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UNIWGS

UNI WOMEN'S & GENDER STUDIES

WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES PROGRAM AT UNI
Hello and welcome to another semester’s worth of news from the WGS program at UNI! My humble greeting will be short but unfortunately not sweet, as I am still reeling from the bombshell revelation of the SCOTUS brief that outlines their intention to overturn Roe v. Wade based on arguments in favor of a draconian anti-choice Mississippi law. For almost my entire life, this essential right has been considered protected by our Constitution and, while not popular amongst some Americans, set the precedent for the protection of many other personal freedoms. I know that I am only stating things that have already been said by many others and more eloquently, but I do want to share with you some terrifying facts to ponder from the Guttmacher Institute* about the position of abortion rights in this country:

23 states have laws that could be used to restrict the legal status of abortion.
9 states retain their unenforced, pre-Roe abortion bans.
13 states have post-Roe laws to ban all or nearly all abortions that would be triggered if Roe were overturned.
9 states have unconstitutional post-Roe restrictions that are currently blocked by courts but could be brought back into effect with a court order in Roe’s absence.
7 states have laws that express the intent to restrict the right to legal abortion to the maximum extent permitted by the U.S. Supreme Court in the absence of Roe.

4 states have passed a constitutional amendment explicitly declaring that their constitution does not secure or protect the right to abortion or allow use of public funds for abortion.
Moreover, in multiple conversations with Tate Reeves, the Governor of Mississippi, interviewers failed to get a straight answer when they questioned him about potential state bills outlawing contraception such as IUDs and Plan B, an even more horrific possibility to contemplate that is surely being considered in almost half the states in the country as I write this.

Many rumors and theories surround the leak and its impact for women’s rights and the US court system’s legitimacy in the days to come. For a moment, however, I’d like to look backward, specifically at how the election of Trump and many other conservative politicians at the state and local levels has altered the playbook for the next decade, if not longer. By playing the long game, Republicans have developed a foundation for the erosion of women’s rights and social justice that will profoundly affect untold future generations. But I hope that it is not too late. Now is the time for Democrats and liberals of all persuasions to put aside any conflicts and stand unassailably united in the face of this very real threat. Believe me when I say that this is just the first major conservative victory in the culture wars in this country that will ultimately touch the majority of its citizens, regardless of gender. Their clear intention is to dismantle any and all advances in social justice and personal freedoms that we have been able to achieve in the last fifty years, and the toppling of Roe v. Wade will give them even greater incentive to achieve these goals. Elections have consequences. Be politically active in your community—participate in local elections, support local liberal candidates, or even better, run for a local office. Make your voice heard with your votes. Take part in a truly grassroots movement that will create a permanent change in how this country treats all of its people, not just the privileged few.

A rising tide lifts all boats… be a part of that tide.

Wendy Hoofnagle

* https://www.guttmacher.org/state-policy/explore/abortion-policy-absence-roe
CEDAR VALLEY WOMEN'S MARCH

On Saturday January 29th, UNI Women's and Gender Studies Program together with Black Hawk County NOW, and Northern Iowa Feminists hosted the 3rd Annual Cedar Valley Women's March in Waterloo. Despite the cold weather, this year the march was held in person and explored intersections of feminism in the United States and Cedar Valley. The event had a kick start with several prominent feminist speakers and indigenous women. We are so lucky to have had Joy Riscoe, Varvara Williams, Nia Wilder, and Timi Brown-Powers all come out and speak despite how cold it was. Speaker, Timi Brown Powers, Iowa State Representative of House District 61, not only addressed their current activities and missions for betterment of women’s lives, but also emphasized the importance of education and raising awareness.

Newsletter Article

For our spring newsletter article, we wanted to highlight the voices of international students. So, we asked international students around campus about their honest feedback and opinion on the United States either before or after coming here. This article is neither intended for political purposes nor is an inclusive sample. It's merely an informative discussion between UNI students and to satisfy curiosity.
To find out what they said, look for the clouds in the newsletter.

"What do people from your country think of the United States? Do they view it as a savior country or a police state?"
March 8th was International Women’s Day, and the WGS program knows how to celebrate it. This year, we tabled at Maucker Union. The event included a card making station to write appreciation letters to women in their lives where they could decorate and add stickers to their card. In addition, snacks were provided for participants. Since it is an international event, WGS students displayed posters of 10 of their favorite international feminist women. The posters included the women’s pictures, where they are from, and their contribution to women’s issues. Finally, students were encouraged to take part in #BreakTheBias, by taking pictures of themselves and sharing them on social media with the hashtag #breakthebias, pledging to call out gender bias and discrimination.

The event was a lot of fun to plan, and to take part in. The students got the chance to interact with amazing people that participated, and to take a break from the academic work for a couple of hours.
February is Black History Month and for our SWAG forum we had a presentation titled “The Significance of Black Lives Matter.” Our co-speakers were Dr. Reverend Belinda Creighton-Smith and Joyce Levingston. Dr. Reverend Belinda is an adjunct instructor in Social Work and WGS, and a pastor of Faith Temple American Baptist Church. She is an anti-racism trainer and activist. Joyce Levingston is a Senior Program Director, a Graduate Research Assistant in her Ed D program at UNI, organizer of the Waterloo/Cedar Falls BLM movement, and the founder of Cedar Valley’s Little Free Pantries. She is also an anti-racism activist.

The presentation had an interactive conversation between the speakers and the audience. It started with the question, “Who here wants to be black?” directed at the audience, to start a conversation about racism, privilege and oppression. The speakers addressed the issue of systemic violence against black people, and the extent it affects different aspects of their lives, such as education, health, and living situations. They also talked about the Black Lives Movement, how it started, and its significance to the black community. Dr. Reverend Belinda Creighton-Smith and Joyce Levingston shared some of their personal experiences of facing racism, and urged the audience to be allies in their anti-racism activism.
MARCH SWAG FORUM

For our March SWAG forum, celebrating Women's History Month, we had a presentation titled "Love & Courtship in Early Modern England." Our speakers were Dr. Jennifer McNabb and Dr. Jesse Swan. Dr. Swan focused on Lucy, the daughter of Elizabeth Cary, and her description of her mother. He discussed sex appeal, body size discrimination and pious shame in royal court life. Dr. McNabb talked about Elizabeth I, or the Virgin Queen. She discussed the history of courtship of Elizabeth, the various depictions of her in Hollywood movies, the eternal image of youth Elizabeth chose for herself, and most importantly, the political background of her choices.

APRIL SWAG FORUM

Our last SWAG forum for the year was for the winner of the Outstanding Graduate Paper Award on gender issues, Emma Watson, who discussed "Militarized Muscular Christianity & Hegemonic Masculine Performance at the U.S. Capitol Riot." The paper provided an analysis of masculinity performances during the January 6th riots, focusing of Christianity and militarism, where rioters believed they were a part of a holy war to save the United States. The presentation was very engaging and well done, and was a great closure to a productive year in terms of SWAG forums.
A student from Afghanistan said, "I would like to answer this question by putting myself in two contexts, academic setting and my encounter with the local Americans. In the academic setting, I usually do not get this feeling that the US is a savior country because people in Academia are more informed and not very opinionated of the USA being a savior country. However, from what I have gathered through my encounter with local Americans, pretty much everyone I have spoken with implies that the US is a savior country and so are the Americans. That is why, they have this attitude of saving other nations without knowing much about the context of people coming from other countries. Even when they help non-Americans, some of them have this savior attitude."

A student from Brazil said, "I don't see the United States as a controlling state nor as a 'savior' country. How much 'freedom' exists can vary according to which political party is in power (not saying that one is more controlling than the other, they just do that through different mechanisms). It also depends on how one defines freedom, and if it is individual or collective. Compared to my home country I would say there are fewer laws, but generally they are enforced more thoroughly. I can elaborate that better if you want me to. Although the question was about control, I think freedom is tightly related to that."

A student from Tibet said, "I cannot speak on behalf of what Tibetan people generally think about the U.S. I personally feel that the U.S. is kind of a savior, in terms of extending support and providing resources, especially for the immigrants and refugees like me. But I think the U.S. could do much more than what they are currently doing and hold the countries or groups accountable that violate human rights or cause violence."
WGS started April with a wonderful community engagement experience! Continuing the tradition of community engagement, our graduate assistants (GAs) were fortunate to have an opportunity to interact with sixth grade students at Hansen Elementary School in Cedar Falls by delivering a presentation on “Teen Activism”. This engaging activity was presented through Zoom and opened the door for three combined classes of students to broaden their understanding of what activism is and the different kinds, especially in the Cedar Valley. Most of the students shared their opinions, experiences, and activities they have participated in. They also asked questions about how a campaign can be successful or what are the different platforms they can use to highlight their voices better.

Both the students and GAs benefited from exchanging in open dialog. The students benefited by not only interacting with UNI students, but also learning what activities we do at the WGS program as an example of activism.

8 years old

She wrote a letter to president Obama to talk about Flint water crisis, since they didn’t receive clean water.

President Obama replied, and came to Flint.

Mari has raised money online for students going to school in Flint, helped load cases of water into resident's cars, participated in anti-bullying campaigns, and worked to give underserved kids free screenings of diverse movies.

How you can participate in Activism

Activism is done everyday. You can start by:

- Recognizing an injustice in your school, community, church, world, etc.
- What or what is the problem?
  - You or large group of people?
  - Underprivileged or minority group?
  - Environment or animals?
- What can you do? Find an appropriate solution or goal you want and can achieve is there a group already working on it that you can join?
  - Join groups that advocate for people, places, or things like: Black Lives Matter, Student Government, Charities, Recycling, Cedar Bend Human Society, Environmental group, etc.
- Speak with your family about how they can help you achieve your goals.
- Write out what you plan on doing so others know what you want to accomplish.
- Start your campaign and tell others about it. You can:
  - Collect donations
  - Make something to sell with proceeds going to the organization
  - Collect signatures for petitions
  - Adding your voice with hashtags on social media
  - Join Marches
  - Learn as much as you can about the topic so you can discuss with others
  - Use art as a form of activism – write, draw, script, etc.
I WAS A TEENAGE FEMINIST

Our last event for Women's History Month was a movie screening and discussion hosted by Monsoon. The movie is titled *I Was a Teenage Feminist*, by filmmaker Therese Shechter. In this movie, Shechter revisits feminism, trying to figure out why supposedly feminist women refuse to identify with the term or movement. 

Spoiler alert: women believe the F word - Feminism - has negative connotations about man hating, hairy and ugly women. The audience had a discussion about the movie, pointing out that it focuses on white feminism, although it touched very lightly issues concerning the black community and their struggles. Shechter revisits feminism in a shallow manner and through a very limiting white feminist lens.

This event provided an opportunity to reflect on the entire Women's International History Month, and consider other ways to celebrate it for future years.

We will be co-hosting another event with Monsoon next fall semester, titled "A Letter to My Body". It is a workshop that allows participants to write a humorous letter to their bodies. So, stay tuned for that!
April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month. In our attempts to bring awareness to sexual assaults, we partnered with Riverview Center and Northern Iowa Feminists for Take Back the Night event. TBTN events started in England in the 1960s, and in the US in the 1970s. They are protest walks initiated by women, demanding to feel safe walking the streets at night. For our event, students met at Kamerick Art Building for the "What Were You Wearing?" exhibit. After the exhibit, Melody, who is a WGS alumni and a Riverview Center Sexual Assault advocate, gave a short speech about sexual assault and the need for women to feel safe walking the streets at night. Afterward, students walked from the Art Building to the University Room in Maucker Union, to join a lecture and discussion about consent with Professor Ana Kogl, hosted by Northern Iowa Feminists. The lecture started with a couple of disclaimers on the content and language that will be used. The lecture addressed sexual assaults, consent and what the law says about it. For future events, it is important to encourage more students to take part in such occasions, and bring more diversity and men included in these conversations.
Adel Scherrer (she/ her)

Adel is a Thesis Track grad student from Traer, Iowa, and this is what she has to say about being a new WGS grad student:

“As a former Political Science student, I have always been interested in social justice and the justice system. WGS allows me to explore both of these fields.”

Fun fact: I ran a marathon at 13!

Rachel Dillavou (she/ they)

Rachel is a Thesis Track grad student from Evansdale, Iowa, and this is what she has to say about being a new WGS grad student:

“I believe this program will help prepare me in pursuing my PhD in the future.”

Fun fact: I already hold a Master’s Degree in Museum Studies from Western Illinois University. But I received my undergraduate degrees from UNI. Go Panthers!
Hakima Afzaly (she/ her)

Hakima Afzaly is a graduate student in Women’s and Gender Studies at the University of Northern Iowa (UNI). Currently, she is writing her thesis about marriage practices in Afghanistan. She is interested in doing research about policies that are gender specific. As a graduate assistant at UNI, her research focuses on the gender aspects of COVID-19. Apart from her studies and research work, Hakima enjoys jogging and playing tennis.

I don’t know my plans after graduation yet, still trying to figure it out :) 

Cierra Naglowsky (she/ they)

My time at UNI is filled with learning and spreading word about Women’s and Gender Studies. I was awarded the opportunity of becoming a Teaching Assistant, where I taught Introduction to WGS and Introduction to LGBTQ+ Studies. It has been an amazing opportunity and I have learned just as much, if not more, than the students I have come in contact with!

I plan to finish my thesis soon looking at the intersections of gender and Fatness and how society perceives Fat bodies in our society.
Hi! My name is Kelby Robb and I’m from Vinton, Iowa. I’m pursuing a post baccalaureate degree in History. I chose to minor in WGS because I’m passionate about the study of gender and sexuality.

Fun fact about me that I’m proud of: I was interviewed by an Omaha news station as an ally and advocate for the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women’s Movement.

I was born and raised in the Cedar Valley area. I’m pursuing the Sexuality, Women, and Gender Studies Graduate Certificate to acquire greater perspective and insight into my research and personal comprehension. As a Public History graduate student and high school history teacher, an intersectional approach is crucial to effective historical practice.

My fun fact: I studied abroad in Klagenfurt, Austria at Alpen Adria Universität for six months learning German language and Austrian culture in my undergraduate degree here at UNI!!
We contacted our Alumni, Megan Vogt-Kostner, to see what she's been up to after graduating from WGS, and this is what she has to share:

"I have been employed in the same position since graduating from the WGS program. My primary duties at the institution rely on my role as the Senior Research Analyst in the UNI Office of Institutional Effectiveness & Planning. In this role I work with individuals across campus to support their strategies of evaluation and assessment while making data informed decisions. This year I also started adjuncting in the Department of Social Work at UNI and teaching Social Work Research (SW:3185) to upper level social work students. I really enjoy this role as I am able to connect and collaborate with students while talking about the research they are interested in.

Outside of work I love spending time with my two (almost three) small children and husband. We love going on long walks to the park and stopping for coffee or ice cream along the way!"
Francesca Soans

Francesca Soans is an award-winning filmmaker and Associate Professor of Digital Media in the Department of Communication and Media at the University of Northern Iowa. Her films and videos have screened worldwide at competitive film festivals, art galleries, and conferences, and been broadcast on public and cable television channels. Soans' films explore gender, identity, and memory. Her documentary film, "Notes towards a History," weaves together traveler's images, poetry, and the memories of a 103-year old South Asian woman, winning the Directors Citation from the Black Maria Film Festival. Her fiction film "Rebirth," which explores race and gender in a small town, was nominated for Best Iowa film by the Wild Rose International Film Festival. Her pioneering documentary, "Sons of Jacob Synagogue," co-directed with historian Robert Neymeyer on the Jewish community in Waterloo, Iowa, received numerous awards, including the Loren Horton Community History Award for Excellence from the State Historical Society of Iowa. She was recently selected as an Iowa Artist Fellow, a competitive award from the Iowa Arts Council. Soans’ films have challenged norms in society and media, advocating for the value of stories from under-represented communities. Since 2003, she has worked on a documentary about the North End and the history of the African American community in Waterloo, part of the groundbreaking city project, Waterloo: A History of Place, a series of documentaries that explore everyday memories and places in Waterloo, Iowa. She is also in post-production on "A River Speaks," a documentary about a community radio station in the Himalayas. She has received several major grants from the Philadelphia Independent Film and Video Association, the Iowa Arts Council, Humanities Iowa, the Guernsey Foundation, and the Broadcast Education Association.

Soans teaches foundational and advanced courses in digital media production in the Digital Media program, including courses focusing on documentary, fiction, and interactive storytelling in digital media, scriptwriting, film and media theory, and feminist film.
Molly Cormaney (she/her)

Molly graduated from UNI with her BA in 1993 and her MA (English) in 2002. She has taught classes as an adjunct instructor at Upper Iowa University’s Waterloo Center, Hawkeye Community College, and has been a faculty member at UNI since 2007. After spending several years in the Department of Languages & Literatures, she moved to WGS and has taught Introduction to Women’s & Gender Studies and Introduction to LGBTQ Studies. A Cedar Falls native, Molly works for a local company by day and as an instructor by night.

“I enjoy teaching and interacting with students. In my spare time, I enjoy reading and spending time with my husband and our many pets!”

A student from Greece said, “I like living in the US. It is the most diverse country I have lived in, where people from different ethnic, race and religious backgrounds blend in the American society. In general the society is working towards more diversity and it is very reassuring for the future. People in the Midwest especially are helpful and kind. Although we cannot close our eyes to what is happening around the globe, I have not felt a controlling/police state in UNI’s community, although I am sure this depends on the part of the country/state/neighborhood you live in. The woman in my family program who lives in Waterloo needs a gun in her house for self-protection and she has said that in her previous house she would listen to gunshots. This is a frightening thought but I have not experienced it myself in Cedar Falls.”
A student from Palestine-Israel said, “In my country we have various views on the United States, and it also changes according to the politics in the US. Some people, mostly the far right, loved the country when Donald Trump was president, because he ‘showed strength’ and was an interesting and an unapologetic man. Those same people think that the US is failing now because they have a democratic president. On the other hand, people who are in the far left, have a more complex view of it. They view it as a place that offers opportunities and celebrates the liberal values the US is known for. At the same time, they are aware of the bloody history of the country, and that minorities are still suffering from it. I believe the world has a long way to go towards an equal and just society.”

A student from Georgia said, “Globally, any big and powerful country has its own ‘big plans’ in terms of taking advantage of others and getting as many economic benefits as possible. Most often it is depicted in ‘peaceful’ practices of negotiations about international or intercontinental global trading, such as accessing different crucial natural resources on different territories and agreeing on some price policies, etc. But sometimes it includes an act of force. Based on my personal experiences here, these two years have been amazing. I met great people who played a crucial role in forming my positive opinion on the US. Also, the sense of safety, better living conditions, the better quality of education, and more opportunities have built an idea in my mind that the US is the best shelter for a lot of people.”

An Alumni of UNI said, “People in Ukraine have a very positive picture of the U.S. they think of it as a democratic state and the land of opportunities. U.S. built really strong ties with Ukraine via numerous exchange programs for students and ongoing diplomatic/cultural efforts locally.”
“Butterflies are like women – we may look pretty and delicate, but baby, we can fly through a hurricane.”
- Betty White

“Sometimes people try to destroy you, precisely because they recognize your power – not because they don't see it, but because they see it and they don’t want it to exist.”
- bell hooks

No outcome of the war is more valuable than the lives that are at stake.”
- Mohith Agadi

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that’s wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise.