TITLE OF PROJECT: The Words to Say It: An Exploration of the Use - and Abuse - of Language in Activism for Social Justice (Undergraduate Project)

PROJECT INFORMATION
Janet Freedman is a Resident Scholar at the Women's Studies Research Center at Brandeis University, and a Professor Emerita, and former Director of Women's Studies, at the University of Massachusetts in Dartmouth. She is at the early stages of a project related to language and the lexicon of activism. In her most recent book, "Reclaiming the Feminist Vision: Consciousness-Raising and Small Group Practice," Janet reports how “feminism” has been defined and attacked from both outside and within the women’s liberation movement. Likewise, having worked in “progressive” political environments she has observed the demonizing of Israel in the boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) movement, and seen the “Z” word, Zionism, avoided even by those who strongly support the country.

Dr. Freedman is interested in how language is used to define and direct debates. Why have some words become so loaded that people and organizations that traditionally have an open-minded perspective shun certain terms or use them in ways that simplify complex issues and polarize discussions? Another concern is the creation of new and often arcane vocabularies, particularly in academic discourse. How are the new words empowering, and for whom? What role has the internet and social media played in creating and expanding new vocabularies?

Janet is looking for an intern who will carry out a literature review of both traditional and online sources, as well as brainstorm with her on the direction of the project. The intern’s work will involve internet and library research, for about 80% of the intern’s time. The remaining 20% of the time will be spent reviewing and informally assessing the websites, blogs, articles and other discovered materials with Dr. Freedman, who hopes to have an exchange on how relevant and interesting the uncovered information will be to the book project.

PROFILE OF APPROPRIATE CANDIDATE
- Interest in the use of language and the lexicon of political discourse particularly as they relate, in this initial phase of the project, to discussions on Israel and women
- Ability to work with library staff to identify and utilize appropriate finding tools
- Strong internet research skills
- Ability to evaluate information resources for relevance to the project
- Ability to know when to ask for guidance and direction