

Fall 2011

Feminism and Feminist Scholarship Today

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Recommended Citation

Baumgardner, Jennifer, and Amy Richards. 2018. "Feminism and Feminist Scholarship Today." *Journal of Feminist Scholarship* 1 (Fall): 3-3. <https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/jfs/vol1/iss1/3>

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JENNIFER BAUMGARDNER AND AMY RICHARDS

Feminist scholarship was born out of necessity. Before it, education meant studying men and cultivating their potential. For more than 40 years, Women's and Gender Studies has ensured that the experiences, perspectives, and contributions of women are a part of academia. Not only has Women's Studies survived and thrived as a unique discipline, it has transformed other fields by challenging campuses to understand and use a gender lens, just as they would use a lens of race, class, or ability—both in approaching intellectual pursuits and making an inclusive campus. Although the world has been influenced hugely by feminism—and feminist ideas are often embedded in courses not labeled as such—there has never been more need for the type of inquiry Women's and Gender Studies pioneered. Students raised in a standardized-testing environment are increasingly dependent on answers being “right” and “wrong”—and less interested in the process of learning. Feminist Studies is the rare department that prioritizes sustained inquiry. In feminist academia, students are encouraged to challenge, think, debate, and to bring their unique selves into the decision-making process. The take we most often hear about Women's and Gender Studies from students is that they had heard it was an easy course. Two classes in they realize it's going to be their most challenging and transformative class. More often than not, it sets them on a thrilling new course for their lives. What could be a better endorsement for its continued relevance and value than that?

Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards are third-wave feminist activists and authors of Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future (2000) and Grassroots: A Field Guide for Feminist Activism (2004), in addition to their many other individual and joint publications.