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## Director's Chair

Greetings to newsletter readers! We have had a lot going on this year in the WGS program. On March 18, Professor of Feminist Studies [Karen Barad](#), of the University of California at Santa Cruz, delivered the annual WGS lecture. Professor Barad is a physicist, and her engaging talk on productive “dis/continuity” and queerness as the undoing of identity was titled “When Time is Out of Joint: Material Entanglements, Temporal Diffractions, and Re-memberings.” We had good attendance for the event, and a stimulating discussion after the lecture.

Also in March, five students and faculty again attended the [Feminist Theory Workshop at Duke University](#), and SMU was again named an institutional co-sponsor. As was the case with last year's Feminist Theory Workshop, our attendees returned from Duke energized by the exchange of ideas at this gathering of the Feminist Studies community.

We have also had much to do in WGS related to the shift to the new [University Curriculum](#) for undergraduates. This change has required us to retool our core WGS courses to incorporate team-teaching, and the challenge of making the transition has brought us together and prompted many fruitful conversations about our teaching interests and goals. We are committed to maintaining the focus of the program on core issues in Women's and Gender Studies, and we believe that ours is an ideal program for the university's new emphasis on interdisciplinarity. Our field has always drawn from a variety of disciplines, and now we have the opportunity to make our diversity a strong selling point for us in the new curriculum.

We have continued work on our graduate certificate program. The process of registering for the certificate has now been streamlined, and the various schools are adding to the list of courses offered. The certificate is currently available to graduate students in Dedman College, Perkins School of Theology, and Dedman School of Law. For students who complete requirements for this program, the graduate certificate indicates that they have focused their work on women, gender, sexuality, and feminist or queer studies.

We would like to thank the Dedman Deans Renee McDonald and Thomas DiPiero, Dedman College Interdisciplinary Institute Director Caroline Brettell, and program donors Suzanne Schmidt '67 and her husband Dan Jones for the generous funding that allowed us to host the Karen Barad lecture and participate



*Denise Dupont,  
Interim Director*

in the Feminist Theory Workshop.

This year that I have been interim director of Women's and Gender Studies, I have enjoyed working with everyone associated with the program, and I have been inspired by the passion of WGS colleagues and students. I would like to give a special thanks to the former director Beth Newman, graduate assistant Jessica Lott, undergraduate work-study student Hannah Beltrán, and finally to Joci Caldwell-Ryan, who is the heart of this program and keeps it running. Many thanks to all newsletter readers for your support for Women's and Gender Studies!

Sincerely,

Denise DuPont

## Women at the Forefront: SMU Dedman School of Law joins WGS Certificate Program

Jessica Dixon Weaver

The SMU Dedman School of Law is excited to be a part of the Women and Gender Studies Graduate Certificate Program. Assistant Professor Jessica Dixon Weaver is the liaison for law students interested in registering for the certificate program. Assistant Professor Cheryl Nelson Butler teaches Critical Race Theory in the spring, which is one of the edited writing classes available for students in WGS certificate program. Professor Butler's scholarship utilizes feminist legal theory, critical race theory, and legal history as tools to explore the intersection of race and gender in the legal response to sexual exploitation. This fall she was invited to speak at the 2015 UCLA School of Law Symposium, "[Examining the Roots of Human Trafficking and Exploitation.](#)" Professor Butler was on a panel with highly esteemed UCLA Law Professor Cheryl Harris that explored the "Historical, Social, and Legal Dimensions of Exploitation, Prostitution & Slavery."

It has been a banner year for the women at the SMU Dedman School of Law! Dean Jennifer Collins is celebrating the completion of her first year as the first female Dean of SMU Dedman School of Law. She has secured a variety of gifts that will enhance the academic reputation of the law school, including the \$1.5M Jack Knox Chair in the Rights and Protection of Children and a \$3.125 million gift to launch the Tsai Center for Law, Science and Innovation.

Ellen G. Solender, Professor Emerita and one of the first female SMU law professors, donated an historic gift of \$2,000,000 for the Ellen Solender Endowed Chair in Women and the Law.

In other thrilling news, the [Judge Elmo B. Hunter Legal Center for Victims of Crimes Against Women](#) will be welcoming its new director, Natalie Nanasi in the fall of 2015. Natalie is currently a Practitioner-in-Residence and Director of the Domestic Violence Clinic at American University Washington School of Law. The Hunter Legal Center will provide legal services for victims of domestic violence and exploitation in the sex industry. Also opening in the fall of 2015 is the [VanSickle Family Law Clinic](#), which will provide legal assistance for low-income North Texas residents in matters such as divorce, annulment, paternity actions, custody and visitation, child and spousal support.

There have been several female professors who have been recognized for their scholarship, teaching, and service. Professor Beth Thornburg was voted a "Peruna Prof" by law students this year in recognition of her outstanding and inspiring work in the classroom. Professor Jenia Iontcheva Turner has been awarded a Sam Taylor Fellowship from the Sam Taylor Fellowship Fund of the Division of Higher Education, United Methodist General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, to survey prosecutors and defense attorneys throughout the country. Associate Professor Meghan Ryan was one of recipients of the 2015 HOPE Award that honors faculty who have made a significant impact to students' academic education both inside and outside of the classroom. She also won the 2013-14 President's Associates Award that recognizes the advancement of teaching and learning in a faculty member.



*Prof. Cheryl Nelson Butler  
at the UCLA School of  
Law Symposium*

Assistant Professor Jessica Dixon Weaver received the 2015 Faculty Appreciation Award from SMU Women in Law at their annual Spring Tea and was also honored by the Black Law Students Association (BLSA) for being the first African American woman to receive a vote and recommendation for tenure at SMU Dedman School of Law. BLSA created an award and scholarship in Professor Weaver's name for a graduating 3L who exhibits excellence in leadership and has made important contributions to the law school.

## A Class with Some Feet on the Ground: Studying Our Lives in the Images Class

*Our program is often able to provide teaching experience in Women's and Gender Studies for Graduate Certificate students through teaching our introductory class: "Gender: Images and Perspectives." Below, a Graduate Certificate student reflects on what she learned through this opportunity.*

Haley Feuerbacher, Graduate Certificate Student

In August, 2014, I walked into my first class as an instructor of the "Gender: Images and Perspectives" class, dripping sweat and frazzled from wandering around campus lost for thirty minutes in the summer heat. For my next trick, I opened up a soda, and it exploded all over the podium and the students' syllabuses. I was sure that I had ruined my professional and scholarly integrity and that the students would drop my class like a bad habit. Surprisingly, they stayed. (Who knows? Maybe the potential for more awkwardness from their professor was an attractive prospect!)



Not only did they stay, but they engaged. Knowing that the course was innately controversial and a required course rather than something of true interest to many of my students, I decided I had to build my students' trust in me so that they would openly consider and discuss the subject matter. A few of the students indicated their surprise when I told them that I believed that they all had experiences and knowledge that I did not have, and that it was my goal not only to share with them my knowledge but to allow them the space to share theirs with me. By making good on this approach, I believe that I not only built many of the students' trust in me but also embodied a mutuality that differed from the top-down flow of power in much of society. I also found it effective to tell anecdotes throughout the semester when relevant and to create a sort of narrative arc throughout the course. Through this, the students discovered that we were not merely discussing policy, theory, or history but issues that were personal to people they knew. As one of my students wrote in his Capstone Paper, he would not have been as open to the course had he not been instructed by someone who had experienced the very pressures we were discussing.

The relationships I developed with my students over the course of the semester were probably the aspects of teaching that I valued the most. One day, a quieter student asked if he could meet with me after class. Presuming he had questions about an assignment, I was elated when he opened our meeting by saying, "We talk about these problems in society, but I want to know what we can do to change things." We began meeting to discuss the issues he encountered personally and where we could find hope and power to change oppressive situations. I hope that I have fueled their passion for justice, helped them approach their world with greater sensitivity, encouraged them to see the flows of power in society and to participate in systems that reflect a bottom-up flow, and empowered them to take action for the betterment of all persons. I know they did for me.

*Haley Feuerbacher is a Ph.D. Candidate in Religious Studies and a Graduate Certificate Candidate in WGS.*

## WGS Minors Make a Difference

*Here we highlight some exceptional accomplishments of our WGS Minors.*

### **From Alex Day:**

“Summer 2013, I interned in the [White House Office of Public Engagement](#). There, I worked with the Deputy Director and Director for Public Engagement for the Council on Women and Girls. President Obama created the Council in 2009 with the goal of incorporating the specific needs and interests of women in every aspect of government, and including their voices in each piece of legislation that is drafted, policy that is put together, and program created. I was able to utilize my background in Women’s and Gender Studies to assist my liaisons with various events connecting grassroots Americans with the White House, an experience that affirmed my commitment to public service. I now feel confident that a career ensuring that women’s voices are heard in politics is what I want to do.”



*Alex Day at the White House*



### **From Colton Donica:**

“During my senior year, I interned as a legal assistant for Attorney Isabela Garcia at Garcia-Windsor. I worked on a wide spectrum of cases, including family, criminal, immigration, and business related ones. The opportunity to see different areas of the law at my internship has helped me see which types of law I am most interested in. Immigration is a topic that I am very passionate about and the opportunity to intern at a law firm that handles these types of cases has been a great way for me to gain experience before I attend law school in 2016.”

### **From Audrey Gill:**

“Using the gender studies framework developed through an independent study with Dr. Caldwell-Ryan, last fall I launched a research project with Engaged Learning. The project examines prejudice towards transgender and gender variant people (TGVP), who face drastically inflated rates of hate-crime related homicide, discrimination in obtaining employment and housing, and suicide. The goal of this research project was, therefore, to contribute to trans rights activism by examining how to address prejudice against TGVP, providing an empirical basis on effectively promoting social change and improving the lives of TGVP. My findings to date indicate that there is an incomprehension of TGVP on a fundamental level, and that general awareness of their existence is often accompanied by negative connotations. These findings and others were presented at the International Convention for Psychological Sciences in Amsterdam, Netherlands in March. The next step in this project is an experimental study that will determine which types of information affect prejudice towards TGVP based on standard psychological personality measures. I plan to submit the entirety of my findings from this project to a scientific journal within the next year.”



*Audrey Gill with her poster presentation in Amsterdam*

## Scholarship and Award Winners



**Katie Bandera, '15**

Religious Studies, Anthropology,  
Human Rights

Ann Early Award



**Shelbi Smith, '15**

Human Rights

Betty Maynard Scholar



**Audrey Gill, '15**

Statistics

Betty Maynard Scholar



**Alex Day, '15**

English, Psychology

Betty Maynard Scholar



**Erica Renstrom, '15**

Sociology, Psychology

Betty Maynard Scholar

## A Second Chance with Wynn

Amy Lefkof, '82



In the late 1970's and early '80s I attended SMU. I stood out because I was Jewish, a budding feminist, and liberal. I wrote to the Daily Campus on a regular basis attacking Phyllis Schlafly and other right-wing speakers who came to campus. I critically assessed the Greek system, the beauty queens featured in our college yearbook, and the emphasis placed on preppy alligator insignia instead of academics. I wrote scathing letters attacking the Features Editor, who thought it clever to write a regular column that made fun of a fictional overweight girl named Martha who wasn't in a sorority.

SMU in those days had the peculiar distinction of being the only university that college guides rated as having a more liberal faculty than student body. In this atmosphere I didn't have to fight through crowds to shake hands with Bella Abzug, Betty Friedan or Karen DeCrow when they came to campus to deliver speeches on women's liberation or to debate the merits of the proposed Equal Rights Amendment. At age 18 I enrolled in my first Women Studies' course and drank

deeply from the feminist fount of writings that included Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex*, and Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics*.

When I wasn't politicking or writing letters to the editor, I was studying. Usually I studied in the "stacks" -- the dark bowels of the Fondren library, where nobody could find me. But on many occasions, my good friend Kathryn (not her real name) would invite me to study in her father's office in the Theology Quad. He was a Professor of History of Christianity. His large office had comfortable leather chairs and couches, wood paneling, and a great collection of books. There were no closing hours so we could study as late as we wanted. Kathryn was as studious as I was, but much smarter. We both made the Mortarboard honor society in our Junior Year.

One evening she looked up from her book and said she had something important she wanted to share with me. She told me that she thought she was gay. She hoped it wouldn't change anything between us. I don't remember what I said. I'm sure it wasn't eloquent like anything I had read in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, or in Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*. I don't even remember the look in Kathryn's bright blue eyes. I turned inward, and felt uncomfortable. I wished that I wasn't alone with her in that paneled office away from everyone else. I felt threatened. Maybe she liked me as more than a friend.

My friendship with Kathryn faded. I don't remember the details. My life became busy with campus politics, maintaining a stellar GPA, and accumulating a string of boyfriends, honors and awards. Phone calls from her may have gone unanswered. We graduated, and Kathryn moved up north to become a social worker, and I went off to law school.

A few years later I returned to campus to visit one of my feminist mentors. I told her how bad I felt about my reaction and the withered friendship. She tried to comfort me, but I felt like a hypocrite. I had failed at truly being a feminist; but more importantly, I had failed at being a good friend.

Years passed. I had two children. My son's best friend in high school was gay. Then my thespian daughter decided to perform at her school's Diversity Night. She chose the monologue from Tina Fey's *Mean Girls* where the mean girl Regina relives her rejection of Janis Ian, spewing, "I can't invite you because I think you're a lesbian. I mean, I couldn't have a lesbian at my party! There were going to be girls there in their bathing suits! I mean right, she was a lesbian!" My daughter had the valley girl inflection down pat. But a week or so before she was to deliver the monologue my daughter began to have second thoughts, telling her father and me that she was scared that her classmates would think she was gay. We reasoned with her that it was precisely because others might think that she was gay that she must do the monologue -- to show that there is nothing wrong with being gay.

I wanted to make sure that my children's politics and the actual lives they led were cut from the same moral cloth. And yet I did not feel a release from my own guilt.

For years I had checked the internet for any mention of Kathryn. Nothing. Then Facebook arrived. I checked often. No Kathryn. And then one day I looked down at my blackberry and saw that someone named Wynn was trying to befriend me on Facebook. I quickly deleted the email thinking, "I don't know anyone named Wynn." But I saw a second email message on my blackberry that said, "Wynn R--- sent you a message."

The neurons inside my dull middle age brain started to signal to each other. I couldn't believe it could be her, but who else? I read the message. It said, "Hi Amy, you'll remember me as Kathryn. I've wondered how you are. I'm now Wynn. Would be great to connect again."

Even though I hate composing anything important with my tiny blackberry keys, I started typing away. I felt a release in each word I typed. I replied to Wynn's message: "While I, like most people, have some regrets in life, one of my greatest regrets is that I let our friendship go." Would I later admit that though I had picketed, pontificated, and written letters to the editor, in the privacy of a paneled office of her father who taught others the theology of compassion, I had shown none?

It's too late now to ask for Kathryn's forgiveness. But maybe with Wynn I will have a second chance.

## News

### Alumnae news

**Anna González, class of '05, has been appointed to Director of Social Media for CNBC. She is responsible for leading CNBC's social media team, helping grow the organization through creative social content and attracting and engaging its multi-platform audience.**

**Whitney Harp, class of '14, accepted a full-time position as State Program Administrator for [IGNITE Texas](#), a non-profit organization that builds political ambition in young women ages 14-25. As a staff member, she's responsible for the implementation, development and management of fifteen high school programs, ten college chapters and a state conference that unites over 200 students with 25+ elected women. Whitney is grateful to the SMU Women's and Gender Studies program for aligning her with an organization that helped her find her passion.**

### Other News

**Katie Bandera, class of '15, will be attending Harvard Divinity School for a Master's in Theological Studies with a focus on religions of the Americas after graduation.**

**Kelsey Rohr, class of '15, is graduating with a BFA in Dance and a minor in Women's and Gender Studies. She plans on dancing with a local dance company, Dark Circles Contemporary Dance, and teaching dance in the Dallas/Fort Worth area.**

**Haley Feuerbacher, a Graduate Certificate student, received the Graduate Scholar Award from the Religion in Society Conference this spring and presented a paper at the Religion in Society Annual Conference at Berkeley. Her paper, "This Is My Body Broken for You: Commodification and Objectification of Bodies and the Crucifixion as a Cautionary Tale" explores the implications of popular Christologies for the treatment of women and their bodies in our society.**

*Send us your news! [womnstud@smu.edu](mailto:womnstud@smu.edu)*

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