

Highlights of Women, Poverty and Globalization Course (GWS 143 - Fall 2009)

Forging connections from classroom to community

GWS 143 students were placed with eight non-governmental or community organizations whose work focused on gender and poverty, either at the global or local level. This experience allowed students to engage in a systematic analysis of the strategies and practices of these organizations, locate the organization in broader efforts to tackle issues of inequality and poverty, conceptualize common challenges faced by such organizations, and apply feminist theory to practices of advocacy and activism. Throughout the semester, students forged a theoretical connection between class readings and the activist concerns of a particular community organization. While student internships varied considerably in their content and task-orientation, all required a considerable level of self-direction.

Dynamic class structure

The task of connecting the theoretical framework of the class to the world of practice is a challenging one. For many in the first GWS 143 cohort, the expectation of critical engagement was a new, and at times uncomfortable, experience. Recognizing this challenge, the class structure was designed to support students in developing these linkages. Class assignments such as guided journaling helped students reflect on how their specific experience fit into the theoretical framework of the course. The course also creatively engaged with new forms of technology and mediums of communication on both a theoretical level and in the quotidian practices of the class. For example, on-line forums fostered discussion beyond the bounds of the classroom. Guest speakers who transverse the space between academia and practice visited the class, including Tiny, The Founder of *Poor Magazine*, and Professor Tara McPherson, Editor of *Vectors: Journal of Culture and Technology in a Dynamic Vernacular*. Both speakers offered reflections based on the specificity of their own experience.

End-of-semester Roundtable event

The semester culminated in a student-organized Roundtable Discussion amongst faculty, representatives of each participating organization and GWS 143 students. Participants reflected on the successes and challenges of the semester while brainstorming how the partnership between GWS 143 students and community organizations can further evolve. Most ambitiously, this course was an attempt to embody a feminist engagement with social issues that would retain its commitment to theory while enacting it in the world. The organizations that hosted GWS 143 interns during the Fall 2009 semester were: [Code Pink: Women for Peace](#), [East Bay Sanctuary Covenant](#), [FORGE](#), [Generations Ahead](#), [IDEX: International Development Exchange](#), [Narika](#), [Rainbow World Fund](#) and [Women's Initiative for Self Employment](#).