Friends, family, and the Women's Studies Program gathered at the Reece Museum on Wednesday, November 8, to celebrate Professor Karen Brewster and Dr. Stacey Williams, this year's recipients of the Notable Woman of ETSU award. The Reece Museum was a fitting place for this year's colloquium—on display were the FL3TCH3R Exhibit for Social and Politically Engaged Art as well as A New Subjectivity: Figurative Painting after 2000, featuring works of expressionism by women artists.

After opening remarks, program director Dr. Phyllis Thompson introduced Professor Karen Brewster, Chair of the newly formed Department of Theatre and Dance. Karen recalled growing up in East Tennessee in the 1960s, showing family photos from days of traveling and camping. She discovered her passion for the behind-the-scenes work of costume design as a student at ETSU, and continued her education in theatre working as a graduate student at the costume shop at Michigan State University before returning to the mountains. Karen served as the Resident Costume Designer for Barter Theatre (Abingdon, VA) and remains a guest designer there since returning to ETSU in 2000. Working on over 100 productions and now leading a new department in the College of Arts and Sciences has been quite the journey. Karen attributes her success to the important close relationships she has formed over the years—her parents, husband, and children; mentors like Gretel Geist Rutledge and Bud and Daryl Frank; and friend Melissa Schaefer.

For co-recipient Dr. Stacey Williams, staying true to herself has brought her to this point in her personal life and professional career. Stacey’s early research focused on the effects of gender-based violence in romantic relationships, but she realized her calling was to understand the experience of people with stigmatized identities. These changes in her research coincided with changes in her personal life. Soon after coming out as a lesbian, Stacey applied her research on stigma to LGBTQ experiences of minority stress. She has since devoted her time and energy to bringing more attention to LGBTQ issues in her field and in the Appalachian region, and has raised over $500,000 research dollars to study gender and sexual minorities. Balancing her roles as Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology and chair of ETSU’s Institutional Review Board with her active research agenda and community action takes intentional effort, and while she originally thought she would want to live somewhere more LGBTQ friendly, she remains in Appalachia. Being LGTBQ in this region and advocating to make the community more accepting of this marginalized group is part of what keeps her here at ETSU.

Once Stacey and Karen fielded questions from the audience and Dr. Thompson gave closing remarks, people hugged each other’s necks and gave the artwork one more study before departing. We left the Reece Museum with a renewed sense of purpose and energy to finish the academic year, recognizing that Notable Woman is an important award because it not only celebrates women and their accomplishments, but also has the power to inspire those who attend.

The Women’s Studies Program would like to give special thanks to Randy Sanders and Spenser Brenner at the Reece Museum for their planning and hospitality, and to our brilliant student staff and Sodexo catering for making the evening welcoming and beautiful. Thank you to Charlie Warden, ETSU Photographer, for capturing our event in images.

Would you like to nominate a faculty member for 2018 Notable Woman of ETSU? Nominations are accepted through mid-March. Email womenstudies@etsu.edu or thomspop@etsu.edu for more information.
Dr. Rebecca Fletcher’s talk focused on health disparities, specifically in Appalachia, and how those disparities are affected by economic change, social location, policy, region, and social activism. She discussed how Appalachia is a geographic and political region that oftentimes has trouble getting proper access to medical care. The challenging terrain of mountainous regions along with political and economic influences have historically played a role in the availability of adequate health care. Currently, however, there are environmental obstacles other than terrain that are taking a toll, such as the effects of fracking and mountaintop removal coal mining. Fletcher showed maps of the region in which developments of serious health conditions correlated with these environmental hazards, and discussed how her research can help inform steps to a more positive future.

Dr. Bethany Novotny from the Department of Counseling and Human Services kicked off the Women on Wednesday series with “Mindset Matters!”, a lecture on the correlation between mindset, grit, and self-efficacy. Novotny defined grit as “passion and perseverance” and discussed its importance in people’s success rates. She also discussed the close relationship between grit and mindset — a higher level of grit usually correlates with a growth mindset, and having one can help improve the other. A grit assessment was offered so the audience could measure how much grit they have. Novotny noted that a low grit score is nothing to get discouraged about because there are ways to improve it like developing a growth mindset, which can be achieved by changing response patterns to issues and setting more learning goals. Although Novotny’s research focuses specifically on people in the helping professions, the concepts can apply to other careers as well.

Dr. Cerrone Foster discussed how crucial it is to bridge the gap between science and society by spreading the word about symptoms of heart disease that often go unnoticed, especially in women. Heart disease and heart attacks manifest differently in men and women: women often see the minor side effects such as fatigue, blurred vision, confusion, and dizziness as just a random occurrence because they need food or sleep. Ignoring these signs could put off the care a woman needs until too late. Foster says one reason that the symptoms manifest differently could be the influence that estrogen has on the body, as there seems to be some correlation between estrogen production over a woman’s lifespan and a healthy heart. While more research is needed to prove how cardiovascular disease really affects women, Foster says progress is being made.

Dr. Julia Bernard ended the fall semester’s Women on Wednesday series with a talk about resilience, which she described as a spirit of hope and healing. She said that just as a smoker’s lung can recover within 10 years after quitting smoking, the brain is also resilient and can heal. Bernard has researched developmental, behavioral, and health outcomes of various resilient populations, and has found that in order to practice resilience we must believe that people are capable of three things—changing, bouncing back, and healing. Two important aspects of practicing resilience are knowing what you can and cannot handle, and being sure to focus on self-care with healthy coping mechanisms. Bernard concluded the talk suggesting concrete strategies for daily resilience: dwell on next steps instead of dwelling on what’s wrong, seek a mentor, write/journal, search for a solution-oriented therapist, and physical activities like yoga or going to the gym.

Spring 2018 Women on Wednesdays Schedule

January 31: Mildred Maisonet (Epidemiology)  
February 21: Loren Biggs (Counseling Center)  
March 14: Cara Harker (Dance)  
March 21: Alison Deadman (Music)  
March 28: Lindsay Rogers (Ceramics)  
April 4: Diana Morelen (Psychology)

In the Multicultural Center Presentation Room @ noon!

Special thanks to the Multicultural Center staff and students for their help and use of space.
English MA student and research assistant Elizabeth Chapman sat down to chat with Dr. Jennifer Grubbs who joined our faculty this fall as Visiting Assistant Professor and Assistant Director of Women’s Studies.

Elizabeth Chapman: What got you interested in the field of Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (WGSS)?

Dr. Jennifer Grubbs: I began taking Women’s Studies classes at the University of Cincinnati while earning my master’s in communication. I became really fascinated at how a feminist lens looked at the texts and theories that I was looking at in communication, then I earned a master’s in WGSS. When I was looking for doctorate programs I wanted to stick with a larger social science, so I did a doctorate of Anthropology but specifically picked a school that specialized in race, gender, and social justice. WGSS explained a lot of my own life. It was my ability to have theory illuminate life in a way that other texts and disciplines had not.

EC: What courses do you plan on teaching for ETSU?

JG: In spring 2018 I’ll be teaching a class about race, gender, and social justice in film and a class on race, gender, and class in society. Rather than teaching and ending at the understanding of systematic oppression, it’s more about beginning at that and ending at a place of action and advocacy. Sometimes you’re teaching a student how to be an ally and what that looks like.

EC: What research projects are you currently working on?

JG: I’m publishing my manuscript for my dissertation which was an ethnography about animal and earth liberation activists in North America and focused on protest strategies used by what oftentimes are deemed as far left, so doing this queer analysis of how direct action queers political protest. My current research expands from that and focuses on environmental justice and resistance in Appalachia, looking at food pathways specifically in Melungeon communities.

EC: What interested you in the animal rights part of your research?

JG: Everyone’s research is informed by their own politics, and being a vegan, my academic interest was creating spaces within academia to talk about it. Intersectionality allows us to openly talk [about how] race and gender intersect and diverge. We’re getting to the point where class, ethnicity, and geographic location are becoming more obvious. What’s also happening simultaneously is the discourse around how the exploitation of animals connects to this. That’s an under-discussed discourse within feminist theory and it’s really isolated and seen as ecofeminist. The critical animal activists expect feminists to be a part of [direct action] but there’s not a reciprocal expectation that the feminists will take into consideration species, and I think that is really interesting and that’s worth exploring.

Grubbs’ interest outside of academia also makes some interesting stories which can be found on her blog: https://thoughtsofapregnantvegan.wordpress.com/

EC: What are your hobbies and interests outside of the women’s, gender, and sexuality studies?

JG: Traveling and trying to enter spaces that in some way or another strip little bits of comfort, like going places where I don’t speak the language or going places where my parenting style is not the norm. I’m a mother of three, so I like to get outside and hang out with my kids. If I have an excuse to take them on an adventure, I will.

This interview was edited for length and clarity.

2017 Tri-Iota Inductees

Congratulations to the 2017 Tri-Iota inductees!

Left to right: Katie Schraeder, Celeste Hobbs, Natasha Aguilar, Jack Rivera.
Not pictured: Kelsey Bailey

For more information on the Tri-Iota Honor Society, please visit our website.
We cannot do this without you.

It is because of the support of individuals like you that we are able to provide opportunities for our students.

Yes, I would like to donate to the Women’s Studies Program at ETSU...

Name: _________________________________________________________________________________
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Please contact me at: _______________________(phone) _______________________(email)

Your donation allows the Women’s Studies Program to preserve the rich educational environment we have for our students. We appreciate and thank you for your generosity! To make a donation, please fill out the above information and send it with your check payable to ETSU Women’s Studies Program.

Our mailing address: ETSU Women's Studies Program, PO Box 70262, Johnson City, TN 37614-1700

If you have news to share, let us know! Email us at womenstudies@etsu.edu

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Faculty Scholarship

Dr. Rebekah Byrd:


Presentations:


Curriculum. Presented at the Association of Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) in Chicago, IL.

Rebecca Tolley:


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Dr. Phyllis Thompson:


“Safe Zone: Diversity Inclusion Training for ETSU Faculty and Staff.” ETSU. April 2017.


Presentations:


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Barbara Brooks Murphy Scholarship
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Dr. Rebekah Byrd:


Presentations:


Curriculum. Presented at the Association of Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) in Chicago, IL.

Rebecca Tolley:


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