French philosopher Michelle LeDoeuff (*Hipparchia’s Choice*, 1991, 29) defines a feminist as one “who does not leave others to think for her (or him).” Feminist inquiry regardless of specialization lends force to that observation. Interrogating accepted beliefs, challenging shared assumptions, and reframing research questions are hallmarks of feminist scholarship in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. Feminist scholars take issue with dominant disciplinary approaches to knowledge production. They contest anglocentric and androcentric “ways to truth” that universalize the experiences of a fraction of the human population. They challenge power dynamics structuring exclusionary academic practices that have enabled unwarranted generalizations to remain unchallenged for centuries or indeed millennia. They identify and develop alternative research practices that further feminist goals of social transformation.

The course is designed to introduce students to a range of epistemologies (theories of knowledge) and methodologies that feminist scholars have drawn upon, critiqued, and adapted to their research purposes. Far from suggesting that there is one feminist mode of knowledge production, the course seeks to foster students’ critical engagement with the complexity and plurality of epistemological and methodological approaches in feminist scholarship. Students will be asked to consider what problems of knowledge particular epistemologies are devised to address; how well they succeed in that endeavor, and what kinds of knowledge exceed specific epistemological frameworks. We will also consider when and under what conditions a particular methodology is helpful, exploring the kinds of research questions it makes visible as well as those it masks. Particular attention will be given to the epistemological assumptions that inform particular methodologies and to the standards of evidence and argument upon which they depend.

Knowledge is a convention rooted in the practical judgments of a community of fallible inquirers who struggle to resolve theory-dependent problems under specific historical conditions. This course will treat feminist knowledge production as a rich and varied tradition. It will explore various conceptions of truth operative in feminist research practices and the diverse cognitive practices that enable feminist inquiry. In this way, the course will assist students in determining the level of analysis, type of explanation, standards of evidence, criteria of evaluation, tropes of discourse, and strategies of argumentation most appropriate for the subject of inquiry s/he wishes to pursue in practicum, thesis, or dissertation research.

To produce knowledge, scholars and activists must engage not only questions about the nature of knowledge and the demands of particular research methods but also cutting-edge debates within their fields of inquiry. To foster heightened understanding of all three of these dimensions, the course will focus on recently published scholarship in leading feminist academic journals.