



CommUNITY Voices: Women's and Gender Studies Newsletter

Spring/Summer 2018

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It's been a great year for Women's and Gender Studies! On top of keeping ourselves busy with community and campus activism, amazing courses taught by our wonderful faculty, and our on-campus programming, we've hired lots of new faculty members into the WGS family who we are all so excited to work with! This semester brought us yet another spectacular Vagina Monologues performance, poignant and engaging activism for Sexual Assault Awareness month, and an incredible new art show in our Rachel Cooper Gallery. In addition to all of these exciting events, this year we put on our 23rd Annual Women's and Gender Studies Symposium, which was filled with innovative student work and a transformative, inspiring keynote speaker.

In this newsletter, we've not only given you a glimpse of these events from the semester, but we've sat down with some of our rockstar faculty members and alumni to talk about how WGS impacts their work, and what advice they have for current WGS students!

We hope you'll join us in celebrating our outstanding students, faculty, and alumni who continue to make us proud with the work they do on campus and in their communities!

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Janaya Khan Delivers Keynote Address

This year's keynote for our annual Women's and Gender Studies Symposium focused on unity amongst activists on the left. Janaya Khan's talk, titled "Demanding Social Transformation, Justice, and Equality for All," was an inspiring and transformative call to work towards finding more commonalities across identity lines, and to stop "allowing our traumas to determine what we care about." Khan's message of unity resonated deeply with the packed room of audience members in a keynote address that kept people talking for weeks after the event.

Khan (pronouns: they/them/theirs) is an international ambassador for the Black Lives Matter movement, and throughout their keynote, they offered multiple examples of the various compromises that need to happen when engaging in activist work. Whether it was working with the Nation of Islam (which Khan acknowledged held very homophobic views)



on anti-racist activism or working with fellow activists whose views might diverge from one's own, Khan reminds us that "you can't always walk in at 100% agreement—sometimes you have to start at 25% and work up from there." Khan pushes for activists to find commonalities where they exist and work towards everyone's liberation.

Congratulations, Graduates!



At the 23rd Annual Women's and Gender Studies Symposium, we honored our graduating WGS Minors and Graduate Certificate students (left), our very first class of Queer Studies Concentration students (middle), and our first class of Iota Iota Iota (Triota) graduates! Congratulations, everyone!



Vagina Monologues Rocks the House!

Pictured left: members of F.L.A.M.E. (Feminist-Led Activist Movement to Empower) posing underneath the marquis at the Normal Theatre in Uptown Normal.

Audience members at this year's Vagina Monologues gathered at an exciting new venue for this year's show! The historic Normal Theatre hosted F.L.A.M.E.'s annual production, allowing for even more people to attend the highly anticipated performances. The new location even allowed for new performance times—this year's performances included a late show on Saturday evening, running from 10:00 PM to midnight, and a Sunday show!

ISU F.L.A.M.E.'s production of Eve Ensler's Vagina Monologues takes place every February, with all proceeds going towards the McLean County's Neville House and YWCA. This year, the Vagina Monologues raised \$1500 to donate!

Each year, F.L.A.M.E. hosts a Vagina Fair before each performance, with booths from campus and community groups providing information and education on gender-related issues, and vendors selling classic Vagina Monologues souvenirs such as chocolate vaginas and crocheted uteruses. This year's event saw one of the largest turnouts for the performances and fair—Saturday night's show came close to selling out!

Sexual Assault Awareness Month Events

April was a busy month for campus activists who organized a number of events in honor of Sexual Assault Awareness month! Health Promotion and Wellness kicked off the month with Consent Day on the Quad, and F.L.A.M.E. hosted both a panel discussion on sexual assault in the criminal justice system and the spring Clothesline Project on the quad!



Faculty Spotlight: Dr. Cynthia Huff

Dr. Cynthia Huff has been a member of the English department and WGS program at ISU since 1989, and has taught feminist theories and literatures throughout her time here, but did you know that Dr. Huff was the first person to hold the official title of director of our program? Dr. Huff was hired by the College of Arts and Sciences to work in both the Department of English and to serve as half-time director for WGS (which, at the time, was called the Women's Studies program) after Virginia Owen, the college's dean at the time, took part in an assessment of the program and its needs moving forward.

Huff's time with WGS started off with just her and an undergraduate assistant, meaning that the day-to-day operations of the program relied on a lot of borrowed resources and extra work that often went unpaid.

Throughout her time, Huff was able to move the program office from an upstairs room at a university house to the whole first floor of a different university house at 604 Main Street. She also organized an extensive collection of programs on campus. When looking back on her time, Huff remembers Women's History Month as being a particular busy time for WGS.

"During Women's History Month, we had events on campus every single day of the month—sometimes even two events in a day," Huff recalled. "We did a lot of work to get those events together, and the energy created by them was—and still is—palpable."

Huff also brought several high-profile speakers to campus as a part of her work with WGS. She was responsible for helping to bring speakers like Dr. Angela Davis (who later came back to ISU in 2015), Sarah Weddington (the attorney representing "Jane Roe" in the historic *Roe v. Wade* case), and Betty Friedan to campus.

In terms of teaching WGS-related content, Huff says that students today are certainly more receptive to the material than students in previous years. Huff recalls particular challenges with teaching Kate Bornstein's *Gender Outlaw*—"I had students complain to the department chair about the course material, but I was definitely backed up on that one." This type of direct pushback is not as prevalent in current classes.



She attributes this to a rise in diverse students, especially from international backgrounds, who bring their lived experiences into the classroom and help provide other students with a wider range of perspectives on feminism and gender-related issues. The presence of a strong WGS program on campus has also helped with this growing acceptance.

The WGS Program has come a long way since its inception over thirty years ago, and Huff's tireless work for the program helped build the foundation for where we are today. As Huff looks forward to retirement, she looks back fondly on the work she has done with WGS, especially in bringing in speakers, as some of her favorite memories on campus.

Alumni Spotlight: Dr. Ana Roncero-Bellido

Dr. Ana Roncero Bellido graduated with her Ph.D in English and a Graduate Certificate in Women's and Gender Studies in 2017. After graduation, she was hired as an Assistant Professor of English at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington. At Gonzaga, Roncero-Bellido continues to incorporate WGS content and values in her work. In this feature, she tells us a little more about the work she's doing, and how WGS helped to shape her research interests.

As a Ph.D student at ISU, Roncero-Bellido taught several courses in Latinx Literatures and Cultures, Latina and Chicana Feminisms, and multicultural autobiography, and has continued this work at Gonzaga. In her multicultural autobiography class, Roncero-Bellido Skyped in fellow ISU alum Lasantha Rodrigo to talk with her students about his memoir, *Fireflies in the Dark*. Roncero-Bellido says that "teaching these classes at Gonzaga with a Jesuit mission in mind has allowed me to continue developing [her] feminist pedagogy."

Roncero-Bellido says that the most enjoyable part of her work has been mentoring underrepresented students. "Students hosted the 'Diversity Monologues' and I helped students to write their monologues and practice their performance. It's been a very great experience to be able to work with students and continue the mentorship I had at ISU—now acting as a mentor," Roncero-Bellido states.

Roncero-Bellido has also made waves as a member of Gonzaga's Women's and Gender Studies program: "as a member of Women's and Gender Studies, I helped to develop ideas to create an Ethnic Studies minor and we even hosted a symposium to hear from students so we could develop this further. It was a really great experience to work on that and create more connections with students and see how my interdisciplinary work manifested through the symposium."

The WGS Program congratulates Dr. Ana Roncero-Bellido on her successful first year at Gonzaga, and wishes her all the best in her future!



Anne M. Semlak Memorial Scholarship Keeps Professor's Daughter's Legacy Alive

To say that Bill Semlak created a legacy at Illinois State is an understatement. He has motivated and impacted students for decades as a professor in the School of Communications, a local Rotarian, and a philanthropist.

In 2008, he established the Anne M. Semlak Memorial Scholarship in the Women's and Gender Studies (WGS) program in memory of his daughter. Anne shared her father's generous spirit and positive outlook. She touched many lives before fighting cancer, which took her in May of 2008. Her named scholarship is awarded each year to an undergraduate or graduate student who is most active in the Women's and Gender Studies program.

Anne graduated from ISU in 2001 with a bachelor's degree in political science. She earned a minor in Peace Studies and what was then called Women's Studies. She was extremely active in the both the Women's Studies program and in The Women's Coalition—a Registered Student Organization.

Among her accomplishments was completion of a WGS internship with the Minneapolis Domestic Abuse Project in the summer of 2000. The following year she received the Women's Studies achievement award for her accomplishments.

Anne moved to Colorado with her husband, Mark Laken, where she continued to do social justice work. She coordinated restorative justice projects for Partners of Weld County in Colorado. The organization provided juvenile offenders an alternative to the court system through mediation. She later worked as a youth program coordinator for Foothills Unitarian Church middle school and high school students in Fort Collins, Colorado.

Anne's heart-felt desire to make the world a more just place truly defined her life. Her spirit and good works live on in those who had the good fortune to know her, and in scholarship recipients who walk in her footsteps.

Her ability to lift up others through her work lives on through the individuals she mentored. The same can be said of her father, as he invested himself in ISU students for 26 years. Bill came to Illinois State in 1974 as director of the Forensics Team, after earning his doctorate in political communications at the University of Minnesota.

Within two years, he moved the program into the national spotlight, where it has stayed. He enjoyed teaching students how to communicate respectfully with one another and to debate their ideas. Of all his accomplishments, he identifies the Forensics Program as the highlight of his ISU career.

Bill also served as director of the Honor's Program. He later led as chair of the Department of Information Sciences, restructuring it as the Department of Communication. A world traveler, he enjoyed helping students learn to navigate their way through France.

He taught a study abroad program in Grenoble, relocating there with his now deceased wife, Elizabeth; Anne; and her three siblings. When he returned to campus, he taught large lecture communication courses and completed his career as director of International Studies.

Semlak and his wife, Joani Moore, reside in Mackinaw and remain actively involved at ISU. He is a member of the College of Arts and Sciences Hall of Fame. He also returned to campus to teach a couple of courses before finally retiring for good.

"You know it's time to go when your students tell you their grandmother had you for class," said Semlak, who ends conversations with "Go for it!" His signature phrase exemplifies his hope for each recipient of the Semlak scholarship, which is designed to empower students as they pursue their goals.

Scholarship support is a main focus of Redbirds Rising: The Campaign for Illinois State. The \$150 million initiative will lift the University for decades to come. Your help is needed to make sure Redbirds continue to soar. Join the more than 44,000 ISU donors and make a gift by calling (309) 438-8184 or by visiting RedbirdsRising.IllinoisState.edu.

Welcome New WGS Faculty!

Dr. Tanya Diaz-Kozlowski, WGS Assistant Director and Academic Adviser

Dr. Tanya Diaz-Kozlowski is a professor, mentor, advisor, and writer. She earned her PhD. in Education Policy, Organization and Leadership with a minor in Gender & Women's Studies and Latino/a Studies from the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign in 2015. Professor D-K currently works as a Professor and the Assistant Director of the Women's and Gender Studies Program at Illinois State University. Professor D-K's pedagogical approach creates a classroom environment that pushes students to use inquiry, dialogue, reflection, and action to think clearly, to speak and write persuasively and eloquently, and to evaluate critically both their own and others' ideas. She is in the thick of transitioning to a new position that requires balancing teaching and advising alongside finishing two articles for publication. One article focuses on the necessity of incorporating intersectionality as a theory of power within the introductory WGS courses and the second stresses that dismantling heteronormativity in K-12 Schools must include dismantling racialized hegemonic gender and sexual norms that are embedded in school climates. The other article outlines the importance of incorporating intersectionality as a theory of power not difference in introductory Gender & Women's Studies courses. During the 2018-2019 academic year Professor Diaz-Kozlowski is teaching a range of courses in Gender & Women Studies that are also cross listed with Latino/s Studies entitled: Gender, Sex, and Power, Chicana Feminist Thought, and Feminist Theories and Methodologies. Professor D-K teaches con ganas y sinvergüenza. La maestra luchando también enseñando. Professor D-K lives in Bloomington, IL and spends her free time reading fiction and non-fiction, painting pottery, traveling, working out, relaxing as much as possible, trying out new bourbons or beer, making memories with close friends, and walking her dog Francisco Tyson everywhere.



Dr. Jason Whitesel, WGS/SOA Assistant Professor

Dr. Whitesel consults and teaches on intersecting oppressions, men and masculinities, body/embodiment, fat studies, social constructions of deviance, and sexuality and queer studies. He is the author of *Fate Gay Men: Girth, Mirth, and the Politics of Stigma* (2014).

Dr. Lisa Ortiz, WGS Instructional Assistant Professor

Lisa Ortiz pursued doctoral training in the Department of Education Policy, Organization & Leadership with minors in Latina/o and Gender & Women's Studies from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Previously, she lived in Puerto Rico where she pursued a M.A. in English Education and a B.A. in Business Administration. Lisa is an interdisciplinary scholar whose interests are grounded at the intersection of (im)migration, media, education, gender, and Latina/x/o studies. Her current research specifically examines rural-to-rural migration among Puerto Rican intergenerational families. She strives to expose structural inequities while encouraging herself and others to critically reexamine what we assign value and worth to; in part by creating access and representation in higher education, especially for vulnerable populations.

