



WOMEN'S, GENDER, AND SEXUALITY STUDIES PROGRAM

Illinois State University

ALUMNI MATTER

A bulletin of Illinois State University's Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program

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A Word from the Director

Dear Fabulous WGSS Alumni,

It's been difficult to compose my usual greetings to you this year. Don't get me wrong, I still look forward to hearing from our WGSS alumni each year because I'm humbled by the courage, strength, and resilience I see in each of the stories you've shared with us.

You have become artists, educators, lawyers, scholars, parents, actors, healers, and community organizers. I hold tightly to the fact each of you has taken your WGSS education out into the world with the fierce desire to make your corner of the planet more just, more kind, and more livable. Lasting change happens when each of us makes a commitment to be the change we wish to see in others.

Like many of you I continue to search for words that accurately describe the times in which we live. Yesterday, I found myself in a staring contest with my third cup of coffee. In between sips I muttered, "I'm living in an all-too familiar place, that I don't quite recognize." I wonder what comes to your minds when you stare into your coffee and listen to the morning news?

I'm not going to rehearse the list of atrocities that we have all witnessed in the past four months (or the past 400 years). I am going to say that I'm frustrated, furious, and exhausted with the repeated assaults on our collective humanity. The pandemic and police actions have laid bare in graphic ways how structural, systemic racism and economic inequality repeatedly incapacitate our institutions, communities, public services, civil rights, and obligation to treat one another with kindness, dignity and respect. I know that many of you share these feelings and desires. Please don't lose sight of them. We need to share what we've learned from WGSS education now more than ever.

In the midst of all this, our program has undergone a few significant changes this year. The big news is that we are now the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program! We have finally secured a non-tenure track line for the program, so please join me in welcoming Professor Bridget Sundin to our community. She has a background in theater and performance and will be teaching WGS120 this year.

In October 2019, more than 260 students marched around the Quad to protest what they described as unfair, discriminatory treatment of Black students on campus. Chanting "fake diversity has got to go," participants called on the administration for not doing enough to honor their core value of diversity, and the University is responding.

Feminist Fridays brought students into our resource center to listen to vinyl records and discuss what came up for them. This year would have been our 25th Annual WGSS Symposium. We had quite the celebration planned, but had to postpone it after ISU canceled all campus events after spring break.

We hosted two student art shows this year. Archana Shekara's design class hung their "This is America" exhibit examining the marginalization of U.S. minority communities. Radiance Campbell curated "Performing Color: Participatory and Community-Based Research in a Modern U.S. Circus," featuring photographs of diverse performers in a United States circus.

Keep making us proud. And, don't forget to stop by when you're in town.

Alison Bailey
Director

What's happening at WGSS?



Memorial altar for Breonna Taylor at the Bloomington Law and Justice Center. Photo by Nathan Masciola '20.

WGSS student reflects on her art exhibition in light of current events

By Radiance Campbell

Editor's Note: *Radiance nurtured her black feminist consciousness during her time at Illinois State. Now, she's helping lead the fight against systemic racism and police brutality. In March, she curated "Performing Color," an art installation featuring photographs of diverse performers in a United States circus. Four months later, she answered a national call to resurrect altars in memory of women of color who were killed by law enforcement. The local installation was purposely constructed in front of the McLean County Law and Justice Center in Bloomington, where peaceful protests have taken place in the wake of George Floyd's murder. I asked Radiance to reflect on her work in light of recent events.*

In light of the death of George Floyd, we've seen everyone from restaurant and clothing brand CEOs, to our university president and RSO faculty sponsors, make statements in solidarity with resistance movements across the nation. It seems like more people than ever defend Black life. It is my hope that this commitment to building an anti-racist world continues beyond these initial statements and into the cultures and policies of our campus communities.

Back in February, before this summer's uprisings, our "Performing Color" installation called for such a movement on our campus. In our art installation, which investigated the experiences of performers of color in Gamma Phi Circus, nine students of color did the work of unpacking and

describing our experiences with racism, sexism, and homophobia. We also did the work of imagining what a better future might look like, and how we might get there. If you can't get to campus to see it, the art exhibit is now accessible to everyone online at: bit.ly/pcvirtualexhibit.

My hope was, and still is, for every student, staff, and faculty member to see this exhibit and to see it deeply. To listen with the goal of unlearning, relearning, and understanding. To take our perspectives and our ideas seriously. To leave committed to making the necessary changes and to amplify students of color's voices.

One of the main themes of the research and exhibit is the fact that racism, sexism, and homophobia are woven into the fabric of our everyday lives. As such, the circus, the University, the (insert your own office, department, or group here) are not excluded from issues of discrimination and inclusivity, whether or not they are intentional. I have hope as I watch more and more people proudly exclaim that "Black Lives Matter." My hope is that we recognize that racial justice is not just a faraway national problem but a very real local battle to be fought right here on our own campus. My hope is that "Performing Color," and the memorial project are just one part of that fight.



Image from "Performing Color" exhibition.

¡Chicanas Movidas!

Dr. Tanya Diaz-Kozlowski took students from her Chicana Feminisms course on a road trip! They attended a discussion and book signing celebrating the publication of *Chicanas Movidas: New Narratives of Activism and Feminism in the Movement*



(Left to Right) Tara Tracy (WGSS Grad Certificate), Cheyenne Flores (WGSS Grad Certificate), Sophie Rout '20 (WGSS minor), Dr. Tanya Diaz-Kozlowski, Kelsey Banks (WGSS minor), and Maggie Rengers (LLS minor)

Era, edited by Dionne Espinoza, Dr. Maria Cotera, and Dr. Maylei Blackwell. The collection contains a wide array of contributions from scholars and activists, including prominent Chicana feminists of the era. Students read selected essays from the new anthology alongside chapters from Mayeli Blackwell's classic, *Chicana Power! Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement*. The event was hosted by The Latina/Latino Studies Department at The University of Illinois.

The students learned a great deal from Cotera and Blackwell's co-lecture style. They enjoyed asking them questions that came up during their class discussions and the book signing. Chicana feminism is extremely marginalized in academia, so having the opportunity to meet and talk with contemporary Chicana feminist scholars was inspiring.

It's not uncommon for students to come into the class with the perception that Chicana feminism was a short-lived digression from the Chicano Nationalist movement of the

1960s and 1970s that ended as quickly as it began. The *Chicanas Movidas* event really opened their eyes to the importance of the course. They had a memorable time hanging out together outside of class. Diaz-Kozlowski remarked, "I loved taking my students to my *alma mater* and introducing them to my colleagues and friends in the Latin American and Latino Studies Department. We had a great time and learned a lot together."

International Women's Day Breakfast

Just days before the stay-at-home order, Dr. Kyle Ciani (History/WGSS) delivered the keynote address on activism in the 20th century for the 24th Annual International Women's Day breakfast hosted by McLean County League of Women Voters and Soroptimists International. Archana Shekara (Graphic Design/WGSS) was one of two speakers to share their activist experiences. Through the sponsorship of the History Department, eight students from her women's history courses, most of whom are also part of the WGSS Program, also attended. They report loving the experience to interact with and learn from such a diverse group of professionals.



Sitting (left to right)—Rachel Johnson, Molly Perling, Erin Hastings, Tara Tracy
Standing (left to right)—Jasmyne Lee, Laura Fleri-Somers, Dr. Kyle Ciani, Kelly Schrems, Andrew Erford.

WGS Alumni Updates

Venise Keys '16 is a full-time visual arts teacher at the Art In Motion Creative Charter School in Chicago's South Shore neighborhood. Her writing has been published in *Adjunct Riot*, a 'zine crafted by Amy Fleming. She has also written "The

People's Church of the G.H.E.T.T.O.," for *Sixty Inches From Center*. The article explores commemoration and healing through a Black Feminist burlesque performance honoring Audre Lorde. She is a member artist at Woman Made



Gallery in Chicago and her work appeared in the TOUCH virtual exhibit June 5. She was also a panelist at the reception, and participated in a live webinar event. She and her wife have been married two years.



Radiance Campbell '20 has accepted a full-ride offer to Georgetown Law's Class of 2023, where she will be a Blume Scholar and Public Interest Fellow. She's moving to Washington, D.C., and is excited to be studying just a few blocks away from the U.S. Supreme Court.

Rhiannon Stringer '20 graduated from ISU with her master's degree, an M.S. in political science. She studied and wrote her thesis on how negative information and trust in government impact the probability of a person protest voting. Because of the coronavirus, she is currently unemployed, but will be staying in Bloomington-Normal.



Alexandra Daggett '19 finished her first year of teaching at Eisenhower High School in Decatur. She is the new sponsor for the Gay-Straight Alliance, and a founding member of the new district LGBT committee. She

is very proud to have been one of six teachers nominated for teacher of the year! She was the only first-year teacher to receive this distinction. She's started working out, is learning to play guitar, reading, and educating herself about issues related to racism and institutional violence.

Matthew Rillie '15 works at Columbia College in Chicago as the coordinator of Student Support and Engagement in Student Diversity and Inclusion. He works to create and grow networks of support and education to help students explore how their identities impact how they navigate the world. He also advises Columbia Pride and the Trans Student Union, the two main LGBTQ+ student support groups on campus. His WGSS education at Illinois State University has been a foundation for his work. He attests so much of his critical thinking and intentional work to his time in the program.



Sarah Ehlers '04 was recently awarded tenure. As of September 1, she will be an associate professor in the English Department at the University of Houston. Her first book, *Left of Poetry: Depression America and the Formation of Modern Poetics*, was published in June 2019 by the University of

North Carolina Press (uncpress.org/book/9781469651286/left-of-poetry).

Andrew Anastasia '06 was granted tenure and promoted to associate professor of English at Harper College. He was a member of the 2019-2020 Social Justice Leadership Cohort at Harper and completed his final project on developing equity-based, trauma-informed curricular infusions for faculty to implement across campus. Recent conference presentations



and invited talks have included creating trauma-informed composition classrooms and working with white, heterosexual, cisgender fragility in the classroom through understanding psychosomatic responses to discomfort and cognitive dissonance. Last October, he and his family visited Illinois State, where he proudly showed the campus off to his 5-year-old daughter, Izzy.

Feminist Fridays: Reclaiming and Reimagining Feminist Consciousness-Raising

By Dr. Tanya Diaz-Kozlowski

The seeds for Feminist Fridays @ ISU took root during the first week of May 2019. I was driving to work listening to a LA podcast episode called, “Do Not Call it a Comeback: Why Analog Will Always Have an Audience” and fell back into a childhood memory. I remembered what it felt like to sit on the floor in front of my turntable and listen to the lyrics of Sade, Fleetwood Mac, and Nina Simone songs while the syncopated piano, bass guitar, and drums rhythms nourished my spirit. As a Chicana butch lesbian educator, teaching and advising at ISU, the podcast reminded me that the body carries memory. Our individual and collective bodies are central to the ongoing political urgency of feminist consciousness-raising.

The term “feminist consciousness-raising” is associated with women’s liberation. It refers to the ongoing process of small groups of women gathering face-to-face to give collective voice to their individual experiences with gender discrimination, gender subordination, and sexism. During the feminist second-wave, consciousness-raising opened up possibilities for women to ask critical questions about their lives, their personal relationships, and their workplace environments. They created solidarity networks as a way to grapple effectively with the many ways patriarchy impacted and shaped their lives.

But, it is “The Combahee River Collective Statement;” *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave*; and, *This Bridge Called My Back: Radical Writings by Women of Color*—a genealogy of women of color writings—that underlie my conceptualization of Feminist Fridays as a fundamentally intersectional feminist consciousness-raising endeavor. In *Eloquent Rage*, Brittany Cooper writes that intersectionality is, “the idea that we are all integrally formed and multiply impacted by the different ways that systems of white supremacy, capitalism, and patriarchy affect our lives” (2018, 99). Feminist Fridays worked toward reclaiming and reimagining feminist consciousness-raising at a predominantly white institution (PWI), cultivated by students, staff, and



Undergraduate and graduate students attending Feminist Fridays

faculty who are members of multiply marginalized and underrepresented groups. We gathered to listen to vinyl records by Black, Latinx, women, and/or queer artists.

For two hours, every other Friday afternoon during the academic year, students, staff, and faculty gathered in the WGSS Program Resource Center to listen to Prince, Beyoncé, Khalid, Lizzo, Janet Jackson, Norah Jones, Nina Simone, and Amy Winehouse. We listened together as a community. We discussed the cover art on the featured album and cultivated an intimate space where we could discuss how the words, rhythms, and photographs wove themselves into individual stories. The personal is always political.

Most of the students attending Feminist Fridays shared fond memories of how their grandparents and parents introduced them to vinyl recordings of their favorite artists while they were growing up. Some sheepishly shared how the music made them feel, others confessed how weird it felt to sit in a room full of strangers, with no specific agenda, other than listening to a record spin on a turntable. A few recognized and named the weight they felt having to manage the chronic pressure to be continually productive even at extracurricular events. After listening to each album, and eating at least one bag of homemade popcorn, our conversations sometimes shifted toward how we might use student art and music to create more equitable spaces on campus. We dared to dream when we listened to music together. We witnessed one another share experiences with racism, anti-blackness, sexism, and homophobia at the Bone Student Center, Starbucks, the Alamo, the residence halls, at fraternity and sorority parties off campus, and on community buses. Bearing witness to these experiences was difficult, but we all made a genuine effort to listen to one another and to stay present.

The organic nature of Feminist Fridays allowed us not only to share our stories, witness one another’s experiences,

eat snacks, and just be present, it also helped us to create space for healing, empathy, and affirmation. At times, our conversations broached serious issues of oppression, then changed directions, suddenly becoming silly and ridiculous. Feminist Fridays used art to open up our human capacities for thinking, feeling, knowing, and being in the world. Listening collectively to recordings by Black, Latinx, women, and queer artists challenged us to raise brave questions. Who am I? Who are my people? Why is society like this? How do I understand myself in relation to others? What do we want? Who is ‘we?’ And, what are we building? Our gatherings dared us to consider why art is never neutral or objective. Art shakes us. Art demands our attention. Art simultaneously calls us out and calls in. Art calls us to wake up. Art reminds us of our humanity, it pushes us to act justly in the face of injustice. Art is resistance. We left Feminist Fridays, knowing that each of us has the power to cultivate gender equity ... if we dare to imagine it.



Dr. Goldsmith (right) receiving the Outstanding Young Alumni Award from Alumni Association Board of Directors member and Awards Chair Susan Nelson-Brown '78 in February.

Q and A with Dr. Jenna Goldsmith

Recipient of ISU's 2020 Outstanding Young Alumni Award

Editor's Note: Goldsmith '08, '10 M.S. is a writing instructor at Oregon State University-Cascades School of Writing Literature and Film. She has published two poetry chapbooks: *Genesis Near the River* (blush books, 2019), and *Suppose the Room Just Got Brighter* (Finishing Line Press, forthcoming). Last spring she returned to campus to receive

the prestigious Outstanding Young Alumni Award. We interviewed Jenna during her visit.

Q: How did the WGSS program impact your educational and personal experiences at ISU?

A: When I transferred from Rock Valley College, I remember seeing the WGSS minor when I declared my English major. It was an easy choice. I was already interested in gender and sexuality and wanted to deepen my understanding of systems of power. Many English faculty are affiliated with WGSS, so my course of study felt tightly integrated. What I learned in the classroom, I experienced in my on-campus work with ISU PRIDE and

FLAME. As a graduate student, I was fortunate to work as the WGSS graduate assistant. It really put me at the center of things. Dr. Bailey provided me an opportunity to see the daily operations of an academic program (hint: it's a lot of work!), which has been invaluable to me in my current position at OSU Cascades.

My WGSS classes were rigorous and I attribute my success in my doctoral program at the University of Kentucky to my coursework at ISU. I remember taking Dr. Cynthia Huff's Feminist Literary Theories class and signing up to give a presentation on Judith Butler. I wound up on Dr. Bailey's office doorstep and we worked through Butler's complicated philosophy. All went according to plan, but I was SWEATING!

Q: How did you end up becoming a writing professor?

A: My route into academia was pretty traditional. I left ISU for a doctoral program, then landed a job at OSU Cascades. But, that path began when I was working at the WGSS Program, and got to meet Dr. Susan Bordo, who came to campus to give the annual symposium keynote address. I got to spend time with her, and her daughter Cassie. Dr. Bordo offered to review my application materials to see if I would be a good fit at the University of Kentucky program, where she taught. I officially became a KU student that fall. It was a fantastic choice for me.

Q: How does WGSS inform your work as a writing professor?

A: I constantly use what I learned as a WGSS student. Oftentimes, this looks like I'm attempting to mirror the faculty who were models in rigor, empathy, and good humor. I will find myself thinking "What would Kass (Fleisher) do?" or "How would Kyle (Ciani) frame this bit of history?" or "How would Alison (Bailey) lecture on this topic?" I've been a student at three different colleges, and an instructor at one. I can honestly say that the WGSS faculty at ISU are stellar in their research and teaching.

Q: What is one concept you learned in WGSS that you wish everyone understood?

A: I wish folks understood the concepts I learned in my WGSS classes are applicable to everyone. When describing systems of oppression, I find myself telling students, "It's in the air we breathe and the water we drink," and for this reason, I wish folks would just take one WGSS course. (Hello ... take WGS 120!). Better yet, take Dr. Ciani's Women's History course. Having even a cursory

