

Fall 2020 Newsletter

Dear Alumni and Friends,

Greetings from the [Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Department](#) in the College of Arts and Sciences at Stony Brook University! I hope this newsletter finds you as well as can be expected in these very difficult times.

We have just started the new school year at Stony Brook. All of our undergraduate classes are online. We felt this was the safest and most accessible way to deliver our curriculum. WGSS has always prided itself on a commitment to teaching excellence and pedagogical innovation, and our faculty and graduate instructors worked hard over the summer in preparation for teaching online. We also prepared our classes for the fall in the wake of the brutal killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Tony McDade, and many, many others, and in the midst of a summer of protest against police violence, racism, and white supremacy. Feminist and anti-racist pedagogy teaches us that the classroom is embedded in larger systems and structures—institutional, economic, political, legal—that delimit our work but also motivate us to transform the classroom and world beyond it.



Lisa Diedrich, Professor and Chair

I was last in touch in the spring as we prepared to celebrate the Class of 2020, even as the pandemic overshadowed that celebration. Knowing that we would not be able to have an in-person graduation, I reached out to our alums all over the world to ask you to help us send a multiplicity of well-wishes to our graduates. Many of you responded, and I had the pleasure of reconnecting with lots of recent and not-so-recent graduates. We created the [WGSS blog](#), a space in which to post stories, photographs, videos from and about WGSS majors and minors, graduate students, and alums. Faculty wrote about our Class of 2020 award winners, graduating seniors posted reflections, and alums told us the amazing things they have been up to since they graduated. We discovered many Stony Brook alums are now on the West Coast, and Portland in particular is apparently a beacon for WGSS@SBU graduates.

The WGSS blog will continue, and we would love to hear from you about things you are up to that we might feature on the blog.

Lisa Diedrich



Professor and Chair



2020 Undergraduate Graduation Awards

Activism & Academic Excellence:
Zach Davidson

Terry Alexander Award:
Nic Grima

Vivien Hartog Memorial Graduate Student Award,
Excellence in Teaching:
Annu Daftuar, Valerie Moyer, Melis Umut

Academic Excellence:
Jeanette Blanchette and Jessica Tom

May 2020 Graduates

We honored 28 graduates virtually in May 2020.

Among the 28 candidates, we had 11 majors and 17 minors; 9 students graduated with honors: 1 summa cum laude, 3 magna cum laude, and 5 cum laude.

WGSS Professor Mary Jo Bona Received the 2019-2020 SUNY Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Faculty Service



Twenty-seven of Stony Brook University's esteemed faculty and staff members received the 2019-2020 State University of New York (SUNY) Chancellor's Awards for Excellence. These awards acknowledge the dedication and accomplishments of

instructional faculty, librarians, and professional staff across SUNY campuses and encourage the ongoing pursuit of excellence. The awards are presented annually in seven categories including Librarianship, Scholarship and Creative Activities, Professional Service, Faculty Service, and Teaching.

Check out the launch of our **WGSS@StonyBrook Blog!**



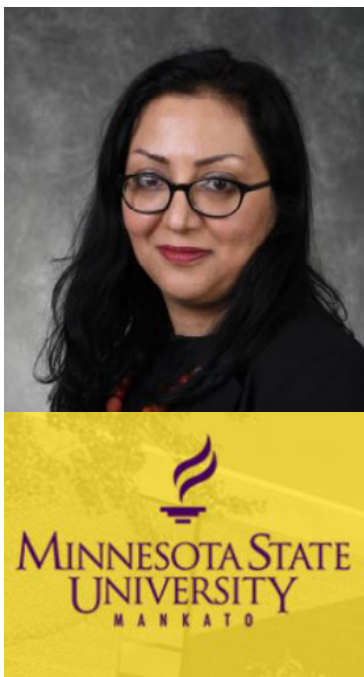
WGSS@StonyBrook
Blog for the Department of Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies at Stony Brook University

HOME ABOUT WGSS@SBU

Breonna Taylor and Tony McDade: Why I Have Become Indebted to My WGSS Education
by Idiedrich on June 1, 2020.

This post is from Elizabeth Varghese, who graduated in May with BA in WGSS and a BS in Biology. Elizabeth received a Provost's Award for Academic Excellence and was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. She will be an MD/MPH candidate at the Renaissance School of Medicine at Stony Brook in the fall.

I started my Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (WGSS) degree by accident. I got locked out of a course I needed for my then journalism minor, and stumbled upon Professor Tiso's WST 102 class in the middle of a panicked and groggy 8:01 a.m. search for anything that would fulfill a general education requirement. Relieved to have simply found a class that seemed easy to balance on top of what would eventually prove to be a difficult semester for pre-meds, I didn't think much of an introductory WGSS course.



WGSS Doctoral Candidate Yalda Hamidi Accepts Assistant Professor Position at Minnesota State University

We are thrilled to announce that our very own doctoral candidate, [Yalda Hamidi](#), has accepted the position of [Assistant Professor of Gender & Women's Studies](#) at Minnesota State University Mankato. Yalda is interested in transnational, postcolonial, and Islamic feminisms. Her area of work is mainly focused on Middle Eastern and Iranian feminisms, war, diaspora, sovereignty, and the relationship between women and the nation. Yalda's research, "From Female Patriotism to Diasporic Womanhood: Negotiating Diaspora and Feminist Aspirations," challenges the appropriation of Iranian diasporic literature in feminist and literary canons, and suggests new ways of applying rhetorical listening for reading the multi-ethnic feminist literature. Congratulations, Yalda!

Interview with Raven Dorsey '16: BA Women's and Gender Studies; Gender, Sexuality, and Public Health Specialization

Tell us what you're doing now.

I am currently a program coordinator at Paid Leave for All, a campaign based out of Washington, DC with the goal of passing a Federal Paid Family and Medical Leave Policy by 2023. I am also a doula, supporting primarily birthing people of color and their families through the prenatal, labor and postpartum process.

How did your WGSS degree help you on the path you're on?

During my Junior year, I decided to complete a concentration in Gender, Sexuality and Public Health. I thought at the time that since I no longer wanted to become a doctor, I could still focus on the intersection of gender and public health. I had no idea that this experience would launch my interest in reproductive justice. Through this concentration I was able to take Maternal and Fetal Medicine. Through this class, I met midwives for the first time and was introduced to the different types of care that birthing people can receive with increased access to information and changes to our Maternal health system. I look back at this class and realize that it planted the seed for my journey into Reproductive Justice. My WGSS degree profoundly influenced my ability to excel at my 2nd year MSW internship and later my first full time job at the Women's Law Project, a state based social justice law center in Philadelphia, PA.



Left, Congresswoman, Ayanna Pressley (MA-07)
with Raven Dorsey

I will also never forget when Dr. Montegary introduced me to the concept that "Everything is socially constructed." My mind was blown and it may have taken years to fully let that concept sink in, but it ultimately taught me that change making is possible if you can point to and name the invisible structures that hold societal norms in place. I am forever grateful for experience in the WGSS department and all of the invaluable lessons my degree has taught me.

Tell us about a book that is important to you.

Pleasure Activism by Adrienne Maree Brown. This book was introduced to me by a dear friend of mine and clearly illustrates the connection between social justice and pleasure. Adrienne shows us how to make every aspect of our lives not only a revolutionary act but fun too! I highly recommend it for all of my fellow WGSS students.

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

A memorable event that I will never forget took place while I was working as a Community Organizer at the Warren for President Campaign in Greensboro, North Carolina. We held an event with Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley at NC A&T and I was honored to introduce her to the audience of community members in March 2020.

What advice would you give to WGSS majors and minors who are about to graduate?

Follow a path that you LOVE and the rest will follow. While at Stony Brook, I did not know what I would do with my WGSS degree until finally deciding to pursue a Masters of Social Work and even then, I was torn between clinical social work and larger structural change work. All I knew is that I loved studying Women, Gender and Sexuality studies (Where else can you write about natural hair and beyonce?) and that somehow everything would come together. Almost five years later, I have established my presence on social media as a #policydoula, working to take my experiences as a doula and eventually translate it into Maternal Health Policy. Keep doing what you love and the success will follow!

Get to know WGSS Assistant Professor Francesca Spedalieri!



Tell us about your work. What do you study?

Drama! And theatre, and performance! Give me all of it. I am interested in contemporary artists whose work resides at the intersection of performance, social justice, and activism. I get a kick

out of thinking about performance in relation to transnational social movements, as well as the tensions between artmaking and social justice in theatre production, criticism, and canon formation.

My research interests include theatre and performance studies; translation/adaptation; Italian/Italian diasporic literary and cultural studies; and queer feminist theories. I am also interested in multilingualism on stage, the intermingling of Italian national and regional languages in performance, and the embodied politics of migration in the 21st century. My areas of expertise are: activism and performance; devised and collective creation; and Italian contemporary theatre. Specifically, I study the works of contemporary women and queer Italian playwrights, directors, and performers, paying particular attention to how they disrupt canonical narratives of gender, race, sexuality, and disability.

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

I will never forget watching *A Season in the Congo* by Aimé Césaire at the Young Vic in London in 2013. The play tells the journey of independence leader Patrice Lumumba and of the struggle for the liberation of the Congo from Belgian rule. As the production indicted neoliberal Britain for its own colonial and neocolonial rule, it also created a space for resistance through radical joy — a space for envisioning a different, equitable future. It continues to stay in my bones.

What was a favorite class you took as an undergrad?

I was privileged to take a directed study on African American Theatre with Dr. Mikell Pinkney at the University of Florida. I had only lived in the

US for two years at the time and I was a newly minted theatre major I switched majors in my junior year). Besides learning about amazing artists and their work, I immensely appreciated the interdisciplinarity of Dr. Pinkney's approach. I learned about Marxist, critical race, and queer feminist theory as I learned about W. E. B. DuBois' pageants, Ntozake Shange's choreopoems, and Suzan-Lori Parks' plays. The class helped me learn how to ask questions of "The Great Hole of History" (from Parks' *The America Play*) and cultivate my own intellectual curiosity. And it was Dr. Pinkney who first encouraged me to consider graduate school. As a first-generation college student, I had never really been on my radar. So much to be grateful for.

What do you like to do to relax or for fun?

I grew up in a big Italian family in a small town surrounded by farms. People grow things and make things and then exchange what they have. For my family, food has always been community and care. I enjoy cooking. Bonus points if I can use foraged ingredients or botanicals I grow. Who knew that garlic mustard and knotted weed make for such good dishes (check out [Alexis Nelson's work](#) if you are interested)? I am working on my pickle game — and, with working, I mean trying not to have my dill pickles explode again!

Dog or cat person?

I do like both but share my life with neither. Plants?

Favorite sport? Favorite team?

Football. I mean, the real one. The one with 11 players, the big net, and the round ball.

I used to play center defense. No favorite team. I enjoy picking a team when I am watching a specific game.

What are you listening to now?

I have been listening to the cast recording of *A Strange Loop* by Michael R. Jackson on repeat.

Also: the *All My Relations* and *Good Ancestor* podcasts.

What's Happening in WGSS?

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FALL 2020



Fri, Sep 18
"What Do You Wish You Knew?"
Grad Student Panel and Q&A: Speakers TBA



Fri, Oct 2
Building Your Curriculum Vitae (CV)
Facilitator: Liz Montegary



Fri, Oct 30
Choosing Advisors, Building Mentoring Relationships
Faculty Panel: Mary Jo Bona, Cristina Khan, & Shirley Lim



Fri, Nov 13
Thinking Ahead to the Comprehensive Exam
Facilitator: Liz Montegary

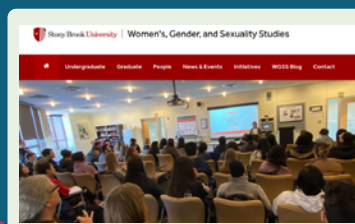
All events will take place via Zoom from 1:00-2:30pm on Friday afternoons.

INTERESTED IN THE WOMEN'S &
GENDER STUDIES MAJOR OR MINOR?

JOIN THE WOMEN'S, GENDER, AND
SEXUALITY STUDIES DEPT AT OUR....

WGSS VIRTUAL OPEN HOUSE

WEDNESDAY, OCT 21ST
1:00-2:00PM



VISIT THE [WGSS HOMEPAGE](http://WWW.STONYBROOK.EDU/COMMCMS/WGSS/) TO RSVP
(WWW.STONYBROOK.EDU/COMMCMS/WGSS/)