

# UNI WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES

A newsletter



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# DIRECTOR'S NOTE

As the Interim Director of Women's and Gender Studies at UNI, I am thrilled to share the remarkable achievements and ongoing initiatives that underscore our program's growth and influence. Over the past year, our students have engaged deeply with critical issues at the intersection of gender, society, and global challenges. Their research topics range from the cultural dynamics of abortion rhetoric in the U.S. to life skills education in Pakistan, shedding light on pivotal issues such as domestic violence, environmental sustainability, and the symbols of resistance in conflict zones like the case of Shireen Abu Akleh.

Our students have not only excelled academically but have also actively contributed to the broader community through impactful activities. They spearheaded The Clothesline Project, enhancing awareness on violence against women, and participated actively in various national conferences. WGS minors were active in creating a queer book club and the program supported enlightening speakers on campus.

The stability and growth of our program are evident. We maintained our enrollment and have seen an encouraging number of high-quality Fulbright applications, which speaks to our global appeal and the interdisciplinary reach of our curriculum. This success is a testament to our program's resilience and the strategic vision that continues to drive us forward.

Looking ahead, the WGS Advisory Board is exploring innovative leadership models with UNI's senior leadership to ensure the sustainability and autonomy of our program. These discussions are crucial as we aim to build upon our foundations and continue to empower our students to lead, innovate, and effect change across various spheres.

Thank you for your continued support and belief in our mission. Together, we are making a significant difference.



**Dr. Danielle McGeough**



## CLOTHESLINE PROJECT

For the 12th year running, UNI's Women's and Gender Studies Program proudly continued its tradition of The Clothesline Project.

This initiative, held in conjunction with Relationship Violence Awareness month every October, serves as a poignant reminder of the ongoing violence endured by women, children, men, the LGBTQ+ community, and other marginalized groups.

Through the creative act of decorating shirts, participants aim to raise awareness and spark conversations around these important issues.

Throughout the week, our Graduate Assistants (GAs) facilitated shirt decorating sessions, providing students with a platform to share their messages of support for survivors and victims of violence.



## IT'S BOOK RECOMMENDATION DAY

WGS has been hosting “Book Recommendation Day” and “Alumni Bookshelf” on social media platforms, creating a wonderful series that showcases the literary and media tastes of our current students and alumni. These weekly posts feature a diverse array of recommendations, spanning books, movies, TV shows, and podcasts related to WGS.

This initiative not only provides an opportunity for our students and alumni to share their favorite books but also allows them to reflect on their journey within the WGS community. It’s been amazing to witness how these posts celebrate the richness of their experiences and the bonds formed through their WGS education.

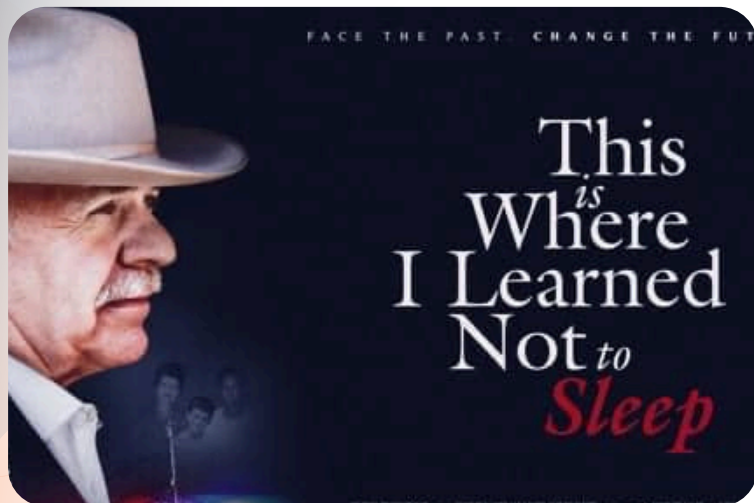
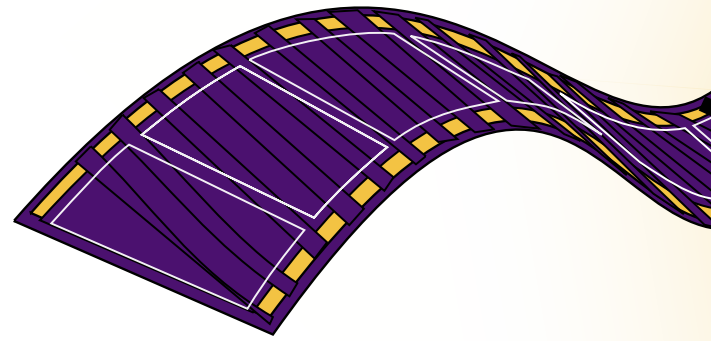
Moreover, it’s an excellent way to engage with our wider audience online, offering valuable insights into the dynamic world of WGS.



## Documentary screening of “This is Where I Learned Not to Sleep- March 7, 2023



# DOCUMENTARY SCREENING

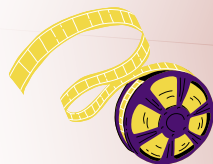


WGS Students had the opportunity of participating in the impactful documentary screening of “This is where I learned Not to Sleep,” hosted by the UNI Center for Violence Prevention.

It was a truly inspiring evening, brimming with empowerment and a renewed sense of purpose in contributing to the safety and well-being of our community.

The event was not only an opportunity to witness powerful storytelling but also a chance to engage with Mark Wynn, whose advocacy journey for the prevention of domestic violence left a profound impact on everyone present.

Moreover, students gained valuable insights into the essential services provided by local nonprofits dedicated to violence prevention.



2024 Waterloo-Cedar Falls “Luncheon of Light”- April 19, 2024

## “Luncheon of Light”



WGS graduate students attended the 2024 Waterloo-Cedar Falls “Luncheon of Light” featuring activist Chanel Miller, hosted by Riverview Center.

Chanel Miller, previously known to the world as Emily Doe, captivated millions with her powerful victim impact statement following the assault by Brock Turner on Stanford’s campus in 2015. Her courage and resilience have now led to the release of her memoir, “Know My Name”.

Her impact statement went viral, prompting legislative reforms in California and even the recall of judges involved in the case. Thousands were inspired by her bravery, finding their own voices to share their experiences of assault for the first time.

At this event, our graduate students had the privilege of hearing Chanel’s story firsthand, gaining invaluable insights into the power of survivorship, advocacy, and resilience.



# PROGRAMMING NEWS

Spring 2024 Women's and Gender Studies Student Conference- April 20, 2024



## WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES STUDENT CONFERENCE

WGS students had an incredible experience at the Spring 2024 Women's and Gender Studies Student Conference hosted by Iowa State University on April 20th.

It was an enriching opportunity for our students to delve into discussions and explore a series of topics surrounding women, gender, sexuality, intersectionality, and feminism.

We're proud to share that our WGS student, Saja Abd El Hai, presented her research on "Symbols of Resistance: The Case of Abu Akleh" during the conference. Her dedication to shedding light on important issues knows no bounds!





# Stephanie Barrrios

CALIFORNIA

Stephanie has a Bachelor in Sports and Recreation Management from Lee University. She later went on to pursue her Teaching Licensure at Iowa Wesleyan University and taught Physical Education in Waterloo for 5 years.

She also coached girl's high school soccer for 12 years and her experiences as a teacher and a coach opened her eyes to the many challenges Latina women face in education and athletics settings.

"I joined the WGS program at UNI in pursuit of finding my voice so that I can advocate for myself and others."

Given her experience as the "middle child" at every intersection of her identity, Stephanie plans to focus her thesis-track on the in between spaces of race, education, gender, and religion, through an autoethnographic lens to help shine a light to the areas she knows she's not alone in.

## FUN FACT

I can say I witnessed a volcano eruption with my own eyes and stood just a few feet away from Lava!







# Plaxcedes Mauwora

ZIMBABWE

Plaxcedes has a Bachelor's degree in Political Science from the University of Zimbabwe. She intends to focus her studies in the applied track, and is interested in gender violence prevention, women empowerment, and enhancing cultural competency within domestic violence shelters.

Currently, she serves as a Graduate Assistant at the UNI Patricia A. Tomson Center for Violence Prevention.

"I chose to attend UNI because it was offering my preferred program and had scholarship opportunities. The application process was straightforward, and I found the admission team to be very supportive and helpful throughout.

This program has provided me with a lens through which to critically examine and understand the multifaceted nature of gender, power, and social justice."

## FUN FACT

If I won the lottery today, I would buy a farm and live there, keep goats, chicken, cattle and fish because it's so peaceful in the countryside.





## Nilufar Babojanova

**TAJIKISTAN**

Nilufar has a Bachelor's degree in English-Russian Translation from the Bokhtar State University, Tajikistan. She intends to focus her studies in the applied track, and is interested in women representation in Abrahamic faiths particularly in Islam. Her applied track focuses on the impact of identity profile differences of the therapy and the patient in the process of therapy services.

Currently, she serves as a Graduate Assistant at the UNI Department of Women's and Gender Studies

"I decided to pursue WGS as I am planning to establish an NGO that would serve as shelter for victims of domestic violence when I return to my home country. It will equip me with needed knowledge and experience and skills for me to run my own non profit and empower women to prosper."

### **FUN FACT**

I sing Persian folk songs and I write poems in Tajik Persian.



# New Fall Cohort-2023



## *Sneha Basu*

INDIA

With both a Bachelor's and Master's degree in Comparative Literature from Jadavpur University, India, Sneha is embarking on an academic journey with a focus on climate justice.

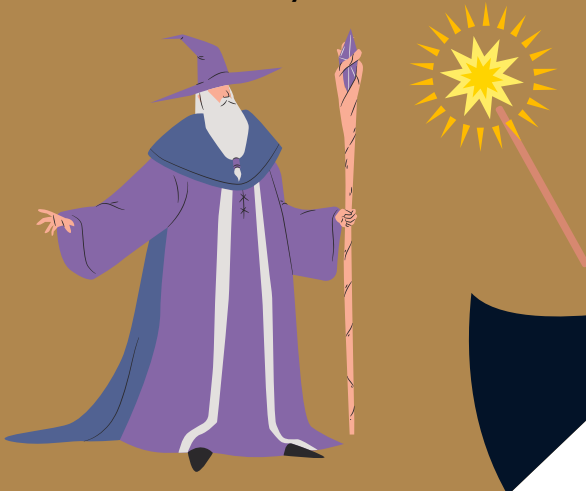
Her research, poised for the thesis track, delves into the critical intersection of literature and environmental advocacy.

Currently serving as a Graduate Assistant in the UNI Financial Aid Office, Sneha's dedication to both her studies and supporting her peers is evident.

Drawn to UNI through a departmental scholarship, Sneha's story exemplifies the transformative power of education and the pursuit of meaningful scholarship.

### *FUN FACT*

Still waiting for my Hogwarts letter!  
A die-hard Harry Potter fan.



# Graduating Students -2024



2024  
Susie  
Grover

Susie's dedication to Women's and Gender Studies (WGS) was sparked during her undergraduate years when she pursued WGS as a minor. Eager to delve deeper, she continued her journey as a master's student, recognizing WGS as essential knowledge for all.

Studying WGS has profoundly impacted Susie's understanding of social justice and equity, empowering her to advocate for change. She voices her concerns to local representatives, amplifying the voices of the marginalized. WGS has heightened her awareness of the injustices and inequities faced daily by marginalized communities, compelling her to take action.

Throughout her academic journey, Susie has obtained invaluable lessons from WGS's interdisciplinary nature. Exploring history, anthropology, criminology, and public health, she's honed in on social inequalities, particularly within the U.S.'s for-profit prison system and institutionalized racism, which fueled her impactful thesis research.

Susie's proud achievement lies in her thesis research on "Dog-Training Programs for Incarcerated Women," where she delved into the transformative benefits of such programs. Her dedication to understanding the stories of those involved has been truly eye-opening.

Looking to the future, Susie plans to apply her WGS knowledge and skills in her role at UNI, fostering empathy and compassion in her interactions. Dr. Carissa Froyum has been Susan's unwavering support system throughout her WGS journey, providing guidance and inspiration.

For incoming WGS students, Susie offers heartfelt advice cherish this nurturing environment, absorb the wealth of knowledge, and then go forth to change the world. Congratulations, Susie, on your graduation! Your commitment to empathy and justice is a beacon of hope for us all.

# Graduating Students -2024



2024

AMY  
BURNS

Amy Burns, our incredible WGS office assistant, is graduating with a BA in Biology: Ecology, Evolution, and Organism. After graduation, Amy will be embarking on a new journey as a Wildlife Monitoring Technician in Boone, Iowa, through the Iowa State University Extension Office. Reflecting on her time at UNI, Amy shares, "I will miss most the community that UNI has provided to me, my professors, classmates, and coworkers who have supported me throughout my academic career" Amy adds, "From my two years working in the WGS office, I was able to learn the importance of effective communication in a job setting. Keeping the office informed about my current schedule and the days I was available was important to allow the office to function smoothly."

# Graduating Students -2024



## *Christiana Ogunlana*

Throughout Christiana Ogunlana's time in Women's and Gender Studies (WGS), her passion for change has been unwavering. Christiana shares that growing up in a patriarchal society, she was inspired to pursue WGS by a profound desire to advocate for women's health. Her academic journey has been transformative, broadening her understanding of social justice and equity through the lens of intersectionality. She's come to grasp the complex layers of privilege and oppression based on race, gender, and socio-economic status, fueling her commitment to make a difference.

In her academic pursuits, she's delved into impactful research projects, from investigating the unique barriers to breastfeeding among Black women to analyzing gendered language in literature. Her current research paper on "Understanding the Unique Barriers to Breastfeeding Among Black Women" is one that she is particularly proud of, along with a research paper she co-wrote titled "A Feminist Stylistic Reading of Sexist Terms As Gendered Language in Adelokun Under The Brown Rusted Roofs" published in ResearchGate. Christiana's key lessons learned echo the profundity of her journey: "spaces" confine "bodies" to diverse ways of expressing identity. She beautifully articulates her experience, recognizing the complex layers of her identity within different contexts. Christiana reflects, "I am a proud Nigerian, but within an American space, I am a Black person, while also being a Black woman, as well as a Black heterosexual woman, and the list goes on". But I have also learnt these spaces can be fought against and new identities can be created."

Each endeavor has been a testament to her dedication and resilience. Looking ahead, Christiana plans to apply her WGS knowledge in the field of Public Policy, with a focus on women's health discourse. Her vision extends beyond the classroom; she's eager to implement change through her women's health community, Doctor's Daughter.

Amidst the challenges in her academic journey, she hasn't walked this path alone. Her biggest support system has been her husband, Mr. Oluwasina Okunoye, whose tireless encouragement has been a constant source of strength. For incoming WGS students, she offers sage advice, "WGS is multifaceted; find your niche and live intentionally"

As Christiana steps into the next chapter of her journey, let's join together in congratulating our graduate, a true champion of empowerment and change!