

August 11, 2020

Dear WGS Majors:

Welcome

I'm writing to welcome you to the Fall 2020 University of Maine semester. I hope that you have all remained safe and healthy since the campus closed in March 2020. I am writing to introduce myself and to catch you up with the WGS program.

Departure of Dr. Susan Gardner

Dr. Susan Gardner has stepped away from her position as Director the Rising Tide Center and the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies program to return to her faculty position for Educational Leadership. The University has profited immensely from Dr. Gardner's leadership; her influence was transformative. WGS will miss Susan's daily presence, but fortunately she will still be teaching for us in WGS 101 this Fall and WGS 480 this coming Spring. The Rising Tide Center has been "suspended" for this academic year.

Introduction to Dr. Laura Cowan

I am the new Director of WGS, located in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. I am an Associate Professor of English here at the University of Maine and I have been involved in WGS (and its earlier incarnation WST) since its inception in 1988. I was the faculty sponsor of the University of Maine Chapter of NOW (National Organization for Women) in the 1990s. I am one of the founding faculty members of the Gender Concentration in the English Department in 2000. I was involved in social justice and equity issues in the Boston Legal Assistance Project, the Public Defenders of Cook County (Chicago), and Historic Savannah Foundation before I became an advocate and ally as an academic. My Ph.D. dissertation examined poet W. H. Auden's queer and gender-nonconforming aesthetics and especially his critique of binary thinking and dualism. I have taught, volunteered, advocated, and given talks under the auspices of WGS for three decades. Last Fall 2020, I taught a cross-listed course, ENG 490: Subversion and Transformation in the Works of Virginia Woolf and Rebecca West and an Independent Study, WGS 498: Queering the Fin de Siècle: Recognizing Queer Identities in the Modernist Era of Literature. I was also a committee member for Maddy Jackson's WGS/Honors thesis, "Exploring the Marginalized Voice: Queer Narratives in Short Contemporary Fiction." I am excited to be joining the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program and I hope I can help strengthen and build our tripartite mission in teaching, research, and activism.

Academic advising

As Director of WGS, I am your *de facto* academic advisor unless you have selected another WGS faculty member as advisor. Most of you are already registered for your Fall 2020 courses. If you have advising questions this summer or early in Fall, I am available for in person meetings in 201E Fernald or for virtual Zoom meetings.

WGS 395, Internship possibilities

If you declared your WGS major in 2018 or after, you are required to do an internship in a WGS field. If you declared your WGS major before 2018, WGS 395 is optional but encouraged. We have three available WGS 395 Internships for Fall 2020. Two of the internships could be mostly "remote," which would mean little or no face-to-face meetings. One of the internships would be letter writing and communications for Maine Family Planning. There is another possibility for an internship with a group advocating for Reparations for Maine Native Americans in the Penobscot tribe. Our third internship would require some on-campus time; we are looking for an intern to work on social media and our website for WGS. We might have available some work study funds for the WGS Social Media and Communications Intern. Please reach out to me if you any of these projects sound like something you might like to pursue this Fall 2020.

WGS Office Operations in Fall 2020

As you all know, the University of Maine closed its physical facilities to transition to remote teaching because of the coronavirus pandemic last March 2020. The University of Maine has continued operations, but most work has been "remote" since March.

Depending upon the nature of the administrative office and the needs of our students and employees, some administrative offices are opening physically; all offices are available through remote access. The WGS Office in 201 Fernald will at first be open on Mondays and Wednesdays this Fall. We are also available virtually. Our AA Laurie Cartier has been working remotely and she will return to campus part-time in the Fall. We hope to get some work study help and open the office for more extended hours as the Fall advances. The office will close at Thanksgiving, but we will maintain remote services until the end of the Fall semester. I will be teaching in-person-on-campus classes and I will be available for in person office hours following Covid-19 protocols on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. I can schedule Zoom meetings on Tuesdays and Thursdays. We will post news about office hours and Laurie Cartier's and my schedule on the WGS website. You can contact individual WGS faculty to find out their arrangements for Fall through email.

WGS community

These are challenging times. Isolation can be hurtful. Your WGS community is here to support you during these difficult times. I hope that circumstances might allow small in-person encounters following Covid-19 protocols. We will also be sponsoring zoom meetings and zoom colloquium and zoom communities of practice for our majors and minors and University of Maine faculty and students.

The Black Lives Matter movement has transformed our social and political spaces since you were last at the University of Maine. WGS is committed to anti-racist practices and policies. Many WGS faculty have been involved in campus activities around Black Lives Matter this summer. The WGS program is by nature intersectional. We hope we can support our students as we advance equity and anti-racism at the University of Maine.

There is also an upcoming election for the United States President, U. S. Congress, and the U. S. Senate this Fall. We urge you all to register to vote if you are not already registered. There will be "Voter Registration Cards" available in the WGS Office, 201 Fernald. The University is sponsoring events around the upcoming election and we will try to keep our WGS community aware of activities.

Please know that WGS faculty, staff, and support people are here for you. Do not hesitate to reach out to us. Feel free to talk to us about your academic concerns, but also reach out if you are looking for support from other University offices. WGS staff can help guide you to resources. For

example, the Alumni Association and the CLAS Dean's Office were able to help students with food insecurity, housing insecurity, or finding safe places last Spring. There will be resources this Fall also. The Cutler Health Center and the Counseling Center are available to students.

Upcoming Events -- Mark your calendars

Zoom lecture and Events about Women's Labor

- **What:** Zoom lecture and Career Center workshop
 - Lecture: "Memory Matters: (Mis)remembering Early American Women's Labor"
 - Career Center Workshop: Employment in Public History Field
- **By Whom:** Professor Marla Miller of the University of Massachusetts
- **When:** Sept. 21, 2020. Details forthcoming
- **Sponsored by:** Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies & the Department of History

Annual March Against Domestic Violence

- Virtual March on Oct. 7, 2020
- Two weeks of instagram, facebook, twitter spots about domestic violence and the prevention of domestic violence by a coalition of Maine organizations
- **WGS students:** If you would like to contribute to this event by making posters, a short power point, a YouTube video, or a short speech, please contact Laura Cowan

Welcome to the 2020-21 academic year and to our WGS community at the University of Maine.

In solidarity,



Laura Cowan
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Pronouns: *she, her, hers*

The University of Maine recognizes that it is located on Marsh Island in the homeland of Penobscot people, where issues of water and territorial rights, and encroachment upon sacred sites are ongoing. Penobscot homeland is connected to the other Wabanaki Tribal Nations—the Passamaquoddy, Maliseet, and Micmacs—through kinship, alliances, and diplomacy. The University also recognizes that the Penobscot Nation and the other Wabanaki Tribal Nations are distinct, sovereign, legal and political entities with their own powers of self-governance and self-determination.