

Spring 2017

01:988:201 FEMINIST PRACTICES

M/W 2:15-3:35

RAB-207 C/D

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The annual 16 Days Campaign against Violence Against Women, campus mobilizations for Trans* equity, the creation of a thrift shop in the poorest neighborhood in Hong Kong, activism against biopiracy, the rural reconstruction movement, the slow food movement, the creation of gender quotas for public office in more than 100 nations, a demand for inclusion at the World Social Forum, the prison abolition movement, Riot Grrrls, the creation of women's police stations in Brazil, Code Pink, Women in Black, Take-Back-the-Night rallies, transnational campaigns against femicide in Central America, the global campaign for sexual democracy, Sister Namibia's campaign against political homophobia, the three-year GEAR campaign to establish UN Women, V-Day performances of Vagina Monologues, DIY 'zines, the Women's Caucus for Gender Justice at the International Criminal Court....all examples of recent and continuing feminist practices. What do these practices have in common? What exactly makes them "feminist?" What is their relation to Women's and Gender Studies or to knowledge production more generally? This course is designed to explore such questions.

Feminism is a vibrant tradition that has contributed to intellectual ferment, cultural enrichment, and social transformation in all regions of the world for at least five centuries. Feminism is also a highly contested term—meaning very different things to those who caricature and repudiate it and to those who embrace the label. Some define feminism as a network of practices designed to eliminate women's economic, political, and social subordination. But many men and women endorse those goals while rejecting the feminist label. How do women and men who identify as feminist differ from those who do not? What is at stake in claiming the feminist label?

Feminist practices involve social change projects inside and beyond the academy. Whether within the university or in larger national and global contexts, feminist projects entail challenging established relations of power (critique), envisioning alternative possibilities (theory), and activism to change social relations. Women's and Gender Studies is often called the "academic arm" of feminism for it challenges what is believed to be "known" about women (and men), demonstrating that established "knowledge" is often shaped by research that takes men's lives as the unquestioned standard, omitting or distorting women's experiences. As an interdisciplinary field, Women's and Gender Studies seeks to correct distortions created when women are omitted from the study of the world. Taking diverse forms of feminist practice as its focal point, the course investigates how to study the complexity of women's and men's lives in ways that take race, gender-power, ethnicity, class, and nationality seriously. The course will also show how such feminist knowledge production challenges long-established beliefs about the world.