

Dr. Sara L. Puotinen

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Dear ——:

I am writing to apply for the position of Assistant Professor in Women's Studies at —— University recently advertised on the National Women's Studies Association website. I have a Ph.D. in women's studies from Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia and am currently a lecturer and visiting scholar in the Gender, Women and Sexuality Studies Department at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. I believe that my teaching and research experience in women's studies and my commitment to women's studies as an essential part of the liberal arts education make me a strong candidate for the position outlined in your notice.

My areas of research and teaching interest are Feminist Ethics, Feminist Philosophy, Black Feminist Pragmatism and Global Feminist Theory. As a visiting scholar at the University of Minnesota, I am currently involved in further research on my dissertation topic. In my dissertation, which is entitled, "Feminist Ethics and the Project of Democracy," I argue that feminists need to rebuild their practices and goals through the framework of a democratic ethos of difference and dissensus. This democratic ethos is one that emphasizes pluralism and the irreducibility of differences between and among feminists. And it is one that prizes the questioning of feminism's key terms and the critical debate that this questioning produces as sources of vitality for the movement. Fundamental to this project was an examination of the complexity of differences among feminists in terms of race (bell hooks and Patricia Hill Collins), class (Dorothy Allison), sexuality (Judith Butler) and ethnicity (Gloria Anzaldúa and María Lugones). While in residence at the University of Minnesota, I am exploring what motivates feminists as they develop that democratic ethos of difference and dissensus (the livable life) and what virtues they need in order to sustain that ethos (flexibility, vigilance, courage and truth-telling). My aim is to create a virtue ethic of democracy for postmodern feminism.

My graduate work at Emory University prepared me well for working in a women's studies department. It trained me to be a collaborative interdisciplinary scholar who enjoys working with other scholars who have different interests, experiences and training. In participating in a small program with a diverse range of faculty and students, I was able to explore feminist theories across the humanities from philosophy to religion to literature to film to cultural studies (see my curriculum vitae for a list of relevant courses taken) and to make connections with scholars in those different disciplines.

My graduate work at Emory also trained me to be an excellent women's studies teacher who is committed to empowering her students to be effective critical thinkers and is experienced in preparing those students to function in a culturally, ethnically, and sexually diverse society. In addition to taking a semester long course in feminist pedagogy and participating in the Safe Space Training Workshop and the two-year Teaching Assistant Training and Teaching Opportunity Program, I taught for two years in the women's studies department, both as a teaching assistant and an instructor. As an instructor, I developed my own introduction to women's studies course. This course was very successful and received excellent evaluations from the students and women's studies faculty. My students rated my performance as an instructor very highly (8 out of a possible 9 points), praising my interest in the material (8.73/9), my accessibility (8.43/9), and my ability to encourage them to express their ideas (8.53/9).

The central goal of my teaching is to empower my students to become active learners and active citizens who claim their education instead of merely receiving it. In the class that I am currently teaching at the University of Minnesota, Feminist Thought and Theory, I have designed the course (themes, content, assignments, discussions) in order to train my students (1) to think critically about the world by challenging assumptions and questioning authority; (2) to use their questioning and critique to develop a critical voice that allows them to express themselves and to be active participants both inside and outside of the classroom; and (3) to think about the world beyond themselves, using their new critical theories to

reassess their relationship to and responsibility for others. For more on my teaching, please see my enclosed teaching philosophy.

In addition to teaching introductory level courses in women's studies, I am interested in developing and teaching upper level courses in feminist ethics and theory. These courses could include an examination of the virtues from a feminist perspective, an exploration of constructions of moral selfhood through space (both literal and figurative), and upper-level survey courses on feminism and community, international feminist theory and black feminist philosophy.

In my future research, I hope to assess the possible connections that exist between postmodern theory and feminist ethics by putting the recent work of Judith Butler and her turn to ethics (*Undoing Gender* and *Giving an Account of Oneself*) into conversation with the work of black feminist pragmatists (bell hooks, Toni Morrison, Patricia Hill Collins). I also plan to continue my documentary work on narrative self, autobiography and storytelling. As I mention in my curriculum vitae, I have already completed and screened two short documentaries on my family's farm in Upper Michigan. Part autobiography and part critical reflection on memory and belonging, these videos enabled me to apply theories that I learned about identity, narrative and subjectivity to a different medium, one that moved my work beyond the academy. I hope to complete one more autobiographical video on the loss of my family's farm (it was sold two years ago) and to encourage others within the classroom and the greater community to document and experiment with their own narratives on digital video.

I am excited about the possibility of teaching in the women's studies department at —— University. I am strongly committed to the value of women's studies for educating students on how to think critically and how to translate their critical thinking into social transformation. I believe that women's studies classes are an essential part of the undergraduate liberal arts education experience. I welcome the opportunity to help develop the women's studies undergraduate program —— University.

My curriculum vitae, teaching philosophy, writing sample and syllabi are enclosed for your review. Letters of recommendation will be sent separately. Thank you for considering my application.

Sincerely yours,
Sara L. Puotinen