



CommUNITY Voices Women's and Gender Studies Newsletter

Fall 2017

IN THIS ISSUE

It's been a busy year for us in the Women's and Gender Studies program! Between community activism, exciting course work, and on-campus programming, we've certainly had a lot to keep ourselves busy with. Just this semester, we've sponsored a rally in Uptown Normal to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment, an art show by Amy Cousins that featured a super fun Queer Dance Party in the University Galleries, partnered with F.L.A.M.E. for the annual Clothesline Project and Take Back the Night events, and have been planning an exciting annual symposium that will feature Dr. Brittney Cooper as our keynote speaker.

In the meantime, we've been catching up with our amazing students and faculty to take a closer look at the amazing work they have all been doing on campus and in the community! We've put together a newsletter celebrating the accomplishments of the wonderful group of people who make up the WGS community. In this inaugural issue of *CommUNITY Voices*, you will find interviews with two of our new instructors, Alexis Wolstein and Lori

Wiebold; a student spotlight with WGS minor and community activist Toni Marie Preston; some information on what courses and programs we are offering next semester; a feature on our new Chicana Feminisms course; and a list of some of our affiliated faculty members' accomplishments throughout the year.

We hope you will take just as much pride as we do in the incredible things our students and faculty are doing to make our campus and our overall community a better place.

Congratulations on yet another awesome semester, and we are so excited to see what you all accomplish in the Spring!

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Welcome to WGS at Illinois State!

The Women's and Gender Studies program has a rich history at Illinois State. We started out in 1972 as just a sequence within the newly established Ethic and Cultural Studies minor. Now, we have grown into a full-fledged program offering both a minor and a graduate certificate, with courses offered in a number of different academic departments. Today, over 69 Illinois State University faculty members from 21 departments/schools within five colleges are affiliated with the Women's and Gender Studies Program. They teach classes in the undergraduate and graduate curriculums, supervise independent study students, serve on committees, and participate in co-curriculum programming. They continue the work of the small core of faculty members who envisioned a women's studies program over 30 years ago.



INTERESTED IN A WGS MINOR OR CERTIFICATE?

To declare a minor or graduate certificate in Women's and Gender Studies, contact our program advisor, Dr. Tom Gerschick at tjgersch@ilstu.edu.

Looking Ahead to Spring 2018...

We couldn't be more excited about our events for the Spring! F.L.A.M.E. will once again be putting on a production of The Vagina Monologues on February 24th and 25th in the historic Normal Theatre in Uptown Normal!

We are also hosting our 23rd Annual Women's and Gender Studies Symposium on April 20th. This year, our symposium will feature Dr. Brittney Cooper, an Associate Professor of Women's and Gender Studies and Africana Studies at Rutgers University and co-founder of the popular Crunk Feminist Collective blog. Her talk, "Eloquent Rage," will take place at 1 PM in the Bone Student Center on April 20th. Keep in mind that our symposium cannot happen without all of **your** amazing research! It's never too early to consider submitting your scholarship to our symposium. Papers and presentations are welcome on any topic related to the study of women and/or gender and its intersections with race, sexuality, ability, class/caste, and colonization. The symposium is an amazing opportunity to practice presenting your research to peers and faculty. This is also a unique opportunity to network with peers and faculty while listening to each other's awesome research! For more information on how to submit your work to our Symposium, check our ISU website: wgs.ilstu.edu, and our Facebook page, "ISU Women's and Gender Studies." We look forward to reading your submissions!



Preston and a group of Trans Rights Activists at the Chicago Pride Parade this summer.



Toni Marie Preston is a Sociology major and Women's and Gender Studies minor in their Senior year at Illinois State. They recently sat down with our Graduate Assistant for an interview about their accomplishments as a student and activist!



In addition to their schoolwork and activism, Preston runs social justice workshops on intersectionality, power dynamics, abolitionism, and radical liberation!



Preston with fellow WGS/Queer Studies students.

Student Spotlight: Toni Marie Preston

by Gina Stinnett

Gina Stinnett: You've made amazing strides in activism both around campus and in the larger community. What sparked your journey into activism?

Toni Marie Preston: 1. Being born with Sickle Cell Disease is what started my journey in advocacy and activism. Even though my mom has always been my caretaker, at a young age, I had to endure a lot and learn many different things. I had to learn how to take care of myself and advocate for my health care needs, and I also had to learn to interact with medical professionals. These things are vital for me because my survival depends on it. Besides advocating for my health, I didn't have much advocacy experience before I came to Illinois State University. Coming to ISU changed my life! I experienced culture shock and I realized how different I was like never before. I grew up in a predominately black, middle class neighborhood so everyone looked like me and had similar experiences and ideologies. I wasn't really exposed to overt racism growing up. When I got to ISU, I experienced microaggressions because of my race, gender identity, disability, and sexual orientation. I didn't have language to explain my lived experiences and the world around me to make sense of my life so I became interested in Women's and Gender Studies, which provided me with the language to advocate for myself and people in my communities. To me, WGS was the blueprint. It taught me that my experiences are valid and about the world around me and the systems set in place to oppress me and other people in society. It explained why my life had been and is the way that it is. After I felt I had the knowledge to vocalize my lived experiences and advocate for myself, I began to educate people. I provided people with my emotional labor with hopes that people would learn about systems of oppression and become invested in dismantling oppression but as I grew as an activist, I learned that only a few people are. I recently shifted my energy so now I only provide my emotional labor for free to people who are truly invested in and dedicated to liberation work. Through growth and experience, I have learned that my emotional labor deserves compensation

so I am now paid for the work I do. I actually got paid to speak on a panel in Chicago to Rush University medical students and it was an amazing experience!

GS: Can you tell us about your work with the #HireTrans Campaign, the Brave Space Alliance, and the Windy City Times?

TMP: #HireTrans is a campaign that was created by the Windy City Times, in partnership with other organizations in Chicago, which is inspired by a similar campaign in San Francisco. The goal of the campaign is to encourage employers to hire trans and gender non-conforming people, and to create more culturally competent and safe work places. The campaign features more than sixty trans and gender non-conforming people, and it includes words or phrases that describe who they are, the work they do, or what skills they bring to the table in the workplace or their field. The campaign website also includes resources for employers and employees.

I got involved with Brave Space Alliance because the executive director, LaSaia Wade, is a good friend of mine and mentor. I also knew the organization would provide much needed resources to folks on the south side of Chicago which is something I wanted to be a part of. Here's a little bit about BSA and the work we do: "Brave Space Alliance is the first Black-led, trans-led LGBTQ Center located on the South Side of Chicago, and designed to create and provide affirming and culturally competent services for the entire LGBTQ community of Chicago. We aim to generate opportunities for ourselves, our families, our comrades, and our futures to engage in healing, community building, and the creation of kinship. We strive to educate, empower, and embolden each other through sharing skills, knowledge, and resources as we build towards the liberation of all oppressed peoples.

I became a guest columnist at the Windy City Times after I met the owner, Tracy Baim, during my photoshoot for the #HireTrans campaign. I told her I am a writer and an activist, and that I was

interested in getting my writing published so she told me to contact her. She allowed me to introduce myself to her readers and write for the Windy City Times as a guest columnist! I'm so grateful for this opportunity because it is just the beginning of my career as a writer. I plan to write about various different topics in the future so this is just the beginning.

GS: What are your plans for life after ISU?

TMP: My plan is to go to graduate school for Social Work. I want to study macro social work because I want to learn to make structural changes in communities and society. My goal is to be a social work entrepreneur, working with corporations and businesses, and teaching them about the lived experiences of marginalized people and how they can create work environments without discrimination, harassment and ignorance. I also want to be a writer, public speaker, activist, and community organizer. I plan to work in communities, making sure folks have access to resources.

GS: You mentioned that you consider WGS to have been your "blueprint" for learning about the oppressive structures that have shaped your life. What has been your favorite WGS course so far?

TMP: 5. My favorite WGS course was Women and Poverty, which was a special topics course. Women in Poverty taught me about the ways in which poverty is viewed by society and it taught me about the realities of women with children living in poverty. I learned a lot about the welfare system, how it operates, and how the system is broken in different ways. Learning about this topic allowed me to view poverty and people living in poverty in a completely different way. It has helped me to envision solutions to poverty and to have more empathy for women and children in poverty.

GS: What would be your advice for fellow students who are looking to get into activist work?

TMP: My advice would be to always grow and never be stagnant; listen to the most marginalized; don't take up too much space; emotionally and financially invest in Black lives, especially Black Trans women and gender non-conforming lives; leverage your privilege and access and be willing to risk losing your privilege and access; be willing to put your body and your life on the line to protect marginalized folks; keep educating yourself; take accountability even when it's difficult to do so. I would also advise students

to learn what kind of self-care methods work for them. Self-care is so important because if you don't take care of yourself, you can't advocate for anyone else.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Want more information on the Brave Space Alliance? Visit <https://bravespacealliance.org/about/>

Interested in hosting a social justice workshop? Toni Preston can be reached for booking at tonimariebooking@gmail.com

WGS Students Visit Amy Cousins Exhibit



University Galleries Senior Curator Kendra Paitz guides students through exhibit (top). Students reflect on exhibit (bottom).



In September, the students in Professor Alexis Wolstein's WGS 292: Intro to LGBTQ Studies course visited ISU's University Galleries for a tour of Amy Cousins' exhibit, "You Will Never Have The Comfort Of Our Silence Again." Kendra Paitz, the Senior Curator of University Galleries, guided the students through Cousins' artistic exploration of "radical queer histories." After the tour, students wrote reflections on their reactions to the art, and their conceptions of the documentation of queer histories. Wolstein shared some photos of the students as they toured the exhibit.

New Faculty Spotlight: Alexis Wolstein and Dr. Lori Wiebold

This year, the Women's and Gender Studies program welcomed two new faculty members! Gina Stinnett, our graduate assistant, sat down with both Alexis Wolstein, who is teaching WGS 292: Intro to LGBTQ Studies, and Dr. Lori Wiebold, who is teaching WGS 120: Gender, Sex, and Power, to talk about their interests both in and out of the academy.

Gina Stinnett: Tell us about your educational background—what are your research interests? What does your work primarily revolve around?

Dr. Lori Wiebold: I have all of my degrees in Sociology, but I did also minor in history. My PhD is from the University of Kansas, which has a heavy feminist, qualitative studies, and theory curriculum, which worked very well for me. My research mainly centers around various forms of inequality and how it impacts people. I've studied health economics in rural areas, adult daughters caring for their parents, and African-American men defying racist gender norms.

Alexis Wolstein: I'm an alumni of the University of Texas at Austin. As an undergrad I majored in English and American Studies. I got my Master of Science in Information Studies at UT's School of Information, with a focus in Information Fluency Instruction and Women's & Gender Studies, and my research still falls somewhere at the intersection of those two fields. I usually sum up my research interests under the broad idea of The Body as a Medium – this has covered a variety of topics that, to me, all come back to how we use our bodies to create and process information. I've also studied body modification, like piercing and tattooing, and its connections to sideshows, performance and identity creation. Most recently, my research has focused on otherness in American sideshows and the history of drag.

GS: What is your favorite piece (whether this is a written piece, a documentary, a film, an art piece or exhibition, etc.) that pertains to the field of Women's and Gender Studies?

LW: It is so hard to pick just one, but I find myself so fascinated by the work and life of Frida Kahlo. I find her so incredibly

enlightening and powerful. Her work carries a lot of emotional weight, and it carries so many issues in such a brilliant and accessible way, which I think is so important.

AW: I don't know if I can pick just one! It depends on the research I'm doing at a given moment. Every time I pick a new research topic, there is a work that seems to epitomize the best things about the topic and becomes my favorite emblematic piece. Case in point, while teaching Intro to LGBTQ Studies this semester, my favorite piece has been *Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton's Cafeteria*, a documentary by Susan Stryker about transgender women and drag queens who fought police harassment at Compton's Cafeteria in San Francisco's Tenderloin in 1966, three years before the famous riot at the Stonewall Inn. It features some incredible news footage and interviews with those who were at the "riot" that are downright overwhelming. The documentary uses firsthand accounts to tell much of the story, something I think is so important and provides a level of intimacy in a way that more "historical" accounts are not capable.

GS: What activism do you take part in outside of teaching?

LW: I'm very passionate about healthcare policy. I find that it's an issue that cuts across all identity lines but especially affects women. I'm interested in getting women access to healthcare outside of work or the institution of marriage, since this type of access can often lead to women being forced to stay in abusive situations. I've attended a lot of Peoria community forums on the issue. I am also very big on civic responsibility—calling your senators, representatives, etc. I think it is important to voice our opinion and to keep those who represent us accountable. In terms of demonstrations, I recently attended the Women's March and the March for Science, which were both incredible and important experiences.

AW: I attended the Women's March in Washington DC last January and, while the event itself and those behind its planning may be problematic, I was lucky to connect with likeminded locals in planning for the trip. These connections lead me to being involved with the formation of Empowered Women Empower Women and the planning

of an International Women's Day celebration here in Bloomington-Normal. On campus, I'm a member of the LGBT/Queer Studies & Services Institute board, and the faculty adviser for F.L.A.M.E. (Feminist Led Activist Movement to Empower at Illinois State University). I'm also a member of the Multicultural Leadership Program Class of 2018. MCLP helps cultivate servant leaders in our community!

GS: What are your interests outside of academia?

LW: I love travelling. I especially love to see art and live music—I make it a priority to see three live shows a year. I also love to read. I've actually declared 2017 to be my 'Year of Women Authors.' This was after I sat down and realized just how many male authors I've read in comparison to the small amount of women authors. I've been reading fiction and memoirs. Some of my favorites have been *Bad Feminist* by Roxanne Gay and Rebecca Solnit's *Men Explain Things to Me*. Finally, I love to hike whenever I can. I find that it helps me to reset from thinking about work. I was so happy to find out that there is an arboretum on ISU's quad—I love learning about all of the trees!

AW: I have a possibly unhealthy love for iced coffee & reading true crime. I'm still trying to recover from *Twin Peaks: The Return* and you probably shouldn't ask me about that unless you really have some time on your hands. Lately I've been obsessed with the *You Must Remember This* podcast and the research rabbit holes and movie marathons to which the podcast leads me. I love road trips with my husband, and lazy afternoons with my short dog and my giant cat.

Chingonas in Training: New Chicana Feminist Thought course

This Fall semester, Professor Tanya Diaz-Kozlowski taught ISU's first course that focused entirely on Chicana Feminist Thought. What started as just a gathering of students who wanted to learn more about Chicana Feminisms quickly turned into a community of "Chingonas in training" willing to support and challenge each other in their journeys to become better activists and accomplices. Our graduate assistant talked with two of her classmates, Juana Chavez-Carrillo, and Kelsey Klopfenstein, about this unique, transformative class.

Juana Chavez-Carrillo originally signed up for the course because she was excited to finally take a class that spoke to her experiences: "it was like, 'finally! I get to learn about myself!'" and "become more educated on topics [she] may not have fully understood." Chavez-Carrillo said that she fully expected to be challenged, and found that over the course of the semester, the class helped her to engage in an "inner struggle/debate" that helped her work through much of what she was conditioned to believe about herself while growing up. Kelsey Klopfenstein also signed up for the course expecting to learn more about Chicana Feminisms and found that the class not only met that expectation, but helped her to grow as a person. Klopfenstein stated that "the tools we are gaining to talk about inequalities and social injustices are ones we can all use and I feel confident that each of us already are using Chicana Feminist Thought to decode messages and interactions around us and critique the system."

From the very start of the semester, this course heavily emphasized the importance of writing. What was originally a challenge ended up being one of the most impactful parts of the course. Chavez-Carrillo stated that the emphasis on writing helped her to realize her own capability to produce knowledge and create change: "I

thought that the women in these books were women who I could never be like, but as the course went on I felt the exact opposite. The reason there is change is because they were courageous enough to go against the norm and demand change." Klopfenstein described experiencing a similar shift in her attitude towards whether or not she could be an agent of change: "this class has given me a much more urgent sense of how I can affect change in my social circles of interaction, in my own thinking and in my ways of being." Many of us in the classroom simply did not think that we were capable of doing the type of work that the women we read were doing, but as we continued to write throughout the semester, each of us discovered the power in our own voices—we have come to see the ways in which we can take what we have learned in this course and use it to continue to work of the women we have been reading all semester.

One important aspect of this class that we all agreed upon is that this class helped to decolonize the Eurocentric ideals at ISU. Klopfenstein stated: "Chicana Feminist Thought at ISU is breaking through the mold of Eurocentric academia and broadening the scope of research and knowledge, ultimately leading to a better environment on campus. We certainly have not arrived at a decolonized campus, but I think it is a vital step in the process." Prior to taking this class, many of the Chicanas in the room had not had the experience of learning about themselves in a classroom environment. Chavez-Carrillo explained how alienating this feels: "it is very disheartening to know that the first time I have learned about myself and my experiences as a Chicana in academia is when I am a senior in college. It is just as disheartening to know that this is the first and possibly the only time this course has ever been taught at ISU."



This is why it is even more exigent that we as a classroom community commit to continuing this work. Armed with our empowered voices and our pens, we can use this knowledge to continue to disrupt Eurocentric spaces on ISU's campus. As Chavez-Carrillo so eloquently states:

"Something I have learned in this class that I will take with me is to not be afraid to speak out and wait for someone else to hopefully say what I want to say. I can be the person to say it! We all have talents and those talents could be put to good use in our efforts to make change—no matter how big or how small, we can all play a role. I was able to discover my love for writing in this class and I learned that my thoughts aren't just random musings. They are political and they can create change.

Mi Existencia Es Resistencia!"

Faculty Accomplishments

Alison Bailey gave her invited talk "Tone Policing and the Anger-Silencing Spiral," at the Gaslighting and Epistemic Injustice Conference, at Claremont McKenna College in September. Her paper "Tracking Privilege-Preserving Epistemic Pushback in Feminist and Critical Race Philosophy Classes" appeared in *Hypatia*. And, her "On Whiteness and Metaphysical Comfort" appeared in the collection *On Race: Thirty-Four Conversations in a Time of Crisis*.

Kyle Ciani was selected in a competitive process as a Fellow for the National Endowment for the Humanities 2017 Summer Seminar, "Gender, the State, and the 1977 International Women's Year Conference"

Shelley Clevenger received the ISU *Teaching Initiative Award*, the *Feminist Criminology Article of the Year Award*, and the American Society of Criminology's *Outstanding Teacher of the Year Award*. She also served as a keynote speaker at Appalachian State in Boone, North Carolina, where she spoke about her research on sexual assault survivors and their families.

Elisabeth Friedman was the recipient of a 2016-17 National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH)/PFIRI Fellowship Award.

Ann Haugo published "Decolonizing Motherhood: Images of Mothering in First Nations Theatre," in *Theatre History Studies*. She was also selected as a participant in the Leadership Institute of the Association for Theatre in Higher Education, a three-day workshop in July 2017. Internally, she was selected for the Leadership Initiative at Illinois State University and is serving on the Executive Committee of the Academic Senate.

Melissa Johnson published her essay, "A Desire in the Process of Becoming," in the exhibition catalogue for *Strange Oscillations and Vibrations of Sympathy*. University Galleries, Illinois State University, 2017.

Sudipa Topdar's "The Corporeal Empire: Physical Education and Politicising Children's Bodies in Late Colonial Bengal" appeared in *Gender & History*.

Christine Varga-Harris published a review of the following book in the February 2017 issue of the *American Historical Review*: Edward Cohn, *The High Title of a Communist: Postwar Party Discipline and the Values of the Soviet Regime* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2015). She also presented several papers, including "Between Friends: The Language of Gender Equality and 'Sisterhood' in Encounters among Soviet and 'Third-World' Women" (at the conference "Languages of Internationalism," University of London, U.K., May 2017) and "Soviet Hospitality, Counterpropaganda and Intelligence Gathering: The Soviet Women's Committee and Visiting Delegates from Africa and Asia" (at this year's annual convention of the Association for Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies, Chicago, IL, November 2017).