INVITATION

FemTechNet:
A Global Project to Activate Networks
of Feminist Scholars of Science, Technology, and Media

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We are writing to introduce you to a project to activate global networks of feminist artists and scholars of science, technology and media. We seek to activate this network to participate in a global learning experiment tentatively called: "Feminist Dialogues on Technology."

During the past year, we have participated in several conversations with feminist colleagues in different locations throughout the world about a collective need to establish a readily available network of feminist scholars and a digital archive of materials on feminism, science, technology, and media. Having both recently published new work that not only addresses topics of feminism and technology but also engages new technologies of scholarship and activism, we are acutely aware of how difficult it is to build and sustain conversations and communities around this work. To this end, we have begun to contact colleagues around the world who are doing research and teaching courses in the topics of Feminist Science, Technology and Media Studies. From these initial contacts will grow more networked connections.

The networking project is currently called: FemTechNet.
The first phase of this project is to activate the networks of feminist thinkers for the purposes of creating the first version of a Massively Distributed Collaborative Learning Experiment (MDCLE) on the topic of feminism and technology to be offered between September and December of 2013.

Unlike a MOOC (massively open online course), where a course is organized and disseminated from a single educational institution, the FemTechNet effort seeks to engage a network of instructors at many different kinds of educational institutions in planning and offering the first version of this course. The course structure and topics are now being discussed by a distributed group of feminist thinkers. We seek to engage feminist colleagues from around the world in this discussion so that we can move into the planning and structuring stage.

The two organizers, Anne Balsamo and Alex Juhasz, will serve to facilitate and coordinate the efforts of participants around the world in the planning, infrastructuring, and delivering the course. This coordination effort includes spearheading fundraising efforts (grants), setting up the technical infrastructure, and facilitating communication among participants.
The following list describes the initial plans for the first iteration of the Massively Distributed Collaborative Learning Experiment (MDCLE):

- The FemTechNet MDCLE would take place sometime during the months of September through December 2013.

- The structure of the FemTechNet MDCLE might take shape as:
  - 8-12 weeks
  - 2 organizers: (Balsamo and Juhasz)
  - 20 campuses across the world that offer embodied classes
  - 16-24 featured discussants
  - 100 instructors (located across the world): blogging, submitting questions, offering other materials for consideration
  - 400 students enrolled in embodied courses
  - 1000 students participating as “self-directed learners”
  - 1000+ people watching the video discussions, accessing the materials, participating in locally relevant discussions

- Our goal is to have at least one embodied course offered in every major global region or continent. The embodied courses would be taught by faculty members at educational institutions around the world who teach courses pertaining to feminist science, technology and media studies and are supported through their own institutions to teach the course.

- Participants can join “as students” in different ways:
  - by enrolling in a class at a particular educational institution—where credit is given for the course by that institution in collaboration with the faculty member,
  - by finding an instructor to serve as a mentor and guide for an “independent study”
  - by engaging with the materials and contributing to discussion as a “self-directed” learner.

- Members of FemTechNet will create a suggested 8-10 -week curriculum on topics pertaining to the feminist science, technology and media studies.

- The curriculum would feature a series of conversations among feminist scholars on specific topics. These discussions, featuring two or more prominent international feminist scholars, researchers, and artists, would be recorded a week or so in advance at their home institutions. NOTE: We do not YET know how we will structure or record these conversations.
These featured discussions would serve as a common set of materials to link all courses. An online-forum space would provide a site for discussion among all participants.

The curriculum would also include other materials prepared in advanced, such as short “video primers” featuring feminist scholars providing brief overviews of key books, topics, keywords, and questions; bibliographies of relevant work; and an archive of digital images, video clips, and other media.

Course materials and weekly conversations would be housed at a common-open online (soft) space.

Faculty and instructors would be encouraged to organize a specific curriculum for their embodied courses, using (remixing) the materials made available on the common-open online space.

One of the COMMON activities that we would like to build into the course is called: “Storming Wikipedia.” As part of this exercise, course participants will conduct a “feminist inventory” of Wikipedia (or the online encyclopedia most relevant to a particular area) to determine the places where feminist scholarship in science, technology, and media should be referenced and included in the digital archive. Based on this inventory, participants will select Wikipedia articles to amend or to create with the objective of getting feminist scholarship into the world’s digital archive.

After the 8-10-week event, the entire proceedings would be archived for later viewing, and would serve as the beginnings of the creation of a digital archive of feminist scholarship on science, technology and media. Iterative offerings of the MDCLE and the future development of the digital archive will be pursued in later phases of the project.

There are many details to plan to facilitate and establish the technological and institutional infrastructure for such a radical endeavor, however we are certain that the time has come for a bold initiative that manifests the histories and continued relevance of feminist work in technology.

To plan this course and activate an international conversation about possible course topics and important participants we started a conversation with a small group of people located in the United States. This was, as discussed above, a project that was activated during meetings with feminist colleagues in Australia, Canada, and Europe. So that although the INITIAL planning efforts were launched in the US, to demonstrates its most “radical impact,” this effort cannot be limited to US or North American participation.

Please help expand the conversation and planning activities to include our colleagues across the globe. A series of information and planning meetings are happening at the following upcoming conferences:


Console-ing Passions: Boston, Massachusetts, US: July 19, 2012


American Studies Association: San Juan, Puerto Rico: Nov 15-18, 2012

Project Announcements and updates on FemTechNet activities will be posted and archived on the digital platform: FEMBOTcollective.org

The FEMBOT collective is a collaborative group of faculty, graduate students and librarians promoting research on gender, new media and technology. As of Spring 2012, the Fembot community spans North America and Asia and encourages interdisciplinary and international participation.

Carol Stabile (US)—one of the founders of FEMBOT—posted a report from the initial FemTechNet planning meeting:
http://fembotcollective.org/blog/2012/04/17/femtechnet-meeting/

This is an invitation to participate by joining the conversations and small group meetings (both virtual and face-to-face) that are being organized to plan the effort.

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