

## Spring 2021 Newsletter

Dear Alumni and Friends,

Greetings from the [Department of Women's Gender, and Sexuality Studies](#) at Stony Brook!

There has been much reflection recently as people recall their memories of how their lives were transformed by the COVID-19 pandemic one year ago. On March 13, 2020, WGSS administrator Jackie Donnelly and I closed the WGSS office as Stony Brook University moved to online instruction. WGSS courses have remained online this year, in the interest of prioritizing safety and student, faculty, and staff health. Our faculty and graduate student instructors have worked hard to create flexible and inclusive classrooms that take seriously one of the themes of all of my classes: to think creatively about healing spaces and practices of care. Doing so is a pedagogical imperative, for me. Although we are hardly out of the pandemic woods yet, and we will be grappling with the enormity of the losses and trauma of the past year for a long time to come, the vaccines and their increasing availability bring us some measure of hope.

As someone who studies and teaches on illness and disability, one important lesson of this past year has been that we can and must make what we do more accessible and inclusive. Although zoom-everything has been exhausting, many of us have come to realize that online classes and presentations have the potential to reach and bring in more people. To mention just one example from this semester: we had been trying to bring independent scholar Sara Ahmed to Stony Brook to discuss her important research on diversity work and what happens when people make complaints about abuse of power at universities. Scheduling a virtual talk proved easier than bringing her to Stony Brook from the UK. More than that, it meant we could broaden the audience that heard her speak—at Stony Brook, but also far beyond. Over 300 people attended her online lecture and were able to hear a powerful analysis of how those who complain about problems of racism, sexism, bullying, and other forms of intimidation and harassment in universities are often treated as the problem. Ahmed broke down the dynamics that maintain hostile institutional climates, but also spoke about ways to create spaces and practices to share the costs of complaint. She encouraged her audience to make complaint collective and provided new ways to think about and act in and beyond institutions. The chat box exploded with questions and comments, and although Ahmed could not answer them all, a rich conversation was started and will continue.



*Lisa Diedrich, Professor and Chair*

WGSS has also hosted other exciting events this semester. Our graduate program director Liz Montegary, along with graduate student representatives Desi Self and Ashley Barry, put together virtual programming featuring graduate student presentations of their scholarly and activist works-in-progress. This year's #WGSSGradCon is on the theme of "Crossroads of Emergency: Modern Dystopias and Imminent Futures" and will feature a keynote by Kai Cheng Thom, a Chinese trans woman writer, performer, somatic coach, and trauma-informed conflict consultant based in Toronto/tkaronto. We welcome you to join us virtually at these events.

We are right now gearing up to celebrate #WGSSGraduation2021. The university has announced it will host several in-person outdoor graduation ceremonies, and WGSS graduates will participate in the ceremony on May 19 from 9-11am. As we did last year, we will also use the [WGSS blog](#) to showcase our graduates and programs. I want to again extend a call to all of you to submit material for the blog. We want to hear what you're up to. So, please send written or video testimonials, photographs, artwork, poetry, etc. Most recently, we have used the WGSS blog to showcase the #WGSSPandemicPlaylist, which we also include here. Songs for the playlist are also welcome! You can email contributions for the blog to me at [Lisa.Diedrich@stonybrook.edu](mailto:Lisa.Diedrich@stonybrook.edu).

Finally, we want to thank everyone who contributed to WGSS's very successful inaugural Giving Day in October 2020. We raised over \$3000 that day for the WGSS Excellence Fund. If you are able, please consider supporting our work [here](#) on #StonyBrookGivingDay on April 21, 2021.

I am hoping we will be able to gather together in person again soon. Yet, let's not forget that we can be together in other ways too. As disability activists Mia Mingus and Alice Wong have taught me: #AccessIsLove.

Wishing you all a happy and healthy summer,

**Lisa Diedrich**



Professor and Chair

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## News and Announcements

- We are THRILLED to announce that **two of our doctoral candidates have received 2021 Graduate Awards**: [Stephanie Bonvissuto](#) received the Madeline Fusco Fellowship Award & [Annu Daftuar](#) received the Faculty-Staff Dissertation Fellowship Award. Congratulations, Stephanie & Annu
- Congratulations to **WGSS doctoral student, [Hafza Girdap](#), on her forthcoming edited collection of first-person accounts of survivors of human rights violations in Turkey**. Preview and pre-order ["The Baby in the Bag"](#) available as of February 7
- **WGSS Professor [Nancy Hiemstra](#) is featured in a story for Women's History Month on [Stony Brook Women: Inspiring the Next Generation](#)**. "Professor Hiemstra is not only an amazing instructor, she is an awesome mentor," writes Diamond Young '20, BS Psychology, minor in Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies. We think so too!
- **Check out this amazing new LGBTQ+ health podcast [#QueerDiagnosis](#), created by Stony Brook University undergrads Zarya Shaikh (a [@WGSSBU](#) minor), Srihita Mediboina, & Jameson Coleman**. Such important work! Listen [here](#).
- **Read Jennifer Itzkin's (BA '20) [interview](#) with the College of Arts & Sciences** on her experiences as an undergraduate in our department.
- Congratulations to our very own **WGSS doctoral candidate, [Val Moyer](#), who has received a research grant from [Surveillance Studies Network \(SSN\)](#) for her work on "Hormonal Surveillance in Women's Athletics."**



## WGSS Faculty Spotlight: Mary Jo Bona, Professor



### 1. Tell us about your work. What do you study?

My work comprises three intertwining fields of study: Italian American and diasporic literary and cultural studies, multiethnic American literary/cultural studies, and feminist literary/cultural studies. Each of these areas intersects with the other and they have never been separated in my scholarship as I always worked within and across disciplinary boundaries throughout my career. My most recent manuscript-in-progress *The Daughter's Abduction: Mothers, Mobility, Narrative* extends an analysis of maternal subjectivities to examine the meanings of motherhood within and beyond natality in U.S. literature. The authors discussed—Harriet Jacobs, Willa Cather, Toni Morrison, Cristina García, Audre Lorde, Kym Ragusa, Carole Maso, and Rebecca Makkai— theorize about motherhood, daughterhood, movement and desire. In doing so, they counter traditional ideologies concerning the maternal, representing various forms of mobility to transform lived experience. I also demonstrate how these works disrupt traditional discourses of the maternal to challenge normative ideas about reproduction and to create spaces not only of resistance but also of difference in order to embrace more capacious understandings of maternal subjectivity.

### 2. Tell us about a book that has had an influence on you and your work.

O my heavens: too numerous to name! Lorde, Rich, Ahmed, Morrison, Dickinson, Shakespeare, Woolf, Rubin, Anzaldúa, Kingston, Jordan, Spillers, Sedgwick, hooks, Tretheway, DuPlessis, Maso, De Rosa, the list goes on. Right now, I am finding inspiration in Adriana Cavarero's *In Spite of Plato*, which performs a feminist revision of Greek figures, including Penelope and Persephone.

### 3. What was a favorite class you took as an undergrad?

So tough to answer. I loved being a student and thought weekends were perfect for re-reading everything I read. If I had to pick, it'd be a directed reading I did with Suzanne Gossett, a Shakespearean scholar and then director of the Women's Studies program at Loyola University. I'd meet her once a week in her office and we'd discuss Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Virginia Woolf, Doris Lessing, all the luminaries from the Anglo-English tradition. I fell in love right then.

### 4. What is something you like to do to relax or for fun?

Mmmm. Let me see if I can remember pre-pandemic. Ah, yes: fine dining with my lovely spouse, Judith; travelling to places of beauty and hiking such as Mesa Verde National Park; meeting with my girlfriends for a bit of bubbly at one of our restaurant haunts on the Island; and sleeping: I love to sleep!

### 5. Dog or cat person?

Oooh, tough choice. I still dream about Esther, our kitty cat; and I'm a very good aunt to Toby, my niece, who is a Schnoodle with a mind of her own.

### 6. Favorite sport? Favorite team?

Tennis, tennis, tennis. Martina, Serena, Ash Barty, Naomi Osaka, and Roger, of course.

### 7. What are you listening to now (music, podcast)?

Jessye Norman. She sang at the Met and opera houses around the world. She died in 2019, too young. Her spirituals are also heart-rending: take a listen to her rendition of "Amazing Grace."

# WGSS Graduate Certificate Alum Spotlight:

**Dr. Nichole S. Prescott**

Doctoral Degree: History, Graduate Certificate in WGSS

Year of graduation: 2009 (MA), 2015 (PHD)



## **1. Tell us about what you are doing now.**

I love what I do. My current role allows me to fulfill my sense of mission, to use my academic and intellectual skills, to be creative, and to have an impact. I thank the Stony Brook WGSS and the

History Departments for helping me to get to this point in my career.

I joined the University of Texas System as the Assistant Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs in 2016. I am responsible for leading and supporting student success initiatives system-wide, collaborating with and convening stakeholder groups from the eight academic institutions in the UT System as well as other universities and systems, non-profits, and state governmental entities. My work addresses the student success continuum, PK-20 and into the workforce, with special focus on strategy, policy, data, and partnerships. My portfolio includes but is not limited to diversity, equity, and inclusion, early childhood, educator preparation, university charter schools, university-school partnerships, dual credit, future of work and learning, and university degree completion programs. Check out <https://elevatetx.edu/utsystem.edu/> to get a little taste of some of what I do. Be sure to watch the video: Become a Legend, Become a Hero, Become a Texas Teacher!

I also serve on the UTS Student Success Guiding Coalition and am the Texas Women in Higher Education Institutional Representative for UTS.

Outside of UT System, I serve as Vice President of the Board of Directors for the Literacy

Coalition of Central Texas as well as a Governing Council Member for the National Institute for Native Leadership in Higher Education.

I am a proud citizen of the Miami Nation of Oklahoma, a federally recognized Indian Tribe, and live in Dripping Springs, TX with my wife, two kids, two cats, and two dogs.

## **2. How did your WGSS degree help you on the path you're on?**

I approach my work through an equity lens with strong attentiveness to historic inequities and systemic sexism and racism, including opportunity and achievement gaps for minoritized student populations. This awareness and critical thinking around equity, systems of oppression, strategies of agency, and drive toward activism was midwived by my experiences, professors, and colleagues in the WGSS program at Stony Brook.

## **3. Tell us about a book that is important to you.**

There are so many! Most recently, I've been reading *As Long as the Grass Grows: The Indigenous Fight for Environmental Justice, From Colonization to Standing Rock* by friend Dina Gilio-Whitaker (Colville Confederated Tribes).

**Continued on next page.**



#### 4. What is a memorable event that you have participated in or witnessed since you have graduated?

I had the privilege and honor to lead a statewide initiative that culminated in the passage of transformative legislation. This legislation transformed educator preparation in Texas by reinstating the education degree as a pathway to teacher certification and will aid in recruiting more students into a teaching degree at university. For this work, I was awarded the Friend of Education Award from CSOTTE, the Consortium of State Organizations for Texas Teacher Education. I can't wait to see this new degree in action—maybe one of my kids will even get a degree in teaching!

#### 5. What advice would you give to graduate students today?

Believe in yourself. Remember that you deserve to be here and that your voice and perspective are not only valuable, but essential to elevating the discourse in your discipline and beyond.

Find a mentor or sponsor (even better). Making lasting relationships with senior colleagues who can provide you with “inside knowledge” of “the game” and/or get you a seat at the table of important decision-making discussions is vital. These relationships are rewarding for both the senior and junior colleague.

Ask questions about your career options inside and outside of academe. Don't foreclose on the possibility of a fulfilling career that makes a real impact in the world but might be outside of the classroom and research labs of the university. For example, your ability to read highly complex material, contextualize it, and draw out implications from it that you then communicate clearly and concisely, give you an immense advantage in the private and public work sectors. The academic and intellectual skills you gain from WGSS are transferable skills that are critical for dismantling institutional oppression of every kind in our communities' most influential institutions.



### **Pandemic Playlist: WGSS@SBU Mixtape #1**

In March 2020, we closed the WGSS office at Stony Brook University and went into lockdown. All classes went online. **We started this [WGSS blog](#) in order to create a virtual space of celebration for the graduating class of 2020. We will use this space again to celebrate [#WGSSGraduation2021](#).**

We decided it would be fun to create a [#WGSSPandemicPlaylist](#) that brings together music that has helped WGSS faculty, students, and alums during this difficult time. [Happy listening!](#)



### **2021 SUNY Online Ambassadors**

Please join us in congratulating [Professor Mary Jo Bona](#), Department of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies who was recently selected as 2021 SUNY Online Ambassadors! CELT instructional designers provided input on the nominations based on the instructor's open-minded embrace of online, willingness to try new instructional approaches, creativity, strong design, and strong pedagogy. In other words, people who are good models for the rest of the faculty. **Mary Jo has joined a group of faculty who truly exemplify quality online teaching.**

# Spring 2021 WGSS@SBU Happenings!

**Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies**  
Spring 2021 Virtual Events

[Registration Required](#)

**Works-in-Progress Workshop**  
**Friday, Mar 5th @ 2:00pm**  
Val Moyer  
(PhD Candidate, WGSS)



Registered participants will receive a draft manuscript one week before the event. Come prepared to offer Val feedback on her work-in-progress

**Brown Bag Talk: Decolonizing Care Work**  
**Wed, Mar 24th @ 1:30pm**  
Jade Kai (PhD Student, WGSS) & Joseph Pierce (Assoc Prof, Hispanic Lang & Lit)



**Works-in-Progress Workshop**  
**Friday, Apr 9th @ 2:00pm**  
Galia Cozzi Berrondo  
(PhD Student, WGSS)



Registered participants will receive a draft manuscript one week before the event. Come prepared to offer Galia feedback on her work-in-progress

**Brown Bag Talk: Tracking Feminisms in 1980's "Woman's Films" in Turkey**  
**Wed, Apr 28th @ 1:00pm**  
Melis Umur  
(PhD Candidate, WGSS)



**Crossroads of Emergency: Modern Dystopias and Imminent Futures**  
Introducing Our Keynote Speaker:



**Kai Cheng Thom** is a Chinese trans woman writer, performer, somatic coach and trauma-informed conflict consultant based in Toronto/okaronto. She is the author of several award-winning books in multiple genres, including poetry, non-fiction, and children's literature. A former clinical social worker, Kai Cheng brings trauma-informed expertise into all of her offerings. Her latest book, *I HOPE WE CHOOSE LOVE* is a series of essays on Transformative Justice.

The WGSS department at Stony Brook University invites you to our virtual graduate conference, *Crossroads of Emergency: Modern Dystopias and Imminent Futures!*

Here you can join communities of scholars to explore issues related to the crossroads of power and struggle that marginalized communities face, present ideologies and strategies of living and resisting, and contribute ideas and methodologies that promote decolonial futures.

We welcome all proposals with reference to the conference theme 'crossroads of emergency,' and encourage paper presentations, performances, creative writing, and short film submissions that center the following: Sexual and reproductive (in)justice; Organizing, activism, and social movements; Migrant trajectories and im/mobility regimes; Contagion, race, and gender; Indigenous sovereignty; Disability, access, and health; Decolonizing futures; Queer futurity; Environmental issues.

The conference will take place on April 23rd from 12 PM to 6:30 PM, 2021 and **submissions are due March 1st by 11:59 PM** to [jade.breaux@stonybrook.edu](mailto:jade.breaux@stonybrook.edu).

**Event Sponsors:** Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Department, English Department, Africana Studies Department, Department of Philosophy, LGBT\* Center



## We Appreciate Your Support

The Department of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies depends on the support of our alumni and friends so we may continue to offer undergraduate scholarships, financial assistance to our graduate students for research and other expenses, as well as to support programming and other departmental initiatives for the benefit of our amazing students!

I hope you'll consider investing in our students and faculty by making a [gift](#) today or speaking with [Hodan Hassan](#), Assistant Dean for Advancement, at (631) 632-4055.

Please stay in touch and send us updates about your accomplishments.