Course Description
What is feminism? Who counts as a feminist? How is this ideology mediated by era, place, and identity? In fact, why does feminism even matter at the present moment, a time of countless opportunities for women globally? And what exactly do transnational feminisms signify, anyway?

Although internationally, women have gained positions of prominence and leadership (it is not uncommon to find women at the executive level in government, business, and the professions), it can be argued that poverty is increasingly feminized. While women have greater access to class mobility, reproductive choice, educational opportunity, and political representation, sharp fissures in the status of different women reveal profound quality of life distinctions, differences determined by class, nationality, ethnic origin, religious affiliation, and educational background. Thus, although life expectancy and its lived quality are at an all time high for a significant percentage of the world population, especially the middle-classes in the industrialized North, to be born into poverty, the former Soviet bloc, or the global South is simultaneously to be at greater risk for hunger, illness and early death, political instability, and ecological devastation. Transnational feminisms, emerging from earlier waves of feminist theory and practice, attempt to address intersections and distinctions in the status of women across the globe, interrogating the role of history, politics, and economics in our current world order, seeking transformation through active social and intellectual engagement.

In this course, we will rely on a selection of women’s prose—fiction, the memoir, and the essay—as well as films and scholarship to examine how women navigate the fine line between the public and the private, between abstract reflection and embodied word. Central to this is the framing of agency, and how it becomes a site of intellectual ferment. By working with a cross-section of texts by a multiethnic/transnational group of women authors, we will engage how women writers rely on the commitment to individual rights and a passion for social justice to write as what sociologist Patricia Hill Collins terms “outsiders within.” In the process, they mediate pressing political concerns, whether about imperialism/colonization; sexuality; transnational migration and the economics of globalization; war and political terror; bioethics; or environmental consciousness, revealing how these matters affect and are in turn affected by race, class, and gender.