Welcome new WGS faculty!

Tanya Díaz-Kozlowski, WGS Assistant Director and Academic Adviser

Tanya Díaz-Kozlowski is a professor, mentor, advisor, and writer. She earned her Ph.D. in Education Policy, Organization and Leadership with a minor in Gender and Women’s Studies and Latino/a Studies from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 2013. 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. Professor D-K teaches with ganas y urgencia. La maestra haciendo también ensenando. During the 2018-2019 academic year Professor D-K is teaching a range of courses in Women’s and Gender Studies that are also cross-listed with Latino/a Studies entitled: Gender, Sex, and Power, Chicana Feminist Thought, and Feminist Theories and Methodologies.

Jason Whitesel, WGS/SAO Assistant Professor

Jason Whitesel earned his Ph.D. at The Ohio State University and holds a joint appointment in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology and the Women’s and Gender Studies Program at Illinois State University. He is delighted to teach the core sequence of classes in the Queer Studies Concentration: Sociology of Gender, Sociology of the Body, Introduction to LGBTQ Studies, and Queer & Transgender Theory. He formerly coordinated the Queer Studies minor in the Department of Women’s and Gender Studies at Pace University where he was awarded tenure in 2018 and LGBTQA Educator of the Year in both 2016 and 2018. He researches, writes, and consults on Intersectional Categories of Oppression, Men & Masculinities, Gay Men’s Experiences, Fat Studies, and Social Constructions of Deviance, and has authored a critically acclaimed book, Fat Gay Men: Girth, Mirth, and the Politics of Signs (NYU Press, 2014). He is currently writing about groups with a mission to support older gay and bisexual men, and he is researching the representations (and lack thereof) of same-gender-loving men of color and size in the queer community.

Lisa Ortiz, WGS Instructional Assistant Professor

Lisa Ortiz has doctoral training in the Department of Education Policy, Organization and Leadership with minors in Latina/o and Gender and Women’s studies from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Previously, she lived in Puerto Rico, where she pursued an M.A. in English education and a B.A. in business administration. Ortiz is an interdisciplinary scholar whose interests are grounded at the intersections of immigration, media, education, gender, and Latina/o studies. Her current research specifically examines rural-to-rural migration among Puerto Rican intergenerational families.

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From the director

It’s been a year of change and growth for the Women’s and Gender Studies Program (WGS). Between community activism, developing exciting new classes, organizing our symposium, hosting student art shows, and hiring new WGS faculty we’ve had our hands full. The good news is that with the support of the college and the Provost’s Office we are moving steadily toward designing a major.

This year we made three historic hires for the program. Tanya Díaz-Kozlowski will be our new assistant director and academic advisor. She is also teaching our Chicana Feminist Thought class. We also welcome Lisa Ortiz, our first full-time instructional assistant professor, and Jason Whitesel, (WGS/SAO) who will be teaching the queer studies course sequence. The WGS Program has also entered into collaborations with African-American Studies, Latin American and Latina/o Studies, and other minors to pool our resources and find ways to co-sponsor events and cross list our classes. Thanks to the College of Arts and Sciences for supporting these new initiatives.

Our annual symposium continues to showcase the work of our minors and graduate students. This year we recognized our very first class (13 students!) to complete the Queer Studies certificate. We also honored our second class of Iota Iota Iota (Triota) honors students. Janaya Khan gave an inspiring keynote address on transformational justice and met with our students in the Black Feminist Thought class.

The next academic year brings even more promise. Kyle Ciani (HIS/WGS) will serve as interim director for the program while I go on a much-needed sabbatical. During that time WGS will conduct an external review that will guide us toward establishing a stronger and more sustainable major. We also hope to update our WGS resource center, expand our programming, and renew the popular Queer Talks series.

As always, the most exciting part of the year is hearing from our alumni. You have become parents, teachers and professors, journalists, mentors, graduate students, social workers, performers, artists, and have given your time and energy to causes for which you are passionate. We are proud of you. We just know that you are collectively making the world a better place to be right now, and for this, we are grateful.

In solidarity,

Alison Bailey
Roncero-Bellido says that Scholarship support is a main focus of Redbirds Rising: The Campaign for Illinois State. Bill Semlak came to Illinois State in 1974 as director of the forensics team, after earning his

To say that Bill Semlak created a legacy at Illinois State is an understatement. He has

Khan (pronouns: they/them/theirs) is an international ambassador for the Black Lives Matter movement, and throughout the keynote, 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 percent agreement—sometimes you have to start at 25 percent and work up from there.” Khan pushes for activists to find commonalities where they exist and work towards everyone’s liberation.

Anne M. Semlak Memorial Scholarship keeps professor’s daughter’s legacy alive

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He returned to campus to teach a couple of courses before finally retiring for good. “You have to start at 25 percent and work up from there.” Khan pushes for activists to find commonalities where they exist and work towards everyone’s liberation.

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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, senior at 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.

Chingonas in training: new Chicana feminist thought course

This fall Professor Tanya Diaz-Kozlowski taught ISU’s first course focused entirely on Chicana feminist thought. What started as a gathering of students wanting to learn more about Chicana feminisms quickly turned into a community of “Chingonas in training” for supporting and challenging each other in their journeys to become better activists and academics. Juana Chavez-Carrillo originally took 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!’” Prior to taking this class, many of the Chicanas in the classroom had not had the experience of learning about themselves in a classroom environment. Chavez-Carrillo explained how alienating that felt: “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.” Kelsey Kopeffstein described experiencing a similar shift in her attitude toward whether 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.” This is why it is even more exigent that we see as a classroom community come to see ourselves as agents of change committed to continuing this work. As they say, “Mi existencia es resistencia.”

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Alumni Spotlight: Ana Roncero-Bellido

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, where she continues to incorporate WGS content into her courses.

In her multicultural autobiography class, she skipped in fellow ISU alum Lusantha Rodrigo to talk with her students about his memoir, Fireflies in the Dust. Roncero-Bellido says that “teaching these classes at Gonzaga with a Jesuit mission in mind has allowed me to continue developing feminist pedagogy.” She has also made waves as a member of Gonzaga’s Women and Gender Studies Program: “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.”

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