

women's & gender studies

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Spring 2017 Newsletter

A Note from Professor Alicia Re Cruz, Interim Director

I am grateful for another opportunity to share with you the achievements of our WGST community and program at UNT. Fall 2016 has witnessed the continuing extraordinary contribution of our faculty in preparing our undergraduates and graduates to be key participants in the current and imminent challenges of social justice and gender equity in local and global societies.

We are cognizant of the ways in which our students and faculty (re)present the program and the value of our scholarly production at professional meetings. We take this opportunity to applaud and recognize their role as our ambassadors at national/international conferences. Kristin Alder, one of our WGST faculty and Liz King, one of our outstanding minors, presented their research at *El Mundo Zurdo* last November. Kristin Alder also participated and represented our program at the NWSA Annual Conference in Montreal, CAN.

At the same time, we are aware of the energy and time that it takes to advise our undergraduate student organizations; the passion that Maia Cudhea, another of our WGST faculty, puts in her work with the FMLA student organization is admirable.

Our WGST program has been participating in quite a few initiatives, programs and conferences during this semester, which reaffirms our commitment to cross disciplinary borders. Among these, we co-sponsored the Department of Dance & Theatre's production of "Melissa's Choice," lectures by visiting scholars in Art and English, and hosted Dr. Dionne Stephens, who presented a talk to our WGST 2100 students on images of women of color (WOC) in popular culture.

With great enthusiasm but not without some sadness in our hearts, we salute our graduating master students, Emiliana Lopez-Echeverri and Jenna Yorke-Slader, who have demonstrated the transformative social role of Women's and Gender Studies in our world.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alicia Re Cruz".

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Faculty Highlights

Dr. Julie Leventhal

Department of Educational Psychology

- promoted to Senior Lecturer in Educational Psychology starting Fall 2016.
- discussed *Learning About Human Rights through Study Abroad Opportunities* at a roundtable panel, and presented *Perceived Support for Advocates of Anti-human Trafficking* at the National Council on Family Relations Annual Conference, Minneapolis.
- presented *Pop Goes Perception (extended version)* at a special interest session conducted for the University of North Texas First Flight.
- published "Pouring the Concrete: Understanding How Human Development is the Foundation of Family Life" In M. Walcheski & J. Reinke (Eds.), *Family life education: The practice of family science (currently in press)*.

Dr. Kelly Donahue-Wallace

Department of Art Education and Art History

- published third book, *Jerónimo Antonio Gil and the Idea of the Spanish Enlightenment* (University of New Mexico Press).
- named 2016 Mentor of the Year by the UNT Honor's College for her work with the art history and interdisciplinary art and design studies programs.
- published reference materials and reviews in the *Grove Dictionary of Art*, the *Oxford Bibliographies Online*, and *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos*, and authored the entire assessment plan and package for the latest edition of Stokstad and Cothren's *Art History*.

Dr. Nicole D. Smith

Department of English

- presented "A Christian Mannes Bileeve, Women's Exegesis, and Vernacular Theology," at the Pacific Ancient and Modern Languages Association meeting in Pasadena.

Dr. Suzanne Enck

Department of Communication Studies

- awarded the Scholar-Activist Award by the Critical Cultural Studies Division of the National Communication Association.
- co-chaired special 1st Vice President's Communication's Civic Callings programming, "Imagining Alternatives to Gender Violence: Working Collaboratively as Activists, Scholars, and Teachers with Community Anti-Violence Practitioners, and served as panelist at two roundtables, "Feminist Perspectives on Hillary Clinton and the 2016 Election: A Roundtable," and "The Stanford Rape Case: A Civic Calling to Dismantle Rape Culture" at the National Communication Association annual meeting in Philadelphia.

Dr. Jennifer Way

Department of Art Education and Art History

- published "Digital Art at the Interface of Technology and Gender," Chapter 6, in Christiane Paul (ed.), *A Companion to Digital Art* (John Wiley and Sons).
- served as a guest editor for Collections and Questions of Belonging issue of *Collections: A Journal for Museum and Archives Professionals*, with Elizabeth Weinfeld, and for a special issue on Contemporary Asian Craft Worlds for the *Journal of Modern Craft*, with Rebecca M. Brown.
- presented "*Photography and Vietnamese Resettlement: Narrating Refugees for Americans*," at the American Studies Association annual conference in Denver.
- published "Rooted to and Routed from the Nation: Craft, Modernity and South Vietnam, 1956-61," in *American Studies Eurasian Perspective*.
- presented "*Politics of American Diplomacy/Politics of Craft*," at the 34th Congress of the International Committee of the History of Art in Beijing, China.
- inaugurated *Conversations: Art, Politics and North Texas*, a series featuring five North Texas artists/scholars who discuss their socially engaged work as it relates to urban contexts, civic institutions, culture, and history in North Texas, with CVAD art history faculty colleague Lauren Cross.

Faculty Spotlight



Women, History, and Bone Health

by Dr. Constance Hilliard

In recent years my research as an African historian has propelled me onto a landscape as alien as the buttes and outcroppings of Mars. While I have been compelled to master a different set of methodologies, the rewards of breaking through disciplinary barriers have been satisfying beyond measure. In June 2016, I published my first article in *Nature*. It explored West African women's immunity to the fragile bone disorder, osteoporosis, in comparison to their East African counterparts, who struggle with the disease in epidemic proportions. The defining variable appeared to be dairy consumption, not in terms of daily intake of dietary calcium, but rather in evolutionary terms.

My work began with a paradox that had stumped medical researchers for decades. Seventy-five percent of African-Americans are lactose intolerant, have dietary calcium intake below recommended levels and yet are at the lowest risk of osteoporosis compared to all other ethnicities in the United States. What my research found in studying this group's genetic ancestors, that is, the Niger-Kordofanian West Africans, was even more perplexing, at first. The bone disorder appeared virtually non-existent within this population group. But how was that possible for these inhabitants of the African continent's tsetse belt, where cattle breeding and dairy farming were not possible because of livestock's susceptibility to insect-borne trypanosomiasis?

The answer lay in comparing this population to their non-tsetse-belt East African counterparts, for whom agro-pastoralism represented the principal livelihood. The genetic variants that allowed East Africans, Europeans and Middle Easterners to digest the lactose in milk, and thus consume four times more dietary calcium than lactose intolerant ethnicities, was also a marker for osteoporosis.

This research is still at its incipient stages. But my experience in applying a historian's knowledge base and sensibilities to the field of health studies, suggests that traversing disciplinary boundaries can offer new ways of seeing recalcitrant problems.

Dr. Constance B. Hilliard, an evolutionary African historian, is a Professor of History at UNT, and one of oWGST's esteemed Affiliated Faculty Members. The article, "High Osteoporosis Risk Among East Africans Linked to Lactase Persistence Genotype," referenced in the piece above can be found in the June 2016 issue of *BoneKEy Reports*.

Undergrad Spotlight

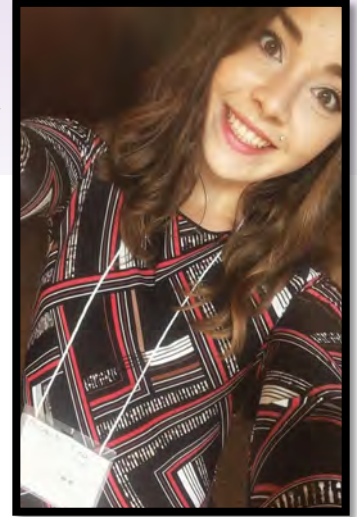
El Mundo Zurdo: An Experience of a Lifetime

by Elizabeth King

When AnaLouise Keating first asked me to present a paper at the El Mundo Zurdo 2016 conference, I had no idea what to expect. Especially as an undergrad, I couldn't possibly imagine the work that would go into writing a conference paper, traveling by myself, presenting on a panel, and socializing with academics in the Women and Gender Studies field. Being an undergrad and presenting at a conference where almost everyone has at least a Masters, if not a Doctoral degree, was intimidating! But AnaLouise and my teachers had faith in me and over time I started to have faith in myself.

Thankfully, the topic of our panel made the overall experience easier and less stressful. AnaLouise and I were on a panel about yoga and spirituality and investigating the connection between yoga and Gloria Anzaldúa's philosophy of spirituality. As a yoga teacher and young student of Anzaldúa's spiritual writings, I was thrilled to be writing about this topic and presenting it in an academic space! My paper specifically focused on Anzaldúa's theory of *conocimiento* and spiritual activism.

In short, I shared the need for the Western yoga world to maintain more integrity off the mat – to start living in *conocimiento* in their daily lives to become spiritual activists so we can create social and political transformation on and off our yoga mats. I focused mostly on Anzaldúa's later writings, specifically her posthumously published dissertation, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality* (published by AnaLouise Keating).



Elizabeth King



Elizabeth King & AnaLouise Keating

After conquering the overwhelming, yet fulfilling, task of writing my paper, I was able to look forward to the experience of the conference itself. What panels would I attend? What scholars would I talk to? When I wasn't doing homework in my hotel room (ah, the life of an undergrad senior), I was attending AnaLouise's other panels over Anzaldúan theory. My favorite panel, though, was one titled "Transforming Desconocimiento(s): Gloria Anzaldúa's Decolonizing Theories of Radical Interconnectivity." I mainly attended this particular panel because my friends and colleagues were presenting: Kristin Alder who was my Women Studies teacher in 2015 here at UNT and who actually introduced me to Gloria Anzaldúa's work and my yoga student and friend, Jessica Spain Sadr. The entire panel was thought-provoking, interesting, and discussed theories from *Light in the Dark* so I was mostly familiar with the philosophies they were presenting about.

All in all, my conference experience was overwhelming, scary, and challenging. But I had a blast and am incredibly grateful for the experience. I am thankful for AnaLouise Keating for reaching out to me and asking me to join her on this adventure. I am also thankful to Kristin Alder, Dr. Re Cruz, and the UNT Women and Gender Studies department for the amazing travel grant and support. I am filled with gratitude.

Grad Student Spotlight

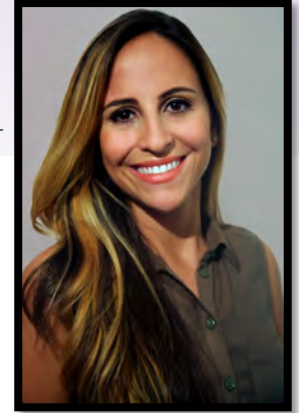
Illegal Immigrants or Refugees? Looking at Migrants through a Different Lens

by Ryan Kober and Emiliana Lopez

"Have you, your family or close friends or colleagues ever experienced harm or mistreatment in the past by anyone? Are you afraid of being subjected to torture in your home country or in any other country to which you may be returned?" These are just a few of the questions that I must ask asylum seekers as I aid them in filling out their applications during the Pro Se Asylum clinic at Catholic Charities of Dallas. When I began the Applied Anthropology graduate program at UNT I knew that I wanted my thesis research to focus on the experiences of undocumented migrants from Latin America. Through my adviser, Dr. Alicia Re Cruz, I was connected with Paul Zoltan, a Dallas immigration lawyer who runs the Pro Se Asylum clinic that helps applicants primarily from Central America with the legal process to apply for asylum. The majority of the applicants who come to this clinic are women and children from El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, and Mexico fleeing varied forms of gang and gendered violence, as well as other forms of oppression and persecution. My role in the clinic would be to build a digital archive of supporting documents. These supporting documents would be created into packets specific to the country and form of persecution that each applicant had fled. The packets would

be printed for the applicants who could then take them to their court hearings in order to support their case. These supporting documents' packets would include news, academic and journal articles that would substantiate the claims that asylum seekers made in their applications.

Prior to working at Catholic Charities I had very little experience studying issues of gendered violence. In addition, I was not a fluent Spanish speaker, which limited my ability to find and use news and journal articles written in Spanish for the supporting documents archive. Dr. Re Cruz suggested that I work with Emiliana Lopez, a Master's student at UNT in the Women's and Gender Studies program who both spoke Spanish and had some background in gendered issues as they pertain to international development, as well as human trafficking. Emiliana and I attended numerous Pro Se Asylum clinics together filling out applications and crafting supporting documents packets that were specific to each individual case. We were able to work together to formulate a clear system for structuring the documents packets. We were forced to learn together the details and intricacies of the legal system and the many formatting requirements that were necessary for the documents to be admissible in court. We both spent hours tabbing, hole punching, numbering, printing, and labeling over a thousand pages of supporting documents materials. This is work that I never would have been able to do by myself due to the sheer volume of materials and large number of applicants. Volunteering at the clinics, reading through pages and pages of applications, and building these massive supporting evidence documents was also an emotionally taxing experience. Because Emiliana and I were able to have these experiences at the same time we could connect and talk about the horrors that many of the applicants had experienced as well



Emiliana Lopez



Ryan Kober

as the discrimination they faced within the United States.

For Emiliana, the Pro Se Asylum clinics opened her eyes to the grand amount of obstacles that refugees face in their quest to receive refuge in a new country. From the moment a person faces persecution in their home country, to the long and strenuous process to receive asylum, and everything in between, it is not an easy or fair process. Working the clinics made it particularly empathizing, as it showed the human side to this complex issue. Arriving early on those Saturday mornings and knowing that you were to hear stories that are unimaginable, heartbreaking and infuriating, truly made Emiliana understand the importance of shedding more light on the process of asylum seeking and looking at migrants in a different manner. While most people are so quick to judge migrants as being merely economic migrants in search of jobs in the Global North, that is not the case for many and the clinics truly proved that. The amount of inequality, oppression and persecution that so the children, women and men face who attend the clinics is beyond imaginable, and for them, a new life in the United States means more than we could ever imagine. It means a

blank slate, new opportunities, and most important, it means safety.

Emiliana and I are currently in a Women's Studies course together where we have been able to connect our experiences in the clinic with wider theoretical models that contextualize the applicants' stories of persecution within global structures of inequality and violence, particularly through a gendered lens. By talking about the work that we have done at the Pro Se Asylum clinic, I hope that we have been able to raise awareness about the intricacies of migration and how personal stories become politicized and often dehumanized within the US asylum court. It has been a great opportunity for us to connect our experiences volunteering with migrants with academic work, while also demonstrating that this is an issue that is occurring in our own backyards. We are grateful for the support of UNT staff and faculty and hope that other Master's students will be inspired to do work with migrants and refugees.

If you are interested in volunteering or learning more about the Pro Se Asylum Clinic you may follow these links.

<http://interactives.dallasnews.com/2015/asylum/>

Paul S. Zoltan's Outreach Program



the FEM FLICKS film series

Pariah

Thursday, February 16th

4 PM

Chilton Hall

Room 111C

He Named Me Malala

Thursday, March 13th

6 PM

Chilton Hall

Room 111C

Brave Miss World

Thursday, April 13th

4 PM

Chilton Hall

Room 111C

Who we are...

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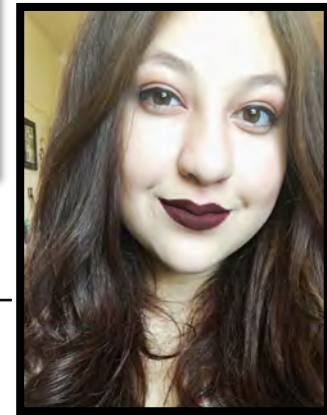
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Jocelyn Castillo,
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What we do...

The Women's & Gender Studies Program at UNT seeks to provide undergraduate and graduate students with the highest quality educational opportunities to study women's achievements, roles and experiences; to reflect critically on cultural definitions of gender; and to examine various theoretical approaches to the study of women, feminism, and gender. Accordingly, the Women's & Gender Studies Program aims to foster understanding of the diversity of women's lives, by promoting innovative teaching and scholarship about the ways in which race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, and age impact female experience. Students in Women's & Gender Studies may interact with more than 30 members of the Women's & Gender Studies affiliated faculty who regularly teach courses examining gender roles, activities, and experiences throughout history and across cultures. These interactions expand understanding of gender differences, cultural diversity, and social changes while strengthening critical thinking and communication skills.



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