International Women's Day

The day we observe as International Women’s Day was first celebrated in 1911. But the layout of this significant event was established much earlier. During the late 19th century, the rising vocals of suffragettes shook the world and in continuation of the movement for justice and equal rights for women, “15,000 women marched through New York City” in February 1908, “demanding shorter hours, better pay and voting rights.”

In 1910, during the International Conference of Working Women held in Copenhagen, a German activist and socialist Clara Zetkin proposed the idea of celebrating International Women’s Day. This idea was unanimously approved.

In 1911, International Women's Day was observed among multiple countries. Initially Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland observed the day on March 19th. In Russia, while campaigning for peace, Russian women celebrated their first International Women's Day on February 23, 1913.

Russia used the Julian calendar and February 23rd on the Julian calendar is March 8th on the Gregorian calendar. Eventually, leaders across the world agreed to observe International Women's Day on March 8th.

The United Nations celebrated International Women’s Day for the first time in 1975. In 1996, the UN announced their annual theme "Celebrating the Past, Planning for the Future." After that year, the UN announces a new theme to commemorate International Women’s Day and accordingly this year’s theme was, “Women in Leadership: Achieving an Equal Future in a COVID-19 World.”
Greetings and welcome to another newsletter from the Women’s and Gender Studies program at UNI! As I reflect on the tumultuous year that was 2020-21, I can’t help but think that we are at a major crossroad in American society, having lost so much but with the potential to gain so much more.

The issues at stake encompass social justice matters in every way imaginable. Even as we celebrated the outcome of Derek Chauvin’s trial and the fact that—rightfully so—he was held accountable for the death of George Floyd, 47 (47!) states were introducing more than 360 bills with the sole purpose of restricting voting rights in a craven attempt to control the election process, in a blatant power grab that leaves me breathless with astonishment. While much of the nation watched the wheels of justice turn slowly during Chauvin’s trial, eight anti-LGBTQ+ bills were passed into law, with an even greater number awaiting a mere swipe of a governor’s pen. Despite the fact that Virginia became the 38th state to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment last year, which should have caused it to be adopted into the Constitution nearly 100 years after its introduction, its fate is still left undecided as lawmakers and courts ponder the legality of ratification deadlines.

I am barely scratching the surface of the untold number of abuses that are being perpetrated as I write this note, which tip the scales away from the direction of achieving true justice—not merely holding one man accountable for an egregious act of base cruelty.

This is not to deny the successes that were achieved in the last year that give me hope for the future; but to see that potential become reality, we must remain tirelessly vigilant and unceasingly vocal in our objections to injustice at every level of society. We must provide support and succor to those heroes who are doing the heavy lifting of social justice work every day. We must protect humanist and democratic ideals from degradation at the hands of those who would see only a few privileged individuals raised up, no matter the cost.

And we must always persist.

I am honored and humbled every year to work with remarkable people who are dedicated to making a difference in the world, some of whom appear in this newsletter. Please do read and share their stories. Let them inspire you, as they do for me, and remind you that sustainable change is possible, and that each one of us has the power and awesome responsibility to ensure that we leave this place better than when we arrived.

Best wishes, Wendy Marie Hoofnagle
One of WGS’ cherished affiliate faculty members, Dr. Karen Mitchell, is retiring from UNI in May! She came to UNI in 1991 after completing her Ph.D. at the University of Louisiana in Baton Rouge, LA, and has been a very visible faculty member these past 30 years. She has contributed greatly to the UNI Interpreters Theatre, Department of Communication and Media Studies, campus diversity inclusion work, and the Women’s and Gender Studies programs.

Dr. Mitchell has a full list of accomplishments during her tenure at UNI. As a performance studies scholar, she directed the UNI Interpreter’s Theatre for many years, building a reputation for addressing difficult social justice issues. Many of her graduate and undergraduate students now teach these performance methods across the country. Due to her pedagogy methods on sexual violence prevention, she, along with Dr. Annette Lynch and other WGS affiliated faculty on campus, earned a major grant awarded to the UNI Women’s Studies program by the Department of Justice in 1999. The grant enabled her to found SAVE (Students Against A Violent Environment, now Students Advocating for Voices and Equality) a group that advocates for a safe campus. It is a social justice peer theatre troupe dedicated to creating a community safe for all. She served as the founding director. She also was a founding member of the UNI National Coalition Building Institute in 2010, and served in the Provost’s office as a Diversity Fellow to help lead the program.

Over the years she has served as an instructor and adviser to WGS graduate and undergraduate students studying performance as a tool to address multiple oppressions and promote social change. The website for the UNI Interpreter’s Theater notes that during her tenure, Dr. Mitchell has uniquely crafted a pedagogical style that emphasizes experiential learning, creative performance, and social justice activism. She is a former president of the international organization, Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed, is an active member in the Performance Studies division of the National Communication Association, received the Iowa Regents Faculty Excellence Award in 2004, the College of Humanities and Fine Arts Excellence in Teaching Award in 2009, the UNI Diversity Matters award in 2011, and the National Communication Association Leslie Irene Coger Award for Lifetime Achievement in Performance in 2013.

Dr. Mitchell is also currently the Secretary for Humanities Iowa, an organization that brings the humanities to the public through grant making, publications, interactive programming and events.

UNI and WGS will miss her and thank her for her dedication to students.
We asked Dr. Mitchell a few questions as she prepares to retire in June.

**What are your research interests in?**
"My research interests are in applied Performance Studies. As I reflect on my career, I’m very pleased that I found a university which valued both my teaching and my creative work as an adapter/director. I had a fulfilling 20+ years as Artistic Director of the UNI Interpreters Theatre. My creative work ranged from a performance of a romance novel sat in the context of reader response literary theory, to a Critical/Cultural analysis of Barbie, to many different projects based on social issues. Two additional contributions are my work as Founding Director of the SAVE Forum Actors (a violence prevention group) and as a founding member of the UNI National Coalition Building Institute to fight racism."

**How long have you been a part of the WGS advisory board and/or an affiliate faculty?**
"I honestly cannot remember when I became an affiliate faculty member of WGS, but I remember very clearly that it was Victoria DeFrancisco who approached me and suggested I apply. That was one of the best things I did early in my career as a college professor. The faculty members I met, including my late partner Harry Brod, have been my best friends, favorite collaborators, and loyal support system for almost three decades."

**How does feminism influence your professional goals/duties?**
"My commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion are concepts that WGS helped me understand on a deeper level by providing me with lectures, book groups, conferences, discussions, and story circles with like-minded people. This changed me personally, professionally and civically; I became a better ally, teacher, and citizen. I can honestly say that every part of my life has been deeply influenced by my understanding of feminism and performance as agents of social change."

**What are your plans for retirement?**
"Of course I will be carrying that WGS experience into retirement. I plan to create workshops on topics such as overcoming anti-racism, understanding white privilege, becoming body positive, and telling your story. In my free time I will be playing scrabble, singing in the choir, gardening, reading, enjoying improvisational acting, planning storytelling events, and creating art with mixed media. And travel. I cannot wait to travel again!"
The Second Annual Cedar Valley Women’s March took place on January 30, 2021. The virtual Cedar Valley march hosted keynote speaker Dr. Reverend Belinda Creighton-Smith together with Timi Brown-Powers, La Toshia Burrell, and Amanda Goodman who explored the intersections of feminism in Cedar Valley and in the United States.

On November 20th, WGS, GSS, and Rod Library staff collaborated with WGS graduate student Noah Andrew to remember the trans lives lost in 2020. It was held live at the Campanile.
Every March the Women and Gender Studies program collaborates with various organizations to make a master calendar of events that occur and celebrate the intersections of women and gender throughout history from past to present.

The 2021 International Women's Day campaign theme was #ChooseToChallenge. Every human is responsible for their own thoughts and actions - all day, every day. The WGS Program chose to challenge by celebrating women's achievements. Sedomda Kpikpitse and Staycie Lyman presented Women's Activism in US to a group of sixth graders at Hansen Elementary school in Cedar Falls.
The final event of Women’s History Month, the Women’s & Gender Studies program and Department of Languages and Literatures co-sponsored a book club with this year’s featured author, Ukamaka Olisakwe. Ukamaka was chosen as one of Sub-Saharan Africa’s most promising writers under the age of 40 in 2014. *Ogadinma Or, Everything Will Be All Right* is a tale of struggle, survival, and strength written by a Nigerian feminist author. The story revolves around the life of Ogadinma, a 17-year-old girl from Kano, Nigeria, who is exiled from her family after she gets pregnant. The tale of Ogadinma is not just her own, it speaks for mothers who are at the mercy of patriarchal domination and how they turn around their situation amid the game of survival. An introduction was done by one of our graduate students; Rifat Siddiqui during the final reading series. Olisakwe shared with the audience that her story is a tribute to her mother’s generation and inspired by the changing narratives about women and marriages in Nigeria.
April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month, and WGS kicked off a virtual Take Back The Night event on April 10th, 2021. This webinar included speakers: Gwen Bramlet-Hecker, Program Director of Riverview; Dr. Michael Fleming from UNI's Center for Violence Prevention; Karrah Bates, GA from UNI's Title IX office; Annette Lynch from UNI's School of Applied Human Sciences; and Shawna Jesse from Student Wellness Services.

Take Back the Night is an important event that advocates for the support of survivors and the end of sexual violence. Sexual violence is common on college campuses, including ours -- what can we do to end it? We heard from campus advocates and the Director of Riverview, to discuss advocacy and support for the cause.
Fatima Saadat (She/Her)
From: Bamyan, Afghanistan
Applied Track student

"I am surprised at the power of this multipurpose major, WGS is not only about women's issues. It goes beyond gender and focuses on humanity and being a leader, addressing deep social problems such as violence, inclusion and social justice which is essential for a healthy society."

Hobbies: "I'm interested in short story writing, drawing, and running. And so much other stuff."

Jane Gayi (She/Her)
From: Volta Region, Ghana
Applied Track student (Gender Equality in non-profit Organization)

I am enthusiastic about doing my Master in Women’s and Gender Studies at UNI.

My plan is to complete the WGS program degree and further pursue a career in Gender Equality and Prevention of Violence against Women. I grew up in a community where there was a lot of violence against women and gender inequality, Early Child Marriage, Female Genital Mutilation, also known as (FGM) is very high in my country Ghana. I wish to bring a solution to women who go through violence and gender inequality in my country Ghana especially Northern Region, Volta Region, Western Region, and part of Eastern."

Quote on why I chose this minor: COVID-19 changed things for me by giving me more time at home with my parents, grandpa, and sister. I was able to make art, go on walks, pick up trash in my area (lakes of Okoboji), and slow down and make time for long-awaited projects. With school, I have been mostly hybrid or online, but it has been a blessing to be able to have more control over my class schedule that way. I am very thankful to be able to be in person for performance art, which has helped me expand my creativity over all areas in my life. The past year has been a big change, but overall I think the opportunity to grow from the time to slow down and reflect was exactly what I needed at this point in my life before graduation.
My professional Goals: I want to become a high school band director wherever I end up in life! It could be Texas? or Iowa! You never know!

Expected Graduation Date: May 8th, 2021

Fun fact: I am a mediocre flute beat boxer that can also say the alphabet backwards!

Quote on why I chose this minor: I chose the Sexuality, Women, & Gender minor because I took the “Women and Gender Studies” Liberal Arts Core class and immediately realized how much I hadn’t opened my eyes to in today’s society. I wanted to change that for myself, my community and for my future students. As a future music educator I found it very important to educate myself on topics that can be difficult to acknowledge, that aren’t spoken about nearly as much as they should be and that more people should become aware of as our communities continue to grow and develop. I wanted to make myself an all around better person and I believe that adding this minor to my plan of study was the right step toward being a more welcoming and understanding citizen wherever I may end up in life.
Every year, the commencement ceremonies are filled with speakers from the university and individual colleges. This year, we are lucky to announce that one of our minors, Bekah Bass will be speaking at the College of Social and Behavior Sciences commencement. Bekah was nominated by Dr. Kysar-Moon in Sociology and a committee then went through the nominations and chose her.

Bekah Bass will be delivering a speech on Saturday, May 8th's College of Social and Behavioral's commencement. She plans to talk about how unpredictable life has been at UNI. Even before the pandemic, life could be unpredictable, in both good ways and bad ways. In her words, "But, everyone who is graduating has grown through those things and has the skills and resiliency to continue facing the uncertainties of life."

Congratulations Bekah and good luck in your future endeavors!
One of the many things I learned as a WGS student is that the hierarchical order of things and humans hinders some of us from thriving. Some aspects of our existence as humans intersect to create unique approaches to discrimination and privilege. In the city where I live, people have always suffered from marginalization. The centralization of the creature comforts in the big cities renders life in smaller cities really hard and limited. The theoretical baggage I have acquired while attending WGS has equipped me with a robust understanding of the social institutions guiding our lives. It has also provided me with a vision for a future free of discrimination and injustices. Learning how to look at things differently, I started getting frustrated by how private educational institutions in my city have turned education into a business. I took it upon myself then to do something about it. Although life has taken me places, and despite the so many shifts of interests I witnessed while growing academically, I went back to my hometown to start this project in an attempt at providing people with an encouraging learning space. As they say, don’t attach yourself to a place, a project, a person, or a company. Attach yourself to a mission, a calling, a purpose. I have made the call for quality education for all as my short-term purpose for the time I’m in Mila, Algeria.
My mission, for the time being, is to provide people in my area with a place they would consider a real locus for learning. Besides being the manager of the school and giving EFL classes, I am also volunteering online for the United Nations. My work for the UN varies from translating and summarizing materials to doing research and collecting data. I will forever be thankful for the Women’s and Gender Studies program at UNI which helped me develop teamwork skills, critical thinking, and problem solving skills that are highly needed in my work.

**Notables and Quotables**