

# WGS news

Department of Women's & Gender Studies  
University of South Florida  
Spring, 2023



## In this issue:

WGS 50th Anniversary  
Events  
Alumni Updates  
Student and Faculty Profiles  
Department News

# Chair's Column: Diane Price Herndl



We are celebrating 50 years of Women's and Gender Studies at USF this year, so this seems like a good opportunity to reflect on how far we've come and how far we still have to go.

In 1972, Juanita Williams

founded Women's Studies at USF and brought Judy Ochshorn along with her into the program, which was housed at first in the American Idea Program, itself part of ISS. When Dr. Williams started the program, there was only one already operating in the country, and only a handful of others that were being started that year. The program made its first hire in 1973 when Marilyn Myerson joined the faculty. Today, we have our own department, ten faculty members on two campuses, and teach more than 3000 students per year. We offer an undergraduate degree, two minors, a graduate degree and a graduate certificate. Our history has sometimes been tumultuous, but we were the first university in Florida to offer Women's Studies, and the first to offer the BA and MA.

What was the US like in 1972 when Women's Studies at USF was founded?

Employment was beginning to open up, following legislation and court decisions that had

- mandated equal pay for equal work (1963),
- prohibited employment discrimination (1964),
- lifted restrictions on the number of hours that women could work (1965),
- determined that women who met physical requirements could hold jobs that had previously been designated for men only (1969, though not codified in case law until 1970),
- and outlawed the practice of refusing to hire women with pre-school children (1971).

In civic and financial life, women

- could be excluded from jury duty because they were central to family life (not repealed until 1975),
- had won the equal right to administer wills (1971),
- could not yet have a credit card in their own name (until 1974),
- could be discriminated against in housing (until 1974),
- had only just gained the right to freedom from discrimination in education (Title IX, 1972);
- Shirley Chisholm became the first Black woman to seek the presidential nomination from a major party (1972),

- even though no Black woman had yet been chair of the board of the NAACP (not until 1975).

In private and reproductive life, women

- did have the right to birth control if they were married (1965),
- and had just gained that right if they were single (1972),
- but did not have the right to an abortion (until 1973),
- and could be forced to take maternity leave if they were pregnant (only ruled against in 1974),
- or sterilized against their will or knowledge, especially if they were Black, Puerto Rican, Latina, American Indian, or disabled;
- they could marry someone who was not of their own ethnic or racial group (1967),
- but they could not charge a spouse with rape (marital rape was not a crime in any state until 1976 and not in all states until 1996);
- anything about their prior sexual history could be brought up in court if they charged someone with rape (until 1975);
- there might be a rape crisis center (first ones started in 1971) or a domestic violence shelter (a few were started in the 1960s, but didn't expand until the 1970s).

Meanwhile, LGBTQ people

- were still classified as having a mental disorder (not changed until 1973);
- could legally have sex in only four states—Illinois, Connecticut, Oregon, and Colorado;
- could not marry each other or openly adopt children as LGBTQ families,
- but had begun holding Gay Pride marches in a few cities, after the Stonewall Riots (1969).

The Equal Rights Amendment passed during 1972, with a deadline for ratification by 1979. Fifty-one years later, it has not yet been ratified. In 1979, the UN recognized women's rights as human rights (with CEDAW), but the US has still not ratified the treaty.

We have certainly moved toward a much more open and equal society, but we have a long way to go to achieve our ideals of freedom and justice for all. We still have profound inequities in employment, working conditions, and pay, despite laws against those things; reproductive freedom is threatened after years of restrictive rules and the repeal last summer of the protections afforded by *Roe v. Wade*; reproductive health is threatened by an appalling maternal mortality rate; and gender theory, queer studies, critical race theory, and intersectionality are all on lists of topics that legislators would like to ban from schools, colleges, and universities.

As we celebrate, we should look back to the brave people who were fighting for civil rights and human rights fifty years ago to honor their vision, their tenacity, and their incredible hard work. We need to be inspired by them to renew our commitment to equality for all people.



Women's & Gender Studies will be celebrating 50 years at USF on March 3, 2023 and we hope that you can join us!

The evening will begin with a rooftop sunset soirée with cocktails, bites, and new connections, followed by a celebration of Women's and Gender Studies 'then and now' - honoring the past, embracing the present, and celebrating the future.

We look forward to seeing you there!

**Details:**

- Friday, March 3, 2023, 5:30 – 8:00 p.m.
- Cocktails and hors d'oeuvres from 5:30-7:00pm; Program 7:00-8:00pm
- University of South Florida Research Park: 3814 Spectrum Boulevard, Tampa, FL 33612

**RSVP is required:**

[usf.to/50WGSregister](https://usf.to/50WGSregister)



Follow WGS on social media to stay up to date on our 50th Anniversary events!

Facebook: @WGSUSF

Instagram: @wgs\_usf

*Newsletter cover image is from the "Pride Belongs to the People" photograph exhibition by Dr. Daniel Conway and Alex Green.*

# Reproductive Justice is for Everyone! Art Exhibit @WGS in Tampa



From October, 2022 - January, 2023 WGS hosted an in-person exhibition of selected pieces from a online art exhibit called *Reproductive Justice is for Everyone!* (the

justice from present day struggles and organizing to the aspirational and everything in between.

The sixteen pieces included in the in-person WGS exhibit included visual, film, and literary art. Artists included: Jude Wolff Ackroyd, Liza Brenner, Rose Briccetti, Danqi Cai, Jennifer Caputo-Seidler, Sam Carwyn, Miranda Darling, Taylor Jackson, Rudi Jie-A-Fa, Baileigh Johnson, Yewande Kotun Davis, Angela Masker, Melissa Meade, Luca Molnar, Ashley Rivera, and Anna Yang.

larger online exhibit was organized by nonprofit JAM Humanities and is viewable at: [museum.jamhumanities.org/rj](http://museum.jamhumanities.org/rj)).

The exhibit was accompanied by four receptions, including two for local community advocates and activists, and another for the USF WGS Alumni Group.

The artwork explored some of the myriad manifestations, experiences, emotions, and meanings of reproductive



Jude Wolff Ackroyd / *Not A She*



Miranda Darling / *Howl*



Rudi Jie-A-Fa / *Magical Daydreams of Baby!*



Baileigh Johnson / *Stigma and Solidarity*



Rose Briccetti / *Bougainvillea and Reverse Drag Triptych: Jeanne Baret in an Edenic California Sunset, a McMansion, and a Wildfire*



Liza Brenner & Melissa Meade / *Oven*



Angela Masker / *Prometheus (Endometriosis)*



Luca Molnar / *Clinic*



Yewande Kotun Davis / *We Are the Ones We've Been Waiting For*

Literary works:

Jennifer Caputo Seidler / *Family Plannig Elective*

Anna Yang / *Motherhood*

Sam Carwyn / *Safe*



Danqi Cai / *Let's Make A Baby!*



Taylor Jackson / *Liberty Restroom*



Ashley Rivera / *We Are Autonomous*



Yewande Kotun Davis / *Dear Black Boys (You Mean the World to Me)*

# World Social Justice Day Showcase

The United Nations commemorates February 20th as World Day of Social Justice. This year's theme for the day is "Overcoming Barriers and Unleashing Opportunities for Social Justice."

To honor this day, WGS has collaborated with Centre Gallery in the USF Marshall Center (Tampa) to host an art exhibit focused on social justice issues.

The pieces included in the exhibit were created by USF students, faculty, and alumni, as well as other community members in the Tampa Bay area.

The exhibit will be on display in Centre Gallery from February 13 - February 23, 2023.

CAMPUS ACTIVITIES BOARD

CENTRE GALLERY In collaboration with... 50th Anniversary 1972 - 2022 Department of Women's & Gender Studies

Opening Reception: Monday, Feb. 13 6:00-7:00 PM

Exhibition Duration: Monday, Feb. 13 - Thursday, Feb. 23

Come See the Exhibition at: The Centre Gallery MSC 2700

**Social Justice Day Showcase Exhibition**

CENTER FOR STUDENT INVOLVEMENT 813-974-1001 usf.edu/involve MSC 2300 & 2306 in the Student Life Tower

AUSFCAB @USF\_CAB @WUSF\_CAB

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA Student Success

For reasonable accommodations, please call (813) 974-1001 (FL RELAY 711)

# Pride Belongs to the People Photograph Exhibit

WGS is proud to host the photograph exhibition, *Pride Belongs to the People* this spring semester. The exhibit opens on February 8, 2023 in CMC 202 and will run through April. Email [cas-wgs@usf.edu](mailto:cas-wgs@usf.edu) for a viewing appointment.

*Pride Belongs to the People* documents the struggles, circumstances and demands of LGBTQ+ activists in Johannesburg, South Africa; Taiwan; India; Cuba; Hong Kong; and New York, USA.



# Pride Belongs to the People Conversation

WGS invited the creator of *Pride Belongs to the People*, Dr. Daniel Conway, to deliver a talk at USF on February 8, 2023. Dr. Conway is Senior Lecturer in Politics and International Relations at the University of Westminster (UK) and his talk was paid for in part by a grant from the Florida Humanities Council (see page 16 for info about the grant).

Dr. Conway presented his research regarding Pride from an international perspective, followed by an enlightening conversation facilitated by Nathan Bruemmer, recently the Florida LGBTQ+ Consumer Advocate, as well as a former Acting Executive Director of St. Pete Pride.

# WGS Faculty Spotlight: Dr. Suzanne Persard

“...[W]hat I write and how I write is done in order to save my own life. And I mean that literally.” -Barbara Christian

As a scholar of Indian indentureship – which was a violent system that exists on the margins of historical memory – the excerpt above from Barbara Christian articulates my own commitments to research and pedagogy. My work on Indo-Caribbean archives, queer kinship and gender-based violence is informed by a decade that I spent working as an activist, beginning with founding Jahajee Sisters, the first non-profit organization in the U.S. established in response to the egregious rates of violence impacting Indo-Caribbean women. My manuscript, *Queering Jahaji*, is an interdisciplinary project that combines archival research; autoethnography; drag performance and political activism to theorize a genealogy of queer kinship in the



Dr. Suzanne Persard

midst of gender-based violence from the 19th-century Caribbean plantation to the 21st-century sidewalks of New York City. As a scholar deeply committed to the preservation of the marginalized history of the indentured diaspora, I have created two digital humanities projects featuring visual storytelling, oral histories and ephemera from descendants of the indentured diaspora in Jamaica; Suriname; the Netherlands; Trinidad and Tobago; South Africa; Fiji; and Australia.

I joined the University of South Florida as a scholar specializing in trans/queer of color critique in 2022, teaching courses that examine gender and sexuality through an intentionally transnational lens, often at the intersections of South Asian and Caribbean Studies. My scholarship about feminist theories of decoloniality; queer archives and post-indenture visual culture; and Indo-Jamaican folk performance and historiography appear in the following publications: *Feminist Review*; *Journal of West Indian Literature*; *Middle Atlantic Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*; and the *Journal of Indentureship and Its Legacies*.

## Courses taught

*Undergraduate:* Queer Theory, Sexualities Studies

*Graduate:* Caribbean Sexualities

**Giving to WGS:** Do you love the work WGS does and want to support the Department and its students? You can give to WGS to support our operating fund, which pays for event expenses, and you can give to our scholarship fund that benefits WGS students.

To give to WGS, visit [usf.to/wgs](https://usf.to/wgs). To give to our scholarship fund specifically, search for Women’s Studies and select one of the scholarship funds.



# UWAG / USF WGS Alumni Group Update

It's been a busy year for the USF WGS Alumni Group (UWAG)! We've been working hard to give back to our community and keep like-minded Bulls connected.

Our Silver Oaks Donation Drive was a success, providing cleaning supplies and pest control for the residents of Silver Oaks Apartments in Tampa. A huge thank you to all who donated!

UWAG was a co-sponsor of the JAM Humanities art exhibition, *Reproductive Justice is for Everyone!* that launched online in August 2022. This exhibit features 30 unique pieces covering topics from fertility control to police violence and religion. When a select showing of pieces from *Reproductive Justice is for Everyone!* opened at USF Tampa, we hosted an alumni reception in December, generously catered by Bartaco in Tampa. We are so proud of the featured artists and thankful for our partnership with JAM Humanities.



UWAG Reproductive Justice is for Everyone! Reception in December, 2022

UWAG also hosted two virtual alumni talks, first with **Aurelie Colon Larrauri** of the National Latina Institute for Reproductive Justice in September, followed by **Brandi Lai**, founder/owner of Best Laid Pens and author of *The Real Lives of Transgender and Nonbinary Humans*, in November. Other virtual alumni events this year included “Let’s Talk Renaissance” and “A Conversation about *The Little Mermaid* (2023)”

where we broke down the cultural impact of both works.

We're looking forward to doing even more in 2023! UWAG's bi-weekly meetings resumed on Thursday, January 12th at 6:15 pm EST on Google Meet. If you're interested in joining us, reach out to Daynah Singh at [singhd@usf.edu](mailto:singhd@usf.edu). Stay up to date on all things UWAG by following us on Instagram: [@usfwgsalumni](https://www.instagram.com/usfwgsalumni).



UWAG Reproductive Justice is for Everyone! Reception in December, 2022

## Marilyn Myerson Student Success Fund

WGS will be launching a fundraising campaign in March for the Marilyn Myerson Student Success Fund, a new fund at USF that WGS will use to fund student research. The Fund will provide money so that students can carry out and present their research at conferences, setting them on a path to finding ways to change the world by achieving real gender equality, and enriching their future careers by giving them practical experience and networking opportunities. If you're interested in contributing to the fund, email us at [cas-wgs@usf.edu](mailto:cas-wgs@usf.edu).

The Fund is named for Associate Professor Emeritus **Marilyn Myerson**. Dr. Myerson was the first outside hire in W(G)S, starting in 1973, when the department was just one year old. She was an administrator at various departmental and dean's levels, including a stint as W(G)S Chair before her retirement as Emeritus faculty in 2010. She shepherded the Human Sexual Behavior class through its many incarnations, developed the original women's health classes, and taught feminist research methodology. Dr. Myerson will be honored for her contributions to the department on March 3, 2023 at the WGS 50th Anniversary Celebration Event.

# WGS Student Spotlight: Alisa Bakieva

*Alisa Bakieva is double majoring in Psychology and Women's and Gender studies and will graduate in the Summer 2023.*



Alisa Bakieva

*Alisa plans to use her background in WGS to be a better mental health counselor:* After I graduate, I will go to graduate school for Clinical Mental Health Counseling or another program that will prepare me to become a Licensed Mental Health Counselor. My ultimate career goal is to be a therapist and have my own practice.

Getting a degree in Women's and Gender Studies has helped me immensely, not only in terms of job readiness but also in professional and personal growth. Learning about how each person's intersecting identities affect their life, and the unique challenges members of marginalized groups face will help me be a more culturally sensitive mental healthcare provider and be more aware of the systemic issues that affect my future clients' lives.

Being aware of my own implicit biases has helped me be a better employee and coworker and will help me be a more mindful practitioner in the future. Finally, getting a degree in WGS has helped me become more empathetic to all people and empowered me to take action to change the status quo, even if it's something small and seemingly unimportant.

*Many WGS classes have been impactful for Alisa:* When it comes to WGS classes, it's hard to pick a favorite because they are all amazing! Out of the core courses, I really loved **Queer Theory** with Dr. Rubin, where we studied a lot of the foundational texts, and **Feminist Research Methods** with Dr. Golombisky, where we learned about how to be a feminist researcher. Out of the electives, I really enjoyed taking **Intro to LGBTQ+ Cultures and Sexuality Studies** with Dr. Wendland, because there I learned about the history and lived experiences of sexual minorities and about sexuality in general. The content of my WGS courses inspired me to write my Honors thesis on non-monosexually identifying people's experiences in therapy.

*Alisa found WGS to be a supportive environment:* One thing that sets the WGS department apart from others is how small it is. Being a part of such a close-knit community gives me more opportunities to get to know and connect with my professors

and classmates. Another unique thing about WGS is that everyone in the department really cares about us students and wants us to succeed. All the professors are very understanding and caring and will go out of their way to meet with me if I don't understand the material or give me feedback before I submit my paper. Feeling supported like this helps me stress out less about school and know that my professors and other people in the department genuinely care about me and my education.

*WGS helps students understand themselves better:* I was born and raised in Russia and moved to the United States with my family when I was halfway through high school. I am also bisexual and have a privilege of being extremely straight passing. Being a WGS major helped me make sense of my life experiences as an immigrant sexual minority woman and find a supportive community of like-minded individuals.

I definitely recommend a WGS degree or minor to anyone who is considering it! I think everyone will benefit from learning what WGS classes have to offer, and I wish more people took these classes. At the very least, I recommend everyone to take at least one class as an elective to become educated on the topics of intersectionality and systemic oppression that are becoming increasingly salient in the changing globalized world.

# WGS Grad Student Spotlight: Deborah Omontese

*Deborah is an international student who will be graduating in spring 2023 with an MA in Women's & Gender Studies.*

*Deborah's background drew her to WGS: My life experiences have been foundational and instrumental to my decision to study the social dynamics of gender and sexuality in order to discover innovative ways of improving the status of women.*

Growing up as a young girl in Africa, I experienced first-hand the challenges that the social structures, cultural practices, and the environment posed to young girls and women with strict or no access to economic, social, political, and educational opportunities. This made me very passionate about feminism and getting involved in activism and community-driven interventions for social change. The MA program in Women and Gender Studies has provided me with advanced training and knowledge of feminists

perspectives on gender, sexuality, culture, and society.

*WGS is an integral part of Deborah's research and future career: My research interests are Gender Inequality, Women's empowerment, Sexuality Education, Women's Health, and Community Health Education. My current research as part of my graduate studies is on: *Social Media and Women Empowerment in Nigeria: A Study of the #BreakTheBias campaign on Facebook.**

Based on my professional and educational experience, I'm interested in getting a doctoral degree along the lines of my research interests, continuing teaching, and feminist activism.

*WGS offers a crucial lens for understanding the world: The MA in Women and Gender Studies has provided me with advanced training in issues of gender and sexuality. I have learned to think about intersectionality and understand the ways in which multiple identities*



Deborah Omontese

interact with structural, social, and cultural inequalities, and pursue interdisciplinary approaches in a diverse transnational environment. It has also prepared me to have specialized knowledge of gender and sexuality that is increasingly needed in feminist education, activism, research, and practice.

In our world today, it is pertinent to understand issues of gender and sexuality. Engaging the intersections of gender, race, sexuality, class, ethnicity, and ability is crucial in being a responsible citizen in a diverse transnational environment and advocating for social change.

## The Caste Of Our Commons with Dr. Marwah

The research interests of Dr. Vrinda Marwah, Assistant Professor of Sociology at USF, span gender, political sociology, health, and work. On February 28, 2023, Dr. Marwah will present her research during a virtual session of the WGS Brown Bag Series in *The Caste of Our Commons: Political Entrepreneurialism and Social Structure*.

Women's care work is usually thought of as impeding their citizenship. In this talk, Dr. Marwah presents findings from an ethnographic study of India's women community health workers to show how their care work expands the social and political rights of citizenship. To register, visit: [marwah.eventbrite.com](https://marwah.eventbrite.com).

# WGS Grad Student Spotlight: Juyeon Shin

*Juyeon is an international student who will graduate with her MA in Women's & Gender Studies in spring 2023.*

*Juyeon's WGS journey is giving her the skills to understand and work in women's climate justice activism:* When I decided to pursue my Master's degree my interests were broader and they weren't necessarily focused on gender or sexualities (e.g., international relations, environmental studies, etc.). However, I decided that I wanted to focus on learning feminisms and the ways in which I can contribute to making the world a better place, and chose WGS as my new path.

Education in WGS helped me develop important skills such as critically examining social justice issues and articulating concepts and ideas that are useful in my research areas. Currently, my research interests are climate justice, indigenous feminisms, and queer ecofeminism. I'm particularly interested in how indigenous women engage in climate action and the ways in which



Juyeon Shin

nonprofit organizations contribute to decolonizing the climate justice movement. In the near future, I plan to find a job opportunity in a nonprofit organization that works on women's climate justice activism. In long term, I would like to pursue a Ph.D. and build my career toward teaching.

*Studying at USF has given Juyeon many valuable experiences:* One thing I learned throughout the WGS program is to take care of myself. Self-care is something that I had never learned to do before I started the program. I truly enjoy and appreciate that the department values self-care even though it can be challenging to do so in an institution like a university. The

WGS department taught me how to better take care of my mind, body, and spirit as well as others and to re-imagine the world with like-minded people.

I'm a Korean first-gen college graduate and international student that came to the U.S. for a Master's degree. Part of living abroad to me was to learn how to make Korean dishes and now I really enjoy cooking especially many different types of Asian dishes in a vegan version.

*Juyeon's reflections on the 50th Anniversary of WGS at USF:* For an international student who recognizes the lack of WGS majors in many other countries, it means a lot to witness the 50th anniversary of WGS. It means so many brilliant people fought, resisted, and endured the systems of oppression and discrimination for 5 decades. I am very appreciative of all the hard work that was put before me, which gave me this chance to study and learn in an established field. I recognize that more work must be done and I'm proud to be part of that workforce.

## WGS Alumni Book Publication

Congratulations to WGS alum Dr. Elan Justice Pavlinich on the publication of their new monograph, *Erotic Medievalisms: Medieval Pleasures Empowering Marginalized People*.

*Erotic Medievalisms* is about the liberatory potential of sexualities, particularly as they relate to medieval histories and modern pleasures. Each of the texts analyzed subvert norms rooted in medieval cultures or assumptions about the "real" Middle Ages. To learn more, visit: [www.routledge.com/9781032232058](http://www.routledge.com/9781032232058).

Dr. Pavlinich is Assistant Professor of English at Wabash College.

# WGS Alumni Spotlight: Barbara Wolodzko

*Barbara earned a BA in Women's Studies at USF in 1994 before pursuing a J.D. degree from Rutgers, a Master of Laws in Estate Planning from University of Miami School of Law, and a Master of Laws in Health Law from Loyola University School of Law. She currently works at USF as the Health Privacy Officer.*



Barbara Wolodzko

*USF is the beneficiary of Barbara's vast experience as a lawyer:* I practiced transactional law (mainly ERISA, estate planning, and health law) for over 25 years, and while I still keep my law license current, I am now the USF Health Privacy Officer. I use my past legal experience to make sure we are in full compliance with all state and federal privacy laws.

After law school, I practiced in a few small to medium firms and always loved legal research, compliance and education. My focus at that time however was estate planning for high-net-worth clients. When the economy suffered some setbacks, the estate planning market suffered a downturn. I wanted to stay in a transactional law area and a friend recommended I get my masters of law (LL.M.) in health law. After earning my LL.M., I did some contract work and was referred by another colleague to apply for an open position at USF Health in HIPAA compliance. The job was truly interesting to me and so I joined USF Health in the area of HIPAA privacy. It was a change from practicing in a law firm but I fell in love with it. I could apply my law background but I did not have to worry about billable

hour goals like I did while at a law firm. I was able to dedicate the time needed to problem solve.

I like being able to use my legal experience and education to protect our patients, employees and the University. I have great colleagues and our leadership team always wants to do the right thing for our patients, staff, and the University. I'm able to help solve problems and be a part of the solution. Additionally, as the Civil Rights Coordinator for USF Health, I am also responsible for making sure we are in compliance with section 1557 that prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, or sex (including pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity, and sex characteristics) in health care.

*Barbara's background in WGS shapes how she approaches her work at USF:* I've learned from my WGS time to question everything. Because of my background in WGS, I want to empower my fellow employees and patients to make sure they are being heard and treated respectfully.

*WGS continues to be relevant to Barbara's work outside of USF too:* My experience in WGS has helped me in reviewing potential textbooks and journals with my best friend who is a professor at another state university. He teaches gender studies and queer theory and I generally read and provide my feedback to him as he selects his texts for each upcoming semester. As I become more settled in my career field, I would like to begin teaching part time.

*Barbara's reflections on the 50th anniversary of WGS at USF:* I feel very privileged to have studied under such great WGS professors like Drs. Linda McAlister, Janice Snook and Marilyn Myerson. In the early 1990's Women's Studies was unheard of as a major. During interviews, I was always given the opportunity to explain what a "Women's Studies" degree involved. It gave me the opportunity to educate.

I am so proud of WGS as they celebrate 50 years. I just want to say "thank you" for all of the professors and students who have been a part of this program. Without WGS I don't believe I would have the self-confidence and critical thinking skills I have today. I felt empowered during my time there and I believe that trust in myself has guided me throughout my career.

# WGS Alumni Spotlight: Viki Peer

*Viki graduated with an MA in Women's & Gender Studies from USF in 2017. She also has a BA in Sociology with a LGBTQ Studies minor from Northeastern Illinois University and a PhD in Gender Studies with a graduate certificate in Disability Studies from Arizona State University.*



Viki Peer

*Viki is using her background in WGS to pursue a career in academia:* I teach Women's and Gender Studies and Disability Studies online courses for Arizona State University, the University of South Florida, and the New College of Florida. I am hoping to become an Assistant Professor at a local university and continue teaching gender- and disability-focused courses. In addition to teaching for three schools this semester, I'm parenting two children who are both under the age of two. So, I really appreciate the flexibility that teaching online courses affords me. I can play with my kids while they are awake and grade papers while they are asleep, and all from the comfort of my home. In a country with no guaranteed paid parental leave, this is about as good as it can get!

*WGS has been beneficial to Viki in many ways:* My time in WGS departments - USF included! - has shaped both how I teach and how I research. Shadowing WGS faculty at USF helped me carve out my own feminist philosophy and practice the art of facilitating discussions about difficult and complex issues. Dr. Diane Price Herndl and Dr. Michelle Hughes Miller were both on my thesis committee and were so helpful to me as I learned about feminist and queer research methodologies.

Angela Davis has been quoted saying "You have to act as if it were possible to radically transform the world. And you have to do it all the time," and while

I'm involved in a lot of large-scale community service and organizing activities, I think my background in WGS has helped me really embrace the power of everyday acts of resistance, care, and intentionality.

WGS, as a field, is committed to asking difficult, important questions about the world(s) we live in. I am humbled and proud to be a part of this field.

*Viki's reflections on the 50th Anniversary of WGS at USF:* For a WGS department to have withstood so many different local and national political, economic, and cultural shifts over the last 50 years and be stronger than ever...wow! Creating and maintaining a bustling WGS department for all these years speaks to the commitment WGS faculty give to the personal and professional growth of their students; myself included! I'm excited for the next 50 years of WGS programming at USF!

*Viki Peer is currently teaching ISS 3420: Interdisciplinary Approaches Disability Studies at USF.*

## WGS Alumni Website Updates

Calling all WGS Alumni! Send us updates on your education and career since graduating from WGS at USF and we will post them on the WGS website on the Alumni page. You can include a photo and a short bio up to 400 words and any social media/networking links you want to share. Email us at [cas-wgs@usf.edu](mailto:cas-wgs@usf.edu).

# WGS Alumni Spotlight: Fyn Morrigan

*Fyn graduated from USF with an MA in Women's & Gender Studies in 2020. He also has a BA in Women's & Gender Studies from the Metropolitan University of Denver.*

*Fyn is thriving working in academia and making a difference in the lives of students:* In October of 2022 I accepted a position as the Student Basic Needs Coordinator at a community college in the Midwest. I am responsible for the operation and running of the food pantries for the college, and work with students 1:1 to help identify and connect them with external resources such as rental and utility assistance, identifying safe shelter, and other student critical needs.

One of the most important duties I have is being tasked with creating an environment where students feel comfortable and welcome in seeking services and are encouraged and supported rather than shamed or ridiculed for seeking/needing help. I have been working to identify and remove barriers, and I successfully advocated for the removal of the food pantry application. I also worked to remove item limits and I eliminated waiting lists for the main campus pantry, and to increase the amount of food and other items available in the pantry. As a result, the pantries serve anyone who is food insecure (this is determined by the individual not the institution and includes employees, faculty, staff, and neighborhood community members regardless of affiliation with the institution) rather than being limited to currently enrolled students.

I have always enjoyed teaching others



Fyn Morrigan

and sharing knowledge, and am hoping to adjunct in the future. The thing I love about working in higher education is that the environment is inherent to knowledge sharing, and while I might not be teaching in the traditional sense of having a class, I still work to share knowledge with everyone who comes into the Student Basic Needs Center.

My favorite part of what I am doing right now is engaging with students. Since I am a one-person department, I interact with anyone who comes into the Main campus pantry/my office, and I have been connecting with many of the LGBTQAI+ students on campus. I have had several students approach me and tell me that it's nice to see a trans person succeeding and working in higher education and academia. I have also connected with several dedicated faculty and other staff members who are passionate about social justice and are working to create a safer and more welcoming environment for all our students.

*Creativity is important to the work that Fyn does in the world:* Prior to deciding to become a WGS major after the traumatic death of my mother in 2011, I was a Fine Arts major with a concentration in Drawing, and art and self-expression

has always been of central importance to my life. I was also really excited to accept the invitation from our Art Gallery Director to serve as the Colleges Ambassador for an amazing photography show featuring LGBTQAI+ artists titled, *This Skin I'm In: A Visual Narrative of Self*.

I would love to be able to write more and to create more safe spaces both in the real world and online for trans youth and adults. I hope to start writing more and my goal is to start putting my work out into the world, whether through traditional academic channels or through social media and activist work.

*Fyn's reflections on the 50th Anniversary of WGS at USF:* What an exciting milestone to celebrate! I am SO proud to be an alumni of this program, and of Women and Gender Studies as a field/movement. WGS changed my life and continues to do so. WGS has given me the confidence and tools to ask the hard questions, to vocalize and help others acknowledge uncomfortable truths, and to work towards collaborative reciprocal relationships in all areas of my life. Dr. David Rubin often spoke about working towards a more just world, and I have never stopped thinking about what that means/looks like/could look like.

One thing that I have realized over the last year that I believe is vital for all of us doing this work is that there cannot be a more just future if it comes at the expense of my(our)self(selves). My background in WGS not only shapes how I approach my work, but also how I approach living.

# Book Launch Event

WGS hosted a book launch event in November for *The Power and Freedom of Black Feminist and Womanist Pedagogy: Still Woke*, edited by USF's Dr. Cheryl Rodriguez and Dr. Gary Lemons, and published by Rowman & Littlefield. To learn more about the book, visit: <https://bit.ly/3RORmEc>.

Dr. Rodriguez and Dr. Lemons shared their thoughts on writing this book, below and on the next page.



## Becoming a Black Feminist Scholar: Dr. Cheryl Rodriguez

*Dr. Cheryl Rodriguez is a Professor at USF in the School of Interdisciplinary Global Studies, and is also an affiliate faculty member in the Department of Women's & Gender Studies.*

Growing up in the Jim Crow south during the Civil Rights and Women's Rights eras had a profound influence on my sense of self and my unwavering belief in freedom, justice and fairness. As a small child I understood the geographic boundaries that restricted and contained where my family could live, work, shop and enjoy life. I lived in a world of dramatic changes, witnessing a Black community weary, angry and ready to break the barriers of racial oppression.

The women in my life were the everyday warriors. My grandmother, mother, aunts, and teachers did everything within their power to create places for us in a hostile society. Pushing past the brutal forces of racism, sexism, and patriarchy every single day, these women taught us to



Dr. Cheryl Rodriguez

value ourselves, even though we lived in a world that did not value us.

When writing and editing the volume, *The Power and Freedom of Black Feminist and Womanist Pedagogy: Still Woke* (co-edited with Dr. Gary Lemons), the spirits of these gentle, dignified, persistent and hilarious women sat right by my side reminding me of my responsibilities to their legacies and to next generation of Black women.

My essay, "The Radical Work of Teaching for Justice," recounts the

intellectual and scholarly influences that transformed a southern Black girl into a Black feminist and womanist scholar and teacher. Most importantly, in that essay, I honor my grandmothers, who "had visions of life beyond kitchens and factories for their children and grandchildren."

The book is about pedagogy but I believe all of our identities come together when we make a sincere commitment to teach. So, as I write in the essay, "Because I benefitted tremendously from the backbreaking work that my grandmothers did on behalf of their families and because I was enriched and encouraged by their hopes, dreams and visions, I introduce myself [to my students] as the granddaughter of women who cleaned houses and rolled cigars". These were the women who taught me that the struggle for freedom, justice and fairness must be ongoing—and yes, one of the best places for that struggle is the classroom.

# Teaching as an “Alternative” Black Male Pro-Black Feminist-Womanist Professor: Dr. Gary Lemons

*Dr. Gary Lemons is Professor of English at USF, and is also an affiliate faculty member in the Department of Women’s & Gender Studies.*

In *The Power and Freedom of Black Feminist and Womanist Pedagogy: Still Woke* (2023), co-edited with my USF colleague Dr. Cheryl Rodriguez, I write about having for many years taught writings by noted Black feminist theorist, cultural critic, and pedagogue bell hooks. As my longstanding mentor, she guided me toward the path of becoming a committed advocate of pedagogy rooted in the womanist concept of “universal”/global liberation for all oppressed people.

Through womanism, as envisioned by Alice Walker in her book *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens*, I would link it to bell hooks’ critique of patriarchy. In her book *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*, hooks calls for African Americans to claim “the representation of an alternative [B]lack man seeking freedom for self and loved ones, a rebel [B]lack man eager to create and make his own destiny” (14).

Having become a longstanding advocate and teacher committed to the vision of Black feminist and womanist liberation, I whole-heartily identify



Dr. Gary Lemons

as “an alternative [B]lack man.” Having embraced bell hooks’ emancipatory ideas of masculinity linked to personal and political self-transformation, I pedagogically seek to demonstrate the life-saving power of activism rooted in the eradication of patriarchal domination and sexism.

For Black male activists who have envisioned the freedom of Black feminist-womanist ideas of Black liberation struggle, first and foremost, we must claim the power to free ourselves from the patriarchal, masculinist, and sexist ideologies of manhood. Committing ourselves to anti-oppressive, community alliance-building—across differences of gender, race, class, and sexuality—we must devote ourselves to activism for the liberation of all who people struggling against systemic and institutionalized oppression. As “alternative Black [men],” we come to know the real power of what it means to be free.

As a pro-Black feminist-womanist professor—teaching love for social justice aimed to free the oppressed—I envision the classroom as a strategic space for building activist, anti-oppressive community alliances. Sharing with students my evolutionary journey toward personal healing and self-recovery from the wounds of masculinist, patriarchal, and sexist ideas of manhood—through invested study of Black feminist and womanist theory and practice—I teach to empower students to contemplate the self-liberating power of coalitional resistance to all forms of systemic oppression.

Creating an all-inclusive, liberatory environment in the classroom, I challenge students to comprehend and critically engage with writings by BIPOC (Black Indigenous People of Color) feminists and womanists. In this pedagogical space for self-transformative, students and I share with each other the liberatory knowledge we gain from Black feminists and womanists. Ultimately, my aim in teaching their writings is to empower students to own the process of coming to consciousness—particularly about the critical need for supporting the vision of Black feminist and womanist liberation.

# Florida Humanities Council Grant for WGS Spring Events

In the fall, WGS was granted \$8,100 from the Florida Humanities Council for three events that will take place in the spring as part of our 50th Anniversary celebration. Dr. Tangela Serls designed the grant-funded program, *Freedom in Creativity: Building Meaning and Bridging Difference Through the Humanities* and served as its principal investigator. This is the second grant that WGS has received from the Florida Humanities Council.

The role of meaning, both in terms of language and semiotics, in helping us to build coalitions across difference emerged as one of the key themes of last year's FHC-grant



funded program, *Re-Imagining the Humanities*. Hence, this year we are seeking to expound upon that theme as we invite scholars and literary artists to contemplate the ways in which meaning is used to help us create freer worlds where creativity flourishes. Ultimately, the goal of our program is to provide participants with a brave space where they learn to explore meaning as a vehicle to

understand others and themselves better.

The following events are part of this program:

- February 8: *Pride Belongs to the People: A Conversation with Dr. Daniel Conway*
- Late March: *A Crunk Feminist Lecture with Dr. Susana Morris*
- April: *A Crunk Feminist Writing Workshop with Sheree Greer of Kitchen Table Literary Arts*

All events are free and open to the public, and will have free parking on a first-come basis. For more details, follow WGS on social media or visit [usf.edu/wgs](http://usf.edu/wgs).

## WGS 50th Anniversary Events

WGS is hosting many events during 2022-2023 to commemorate the department's 50th anniversary. Below are some of them, past and future:

- **Muslim Alums, Living Our Feminist Lives: A Roundtable Lunchtime Conversation Honoring the WGS 50th Anniversary** with Aslı Aygüneş, Tasnim M. Rahman, Sabeedah Ravat, and Rakshinda Shah on September 7, 2022
- **Past, Present, and Future Survival: An Anti-Racist Writing Workshop** with Sheree

Greer of Kitchen Table Literary Arts on October 19, 2022

- **Living Feminisms Conference** on October 28, 2022
- **Reproductive Justice is for Everyone! @WGS in Tampa** art exhibit from October 24, 2022-January 27, 2023
- **Book Launch Reception** for *The Power and Freedom of Black Feminist and Womanist Pedagogy: Still Woke* on November 16, 2022
- **UWAG Reception** at Reproductive Justice is for Everyone! on December 8, 2022
- **Community Activist Reception**

at Reproductive Justice is for Everyone! on January 26, 2023

- **Pride Belongs to the People Photograph Exhibition** in CMC 202 from February 8, 2023 through April, 2023
- **Pride Belongs to the People: A Conversation with Dr. Daniel Conway** on February 8, 2023
- **World Social Justice Day Showcase Art Exhibition** in Centre Gallery at USF from February 13-23, 2023
- **WGS Brown Bag: The Caste of our Commons: Political Entrepreneurialism and Social**

Events Continued...

**Structure”** with Dr. Vrinda Marwah on February 28, 2023

- **WGS 50th Anniversary Celebration** on March 3, 2023; RSVP at: [usf.to/50WGSregister](https://usf.to/50WGSregister)
- **A Crunk Feminist Lecture** with Dr. Susana Morris in late March, 2023
- **A Crunk Feminist Writing Workshop** with Sheree Greer of Kitchen Table Literary Arts in April, 2023

# A New Role at USF for Dr. Tangela Serls

WGS Associate Professor of Instruction Dr. Tangela Serls was recently awarded the position of Special Advisor to the College of Arts and Sciences Dean on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. As a member of the CAS Dean’s leadership team, Dr. Serls will provide transformational leadership on matters related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) within the College, assess existing DEI efforts and, in collaboration with CAS leadership, faculty, staff, and students, provide recommendations on the development of new initiatives to advance the university and college’s goals to promote and foster a diverse and inclusive community for learning and discovery.

Congratulations, Dr. Serls!

## WGS Degree Programs

### Undergraduate Programs:

**Major or Second Major in Women’s & Gender Studies:** 36 hours (30 for second major). The major focuses on feminist research and practice. WGS promotes social justice through the discovery and production of knowledge that emerges from feminist perspectives on culture and society.

**Minor in Women’s & Gender Studies:** 18 hours. This minor offers students from other majors the opportunity to learn more about feminist analysis, research, and activism.

**Minor in Queer and Sexuality Studies:** 18 hours. This minor trains students in the critical analysis of sexuality. It examines the rich history and cultural contributions of LGBTQIA people as well as the processes of normalization and pathologization that have structured sexual relations in different contexts.

### Graduate Programs:

**M.A. in Women’s & Gender Studies:** 36 hours. The M.A. is useful for students and professionals who are preparing for advanced degrees, nonprofit sector employment, and those interested in broadening their understanding of WGS topics. Deadline to apply for fall admission: February 15. Funding is available to students through graduate assistantships.

**Graduate Certificate in Women’s & Gender Studies:** 12 hours. The Certificate provides an opportunity for graduate students and other professionals to gain a more inclusive knowledge of women’s and gender issues in society, including feminist studies.

For more information, visit: <https://www.usf.edu/arts-sciences/departments/womens-gender-studies/academics/index.aspx>.

# WGS Faculty, 2022-2023

Dr. Diane Price Herndl  
Professor and Chair

Dr. Elizabeth Bell  
Professor

Jennifer Ellerman-Queen  
Assistant Instructor and Graduate Program Coordinator

Dr. Kim Golombisky  
Associate Professor and Undergraduate Studies Director

Dr. Amanda LeBlanc  
Visiting Assistant Professor of Instruction

Dr. Jill McCracken  
Professor

Dr. Michelle Hughes Miller  
Professor and Director of Graduate Studies

Dr. Suzanne Persard  
Assistant Professor

Dr. David A. Rubin  
Associate Professor

Dr. Tangel Serls  
Associate Professor of Instruction, and Special Advisor to the  
College of Arts and Sciences Dean on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Dr. Milton Wendland  
Professor of Instruction and Internship Director

## Contact Info

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Facebook: [www.facebook.com/wgsusf](https://www.facebook.com/wgsusf)  
Giving to WGS: [usf.to/wgs](https://usf.to/wgs)

To read our past newsletters, visit:

<https://www.usf.edu/arts-sciences/departments/womens-gender-studies/news-and-events/newsletter.aspx>

## WHAT CAN YOU DO WITH A WGS DEGREE?

We asked WGS alumni what they have done...

### LEADERSHIP ROLES

WGS alumni are leaders:



executive director, assistant director of stewardship, annual giving manager, project manager, director of account management, strategy manager of process engineering, IT manager, insurance claims manager, healthcare practice administrator

### EDUCATION & RESEARCH

WGS alumni build knowledge and educate:



assistant professor, librarian, research manager, academic services administrator, teacher success coach, social studies department head, instructional designer, Montessori teacher, editorial coordinator

### HEALTHCARE & COUNSELING

WGS alumni help people to lead healthier lives:



med student, public health researcher, mental health clinician, school counselor, clinical trauma interventionist, medical case manager, children's therapist, sex therapist, social services case manager

### ANYTHING YOU WANT!

WGS alumni follow their passions:



attorney, law student, deaconess, video game writer, state park assistant manager, poet, feminist real estate agent

[usf.edu/wgs](https://usf.edu/wgs)