

**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**

Instructor: Dr. Mary Maxfield (she/they)  
Office: McGannon 141B  
Office Hours: M/W 11-noon (or by appt)  
Email: [maxfieldma@slu.edu](mailto:maxfieldma@slu.edu)  
Phone: 314-977-2162

**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%)**

**SHOW-AND-TELLS (10%)**

**REFLECTIONS (25%)**

**ACTIVIST PROJECT (40%)**

**ALLY/ COLLABORATOR/ CO-CONSPIRATOR PROJECT (10%)**

**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 their instructors 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.

**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. 7<sup>th</sup>.

**Show-and-Tells:** If you ever did “show-and-tell” in elementary school, you’re already familiar with this kind of sharing. Each student is asked to bring an item for show and tell **two (2) times** during

the semester: one before midterm and one after. Bring in whatever you'd like to share, as long as it demonstrates a feminist action. You might bring a flyer from a protest, a song with a feminist theme, a souvenir from a Pride parade, an article from the newspaper, a TikTok video that you find provocative or interesting ... the possibilities are endless. We will spend a few minutes at the beginning of each class period doing show-and-tell before our discussion of the day's readings and other materials. You'll be asked to introduce the object and explain why it made you think of the class.

**Restrictions:** The item should not be grossly offensive or express extreme content in terms of violence, hateful stereotypes, or otherwise objectionable material. It cannot be one that is assigned in class or has already been displayed by the instructor or another student.

**Due date/ Instructions:** Show-and-tells are scheduled by student. One show-and-tell must be completed by Oct 17, and the other by Nov 30. To schedule your show-and-tell, email the instructor a brief proposal at least one class day before you wish to present (Monday for Wednesday, Wednesday for Monday). On the day of your presentation, have the item available to view before the start of class (for example: email a link to the instructor or bring on a jump drive).

**Reflections:** Throughout the semester, you will have many opportunities to submit short, written reflections considering your own experience, assigned sources, and larger themes related to feminism in action. These reflections can be broadly divided between two categories:

- 1) **Personal reflections** ask you to reflect on your own experience as a feminist/ activist. You are required to complete **3 of the 5** assigned personal reflections.
- 2) **Action reflections** ask you to reflect on a specific example of feminist action discussed in a reading or other assigned source. You are required to complete **12 of the 17** action reflections.

Instructions for individual reflection assignments will be available on Canvas. In general, reflections should be a minimum of 400 words and should make clear connections to assigned sources (for example, quoting and citing readings). Students will have opportunities to try multiple writing formats, including writing creatively, and are welcome to propose alternative forms of reflections in advance of the deadlines.

**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.

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]
- **Stage 2: Imagining Alternatives** [~2 page paper]

- **Stage 3: Learning from Others [~2 page paper]**
- **Stage 4: The Action**
- **Stage 5: The Final Paper [6-8 pages] & Presentation**
  - 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.)

**Ally/ Collaborator/ Co-Conspirator Project (10%):** This assignment gives you an opportunity to earn credit for work you do in support of classmate/s 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 3-4 hours. A form will be provided for you to log your hours. Provide at least 2 paragraphs of reflections on being an ally/ collaborator/ co-conspirator: what does it mean to contribute to someone else's project--why, perhaps, should we do such work? What is learned about their work, about activism, and about yourself as a feminist activist?

### **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 an appointment for another time.

**. . . YOU DESERVE RESPONSES.**

## COURSE 1

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.**

- Assignments:
  - Personal Reflection 3

## 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>
  - Action Reflection 1
- W Sep 21**     **Lesbian Activism: Womyn’s Music Movement**
- Read “By The Time I Got to Wombstock” (Morris)
  - Action Reflection 2
- M Sep 26**     **Trans Activism: Trans Poetry**
- *Femme in Public* excerpts (Menon)
  - “Your Life” (Gibson)
  - *We Want It All* excerpt (Abi-Karam and Gabriel)
  - Action Reflection 3
  - **Feminist Action: Stage 1: The Problem due**
- 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=\\_vdeeR5D0So](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_vdeeR5D0So)
  - Explore the Disability Visibility Project website
  - Watch at least 2 DVP interviews of your choice: <https://disabilityvisibilityproject.com/category/dvp-interviews/>
  - Action Reflection 4
- W Oct 5**     **Fat Activism: The Fat Underground**
- Life in the Fat Underground (Fishman)
  - Fat Liberation Manifesto (Fat Liberation)
  - Action Reflection 5

## 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
  - Action Reflection 6

- W Oct 12      Prison Abolition Activism: Close the Workhouse**
- “Are Prisons Obsolete?” (Davis)
  - Explore the “Close the Workhouse” website
  - Action Reflection 7
  - **Feminist Action: Stage 2: Imagining Alternatives Due**
- 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
  - Action Reflection 8
  - Last opportunity for first show-and-tell
- 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
  - Action Reflection 9
- M Oct 24      Sexual Violence: Chanel Miller**
- Read *Know My Name* [excerpt] (Miller)
  - Watch Emily Doe’s Victim Impact Statement (~50 min)
  - Action Reflection 10
  - **Feminist Action: Stage 3: Learning from Others Due**
- W Oct 26      Sexual & Domestic Violence: Safe Connections**
- Watch “About Us – Safe Connections” (~4 min)
  - View the Safe Connections website
  - Action Reflection 11

#### **UNIT 4: REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE**

- M Oct 31      Reproductive Justice: Forced Sterilization**
- No reading, view film in class
- W Nov 2      Reproductive Justice: Abortion**
- Read “Calling Jane” (King)
  - Action Reflection 12
- M Nov 7      Reproductive Justice: Maternal Health**
- Read “About Black Maternal Health” (House of Representatives)
  - Watch “Full Circle” (~4 min)
  - Explore the Jamaa Birth Village Website
  - Action Reflection 13

- W Nov 9      Reproductive Justice: Sex Education**
- Listen to “A Very Specific Mary Poppins” (~40 min)
  - Explore the Scarleteen website.
  - Action Reflection 14

## **UNIT 5: CULTURE AND LAW**

- M Nov 14      Sport & Education Inequity: Title IX**
- Read “Title IX and How We Got It” (Sandler)
  - Action Reflection 15
- W Nov 16      Feminist Literacy**
- Read *The Feminist Bookstore Movement* [excerpt] (Hogan)
  - Action Reflection 16
- M Nov 21      Looking Forward**
- “A Killjoy Manifesto” and “A Killjoy Survival Kit” (Ahmed)
  - Personal Reflection 4: Your Manifesto
  - **Feminist Action: Stage 4: Action Due**

**W Nov 23 NO CLASS**

- M Nov 28      Culture Work: Riot Grrrl**
- Watch *The Punk Singer*
  - Action Reflection 17: Riot Grrrl
- W Nov 30      Looking Back, Looking Forward**
- Personal Reflection 5: Feminist Killjoy Survival Kit
  - Last opportunity for second show-and-tell
- M Dec 5      Student Presentations (Tentative Schedule)**  
**Feminist Action: Stage 5: Reflection Essay Due**
- W Dec 7      Student Presentations (Tentative Schedule)**