Notable Women of ETSU
An annual celebration of women, their lives, and their accomplishments

On the evening of November 14, a community of researchers, activists, professors, students, and family members filled the Reece Museum to celebrate Dr. Kelly Atkins and Dr. Jodi Polaha, this year’s recipients of the Notable Women of ETSU award. The Women’s Studies Program hosts this event each year to honor and celebrate the work of remarkable women on our campus and to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas, research, and projects that are generated by women faculty. Guests mingled throughout the Reece Museum surrounded by the FL3TCHER Exhibit for Social and Politically Engaged Art and UPSTATE: A Portrait of a Post-Industrial City along the Hudson, which features the work of photographer Tema Stauffer, who is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Art and Design.

Dr. Phyllis Thompson, Director of the Women’s Studies Program, welcomed everyone. “Make no mistake,” she said. “We at ETSU cannot make a claim as bold as ‘People First’ without the work done by Dr. Kelly Atkins and Dr. Jodi Polaha.”

Dr. Atkins accepted her award first and named three themes she felt best described her life: perseverance, joy, and service to others. Dr. Atkins is an Associate Professor in the Department of Management & Marketing and leads the Merchandising Program. She discovered her passion for working with young adults during the 16 years she spent working in the merchandising industry. Since earning her Ph. D. in Human Ecology from the University of Tennessee, she has completed significant research on multi-dimensional, gender neutral measures of apparel shopping and effective classroom management and evaluation of group assignments. Dr. Atkins spoke of the gratitude she feels for those who have helped her along the way, the knowledge she has gained from her students, and the ways in which service has fulfilled her. She inspired the audience to persevere and find joy.

Dr. Jodi Polaha is from the Department of Family Medicine, and when she received her award she was honored to be in the ranks of the women who came before her in receiving the same recognition. Dr. Polaha spoke of the lessons she learned from her family, mentors, and teachers and how they all sparked her interest in psychology. She discussed her days as a pioneer in integrated healthcare, working in clinics to ensure patients’ mental health needs were addressed alongside the treatment they received from their primary care physicians. In addition to being a dedicated professor and researcher, Dr. Polaha serves as Washington County commissioner, writes a regional hiking blog, serves on the Tannery Knobs Task Force, and is an avid cyclist and open water swimmer. Dr. Polaha’s passion was evident in her words, and her enthusiasm for life was infectious.

Notable Women is an award designed to advance our understanding of women, their work, and their lives. This year’s event certainly accomplished that goal. As the crowd dissipated, there was an air of empowerment in the museum, one that can only come from listening to the struggles and triumphs of others and being moved by those stories.

The Women’s Studies Program would like to thank Spenser Brenner at the Reece Museum for his planning and hospitality, our student staff for their work, photographer Ronald Campbell and videographer Jason Jones for capturing our event, and all who attended for their support.

Would you like to nominate a faculty member for 2019 Notable Women of ETSU? Nominations are accepted through mid-March. Email womenstudies@etsu.edu or thomspop@etsu.edu for more information.
Trauma-Informed Dialogue: the Power of Conversation
Dr. Meira Yasin from the College of Nursing launched the Women on Wednesdays series with “Trauma-Informed Dialogue: The Power of Coffee and Conversation to Change the World,” a lecture on her experience with trauma-informed care and assisting individuals with high numbers of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). Dr. Yasin shared her experiences of traveling the world providing global and refugee health to vulnerable populations such as Jordan, Palestine, and Greece. She also discussed how a trauma-informed lens can help us better understand the child or adult in need, which in turn will create a safe and transparent environment for healing.

Mingle with the World: Life and Work of Jessie Ackermann
Amy Steadman’s inspiring talk shared her biographical research of Jessie Ackermann, a world traveler, missionary, feminist, and social reformer whose primary work was done in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Steadman discussed Ackermann’s remarkable life with an interactive tour throughout the Reece Museum exhibition, The World through a Woman’s Eyes, which displayed Ackermann’s artifacts including the dress she created and wore for the Pope, photos of Ackermann with natives of Australia, her writing desk, and more. Jessie Ackermann’s feminist values and eagerness to explore the world left the attendees inspired to do the same.

Is ETSU in the Zone? Safe Zone at ETSU
Organizers of ETSU’s Safe Zone program, Drs. Alison Deadman and Stacey Williams, led an interactive discussion on the history and importance of Safe Zone at ETSU. The audience was asked to evaluate ETSU’s campus climate towards the LGBTQ community and also define what being an ally means to them. Deadman and Williams also discussed Safe Zone’s definitions and the vision for Safe Zone’s future at ETSU. With the help of the audience, Deadman and Williams brainstormed ways Safe Zone can expand its reach on campus through visibility, financial growth and collaboration.

UPSTATE: A Portrait of a Post-Industrial City Along the Hudson
During her artist talk, Tema Stauffer shared the evolution of her photography and the many bodies of work that led to her current exhibit, UPSTATE. This project highlights the rural areas along the Hudson River and the imprint of American industrial and agricultural history. This moving body of work was published as a monograph by Daylight Books earlier this year. Stauffer’s work beautifully portrays a complex story within each photo as she aims to provide visibility to the stifled and the oppressed. In her talk, Stauffer discussed the inspiration behind UPSTATE and her previous projects as well as some of her photographic processes.

Infertility Finds all the Weak Spots: Effects of Infertility on Women’s Functioning
Assistant Professor in Psychology, Dr. Julia Dodd shared her study on women who have experienced infertility throughout their adult lives and their many burdens as a result of this experience. To great surprise, her findings showed a large number of women remain positive during their experience with infertility. Along with the financial and emotional burdens, she discussed how the stigma surrounding infertility plays a pivotal role in the psychological burden on women. Dodd plans to expand this research to also study the effects on males in heterosexual relationships experiencing infertility, as well as those in same-sex relationships.
What are the intersections of Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and Counseling in your approach to teaching?

In the Sex, Gender, and the Body course, I help them understand some of the clinical side of what I’ve seen with sexual minorities or people who are in the process of transitioning. On the flip side, as I immerse myself in the sex and gender literature, I am able to bring that more into counseling so students can better understand sexual minorities and how to work with those individuals. The Human Services Program is even considering introducing the Contemporary Sexualities course into our curriculum, to possibility make it part of our core curriculum, so I think that this partnership has worked really well in me being able to bring some things into Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies that they haven’t had with a counselor/mental health focus, and then bringing more sexuality studies into Human Services and Counseling.

What do you think of the LGBTQ+ Resources on campus, and how they have impacted student life?

I’m glad to see that there are opportunities for LGBTQ students to get involved with student organizations. However, we really need an LGBTQ resource center on campus. Students typically will find out where they can go to have support, but I feel like there’s no collective initiative that really makes a statement about being an inclusive campus. I think it’s good that we have some things in place, the push for having gender neutral bathrooms on campus is a very visible sign of trying to implement inclusive facilities. But I don’t think there’s anything university-wide that is an inclusive initiative for the LGBTQ community on campus, and I think we’re in a place in time where we can draw a statement about that.

What research projects are you currently working on?

One of my projects that’s further along is looking at how leadership training influences grit and resilience. I have some studies I want to start that are looking at “within group bias.” I’m very curious about individuals who have common identities, but yet we see bias and prejudice happen within that group. Within group bias has been studied primarily in communities of color, and I want to transition that to the LGBTQ community.

What are your interests outside of ETSU?

I do a lot of multi-day adventure activities. This past summer I did a bike-packing trip and rode the Great Allegheny Passage. I like to do stuff like kayaking, biking, hiking, anything outdoors, and I play racquetball at the CPA. On my bucket list is to visit Kiwi bungalow in Bora-Bora. I like hot weather and sandy beaches.
**Director's Corner**

Words from Director Phyllis Thompson

It has been an exciting semester in Women’s Studies at ETSU. The Steering Committee and affiliate faculty started strong with a grant-funded Trauma-Informed Care and Curriculum Development Retreat at The Highlander Center this summer. During the fall, we followed-up with a series of workshops that applied a trauma-informed approach to our feminist pedagogy and practice. Afterward, steering committee and faculty members assessed syllabi, worked on assignment development, and analyzed current policies and procedures for their trauma sensitivity, making revisions to better serve the students, faculty, and staff in our classrooms and offices. Last semester, we also enjoyed record numbers at our popular lecture series and Notable Women of ETSU Colloquia. In this newsletter, you can read about the accomplishments of individual Women’s Studies students and faculty, including the six Women’s Studies majors and minors we inducted into our national honor society, Tri-Iota. Our faculty spotlight highlights the work of Dr. Bethany Novotny (Assistant Professor in Counseling and Human Services), who teaches in Women’s Studies and is a member of the ETSU Commission on Women. As we look forward to spring, we are excited to announce that thirteen ETSU Women’s Studies faculty, staff, and students have been accepted to give presentations at the Southeastern Women’s Studies Association Conference at the University of Mississippi. From Highlander in New Market to Ole Miss in Oxford, Women’s Studies at ETSU is engaged, on the move, and committed to the work of radical belonging on campus, in the community, and across the Southeast.

**Faculty Scholarship**


Marsh, H. & Thompson, P., Training Facilitator. Safe Zone Program, Fall 2018. East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN.


Thompson, P. (2018) Creating common ground in southern Appalachian soil: pedagogy, education, and justice, National Women’s Studies Association Conference, Atlanta, GA.

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

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