LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

It's an exciting time to be taking over as chair of WGSS at Williams. We have our two wonderful new faculty, Profs. Kai M. Green and Vivian Huang to join Profs. Greg Mitchell and Kiaran Honderich, who more than double our teaching staff and bring in exciting new areas of expertise for our students to explore. Prof. Mitchell just received tenure this fall, majors are rising, and our long-term future looks bright.

This spring, Program faculty have been working on a redesign of WGSS 101 for next fall. For next year, we have, in addition to our regular faculty, no less than three wonderful visitors coming our way: Maria Uden, who teaches Gender and Technology at Luleå University of Technology, Sweden; Mel Y. Chen, from the Department of Gender and Women’s Studies at Berkeley; and Greta Snyder, who comes to us from the Political Science and International Relations Programme at Victoria University, Wellington, New Zealand.

Please check out their profiles in this newsletter, and take a look at the exciting courses they are offering next year.

Outside of Williams (and sometimes in it!), these days can feel like dark times for women, LGBTQ people, and their allies—especially those who are immigrants, people of color, or poor. Every day’s headlines seem to bring news of more hard-won gains threatened, eroded, or reversed outright, new levels and vectors of hostility normalized. But this has also led to new organizing, new commitments to political activism, new alliances. WGSS has an important part to play in this. In our program, the quest for knowledge has always been closely tied to the quest for justice— we seek to know better so that we can do better. It’s never been a better time to be a student of WGSS.

Alison Case, Chair of WGSS
WHAT HAVE WE BEEN UP TO?

WGSS COURSES OFFERED IN THE SPRING
Cross-listed with twenty-one other departments, including Africana Studies, Art History, Sociology, Arabic Studies, Theater, and Asian Studies.

AFFILIATED PROFESSORS
Professors who taught WGSS courses this semester are officially located in twelve different departments.

CO-HOSTED EVENTS AND SPEAKERS
Including Laverne Cox, Janet Mock, Loretta Ross (interview included in this issue), and Carol Leigh!

INSTAGRAM FOLLOWERS
Go like our new page, wgss_at_williams, for updates on events, students, professors, and more!

LIKES ON FACEBOOK
Go like our Facebook page, WGSS at Williams, for updates about events! Also, if you don’t have Instagram, all of our Instagram posts also get posted to our Facebook, so you can still see them!

WGSS.WILLIAMS.EDU
WGSS Spring Events

February
1st: Janet Mock in Conversation
20th: Staying In: Mitski and Ocean Vuong’s Unaccommodating Forms
21st: Winckelmann: Classical Art, Sexual Freedom, and the Prehistory of Gay Identity

March
6th: Sentimental Activism as Queer-Feminist Documentary Practice
9th: Dance/Performance: Walking
12th: Ain’t I A Woman: My Journey to Womanhood with Laverne Cox

April
2nd: Race, Gender, and Political Dissent: Latin American and Caribbean Film Today
3rd: Meet Me at the Intersection of Trans and Jewish Identity
3rd: Reproductive Justice as Human Rights with Loretta Ross
10th: "How Do You Say Blackface in French?": Translating and Anchoring the Black Experience in the Hexagon
12th: Urooj Arshad: "Invisibility and Visibility: Queer Muslim Identity in the United States”
12th: Delilah and Black Enuf*: Film Screening and Discussion with Filmmaker Carrie Hawks
13th-15th: Civil Liberties and Public Policy Conference
16th: Tolstoy, Incest, and the Russian Novel
23rd: PrEP, Institutionalized Racism, and How We End the HIV Epidemic
26th: Graphic Reportage: A History and Particularities of the Genre in Russia
26th: Sex Workers Take Back the Night: Identity, Diversity, and Sex Worker Feminism with Carol Leigh
RACHEL JONES

DARING TO GAZE BACK: USING QUEER OPPOSITION TO DECONSTRUCT THE CARE POLITIC IN BLACK FEMALE MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS

My thesis is an auto-ethnographic look at the ways that media representations of black womanhood in regards to romantic love and desirability have shaped the ways that I view myself and am viewed by society as a black, queer woman. The process was definitely challenging and overwhelming: in part due to the sheer amount of work, but also due to the intense personal and emotional engagement that defined this thesis. However, I think this year has taught me the validity in lived experiences and identities as valuable intellectual and academic contribution, and I hope that other WGSS students can continue to forge places for themselves through their research.

AYAMI HATANAKA

CARCERAL FEMINISM AT HOME IN THE UNITED STATES: SEX WORK, LEGISLATIVE INFLUENCE, AND ANTI-TRAFFICKING DISCOURSE

My thesis is about carceral feminism and understanding how the logics of it are used through anti-trafficking discourse, legislation, and policy, thus impacting sex workers through criminalization and masking other harmful actions and policies. The process was challenging! Since part of my methods were oral history, the interview process of partnering with sex workers was significant. A piece of advice to future WGSS thesis writers: it's probably not helpful to compare your process and progress with the other writers. It'll likely just stress you out unnecessarily (which it did for me)! Rather, check in with your advisors and make sure you're always on the same page -- don't be afraid to ask for what you need in terms of advice, transparency, and resources.
The process of translating comic books into films tends to be very complex. How do you see La Borinqueña working within that shifting process of representation between the comic world and the film world?

When I first heard about this I never assumed it would become a movie in my lifetime. The creator used to work for Marvel, and part of the reason he left is because he wasn’t allowed to write stories or characters the way he wanted to. He really wanted to have his own character that centered his experience, but also tried to uplift the voices of Afro-Puerto Ricans, which is such a complicated thing because he is a non-Black Puerto Rican man, and he acknowledges that that’s not his experience, but he tries to work from the stories and experiences of women and mentors in his life, so it’s never going to fully capture their lives, but it’s something. It’s also such a different type of comic book in the sense that it’s independently published through his own company that hires primarily other Puerto Ricans. I do worry that if it were ever to be transferred to a big screen that they would try to have someone like J Lo play her. And that’s actually one of his concerns more generally. He is the artistic director, so he designed her physical attributes, and was very purposeful about her being a Black Puerto Rican.

But when other artists have drawn chapters of her, he’ll sometimes get a sketch or a mock-up of what the page will look like and people have tried to lighten her, or make her much thinner, and basically like Wonder Woman, which is an appearance he’s really trying to work against. So I think if it were to ever enter mainstream cinema it would raise a lot of questions about Afro-Latinidad, which is so complicated, because of anti-Blackness in the Latinx identity and communities, along with reluctance to acknowledge colorism and other forms of oppression in Latin America, the Hispanophone Caribbean, and the US that disenfranchise Afro-Latinx people.

But it’s interesting because the first time I met him he wasn’t sure if it would take off, because people at Marvel told him this book was too niche, that it was too small of an audience, that it wouldn’t reach outside of this specific audience. But, I’ve met him three times, and he always draws such a big crowd. It’s a story, it’s not perfect, no story ever is, but it’s something for Puerto Ricans.
Has there been any appearance of sexuality or romance within her narrative?

So in terms of her, the main character, not so much. He’s kind of reluctant to put her with someone at the moment, because he’s worried about the backlash that will come if he does. He hinted at the fact that in the anthology that’s coming out that there may be instances of Aquaman or someone who tries to flirt with her and she swerves them. There have also been a lot of questions about her best friend, who is Chinese Dominican, because a lot of people have been reading her as queer, which is very interesting because we don’t know a lot about her.

In *La Borenqueña*, what is the moment in which she first discovers her powers and becomes a superhero, and what histories or experiences is that moment grounded in?

So there’s a lot of history related to that moment. The reason she’s on the island is that she’s a geology major, doing an independent study about these crystals that are rumored to be on the island. She does this with the University of Puerto Rico, and the university tells her that because of the budget cuts, they don’t have an advisor for her, which is definitely a reference to the debt crisis in Puerto Rico. So she goes by herself, finds these crystals, puts them all together, and they form the star on the Puerto Rican flag.

Then there’s a beam of light, and she’s transported to this alternative dimension where she meets a Taíno mother-goddess who is one of the main deities in terms of those spiritual practices, she’s the goddess of fertility, and water, and life. So she says, “I need you to be a protector of the Puerto Rican people,” and then this spirit shows her different images of Puerto Rican history, both from the island and the diaspora, and images but also history that comes from the diaspora, and these images are very rooted in a history of radical and revolutionary moments in the US that included Puerto Ricans. There’s an image of a Puerto Rican nationalist from when the independence movement was stronger, and he was basically imprisoned by the U.S. and tortured with radiation and other poisons, and he eventually died from that radiation poisoning. So there’s an image of him with chemical burns on his body, which adds to this graphic reimagining of Puerto Rican history. There are also images of the Ponce Massacre, when U.S. trained island police killed a lot of people for protesting and demanding independence from the U.S., and in an area that is one of the most historically Black areas on the island. He also has an image of Pulse; the first couple that you see is two men and one of them is wearing a pride shirt, and the other is wearing a Puerto Rican flag shirt, and they have their arms around each other, and they have candles and they’re crying.

And then there’s a line of other characters, white, brown, and black bodies crying, and in the back you see the Pulse sign and you see the pride flag and the Puerto Rican flag. And in the dialogue that’s happening on those panels, the spirit is saying, “I’m showing you these images because Puerto Ricans have had a difficult history that is full of violence perpetrated by the US, and I want people to know this history, and I want my Puerto Rican children to be protected.” So that moment of becoming a superhero is very rooted in spirituality, and in Puerto Rican history, and I was very appreciative that it was history that comes from the island but also comes from the diaspora.
Media Recommendations

Television

Everything Sucks!
Unreal
Glow
Chewing Gum
Crazy Ex-Girlfriend
The Handmaid's Tale
Runaways
Insecure

Film

Signature Move
Princess Cyd
Obvious Child
Girlhood (2014)
Tangerine
Protect: Indigenous Communities at the Frontlines of Climate Change and Fossil Fuel Extinction

Literature

Night Sky with Exit
Wounds, by Ocean Vuong
The Summer Prince, by Alaya Dawn Johnson
Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth, by Warsan Shire
Fierce Femmes and Notorious Liars by Kai Cheng Thom
The Power by Naomi Alderman

Other Media

Butterfly Soup
Hayley Kiyoko (Music)
Forbidden by Todrick Hall
The Aces (Music)
Stevie Boebi (YouTube)
Hannah Witton (YouTube)
Kara Walker (Art)
The Last Wife, WAM Theatre, Lenox, MA (Play)
"Where are our alumni now?

“I sat at my medical school interview, shocked that the student giving the tour had asked me, “A gender studies major? What are you going to do with that?” “Become a doctor,” I said, wearing my suit, holding my folio, having just completed a round of questioning with the medical school staff.”

“As a woman and a member of the clergy, seeing how the gendered nature of people’s expectations plays out in a tradition-bound arena, my WGSS background is relevant every day.”

“WGSS has helped me analyze the world that my students and I live in. I am able to bring those critical thinking skills to my high school classroom. It has also made me a more thoughtful mentor and ally to young people. It has also just helped me be happier.”

“My coursework in Women’s and Gender Studies provided a basis for my current work with sexual and intimate partner violence. I learned specific content relevant to the work (such as gender stereotypes and intersectionality). I also learned how to think, evaluate data, talk about ideas, and write.”
What can you do with a WGSS major?

Our alumnae speak

Throughout the months of February and March, Olivia Goodheart and I, Julia Blike, the two student assistants for the WGSS Program, were given the opportunity to interview several alumnae of the Women’s Studies and Women’s and Gender Studies Programs, as the current program was named when these alumnae were in attendance. Throughout these conversations, we learned much about Williams in the past, how it has changed (or remained the same), and, most importantly, how being a Women’s or Women’s and Gender Studies student has benefitted these individuals in very different but altogether profound ways.

Tell us a little about the WGSS Program at Williams while you were there.

Sarah Taub: I was there from ’84 to ’88, and it was called Women’s Studies. It was not a major, so I concentrated in Women’s Studies, and had two other majors, so I was kind of busy. When I was a senior, for my independent project, I studied different world views, cultures, and examined what would be a feminist re-visioning of the world, and that project was very influential for me.

Margit Sande-Kerback: I thought the program was fantastic. I chose to join the major because, even though I was a pre-med student, I was really interested in having a well-rounded education, with humanities complementing sciences. After the first course I took in Gender Studies, I just fell in love with the people, the professors, and the classes. Those classes taught me things about real life, and they were often small, thought-provoking spaces that felt safe and comfortable. My memory of it was feeling engaged and interested in topics that made me think about life, overarching concepts of privilege and oppression, and the idea of intersecting aspects of oppression, all of which really resonated and stayed with me into later work that I’ve done.

Rebecca Brocks: It was just before there was an actual major, but the department was clear and well-defined, and there was a history of people making contract majors, which is what I did. The department was very much historically Women’s Studies, and only just becoming Women’s and Gender Studies. There were very few classes that were truly focused on Gender Studies, but it was an emerging concept that was new and exciting because it included the assertion that it is not just the construction of femininity, but, instead, the construction of gender as a whole, and that we could perhaps study more than what comes out of second wave feminism.

Since Williams, what careers or jobs have you held, or what other career paths have you explored?

ST: Right out of college I worked for an anti-poverty agency in the Boston area. Although I enjoyed that work, I felt that I wanted to use my brain more, so I went back to graduate school, and then taught for nine years at Gallaudet University. Women’s Studies definitely gave me a foundation in working with oppressed minority communities; for example, around deafness and disability activism, the deaf community does not see itself internally as disabled, but sees itself as a different world and culture. Since my capstone project for Women’s Studies was about seeing things through different cultural or even different linguistic lenses, it was really interesting to think about how our differences are rooted in the way we think or speak, and how deep they are. While I was teaching at Gallaudet I got very involved with an organization called “Network for a New Culture,” and I ended up leaving (Cont. 2)
ST (Cont.): Gallaudet to start a small non-profit, which is now what I am doing full-time. Our group is called “Center for a New Culture,” and the vision is creating a world that’s sustainable, where we can work out our problems without violence, where we can find joy and fulfillment in our human relationships and our connection to the natural world, and where purchasing and consumerism are not the focus. Currently, I work with a collective who are creating events where people come together as a community and attend workshops about emotional reactivity, understanding and healing from personal or impersonal structural oppression, and strategies for clear communication. I haven’t yet mentioned joy and fun, but there’s a lot of that too.

MSK: I was pre-med, and I did pursue that for a while. I finished all of the pre-med requirements, and, it’s a long story as to why I didn’t pursue that career further at that time. For the past seven years, I have been a chaplain in several hospitals and a hospice agency. My first job out of college was working with an exchange program for Japanese and Hawaii medical students and teaching them through workshops about clinical reasoning and bedside manner. While I had a lot of fun, it wasn’t meant to be a long-term career but was mostly a way to support myself while I was living in Hawaii, training at a zen temple, and doing a lot of self-discovery and learning. Chaplaincy work was a lot closer what I wanted to be doing, which was direct work supporting people in the midst of intense suffering and personal/family crises, and that was what I felt a calling to do.

RB: It’s all been on one trajectory, it’s just been a long-haul of continued training. Partway through Williams I decided I was going to go into medical school and needed a year’s more preparation while at college to take all of the classes that I needed before I could apply. I then had a job in health care, working at a medical school in Colorado. Then, after four years in medical school, I went to residency, where I spent seven years in training for surgical residency and another two years in training for my specialty, pediatric surgery. I started practice as a pediatric surgeon in 2016 in Springfield, MA.

How did your WGSS education influence these choices or experiences?

ST: It helped me feel empowered as a woman, and it helped me gain a sense of how social movements work. I think being able to read a lot of early feminist literature, and being able to marinate in it personally and getting the benefit of having my own mind become open and expanded while simultaneously being in a group of people who were doing the same thing really felt empowering to me.

MSK: The main thing was this idea of there being oppression of people in so many different ways, as well as a recognition of my own privileges. I didn’t live in a very diverse area growing up, so I didn’t have a lot of that education or knowledge or real-world understanding of oppression before college, and especially living in Hawaii, which is an extremely diverse space, where the majority is definitely not white, and there’s a really wide range of socioeconomic levels and different cultures. I think for a really long time now it has been more noticeable where oppression impacts people’s lives, and this is important for me because, as a chaplain, I interact with people from all walks of life and have the opportunity to sit, listen, and learn about their struggles and support them. And privilege is so important, because I try really hard not to walk in and say, ‘I’m going to fix your problems, and I’m going to cure your suffering,’ because, when you’re a chaplain, your role is to be a spiritual support person and walk with someone through a time of suffering. (Cont. 3)
MSK (Cont.): I am there to humbly walk alongside that person, help them carry their burden however I can, listen, offer hope, and ultimately connect them with their own source of strength that will enable them to get through this time of crisis. It’s not about me using my status, training, or spirituality, etc. to “fix” their problems, but rather, empowering them to help themselves. I think it’s a position where knowing about privilege and oppression is of great help, and my major really got me thinking about that in that way.

RB: I would say that my interest in medicine and Women’s and Gender Studies evolved together, because I had entered college saying that I was never going to be a doctor. My best friend, who I have known since I was five, had always suggested that perhaps I should be a doctor, and I always told her that she was crazy, that the people I knew who wanted to be doctors were jerks who just wanted to make money. Nonetheless, I had done a lot of science before Williams, so I was able to place out of some of the basic science courses at Williams, and I found myself in higher level biology courses and having lots of fun. I was constantly asked if I was going into medicine, and I always said no; but then, I met some people who were perhaps not the pre-med types that I had previously met, and they taught me a different way of being a doctor. As I was deciding to become a doctor, I was also deciding that I wanted to go into doctoring with a social science background, very explicitly seeking to balance all of my pre-med requirements by having a major in something else. From then on, college became a deliberate balancing act of biology and chemistry on the one hand, and the rest of my academic work in Division II on the other hand, so I can have something else that I study and I can be a human while I go into medicine.

ST: Overall, I am very happy with my time at Williams. I think it was a very supportive space for me, and I feel that I learned a whole lot there. I was involved with the LGBT organization, which, when I started, was the GLU, the Gay Lesbian Union. However, I personally identified as bisexual, I still do, and so I think my second year is when they added the B and it became the BGLU. But I didn’t feel fully supported; I didn’t experience biphobia directly, but I had this internal sense of ‘this space is not really for me.’ And, at the time, my heart and soul was also very involved in alternative relationship structures, and I felt there was no place for that at Williams or in the larger culture, and I struggled with that for many years. It was like I was trying to practice polyamory with no sense that it could be ethical, so there was a lot of internalized shame and I made a lot of choices that didn’t really serve me or the people that I was trying to be in relationships with.

MSK: I wasn’t very involved in activism, I was a little bit in my own bubble just trying to get through my rigorous pre-med major and trying to have a balanced life. I think at the time I was inspired to help others but just didn’t have a way to do that, and I don’t think I had a good sense of what kinds of activism were available. I think for me right now, in my current place in life, looking back I am sorry that I wasn’t able to do more for the community at Williams. But if I could go back and pursue activism, one thing that is on my mind a lot at the moment is the destruction of the environment and the natural world, and the animal species that are dealing with grave threats to their existence.

RB: So to answer the last first, it’s that same sort of yes and no, the sort of quieter kind of activism, I was a JA, but I was out as a JA, and while I didn’t feel particularly threatened. I also knew that for some of my freshmen this was going to be the first time that they ever met somebody who was openly queer. I was also part of the Queer Peers, and so made an effort to be available to people who wanted to talk, in ways that they had never been able to before. (Cont. 4)
RB (Cont.): Mostly I would say that my activism involved being as open and approachable as I could, so that people would feel comfortable asking me questions, or at least seeing an example of somebody who wasn’t exactly like everyone else. But as for the first part, I think what I was just saying hits on what I think could be better, is that if there were more people who could be there and help open all of our eyes to where people come from and how they get there so you aren’t just studying in a book, but maybe learning a little bit in real life. To really get people from a wide variety of places who can come together and help people learn.

One piece of advice for current or potential WGSS majors?

ST: Be curious. Hang on to your excitement. Wherever there is a big societal clash or interpersonal blow-up that’s where the juice is, that’s where there’s something new that can emerge, so keep focused on what is the new and beautiful thing that wants to emerge from the chaos.

MSK: It’s funny because what immediately came to mind is something that my husband always says, which is to refrain from giving someone advice unless they have specifically asked for it. It’s just so often the case that we give advice to each other without really listening first, and trying to understand people, and hearing what they really need from us. I think it’s important not to take a paternalistic approach, or a condescending approach, or thinking that we know what someone else needs. There are reasons that people choose to or choose not to do things that may not seem, to an outside person, like they’re in their best interest, but they’re making the best choices for them. So in summary, not giving advice without asking permission to give advice first, and without first listening to what the person needs, and what that person can tell you about themselves. And also see strengths in people where we might have a tendency to look down on them, and see them as weak and not capable of finding their own way.

RB: Think and learn, never stop thinking and never stop learning. I hope that that’s part of what anybody who is going into a Women’s or Gender Studies major is interested in, because I think that implicit in studying gender is examining something that most people take for granted and don’t even think needs examining, and I think if you can take that approach to the rest of your life and examine things and not simply take them for granted then you will be engaged in whatever portion of life you’re in, and whether you go on to study social sciences or science or no matter what you grow up to be, those things will never fail you.

We would like to offer a huge thank you to all of the alumnae who generously volunteered their time to talk with us and answer our questions about Williams and the Women’s Studies and Women’s and Gender Studies Programs, the earlier versions of the WGSS Program we now know and love. If you are an alumnus and would like to be included in future newsletters, be on the lookout for future surveys sent out by the WGSS Program and the WGSS Chair.

Olivia Goodheart ‘18.5 and Julia Blike ‘19
Loretta Ross
An Interview with Olivia Goodheart and Julia Blike
WGSS Office Assistants

On April 3, right before her lecture entitled, “Reproductive Justice as Human Rights,” Olivia Goodheart and I had the opportunity to interview Loretta Ross on her life, her work, and her activism. Before we began asking our official questions, Ms. Ross insisted that Olivia and I tell her our stories – what we do, what we study, what we love, and how we came to do all of these things. After each talking for several minutes about our hometowns, our high school experiences, our decision to study at Williams, our majors, and our activisms, we turned back to Loretta Ross, who smiled, thanking us genuinely not only with her words, but also with her welcoming and warming affect. She explained that stories were very important to her activist work; engaging with people had never been a one-way street for her, since she always wanted to know to whom she was speaking before she spoke herself. The rest of the interview was incredible: it was informative and interesting, at the same time that it was recuperative. It felt simultaneously as if I were speaking to someone I greatly admire and catching up with an old friend. Loretta Ross captivated me in the same way that she would captivate the audience, which nearly filled Griffin 3, about an hour later. It was truly a gift to be able to speak with her in such a personal manner, and I hope that it is equally a gift to be able to read the wisdom that she shared with us, that we now may share with all of you.

You’re currently a visiting professor at Hampshire College. Could you talk a little about that experience?

I’m an accidental professor. I spent nearly fifty years as an activist, but had always had a lust to be a teacher in the academy. I even went back to school and was working on my PhD in Women’s Studies thinking that I needed that qualification in order to achieve my dream of teaching, but I dropped out and didn’t finish that degree, so I thought that dream was forever going to be denied to me. Then, of my dear friends at Hampshire College took sabbatical last year, and asked me if I would mind teaching in her place, so I proposed a course called “White Supremacy in the Age of Trump.” Before I became known for Reproductive Justice, I monitored hate groups like the KKK, and spent the ‘90s embracing anti-fascist activism. I had not in twenty years been able to pay any particular attention to that, but the 2016 election indicated that I needed to reset and pull that back into the front of my activism. When the mainstream media finally learns to say the word white supremacy, it’s time for those who are experts on it to offer a word or two. We have a saying in our movement, that if you don’t understand white supremacy, everything else you think you know will only confuse you. And so, I’m teaching at Hampshire College, where many of the students are quite privileged, but, much to my surprise, in the first semester, twenty-five students registered for a class I had designed for twelve. In the second semester, thirty-one, and a waiting list. It turns out that these children, who could easily be defined as children of the one percent, want to learn how to fight white supremacy, and I’m having a ball. However, the reaction of the students is probably the most painful, but not unexpected part; they are all fundamentally angry that this knowledge has been kept from them for so long, that they experienced what we would probably call the best education in America, and yet were taught such a distorted version of history. I try to make learning about white supremacy as fun as possible, because the content really is a bitter pill to swallow; I make the process fun while I’m making people swallow the cod liver oil of intellectual knowledge.

Olivia Goodheart and Julia Blike
WGSS Office Assistants
What do you think the role of student activism is or should be in the contemporary moment?

I’m a great believer in student consciousness raising, but I’m also a great believer in smart activism. I’m of the opinion that students cannot and should not sabotage their own dreams in the futile drive to change a hundred year old institution. Your job is to come here and graduate and get your paper, and I believe it’s the job of faculty and staff to change the hundred year old institution, since they’re the ones who are making the big fat checks. I think that students should protest not being taught appropriately, not being given critical thinking skills, not being given a variety of speakers to come to campus, and being subjected to the suppression of radical thinking. Students should always be involved in fighting for academic freedom. Whether or not the school has quality anti-racist policies and trans policies and stuff, that I think the students should also pay attention to, but not have the expectation that it’s their job to make those things happen. It’s almost impossible to professionally manage upward. If you don’t have the power, don’t take on the responsibility for the change. I tell my students that I want them to do smart activism; the first thing you do is get your degrees and join the movement, because we need people in the movement with credentials who have our politics; if you want to change your alma mater, get in the movement, get in your profession, and earn enough money to become a donor – they’ll read one letter from a donor a hundred times, and a letter from a hundred students once. I’m never going to mislead students by over-promising what student power can deliver without discussing how these neoliberal institutions actually work. When you’re young and you’re an activist you expect a radical change tomorrow, and you expect everything you want to do to work perfectly the first time, and so it makes it very hard to forgive other people’s mistakes because you can’t forgive your own.

How do you think authoring or co-authoring books has been part of your activism and political work?

I needed help finding my written voice, and trusting it. It was women who were in the academy who first encouraged me to start writing down the speeches that I would give, but I didn’t trust my ability to do so. As an activist, you’re always writing, grant proposals, evaluation reports, strategy details, but I never actually saw that as being a writer – I was an organizer who was forced to write. And so, I liked co-authoring, because that meant that I received guidance and help in expressing my written voice. It wasn’t until my last book that I was the lead editor, since it had taken me my two previous books to trust my ability to produce a manuscript by myself. The next book I’m writing all by myself, called “Calling In the Calling Out Culture,” based on a speech I’ve given and other work I’m doing.
How does one hold the grief and violence that is constantly happening, but also sustain self and community?

When you do activist work and people entrust you with their stories you have to treat them as precious gems that you can’t be irresponsible with. I found that when I first got into activism, I was hyper-serious and extremely conscious of the martyrs, the people who had died before me so that I could do the work that I was doing. When I first started anti-clan work, my mentor, Leonard Zeskind, saw me working crazy hours, throwing myself into the movement, and losing my sense of humor and perspective, and he told me, “Loretta, lighten up. Fighting Nazis should be fun. Being a Nazi is what sucks.” I had to laugh as he said it, but then I started thinking about how I had stopped partying, had stopped being able to watch a movie without doing a postmodernist analysis of the gender roles, and had sucked all the fun out of being alive. That’s not how you do it over the long haul. If being an activist is not fun, then I really beg people to find something else to do, because we professionally have to look at vomit. So if I don’t intentionally incorporate self-care of my mind and my soul, then I won’t survive for very long. You need an on and off switch to the consciousness. To me, that is not a compromise, but self-preservation. Also, once I’d gone through sufficient therapy, I began to understand that I was really using the movement to block confronting things in my own mind and my own soul, but the movement’s not yours to use that way. You find a lot of people come into the movement because they think the movement can help them heal, but that’s not its purpose. It’s purpose is to end oppression, so you need to find other healing strategies, because otherwise you try to distort the movement to be about you.

How does your home, and also other spaces you have lived and worked in, affect how you think about and move through the world?

My home is my joy and delight. I was an army brat, so I moved every six to eight months growing up. Once I had the capacity to establish a base, I lived in DC for twenty years, and now in Atlanta for almost thirty. I love the city of Atlanta because it’s a place where a single woman making a fairly modest salary can buy that middle-class home dream, so a lot of people are attracted to it for that reason. It’s a five bedroom house in a forest, fifteen minutes from downtown Atlanta. Because I’ve done a lot of traveling, and every time I went somewhere international I brought something back for my house, it’s full of exotic art from Africa, and Asia, and Latin America. It’s a house of peace, in that I won’t let fights and arguments take place there. I’ve actually had to put a dear friend of mine out in the snow because she came there looking for a fight, because that’s her style of relationship building, is that she loves you the more you argue with her. And that’s fine, but not in my house. And she didn’t believe me, so she went out in the snow because she was trying to pick a fight with me, and she stood outside for about an hour until she finally came back in and she and I have not had a big fight since then, and it’s been about fifteen years.

Do you have any advice for young people today who are engaged in activism and liberation projects?

One of my favorite realizations is that activism is the art of making your life matter. You never wake up wondering why you’re on this earth unless you’ve made a commitment to making the world better. All that confusion and doubt disappears, and the only thing that you have doubt about is how well you’re doing it – but that you’re doing it you have no doubt. The most radical revolution is inside your own soul, because the one thing you are in charge of every day is defining what kind of person you want to be. I choose to define myself not by what I’ve survived, but who I serve.
On a breezy April day, Julia Blike and I (Olivia Goodheart) had the pleasure of eating lunch with Professor Maria Uden, visiting faculty in the WGSS department for the fall of 2018. We were able to learn more about her work and research at the Luleå University of Technology in Sweden. Professor Uden teaches courses on Gender and Technology, which is the subject of the class she will be teaching at Williams in the fall semester. Her current school has about 10,000 students, and she typically teaches online classes, so we learned that she is excited to have more individual interaction with students! Professor Uden also plans to bring Swedish statistics to the class, and stage a collaborative effort between herself and the students to generate comparative statistics from the US.

We were excited to learn about what Professor Uden does with her research centering on the intersections of gender and technology. She described her work with indigenous people in Sweden to utilize technology within the context of a lifestyle that is not rooted in consumerism or materialism, but rather in sustainability. This approach to tech innovations certainly feels new to the Williams curriculum and we are certain will garner interest from students. Professor Uden stressed the intersection of technology with the social sciences, which we expect will be a welcome addition to STEM at Williams.

In typical WGSS fashion, we all bemoaned global capitalism and mega-corporations. Professor Uden discussed the metric of negative consequences of technology compared to positive benefits or outcomes of technology, and explained that it is an intelligent metric to use because so often the populations that are experiencing the worst consequences are receiving minimal to no benefits. Julia and I drew connections to the DAPL and the Flint, MI, water crisis, which prompted the three of us to discuss the intersections of technology with accessibility in education and in health care. This prompted us to think about the WGSS keynote speaker, Loretta Ross, and her explanation of technology as a human right, as well as the implications of studying technology as separate from social sciences or systemic oppression. We noted how not having access to technology is progressively becoming something that can easily marginalize or disadvantage someone, and we know that Professor Uden’s fall course is an excellent opportunity to study these issues in depth!
Last Friday, a group of 10 students and staff members from the College traveled to Hampshire College for the Civil Liberties and Public Policy (CLPP) Conference. The next morning, an additional 30 Williams students, staff, faculty and community members followed for the opening plenary of the annual Reproductive Justice (RJ) conference, which has been held at Hampshire since 1983. Collectively, 40 people from the College and the town attended the conference. The event was organized and hosted by CLPP, which defines itself as a “national reproductive rights and justice organization dedicated to educating, mentoring and inspiring new generations of advocates, leaders and supporters,” according to its website.

CLPP represents one of the largest global conferences that centers on and celebrates RJ activism and organizing. Led by RJ activists and attended by nearly 2000 people each year, the conference consists of a series of nearly 75 workshops organized by students. This year’s seminars ranged from “Power, Pleasure, Profit: Radical Visions of Consent from Young Feminists,” to “Transforming Reproductive Justice: Trans Healthcare Access,” to “Immigration Justice in Dangerous Times.”

RJ, a framework developed by a group of black women in 1994, is defined by SisterSong, a women of color RJ collective, as “the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities.” As its definition suggests, RJ is a framework that can encapsulate many subsets of social justice.

Feminist Collective co-chair Olivia Goodheart ’18.5 explained the wide-reaching applications of RJ. “RJ is intrinsic to all political movements and is a necessary framework for intersectional political work,” she said. “The workshops, speakers and participants at CLPP demonstrated the way RJ is linked to everything from indigenous activists fighting big oil in Oklahoma, to the treatment of women and trans people in prisons, to justice for sex workers everywhere.”

Berkshire Doula Project (BDP) board member Madeleine Elyze ’18 explained that the scope of RJ goes beyond the issue of reproductive rights. “RJ is about shifting power through a historical and community approach,” she said. “We must create strategies for change that address stigma and discrimination in addition to the historical root causes of oppression. In the process, we must uplift each other.”

BDP board member Alice Westerman ’21 connected the conference to the Berkshire community. “CLPP is an empowering and energizing conference that puts the work we do with the BDP [at Williams and in Berkshire County] into the context of a much larger movement,” she said.

CLPP resonated in diverse and nuanced ways. Roshny Vijayakar ’17, who helped found BDP, reflected on the experience from a recent graduate’s perspective. “As an alum who does not get to participate in RJ activism or advocacy in my current job, CLPP was a refreshing and inspiring experience,” she said. “To share space and conversation with so many bold and beautiful souls who are doing the hardest work of all – dismantling systems of oppression in compassionate ways – really grounded and re-centered my purposes in life, both personal and professional.”

Elyze also appreciated the atmosphere of the conference. “CLPP offered a space for unconditional, radical love,” she said. “United in our passions for human rights and social justice, we brought our entire selves into a uniquely intersectional, safe community. This was a space for learning, teaching, and healing.”

Grace Fan ’19 experienced CLPP within a larger framework of activism and education. “CLPP reminded me that learning and unlearning are continual processes that I need to foster actively, otherwise I become stagnant,” she said. “CLPP served as a stark reminder that – as someone who isn’t very well-versed in RJ activism – I have a lot of work to do in breaking down the lingering traces of stigmas that were taught to me while growing up in a conservative home.”

For many, CLPP stood as a reminder – to continually educate ourselves, check ourselves, love ourselves and, most importantly, organize ourselves against the systems that continually prevent us from doing so.
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WOMEN’S, GENDER, & SEXUALITY STUDIES
FALL 2018 COURSES

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Kimberly S. Love – TR 8:30-9:45

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Kai M. Green – W 1:10-3:50

WGSS 301 Sexual Economies
Gregory Mitchell – MR 1:10-2:25

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Jason Storm – W 1:10-3:50

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