

Fall 2021 Newsletter

Greetings from the [WGSS Department](#) at Stony Brook!

Although the pandemic is far from over, many of us are back on campus, fully vaccinated and wearing masks indoors. This semester I am teaching a class that explores big questions about life and death, health and justice, which is both enlivening and difficult for the students and me. We are investigating various examples of how knowledge, power, and choice operate in different healthcare settings, as well as effective strategies and models of good care and healthcare delivery. The major assignment for the class is a "Documenting COVID-19" final project, in which students can choose one of three options: an interview, a comic, or a public health or illness politics poster or meme. It seems important to acknowledge what we have been through, and continue to go through, as the official count of COVID-19 deaths in the US surpasses 750,000.

This semester saw the 20th anniversary of the attacks on September 11, 2001, and Stony Brook had a remembrance ceremony at the Memorial Arch on campus. Fall 2001 was my first semester at Stony Brook and I had been in New York less than a month when the attacks happened. As a teacher, I felt ill-equipped to deal with the trauma of that day and its many aftermaths, but I learned then that the classroom could be a holding environment for grappling with the impact of an event on many levels at once—personal, institutional, local community, national, and world-historical. The day before the 9/11 remembrance ceremony, Stony Brook celebrated the 2020 graduating class who had not been able to have an in-person ceremony in 2020 because of the pandemic. On Sunday, September 12, a small group of anti-vaccine and anti-mask protestors held a rally on the Stony Brook campus. For me, this confluence of events was a reminder of the deep divisions and conflicts that continue to shape and impact our lives in many ways. But it also reminds me of the importance of the critical pedagogical work we do in the WGSS classroom.

This semester, we partnered with the School of Communication and Journalism to bring in a WGSS Communications and Media Intern, Angelina Zingariello. A junior transfer from SUNY Oswego and a Journalism major, Angelina will blog, post, and report on all things WGSS, including in this newsletter!



Lisa Diedrich wearing her Linda Lindas t-shirt to kick off her last year as chair of WGSS

Angelina interviewed and wrote the feature on Zarya Shaikh and the amazing Queer Diagnosis podcast, and she also interviewed Suzanne Staub for our Alum in the Spotlight feature. Which brings me back to my first semester at Stony Brook. Suzanne was a student in one of my classes that very first semester and the semester after she, was an undergraduate TA for a Feminist Theory class I taught. I have many fond memories of Suzanne as a student, including of her reading an Audre Lorde poem to a rapt group of her peers. At my first WGSS graduation at Stony Brook, I met Suzanne's parents. Like so many Stony Brook parents I have met over the years, they were so proud of their daughter. I'll never forget what Suzanne's father said to me at the graduation. "I didn't get it at first. But now I understand what you do with a degree in WGSS. You change the world."

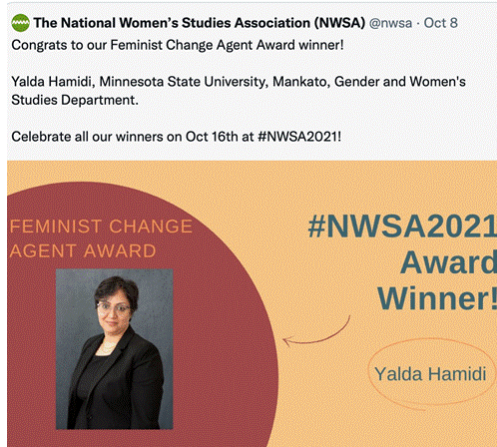
Hoping you'll be in touch!

Be well,

Lisa Diedrich
Professor and Chair

News and Announcements

Congratulations to WGSS doctoral alum **Yalda Hamidi**, who has been awarded the National Women's Studies Association's Feminist Change Agent Award!



Congratulations to two of our doctoral candidates, **Valerie Moyer** and **Stephanie Bonvissuto**, for recently being selected to receive Presidential Fellowship Funding.

Valerie Moyer was selected to receive a 2021 Presidential Postdoctoral Extension Award. Val will serve as a Postdoc Associate for six months starting in June 2022.

Valerie says: "My current research is on transgender participation policies, and policies related to women athlete's testosterone levels within the Olympics and Paralympics from 1984 to today. I'm arguing that factors like the global "war on terror" surveillance landscape, ideas about bodily "fitness" coming from eugenics, and the racialization of

gender difference shape global sports policy governing women athletes' bodies. Through this critique of the concept of "unfair advantage," I propose new ways forward in women's sports that move beyond restrictive gender categories towards meaningful competition."



Stephanie Bonvissuto was selected to receive a 2021 Presidential Dissertation Completion Fellowship, which provides a funded graduate assistantship for the Spring 2022 semester.

Stephanie says: "My dissertation research, a qualitative study of the mutually constituting relations between all-gender social spaces and their trans, nonbinary, gender nonconforming, and queer users, asks what inclusive sites can provide gender and sexually marginalized peoples beyond immediate sanctuary. Using an interdisciplinary analytical lens comprised of feminist, trans, and queer theory, and data from 50 semi-structured interviews, I follow how meaning and power are accorded across three research sites: public all-gender restrooms, LGBTQ+ community centers, and alternative sex parties. I argue that such inclusive sites offer a uniquely queer spatial opportunity to

validate and legitimize gender and sexual minorities while potentially reproducing social inequities through unmarked spatial inequalities, as well."

Queer Diagnosis

THE LGBTQ+ HEALTH PODCAST

Queer Diagnosis: The LGBTQ+ Health Podcast was created by Stony Brook students **Zarya Shaikh**, **Srihita Medibiona**, and **Jameson Coleman**. Their podcast, created in January 2021, aims to amplify LGBTQ+ voices and issues in healthcare.

The idea for the podcast originated through Shaikh's inquiries into LGBTQ+ physicians, including Muslim and more specifically, Pakistani Muslim LGBTQ+ physicians, leading to zero results in her search.

"I was devastated, but I'm a big fan of statistics and the math didn't add up," Shaikh said. "There must be other people like myself who identify with the community, are Muslim, and are physicians."

Her research led her to an article written by a physician who interviewed colleagues who spoke about how isolating it is to identify as LGBTQ+ in healthcare. Shaikh was tempted to email him when she realized the conversation she hoped to have could be one from which many others could benefit.

"That night, I called Jameson and Srihita and we got to work almost immediately. I knew I could count on Jameson to direct our production efforts. Srihita would be my co-host since the conversations I hoped to stream were simply an extension of those we were already having in our dorm room. We discuss equity within and between different communities almost daily. A podcast is a great way for us to continue having these conversations with the added benefit of an outside perspective, specifically from individuals who identify with the LGBTQ+ community."

The podcast has become an effective way to discuss LGBTQ+ issues despite the challenges of being full-time students with part-time jobs. Reserving a time compatible with all of their schedules to record, edit, transcribe, and promote episodes is not "procrastination-proof," Shaikh explains.

In Fall 2021, WGSS teamed up with the Queer Diagnosis podcast to offer an internship for students interested in working on the podcast.

"It's been a process trying to balance the workload of making a podcast that meets our standards and also learning how to communicate what we expect from the podcast and from each other. The communication component has become ever more important as we have started the internship," Medibiona said.

Coleman notes there has been space for growth in terms of the production aspect.

"Early on we had quite a few technical difficulties, we went through a few different software and methods, but have mostly settled," he said. "Other than that, just getting the word out about the podcast and getting a following was tough. The first couple of episodes didn't pick up traction but now we've been doing a lot better!"

Queer Diagnosis has gained plenty of support not only from viewers, but especially from the WGSS, Psychology, and Sociology faculty. Their audience provides them with valuable feedback and ideas on where they could take the podcast.

Hosts Medibiona and Shaikh have become more confident with each recording, and Coleman believes the podcast has improved in terms of audio quality and editing.

Although the podcast is less than a year old, this



Shaikh and Coleman

is certainly just the beginning of Queer Diagnosis. Its main goal is to have a greater impact on the community outside of the podcast.

"I'd like to start a Queer Diagnosis scholarship fund for high school seniors and

undergraduate students! We're in the beginning stages and learning how to reach potential donors," Shaikh said. "I also would love to make the WST 488 internship available to SBU students after I graduate. Our interns have great ideas, and they have been integral to our recent growth as a platform for the LGBTQ+ community."

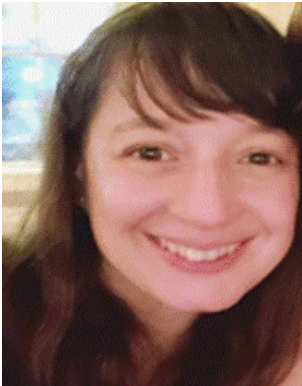
The team will continue their mission of highlighting the visibility of marginalized populations in medicine and ensuring that all LGBTQ+ voices involved in the healthcare decision-making process are represented.

"It's given me the opportunity to talk to people and learn from people that I really admire. As an avid fan of podcasting myself, I've been able to do what I love the most: talk and even share my own experiences," Medibiona said.

For more information on the Queer Diagnosis podcast, visit QueerDiagnosis.com and follow them @QueerDiagnosis on [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/QueerDiagnosis) and [Twitter](https://twitter.com/QueerDiagnosis).



Alumni/Instructor Spotlight: Suzanne Staub '03, BA in Women's Studies



Suzanne Staub graduated from SBU in 2003 with a BA in Women's Studies. That year, she won the Long Island Community Service Award and the Undergraduate Achievement Award in the Department. She went on to receive her MA in Women's Studies

in 2004 from the University at Albany. Now, Staub teaches here at Stony Brook and at Suffolk County Community College. We thank Staub for her work in the Department, and for giving us an insight into her personal life.

Tell us some of the things you want your students to take away from your classes.

Right now, I am teaching WST 103 at SBU, and Gender and the Humanities at SCCC. The classes have a lot of similarities. I particularly like teaching WST 103 because the last section is based on poetry evaluation and criticism. We spend a few weeks considering how poetry can make connections to identity, explore differences, create change and influence culture. More and more I am reading poets who are addressing issues we discuss in WGSS and incorporating them into my course work across colleges. After all, Audre Lorde said "Poetry is not a luxury." I want students to take away the accessibility of the art form and use it as an outlet to make connections to their own lives and the experiences of the people around them.

Tell us a memorable event you've participated in or witnessed since graduating.

It has been some time since I graduated and have participated and witnessed many memorable events. The most recent would be my youngest daughter, seven at the time, watching Kamala Harris being sworn in as Vice President by Justice Sotomayor (my daughter's favorite Supreme Court Justice). She happened to be home for a virtual day. I snapped a quick photo from behind. It was like witnessing all the possibilities for the future happen in real time.

What do you do to relax?

I am currently really into watching British murder mystery dramas on Netflix. They have these vast and beautiful country landscapes, crashing waves and complex characters. My partner and I just finished three seasons of *Broadchurch*. Everything about the series was engaging. It kept me guessing till the end!

Tell us about a book that is important to you.

Adrienne Rich's *Diving Into the Wreck* is a series of poems Rich wrote in the early 1970s. I read the book in my early teens and it was the first time I felt empowered. The title poem is still one of my all time favorites. Also, my close friend, Richard Mirabella recently wrote a short story titled "Levittown." It was nominated for Best of the Net, Fiction. A haunting work of friendship, trauma and that where we are from doesn't define who we are.

Dog or cat person?

I am a dog person. I love cats but I have the sweetest chocolate lab mix. She's such a good girl. She loves naps and patrolling the backyard. I follow many dog rescues and work hard to resist adopting every dog I see. It's a lot of willpower.

Favorite sport/team/player?

Right now, I'd have to say Dek Hockey, which is essentially organized street hockey on a non-ice rink. My daughter is my favorite player.

What are you listening to now?

JD McPherson, Lizzo, Broadway musicals. I like everything!

Advice for graduating WGSS majors/minors?

As for students who want and work for social justice, never doubt that your efforts are enough. Your existence as someone who works to learn, who wants something better, who seeks change in itself, is enough. Back away from the thoughts that make you feel you could be doing more to achieve the societal goals you are after. Many students don't identify themselves as feminist or activists because they have yet to cross some imaginary finish line. The smallest of achievements matter.

We Appreciate Your Support

The Department of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies depends on the support of our alumni and friends so we may continue to offer undergraduate scholarships, financial assistance to our graduate students for research and other expenses, as well as to support programming and other departmental initiatives for the benefit of our amazing students!

I hope you'll consider investing in our students and faculty by [making a gift](#) today or speaking with [Hodan Hassan](#), Assistant Dean for Advancement, at (631) 632-4055.

Please stay in touch and send us updates about your accomplishments.