

❖ *A Department in the College of Humanities and Fine Arts*

MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIR

A quick note about this newsletter

In these difficult times, we wrote this newsletter to sustain our wonderful WGSS community. However, due to budgetary concerns, it is in B&W. Thanks for your understanding!

Zooming for all of life

Was I online too much? I always worried. And then the pandemic hit! Now, there is no luxury to be worried about it – this is work, this is play, this is life! Late on a Friday afternoon before spring break, UMass announced that we would move to a model of remote education. Overnight, everything was virtual – classes, office hours, student meetings, department meetings, committee meetings, seminars, conferences, book groups. Then, modes of work life seeped into the rest of our lives - chat hours with family and friends. We now have a new vocabulary that tries to capture our tired eyes, spent brains, and exhausted bodies in our new digital lives. And we do this because life and living are the key – we embrace this new mode of life so that we and others may be safe.

As fall 2020 approaches, we are gearing up for another semester of remote education. But this time, we have time to plan, to be thoughtful, deliberative, innovative, and creative. For most of us, this is where our summer has gone to – in rethinking and revamping our courses to give our students an engaged and rigorous education. As many of us discovered this spring, while we deeply miss face-to-face contact, online education offers new and exciting possibilities for the classroom. We are working to incorporate this radical potential into our courses. We look forward to seeing our students and engaging them. After all, these days nothing is certain, and the world each day is literally theory-in-the-making. Each day we discover something new about the biology, epidemiology, and cultural politics of COVID-19. Each of us brings a different set of experiences to the classroom, and with them different theories. In spring 2020, Angie Willey, Sandra Russell and I were team teaching a class on *The Biology of Difference*. Post-spring break we developed a COVID-19 syllabus. Each week we discussed the pandemic as it unfolded. Some of the students in the class were working as EMTs, as healthcare workers on COVID floors, as caregivers to high-risk family and friends, and as high-risk individuals themselves. Students reported back from various parts of the country, and the world. As the class unfolded, I realized that these were model WGSS classes, where everyone brought their individual perspectives to the work we were doing. But as a class, we put the information together to develop a deeper understanding of the complexities of the global pandemic.

“We now have a new vocabulary that tries to capture our tired eyes, spent brains, and exhausted bodies in our new digital lives”

The History of Plagues and the Future

As we battle COVID-19, I have been reading a lot about the histories of plagues and pandemics. And one thing seems clear. At each moment, some hoped that the horror, deprivation and destruction around them would awaken the generous human spirit and bring the whole planet together. Alas no! What such moments actually did was to heighten the inequities already present. What was before always shapes the after. Indeed, we see this playing out before our eyes. In order to survive a pandemic, we have stay-at-home orders. But who gets to stay home and who must leave? We clap for our essential workers, but refuse them hazard pay for work that endangers their lives each day. Across the globe it is the poor, disenfranchised and minority populations that have borne the brunt of the pandemic. And closer to home, we weather COVID-19 through distance education, but

how do we ensure that this does not become the new normal, the new good enough, cheap enough? How do we ensure that remote teaching does not become simply a new mode of faculty de-skilling, and a new instrument of online surveillance that, together, ultimately reduces a robust education into the mastery of digital widgets?

Now more than ever, the importance of WGSS is clear. We need to craft a new future that draws on our interdisciplinary depth and breadth. The virus is not evil, Chinese or foreign – it is a single strand of RNA. The virus is successful only because of the world some humans have created - increased colonization of the wild that opens new pathways for viruses into human worlds; globalization hubs that transmit goods and people everywhere; and an impoverished health system that renders the virus lethal. Our focus can't be on the virus. Rather, it must be on the oppressive systems that have and will forever enable pandemics of all kinds. This is the WGSS education that helps us understand our contemporary moment. Our ability to rise to the occasion is possible only because of the support and hard work of so many talented faculty, staff and students over our 46-year history.

WGSS Successful Department Evaluation and some goodbyes

This year has been an eventful one. WGSS completed its external evaluation, and the review is glowing – the external reviewers concluded that *we are one of the best WGSS departments in the country*. Our proposal to establish a new Ph.D. program in WGSS was approved by the faculty senate, and now moves to the legislature. We have achieved all this because the community of faculty, staff and students across campus is deep and wide. Our talented and inspired faculty and graduate students who continue to publish award winning work, also bring analytic rigor into our courses and our WGSS programming. WGSS is also blessed to have in Karen Lederer and Linda Hillenbrand two dedicated, engaged and experienced staff who have helped the department weather this difficult transition to a virtual workplace. We are ever so grateful for our alums, who support the department through generous contributions, stay in touch with us and provide engaged and exciting role models for our students. WGSS is a robust field today, with a deep past and an exciting future.

This past spring, Professor Laura Ciolkowski hosted a series of conversations around Issues in Feminist Research. Each week, three or four feminist faculty from all across campus were invited to come together to talk with each other about their research and the broader feminist methodological issues that they address in their work. It was striking that no two of the thirty-odd faculty were alike in their approaches! We are so grateful to the amazing and dedicated affiliate faculty and staff who participate in our seminars, serve on our committees, and contribute so much to the life of our department. We are so appreciative of how much the WGSS community does for our campus and beyond.

In other news, after years of dedicated service, our beloved colleague Alex Deschamps will be retiring this year. One collateral damage of the pandemic was the need to postpone our celebration of Alex's incredible contributions to WGSS and the university. Alex has over her years here left an indelible legacy – her inspired teaching has shaped generations of students who now teach across the globe, her powerful intellect and generosity of spirit have shaped the department, a legacy we are all indebted to, and deeply grateful for. We hope you will join us in celebrating her this coming year. Also, our dearest colleague Fumi Okiji has accepted a position at the University of California, Berkeley. We wish her the very best, even as we are all feeling so sorry to lose her. In two short years, Fumi has become a beloved colleague and friend to so many of us and we will miss her deeply.

Finally, we would like to send Dean Julie Hayes our very best wishes and our gratitude for her work over these many years. Dean Hayes has been a big supporter of WGSS and, after a well-deserved sabbatical, will rejoin the faculty in the Department of Languages, Literature and Culture. We look forward to working with our new Dean, Barbara Krauthamer, Professor of History. Barbara is an eminent historian of slavery and emancipation in the 19th century American South, a devoted mentor, and an innovative leader. We are fortunate to have these distinguished scholars and leaders at UMass.

WGSS Solidarity

These are unprecedented times – and our newsfeeds herald both apocalyptic visions and hopes for new beginnings. Recent events exposed the deep roots of police brutality and anti-black racism in this country. The ensuing marches and protests blossomed into some of the most hopeful signs of feminist activism and community in recent times. Please see the WGSS solidarity statement on our website for a deeper analysis of this consequential moment in our history. Too much about the future remains unclear. Each day, new discoveries about the virus transform what is possible and what is not. Each day, new revelations document the deep inequities that shape our lives. Living in what surely feels like a failed state, we are forced to make sense of the world around us; we have been transformed into agents and advocates for ourselves and our communities. The devastation of the world has laid bare the failure of the regimes that brought us here. The future may seem uncertain – but these are moments when WGSS communities mean everything. Sustaining connections, sharing information and wisdom, thinking and acting together are key. The world would not be what it is without feminist resistance and feminist activism.

We invite you to join us as we continue to build community in order to face this moment together. During the spring, we began a WGSS Check-in Hour, where we invited students, faculty, staff, and alums to join us in community and conversation. So many of you zoomed in, and it was thrilling to initiate a cross-national, cross-generational, and global feminist dialogue. We are continuing this practice this fall and I hope you will join us. If you are not on our listserv, please let us know. Together, we hope to make the most of this moment and to transform the disembodied forms of digital interaction into novel modes of community and world making.

Banu Subramaniam

Thank you to our donors!

Now more than ever we appreciate our donors! We couldn't give our graduates breakfast this year, but we could still give them bread and roses symbolically and that is due in large part to your generosity. We mailed special red-for-grads-only WGSS t-shirts to our graduates and included a button with yellow roses! Thank you! Donations can be made directly off our website by simply clicking the **give** button.



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NEWS

Farewell Fumi Okiji

We will miss **Fumi Okiji** who has accepted a position at the University of California Berkeley. Fumi has been a wonderful colleague and a gifted teacher and we wish her all the best.

Events for 2020-2021

We were all looking forward to our gathering in celebration of the career of WGSS professor and Commonwealth Honors College Associate Dean **Alexandrina Deschamps** in the Spring of 2020—but then all events had to be cancelled. We are still working out the details about when and how to celebrate Alex Deschamps' wonderful career. Stay tuned for details.

Our weekly “WGSS Check-in Hour,” launched last spring, and will continue this year. Please join with other students, faculty, staff, and alums every Friday at noon during the semester as we continue to build community and prompt cross-national, cross-generational, and global feminist dialogue.

If you aren't on our listservs and want to be sent the invitation, email Linda Hillenbrand lindah@umass.edu, and tell her how you are related to WGSS (faculty, staff, alum, current student, friend) and anything else relevant to our department, and Linda will add you to the appropriate list.

Stay tuned for a career event (on zoom of course) in the fall. This event will be for current students, alums, and anyone else who wants to join us!

New Undergraduate Requirements starting Fall 2020

UMass-Amherst WGSS is one of the oldest WGSS departments in the United States. One of the many advantages of being such a well established department is that over the decades we have been able to continue to refine our curriculum and reinvent our undergraduate program as the field changes. This past year we made new and important updates to our requirements:

WGSS Major

The WGSS major remains 36 credits and has 7 required classes. Because all of the courses in our department approach gender as a complex and racialized category, we have eliminated our “distribution requirements”.

The new major requirements are as follows:

- ◆ WGSS 201: Gender and Difference: Critical Analyses
- ◆ One WGSS 300-level course that fulfills the theory requirement
- ◆ WGSS 310: Writing for Majors
- ◆ WGSS 494TI: Unthinking the Transnational

Majors are also required to take a minimum of three additional WGSS department courses, 3 credits or more, at the 200 level or above. This last requirement replaces our “distribution requirements.”

Most of our majors take between 10-14 classes within the department, but this requirement ensures that students are well grounded in the field through coursework with our own faculty. In addition, we have expanded our theory course offerings. Majors are still required to complete an end of program report and they must, of course, meet all University requirements, including a minimum GPA 2.0 or higher in the major.

WGSS Minor

The 18-credit WGSS minor has changed in similar ways to the changes in the WGSS Major:
The new minor requirements are as follows:

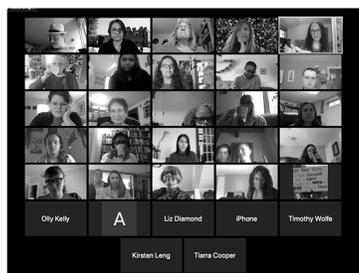
- ◆ WGSS 201: Gender and Difference: Critical Analyses
- ◆ One (minimum) additional 200-level class in the department

Many of our minors take most of their 18 credits within the department.

WGSS majors and WGSS minors may also take their major or minor courses outside the department. We list them in our courseguide every semester.

We have also streamlined the process for officially declaring a WGSS major and minor. Applications are no longer required; students may simply request to enroll in the major or minor and will be assigned a faculty advisor. Majors still have the option to design an individual course of study. WGSS majors who select this individualized option are required to outline their course of study and obtain approval from a faculty member.

These requirements take effect for new majors or minors, beginning in Fall 2020. Please reach out to Undergraduate Advisor Karen Lederer with any additional questions. We are excited to immediately welcome students who wish to join us!



Celebrating Grads!

Despite everything, we celebrated our grads, albeit on zoom, with moving video contributions from students, faculty, alums and staff, and terrific technical assistance from Kevin Henderson. Linda was able to mail out t-shirts and yellow rose pins, so we could “hand” our grads a tangible token of our congratulations. We loved seeing everyone, and noticed that some folks had friends/partners/ family with them in their little zoom squares!



The videos from our alums, many of whom had graduated decades earlier but returned to join us in celebrating our grads, were particularly moving. They sent their love and reflected on how they continue to use in their current work many of the insights and critical tools they acquired in WGSS. Our alums, now in careers ranging from medical care to graphic arts, encouraged our students to persevere, despite the challenges of this moment.

As always, we are awed by the impressive accomplishments of our students and look forward to hearing from them about the road ahead. Congratulations to all our WGSS majors, minors and grad certificate students who completed this year.

Continuing Community and a Message from Gloria Steinem

Banu initiated zoom drop-ins several times a week for the remainder of the spring semester after the campus went virtual. These were lovely “gatherings” with a rotating group of students, faculty and staff. Sometimes we discussed the big issues related to covid-19, sometimes we discussed details of academic life post-zoom. Banu later extended the invitation to our graduates and it was heartening to see them again and hear what they were doing now and what they had to say.

One of our graduates (!) reached out to Gloria Steinem who also had some things to share with our grads:

The UMass Women's Studies (now women's, gender, and sexuality studies) program was one of the first - established in 1974. Do you have any recollection of activism for women's studies from this time? Any memories of the UMass student newspaper occupation (feminist students took over The Collegian for 2 weeks in Spring 1978 to demand more coverage of feminist issues.)

I don't have physical memories of the occupation because I was supporting it from afar, but I do remember joining Robin Morgan in offering encouragement. She had led the successful occupation of a leftwing, male dominated newspaper in the '60s, and written, "Goodbye to All That" -- a joyful anthem of feminist liberation to this day, a classic. In 1970, I had left New York Magazine, but in a way less dramatic way, since I was one of its founders, and it helped us to start Ms. Magazine. Freedom of the press belongs to those who own the press, so it's crucial that those people look like the country, not just one group.

What do you see as some of the contributions of gender studies to feminist progress?

What were called Black Studies and Women's Studies might also be called Remedial Studies. They are necessary for all students in order to make up for the very incomplete versions of the past we've been subject to. Even now, we almost never begin the history of North America with its early and very advanced civilizations. No, we begin when Columbus and Europeans showed up. We also don't learn enough about pre-colonial Africa and Asia, even though they were more advanced in many ways than Europe. It's also great to have Gender Studies -- because gender, like race, is a cultural invention -- but even they rarely begin before patriarchy and the invention of gender as we know it. Also Religious Studies aren't always Spirituality Studies. So altogether, we need a lot of Remedial Studies!

Do you have a message for feminist graduates who are entering adult life during a time of such uncertainty and political distress?

This time of virus and danger is also teaching us: The virus knows that we are all human beings, and race, gender, class and other labels are cultural inventions, as are national boundaries. We are all passengers on Space Ship Earth. This is a great time to take that understanding forward in a positive way!

Awards and recognitions! Our Graduate Students Win Awards!

Congratulations to **Nicole Le Roux** a Ph.D. candidate and certificate student who won the *Ann Ferguson Women and Gender Studies Scholarship from the Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts*. Ann Ferguson is a tireless scholar, inspirational activist, and a retired faculty member and former department chair. **Sandra Russell** won the *Joyce Berkman award* for her essay "Toward a Ukrainian Feminist Poetics: The Last Soviet Poetry of Iryna Zhylenko, Natalka Bilotser." The prize for Outstanding Graduate Feminist Scholarship is awarded annually in honor of Joyce A. Berkman, feminist teacher, activist, History Department faculty for 48 years, and a proud co-founder of the UMass Department of Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies. **Siobhan Mei's** dissertation project was awarded a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship in Women's Studies.

Book Award

Each year WGSS recognizes a local high school junior for their activism or scholarship around WGSS issues. The 2020 winner of the University of Massachusetts Amherst Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies Book Award is **Maya Sessions**. Congratulations and good luck to Maya!

REMOTE REFLECTIONS by Karen Lederer

With faculty contributions from Cameron Awkward-Rich, Kiran Asher, Laura Ciolkowski, Kirsten Leng, Laura Briggs (Briggs), Angie Willey)

One of the things most of us realized fairly quickly was how much we all missed one another! Yes, we met in appointments and hosted events and held classes and chaired meetings on zoom, but those discussions in the hallway in South College, the political insights in the office, the noticing of shoes and haircuts, plus updates on pets and families were mostly missing. I asked the faculty to reflect on the shift to remote work, mid-spring semester, and then took editorial license to pretend we had this conversation in person, overlooking the hills in Hadley, from our beautiful conference room in South College.

1. What was challenging about the sudden move to remote teaching/learning? What did you miss about face to face interactions with students?

Briggs: I missed everything! The worst part was that our interaction became dramatically more one-way. In a class of 170 people, I stopped hearing from them, except in scripted ways—they answered discussion prompts and wrote papers, but I didn't spontaneously hear what they were thinking about as we worked through this incredibly provocative material on race, immigration, and sexuality. It was a huge loss, and I learned a lot less from them in the second half of the semester than the first.

Kirsten: What was missed was, of course, the spontaneity of the classroom experience. So much of learning and teaching I find to be improvisational, so to not have that same energy or responsiveness was difficult. But again, I'm impressed how well everyone did with the hand we were dealt.

Cam: Especially in my undergraduate classes, I work hard to create classrooms, assignment structures, reading lists, etc. that allow for personal/emotional growth, in addition to the intellectual work of the class. I was worried about how that would work when we couldn't physically share space, when the kinds of assignments I could imagine were much more limited, and when everyone (me included!) was generally much more anxious, scattered, thrown. I think that things went okay, in the end, but the real challenge was trying to recalibrate what I could expect from my students and from myself.

Kirsten: The real challenge was trying to teach with a toddler running around. And I know for both my students and myself, focus and stamina were both issues. We spent a lot of time collectively processing what was going on. That said, I was incredibly impressed that students stuck with the work and were able to discuss our readings seriously via Zoom — including some very difficult subject matter and esoteric texts.

Briggs: I was happy and relieved when I saw on course evaluations that they still felt like they had learned a lot and thought the way our teaching team shifted to online learning was smart, effective, and humane, but I am still full of grief that our big, buzzy, dynamic, and exciting classroom was reduced to a quiet, uneventful hum of online submissions. I am looking forward to fall, when I hope with more planning (and some more experience under my belt) I can create a much more lively, emotionally and intellectually rich online space.

2. Were there unexpected gains from remote everything—teaching, learning, meetings, events? Or what was surprising?

Several people commented about how exhausting it is to Zoom.

Kirsten: I feel for students who had to Zoom all day long.

Kiran: As a teacher, I loved the flexibility of not having to focus on grades but on actual learning and discussion. The online platform was not ideal but being able to engage my students every week was very grounding.

Kirsten: I was surprised by how emotionally vulnerable students allowed themselves to be in this medium, and how their classmates rallied around them in supportive ways week after week. We had some of our most intimate and prolonged discussions over Zoom.

Cam: I was genuinely surprised how many of my students continued to take our reading and class discussions very seriously – I think I underestimated the extent to which the classroom (even the virtual one) can serve as a sort of temporary shelter from chaos. Either that or I underestimated how many of my students genuinely enjoyed the work we were doing together. The extent to which they were willing and able to show up was very reassuring for me!

Karen: I was really surprised, and pleased, that all my students showed up to the first class on zoom after spring break. I had surveyed them about whether they wanted to meet at the same class time, posted a video, written them emails and heard nothing. How reassuring and nice it was to all see each other again! We agreed to meet the rest of the semester at class time, and it was a pleasure all around.

Angie: Shifting to remote learning has made me acutely aware of all the subtle nonverbal communications that contribute to the intimacy of the classroom. At first, I felt that loss profoundly. Over the last weeks of the semester I started to notice my own and everyone else's comfort with the new platforms growing, so I'm feeling more optimistic about what's possible in the remote classroom.

Cam: Being online forced us all to experiment with assignments, readings, course structure, and technology; some of the lessons I learned through that experimentation will certainly come in handy in the future. I have become much better at using video editing software, for example.

Kirsten: Preparing a guest lecture for a colleague did get me to think about lecturing in a whole new way, and how to organize and present material. I hope to parlay some of this learning into online teaching.

Briggs: As the semester was drawing to a close, my students started sending me little digital gifts. Have you seen this Jay-Z music video? Here's a great Facebook live event with Angela Davis. Apples for teacher. At first, I was surprised and a little puzzled. Then I realized that this had become our medium of interaction. I was leaving them YouTube videos, webinars, and the like on our class website, and they were returning the favor. It was really touching.

3. As was true of so many people during this time, you were working/teaching and parenting at the same time. How did you manage that?

Angie: I had two amazing teenagers--Kris and Cloe--move in with me in late March, so becoming a full-time custodial single parent has kept me pretty busy. We've been dividing our time between various to-do's (academic, etc.), making our backyard fabulous, and doing political work (protesting and studying white supremacy, antiracism, and histories of policing). Pandemic highlights here include adding a new pup named Chester to our pack. I have learned to use my oven and Instagram and seriously upped my composting game.

Briggs: I was working double shifts between the university teaching and homeschooling my remaining kid at home, so there wasn't really time for distractions. For the last five years, since my little dude was a kindergartner, I have been tremendously impressed with his affinity for math, but lamented his lack of interest in reading and writing. When he proposed a big research paper on the history of plagues and pandemics, I thought that was a great way to make sense of our current predicament. At first, it was like pulling teeth to get him to write. As the weeks went on, though, he found a fine writerly voice and I began to enjoy our work together on it. By June, he had also started work on creative nonfiction and poetry through a Zoom class with a local writer who got brilliant results with youngsters just by treating them like real writers--she kept their rapt attention through two hours of writing and reading their work out loud! At the same time, we gradually increased his reading time from 20 minutes a day to 90 minutes.

Briggs continued: I wouldn't have chosen home schooling, ever, but somewhere along the way, I got to share my passion for writing history with our little guy, and our mathematician has turned into a marvelous young writer and a serious reader. It was a gift to share this time with him, just as he was hitting the age when his friends were becoming deeply important to him... I feel like I got to turn back the clock on his growing independence from us, and teach him something important along the way. (Now, he needs to get on with his growing up and turn away from us again! Unfortunately, it's not clear that's what the next year will bring.)

Kirsten: Having to attend to a little one--as well as a gaggle of pets of all ages and life stages--has certainly proved centering, and forced me to be present in attending to their needs. I've learned that Dr. Seuss books still hold up for little ones in 2020.

Karen: And for many of us with family and friends far away, the worry was extremely distracting, but you couldn't actually do anything!

4. What new hobby/old interest/indulgence/distraction did you engage in to cope with the sudden shift and the overwhelming reality of the pandemic? (You will see the answers reflect many areas of life which for all of us shifted so suddenly!)

Cam: Well, in the early days I just threw myself into figuring out how to teach, because holding together my classes and independent studies seemed urgent and, most importantly, something I could feasibly do. But now I've just returned to all of my old mechanisms for living: running, re-reading novels, learning to cook new food, writing creatively, letting myself sit still.

Kirsten: I still turn to late night comedians and comedy podcasts as reality buffers. Thanks to the wonderful work of an MFA student on whose thesis I was honored to serve as external member, I've been working my way through Mindy Kaling's *oeuvre* in the evenings. And, perhaps in a nod to my homeland sealed behind a closed border, I'm reading a history of the (perhaps now problematic yet somehow still to me, especially from a gender perspective, fascinating) sketch group *The Kids in the Hall*.

Karen: I did all the quarantine things: sewed, did puzzles, pickled onions, baked bread, grew scallions from the discarded root ends, filed and sorted etc. to try to deal with the grief and worry. It is possible to find and then use a good recipe for gluten free bread made with the steel cut oats that were bought by mistake!

Kiran: Stress sewing masks! After a week of intensive and obsessive research into mask design and materials, I started making masks. Given that classes were still in session, my rate of production was not high. So I mainly made masks for family, friends, neighbors and colleagues many of whom are doctors and other kinds of essential workers, or are ill. In May, I "graduated" from using pretty fabric to silly fabric (think animal prints, donuts, vintage cars, jazz instruments...). Thanks to a friend whose stress relief entailed refurbishing vintage sewing machines, I got to play around with a few that were lying around in my garage!

Kiran also asked her students for their impressions and a few jumped out:

"The most important thing is the de-emphasis on grades, especially after the switch to remote learning. This takes the stress out of my learnings, allow me to learn to learn. ... usually lost in other courses where we have to rush through assignments and worry about final grades."

"The course was reflexive to where we were at with our questions, understanding and after the pandemic hit also with our personal lives. This is a rare approach that was invaluable."

One student after writing for some time about all they had learned and gained concluded: "I only wish that we had had a chance to carry on in person."

Laura Ciolkowski, in true feminist style, posed a different set of questions. Here are her thoughts:

In her essay "The Pandemic as Portal," Arundhati Roy writes: *"Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it."*

As a substitute of sorts to Karen's questions about how we are living and managing this changed life in a pandemic, I would like to pose a few questions of my own, prompted by Roy's portal and inspired by a creative assignment that the brilliant Farah Griffin crafted for her undergraduates this past spring:

As we pass through this portal, think about what you might take to the other side, and what you want to leave behind?

What one book from class would you want to take with you?

I taught two courses in the spring, so I will take with me one book from each course: WGSS 393J/Critical Prison Studies: Danielle Sered *Until We Reckon: Violence, Mass Incarceration, and a Road to Repair*, a book that helps me to understand the importance of embracing justice as consequence rather than retribution or punishment.

WGSS 691B/Issues in Feminist Research: Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval*, an eloquent and creative archival meditation on interior life and insurgent desire, that helps me to think differently about fugitive bodies, knowledges, and pleasures.

What do you appreciate that you would like to take with you?

Along with my family (including my dog Max) and my friends, I appreciate my students – every one of them, across the many years, institutions, and shared spaces in which I have had the good fortune to think together with such generous and wise and inspiring people.

What, if anything, from your old life do you want to leave behind?

I would like to leave behind the discomfort I feel with leaving things unfinished. There is power in the unfinished and room to grow in things that are open and incomplete. In my life on the “other side of the portal,” I would like to be able to embrace that!

What change, if any, would you like to see, and commit to bring about, on the other side?

I would like to see us learn to face the suffering of others without indifference – a tall order in a universe in which there is such an enormous amount of suffering, but I hope that this will enable us to imagine and build a better world on “the other side.”

STAFF REFLECTIONS ON WORKING REMOTELY

Karen: I think at first in the mad scramble it was just “What do I need at home? How is everyone doing? Will my poor home computer stand up to all this?” which gradually changed to questions like: “Should I just bring my work computer home? Should I bring my plants home instead of going in to water them?” My biggest logistical challenge is the ergonomics. In the improvised space that is my home office, I don’t have my adjustable chair and desk, so making everything work is difficult. I’m also stuck in a part paper/part electronic world (what can I say, I’ve been at UMass for decades) so that has been challenging.

Linda: When I bought my laptop a few years back, I barely used it – who needs a computer when a tablet is so much fun? But then, we switched to working at home...and now this poor little Lenovo with only 1 USB port and a terrible keyboard is getting a workout. Our wonderful IT person helped me so I could access my work computer from home...wow! Eventually the movement from a 37” screen to a 10” screen was tiring to these old eyes. So, a monitor came home, then my scanner and work chair. Then a camera for the monitor, a bluetooth keyboard and mouse and a USB extension. Problems solved! Music while working is definitely louder and I’m singing a little more, so I guess that’s good. Communication only by email is frustrating and tricky, so I appreciate emails that make me laugh!

Karen: I miss my colleagues, especially the friendships, but in terms of work, I liked the ease of catching someone in the hall to ask a question instead of exchanging multiple emails. I think we all feel the strain of trying to relate to groups of people by staring at them in their tiny zoom boxes. On the other hand, given the public health requirements, advising lends itself to zoom—we can see each other smile, I can screen share and so on. I was trying to envision advising with masks and social distancing which would have put my students in the hall!

Linda: I miss everyone! Colleagues in WGSS, staff in S. College and around campus, and the students. I miss the face to face conversations, the laughs, the political conversations, the sharing of frustrations about UMass. I especially miss my student workers and all the other students that stopped in to say hello. Zooming can’t really replace face to face, but it’s better than not seeing anyone.

FACULTY NEWS

Our faculty members commented that it was odd to write typical news of publications and conferences during a pandemic. Nevertheless, they persisted and did (and do!) important research and outreach.

Kiran Asher

Reflecting on the arc of the academic year to write for the newsletters gave me a chance to pause during these intense times, and to appreciate what being part of being in a feminist department enables. In the Fall, I was particularly happy to have been able to attend the Annual meeting of the American Anthropology Association in Vancouver in November 2019 to read a paper “Learning to learn from below with Gayatri Spivak”. Thanks to a Fulbright, I spent the month of January in India where I gave a talk on environmental justice at my alma matter St Xavier’s College in Mumbai, did field work among pastoralists in Kutch (using my mother tongue!), and jumpstarted new research on gender, race and the environment. Among the highlights of the short, cold month of February were participation in a fantastic panel (Feminisms Unbound: Cyborg Manifestations) at MIT on the confluences between STS (Science and Technology Studies) and feminist studies of gender and sexuality, and a chance to give an invited talk “Lost in Application: Feminist Fears in Gender(ed) Discourses of Sustainable Development and the Environment” at the University of Colorado in Boulder.

I am also glad that some of my publications this year speak to the current conjuncture of struggles for more radical democratic politics. They include: “Rethinking decolonial and postcolonial knowledges beyond regions to imagine transnational solidarity” (co-authored with Priti Ramamurthy and published in *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*), and “The Brilliant, Monochromatic Red of *Climate Leviathan*,” (in *Rethinking Marxism*) and “O brothers lets go down, Oh sisters, where art thou?” (in *Progress in Human Geography*). The last two are critical reviews of Geoff Mann and Joel Wainwright’s 2018 book *Climate Leviathan: A Political Theory of Our Planetary Future* and argue that a critique of capitalism must necessarily engage feminist, anti-colonial, and other critical theories and philosophies of difference.

Cameron Awkward-Rich

As others have mentioned, it’s slightly strange to reflect on the work year, because everything shifted so abruptly in March. But, before then, I spent much of the year on airplanes: I presented work at the National Women’s Studies Association and Modern Languages Association annual conferences; gave talks at Salem College, the University of Mt. Union, and New College of Florida; and gave poetry readings at Brandeis University and Oberlin College. Because my second collection of poetry, *Dispatch*, was published this December, I was scheduled to do more travelling for shows, but I have instead been doing virtual readings from the comfort of my kitchen table with some regularity since March. But, despite not being able to do much promotion, *Dispatch* has received some nice attention; it was a finalist for both Lambda Literary and Believer Books awards, and was noted in *The New Yorker* back in April.

Additionally, two of my scholarly essays were published this year: [“‘She of the pants and no voice’: Jack Bee Garland’s Disability Drag” in *Transgender Studies Quarterly*](#) and [“‘t4t: Toward a Crip Ethics of Trans Literary Criticism” in the *Routledge Companion to Literature and Disability*](#). The most exciting thing, for me, is that I was awarded a fellowship from the American Council of Learned Societies to complete work on my first academic book next fall. The ACLS fellowship, combined with a UMass-sponsored research-intensive semester in the spring means that I won’t be around much next year. I’m looking forward to spending the year with my books, and to returning to teaching in fall 2021.

Laura Briggs

The big event this year was the publication of *Taking Children: A History of American Terror*. Academic books typically take a long time, but this one came together in nine months, which was a little overwhelming. It began as expert testimony for a case against the Trump administration’s policy of separating the children of parents

who were petitioning for asylum. A lawyer for the case asked if the government had ever separated children for political ends before, and I was like, of course they have. There were state governments who took Black children into foster care in the south during the civil rights era to intimidate communities that were demanding school desegregation. The “crack baby” crisis of the 80s and 90s was another iteration of the war on drugs and mass incarceration, except that it involved taking people’s kids. There were Indian Boarding schools and after that, the punishing of Native communities where Red Power groups were active. There was the effort to create an extreme gender imbalance in 19th century Chinese American immigrant communities so that babies would never be born. The US School of the Americas trained the Central American paramilitaries who took children. And every president since Reagan has held refugee children in immigration detention. So that became the outline of the book, now out.

Laura Ciolkowski

My impressions of this past year have been largely crowded out by the pandemic and the last few months of Zooming, marching, more zooming, protesting, caregiving, and writing and creating in the spaces in-between. That having been said, here is a summary of some of my recent “professional activities”: I’m honored to have received a Public Service Endowment Grant for my prison education project. Although it is unclear what this will look like in Covid-world, my project includes a pilot humanities course (“Imagining Justice”) to be taught in the Hampshire County Jail and enrolling an equal number of UMass students and students who are currently incarcerated in the jail. This past semester I also taught a humanities course in the Franklin County Jail, although that course was interrupted, mid-semester, by the public health crisis, and I am working on a grant to support “bridge to college” humanities programming in the jail.

I am also grateful to have received a Five College Reproductive Health, Rights and Justice curriculum development grant to support my work on a new course to be launched in 2021.

My article “Narrating Captivity, Imagining Justice: Gender, Monstrosity, and Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* in the Prison Classroom” is forthcoming in Sheila Smith McKoy and Patrick Elliot Alexander, eds., *Teaching Literature in Prisons* and my reviews of Kiera Vaclavik, *Fashioning Alice: The Career of Lewis Carroll’s Icon, 1860-1901* and Lauren Helen Marks, *Alice in Pornoland: Hardcore Encounters with the Victorian Gothic* are forthcoming in the journal *Victorian Studies*. In January, I will be delivering a paper titled ““What to do with the Dangerous Few?”: Abolition, Monstrosity and the Reimagination of Sexual Harm” at the Modern Language Association’s annual conference. This paper is part of a larger project I’m working on that addresses prison abolition through the lens of sexual violence. Finally, I am working on a book based on my 2016 “Rape Culture Syllabus,” to be published by Columbia University Press.

Miliann Kang

I’m finishing my book manuscript *Mother Other: Race and Reproductive Politics in Asian America* which is under contract with University of California press. I also published an article in gender work and organization on my Fulbright research, co-published with Hye Jun Park, professor at Seoul National University and one of our certificate grad students Juyeon Park. The title is “Teachers as good mothers, mothers as good teachers: Functional and ideological work–family alignment in the South Korean teaching profession” and is available here: onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/gwao.12396

Last summer I did a residency at Beijing Normal University and have a Worldwide University Grant with Prof. Jing Song at Hong Kong University to study gender, work and mobility in Asia. In addition, I continue as the Director of Diversity Advancement in the College of Humanities and Fine Arts.

Kirsten Leng

It feels strange to write about research, talks, publications, etc., in the midst of the quarantine, as I feel all of those activities ground to a halt on March 13th. Before then, however, I was able to present work at the 2019 annual meetings of the American Studies Association and National Women’s Studies Association from my ongoing study

of humor in the history of U.S. feminism. These papers focused on the fans of Alison Bechdel's long-running comic, *Dykes to Watch Out For*, as well as the world of queer feminist cartooning in the 1980s and the 1990s. Two papers from the aforementioned research project have also been published this academic year—a paper about groundbreaking Black feminist Florynce Kennedy in *Feminist Formations* in Fall 2019, and one about the Lesbian Avengers in *Gender and History* in its Spring 2020 edition. A third paper from this project, about the Guerrilla Girls, (activists against sexism and racism in the art world and beyond) has been accepted by *The Journal of Women's History*. I had organized panels that had been accepted for upcoming meetings of the Berkshire Conference on the Histories of Women, Genders, and Sexualities, the American Humor Studies Association, and the International Humor Studies Society—all of which have been cancelled due to COVID-19. Currently, I'm plugging away on a new paper thinking through comedy as a form of care, and trying to get some new online and multimodal courses off the ground, while working in 45-minute chunks in the afternoon and evening.

Svati Shah

I am currently working on my second book project, provisionally entitled *Nationalism, Sexuality, and the Dream of India: Economic Futures and Political Dissent in Queer Times*. In this project, I consider with questions of labor migration, sexuality and the production of certain 'types' of social groups as ethnographic objects by focusing on India's lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) social movements. I am using the book to examine how the idea of economic development is produced in relation to and within queer and transgender movements in India. Drawing from my earlier work on sex work and urban informal economies, I am particularly interested in how LGBTQ movements address questions of economic and racialized stratification and survival, and where and how those discussions implicate discourses on India's economic development. The project has grown to include critiques of Hindu nationalism that have been a key feature of contemporary debates on India's economic future, as well as being debated within LGBTQ movement spaces. I conducted the ethnographic research for this project between 2013 and 2019, living in India for two years of that time and visiting for several months in between. This time period covered several key developments in Indian law, politics, and economic policy. For example, the current governing coalition, which has set about consolidating Hindu majoritarian rule, came to power in 2015. In late 2016, it enacted 'demonetization,' wherein 90% of the currency notes in circulation were 'replaced' overnight, causing chaos for months afterward, especially amongst informal sector workers, as cash transactions ground to a halt. In the aftermath of this crushing economic situation, homosexuality was decriminalized by the Indian Supreme Court, in late 2018, at around the same time that a slate of conservative reforms on transgender law, laws on surrogacy and prostitution, and a new, punitive law on Muslim divorce were also put into place. The book's innovation is in connecting these seemingly disparate moments ethnographically, in order to show how central discourses of sexuality and gender are to Hindu nationalism, and to the idea of a powerful Indian economy. In showing how these kinds of connections are apparent in everyday life, the book also engages a number of ongoing debates within anthropology, including on the relationship between casteism and capitalism.

Angie Willey

Most recently, I have a short thought piece on the sexual politics of "fake meat" forthcoming in a volume called *Meat!: A Transnational Exploration* (co-edited by Banu Subramaniam, Duke University Press) and did a remote talk on my first book *Undoing Monogamy* in a history of sexuality class at Yale in April. My NSF (National Science Foundation) grant received lots of great feedback and we were strongly encouraged to resubmit, so my co-principle investigator and I are working on revisions. I'm researching two projects this summer, both part of my next book, tentatively titled *Queer Feminist Materialisms*. One is on eros and embodiment and the other is on what I'm calling "lesbian feminist science studies" – an archival project exploring the role of lesbian feminist movement in building the field we now know as feminist science studies.

ALUMNI NEWS

Even during a global pandemic and long overdue attention to racism (or maybe especially then) our graduates are doing great things. Because we've been graduating people since 1974, we have news from recent grads, alums who are ready to retire, and everyone in between! Read on for news of our former students--majors, minors, and graduate certificates--and what they are doing now. Congrats to all on your endeavors, awards, publications, admittance to schools and everything else!

Rose Achino lives in Brooklyn and works as an assistant editor at NBC Universal. "I am currently helping with the launch and first year of our collaboration with quibi, we are making their news shows. I am training to eventually become an editor or an engineer, and try to pass along as many resumes of women and/or POC folks as possible. Working there also allows me time to write and read A LOT. And I volunteer with asylum seekers supporting them in filling out their immigration paperwork."

Erika Arthur wrote: "along with esteemed colleague and co-author Penthea Burns, I have an article in the forthcoming Bicentennial issue of the Maine Policy Review entitled 'A Call for Repairing the Harms of Colonization—Maine's Bicentennial as an Opportunity for Truth, Acknowledgement, Resistance, and Healing'".

Chris Barcelos* is an assistant professor at UMass Boston, in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. Chris has a first book coming out in December part of the Reproductive Justice series at the University of California Press: *Distributing Condoms and Hope: The Racialized Politics of Youth Sexual Health*.

Rachael Bazzett earned an MSW in 2015 and works as a therapist for people who have experienced domestic and sexual violence. Rachael added, "I am pursuing additional education focused on sex therapy and look forward to continuing to work in this field with the lens gained from my undergraduate program."

Lauren Brannon, NP, FNP-C is practicing family medicine in a rural setting in North Carolina. She reports that she "is proud to have brought trans-affirming care to her community. She uses an intersectional feminist lens informed by her time at UMass to promote wellness and healing and truly loves the impact she is able to make in the lives of her patients. She lives with her six-year-old daughter and will soon be adopting a puppy!"

Dennis Canty is a dorm parent on a residential school campus and works for the Massachusetts Department of Public Health overseeing all federal grants for the Office of HIV/AIDS and managing the state's HIV drug assistance program. Dennis has been admitted to the University of Pennsylvania Masters in Non-Profit Leadership Program.

Ben Casella is a history teacher at the Kiski School in Western Pennsylvania.

Susan E. Cayleff majored in Women's Studies [earlier name of the department] through BDIC. She treasures the mentoring of Ann Ferguson and Joyce Berkman. The passions she discovered at UMass set her on a lifelong path. She earned an MA in Women's History at Sarah Lawrence College and a Ph.D. at Brown University in American Studies. She taught for four years at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston, Texas (in the Institute for Medical Humanities) before returning to her true love: Women's Studies at San Diego State University. She published six books on the history of women and medicine/healing and women's sports history. Her biography of Babe Didrikson, *Babe: The Life and Legend of Babe Didrikson Zaharias*, was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize and won the Lambda Literary Award in San Diego. After 33 years on the faculty, serving as Chair, graduate director, co-founder of the SafeZones@SDSU LGBTQIA+ Ally training and social justice program, and anchoring the Young Women's Studies Club at nearby Herbert Hoover High School for 27 years, she has just retired. A Faculty/Scholar award was named in her honor with her co-founder of SafeZones by SDSU's Pride Center. She received the San Diego Human Relations Commission Ashley L. Walker Social Justice Award for her lifelong work to better the lives of women, girls and LGBTQIA+ people. She and her wife of 26 years are re-locating to Cape Cod where they will split their time between Falmouth and Provincetown.

Julietta Chaparro* is a lecturer in the Sociology of Gender and Reproduction at the University of Cambridge.

Rebecca Fowler is an MPH candidate in Public Health at Johns Hopkins with a focus on LGBTQ health and gender-based violence.

Tyran Grillo has published a new book, *Between South and Space: An ECM Records Primer*.

Dru Levasseur wrote: "I am happy to report that I've been elected to the boards of the ERA Coalition and the Fund For Women's Equality. In my day job, I am the Deputy Program Officer for the National LGBT Bar Association, heading up the LGBTQ+ inclusion coaching and consulting program, Lavender Law 365, for law firms, companies, and law schools."

Kate Litterer* relocated to Boston with her partner, cats, and dog, and launched her business as a Slow Productivity coach. "She coaches folx on productivity and long-term projects via the lenses of habit formation, mindfulness, intention, and slow living. She also plans to make her dissertation research on Lisa Ben (the woman who wrote the first lesbian magazine in the U.S. in 1947-48) freely accessible online later this year. You can read more of what she's up to at thetendingyear.com or on Instagram at @thetendingyear."

Nicole Manganelli is a leftist printmaker and graphic designer living in Portland, Maine. Her work focuses on art as a tool for movement-building and can be found at radicaleprints.com. She's especially interested in supporting rad organizing with good design. The first letterpress print in her series of "anti-capitalist love notes" ("you are worth so much more than your productivity") went viral in 2015 & continues to connect her with folks all over the world. She is also an active member of the Southern Maine Workers' Center.

Garrett Sager cofounded "Queer & Now," an Amherst-based theater company which is developing Sex Ed, a new piece that uses drag, lip sync, and dance to create an inclusive curriculum of queer & trans sex education. Garrett is the Digital Marketing Assistant at the Fisher Center at Bard in Annandale-on-Hudson, NY.

Seda Saluk* was awarded a 2-year postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Michigan College of Literature, Science and the Arts and National Center for Institutional Diversity, where she will hold the position of Collegiate Fellow in the Department of Women's Studies.

Parisa Saranj was the translator for the documentary *NASRIN* about the life of Iranian human rights activist, Nasrin Sotoudeh. The film also features other women's rights activists. *NASRIN* is premiering in at a film festival in Boston this fall. Parisa wrote that it brings together "my two loves (writing/translating and women's rights)".

Veronica Santana graduated with an Ed.M. in Hampshire Development and Psychology from the Harvard Graduate School of Education ("thanking the always amazing Professor Deschamps for the recommendation"). Veronica is currently the Administrative Fellow for Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging at Harvard's School of Engineering and Applied Sciences. Veronica was also recently elected to be President of the Girls Rock Campaign Board of Directors which empowers girls, transgender youth and gender non-conforming youth to believe in themselves by providing a supportive community that fosters self-expression, confidence and collaboration through music education and performance.

Stefana Soitos wrote: "I recently completed my MPA at Cornell University and started a new position as Director of the Biotech Learn and Earn Experience at Middlesex Community College. I am enjoying living in Massachusetts again."

Mahala Stewart* is a visiting assistant professor at Hamilton College and recently published an article "Pushed or Pulled Out: The Racialization of School Choice in Black and White Mothers' (Home)Schooling Decisions for Their Children," in *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* and also wrote a piece about it in *The Conversation*. theconversation.com/black-americans-homeschool-for-different-reasons-than-whites-137554

Caroline Tomasetta was working in Spain, but had to leave due to Covid-19. In Spain, Caroline met another WGSS grad!** Caroline is moving to Los Angeles and will be "teaching Spanish at a private high school this fall. The school puts a lot of emphasis on social justice and service learning, so my WGSS skills and experiences definitely helped make me a stronger candidate. I'm excited to incorporate current social justice topics and service opportunities into my classes."

Alums of our graduate certificate program putting their training and experience to great use!

*Editor's note: our grads are everywhere and do everything!

Alum news is in the fall newsletter! Send your updates by next summer to wgss-dept@umass.edu

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DIGITAL MUSINGS

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We have listservs (soon to be Google Groups) for everyone. If you haven't signed up for a listserv, please email Linda at lindah@umass.edu or check out our website for the most appropriate one.

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We love the newsletter in all forms, paper and electronic. What about you? Would you prefer to receive it in your email, postal mail or both? Let us know by writing wgss-dept@umass.edu. We urge all alums to join the friends/alum list, even if you prefer to continue reading the newsletter on paper. So, email us about that too. And join our facebook page and linked-in group and follow us on Instagram.

This newsletter is typically produced twice a year on paper and is also available on our website. Written and edited by Karen Lederer, design, production and distribution by Linda Hillenbrand. Thanks to all the faculty for their written contributions and to Laura Ciolkowski for her sharp editorial eye.