

Dr. Rachel Hurst

# OPENING LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

When Dr. Rachel Hurst's Feminist Theory students weren't seeing a connection between real life and course material, Dr. Hurst introduced a new way for the students to learn: a Service Learning project to create short videos illustrating a feminist theory concept.

Their efforts resulted in an online library, "Doing Feminist Theory Digital Video ([www.doingfeministtheory.ca](http://www.doingfeministtheory.ca))," and the feeling they were making original contribution.

"Students felt proud of what they had accomplished, and quite often shared their videos with others," says Dr. Hurst, a faculty member in women's and gender studies and in anthropology since 2009. In September, she will also be one of three professors teaching in the first cohort of StFX's Social Justice Colloquium, teaching Introduction to Women's and Gender Studies.

Encouraging creativity and opening avenues for discussion is important to the professor. Dr. Hurst says she tries to accommodate different learning styles, offer an inclusive space, and provide ways to express ideas through creative and rigorous learning opportunities that help each class come closer to answering questions they're posing. "My teaching philosophy is shaped around trying to provide a range of learning

opportunities in every course." Dr. Hurst's teaching centres on contemporary and historical feminist theories, embodiment, and cultural theory. She teaches two second year courses—Gender, Sexuality and the Body, and Gender in Popular Culture, popular courses which attract students from all disciplines—and two third year courses, Feminist Theory, and Critical Race and Sexuality Studies in Canada.

Though all her degrees – undergraduate, masters and PhD – are in women's studies, she came to the subject almost by happy accident.

She studied English and French during her first year of university and planned to become an elementary school teacher. But that year, her interests changed. Speaking with an advisor about possible options, the advisor saw she had taken an intro women's studies course ("I loved it," Dr. Hurst says) and suggested she change her major.

Though not something she'd considered, she found it a perfect fit (she found the teaching interesting and intellectually rigorous, she liked how creative expression was valued, and student and faculty commitment to activist projects outside academia) and went on to complete her BA in women's studies at Glendon College at York University, her MA

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at Simon Fraser and her PhD at York.

Teaching at StFX has been terrific, she says.

"I love the opportunity to really get to know students. I also love having the opportunity to see students move through their degree, to see how somebody is changing, how interests are changing. As a teacher, it's amazing to see that kind of development."

Dr. Hurst is also an active researcher. One of her three main projects examines the importance of photographic and dermal surfaces for cosmetic surgery. Her research has been published and presented internationally, and her book *Surface Imaginations: Cosmetic Surgery, Photography and Skin*, is presently under review. She has also co-edited a book, *Skin, Culture and Psychoanalysis*.

Outside research and teaching, she's active in the community, most notably serving as LGBTQ advisor for StFX students, and on the board of Preventing Violence Against Women at StFX.