FACULTY SPOTLIGHT: VISITING ASSISTANT PROFESSOR RACHAEL LIBERMAN

By Carson Baer, Sophomore Strategic Communications Major

Since she was young, Dr. Rachael Liberman knew she wanted to share stories and ideas with the rest of the world. Now a Visiting Assistant Professor of Media Studies at the University of Denver, Liberman has not only maintained her passion for cultivating knowledge, but has made a career out of it.

"Throughout my life, my interest in media studies, teaching, and research has stemmed from my interest in developing critical thinkers," Liberman said. "I enjoy the ability to cultivate media literacy, and teaching gives me that opportunity."

With a particular focus on feminist media studies, Liberman’s research explores the inequalities and systematic issues present within today’s media. However, pursuing this realm of study wasn’t always what the Chicago native planned.

"No matter what, I always wanted to write,” Liberman mentioned. “I wanted to gather information and present it to the public.”

Liberman planned on being a music or fashion journalist, with aspirations of writing for magazines like Women’s Wear Daily or Vogue. After receiving a degree in Journalism at Marquette University, the ambitious graduate went on to work for the Naperville Sun and did some freelance writing for outside publications.

Despite staying busy writing for multiple organizations, Liberman found herself thinking back to a class she took her senior year of college on gender, race, and media.

"I couldn’t get that critique out of my head, I always kept going back to the shortcomings or inequalities of media and I soon realized I wanted to research the subject and be a professor, so I decided to go back to school,” Liberman recalled.

Over the next six years Liberman would go on to receive her Masters in Media Studies at The New School in New York City and her Ph.D. in Communication at the University of Colorado, Boulder. Liberman was working as a senior fellow at CU’s Center for Media, Religion, and Culture when she was offered the opportunity to come to DU and teach.
Now in her fourth year at the university, Liberman is very happy with the level of commitment and enthusiasm she sees from the students in her classes. Over the years Liberman has taught several media studies classes that tackle cultural issues such as gender, race, and sexuality, all from a critical perspective.

This year Liberman taught a Freshmen Seminar on Media, Power and Sexualization for the third time. For their final project, students were asked to write and develop a television show that tackled sexuality in a sex-positive way and didn’t seek to sexualize the characters.

"It was really rewarding to watch these students adopt the lessons of the course and then come up with their own ideas. Watching them learn to think critically makes me feel like I’m doing my job,” Liberman said.

Liberman is constantly searching for ways to make her classes more meaningful to her students. Always looking out for a piece of media that will enhance the classroom experience, Liberman encourages students to draw on their own experiences so they can better analyze and connect with the material they are learning.

"My advice for students is to read and consume as much media as possible. It’s important to stay on top of trends and be diligent about exploring narratives and understanding the language surrounding the subject,” Liberman remarked.

As for future classes, Liberman currently has an ASEM in the works that will teach students about marketplace feminism. The class will the examine the mainstream coverage of feminism and its emergence in pop culture. Liberman also plans to start a study in the near future that will focus on the way studies of media are framed in classes outside of media studies courses.

"I would like to end the cycle of not understanding the media landscape: you can gain so much from understanding how media operates and acknowledging the ideology behind it,” Liberman said. "I didn’t know where I wanted to be in media but I now know I want to be in the educational part."