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Unpaid and Critically Engaged: Feminist Interns in the Nonprofit Industrial Complex

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In 2011, the National Women Studies Association (NWSA) joined a national conversation about civic engagement by publishing what has come to be known as the Teagle White Paper (Orr “Women’s”). In this document a panel of women’s studies scholars make the case that women’s studies, as a field, has been developing pedagogical approaches that look very similar to the work currently being advocated in national educational reform movements. Women’s studies, as a result, can (or, perhaps, should) be considered a vital resource for scholars and, more importantly, administrators looking to infuse campus life with civically engaged curriculum. The national movement aimed at jump-starting the civic purpose of colleges and universities started in the mid-1980s, when a handful of university presidents founded a coalition (Campus Compact) that supported and promoted civically engaged practices and programs (Hartley; Musil). As Matthew Hartley notes in a review of the movement, curriculum reform was central to this effort, but community service or the integration of community-based activities into university coursework was equally important (12).

Bridging campus and community, or theory and practice, has long been a critical component of women’s studies, especially at San Francisco State University, where an internship course has been part of the department’s core curricula since its inception. However, the terms of engagement in women’s studies are strikingly different from those in national educational reform movements. The Teagle White Paper links feminist pedagogy to the civic engagement movement and makes the work and history of women and gender studies more legible to our colleagues, students, community partners, and campus administrators. While we share the goal of making the intellectual and political contributions of WGS more visible, we hesitate to embrace the phrase “civic engagement” because its historical focus on “producing ‘better’ citizens” (Orr, “Women’s” 6) can unwittingly underplay the role the corporate university and nonprofit sector have in maintaining rather than disrupting the status quo.

In the discussion below, we trace the development of an internship class in women and gender studies at San Francisco State University, showing how it

shares some common elements with the broader trajectories of the civic engagement movement, even as it departs from it in productive ways. We offer our internship class as one example of what we are calling “critical engagement,” a phrase that foregrounds how innovative feminist pedagogical approaches both bridge and interrogate the gap between campus and community, theory and practice. We conclude by discussing two key outcomes of our internship course: that it remains a space of contradictions and that it complicates notions of praxis.

The Internship Class in Women and Gender Studies at San Francisco State University

The internship class in the Department of Women and Gender Studies at San Francisco State University is required for graduating seniors and an elective for graduate students. Over the years a network of community organizations working on issues important to women and gender studies have generously mentored and supported our students during their internships. At exit interviews with students before graduation, and in anonymous exit surveys and student evaluations, students repeatedly mention the internship class in terms that suggest its transformative potential. Students enthusiastically note that this class provides an opportunity to enact and embody some of the feminist principles and theories with which they have grappled in their other coursework. At a recent alumni panel in our department, where former students return to talk about how women and gender studies has prepared them for work and community engagement, student after student mentioned how important

our internship class had been to their education and subsequent work.

Despite these positive reviews, the internship class raises difficult questions about the role and purpose of unpaid labor for women and gender studies students specifically—and about the workings of neoliberalism more broadly. Since at least the 1973 National Organization of Women Task Force on Volunteerism, feminist critiques of volunteer labor have argued that unpaid service work offers at best a band-aid solution for social inequities and at worst prevents deeper social change (Bojar 39). Wary that women and gender studies as a field might uncritically provide community organizations with unpaid interns and future underpaid employees and redirect energies away from broader political transformation, our department has sought to make the class a space of critical engagement that interrogates—rather than tries to transcend—the binaries of academia/community, theory/practice, individual/collective, and local/global. By interrogating these binaries rather than trying to bridge or transcend them, our conceptualization of critical engagement pushes back against a more broadly conceived notion of civic engagement. Indeed, it is precisely the class’s self-reflexivity that makes it such an important part of our curriculum and that we address below: it invites students to critically reflect upon their own experiences; to theorize how community organizations understand their work and constituencies; to grasp the interconnectedness of political economy, academia, and community organizations; and to inhabit, often uncomfortably but always self-reflexively, the complicity that these interconnections create.

At San Francisco State, the internship class began in the late 1970s as a way

to manage the resource-thin economic environment in which women studies, as a proposed new major, emerged.¹ In the wake of the 1968 SFSU student strikes, which demanded the development of new curriculum and an autonomous College of Ethnic Studies, a cluster of “focus on women” courses emerged in 1970 in three different departments (Winkler 40–49). By 1975, the cluster had grown to include thirty-three “women studies” courses in twenty-one departments. In 1976, a handful of faculty, administrators, and community activists proposed a Bachelor of Arts degree in women studies, arguing that the degree would serve student interests, support faculty development, and provide trained workers for a variety of community agencies and organizations. The proposal included forty-seven letters of support from individuals, groups, and community agencies, twelve of which testified that a degree in women studies would provide their agency with well-trained employees in specialized fields—typically nonprofit administration in health and human services (Proposal for B.A. Degree Program in Women Studies).

From the start, the women studies program at San Francisco State (WOMS) articulated a service-based curricular mission and active collaboration with community-based organizations. The program’s internship class, however, was initially proposed to serve departmental needs rather than community-based organizations. Titled WOMS 698: Work Study in Feminist Projects and initially offered in spring 1977, the course functioned as one of a dozen WOMS electives. Taught by the program coordinator, students who enrolled in WOMS 698 were offered a “unique opportunity to do supervised community, university, or Women Stud-

ies Program service which implements or otherwise relates to the Women Studies Major program or individual WOMS courses” (SFSU Bulletin, 1977–78). Course activities included tutoring, teaching, evaluation of curricula, and service on departmental committees. Initially, the WOMS program at SFSU had been granted four full-time equivalent (FTE) faculty and a one-quarter teaching load reduction for the program coordinator, but no administrative assistance. This was common among early women’s studies departments, as Florence Howe notes in *Seven Years Later: Women’s Studies Programs in 1976* (26–27). As programs got off the ground, they typically managed the labor of departmental governance and program administration by employing the service of community boards or councils, which, importantly, included students. SFSU’s program was no exception, and administrative service was often understood to be educational in and of itself. Howe summarizes that “[f]or many of the faculty and students interviewed, participating in the process of a women’s studies committee has been as educational as the curriculum” (27). At San Francisco State, students in the women studies program worked alongside faculty to develop curricula and often co-taught elective courses. Students also served on hiring committees and participated in other critical aspects of program administration. Shared governance across the student-teacher divide enabled the department to self-govern with few resources, but it also mirrored the department’s ideological and pedagogical mission. As Barbara Winkler argues in her comparative study of four women’s studies programs, San Francisco State’s program articulated an ideological commitment to student participation, which

it exercised in a number of different ways (196). SFSU's women studies program's early internship course, then, can be seen as a way to compensate students for the labor of program development but also, if program development can be considered a kind of civic engagement, as an initial attempt to engage students in a pedagogical exercise that interrogates the relationship between theory and practice.

Through the 1980s transformations in the broader field of women's studies reframed the role internships played in the WGS department's core curricula. In 1982, an internship course (WOMS 695) more explicitly focused on off-campus service in "cooperating community agencies" became part of the core requirements for women studies majors. The work-study course (WOMS 698) remained a part of students' elective course offerings, signaling a continued need for student contributions to program development, but WOMS 695 took a different path, seeking to address emergent tensions in the field of women's studies. As women's studies as a field began to institutionalize, the activist moorings that inspired initial curricular developments seemed to lose footing in the face of rapid theoretical developments. At SFSU, WOMS 695 structured itself as a bridge between academia and activism, theory and practice by including biweekly seminars to discuss the "application of theoretic readings and students' perceptions and problems concerning their agency work" (SFSU Bulletin, 1982–83). By the mid-2000s, WOMS 695 had been folded into WOMS 698, but the course retained its emphasis on off-campus, nonprofit service work and, for reasons unknown to us, reclaimed its (clunky) initial course title, Work Study in Feminist Projects. Following the department's

renaming to women and gender studies in 2009, the class became WGS 698 and has remained part of the department's core course offerings since that time.

Today, students choose their own internship site, usually from a list of community organizations posted on the departmental website but also by word of mouth. During the first few weeks of the semester student interns are responsible for making contact with an agency or organization, scheduling an interview, and negotiating a contract to complete approximately one hundred hours of unpaid community service-learning over the course of the semester.² The course requires internships to be served at nonprofit organizations, but some are large and well-funded while others are small and economically strapped. Some have well-established training programs in place while others are less organized with regard to directing the labor of unpaid volunteers. For instance, many WGS students at SFSU seek internships at Girls Inc., a large nonprofit that offers skill-building and academic enrichment programs to local girls. The Alameda County branch of Girls Inc. (just east of San Francisco) is well funded and receives 68 percent of their annual budget from government grants and foundations. It also has a well-structured training program that manages over fifteen thousand hours of volunteer service each year (Girls Incorporated of Alameda County). In contrast, Justice Now, a prison abolition organization in Oakland, California, that works with people in women's prisons to secure compassionate release, demand access to healthcare, and defend parental rights, is a much smaller operation with only a handful of paid employees. At Justice Now, internships are not hierarchically structured within the organization,

and interns carry their own caseload of incarcerated clients with whom they work directly. There are many other nonprofit organizations of various size and influence that employ women and gender studies students as interns. In our observation, the factors of organizational size, structure, and funding sources influence the overall experience of students during their internship. Indeed, the ways in which students are put to work at the agency and the degree to which they feel that they can usefully deploy the theoretical insights they have garnered in the classroom impacts the degree to which students experience the tension between theory and practice that the course is designed to underscore. The size, structure, and resources of the internship site make visible the mechanics of what Dylan Rodríguez and Ruth Wilson Gilmore call the “non-profit industrial complex,” discussed in more detail below.

A few of the organizations that are currently popular with women and gender studies interns, like Planned Parenthood and Bay Area Women Against Rape, were on the B.A. program’s 1976 proposal. As mentioned above, as part of the justification for a new major in women studies, community organizations testified that educating students in “sex role differentiation” would prepare them for professional work. The Childcare Switchboard of San Francisco, for instance, noted “the need for qualified, skilled people in all areas of government, social services, etc., who have a basic awareness of the needs of women” (Proposal for B.A. Degree). Similarly, San Francisco’s chapter of the National Organization of Women asserted that “we also hear of the need for women who could be trained professionals—women’s lawyers, doctors, mental health

counselors, affirmative action officers, clinicians, job counselors, etc. . . . [and] we feel very strongly that Women’s Studies is the correct background for women who will later work in those fields” (Proposal for B.A. Degree). The idea of Women’s Studies as a vocation hovered just below the surface of these testimonials, as well as a presumption that it is primarily women who select it as a major. The internship course, as it developed over time, initially appeared to confirm these expectations. Four decades later, the range of WGS students and their motivation for enrolling in the major challenge these vocational and gender connotations. While internships often lead to jobs after graduation, the internship course functions as a practicum where students gain first-hand knowledge of the ways the nonprofit sector perpetuates an underpaid, and unevenly gendered and racialized, labor force that absorbs many of the burdens of the shrinking welfare state. As such, WGS 698 simultaneously facilitates students’ entrance into the nonprofit sector as laborers (in the name of vocational training) and encourages students to grasp and criticize the exploitative nature of that same labor.

Curricular attempts to challenge or bridge the perceived separation between “campus” and “community” are not unique to women and gender studies but have become an increasingly important part of campus life in the twenty-first century (Hartley; Musil). Various service learning, community service, integrative learning, internships, experiential learning, or, more recently—as the title of this special issue of *Feminist Teacher* reflects—civic engagement, these classes provide hands-on or praxis learning that combines theory and practice of a given

field. The expansion of such programs at our own and other institutions reflects a drive to link education to civic life (Hartley). Part of this process has been the development of programs that invite students to apply classroom learning to community (nonprofit) or professional (for-profit) organizations or environments. The process of circling back—linking internship experiences back into the classroom—has been more difficult to comprehend, as it involves a variety of different ideological approaches and debates, as Matthew Hartley describes (17). Should civic engagement transform students, academic programs, and academia, making the university more reflective of social diversity, as Caryn McTighe Musil argues? Or are internships a path toward increased professionalization for students? Should internships foreground social justice or educational engagement? (Bickford and Reynolds; Bruce and Brown; Hartley).

Programs that encourage civic engagement provide students with marketable skills, but they also raise concerns about the ethics of and expectations about student internships. In their Fact Sheet about “Internship Programs and the Fair Labor Standards Act,” for example, the U.S. Department of Labor argues that the unpaid internship must “benefit the intern” and “not displace regular employees,” (“Fact Sheet #71”) while the National Association of Colleges and Employers, which connects campuses with employers, follows the Department of Labor’s criteria, adding in their “Position Paper on U.S. Internships” that employers should consider “whether or not work performed by an intern will primarily benefit the employer in a way that does not also advance the education of the student.” In other words, both the Department of Labor and National

Association of Colleges and Employers recognize that unpaid work has historically often benefitted the organization or employer more than the intern. The curricular importance of civic engagement and community internships within women’s and gender studies thus must be situated within these broader national conversations about equity and social justice. At the same time, we believe that WGS internship courses raise specific questions about feminist methods and pedagogies. Indeed, given the productive power of disciplines to produce institutional identities, we must consider what kinds of identities our WGS internship class produces (Wiegman).

How do we reconcile the tensions that internships raise alongside the fact that most of our students report a high degree of satisfaction with the course? Of forty-two exit surveys conducted between 2010 and 2012, 73 percent agree or strongly agree that the class helped them connect feminist theory with practice; 76 percent agree or strongly agree that the class increased their ability to critically understand the connections between social, political, and economic institutions locally and globally; 81 percent agree or strongly agree that their internship was a worthwhile experience; 81 percent agree or strongly agree that their internship experience enabled them to combine classroom and service learning environments; and 81 percent agree or strongly agree that their internship experience resulted in being better able to understand and participate in social change. This quantitative data is corroborated with anecdotal and qualitative evidence from exit interviews, anonymous student evaluations, alumni day events, and informal comments from students about the value of our internship class. Finally, in the papers and journals

that students write for this class where they are asked to address specific ways that the class helped them reflect on their WGS studies and make connections between theory and practice, students often focus on being better able to understand the politics of funding and also their own mixed feelings about engaging in critically informed community work.

Curricular Engagement

An internship class is key to our curriculum because it critically stages feminist approaches to nonprofit and volunteer work. The syllabus, for example, provides readings and a structure to cover four overlapping themes: (1) the gendered histories of volunteerism; (2) the concept of community; (3) the transnational politics of service learning; and (4) the consolidation of the nonprofit industrial complex (NPIC). In terms of staffing, the department chair typically teaches this course, primarily because it is a class that requires numerous individual meetings with students, which is often most easily accommodated by the chair's on-campus schedule. The class meets as a group five times per semester for three hours each session, during which time students discuss readings that address the history and politics of internships and make connections to their own experiences. But class time also provides a space for more informal discussions about how students feel about their internships, and instructors routinely open class with a check-in, allowing students to share how their internship is going. Over the course of the semester these check-ins typically shift from early anxiety and uncertainty, to the excitement and satisfaction of being involved with an organization, to resistance and dissatisfaction with the

exploitative elements of internships more generally, to, finally, some kind of reconciliation with the tensions and contradictions of participating in the NPIC. Students who often begin the semester by referring to their organizations as "they" by semester's end are saying "we." In this way, students become interpellated—sometimes reluctantly, sometimes enthusiastically—as participants in the nonprofit industrial complex, and the mix of responses becomes a register of their ambivalence but also critical engagement. These affective shifts generate some of the most challenging, but ultimately, we believe, productive conversations about the ways that we all become complicit in the contradictions of global capitalism. Indeed, by deconstructing the premise and function of nonprofit organizations and internships and addressing their unevenly gendered and geopolitical histories, students and instructors alike grapple with and confront our own participation in these troubling histories and structures.

Each of the syllabus's four key themes provides a space to address crucial issues in relation to internships. First, the history of unpaid labor and volunteerism in the United States is unevenly gendered, raced, and classed. While some middle-class U.S. women have historically found that unpaid volunteer work can be an avenue into public participation, there has been a much broader and longer history of unpaid volunteer labor from women of color and working class women in the United States that has gone unrecognized, whether financially or socially (Bojar). The naming of labor as paid or unpaid, and employed or volunteer, suggests that there are clear-cut distinctions. In fact, as Karen Bojar argues, volunteer work can include such activities as doing additional unpaid hours at your

employment, helping out a neighbor with childcare, or volunteering at a community organization to get a sense of satisfaction that is unavailable at your job (37–42). Indeed, Miranda Joseph argues that a “gift economy” undergirds much nonprofit work, which functions as a form of capital circulation: volunteers and interns become productive insofar as they “give back” (in donated time or money) to communities to which they feel connected (70–72). These “gifts” of time and labor facilitate the identification of volunteers or interns with the values and ideologies of the community organization. When discussing volunteer labor, then, it is crucial to address not just that it has historically been unpaid (and this being unevenly experienced by gender, race, and class), but also that—like other forms of unpaid care work—volunteer labor sustains neoliberal capitalism in ways that are not always recognized. For our students, these discussions enable them to situate their internship within a much broader history of unpaid labor.

The uneven history of volunteerism and its financial recognition often sustains an idealized notion of community. As Raymond Williams argued, “community” is a “warmly persuasive word” that has almost exclusively positive connotations (76). The second key theme of the course thus investigates what ideological work happens in its name. Even when volunteer labor is unpaid and earns no additional forms of social capital, for example, the idea that it provides a form of affective compensation—that you feel good, that you enjoy being part of something larger than yourself, that you are doing good work—maintains what Joseph calls the “romance of community.” This romantic notion of community is both temporally and spatially other to capitalism. Tempo-

rally, the idea of community nostalgically invokes “an idealized past” (Joseph 9) and spatially, the idea of community connotes the “local,” which is used to invoke particular or specific identities (Joseph 147). These rhetorical invocations become materialized through the activism/academic binary that continues to haunt women’s and gender studies (Balén; Orr “Activism”; Zimmerman). Temporally, activism is often invoked as part of the origin story of WGS, rather than part of its current narrative. Spatially, activism is how feminist work that happens outside of the academy is often named. Yet this discursive framing, as Catherine Orr argues, disciplines the field by making activism simultaneously central and that which is always made to be absent or displaced in academia (Orr “Activism” 92). Rather than community organizations and the activism they deploy being the “other” of capitalism—providing the sense of community that capitalism cannot or does not provide—they are, as Joseph puts it, necessary to the smooth functioning of capitalism and, thus, its “absent center” (118).

Given how important notions of “the community” have historically been to WGS as a field, it can be unsettling to identify how the concept of community functions hegemonically within the nonprofit sector. Yet this unsettling is productive, challenging the idealizing of community spaces that in practice, as Bernice Johnson Reagon argues, enact “barred room” policies (358). Demystifying community as a concept thus allows for deeper discussions about, as Reagon argues, the difficult but critical work of building productive coalitions and alliances.

Engaging in meaningful community work includes addressing the power relations between interns and community

organizations in the context of globalization. The third course theme, the transnational politics of service work, brings into focus how missionary narratives of help and rescue have dominated many U.S.-based community organizations. Both locally and globally, service learning has often been framed within a logic that Donna Bickford and Nedra Reynolds call “the assigned encounter with difference” (232), which reinforces rather than challenges power relations and perceived differences. Distinguishing an approach that asks, “how can we help people?” from one that asks, “why are conditions this way?” (231), Bickford and Reynolds argue that instead of organizing service learning through difference it should be organized through points of connection and alliance and a “shared goal of creating social change” (237). The global politics of funding can undermine these alliances. By disproportionately locating feminist human rights organizing outside of the West, funding agencies imply that human rights within the United States and other Western nations are not under threat. At the same time, within human rights work, funding is often more easily available for sexual or political violence rather than for economic violence, which is often the legacy of colonialism (Basu). Structural adjustment programs continue to shape the kinds of alliances and financial support that are possible for nonprofits (typically called NGOs when outside of the U.S.). The possibilities of transnational feminist solidarity (Desai; Naples) and Western expectations about non-Western community organizations—particularly funders’ requirements to focus on activities that have measurable outcomes—can also undermine an organization’s work and goals (Ford-Smith). These factors con-

tribute to uneven power relations as they play out transnationally within and among community-based and feminist organizations. Even when organizations have what appear to be an exclusively local focus and constituency, they still sometimes enact what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak calls “worlding,” whereby the “third world” is rhetorically invoked in ways that recenter and naturalize the West’s power. A transnational analysis of nonprofit community organizations can thus identify how apparently local decisions and priorities can have global consequences.

A transnational feminist analysis also brings critical engagement with what gets named as local or global, challenging the idea that the transnational is always somewhere else. As Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Mohanty argue, one of the ways that a transnational focus can become a “normativizing gesture” is when the transnational is figured as “elsewhere” (24, 33). Neoliberal policies shape the operational budgets of not just IMF-funded community organizations but also those of our student’s internship sites. Though not named structural adjustment programs when they happen in the U.S., similar policies restructure funding for education and social services in ways that directly impact our students. Moreover, new forms of empiricism associated with neoliberalism have reverberations for women’s and gender studies beyond explicit gender issues because they shift how research, teaching, scholarship, and civic engagement are defined and valued (Lewis). The broader backdrop of global capitalism and neoliberalism thus shapes both the classroom and community aspects of our internship course. A transnational analysis of community organizations allows students to identify the interconnected

flows of labor, capital, commodities, and desires, and to develop what Doreen Massey calls “a global sense of place” about their own very local internship site. Over the course of the semester, students begin to understand that part of employing a transnational rather than global feminist approach means recognizing how the West’s complicity in the discrepant and uneven relationships of global power continues to structure the nonprofit sector. By reflecting on their experiences in journals and class discussions, students begin to identify possible moments of alliance and solidarity and dislodge neocolonial narratives of help and rescue.

The three themes of unpaid labor, community, and transnationalism come together in the fourth course theme: the nonprofit industrial complex. Using excerpts from the important anthology that popularized this term, *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded* (INCITE ed.), alongside essays that draw upon this work (e.g., Mananzala and Spade), students are introduced to the idea that, as Andrea Smith writes, the nonprofit industrial complex “manages and controls dissent by incorporating it into the state apparatus, functioning as a ‘shadow state’ constituted by a network of institutions that do much of what government agencies are supposed to do with tax money in the areas of education and social services” (Smith 8–9). The shadow state thus does the work of the state but under the guise of social justice and by redirecting protest into service. The concept of the NPIC is perhaps the most important to giving our students the critical language and broader understanding of the role of nonprofit organizations historically and today. The INCITE collection delineates not only how nonprofits act as a band-aid that deflects energy away from

broader social change but also how the tax code and structure of foundations and charities consolidate economic and political power with the elites. This framework enables students to identify ways that their internships fit into the logic of the NPIC and thus are often complicit with rather than a challenge to broader structures of global capitalism and neoliberalism. This conceptual shift enables students to name some of the contradictions and tensions they feel during their internships: that their organization must identify and catalogue measurable outcomes to receive current or secure future funding; that their supervisors must spend significant amounts of time writing grant proposals; and that difficult decisions must be made between providing direct services and developing a longer-range vision of social justice and transformation. Throughout the internship course, students develop a language to critique the broader politics of internships at the same time that they are interns receiving course credit but not wages.

In addition to these theoretical critiques, which can unsettle easy notions of service, students also report that the class feels challenging in terms of the time commitment. Since the hours must be done on-site (rather than as homework, which can be done anywhere), the work is less mobile than with other courses. The course can thus feel like it demands more time than other courses. Many students are also simultaneously working for wages, some, ironically, at nonprofit organizations. Students often wonder why they are required to take this class, which typically demands eight to ten hours of service work per week, when it participates in the troubling histories of the NPIC and demands so much of their time. Their questions challenge us to justify why we continue to

offer the class, which in turn motivates us to sustain it as a space of ongoing critical engagement and feminist praxis.

Critical Engagement and Feminist Praxis

Why is this course part of our core curricula—one of four required courses—and what does it contribute to the program’s overall pedagogical goals? Historically, the internship course functioned as an aspect of shared governance, and while democratic principles continue to be a departmental goal, the women and gender studies department at San Francisco State no longer employs the service work of student interns to do on-campus departmental administration. Students do not sit on hiring or curricular committees, and “work study” students who have financial aid benefits and are employed by the department for (mostly) clerical work tend to be hired from outside the department rather than from our pool of current students in order to protect the privacy of students and faculty (work study employees have access to teaching evaluations, personnel paperwork, faculty retention and tenure files, graduate student files and transcripts, etc.). Nor is the establishment of women studies as a vocation, as it was articulated in the department’s earliest curricular justifications, a course goal. While the department maintains good relationships with feminist community organizations, the internship course is no longer conceptualized as a mechanism, for training students in nonprofit and feminist service work. This is true despite the fact that when asked what kinds of jobs our alumnae have we often enthusiastically report that many graduates successfully land jobs in the nonprofit sector.

The internship course is part of the women and gender studies core curriculum because it enables students to rethink feminist praxis as they critically engage with readings that both illuminate the history of volunteer labor and deconstruct the mechanics of the contemporary nonprofit industrial complex. In other words, students gain experience working with and within neoliberalism on the ground. These experiences often do the practical work of enabling students to perceive transnational flows of labor—to see the global working within the local. The course also offers students a critical engagement with complex subjectivity. As students become aware of the mechanics of the NPIC on the ground, they are better able to see how feminist ideology or feminist ideals translate into embodied practices and organizational structures. They also often feel the pull of identification within organizations (or the romance of community) as they witness or practice the hierarchical structures or funding initiatives that characterize their volunteer labor. In the classroom students are asked to consider what it means to “do” the work of feminism—to be active or engaged in the practice of feminism. Through their internship experiences and in class discussions, students learn that feminist action or practice often involves complicity with uneven power relations and an engagement with the contradictions of global capitalism. This unsettling insight surfaces in the classroom as students reconvene periodically to share experiences and compare notes. Students are encouraged by instructors to discuss the structures of their different organizations, to weigh the merits of various organizations’ funding strategies, to observe power structures and hierarchies of value, and to test out new theories regarding the

mechanics of feminism in action. Classroom conversations are integral to the course's method. The "praxis" in feminist practice happens when students return to the classroom to compare notes and share experiences. Here, they grapple with power—not in the abstract but in the everyday ways it plays out in explicitly feminist community organizations.

The course structure and syllabus stage the histories and debates about the NPIC as problems rather than solutions. Using the readings as a starting point, the class employs feminist methods and pedagogies to deconstruct key binaries that have animated the field of women's and gender studies: activism/academia, individual/community, local/global, and theory/practice (cf. Bickford and Reynolds; Nagar and Swarr). By deconstructing the binary of intern and constituency, for example, students and instructors are able to "see their own complicity in the structures that reproduce discrimination" and to critically reflect upon how—or even if—they experience the "assigned encounter with difference" (Bickford and Reynolds 247). By inviting students to attend to what feels familiar as well as to what feels different at their internship, students can identify moments where the smooth workings of ideology continue uninterrupted as well as moments where their prior conceptions were dislodged. Similarly, by taking apart the direct services/social change binary, students learn how providing essential services can also be moments of radicalization and political transformation (cf. Bierria; Mananzala and Spade). Rather than having students pivot between discrete forms of feminist engagement—"activism" in the "community" and "critical reflections" during their "class"—our internship course has historically allowed students

to critically reflect on their internships and to see how theory and practice are always intertwined. Referring to this process as critical engagement rather than civic engagement interrupts these structuring binaries, foregrounds social justice, and challenges neoliberal ways of thinking.

Ultimately, we believe there are two broad outcomes of this class that explain why it has continued to be such an enduring part of our curriculum. The first is that this class allows students and instructors alike to fully apprehend and engage with the contradictions of living in global capitalism. For students, this means critically inhabiting the tensions between the feminist theories and the practical applications they employ outside of it as well as the tensions they experience between engaging in critiques of the NPIC and being a participant in it. By critically inhabiting these contradictions rather than simply becoming complicit in them (or believing that there is a pure space outside of them), students are intellectually and practically equipped to challenge (not just participate in) the structures of neoliberalism. For instructors, engaging with the contradictions of living in global capitalism means critically inhabiting the tensions between teaching feminist histories and preparing students to be paid or unpaid laborers after they graduate. Even as we resist the demand for arguments about the utility of women's and gender studies as a major, we also acknowledge the importance of high graduation rates and high job placement rates of students after graduation. The internship class brings this contradiction into graphic relief, allowing us to support our students and prepare them for future work while simultaneously resisting the push for vocational or utilitarian arguments

for women's and gender studies. By foregrounding critical thinking skills and the everyday implications of feminist theories and analyses, the class highlights for students and instructors alike the importance of recognizing the contradictions of global capitalism and the fact that there are no pure spaces outside of it.

The second outcome is the insight that feminist praxis happens in the classroom as well and as much as in community organizations. By the mid-2000s, our internship class had evolved to include, among other things, a critical analysis of the theoretical interventions that emerge out of community-based organizations as well as a deconstruction of the theory/practice and academia/activism binaries. It has become clear that theory work happens just as rigorously at community-based organizations as in the classroom, so the idea that theory is exclusive to the classroom has been broadly interrogated and complicated. What has not been complicated well enough is the assumption that practice or praxis only happens outside the classroom. In the WGS internship course at SFSU we find that it is in the space of the classroom that the tensions and contradictions of putting feminist theory into action are directly addressed but not resolved. Moreover, we realize that the practice of critical engagement through conversation and comparative analysis has become a kind of feminist praxis. In the classroom, as students affectively register their discomfort and become increasingly aware of the mechanics of the nonprofit industrial complex, a productive disidentification with service work ensues that both demystifies the romance of community and enables students to seek out new alliances and coalitions. End-of-semester writing

assignments and an assembled portfolio of collected materials enable students to extend and solidify their disidentificatory approach. As students learn to navigate the nonprofit industrial complex—or neoliberalism more generally—through their grounded engagement with feminist theory/action, they become smarter “consumers” of the promises of feminism. Continuing to be critically engaged, students (and faculty) learn that despite the contradictions of global capitalism, they can move through the world both uncomfortably and productively cognizant of these factors.

NOTES

The WGS internship class at SFSU is the product of over forty years of curricular development and discussions among faculty, students, and community partners. Our discussion of it here is indebted to and builds on this earlier work. We are also grateful to our colleagues in the Women and Gender Studies department, with whom we have had many rich and productive conversations about the WGS curriculum: Deborah Cohler, A.J. Jaimes Guerrero, Julietta Hua, and Kasturi Ray. We warmly thank LeeRay M. Costa and Karen J. Leong for their helpful and engaging feedback on this essay. Finally, we thank our students, whose questions, comments, and class discussions keep the internship class a space of feminist praxis and critical engagement.

1. The women studies department at SFSU was founded in 1976. At that time, most similar programs were called “women’s studies.” The apostrophe can imply that the discipline belongs to women rather than has women as its object of study. The program at SFSU chose to identify women as our object of study, not as the owners of the field. The women studies department at SFSU is unique in its use of the construction “women studies.”

2. “Community service learning” is the phrase used by San Francisco State University’s Institute for Community and Civic Engagement,

a campus unit founded in response to SFSU's then president Robert Corrigan's involvement in Campus Compact. The Institute for Community and Civic Engagement has worked to establish "service-learning" courses on campus, which monitor student internships and record students' service-learning hours on their transcripts. In addition to the establishment of service-learning courses, the Institute sponsors programs aimed at "experiential learning, political engagement, participatory action research, and direct services" (Institute for Community and Civic Engagement Homepage).

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