

# Saint Louis University

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Office hours: Monday 1-2:00 and Wednesday noon-1:00, and by appointment

Fall 2017

MWF 11-11:50 a.m.

## WSTD 385-01/POLS 385-01 FEMINISM IN ACTION

### Course description

This course will explore the great variety of ways in which people who are inspired by feminist ideas have worked for social justice. We will begin by focusing our classroom readings and discussions on feminist activism at all levels of education, followed by activism around health issues, violence against women, and the workplace. At the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Give examples of different types of feminist activism;
- Use feminist concepts and ideas to analyze how culture and social institutions shape possibilities for justice in everyday life;
- Use intersectional theories and concepts to participate in community action or service;
- Analyze the mutual influence of theory and practice in American feminism; and
- Have engaged in two feminist activist projects.

### Textbook

The following required text is available in the university's bookstore:

- Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards, *Grassroots* (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005).

There are a number of additional articles that will be made available electronically. These are noted with an asterisk in the list of assigned readings.

Course requirements and grades: Your final grade in this course will be determined as follows:

**Class participation and attendance.** The quality of this course will depend upon your willingness to engage in discussion. Discussion includes a lot of things, such as attending class, commenting upon a passage in the reading, active listening, asking questions, clarifying a point, and relating the course material to your own experiences or contemporary issues. Because we have a relatively small group, it is crucial that everyone attend class, read the assigned material before class and be prepared to participate in discussions. **You may miss a total of three class periods** during the semester for any reason, including illness (you need not provide an excuse); additional absences will lower your grade. I strongly suggest that you “save” your absences for times when you may really need them during the semester, such as when you are ill. I will use

participation in class discussions as a factor in deciding borderline grades for the course.

**Show and tell, 5% of course grade.** Every student will bring an item for "show and tell" twice over the course of the semester, once before Fall break and once after. You can "show" or "tell" anything you want as long as it concerns feminist activism. We will make time for these at the beginning of the class periods, and each show and tell should last no longer than 5 minutes. This should be fun and exciting. Bring a picture of your grandma, a song with a feminist theme, an article from the newspaper, a YouTube video you found provocative, etc., and talk about how it connects with feminist activism. At the end, **ask one open-ended question** to facilitate class discussion about it. These will be graded credit/no credit. If you do both successfully, you will earn an "A," if you do one you will earn a "C," and none gets you an "F" for this portion of your course grade.

**Activist journal, 10% of course grade.** In this journal, you will record your reflections on the assigned readings. I suggest that you keep the journal in a three-ring binder.

For your reflections, you will make entries for each class period's assigned readings. The entries should be in the form of a list of three things that you learned from that day's readings; include some indication of which readings prompted each entry. Your individual entries need not be full sentences, but feel free to include longer reflections if you want. Once you get multiple lists, attach headings to the individual entries that indicate the lessons that you might apply to your own activism. For example, you might use headings such as:

- Surprising things I learned
- Things that inspire me
- Things that do/don't resonate with my own experience
- Definitions of feminist activism
- Goals of activism
- Motives and motivations behind activism
- The effectiveness of different forms of activism
- The role of coalitions in activism.

The headings can then become useful ways to group your reflections, compare ideas from different readings, and see how your interests change over time. These will then serve as a basis for you to chart the evolution of your thinking over the course of the semester, and as material for your final paper.

Please bring each day's reflections to class and date them. You will hand in each week's reflections on Friday (covering the three class periods for the week) and they will be graded credit/no credit.

**Activist projects.** Each student must engage in two activist projects of her/his/their own choosing during the semester. These projects must either be different from your current volunteer activities or must take your current volunteer work in a new direction. One of the two projects will be your main project and the other will be your secondary project:

**Main activist project, 50% of course grade:**

- 15 hours of work plus a 10-page final paper. In this paper you will incorporate what you have learned in the course that is relevant for the project. I will provide more details about the format, etc. in a few weeks.
- Attach to the end of the paper a log of your hours spent working and a very brief description of each activity.

**Secondary activist project, 30% of course grade:**

- 15 hours of work plus a 1½ page final reflection paper. This paper will describe your activities and how you think it/they promoted your social change goals.
- Attach to the end of the paper a log of your hours spent working and a very brief description of each activity.

Each student must choose to do a project from two of the following three categories, for a total of two projects:

**1. Activist project in the Women's and Gender Studies Department.** Women's and Gender Studies has its roots in feminist activism and, more than most academic programs, still has a commitment to action. You can develop your own contribution to the WGS department or choose from the following:

- learn about and assist with an ongoing project (e.g., Brown Bag Speaker Series, Take Over Thursdays, or the Women's Studies Newsletter);
- contribute something new that adds to current programming;
- use your particular skills to advertise, fundraise, enhance the website, etc.; or
- contribute to longer-range planning for the department (e.g., help plan for Women's History Month).

Up to half of these hours can be as a participant-observer in WGS events. You may work individually or in groups. Your goals are to learn about organizations and organizing, build your skills, and add to your experience. The WGS Administrative Assistant, Jennifer Semsar, can give you additional information about the current needs of the department.

**2. Activist project on the SLU campus.** You may work in an *ad hoc* fashion on a particular issue (for example, sexual assault policy or body image or eating disorders) or with an existing organization, depending on what skills you are trying to gain and what your interests are. Again, your goals are to learn about organizations and organizing, build your skills, and add to your experience. You may work individually or in groups.

**3. Activist project involving the St. Louis community.** Working individually or in groups, create your own community project or volunteer at an agency with broadly feminist aspirations. There are notebooks in the WGS office with information about a

wide variety of organizations, and SLU's Center for Service and Community Engagement has an online database. Here, your role may include that of a participant-observer, learning from and about the agency, the staff, and the clients.

**In-class presentation about your main project, 5% of course grade.** These will be scheduled during the final two class periods.

**Portfolio entries of work from this course (required of all WGS majors, encouraged for WGS minors).** WGS has developed an online portfolio program that is easy to set up and use. I will provide you with all the information you need to do so. WGS majors will add at least one of your projects and corresponding paper from this course to your portfolio. You may also want to use it the portfolio to organize material from your other courses, but that is completely optional.

**Electronic devices:** Students may not use any electronic devices in class, including cell phones, tablets, and laptop computers.

### Academic Integrity and Honesty

*Academic integrity is honest, truthful and responsible conduct in all academic endeavors.* The mission of Saint Louis University is "the pursuit of truth for the greater glory of God and for the service of humanity." Accordingly, all acts of falsehood demean and compromise the corporate endeavors of teaching, research, health care, and community service via which SLU embodies its mission. The University strives to prepare students for lives of personal and professional integrity, and therefore regards all breaches of academic integrity as matters of serious concern.

The governing University-level Academic Integrity Policy was adopted in Spring 2015, and can be accessed on the Provost's Office website at:[http://www.slu.edu/Documents/provost/academic\\_affairs/University-wide%20Academic%20Integrity%20Policy%20FINAL%20%2006-26-15.pdf](http://www.slu.edu/Documents/provost/academic_affairs/University-wide%20Academic%20Integrity%20Policy%20FINAL%20%2006-26-15.pdf).

Additionally, each SLU College, School, and Center has adopted its own academic integrity policies, available on their respective websites. All SLU students are expected to know and abide by these policies, which detail definitions of violations, processes for reporting violations, sanctions, and appeals. Please direct questions about any facet of academic integrity to your faculty, the chair of the department of your academic program, or the Dean/Director of the College, School or Center in which your program is housed.

### Academic Support for Students

In recognition that people learn in a variety of ways and that learning is influenced by multiple factors (e.g., prior experience, study skills, learning disability), resources to support student success are available on campus. The Student Success Center assists students with

academic and career related services, is located in the Busch Student Center (Suite, 331) and the School of Nursing (Suite, 114). Students can visit [www.slu.edu/success](http://www.slu.edu/success) to learn more about:

- Course-level support (e.g., faculty member, departmental resources, etc.) by asking your course instructor.
- University-level support (e.g., tutoring services, university writing services, disability services, academic coaching, career services, and/or facets of curriculum planning).

Students with a documented disability who wish to request academic accommodations **must** contact Disability Services to discuss accommodation requests and eligibility requirements. Once successfully registered, the student also **must** notify the course instructor that they wish to access accommodations in the course. Please contact Disability Services, located within the Student Success Center, at [Disability\\_services@slu.edu](mailto:Disability_services@slu.edu) or [314.977.3484](tel:314.977.3484) to schedule an appointment. Confidentiality will be observed in all inquiries. Once approved, information about the student's eligibility for academic accommodations will be shared with course instructors via email from Disability Services and viewed within Banner via the instructor's course roster. Note: Students who do not have a documented disability but who think they may have one are encouraged to contact to Disability Services.

### Title IX

Saint Louis University and its faculty are committed to supporting our students and seeking an environment that is free of bias, discrimination, and harassment. If you have encountered any form of sexual misconduct (e.g. sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, domestic or dating violence), we encourage you to report this to the University. If you speak with a faculty member about an incident of misconduct, that faculty member must notify SLU's Title IX coordinator, Anna R. Kratky (DuBourg Hall, room 36; [akratky@slu.edu](mailto:akratky@slu.edu); [314-977-3886](tel:314-977-3886)) and share the basic facts of your experience with her. The Title IX coordinator will then be available to assist you in understanding all of your options and in connecting you with all possible resources on and off campus.

If you wish to speak with a confidential source, you may contact the counselors at the University Counseling Center at 314-977-TALK. To view SLU's sexual misconduct policy and for resources, please visit the following web addresses:  
<http://www.slu.edu/general-counsel-home/office-of-institutional-equity-and-diversity/sexual-misconduct-policy>  
[www.slu.edu/here4you](http://www.slu.edu/here4you)

*This syllabus is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor to accommodate instructional and/or student needs.*

### Class Topics and Readings

#### **Introduction to the course**

8/28 No assigned reading.

#### **What counts as feminist activism?**

Focus: • Activism as distinct from charity: What is the difference?  
• What are some activist strategies?

8/30 *Grassroots*, read the Introduction, Prologue, Chapter 1, and Appendix A.  
Take a look at the Feminist Poster Project at the University of Dayton, available online.  
Take a look at Gene Sharp's "Methods of Nonviolent Action," available online.

#### **Feminist activism and education**

Focus: • How important is it that activism include consciousness raising?  
• What is the role of emotional engagement in activism?  
• Why are students often well-situated to be effective activists?  
• What are some characteristics of successful activist programs?  
• What characteristics can make teaching a form of activism?  
• How can activist projects affect the people involved?

9/1 \*Lee Anne Bell, "Changing Our Ideas About Ourselves: Group Consciousness Raising with Elementary School Girls as a Means to Empowerment," in *Empowerment through Multicultural Education* (SUNY Press, 1991), pp. 229-249.

9/4 Labor Day: No class.

9/6 \*Teaching Tolerance Project, "Everybody's Story" and "A Wider Circle," in *Starting Small: Teaching Tolerance in Preschool and the Early Grades* (Southern Poverty Law Center, 1997), pp. 1-15 and 31-44.

\*Rachel, "High School Gauntlet," in *That Takes Ovaries! Bold Females and Their Brazen Acts* (NY: Three Rivers Press, 2002), pp. 169-170.

9/8 *Grassroots*, Chapter 2, "Of Minor Importance."

9/11 *Grassroots*, Chapter 3, "Rebels with Causes" and Chapter 4, "The Real World."

- 9/13 Speed dating: get to know your classmates' interests and skills (no assigned reading).
- 9/15 \*Jackson Katz, "Mentors in Violence Prevention," in *Reconstructing Gender: A Multicultural Anthology*, ed. Estelle Disch (McGraw-Hill, 2009), pp. 399-412.
- 9/18 \*bell hooks, "Toward a Revolutionary Feminist Pedagogy," in *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (1989).
- 9/20 \*Hal Adams, "A Grassroots Think Tank—Linking Writing and Community Building," in *Teaching for Social Justice* (NY: The New Press, 1998), pp. 81-97.
- 9/22 No assigned reading.

### **A brief history of U.S. and transnational feminist movements**

- Focus: • Changes in issues and strategies over time
- Coalitions and divisions within feminist movements
  - How important is it to have feminist organizations?
  - Feminism within existing institutions (churches, government) and insider-outsider strategies
  - Coalitions with other social movements
- 9/25 Watch the documentary, "She's Beautiful When She's Angry," available on multiple streaming services (1-1/2 hours).
- 9/27 Watch these two TED talks:
  - Courtney Martin, "This Isn't Her Mother's Feminism" (11-1/2 minutes).
  - Roxanne Gay, "Confessions of a Bad Feminist" (11-1/2 minutes).
- 9/29 \*Suzanne Staggenborg and Verta Taylor, "Whatever Happened to the Women's Movement?" in *Mobilization* 10(1): 37-52. NOTE: Read only pages 41-47, beginning with the subheading, "The Nature and Scope of the Women's Movement."
- 10/2 \* Marjorie Mayo, "Globalization and Gender: New Threats, New Strategies," in *Social Movements: A Reader*, ed. Vincenzo Ruggiero and Nicola Montagna (London and NY: Routledge, 2008), pp. 307-15.
- 10/4 No assigned reading.

## Key theoretical concepts in feminism

Focus: • Intersectionality  
• Standpoint

- 10/6 \*Patricia Hill Collins, "Some Group Matters: Intersectionality, Situated Standpoints, and Black Feminist Thought," in *Feminist Frontiers*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (2004).
- 10/9 \*Sharon Bays, "Work, Politics, and Coalition Building," in Nancy , ed., *Community Activism and Feminist Politics*, Ch. 13.
- 10/11 \*Mary Pardo, "Creating Community," in Nancy Naples, ed., *Community Activism and Feminist Politics*, Ch. 12.
- 10/13 No assigned reading.

## Activism concerning health issues

- 10/16 \*Jael Silliman, "Founding the National Black Women's Health Project," in *Undivided Rights: Women of Color Organize for Reproductive Justice*, ed. Jael Silliman et al. (Boston: South End Press, 2004), pp. 63-85.  
Look at the website of the Emma Goldman Clinic at <http://emmagoldman.com/index.html>.
- 10/18 \*Sia Nowrojee and Jael Silliman, "Asian Women's Health: Organizing a Movement," in *Dragon Ladies: Asian American Feminists Breathe Fire*, ed. Sonia Shah (Boston: South End Press, 1997), pp. 73-89.
- 10/20, 10/23: Fall break: No class
- 10/25, 10/27: Work on group projects during class time
- 10/30 Film, "Taking Our Bodies Back: The Women's Health Movement," shown in class.
- 11/1 \*Boston Women's Health Book Collective, "Organizing for Change," Chapter 32 in *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), pp. 748-58.

## Art as feminist activism

- 11/3 *Grassroots*, Chapter 6, "Creating Activism."

Look at the Guerrilla Girls Website: <http://www.guerrillagirls.com/#open>  
Read Lizzie Crocker story, "The Feminists of Pussy Riot and Femen Who Stood Up to Putin," published 3/10/14 in the Daily Beast, available online.

11/6 Guest Speaker: Ilene Berman, Social practice art.

### **Activism around issues of violence against women**

11/8 \*Sista II Sista, "Sistas Makin' Moves," in *Color of Violence: The INCITE! Anthology* (Boston: South End Press, 2006), pp. 196-207.

11/10 \*Aisha Simmons, "The War Against Black Women, and the Making of *NO!*" in *Color of Violence: The INCITE! Anthology* (Boston: South End Press, 2006).

- Film, *NO!* (2006), shown in class.

11/13 No assigned reading.

11/15 \*"Taking Risks: Implementing Grassroots Community Accountability Strategies," by members of the CARA collective, in *Color of Violence: The INCITE! Anthology* (Boston: South End Press, 2006), pp. 250-66.

11/17 \*Elizabeth (Betita) Martinez, "Unite and Rebel!" in *Color of Violence: The INCITE! Anthology* (Boston: South End Press, 2006).

Look at the website of INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, the section entitled, "Community Accountability: Principles/Concerns/Strategies/Models Working Document."

### **Activism around workplace issues**

11/20 \*Nies, "Mother Jones," in *Nine Women: Portraits from the American Radical Tradition*.

11/22, 11/24 Thanksgiving break: No class.

11/27 *Grassroots*, Chapter 5, "The Activist at Work."

11/29 \*Virginia Rinaldo Seitz, "Class, Gender, and Resistance in the Appalachian Coalfields," in Nancy Naples, ed., *Community Activism and Feminist Politics*, Ch. 9.

12/1 \*Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, "Latina Immigrant Women and Paid Domestic Work: Upgrading the Occupation," in Nancy Naples, ed., *Community Activism and Feminist Politics*, Ch. 8.

12/4 \*TransJustice, “Trans Action for Social and Economic Justice,” in *Color of Violence: The INCITE! Anthology* (Boston: South End Press, 2006).

**Living an activist life**

12/6 *Grassroots*, Ch. 7, “The Revolutionary Next Door.”

12/8 and 12/11: In-class presentations of students’ main projects

12/13, 3:50 p.m.: FINAL PAPERS DUE