Senior Finds Niche in Gender and Women’s Studies
by Janette Ballard

Julia Seldin has found a good fit in the gender and women’s studies (GWST) program at DU. She was first drawn to the interdisciplinary nature of the program, and thrived on the variety of humanities classes it offers. Along the way her love for the GWST community grew, as well as her passion for gender studies and feminism. Seldin hopes that her senior thesis will help to demystify third-wave feminism.

“As a highly fragmented and individualistic movement, third-wave feminism is often discussed in vague and non-committal terms. To many, this has made the movement seem weak, unnecessary or, dare I say, even old-fashioned in a post-feminist reality,” said Seldin.

First-wave feminism laid the foundation for the feminist movement in the late 19th century with a focus on suffrage and legal opportunities for women. Second-wave feminism emerged in the early 1960’s and widened the debate to include issues of sexuality, family, the workplace and reproductive rights. Third-wave feminism gained momentum in the early 1990’s and focuses on issues that limit or oppress women as well as other marginalized identities.

“A lot of ambiguity comes from the fact that third-wave activism does not look like that of the second wave, such as marching on the streets and protesting, but is more focused on using technology to produce and distribute individual feminist stories,” Seldin said. “Through my research I attempt to qualify third-wave feminism in terms of its message, its identity and its recipe for change.”

Seldin intends to use spoken word poetry to explain how this form of storytelling is emulative of the new third-wave breed of activism. She first gained experience using this type of medium as an intern with the Write Now Poetry Society. Last summer the organization sponsored an event for the Body is Not an Apology, a movement that started as a spoken word poem and now functions on a global level.

“The platform of the movement is to reject the overpowering culture of body hatred and shame while empowering individuals to love their bodies unapologetically including all factors of size, race, ability, gender, etc.,” said Seldin “The movement functions largely through social media but also holds events around the country like the one I worked with last summer.”

“Through both the content of the poems as well as the aesthetic of performance and distribution, spoken word poetry captures so much of how third-wave feminist activism is functioning on the ground,” she said.

Have Gordon, director of the Gender and Women’s Studies program, notes that Seldin has been a vital part of the GWST community during her time at DU. “Julia is clearly passionate about gender studies, feminism and social justice more generally. Always ready to engage in
thoughtful discussion, Julia offers a unique enthusiasm for the program that continually inspires faculty and students alike. She has undoubtedly made the program even better, and she has contributed to gender justice at DU more generally through her involvement in countless campus initiatives.”

Seldin hopes to pursue one of her many interdisciplinary passions, either law, social work or additional feminist studies, in grad school. “I’m sad to be leaving the GWST program, but feel very well prepared for whatever I do next,” she said of graduating in June. “As for next year, I’m looking forward to continued work on my multifaceted internships and existing as a feminist and advocate within the community.”