Greetings from the cool North, which some of us were able to escape last semester when we went to Puerto Rico to attend the National Women’s Studies Association in warm San Juan. For many in our department it was the highlight of the semester as the NWSA offered a comprehensive program with hundreds of sessions, keynote speaker Bell Hooks and a special roundtable discussion on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict attended by over a thousand NWSA members. The latter showed, again, how much of our work is centered around issues of injustice. Author, feminist and social activist bell hooks reminded us how important it is to question society’s norms, especially when they support mainstream culture(s) over the less privileged.

Many more participants this year, I was told by attendees of past conferences, were people of color. This has to be applauded just as much as the vast amount of LGBT and GLBTQ sessions that were offered. However, Women’s Studies sessions were less in numbers, a trend that has also become more visible on college campuses across the U.S. where Women’s Studies courses are being more and more replaced by LGBT courses. Women studies has been instrumental in bringing about some of the much needed societal changes we are seeing today. As was voiced over and over again in a session for dept. heads and women center’s directors that I attended, administrators are quick in exchanging one area of study for the other. Given the long way we still have to go to address societal injustices of gender, race, class, and sexism, women studies classes and women studies departments have a vital role to play in years to come, just as LGBT classes and Gender and Sexuality departments. Only together can we learn. Only together can we be strong!

Our community meeting in the fall demonstrated the wonderful work that is being done to end discrimination and injustice right here in Duluth by and on behalf of women with various backgrounds. Thank you, PAVSA, Safe-Haven, North Shore Horizons, Community Action Duluth, Witness for Peace, Planned Parenthood, AAUW, CASDA, the Women’s Health Center, Men As Peacemakers, and DAIP representatives for being at the table and speaking about the essential work you do to combat and prevent violence in the community on so many levels. Thank you to the Women’s Resource and Action Center, WRAC students, and director Susana Woodward for the services you provide to UMD Students, staff, and faculty. And thank you, members of the Women Studies Advisory Board, for reaching out and joining us in learning about community issues related to women and the LGBT community. Only together can we be strong. Only together can we address vital issues of our common concerns. Only together can we teach UMD students to follow our lead.
What Does Studying Feminism Have To Do With Anything?
A Transfer Student’s Perspective

By Alexis Meyer

Transferring to UMD last fall was a challenge, to say the least. Not only did I have no idea what I wanted to do with my career, I was changing schools half-way through college, I moved hundreds of miles from home, and was pretty much starting over in every aspect of my life. It was rejuvenating—and necessary—to have a fresh start, but it was mostly utterly terrifying. There is no avoiding the fact that it was difficult.

Out of all of the classes I was taking, my Introduction to Women and Gender Studies class stood out the most. Coming from a background of studying nonviolence and social justice, the topics I learned about were familiarly challenging and motivating. In all honesty, this has been the only subject in my college career where I have truly learned how to benefit from challenging myself.

When you major in Women and Gender Studies, you study politics, philosophy, literature, history, sociology, and psychology, all with a feminist perspective. You explore why women are underrepresented in politics and higher-level jobs, and the social construction of gender, race, and class. As long as there is injustice in this world, women and other marginalized groups of people need advocates for equality, and that’s where a Women’s Studies major comes in. Oppression has a very real presence in our world, but when you begin to learn the power of critical thinking and the necessity of questioning authority, there is hope. With studying poverty and other forms of structured and strategic violence, most of the time I would leave class frustrated. This anger only fueled my motivation to create change. It’s validating to be surrounded by so many passionate and educated professors and peers, all striving toward creating a more just, equal, and vibrant society.

To say that Women’s Studies is misunderstood would be an understatement, especially coming from those of privilege. My family is no exception to this. Upon going home over winter break, all of the questions from my family members soon sounded the same. After explaining what Women’s Studies was, I watched their facial expressions twist with subtle glimpses of doubt, usually with a snide half-chuckle.

“What do you plan on doing with a degree in Women’s Studies?”

“What does studying feminism have to do with anything?”

And of course the statement from my questionable Uncle Jeff, “I studied women in college too… ha ha.”

The conversation usually ended there.

As frustrating as it is to know that I may not find approval from my family in what I am studying, it’s all the more validating on why this is so important. The fact that Women’s Studies isn’t taken seriously only shows how much room for growth we have as a society. Being a Women and Gender Studies student is not so much a career choice as it is a life choice. I’m adopting a vital perspective that I will use in every relationship, every job, and every circumstance. What I am learning in this field, the skills and life lessons, will never be able to fully translate to a piece of paper.

Now, in only my second semester at UMD, I feel at home thanks to the WGSS department. I do not necessarily know exactly what I want to do with my career, but I know that whatever path I choose in life I will be making a difference. My transition to Duluth was far from easy, but I am proud to be a part of something so much bigger than myself.
Three kates, three questions

The three Kates (Kate Mensing, Kate Monson, and Kate Tusha) all graduated within the last year. They agreed to be a bit cheesy with us and answer three questions about their lives and WGSS experience. Their responses are listed in alphabetical order.

Question 1: Tell us a bit about yourself and what you are doing post graduation.

Kate Mensing: I am currently in my dream job of empowering girls through the YWCA’s Girl Power! program. I worried for a while in college that I would have to work just cleaning up the terrible messes that patriarchy has created in this world. When I realized that I can work on the preventative side of it, I was overjoyed. I love working with youth and empowering girls to change the world exponentially through their lifetimes.

Kate Monson: For a year after graduation I searched for jobs, and kept working the job I had during college as a Patient Registration Representative at St. Luke’s Hospital. I also volunteered as a member of a local artist/art gallery collective. I curated an art show for women Valentine’s Day 2014, and helped host the 2014 Minerva Zine party. In my private life I wrote poetry, published a piece I wrote during my time in Women’s Studies seminar, and performed my poetry locally.

I recently moved to Minneapolis, MN. I now work at Planned Parenthood scheduling family planning and abortion appointments for the Minnesota and South Dakota Planned Parenthood locations. It combines my Women’s Studies degree, and the work experience I gained at the hospital during undergraduate work. I didn’t expect to be doing this work, in fact, I had no idea what I wanted to do. I’m not sure I want to be doing this, either. I do know that I want to work for feminism in the world, and so I’ve found something to do daily that nurtures that part of me. More than my work life, what surprises me is the way I’ve used my free time re-reading the books I bought for undergrad Women’s Studies classes. I’ve re-read The Heroine’s Journey, Women and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her, and essays from my Feminist Theory text book. The new books I choose are also highly influenced by the books my old classmates and professors have recommended. It is wonderful to know where to get first-rate reading suggestions. (Beth, I await your “essential” reading list!). I find myself thinking about concepts I learned about frequently like the loving eye, the goddesses, and walking earth meditation. I also text and email my old Professors when I forget exactly what reading something I’m thinking about came from, and they always respond.

Kate Tusha: I graduated in December with a double degree in Political Science and French, with a minor in WGSS. I loved UMD and am still extremely biased towards the campus and city. I firmly believe that Duluth is the greatest city on earth. Post graduation...Continued on Page 4
Three Kates continued from page 3

I'm finding myself already looking forward to grad school. I thought I would want to jump right into a job, but I've found that the more I have learned as an undergrad, the more I have realized I have left to learn.

**Question 2: What would you tell students who were just starting out at college?**

**Kate Mensing:** Explore. If you do not change your major, transfer colleges, or at least branch out into courses you "never thought you would take," you are heading towards a mid life crisis. Now is the safest time to play, experiment, question, and create. Listen to the people you trust. Trust yourself. Life is both long and short.

**Kate Monson:** My advice is to explore, dive into what nurtures you, and fill your life with people who support you on those adventures. George once said to me, "Nothing has to be permanent" when we discussed grad school. That's been a great help to me this transition year, as I try new things to see what fits.

**Kate Tusha:** I hate to be a cliche, but get involved when you're a freshman! Just pick something you care about and run with it! The connections I made with people in my major or with students involved in clubs I joined were not only fun, but meaningful. You share so many things with the friends you make in those places, much more than the students who might happen to live in your hall. Making connections over a shared interest creates such a strong bond and such great friendships! (I really do sound like a welcome-to-college brochure, but I mean it with complete sincerity!)

**Question 3: How has your degree/experience in WGSS benefited your life and career?**

**Kate Mensing:** I never would have found the YWCA if not for WGSS. I think about ideas from courses every day. The books I read are influenced by authors I learned about in WGSS classes, and feminism has become a crucial part of my identity.

**Kate Monson:** My degree aided in the hiring process at the job I currently do at Planned Parenthood, in more ways than one; firstly because I have the degree, and secondly because one of the people who interviewed me had the same Feminist Theory reader and some of my favorite books on her bookshelf. We had a wonderful conversation once my interview was finished. This happens so frequently in situations I find myself: at coffee shops, job interviews, grocery stores, bars, libraries, dog parks… There is a moment of solidarity, a spark that happens when I meet someone with a Women's or Gender Studies degree.

**Kate Tusha:** My experience in WGSS changed more about my academic and career goals than I ever expected. I came into my first WGSS class thinking it would be an easy grade and it might even be interesting. I don't think I would have even identified as a feminist before that class. But it piqued something really passionate for me, and one class was never enough. Adding it to my degree was never a problem, because those were always the classes I looked forward to. I loved the small classes and the truly fierce discussions we could get into. When it came time to look at graduate programs, I knew the discussions that had been started in those classes were the ones I wanted to continue. I never anticipated that love or excitement and although I'm going to school for International Development, I think I'm bringing something different to the table with my background in WGSS. That perspective continues to give me so much and I am so grateful to the WGSS department and of course, professor Deb Plechner, for sparking my interest in such a massive way.

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**STUDYING VIOLENCE AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN ITALY**

In Partnership with the Study Abroad office at UMD, WGSS offered a study abroad trip during January break 2015. The class focused on the themes of gender, health, art therapy and community support.
NATIONAL WOMEN’S STUDIES ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE IN PUERTO RICO
Pictured above are some of the WGSS faculty who attended the NWSA conference last November. Geza Zinn and Cindy Christian presented *Injustice and Incompetence on American Campuses: Administrators Look on As Workplace Bullying Explores. No End in Sight?* Susana Woodward and Beth Bartlett presented *How to put the WGS back into Women’s Centers.* (Beth Bartlett was unable to attend the conference and Tineke Ritmeester presented on her behalf.)

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

FEBRUARY

V-Day UMD presents: The Vagina Monologues
(with 2 Brand New Monologues add to original script!!!)
Saturday, FEBRUARY 21 at 6PM
Monday, FEBRUARY 23 at 6PM
Saturday, FEBRUARY 28 at 2PM
In the UMD Rafters
Student Tickets are only $6! 100% of proceeds will be donated to Program to Aid Victims of Sexual Assault’s (PAVSA) Sex Trafficking Task Force Fund

FEBRUARY 25—Wednesday
8 am-5pm Kirby Ballroom
2015 UMD Summit on Equity, Diversity and Multiculturalism
Please visit UMD Diversity Commission for registration and schedule. *Sponsored by UMD Diversity Commission, Office of Cultural Diversity, Kirby Leadership Program*

FEBRUARY 28—Saturday
Romano Gym (Dinner) 5:30pm, MPAC (Performances) 7:30pm
47th Annual Feast of Nations
Featuring a worldly selection of foods to feast on and performers from around the globe. For more information please contact Kamila Xiong at xiong875@d.umn.edu *Sponsored by UMD International Club*

MARCH

MARCH 2 – Monday
Kirby Student Center 268; 5:30pm-7pm
Art Enrichment Workshop
Come and join Susan Meyers and psychology student, Abby Splittstoesser, in Art enrichment Group for students, staff, faculty and community members who are victims/survivors of inti-

/MARCH 4—Wednesday
Kirby Student Center 268; 12-1pm
Brown Bag Series: *Sponsored by the Women’s Resource and Action Center and the Women’s Gender and Sexuality Studies*

MARCH 9 – Monday
Bus Hub; 10am-1:30pm
International Women’s Day:
*Sponsored by the Women’s Resource and Action Center and the Women’s Gender and Sexuality Studies Department*

MARCH 9—Monday
UMD Library Rotunda 4:00—5:30
Mona Susan Power and Erika Wurth, American Indian Authors, will be reading from “Sacred Wilderness” (Power) and “Crazy Horse’s Girlfriend” (Wurth) and answering questions from the audience.

MARCH 9—Monday
Kirby Student Center 268; 5:30pm-7pm
Art Enrichment Workshop

Please check the UMD Events website or events on www.d.umn.edu/ws for more events and information.
THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING UMD'S DEPARTMENT OF WOMEN, GENDER, & SEXUALITY STUDIES

I/We would like to make a gift to Women’s Studies: $__________
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