

**GSFR 707**  
**Knowledge in Action**  
McMaster University, 2017-18  
Term 1: Thursday 11:30am-2:20pm, BSB B138  
Term 2: Wednesday 11:30-2:20, CNH 307

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**Course Description:**

In the Canadian university setting, the past decade has seen a noticeable turn to community-engaged research, teaching, and learning. As of 2011, for example, McMaster University president Patrick Deane declared Community Engagement (CE) one of our institution's top new priorities. In many ways, CE at universities across the country offers exciting possibilities for (more) ethical encounters across difference through community-engaged research, teaching and learning. It is worth asking, though, whether CE serves, rather than challenges, the ongoing transformations of the university and large-scale cuts to government spending on social welfare and public services that are so central to neoliberal economic and ideological agendas. The emphasis on "doing good" through CE may also risk mobilizing a colonial and imperialist logic that downplays (or disavows altogether) the ways that academic institutions and knowledge-making have historically been (and continue to be) deeply implicated in the furtherance of colonialist and imperialist projects.

Feminist alliances across difference, too, can be rife with conflict (often related to inequities on the basis of race, class, sexuality, ability, and geography, to name but a few areas of difference). For example, feminist movements have themselves been implicated in exploitative and damaging politics that have furthered racist, colonialist, imperialist, classist, queer/trans-phobic and ableist agendas. Nonetheless, a commitment to bridging theory/practice and university/community divides can be traced back to the field's founding, and as Catherine Orr notes, WGS approaches to Community Engagement (CE) typically involve "social justice frameworks that distinguish engagement from 'service' or 'volunteering' where too often issues of power and privilege go unquestioned."

This course asks whether and how the institutional turn to 'community engagement' might be harnessed to further the focus on social justice and activist-oriented research, teaching and service often associated with the field of Women's and Gender Studies (WGS). In the interest of striving towards a critical, feminist model for community engagement that challenges dominant paradigms, we will collaborate with advocate-activists involved in feminist and/or other social justice struggles, movements, and organizations in the wider Hamilton community.

## **Course Objectives:**

This course aims to challenge dominant paradigms of CE and to reflect critically on the challenges of building feminist solidarities across difference, in order to contribute to the ongoing formation of local feminist communities struggling together towards greater forms of justice.

More specifically, the course aims:

1. To assist students in understanding feminist interventions in the dominant paradigms of community-engaged learning, as well as the challenges associated with building alliances and solidarity across difference in feminist struggles;
2. To provide opportunities to think together about the nature of communities and the role of feminist activism in building counter-hegemonic communities that resist/oppose a broad range of injustices.
3. To assist students in understanding theories of advocacy, social activism, and experiential learning as they intersect with feminist commitments to praxis;
4. To introduce students to a variety of advocates/activists in the local community and to create opportunities to learn about local approaches to knowledge-building, activism and advocacy from them;
5. To provide experiential and collaborative learning opportunities that will allow students to begin developing practical skills in community-based research, advocacy and activism and to reflect on these skills in conjunction with their community mentors and instructor;
6. To provide a range of written and oral assignments that will help students develop skills in communication and in integrating theory with practice through critical self-reflection.

*In this course, students will:*

1. Demonstrate fluency with published research on community engagement, advocacy, and activism, particularly through the lens of feminist, women's and gender studies;
2. Develop the ability to summarize, analyze, and synthesize theoretical texts;
3. Engage in critical discussion of key texts in seminar discussion and through written work;
4. Contribute to direction and quality of discussion in seminar and learning team meetings;
5. Develop and exercise skills in critical approaches to community engagement, including advocacy/activism and feminist community-building;
6. Explore and establish a code of ethics for community-based learning;
7. Undertake a CE project under the supervision of a community-based mentor;
8. Help to mentor fellow students, particularly fellow members of learning teams, by fostering a supportive and engaged environment for experiential learning;
9. Practice the integration of theory with practice through written work that involves critical self-reflection;
10. Work collaboratively to develop a proposal for a Social Justice Intervention (SJI), and present that proposal orally for feedback from a panel of community-based experts.

## **Required Texts:**

Available online via Mills library – links to be posted on our Avenue course site.

## **Class Format:**

This course will be structured differently than what you have come to expect from traditional graduate seminars. The course will be taught by a faculty member along with mentors who have a range of advocacy/activist experience in feminist or other social justice struggles, movements, and/or non-profit organizations in the wider Hamilton community. Students will be placed in learning teams and these groups will form the basis for students' Community Engagement Projects (CE Projects).

Our initial meeting will give us a chance to get to know one another, go over course requirements, and learn about the CE projects available this year. Shortly thereafter, we'll participate in an informal gathering with mentors of CE projects from the past several years as well as mentors for this coming year's projects. This meeting is designed as a larger introduction to the Hamilton non-profit and activist community landscape, as well as a chance for CE project learning teams to meet in person for the first time.

At this point in the semester, and as you are working with your fellow learning team members and mentor to develop outlines for the CE projects you will undertake this year, we will also meet as a larger group in seminar to discuss and critically reflect on key texts concerning community-based praxis learning as it has developed in the field of WGS and on a number of additional institutional and structural challenges that inform social justice work approached by means of CE.

The following weeks will be a mixture of seminars and separately scheduled student/mentor learning team meetings. **You are expected to meet with your learning team each week and with your mentor once every two weeks during project planning and implementation.** These meetings are to be scheduled independently at a time that works for the mentor and the learning team. To accommodate these meetings, most seminar meetings are scheduled for only two hours per week as opposed to the usual three, allowing additional time to be dedicated to learning team and mentor meetings throughout the year.

**NOTE: In addition to learning team meetings, students are expected to spend at least 75 hours each, over the course of the year, on their CE Projects. This works out to approx. 5 hours per week for the 15 week period from Monday Nov. 6 to Friday Mar. 16, not including December and Winter Mid-Session breaks. Note that these hours will likely be dispersed differently across weeks depending on the nature of the project.**

Throughout the year, seminar meetings will include discussion of the challenges and possibilities for social justice activism and alliance/coalition building. While these discussions may take up learning team experiences in CE Projects, they will do so for the most part in connection with required assigned readings, including several chosen by local activist/advocates who will visit our class.

After the CE Projects wrap up in mid-March, students will embark on the planning process for their SJI Proposal Presentations. These presentations will take place in class on April 4; note that in order to allow ample time for discussion, this class meeting will run for the full three hours (9:30-12:30) rather than our usual two.

There will be several weeks during the term when we will forego our regularly-scheduled class meetings in the interests of allowing additional time for CE Projects and SJI Proposal

development – students are encouraged to regularly consult the tentative schedule below and our ‘Avenue’ course site for updates to this schedule as the course proceeds.

### **Assignments and Evaluation Scheme:**

- Seminar Participation Term 1 – 5%
- Seminar Participation Term 2 – 5%
- Community Engagement Project Learning Team Participation – 10%
- Community Engagement Project Outline – 10%
- Discussion Questions (4 @ 300-500 words each) – 15%
- ITP Papers (3 @ 750 words each) – 15%
- Social Justice Intervention Proposal Presentation – 15%
- Critical Reflection Paper (3,000-3,200 words) – 25%

### **Important Notes**

**Email Communication Policy:** It is the policy of the Faculty of Humanities that all email communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student’s own McMaster email account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. Instructors will delete emails that do not originate from a McMaster email account.

#### **Assignments:**

- (1) Please submit all written assignments to the Avenue Submission Folder and/or Discussion Tool by the date/time specified in the relevant Avenue handout.
- (2) Please bring print or electronic copies of Discussion Questions to class on the date you are submitting, in addition to submitting them to Avenue.
- (2) Late assignments will be penalized 5% per day, 7 days per week. All late assignments forfeit written comments.
- (3) Please keep copies of and preparation notes for all assignments, including research notes. You may be required to hand in these preparation notes; failure to do so may result in loss of credit for the assignment.

**Extensions and other Accommodations:** Please make all requests for assignment extensions in person or via email no later than the end of the third week of classes. Note that the office of Student Accessibility Services (SAS) approves accommodations for students with disabilities. These accommodations are designed to ensure that each student has a fair opportunity to perform in McMaster courses. Students with disabilities are encouraged to identify themselves to SAS in order to receive accommodations, ideally no later than the end of the second week of classes. If you have an SAS accommodation letter, please have me sign it (or inform me that it is coming) as soon as possible; I look forward to working with you to ensure appropriate accommodations. For further information, or to register with SAS, please see <http://sas.mcmaster.ca/>, call 905.525.9140 x28652 (TTY: 905-528-4307) or go to the SAS office at MUSC B-107. If you have questions or concerns about these steps, and/or wish to discuss accommodations informally, I am happy to speak in person; please drop by my office hours or make an appointment.

**Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous and Spiritual Observances:** Students requiring academic accommodation based on religion and spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the Course Calendar or by their respective Faculty. In most cases, the student should contact his or her professor or academic advisor as soon as possible to arrange accommodations for classes, assignments, tests and examinations that might be affected by a religious holiday or spiritual observance.

**McMaster’s Statement on Academic Integrity:**

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, located at <http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity>

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- 1) Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- 2) Improper collaboration in group work.
- 3) Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

**Course changes:** Instructors and the university as a whole reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. If such modifications become necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of students to check their McMaster and Avenue email accounts and their Avenue course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

**Evaluations:**

Students will be requested to complete a course evaluation near the end of term.

## TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES, TOPICS & READINGS<sup>1</sup>

<b>Sept 14</b>	<b>Introduction to GSFR 707</b> <i>Project preferences – due via email Mon. Sept 18</i>
<b>Sept 21</b>	<b>University-Community Collaboration and Women’s/Gender Studies</b> Assigned reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deane, “Forward with Integrity: A letter to the McMaster Community”</li> <li>• National Women’s Studies Association, “Women’s Studies as Civic Engagement”</li> </ul>
<b>Sept 28</b>	<b>Meeting with Mentors (details TBA)</b> Assigned reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pathways to Collaboration</li> <li>• GSFR 707 Project Manual</li> </ul>
<b>Oct 5</b>	<b>Structural Challenges 1: Neoliberal State/Funder Limits on Political Activism</b> Assigned Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Smith, “Introduction: <i>The Revolution Will Not Be Funded</i>”</li> <li>• Bierria &amp; Communities Against Rape and Abuse (CARA), “Pursuing a Radical Anti-Violence Agenda Inside/Outside a Non-Profit Structure”</li> </ul> Learning team meetings with mentors as individually scheduled to plan project outlines
<b>Oct 12</b>	<b>Midterm Recess (no class meeting this week)</b>
<b>Oct 19</b>	Learning team meetings with mentors as individually scheduled to draft project outlines (no regularly scheduled class meeting) <i>Project outlines due to Avenue Sun. Oct 22</i>
<b>Oct 26</b>	Learning team meetings with instructor as individually scheduled for oral feedback on CE Project Outlines (no regularly scheduled class meeting)
<b>Nov 2</b>	<b>Structural Challenges 2: Benevolence, Imperialism, Colonization</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blackstone, “Doing Good, Being Good, and the Social Construction of Compassion”</li> <li>• Jefferess, “Benevolence, Global Citizenship, and ‘Post-Racial Politics’”</li> <li>• LeFrancois, “The psychiatrization of our children, or, an autoethnographic narrative of perpetuating First Nations genocide through ‘benevolent’ institutions”</li> </ul> Projects continue; learning team meetings with mentors as individually scheduled <i>Revised project outlines due Sun. Nov. 5</i>
<b>Nov 9</b>	<b>Projects continue (no class)</b> Learning team meetings with mentors as individually scheduled

<sup>1</sup> At certain points in the course it may make best sense to modify this schedule. The instructors reserve the right to modify elements of the course and will notify students accordingly.

<b>Nov 16</b>	<p><b>Possibilities for (More) Ethical Engagements Across Difference 1: Encountering “Strangers”</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Himley, “Facing (Up To) ‘The Stranger’ in Community Service Learning”</li> <li>• Dean, “What Lives On”</li> <li>• Bogo and Vayda, “The Integration of Theory and Practice: The ITP Loop Model”</li> </ul> <p>Projects continue; learning team meetings as individually scheduled</p>
<b>Nov 23</b>	<p><b>Projects continue (no class)</b></p> <p>Learning team meetings with mentors as individually scheduled <i>ITP paper 1 due to Avenue Thurs. Nov. 23</i></p>
<b>Nov 30</b>	<p><b>Possibilities for (More) Ethical Engagements Across Difference 2: Advocacy and/as Dissent</b></p> <p>Assigned reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alcoff, “The Problem of Speaking for Others”</li> <li>• Bickford and Reynolds, “Activism and Service-Learning: Reframing Volunteerism as Acts of Dissent”</li> </ul> <p>Projects continue; learning team meetings as individually scheduled</p>
<b>Dec 7</b>	<p><b>Projects continue (no class)</b></p> <p>Learning team meetings with mentors as individually scheduled <i>Seminar participation self-assessment for Term 1 due to Avenue Fri. Dec. 8</i></p>

### December Break

<b>Jan 10</b>	<p><b>Additional Reflections on WGS Community Engagement</b></p> <p>Assigned reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Zimmerman, “The Past in Our Present: Theorizing the Activist Project of Women’s Studies”</li> <li>• Orr, “Challenging the Academic/Real World Divide”</li> <li>• Gilbert and Sameh, “Building Feminist Educational Alliances in an Urban Community”</li> </ul> <p>Projects continue; learning team meetings with mentors as individually scheduled</p>
<b>Jan 17</b>	<p><b>Projects continue (no class)</b></p> <p>Learning team meetings with mentors as individually scheduled <i>ITP paper 2 due to Avenue Thurs. Jan. 17</i></p>
<b>Jan 24</b>	<p><b>Seminar with local activists/advocates</b></p> <p>Assigned reading: TBA</p> <p>Projects continue; learning team meetings with mentors as individually scheduled</p>

<b>Jan 31</b>	<b>Projects continue (no class)</b> Learning team meetings with mentors as individually scheduled
<b>Feb 7</b>	<b>Seminar with local activists/advocates</b> Assigned reading: TBA Projects continue; learning team meetings with mentors as individually scheduled
<b>Feb 14</b>	<b>Projects continue (no class)</b> Learning team meetings with mentors as individually scheduled <i>ITP paper 3 due to Avenue Wed. Feb. 14</i>
<b>Feb 21</b>	<b>Mid-Session Break (no class)</b>
<b>Feb 28</b>	<b>Seminar with local activists/advocates</b> Assigned reading: TBA Learning team meetings with mentors as individually scheduled
<b>Mar 7</b>	<b>Informal discussion in class: preparing to wrap up CE projects and begin SJI Project Presentation preparation</b> Assigned reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whitmore, Wilson, Calhoun, “Activism that Works: Emergent Themes”</li> <li>• Sudbury &amp; Okazawa-Rey, eds. <i>Activist Scholarship: Anti-Racism, Feminism, and Social Change</i>, Introduction</li> <li>• Collins, “Where Do We Go From Here?”</li> </ul> Projects continue; learning team meetings as individually scheduled
<b>Mar 14</b>	<b>Projects conclude (no class)</b> Learning team meetings as individually scheduled
<b>Mar 21</b>	<b>Planning for SJI Project Presentations (no class)</b>
<b>Mar 28</b>	<b>Planning for SJI Project Presentations (no class)</b>
<b>Apr 4</b>	<b>SJI Project Presentations</b> <i>NB: Class this week meets 11:30-2:20</i>
<b>Apr 11</b>	<b>Course wrap-up</b> 11:30 am-12:20 pm: seminar meeting, course evaluations (on campus) 5-7 pm: End of year celebration for students, mentors, teaching team members, guests (off campus location TBA) <i>Seminar Participation Self-Assessment for Term 2 due to Avenue Fri Apr 13</i>

**Apr 18:** *Critical Reflection Paper and Learning Team Participation Self-assessment Form due to Avenue*