Feminist Social Distancing

Spring semester 2020 presented students and faculty with new and unexpected obstacles as COVID-19 pushed everyone out of their comfort zones. Students were displaced, classes transitioned to online, and Zoom meetings became the new norm. In early April, the Women's Studies Steering Committee and Women's Studies faculty at ETSU gathered to hold a zoom conversation on Feminist Social Distancing and to discuss their ideas, strategies, frustrations and questions that surfaced during the pandemic. Faculty, staff, and graduate students from Arts & Sciences, Clemmer College, Continuing Studies, and Liberal Studies shared what is working and what is not working in their personal and professional experience and offered practical suggestions for both.

First and foremost, we asked what is Feminist Social Distancing? How does it differ from other forms of social distancing? How do our feminist democratic practices inform social distancing? Feminist Social Distancing employs an additional level of care towards students that extends beyond the walls of the virtual classroom. This work crosses multiple platforms and asks educators to find ways to practice empathy and compassion in virtual office spaces, across social media, through publicity, in organizations, in the classroom, in assignments, via policies, across Zoom channels, discussion boards, phone lines, and email inboxes. Feminist Social Distancing invites active listening as we help our students connect, de-stress, self-care, heal, and make meaning of the individual situations in which they find themselves.

Many involved in this discussion expressed concern for students who were now living in hostile environments or non-affirming households, had lost their jobs, or had stopped attending classes altogether. Others mentioned how old standards for the new virtual classroom were now inadequate and had to change for students and educators, alike. One faculty member noted how they had let go of controlling the class and instead allowed students to pace themselves. This included being more flexible on due dates which lowered the stress for all. Other approaches this group discussed were reducing the number of assignments, posting information about resources in the news feed, sending regularly scheduled check-in or “this week in review” emails, opening a virtual “panic room” or care area in discussion board, holding zoom office hours, and continuing to practice all the other creative ways to extend compassion to students.

The pandemic asks educators to support their students but it’s not just students who need support. It’s also one another -- staff and faculty -- and conversations like this one, finding ways to get together and check in, are part of what it means to Feminist Social Distance. Many questioned sustaining life/work balance and shared the sentiment that they were never truly ‘off’ during this time which was beginning to interfere with personal engagements and mental health. At a time when everyone is craving connection, these conversations help to bridge that gap and provide support, even virtually. As one faculty member reminded us, there is no magic bullet; we just need to be gentle and kind, with ourselves and others. What is Feminist Social Distancing? We are #TOGETHERAPART.
Ecofeminism & Industry: Women in Peripheral Film Environments

Dr. Chelsea Wessels kicked off the spring semester’s Women on Wednesdays series with an inside look at feminist filmmakers such as Kelly Reichardt, Lynn Shelton and Megan Griffiths who are redefining the film industry. In her talk, Wessels demonstrated how these filmmakers reconnect with the landscape by honoring natural geographical characteristics rather than conquering or owning the land. She refers to this as bioregionalism, a concept that emerged in the 1970s that prioritizes things such as mountain ranges, rivers, and valleys rather than political or man made boundaries. This ecofeminist approach to film is not only a catalyst for change through activism, solidarity and sustainability, but also a transformative movement that can offer hope for a brighter future.

Claire-Lise Holy: An Artist’s Reflections

Surrounded by an exhibit of poetry and artwork, Dr. Katherine Weiss, Professor and Chair in the Department of Literature and Language, discussed the recurring motifs found within the works of Claire-Lise Holy and how her work is related to that of Dieter Leisegang and Samuel Beckett. Intentional or not, traumatic experiences such as war seemed to surface within each of the artists’ work. The work of Beckett and Holy often included haunting figures and monochromatic settings that created an ominous feeling for the viewer. Each of the artists also used windows to reference a surreal life that may represent their hopes or fears. Weiss highlighted how art became a refuge for each of these artists and how all suffered when this escape was no longer available to them.

Zines! Zines! Zines!

Assistant Professor in the Art and Design program, Sage Perrot, led an interactive discussion on the versatility of zines, the vast network of zine makers, and their shared passion for this style of art. Perrot, also known as Haypeep, recognized the need for broader accessibility to zine making and described discovering ways to use a copy machine to create beautiful works of art that nearly anyone can make. Haypeep is passionate about providing opportunities for students and others to create zines and share their work with other zine makers around the country. Haypeep is most excited about the ways zines can build community and relationships between people living in rural areas and other artists around the world.

Stay on the lookout for more lectures coming Fall 2020 and Spring 2021!

Deidra Rodgers from the Department of Counseling and Human Services will draw from her experience to discuss the impact of change on her developing sense of self. Director of ETSU’s Multicultural Center and Access and Student Success Carshonda Martin’s lecture will discuss ways to foster inclusion and belonging for diverse populations on campus.

WOMEN’S STUDIES RECEIVES GRANT

The Women’s Studies Program is pleased to announce that we have received an Instructional Development Grant for 2020-2021 to organize and host an Institute on Trauma-Informed Teaching and Learning that will be open to the university community. Dr. Janice Carello will be the keynote speaker of the Institute.
What is the Safe Zone Program?
Safe Zone is designed to create a community of faculty, staff, and student leaders committed to creating and maintaining safe and inclusive spaces for gender and sexual minorities (GSM) at ETSU. We facilitate trainings about improving allyship for the LGBTQ community—what are the most important concepts and ideas to be familiar with, what being an ally looks like, how we can put the knowledge into practice. After completing Safe Zone training, members who have taken the Safe Zone pledge receive a decal they can display on their office door or at their desk letting others know they can be a support when needed.

Why is Safe Zone important?
We’re hoping to challenge negative attitudes and assumptions while encouraging ETSU faculty, staff, and students that our campus is a place they can be themselves. There’s quite a bit of research showing that providing affirming spaces improves the quality of life for LGBTQ folks, so creating this climate of acceptance and belonging is crucial.

What is your role and how did you become involved?
I initially took a Safe Zone training when I was hired as the executive aide in Women’s Studies in 2015, and in years that followed I became a facilitator to help lead trainings. In the last year, I’ve been working with Stacey Williams (Dept. of Psychology) and Alison Deadman (Dept. of Music) as a co-organizer of the program.

What are the intersections of the work of Safe Zone and Women’s Studies?
As an academic unit on campus whose mission is to educate about gender and sex equity, Women’s Studies is committed to cultivating a sense of belonging for all marginalized peoples on campus, including GSM. Our curriculum and programming have expanded over the years to include more focus on LGBTQ issues, so working with Safe Zone is a natural fit. Both our program director and I serve as facilitators, and all our office staff of undergraduate and graduate students have been trained, so we’re very proud to display our decal on the front of our office door.

What’s on the horizon for Safe Zone?
Last year I began working on a Safe Zone Part 2 training program with Brittany Wilkins (Dept. of Social Work) that is designed to build on the information folks learn in Safe Zone. Trainees practice skills like intentional listening and create a toolbox for responding to tricky situations. We’re hoping to make this available to people who have completed Safe Zone in fall 2020. It’s very exciting!

Spotlight: Award Recipients

Jaden Finch was selected as this year’s Outstanding Scholar Activist in Women’s Studies. Jaden is a Digital Media major with a Women’s Studies minor. They were selected for this award because they infuse feminist activism across all parts of their campus and community life, significantly enriching Women’s Studies as well as the other programs they’ve been part of, such as Diversity Educators. Known for producing quality academic work, Jack is also recognized by their professors for mentoring younger feminists in classes. Jack’s presence enlivens our office and demonstrates a commitment to transforming and re-visioning our campus community into a more feminist and inclusive space.

Lia Bevins was selected for the Graduate Feminist Activist Award this year. For the last two years, Lia has worked with Women’s Studies as the Tuition Scholar while also working towards her master’s in Liberal Studies focusing on gender and diversity. Before coming to ETSU, she earned her bachelor’s in English from Lincoln Memorial University and played volleyball. When she’s not at school, she spends time with her wife Kendra by the river, exploring the mountains, or home with their pups.

Zoe Hill was also selected for the Graduate Feminist Activist Award this year. Zoe has worked with the Women’s Studies Program for the past two years as our graduate assistant while working toward her master’s in Brand and Media Strategy. Previously, she studied Media and Communication here at ETSU. Her favorite WMST memory is getting to present at SEWSA last year while learning and spending quality time with the faculty, staff and students of women, gender and sexuality studies programs from across the country.

Graduate Assistant Zoe Hill talked with Heidi Marsh about the Safe Zone Program at ETSU. Heidi serves as the Women’s Studies Executive Aide and Safe Zone Co-Organizer. She also teaches part-time in Women’s Studies and previously in the Dept. of Literature and Language.

Women’s Studies continues work with Safe Zone program to create LGBTQ-affirming spaces on campus
**Director’s Corner**

*Words from Director Phyllis Thompson*

As I did in December, I’m writing this spring’s “director’s corner” on the last day of classes, sitting at the same desk, sipping steaming coffee from the same Porché mug, looking out the same window, and watching the same sun rise on a new day. But the view this morning is entirely different.

It is different because I will be teaching my class in a few minutes from this chair, not Burleson. It is different because students will show up in fuzzy pjs or not at all because they have selected disengage video. It is different because I cannot see most of my students’ faces and am desperately trying not to look at my own. It is different because our customary classroom circle is a proverbial one, and we are all navigating virtual space. It is different because Heidi and I are not buying burgers and dogs at Kroger for the annual cook-out that would normally take place this Friday, providing us some needed down time together and a chance to say farewell for the summer or congrats on graduation. Saying our good-byes is always hard; not saying them is harder.

As I look toward the weeks ahead, there remains a great deal of uncertainty but there are still some things we can all just depend on. While feminist practice in the time of COVID may look different, you can count on women’s studies continuing to do the work of women’s studies and that we will be open for business Monday through Friday, 8:00-4:30. You can count on Heidi Marsh answering your call or email every day. You can count on women’s studies faculty being available in the Zoom Check-in & Chat room all summer. You can count on women’s studies students doing great work. We are so proud of all our students and the feminist work they have been doing this spring in spite of COVID, such as Teasha Brown’s (WMST) and Omolola Giwa’s (ENGL) archives projects to increase visibility about educator and Civil Rights activist Septima Clark; Hannah Hoover’s (ENGL) conversations at Highlander Center with feminist and Civil Rights activist Candy Carawan; and Claire Liszka’s (WMST) internship with Free the Girls. We are proud of our award recipients who inspire us and have led the way in feminist action on campus and in community. Jack Rivera (DIGM/WMST), Jaden Finch (WMST), Lia Bevins (MALS), and Zoe Hill (BDMS). We take special pride in our graduates: major Jaden Finch and minors Shelby Liz Ashley, Cheston Axton, Kelsey Bailey, Alison Dyer, Celeste Hobbs, Kendra Knight, Claire Liszka, Yesenia Ortiz, Bryanna Prince, Ricki Smith, Lauren Snyder, Mikaelah Taylor, Emerson Todd, and Carly Tribble. Congratulations Graduates! We are proud of you!

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**Faculty Scholarship**

LeRoy-Frazier, J. *Ecology, Activism, and the Experts: Fielding Burke’s Call Home the Heart, Harriette Simpson Arnow’s The Dollmaker, and Wilma Dykeman’s Return the Innocent Earth* --part “Agricultural Extension of Everything” a pre-arranged panel, co-presented with Dr. Garrett Graddy-Lovelace and Veronica Limeberry, American University; Heather Hyden and Dr. Rosalind Harris, University of Kentucky; Marcus Bernard, Kentucky State University; Kim Niewolny, Virginia Tech University; Tiffany Bellfield-AlAmin, Community Farm Alliance; and Dr. Jahi Chappell, Food First —Dimensions of Political Ecology annual conference, University of Kentucky, February 2020


Williams, S., with Reid, D. and Thompson, P. "Safe Zone Workshop," ETSU, April 17, 2020.


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LeRoy-Frazier, J. *Getting In and Staying In: Strategies for Retaining Post-Traditional, Early-Stage Liberal Studies Students* Association of Graduate Liberal Studies Programs Pre-Conference Workshop for Faculty and Directors, AGLSP annual conference, San Antonio, TX, October 2019.


Marsh, H. “What is Media Literacy?” ETSU Governor’s School, Johnson City, TN. June 4, 2020.

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