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Feminist Flash Mob Intervention

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### Feminist Flash Mob Intervention - UR Collegian article

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[News](#)

# Feminist flash mobs seek to protest, encourage discussion



The flash mob performs at the Stern Quadrangle

Photo by [Ben Wasserstein](#) | The Collegian

By [Ben Wasserstein](#)

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The beat of the drums and the chants of “timely warning” bellowed across campus during the feminist flash mob interventions at the University of Richmond on March 5.

The event was planned by Mariela Méndez, professor of Latin American, Latino, and Iberian Studies and Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and Associate Professor of Theatre and Dance Patricia Herrera.

The demonstration was modeled after a Nov. 25 protest in Chile, Méndez said. The protests were originally about neoliberal economic measures, but quickly shifted to a feminist movement, she said.

Using the protest as a template, students performed a version of the protest chant localized to the UR community.

“Timely Warning/ Patriarchy is our judge/ That imprisons us at birth/ And our punishment/ Is the violence you DON’T see./ Racism is our judge/ That affects us all at birth/ And the punishment/ Is the violence you CAN see,” is part of the chant that students from seven different classes wrote.

Herrera and Méndez wanted to show their students how to use their bodies as vehicles of change, they said during the flash mob interventions.

Seven classes participated in total, including Herrera and Méndez's course, "Gender, Race, and Performance Across the Americas."

"That's part of the work that we're doing with our class," Herrera said, "Really exposing our students to the many ways that the body is a vehicle for social change and how they can use and incorporate the body in their own thinking or being just global citizens of the world."

The flash mob occurred three times, each time moving from several different spots: Fraternity Row, E. Clairborne Robins Stadium, the Stern Quadrangle, Tyler Haynes Commons and the University Forum outside of Gottwald Center for the Sciences.

Rather than place blame on a single organization, the protesters chanted about the complicit actions from students, faculty and administration, Méndez said.

"It's thinking about gender and race and even class," Herrera said. "And thinking about the organizational structure of the institution as being part or complicit in enacting these violences, and it's not a physical violence, but it's kind of a social violence that occurs."

In order to combat the racist and sexist tensions at the school, Méndez and Herrera propose students be incorporated into the discussions of these topics.

Méndez said that faculty should also take part in discussions regarding these topics.

"We've been in many conversations where there's faculty that explicitly say 'no it is not my role to talk about gender violence,'" Méndez said.

Herrera proposed creating more areas where students can feel comfortable sharing and discussing their lives.

"I think the ability to create more spaces for people to do that deepens our understandings of the many perspectives and the many experiences here on campus," Herrera said.

Student and faculty reaction to the event has been positive, Herrera and Méndez said.

Méndez said one professor who participated in the the flash mob intervention told her that it had felt powerful to be able to march around the campus where that professor had worked at and shout about misogyny and racism," Méndez said.

Sophomore Isabel Brazzel participated in all three flash mobs and found them cathartic, Brazzel said.

"I thought it was a really interesting way and methodology of transforming structural issues that are relevant to Chile and seeing how like similar structures are also at play here on our campus," Brazzel said.

Herrera and Méndez hope that students will come away with empathy for others, even if it is uncomfortable.

"It's very messy... it is not easy to have conversations about gender violence, about race, about class," Herrera said. "So the only way to have them is to sit in the discomfort and work through it. Work through the messiness."

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