.” This can be literally anything—a meme, a song, a book, a pin, an item of clothing, etc—but it should be something that you can show to the class and connect to “feminism” as you understand it.
 - Personal Reflection 1: Your Definition of Feminism

W Aug 31 Activism: What is it? What “counts”?

- Readings: “What Counts as Activism? The Role of Individuals in Creating Change” (Martin et al)
- Assignments:
 - Personal Reflection 2: Your Definition of Activism

M Sep 5 NO CLASS (LABOR DAY)

W Sep 7 The Personal Is Political: Developing a Feminist Consciousness

- Readings: *Living a Feminist Life* [excerpts] (Ahmed)
- Assignments:
 - Post-It Activism Project Due

M Sep 12 NO CLASS

Schedule a 1-on-1 meeting with Dr. Maxfield to discuss your feminist action ideas.

W Sep 14 NO CLASS

Schedule a 1-on-1 meeting with Dr. Maxfield to discuss your feminist action ideas.

UNIT 2: INTERSECTIONS

- M Sep 19 LGBTQIA+ Activism: The St. Louis Queer Support Helpline (SQSH)**
- View “A Conversation with SQSH” [video], starting at 30:15 (SQSH’s Founding, Mission and Programs)
 - Note: the earlier section of the video on common LGBTQIA+ terminology is recommended for students who find it useful, but not required.
 - Explore the SQSH website: <https://www.thesqsh.org/mission>
 - Discussion Lead 1 (Vision/ Values, People, and Discussion Question): TBD
 - Discussion Lead 2 (Tactics, Scale, and Discussion Question): TBD
- W Sep 21 Lesbian Activism: Womyn’s Music Movement**
- Read “By The Time I Got to Wombstock” (Morris)
 - Discussion Lead 1 (Vision/ Values, People, and Discussion Question): TBD
 - Discussion Lead 2 (Tactics, Scale, and Discussion Question): TBD
- M Sep 26 Trans Activism: Trans Poetry**
- *Femme in Public* excerpts (Menon)
 - “Alok V Menon on Fashion’s Genderless Future” (Menon video)
 - Discussion Lead 1 (Vision/ Values, People, and Discussion Question): TBD
 - Discussion Lead 2 (Tactics, Scale, and Discussion Question): TBD
- W Sep 28 NO CLASS**
- M Oct 3 Disability Activism: Disability Visibility Project**
- Watch the Heumann Perspective interview with Alice Wong (~9 minutes): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_vdeeR5DOSO
 - Explore the Disability Visibility Project website
 - Watch at least 1 DVP interview of your choice: <https://disabilityvisibilityproject.com/category/dvp-interviews/>
 - Discussion Lead 1 (Vision/ Values, People, and Discussion Question): TBD
 - Discussion Lead 2 (Tactics, Scale, and Discussion Question): TBD
 - **Feminist Action: Stage 1: The Problem due**
- W Oct 5 Fat Activism: The Fat Underground**
- Life in the Fat Underground (Fishman)
 - Fat Liberation Manifesto (Fat Liberation)
 - Discussion Lead 1 (Vision/ Values, People, and Discussion Question): TBD
 - Discussion Lead 2 (Tactics, Scale, and Discussion Question): TBD

UNIT 3: VIOLENCE

- M Oct 10 Police Violence: Say Her Name**

- Watch “How the ‘Say Her Name’ Campaign Began” (~20 min)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OFQLc-AANLY>
- Explore the “Say Her Name” website
- Discussion Lead 1 (Vision/ Values, People, and Discussion Question): TBD
- Discussion Lead 2 (Tactics, Scale, and Discussion Question): TBD
- **Personal Reflection 3: Your Problem & You**

W Oct 12 Prison Abolition Activism: Close the Workhouse

- “Are Prisons Obsolete?” (Davis)
- Explore the “Close the Workhouse” website
- Discussion Lead 1 (Vision/ Values, People, and Discussion Question): TBD
- Discussion Lead 2 (Tactics, Scale, and Discussion Question): TBD

M Oct 17 Street Violence: Take Back the Night and Stop Telling Women to Smile

- Read “History of Take Back the Night”
- View the video “Stop Telling Women to Smile” (~6 min)
- Explore the Stop Telling Women to Smile website
- Discussion Lead 1 (Vision/ Values, People, and Discussion Question): TBD
- Discussion Lead 2 (Tactics, Scale, and Discussion Question): TBD

W Oct 19 Sexual Violence: Me Too

- Read *Unbound* [excerpt] (Burke)
- Watch “Me Too is a Moment, Not a Movement” (Burke) [~16 min]
- Explore the “Me Too” website
- Discussion Lead 1 (Vision/ Values, People, and Discussion Question): TBD
- Discussion Lead 2 (Tactics, Scale, and Discussion Question): TBD

M Oct 24 Dr. Durfee on Domestic Violence

W Oct 26 Sexual Violence: Chanel Miller

- Watch Emily Doe’s Victim Impact Statement (~50 min)
- Discussion Lead 1 (Vision/ Values, People, and Discussion Question): TBD
- Discussion Lead 2 (Tactics, Scale, and Discussion Question): TBD

UNIT 4: REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE

M Oct 31 Reproductive Justice: Forced Sterilization

- No reading, view film in class
- **Feminist Action: Stage 3: Learning from Others Due**

W Nov 2 Reproductive Justice: Maternal Health

- Read “About Black Maternal Health” (House of Representatives)
- Watch “Full Circle” (~4 min)
- Explore the Jamaa Birth Village Website
- Discussion Lead 1 (Vision/ Values, People, and Discussion Question): TBD

- Discussion Lead 2 (Tactics, Scale, and Discussion Question): TBD

M Nov 7 Reproductive Justice: Abortion

- Read “Calling Jane” (King)
- Discussion Lead 1 (Vision/ Values, People, and Discussion Question): TBD
- Discussion Lead 2 (Tactics, Scale, and Discussion Question): TBD

W Nov 9 Activist Speed Dating

- 2.5 min on your project, what you need, what you can offer

M Nov 14 Reproductive Justice: Sex Education

- Listen to “A Very Specific Mary Poppins” (~40 min)
- Explore the Scarleteen website.
- Discussion Lead 1 (Vision/ Values, People, and Discussion Question): TBD
- Discussion Lead 2 (Tactics, Scale, and Discussion Question): TBD

UNIT 5: CULTURE AND LAW

W Nov 16 Sport & Education Inequity: Title IX

- Read “Title IX and How We Got It” (Sandler)
- Discussion Lead 1 (Vision/ Values, People, and Discussion Question): TBD
- Discussion Lead 2 (Tactics, Scale, and Discussion Question): TBD

M Nov 21 Feminist Action: Stage 4: Action Due

W Nov 23 NO CLASS

M Nov 28 Riot Grrrl

- Watch *The Punk Singer* (80 min)
- Discussion Lead 1 (Vision/ Values, People, and Discussion Question): TBD
- Discussion Lead 2 (Tactics, Scale, and Discussion Question): TBD
- **Ally/ Co-Conspirator Project Due**

W Nov 30 Looking Back, Looking Forward

- “A Killjoy Manifesto” and “A Killjoy Survival Kit” (Ahmed)
- Personal Reflection 4: Your Manifesto
- Last opportunity for show-and-tell

M Dec 5 Work Day

- **Extra Credit Action Reflection Due***

W Dec 7 Looking Forward

- Personal Reflection 5: Feminist Killjoy Survival Kit

M Dec 12 NO CLASS - Feminist Action: Stage 5: Reflection Essay Due

W Dec 14 Women's & Gender Studies Symposium, 1pm-4:30pm
Present (7-8 min) & attend at least two panels

*Note: The 16th opportunity for an Action Reflection has been removed. If you need another action reflection to meet the required 11 you can complete it on *any action of your choice* and submit on Canvas by 12/5. If you map a bathroom for the BBAP, you only need to complete 10 action reflections.