

# Exploring gender: New feminism class challenges assumptions

**Michael Kimberling**

*The Clackamas Print*

After an absence at Clackamas Community College, Women's Studies is back on campus.

Kjirsten Severson, a graduate of George Washington University with a master's in Women's Studies, is here to help answer the questions of women's studies and feminism.

"Women's studies is the academic expression of feminist theory. Women's studies is critical to each individual. We are all affected by our inherited assumptions about sexual difference, often without even knowing it," said Severson.

"The tension between the sexes, our assumptions about others, and our assumptions about ourselves limit us from enjoying the potential we all carry within us as human beings. Clackamas

students are no exception; we need the opportunity to learn about our 'gendered selves,'" said Severson.

Severson stands before her class of young women and men, who she refers to as her 'poker-faced' students.

She teaches the difficulties that women's studies faces related directly to our fear of change, and to the caricature of feminism presented by the mass media to the American public.

"Women's studies and feminism (aka the f-word) have become taboo not just here, but within our mainstream culture primarily through the fear we all have of change and how this fear was harnessed by the media, creating an incredibly shallow and narrow idea of what 'feminism' is," said Severson.

Unless we have a particular connection to feminism, most of us understand it through the images presented by the media, according to Severson.

**"We are all affected by our inherited assumptions about sexual difference, often without knowing it."**

**Kjirsten Severson**  
Women's Studies  
Professor

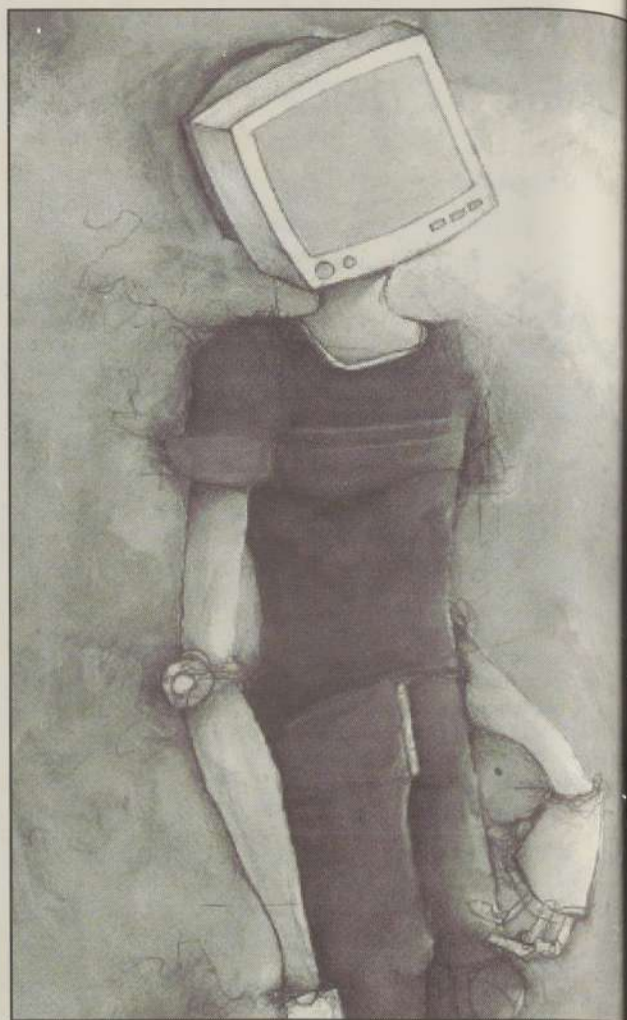
"The mass media serves one primary purpose, to sell product. We cannot look to the mass media to give us information that is full of meaning," said Severson. "By understanding this perspective, we are better equipped to recognize the narrow, controversial image the media gives us of feminism. Controversy sells."

Severson continues by saying that the media has no reason to understand feminism or to present a full understanding to the public.

"The media representation of feminism will change when feminism becomes marketable," said Severson. "Pretend somehow feminism becomes user-hip; 'feminist' products will be created to sell to the public and the media messages regarding feminism will change from cheap shots to over-the-top ads similar to the promises of ecstasy and fulfillment made in dish soap ads."

Severson's final thoughts on feminism are hopeful.

"We understand ourselves, others and the world around us through a gendered lens. If we truly wish to understand this human existence also known as our very own lives, why would we not investigate how we understand it through our concept of gender. Doing so can and will only create a greater sense of freedom for all of us."



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## Spanish club plans trip to Barcelona

**Megan Koler**

*The Clackamas Print*

Sophisticated and stylish Barcelona will be the temporary home for a handful of Clackamas' students this summer.

Clackamas is providing an intensive Spanish course that will be taking place in Barcelona, Spain from June 18 through July 18. The cost of the program is \$1,450, which includes boarding, tours and activities. Airfare is not included, however.

"It is an extremely cosmopolitan city. It has an old part that is very intriguing, with cathedrals, castles and the narrow winding streets of the Barrio Gotico," said the Foreign Language Department Chair Irma Cristina Bjerre.

Another facet of Barcelona is

International House. It is the institution where the students will be learning this summer. The House hosts courses in Spanish, English, culture and teacher training. International House is located just five minutes from the city's main square, Plaza Catalunya.

"It is a large and very effective school. It has been established since the late '50s and teaches students from all over Europe and the world," said Bjerre.

During the weekdays students will be taking four hours of immersion Spanish courses. The rest of their school day will be dedicated to culture classes and excursions through the city. On the weekends the students will travel with the school to the coast, mountain towns and cultural sites.

"It is quite an intensive school, but it maintains a relaxed atmo-

sphere," commented Bjerre.

The program provides housing with a carefully screened Spanish family, where they are provided meals a day and weekly laundry.

"Students get to know the Spanish culture by living with families. Some families are extremely supportive however, others can develop cultural clashes," said Bjerre.

Students have the opportunity to earn one to three independent credits for this course. The only prerequisite to the course is a passing grade in SPN 103 or SPN 203.

Students interested in the program can contact Bjerre at 503-657-6958 ext 2381, or pick up an application.

Information about International House can be found at <http://www.ih.org>. Applications are due by Feb. 28, and final payments will be due May 15.

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