



# 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*

August 2022

## From the Director

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Dear WGSS alumni,

I will remember this academic year as the point where we began our collective journey toward a new normal. Our fall classes began online. Our Resource Center was empty. Nothing seemed to work. A more vibrant community emerged when spring rolled around. The Quad filled up with students, and our Resource Center filled up with students, art, and conversation. The Clothesline Project moved from our storage closet onto the Quad making visible the violence that is routinely ignored on campus and introducing a new generation to the healing power of survivors' resistant stories.

The Clothesline Project's appearance was timely. This year our campus celebrated the 50th anniversary of Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972, which prohibits sex discrimination in any education program or activity receiving federal funding. In the wake of #MeToo, the project reminds us how sex-based harassment and violence disrupt our educations. In an effort to foster a more complete discussion of Title IX on campus, Dr. Jenna Goldsmith crafted a summer seminar on the Amendment and invited civil rights lawyer [Alexandra Brodsky](#) to talk about her new book *Sexual Justice: Supporting Victims, Ensuring Due Process, and Resisting the Conservative Backlash*. The discussion was open to the community.

After a two-year delay we finally had the opportunity to celebrate our 25th Annual WGSS Student Research symposium. Uncertainty pushed the student presentations and four keynotes into Zoomland, but we gathered on the sixth floor of Milner Library on the final day to celebrate our students. We were thrilled that Dr. Sandra Harmon, who organized the first WGSS symposium, was able to attend the event. She and

I walked through the *25th and Change* Symposium retrospective exhibit together, and she told me stories sparked by the artifacts. It was magical. By pandemic standards, we had record turnouts for our student panels and keynote lectures. A highlight for me was listening to [Maia Kobabe's](#) talk on the creative process behind her new landmark graphic novel *Gender Queer: A Memoir*. The talk was timely. A few weeks later [The New York Times](#) listed the memoir as the most banned book in the country.

Our students remain active and engaged. Professor Bridget Sundin taught six sections of WGS120 and recruited more students to the minor and Queer Studies Concentration. Next year she will be teaching the first course ever on Queer Theater! It filled immediately.

The recent news from the Supreme Court, the massacres in Buffalo, New York, and Uvalde, Texas, are reminders that social justice requires our vigilance and engagement. I know that our WGSS alumni will continue to employ the lessons they have taken from the education they claimed at ISU and use them wisely in the service of social justice. So, keep making us proud. Please stop by the WGSS program office when you're in town. We love catching up with our alumni.

All Good Things,

Alison Bailey  
Director

## What's happening at WGSS?

### WGSS Students Collaborate on *Feral Feminisms* Journal Review Issue

By Ray Hatch and Ela Przybylo

The issue of [Feral Feminisms](#): Celebrating Ace and Aro is now in print! *Feral Feminisms* is an independent, inter-media, peer reviewed, open access online journal. This issue of the journal was published by the students in Dr. Ela Przybylo's (ENG/WGSS) spring seminar on Asexualities and Aromanticisms Across Media. Students in the class worked in groups to edit, copyedit, create proofs, and select a cover image for the issue. Students also had an opportunity to write and publish their own reviews, 11 of which are included in this special review issue.

"For this issue, we opened up the framework to include work published by ace and aro authors as well as work on themes and topics related to ace and aro more broadly," said Przybylo, who is a founding editor of the international peer-reviewed feminist journal.

"I never thought I'd get to learn about asexuality and aromanticism on a college campus," said Janeth Montenegro Marquez, a first-year anthropology master's student from Sacramento, California. Understanding the behind-the-scenes processes of working on a journal offered new insights, said Marquez. "In many ways, I learned how articles and journals are a powerful tool for self-expression, especially for marginalized groups."

In simplest terms, asexuality is a sexual orientation and describes a person who does not experience sexual attraction, while aromanticism speaks to a person who does not experience romantic attraction to others. "Both ace and aro people experience close connections and intimacy, though compulsory sexuality and amatonormativity create social pressures for people to be sexual and romantic as a default and norm," said Przybylo, whose scholarship works to challenge how society defines intimacy. She is the author of the book *Asexual Erotics: Intimate Readings of Compulsory Sexuality* (Ohio State University Press 2019).

Przybylo worked with the class to gather reviews of the works of ace/aros authors and creators or on ace and aro content. Those reviews make up the issue and also provide a sampling of books, journals, short stories, and internet artifacts.

The issue not only serves as a resource for those interested in ace and aro authors and content, but also serves as a teaching tool for the students in Przybylo's class. "I see publishing as a



pedagogical tool," she said. "It teaches the process while also allowing students to explore aspects of feminism, intersectionality, and what it means to actually put something together as a group." [Read the issue here.](#)

### Women's History Club Hosts President Kinzy and Guest Speakers

By Dr. Kyle Ciani



ISU Women's History Club hosted University President Kinzy at its November meeting for a Q & A with over 60 of its members. The other guest speakers for the monthly meetings included Assistant Professor of Art History

and Affiliated Faculty for WGSS Saskia Berenak (Sept); Interim Director of Honors and Professor of History and Affiliated Faculty for WGSS Linda Clemmons, Theatre historian Dr. Shannon Epplett, enrolled member of the Sault St. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, and president of ISU's TRIBE, Nitakechi Muckintubbee, Choctaw (Oct); Professor of Music Martha Horst (March), and University Archivist April Anderson-Zorn (April). Thanks to all these experts in women's history for sharing their knowledge with club members this year.

### WGSS Program Hires New Tenure-Track Faculty

This year the Department of Psychology collaborated with WGSS on our third joint interdisciplinary tenure track hire. Dr. Caitlin Mercier comes to us from Louisiana Tech University and is the program's third joint tenure track hire. She has taught classes on Cultural Diversity and Social Justice and General



Psychology. Her primary research interests concern the experiences of Black Americans/women in the context of anti-Black racism. Recently, she completed a mixed-method investigation of the impact of anti-Black racism on the mental health of the Black community during the COVID-19 pandemic, which will be published in *The Counseling Psychologist*. Her research also engages experiences of U.S.-based veg\*ns and stigmatized identities. Her dissertation project was a mixed-method investigation, exploring the experiences of veg\*ns within the context of stigma and the association between anti-veg\*n and multicultural attitudes. Please join me in welcoming Dr. Caitlin Mercier to the WGSS faculty.

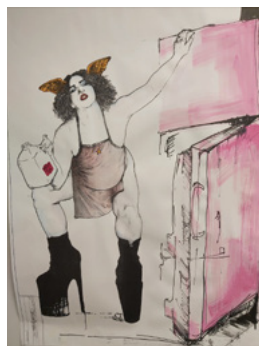
### Student Art Shows Return to the Rachel Cooper Gallery

We have art back up on our walls! This year the WGSS Program hosted two student art exhibits. Japheth Asiedu-Kwarteng's *Behind the Screen* in the fall and a mixed media group show in the spring. Asiedu-Kwarteng is an MFA student working primarily in ceramics and mixed media. His works are largely inspired by traditional Ghanaian symbolism. His research and creative practices are inspired by Kente and its history in materiality. He expands its symbolism to explore the communicative potential of fabric and fibers to engage the experiences and complexities of African diaspora. He describes his creations as "as diary of a monumental visual language commemorating my memories, mixed feelings, and traumatic experiences ... they unearth who I am."

We hung the 131: *A Collaborative Art Exhibit* in the spring. Thanks to Peyton Fitzgerald, Sarah Eckstine, Cooper Gibson, Nicci Arnold, and Ian Cooper for their mixed media group show. It will be open until the end of the summer; so please stop by.



Japheth Asiedu-Kwarteng with his sculpture.



Ian Cooper's *Approve by Cracker Barrel 02*



Nicci Arnold's *Study in Pink and Purple*

### The Clothesline Project Returns

After a two-year hiatus [The Clothesline Project](#) returned to the ISU Quad. The WGSS Program in collaboration with McLean County YWCA Stepping Stones, the Student Wellness Ambassadors Team (SWAT), Students Ending Rape Culture (SERC), and Health Promotion and Wellness were pleased to introduce the project to a new generation of students in April. It's our greatest hope that display will continue not only to make visible and educate the broader community about the impact of sexual violence but also help survivors to connect with a healing community. Survivors and advocates were invited to decorate and hang up shirts on clotheslines displayed on the Quad, with each color T-shirt representing a different type of violence. Ella Sharp a first-year marketing major had this to say after seeing the display for the first time: "The number of shirts helped put the problem into perspective. I always hear one-off accounts, but you never see the full gravity of the situation until it's really in your face like this. That's why I feel it is so powerful that we're putting it on the Quad where everyone can see it and can't ignore it like they might have in the past."



Ann Grider, an ISU junior, reflects on the shirts hung on the Quad for Sexual Assault Awareness Month.

### WGSS Student Highlights

By Courtney Ebersole

This year we started the "WGSS Student of the Week" social media campaign to grow our WGSS community and celebrate our students. We asked our minor and graduate certificate students several questions about their experiences in the WGSS Program and received wonderful responses.

To highlight a few, sociology master's student Maria Ross told us that her favorite thing about the WGSS Program is "the sense of community created in every class. Hearing about my classmates' experiences helps me to form connections with the readings and my classmates. Each class feels like a support group when we discuss difficult topics." Kelsey Banks, a social work major, shared that her WGSS courses have been fundamental to her college experience, noting that "many of the WGSS courses I have taken consisted of writing personal essays. It was therapeutic at times to incorporate past struggles into my academic work. Having the opportunity to relate my experiences to topics being taught shaped me more as a student and a young woman navigating college." Courtney Ebersole, a sociology master's student and our WGSS graduate assistant, explained that taking WGSS courses has "strengthened my dedication to producing feminist research and has deepened my understanding of feminist theory, methodology, and praxis." Otis Schulz, a sociology major and the recipient of the Rhonda Nicol Book Award, provided advice for new WGSS students: "Take every opportunity you have. Even if that feels scary, there is a huge group of people who are there to cheer you on. Take chances, they'll pay off in the future."

## Queering Gender: The 25th Annual WGSS Symposium

By Courtney Ebersole

This year we celebrated [the 25th anniversary of the annual WGSS Student Research Symposium](#). In addition to our talented student presenters, the symposium committee invited a record number of keynote speakers to discuss topics related to the Queering Gender conference theme. Dr. Arlene Stein presented "Fear of a Gender-Fluid Planet? Understanding the New Culture Wars," which spoke to the recent cultural movements and conflicts generated by the increased visibility of public discussions around gender fluidity and queer identities. Dr. Veronica Ivy presented "[Sport is a Human Right, Even for Trans People: The Science, Ethics, and Law of Fairness in Competition](#)," which spoke to her own experiences as a transwoman Olympic cyclist and the right of transgender people to compete in professional sports. Her presentation was the most comprehensive account of the obstacles faced by transathletes I've heard. It offered readers a deeply informed explanation of both the biological and moral questions generated by transathletes' desire to compete. Dr. Karma Chávez delivered "[The Borders of AIDS: Race, Quarantine, and Resistance](#)," which addressed issues of race and resistance in the context of viral illness. Maia Kabobe presented "Writing

and Drawing Gender" and spoke on eir's\* experiences as a nonbinary, queer author, and illustrator.

We also started a new tradition this year: The WGSS Alumni Panel! Our panelists this year not only shared their accomplishments with the student audience but also answered questions about how they are putting their WGSS education to use in their current positions. That said, we would like to thank the alumni who served on the panel: Dr. Erin Frost of East Carolina University, Val Laymon of Panera Bread, Meaghan Lynch M.S. of Nevada State College, Dr. Andrew Anastasia of Harper College, and Dr. Ana Roncero-Bellido of Lewis University.

\*Maia Kobabe uses *elemleir* pronouns, known as *Spivot* pronouns.

## Milner Library Exhibit Showcases 25 Years of WGSS Student Research

By Rebecca Fitzsimmons



Sustaining over two decades of annual symposia is no small accomplishment. [25th & Change](#) commemorates 25 years of the annual [Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies \(WGSS\)](#)

[Student Research Symposium](#) at Illinois State University through a series of dynamic artifacts and remembrances. Composed of symposium programs, advertisements, posters, photographs, and an assortment of ephemera, the exhibit makes material the evolution of the symposium from its beginnings as a small, program-wide symposium to the large event that it is today.

The exhibit offers a chance to see many changes documented over the years, from the presence of older technology such as slide carousels and overhead projectors to the changing design aesthetics of the promotional posters. Many of these posters were created by graphic design students in the Design Streak Studio, so the materials on view capture student involvement beyond research panels and performances.

The objects on display, including documentation of student projects from various years, also trace the history of research, activism, and creative production at Illinois State.

"The Annual WGSS Symposium represents a cross section of women's history, performance, scholarship, and activism over

the past 25 years, not just in the U.S., but at Illinois State University,” said Jenna Goldsmith, assistant director of the WGSS program. “Having participated in the symposium as an undergraduate and graduate student presenter, volunteer, and now an administrator, I’ve seen the symposium from 365 degrees and am so proud of how it’s grown and evolved over the years. The 25th anniversary of the College of Arts and Sciences signature spring program is something for the entire Illinois State University community to celebrate.”

### Milner Library Exhibit Showcases 25 Years of WGSS Student Research

The **Luellen Laurenti Scholarship** was awarded to rising senior Caitlin Bradford, a political science major and WGSS minor. Bradford interned for WGSS in collaboration with Milner Library this semester, focusing specifically on program development and alumni relations. She hopes to attend graduate school after her undergraduate degree, eventually working as an advocate for voting rights.

The **Dorothy E. Lee Scholarship** was awarded to Jessica Whisenand, a senior history-social sciences education major. She returned to school after a two-year gap as a stay-at-home mother. As a half-Filipino woman, she dealt with feelings of not being “white enough” or “Filipino enough” to fit into either world. She has worked hard to embrace her cultural identity and now feels fortunate to have such a rich background.

The **Anne M. Semlak Memorial Scholarship** was awarded to our undergraduate assistant, Kate Fortner, a junior creative writing major, a classical studies minor, and a WGSS minor. Fortner will be using the scholarship funds to support herself during a study abroad program this summer in Italy.



Dr. William Semlak, Joan Moore and winner Kate Fortner

The **Dr. Rhonda Nicol Book Awards** were presented to graduate student Ulysses Constance Bougie (ENG) and undergraduate student Otis Schulz (SOC) for their wonderful presentations in the WGSS Symposium. Bougie presented “Ace Sex Positions: Representing A/Sexual Dis/Interest Through Visual Art,” and Schulz presented “Decolonializing Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies.”

### WGSS Faculty Highlights

Despite the stress of the pandemic our WGSS faculty continued to thrive this year. **Dr. Alison Bailey (WGSS/PHI)** published [The Weight of Whiteness: A Feminist Engagement with Privilege, Race, and Ignorance](#) (2021) as part of Lexington Books Philosophy of Race Series. **Dr. Dawn Beichner (CJS)** was elected to the position of vice chair, Division of International Criminology, American Society of Criminology and was named Spring 2022 Campus Hero for her work as a research consultant for the YWCA Labyrinth Outreach Services to Women. **Dr. Kyle Ciani’s (HIS)** book, [Choosing to Care: A Century of Childcare and Social Reform in San Diego, 1850-1950](#) (2019), was selected by the Society of the History of Children and Youth as part of its featured scholarship series for 2020-2021. **Dr. Melissa Johnson’s (ART)** piece, “Drawing finer and finer the thread between us” was displayed in the exhibition, *My Covid Year*, at Heartland Community College, McCauley Gallery. **Dr. Georgia Tsouvala (HIS)** was elected president of the Association of Ancient Historians to a three-year term (2020-2023). Additionally, she published a co-edited volume on women’s history titled [New Directions for the Study of Women in the GrecoRoman World](#). **Dr. Gavin Weiser (EAF)** was selected as a member of the 2021-2022 Campus Compact Engaged Scholar Initiative as well as NASPA’s Emerging Faculty Leadership Academy. Ze was elected to the inaugural board of the Queer Coalition at ISU and currently serves an inaugural faculty mentor to the Rainbow Floor at Watterson Towers, a living and learning community supportive of the LGBTQ+ community. **Dr. Jason Whitesel (SOC)** published “Interactive Nature of Fat Activism and Fat Studies Within and Outside Academia” in *Fat Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Body Weight & Society* and “Review of Scholarship on Fat Gay Men” for [The Routledge International Handbook of Fat Studies](#). **Dr. Jenna Goldsmith (WGSS)** published [THERE IS NO COLLEGE IN COVID: SELECTIONS FROM THE OSU CASCADES COVID-19 JOURNALING PROJECT](#) by Parafine Press. She also recently published a chapbook of poems in May of 2022 titled *TITLE.NINE*, by Press 254, the teaching press of Illinois State University.

## Alumni updates

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**Loretta Addo Danso ('21)** recalls how her WGSS graduate certificate broadened her skills in her new position as a current legal advocate for sexual assault survivors. She will be starting her Ph.D. in criminology at the University of Delaware.

**Brandice Thompkins ('17)** continues to work at a personal injury firm as a litigation paralegal. She has learned so much about cases from pre-trial to trial and now eagerly awaits her first real courtroom trial. She is moving to the firm's Austin location this summer and will take the LSAT this fall.

**Rachel Johnson ('21)** began working at The Center for Prevention of Abuse in Peoria right after graduation. She currently serves as a caseworker for the Adult Protective Services Department. She is grateful for her WGSS education and tells us that it prepared her to engage with her clients compassionately.

**Flourice Richardson ('15)** recently accepted an assistant professor position at Winston-Salem State University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. She will be assisting in the development of a technical writing program.



**Venice Lashon Keys ('16)** was accepted to the Wild Yams: Black Mothers Artist Residency for 2022. This innovative studio collaboration designed to support, uplift, and encourage sustainability and arts equity for Black mothers and caretakers on Chicago's South Side.

**Rachel Spangler ('05, '07)** was recently awarded a Bronze Medal by The Independent Publisher Awards for their 19th novel, *Thrust*. Their 20th sapphic romance, *Plain English*, was published in February by Bywater Books, and number 21, *Heartstrings*, will be out in July from Brisk Press. They feel tremendously blessed to get to spend every day telling stories about women and queer folks falling in love and living the happy endings we all deeply deserve.

**Jamie Donahue ('21)** with her master's in social work and a WGSS graduate certificate in hand, accepted a position at Children's Home Association of Illinois, a nonprofit organization in Peoria. She is currently a behavioral health therapist

in the Tri-County Behavioral Health program. She thinks about her time in WGSS often and uses what she's learned in her work stabilizing children and adolescents using direct individual and family therapy.

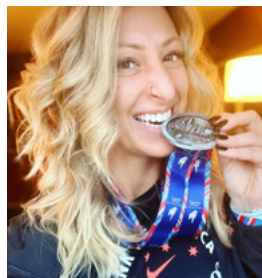


**Chloe Kasper ('18)** just accepted a position as business communications specialist at Ace Hardware in Oak Brook. She uses her WGSS minor studies to inform her experience in agency, nonprofit, and corporate communications. She is a member of the Association for Women in Communications (AWC) and recently won the AWC's Advancement Fund Grant to attend the 2022 AWC National Conference, "*Versatility: Elevating Your Voice in Changing Times*." She also leads the AWC Book Club.



**Paige Rogge ('19)** completed her MSW internship at Gateway Family Services of Illinois and was hired as a clinical therapist specializing in the treatment of women and youth with complex developmental trauma. Her therapy clients include a handful of inspiring LGBTQ+ teens who

continue to teach her about the beauty of our diverse humanity. She uses Trauma-Focused Equine Assisted Psychotherapy, as well as other neuroscience-based therapies, to help clients process and cope with traumatic stress. She credits the WGSS program graduate certificate for her unique insight into the struggles her clients face and her ability to make an impact in her corner of the world.



**Kelly Smith ('11)** has been a faculty director and college instructor for the past 10 years. She recently joined the Learning Engineers Group in the Division of Continuing Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison where she consults with content experts, instructors, and administration to

design engaging courses for students. She and her husband are busy raising their two kids. You can still find her training for races and outside of the stadium during tailgate season.



**Jena Self Garrett ('21)** took a huge leap of faith after completing her WGSS Certificate. She opened her own business in downtown Bloomington The Energy Hut (200 W. Monroe St., suite 104 inside Fox & Hounds salon building) serving herbal tea and protein shakes. She said she

uses her feminist toolkit to continue navigating life, relationships, and interactions with individuals each day.



**Misia Grzybowski ('18)** after graduating with her WGSS Certificate and a master's in psychology and college student personnel, she took a job as senior specialist for Peer Education and Advocacy in the Health Promotion and Wellness Office. She advises and supports two incredible student groups: Students Ending Rape Culture (SERC) and the Student Wellness Ambassador Team (SWAT). "I so often find myself returning to the books, theories, and lessons we learned in our WGSS classes and weave them in throughout the educational opportunities I help create for my students," she said.

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## Got news?

Send us an email and let us know what you're up to. In town? Stop by and see what we're up to!



[wgstudies@IllinoisState.edu](mailto:wgstudies@IllinoisState.edu)



For more information, visit [Homecoming.IllinoisState.edu](http://Homecoming.IllinoisState.edu)



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