Introduction to the Special Issue: Feminist Approaches to Graduate Level Instruction and Mentorship

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Introduction to the Special Issue: Feminist Approaches to Graduate Level Instruction and Mentorship

We are delighted to present this collection of works dedicated to expanding the knowledge of graduate education, including best-practice recommendations, reflections on ethics, and pedagogical inquiry all with a feminist lens. While conversations about pedagogical approaches to higher education for undergraduate students have been widely studied to interpret the efficacy and equity of educational opportunities, experiences, and practices, materials that center graduate student education are limited. This special issue focuses on using a feminist lens to highlight the unique challenges and facilitators, triumphs and barriers, of approaching graduate education.

Graduate education includes far more than the classroom, encompassing the additional areas of professionalization, network development, and work-life reconciliation. These works discuss the importance of structural inequality and institutional power dynamics that shape the graduate educational experience, leading to differential experiences that educators must recognize and strategically address. Recent educational advancements such as curricular decolonization, reflexive professionalism, and trauma-informed pedagogy are just as important in the graduate school educational space as the undergraduate classroom.

Graduate students have different needs, and different goals, than undergraduate students. Though there are certainly parallels and applications of undergraduate teaching principles and approaches in graduate classrooms, a graduate classroom should be a different space. In many ways we are training our future colleagues, developing expertise, and importantly supporting our students' journeys to become independent scholars. Some of the ways we have identified that graduate student pedagogy needs to be distinct from undergraduate pedagogy are: Graduate students are at a more advanced academic level compared to undergraduate students. Therefore, they require more advanced and specialized knowledge, research skills, and practical training to succeed in their respective fields. Graduate students also are often pursuing their studies with the aim of advancing their careers or transitioning to a new career path. Therefore, they require a more career-focused education that provides them with the skills, knowledge, and experiences necessary to succeed in their chosen field. Graduate students are often expected to conduct original research and contribute new knowledge to their field. Therefore, they require specialized training in research methodology, data analysis, and academic writing, which may differ from the requirements of undergraduate studies. Graduate students are expected to take more responsibility for their learning and research. They are often more self-directed and have greater autonomy compared to undergraduate students. Overall, graduate students require a more specialized, career-focused, and self-directed education that prepares them for the challenges and opportunities in their respective fields. We hope in this collection of teaching tools and critical commentaries we can open the conversation of scholarship that utilizes feminist approaches to graduate level instruction to emphasize the importance of creating an inclusive, equitable, and diverse learning environment that addresses issues of power, privilege, and oppression.

Original teaching activities in this special issue display a variety of approaches to teaching graduate students utilizing feminist approaches and principles that engage with learning outcomes specific to graduate level education. Critical Commentaries engage with key feminist issues important in graduate instruction.

Kelly W. Guyotte and Carlson H. Coogler focus on the co-construction of an evaluation rubric between teacher and student in a qualitative art-based research course. Drawing on feminist liberatory pedagogy,
the authors discuss the possibilities of problematizing traditional teacher/student roles, scaffolding rubric construction as a learning experience, and supporting students as scholars and teachers. The practice of making the rubric together prepares graduate students to challenge conventional norms.

Andrea N. Hunt's teaching activity argues for the inclusion of policy writing in graduate education from a feminist perspective. It provides strategies for policy writing and highlights the differences in audience, tone, purpose, and format compared to other forms of writing.

Maria S. Johnson presents a teaching activity that helps students develop inclusive vocabulary and deepen their understanding of their own positionality, not assuming that all graduate students enter graduate school from the same social position.

Shawn N. Mendez and Samuel H. Allen introduce a teaching activity for instructors of graduate students that applies the Hegemonic Heteronormativity (HH) model. The assignment involves independent reading of the model, application to real-life examples, and a class discussion.

Mairi McDermott discusses an assignment designed to disrupt patriarchal conventions in literature reviews and citation practices. They discuss their experience with the assignment and how it encourages doctoral students to engage with these materials in crafting transgressive knowledge through research.

Stefani Boutelier explores gamification and ungrading from a feminist instructional design perspective. The outcomes and potential for a humanized curriculum are discussed, emphasizing the decentering of colonial educational structures.

Carolyn M. Cunningham addresses networked misogyny and provides resources for addressing it, including digital literacy, feminist critiques of self-branding, strategies for handling online harassment, and trauma-informed pedagogy. They aim to empower graduate curriculum designers to combat networked misogyny.

Takhmina Shokirova explores how care and vulnerability can reduce power imbalances between instructors and students in graduate-level contexts. Through direct and intentional approaches Shokirova aims to empower students and create the potential to reorient power dynamics between student and teacher.

Amanda Lock Swarr explores how feminist writing workshops for graduate students, building upon important work in critical feminism. By focusing on collective writing practice and feminist peer review as effective pedagogical strategies aims to build important skills as well as feminist communities and networks.

As a partnership between a graduate student and an educator of graduate students, we are honored to do this work to improve the visibility of feminist pedagogical approaches to graduate student education. We hope this special issue of Feminist Pedagogy will serve as a stepping stone to continued conversations applying feminist interpretations to improve the efficacy and equity of graduate education to shape the next generation of researchers and educators.