

Dr. Sara L. Puotinen
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Dear Committee Members:

I am writing to apply for the teaching/directorship position in Women's Studies at — College recently advertised on the Chronicle of Higher Education website. I have a Ph.D. in Women's Studies from Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. I am currently a Visiting Assistant Professor in the Gender, Women and Sexuality Studies Department at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. I believe that my extensive training and teaching in Women's Studies, combined with my commitment to feminist praxis and my roots in the Twin Cities and Lutheran higher education make me an excellent candidate for this position.

My scholarly areas of interest range from feminist and queer ethics, to the connections between curiosity, care and social justice, to feminist/queer/anti-racist pedagogies to social media and online technologies and their limits and possibilities for feminist and queer activist projects locally, globally and transnationally. Underlying all of these areas of interest is a focus on troublemaking as a way of critically, creatively and responsibly engaging in and with the world. In my research, writing, teaching, and activism, troublemaking functions in a number of different ways. It is an interdisciplinary method for putting a wide range of ideas across disciplines and the academic/non-academic divide into conversation with each other. It is a critical and playful approach for engaging with ideas and theories. It is a compelling way to describe and understand a central theme and task underlying many social justice movements. It is the basis for my pedagogy inside and outside of the classroom. And it is a central virtue in my vision of a feminist virtue ethics.

In my work, I envision social media, particularly blogs and twitter, as important forms of feminist praxis. I believe that blogs can be powerful spaces for radical transformation, critical and creative expression and community building. They can encourage us to connect and collaborate with others and enable us to engage in forms of public education that challenge and transform unjust and ineffective ways of learning and producing knowledge. Since 2007, I have been theorizing about, reflecting on and engaging with blogs inside and outside of my feminist and queer classrooms. In addition to making blogs a central part of my classes (I have created and maintained 19 course blogs), I write on my own research/writing/thinking blog and on a collaborative feminist pedagogy diablo. I also use the micro-blogging platform, twitter, for connecting with students and colleagues and experimenting with my own critical and creative projects. I have written extensively about the importance of blogging and micro-blogging in the feminist classroom and have given multiple presentations and workshops on how and why to blog and to tweet.

In my current research, I am building on the work that my Feminist Debates students and I did this past semester (<http://blog.lib.umn.edu/puot0002/feministdebates2011>) on the potential value of social media for mass-based feminist education and feminist/womanist activist projects by critically exploring: 1. How digital divides (locally, nationally, globally) are created through a lack of access to the internet and digital literacy/fluency training, and complicated by the increased use of mobile devices, 2. How various (primarily U.S.) organizations and individuals are using social media, particularly twitter, to articulate and/or advocate for their reproductive justice goals and 3. How U.S based social media projects advocating for girls/women in the Global South, like *The Girl Effect*, frequently co-opt feminist principles, reproduce imperialist narratives of "saving," and discourage active engagement in favor of passive online participation (slacktivism). Additionally, I am researching and experimenting with how to use iPad/iPhone Apps in education, health and self-help for individual queering feminist ethical and pedagogical projects in ways that subvert the intended goals of those apps (hacking). I am also experimenting with podcasting as a way to engage in public pedagogy and developing resources for online and offline training on how to effectively and responsibly engage with and on social media.

While much of my current research is devoted to exploring the potential value of social media, I do not uncritically embrace it. Instead, I am interested in contributing to the development and continued practice of a feminist praxis—in the form of critical and creative reflection, action, collaboration and engagement—of social/online media. As women's studies educators, we need to find ways to respond to social media

and its ever-increasing presence in our lives/classrooms/workplaces. We need to persistently ask ourselves and each other: How are social media shaping who we are, what we know and how we know it? How can we position ourselves in relation to social media in ways that are more resistant to its harmful effects while harnessing its potentially transformative possibilities? How do we use social media in resistant, transgressive and transformative ways and for our feminist pedagogical-theoretical-activist practices and projects? What role can feminist scholar/educators/activists have in shaping how social media are practiced and how people are trained to use them? I am very excited for the opportunity to help shape—through conversations, collaborations, programs, new courses or course activities and more—a feminist praxis of social media at — College. I imagine this feminist praxis to incorporate conversations and collaborations beyond the — community. How do these questions of social media's influence and potential get framed locally in the Twin Cities? Outside of the U.S. and the West? How are feminist activists in China or Egypt, for example, using and/or resisting twitter or facebook?

As my curriculum vitae shows, I have experience teaching a wide range of courses in Women's and Gender Studies, as a Ph.D. student at Emory University and as a lecturer and Visiting Assistant Professor at the University of Minnesota. On the undergraduate level, I have taught introductory lecture classes on women's studies, the politics of sex, GLBT studies, and women in popular culture; mid-level courses on feminist theory and contemporary feminist debates, and upper level seminars on queering theory, queering desire, the history of western feminisms and transnational feminist theory. On the graduate level, I have taught seminars on feminist pedagogies, Queer Ethics and feminist and queer troublemaking. My teaching, both at Emory and the University of Minnesota, has received very positive evaluations from students and faculty members alike.

Some of my strengths as a Women's and Gender studies colleague are my extensive training in women and gender studies, feminist theory and queer theory; my ability to teach a variety of courses across the department; my interdisciplinary focus; my contagious enthusiasm for teaching and working in a women and gender studies department; my willingness to experiment with new ways of teaching/thinking/acting and with new technologies; my deep respect for students and colleagues as fellow learners and collaborators; and my experience practicing on and training with social media from a feminist perspective.

Thank you for considering my application. I am also attaching my curriculum vitae.

Sincerely yours,
Sara L. Puotinen