Let me introduce myself; my name is Dr. Kimberly Brown and I am the new Chair of the Department of Gender, Sexuality and Women’s Studies here at Virginia Commonwealth University. Welcome to the 2014-2015 academic year!

Apart from my appointment as Chair, last year was a transformative one for our Department. We officially changed our name from Women’s Studies to Gender, Sexuality and Women’s Studies (GSWS). Our departmental emblem, the ampersand, symbolizes our inclusivity of sexual minorities, racial diversity, and our commitment to social justice, as the name change more appropriately reflects our student demographic, faculty research interests, and scholarly innovations in the interdisciplinary field. And while our faculty and students are definitely GSEXy, it is important that we emphasize that GSWS is our department’s official acronym. Without the WS designation, it is quite easy to forget a history of struggle hefted on the backs of women who not only fought for female equality, but who paved the way for many others seeking representation within the ivory tower. That commitment is the linchpin of the scholarly activism we emulate.

Counting myself victorious after surviving my first year as Chair, I have high hopes for this semester. I would like to thank the outgoing Chair, Dr. Janet Hutchinson, for her leadership and her continued dedication to our Department. Upon retiring, Dr. Hutchinson established a $1,000 scholarship to be shared by two GSWS students who plan to attend graduate or professional school upon graduation. Dr. Hutchinson will be missed, but through this act of kindness, her legacy will live on.

GSWS had many well-attended events this past academic year. GSWS teamed up with the School of Social Work to invite Pop Culture Scholar and recent Yale Doctoral Graduate, Madison Moore, to engage our students with what he aptly labeled, “Beyoncé: A Masterclass in Fierceness.” Additionally, as part of my final project with the Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute and in partnership with various university units, GSWS was delighted to host Civil Rights Leader, Author and Activist Elaine Brown, who delivered an impactful lecture titled, “Where Do We Go From Here?: Social Justice in the New Millennium.”

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Brought to us by Art Mafia, GSWS put on two art shows. The theme of Fall/Winter Art Show (2013) was “Politics of Place and the Poetics of Space.” Local and VCU student artists presented their creative interpretations of the ways that bodies (broadly defined) interact with various spaces and how the interaction between/among bodies and spaces opens up political, poetical, and aesthetic possibilities. The Spring/Summer Art Show (2014) was titled, “Performing (Place Placing) Identity.” Artists explored alternative and participatory forms of creative expression to complicate and challenge the social construction of identity and the imposition of so-called high art cultural places on artistic expression. Artists addressed the appropriation of cultural practices by fine art institutions and examined how classism, racism, and sexism are still enacted within these places.

Please take a moment to explore our newsletter for other highlights from last year and to get a preview of what’s to come this academic year.

Here’s to a productive semester!

With respect,
Kimberly Nichelle Brown, Ph.D.
knbrown@vcu.edu

Meet the New Faculty

Dr. Christine Cynn
In Fall 2013, Dr. Cynn joined GSWS as an assistant professor. After receiving her Ph.D. from Columbia University, Cynn was awarded a Fulbright to teach at the University of Cocody and to research HIV prevention policies in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire. Cynn was a recipient of an Andrew W. Mellon Post-doctoral Fellowship in Women’s Studies at Barnard College, where she also served as Assistant Director of Africana Studies. Cynn’s current book project, The ABC’s of HIV Prevention in Sub-Saharan Africa, examines United States-sponsored HIV prevention media. Additionally, Cynn has served as a community organizer and reproductive rights program coordinator in non-profit organizations serving low-income people living with HIV in New York and continues to work with women living with HIV in Côte d’Ivoire.

Dr. Margaret Ozierski
We are lucky to have Dr. Ozierski joining us this year as a Visiting Assistant Professor and the temporary Undergraduate Advisor for GSWS. Ozierski earned her Master’s in French Cultural Studies at Columbia University, and her Ph.D. in French at Duke University. Her dissertation explored the films and writings of Jacques Rivette and Samuel Beckett through the critical lens of Barthes, Foucault and Agamben. Her publications include an article on Rivette’s La belle noiseuse, and, just out, a chapter on Quentin Tarantino’s Django Unchained (Django Unchained: The Continuation of Metacinema [Bloomsbury Press, 2014]). Previously, Ozierski taught global film studies and French language and culture at VCU as a full-time instructor. This fall, she is bringing that perspective to GSWS, teaching the introductory course and a seminar on feminism and film noir. A recent recipient of a European ERASMUS Grant, Ozierski will be guest teaching later this fall at the GEMMA Insitute for Women’s Studies at the University of Granada, Spain.
Awards

Professor Canfield and Open Minds Receive Quest for Innovation Grant
Professor Liz Canfield’s “Open Minds Program” project was one of only 15 selected out of nearly 70 applications from VCU faculty, staff and students to receive the 2013-2014 Quest Innovation Grant. The Open Minds Program at VCU was founded by Dr. David Coogan, an Associate Professor of English, and is a collaborative partnership between VCU and the Richmond City Sheriff’s Office to offer educational opportunities to the incarcerated. Written in conjunction with Jon Waybright, the Quest Innovation Fund will help support the expansion of the project to produce art books, CDs and to facilitate workshops and bring speakers to highlight issues related to mass incarceration. As the grant’s principal investigator, we here at GSWS applaud Professor Canfield’s continued dedication to this cause.

Dr. Christine Cynn Awarded Humanities Research Center Award
New faculty member, Dr. Christine Cynn, has been awarded a Residential Fellowship with the Humanities Research Center for the Spring 2015 semester as part of a group focused on “Authorizing Health: Community Interpretations and Regulation of the Gendered Body.” Dr. Cynn is off to a productive start.

GSWS Academic Excellence Award
Congratulations to graduating seniors Natosha Yingling and Harmony Evans! Both are the first recipients of the new GSWS Academic Excellence Award. GSWS is honored to have received a generous donation from former Chair Dr. Janet Hutchinson to award two scholarships of $500 apiece to seniors entering graduate school this fall and who earned a Grade Point average of 3.8 or better. In the fall, a GSWS and Psychology double major, Harmony Evans, will be attending Northeastern University to obtain a Master’s of Science degree in counseling. Evans hopes to become a transgender therapist, and eventually, open a practice serving underrepresented populations. Natosha Yingling, a double major in GSWS and English, will attend Rutgers University’s Department of Women’s and Gender Studies where she hopes to continue in their Ph.D. interdisciplinary program after she receives her Master’s. Yingling’s goal is to become a Gender and Women’s Studies professor in the future. Congratulations to both of our majors! They are sure to make us proud.

An honorable mention goes to Emma Barnes; out of all of our graduating seniors majoring or minoring in GSWS, Ms. Barnes had the highest Grade Point Average. Not only is her dedication admirable, it also speaks well of her commitment to the department, as well as to her intellectual talents.

Kudos to you, Ms. Barnes!
We at GSWS are proud to announce the release of Dr. Tamura Lomax’s edited volume, *Womanist and Black Feminist Responses to Tyler Perry’s Productions* (Palgrave 2014). As you know, Dr. Lomax is a visiting assistant professor in GSWS here at VCU, as well as the CEO and co-founder of The Feminist Wire, an international feminist news site consisting of over 25 scholar/activists, founded in 2010 with a weekly readership of 50-70,000.

Palgrave Summation of the volume: “African American playwright, actor, television producer and filmmaker Tyler Perry is an American cultural phenomenon. Perry has made over half a billion dollars through the development of films, plays, and television series that center storylines about black women, black communities and black religion. The success of a Tyler Perry Production, coupled with Perry’s participation in a range of media and in multiple roles as creator and actor, position him as a significant site of black religious and cultural expression, and thus critical inquiry and reflection. *Womanist and Black Feminist Responses to Tyler Perry’s Productions* examines Perry’s works from interdisciplinary perspectives and provides a necessary response to Perry’s current prominence regarding black representation, black religion and black cultural production.”

*The Womanist and Black Feminist Responses to Tyler Perry’s Productions* can be ordered on the Palgrave site: (http://www.palgrave.com/page/detail/womanist-and-black-feminist-responses-to-tyler-perry’s-productions-lerhonda-s-manigault-bryant/?k=9781137429551.) The book is also available on other retailers, including Amazon and Barnes & Noble.
We are pleased to announce that Dr. Megan Taylor Shockley, Professor of History at Clemson University, has agreed to be the 2014 speaker for our Fifth Annual Crenshaw Lecture. The Crenshaw Lecture is named after Anne Clay Crenshaw, a founder of the Equal Suffrage League (ESL) of Virginia in 1909. In November 2013, a historical marker dedicated to the Equal Suffrage league of Virginia was officially placed outside of our departmental home, aptly labeled the Crenshaw House, as it is the former home of Anne Clay Crenshaw and the location of the ESL meetings during the fight for women’s voting rights.

Shockley is the author of *We, Too, Are Americans: African American Women in Detroit and Richmond, 1940-1954* (2004) and *The Captain’s Widow of Sandwich: Self-Invention and the Life of Hannah Rebecca Burgess, 1834-1917* (2010). She is also a coauthor, with Cynthia Kierner and Jennifer R. Loux, of *Changing History: Virginia Women through Four Centuries* (2013) and is a past executive secretary of the Southern Association for Women Historians.

**Fall 2014 Panel Discussion & GSWS Fall Art Show**

Join us this Friday for the first GSWS panel discussion that will engage and inspire work for the Fall Art Show. Whether you use the internet to connect with friends or strangers, construct secret identities, find, share, or produce your art or the art of others, document and reblog and tweet about it, this panel will ask you to consider how material and cultural production in the digital space shifts and alters the identities around us.

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<td><strong>Friday, August 29, 2014</strong></td>
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This fall, Dr. Christine Cynn is teaching an upper level course, Illness Narratives, that will be cross-listed with the Sciences, Technology and Society Program in the Department of History. This course will count towards the GSWS Health and Science track or for the Medical Humanities minor track for the Department of History.

**Illness Narratives: GSWS 391/SCTS 301**

Doctors, scientists, social historians, policymakers, patients, caregivers, activists, and fiction writers all offer differing, at times conflicting, perspectives on illness. This course examines a selection of such accounts, how they define illness, in what contexts, and to what ends. We will begin with colonial texts that attribute skin color and racial difference to leprosy, a disease that could be “cured”-- and that threatened to contaminate whites. We will then examine more contemporary accounts of race, femininity, homosexuality, and disability as pathological and that thereby justify various forms of social exclusion. Finally, we will consider how narratives of illness, and of HIV/AIDS in particular, from the United States, Europe, and sub-Saharan Africa attempt to intervene in and contest assumptions about race, gender, sexuality, poverty and/as disease. These challenges have been instrumental in shaping public policy, health care, and what has been recently termed “narrative medicine,” or clinicians’ attempts to interpret and better understand patients’ stories of illness.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**

After taking this course, students should be able to:

· Understand how definitions of disease reflect and participate in the production of categories of difference that reinforce social devaluation and exclusion.

· Recognize how social and historical contexts inform the production of “medical textbook” accounts of health and disease.

· Explain how alternative narratives of illness seek to challenge “medical textbook” accounts and thereby to transform public policies, as well as medical knowledge making.

· Articulate and give examples of how narratives in medicine have helped policymakers, doctors, nurses, social workers, and therapists to improve access to and effectiveness of healthcare.
Reflections on GSWS Summer 2013
Study Abroad to Brazil

Each year, GSWS faculty lead an extensive study abroad program that places students in activist spaces to do community work abroad. Students have traveled to and worked in Canada, India, and Brazil, and will be going to Chiapas, Mexico in 2015. We interviewed GSEXer Natosha Yingling (Tosha) about last summer’s trip to Brazil.

Q. Wow! Brazil though. What was that like?

Tosha: Brazil is a really amazing place. I felt a huge sense of relief being there that made coming back to the states very interesting. Particularly as a fat woman, Bahia was a great environment for me to nurture the relationship with my body outside of a climate of fear and oppression I often feel in the US. It was great to go out on the beach in a bikini and not have to be prepare myself to be spectated or to have a healthy and public relationship with food. The sense of community I felt there in opposition to a lot of the alienation I feel in the States was a stark contrast.

Q. What was your favorite place to be?

Tosha: We went to my favorite place for a weekend beach clean-up, Imbassai. It’s this amazing rural beach area with beautiful tropical vegetation. It was so quiet and comforting being by the water and sleeping with our windows open in this awesome family-owned hostel. It was an easy place to feel calm. And there was tons of gorgeous fat babes in bikinis there.
Q. What was the most exciting work that you did in Brazil?
**Tosha:** I thought all the work we got to do in Brazil was really exciting because it was based on exchanging knowledge rather than something more paternal and appropriative. My favorite day involved a discussion about subversive hip hop in the US in comparison to Brazilian hip hop, and ended with us making music together. I thought I would feel really shy or embarrassed, but it was amazing to make something together and have a conversation, despite a language barrier.

Q. What was the most exciting work you saw being done in Brazil?
**Tosha:** In Salvador, we saw a lot of great examples of activism that aimed to trace Bahia’s roots back to a raced history that was less white-washed than the touristic version of paradise that many people flock to the city for. This idea was expressed in everything from religion to food to even tours of the city, but I was most touched with how it manifested in art, particularly in graffiti. Graffiti is a really awesome outlet for artists in Salvador to subvert the colonial image of the city in favor of voicing the voiceless, and we got to tour entire neighborhoods with house-fronts that had been turned into canvases in

Q. Do you feel like this trip will impact the work you do in GSWS in the future? How so?
**Tosha:** The trip has changed how I see myself as a GSEX student. While my primary concern in Brazil was that I would appropriate Brazilian culture or become a voyeur, this line of thought pushed me to challenge the colonial ways we view each other in academic competition at VCU. The amazing sense of community in Brazil inspires me to apply that nourishing and supportive environment to GSWS so that we can learn from one another and share our experiences inclusively, apart from the desire to always be right and be validated in a classroom as promoted by academia, which promotes cliques and makes people feel like outsiders.

*Note: Natosha Yingling recently graduated with a dual major in GSWS & Psychology.*

To see more photos from Brazil, check out [http://gsws.vcu.edu/brazil](http://gsws.vcu.edu/brazil).
The Global Education Office and the Department of Gender, Sexuality & Women’s Studies at Virginia Commonwealth University, in conjunction with the Mexico Solidarity Network, are pleased to offer a unique opportunity for students to engage in a study abroad experience in Mexico. The experience abroad is part of a service-based course, Global Scholar/Activist Spaces, in which students are expected to be engaged actively in the preparation work before departure, the collaborative learning and work while in Chiapas, and the community activist work upon their return.

Students will participate in the following activities:

• Organic farming, gender dynamics, liberation theology, and indigenous rights in San Cristóbal, Chiapas
• Traditional weaving, boot-making, indigenous culture, and introduction to autonomous education in Oventic, Chiapas
• Traditional cooking, herbal medicine, emigration dynamics, organic fertilizer production, and local festivals in Tlaxcala

They will take workshops and classes conducted mostly in Spanish with some English translation. Students will also have the opportunity to learn Tzotzil, an indigenous language, if their Spanish is fluent enough for instruction. If not, students will learn conversational Spanish through their work in Chiapas.

Before departure, students will read/research the history of the region, the Zapatista movement, NAFTA, and US/Mexican politics in terms of how they relate to gender dynamics, political struggle, race/racism, indigenous rights, and feminism. Students will conduct a research/creative project that furthers the immigration rights movement in Richmond upon their return, using what they’ve learned in Chiapas to enhance their own activism at home. In addition, students will collaborate on a media project about their experience in Chiapas.

This course can be taken for 6 credits on the undergraduate level (GSWS 391) or 3 credits on the graduate level (GSWS 691).

More information can be found at: http://vcu.studioabroad.com/index.cfm?FuseAction=Programs.ViewProgram&Program_ID=11131
Meet recent GSWS alumna, Rebecca Keel, and hear about the work she’s been doing in her community and the way that GSWS has motivated her.

Q: Hi Rebecca! Could you give us a summary of some of the projects you’ve been working on recently?

A: I’ve been working on a political education program with a badass group called Southerners on New Ground (SONG). The purpose of this program is to stimulate the minds of young activists, such as myself, and build leadership skills. What I have learned through that program I’ve taken to other organizations. For example, I was the Coalition Coordinator of Students for Sensible Drug Policy at VCU (SSDP) and was using techniques I learned about connecting struggles to make some moves within SSDP, specifically around outreach and working with other student and community organizations. Aside from that, I was briefly interning with a great organization called Colaborando Juntos, which translates to “working together.” This nonprofit worked to facilitate trainings, networking opportunities, raise cultural competency, and connect Latin@ families in and around Richmond to many resources.

On a more personal note, I have been developing my yoga and meditation practice day by day, and have been involving myself with more group meditation. Oh yeah, I’ve also been figuring out what I’m going to do now that I graduated! A work in progress, but I’m feeling good about my plans so far.

Q: I know that you do work in a lot of different but intersecting areas, such as LGBTQ issues, drug policy reform, yoga that is accessible to a wider range of people and bodies. What would you say it is that fuels your passion as an activist and organizer?

A: I get antsy when I have too much free time, simple as that. I thrive when I have my hands in many projects, and when I am working with many people, so I do activist work and organize to keep myself balanced. I’m also a problem solver through and through and see an immense need for organizing around LGBTQ issues, drug policy reform, mental health competency, etc. Being active and helpful is personally fulfilling and if I can help meet the needs of community along the way then I know I’m doing something right.

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Q: In what ways has GSWS influenced the work that you’re doing in your communities?

A: Being involved has helped me examine the ways in which decisions are made, how and why people mobilize around causes, and how seemingly small actions coalesce into big changes. I feel like I can bring a more well-rounded perspective to the groups and people I organize with because GSWS teaches folks all about intersectionality. So many people are used to having to fragment their identity for a cause, but understanding how people and systems operate in unison is a helpful analysis to bring to spaces, especially activist spaces. In organizing, I usually find myself saying “but what about how this actually plays out holistically?” I don’t think I would be so able to take the macroscopic perspective without having been so involved in the program.

In addition, GSWS classes have facilitated many tough discussions that folks never want to actually talk about. I am now way more comfortable with productively bringing up privilege, race, class, gender, ability, etc., and how they affect work and progress. In summary, GSWS has made me considerably more outspoken and incisive than I was when I first started college.

Q: Which upcoming projects of yours are you most excited about?

A: SONG (Southerners on New Ground) is in the beginning stages of a campaign that will address many of the issues/injustices people face as a byproduct of public education. We decided to focus our efforts on public education because many people experience it negatively, and we see a huge problem with that. Two broad goals of the campaign are to transform how we educate ourselves both within and outside of public educational systems, and to eliminate the hostile environment found within these systems.

Another project I am quite thrilled about is the Virginians for Medical Amnesty Campaign. This initiative, if passed, would create a law that grants amnesty to people who call for medical help in emergency overdose situations. Say, for instance, you’re at a party where underage drinking and/or other illegal substances are being used. Somebody overdoses and is in need of an ambulance, but folks at the party are too afraid of legal repercussion to get help. This law would make it so you can call for help without facing legal repercussion, and that friend who overdosed can receive the medical treatment they need. This is a truly life saving initiative and I am eager to see SSDP get it passed on the state level!
We want to keep up with you just as much as you want to keep up with us. We have a new tumblr! We will also be posting and responding regularly on Facebook and Twitter. Please follow us. These social media will be a way to get the most up-to-date word on what’s going on within the department.

- web gsws.vcu.edu
- tumblr vcu-gsex.tumblr.com
- twitter twitter.com/vcuWMNS
- facebook www.facebook.com/groups/119296113604

We miss you. Just stop by to say hi! Reasons to come into the GSWS Crenshaw House: Check out the current art show, our new book collection, pick up a GSWS brochure, check out our bulletin board for upcoming feminist events, chill out or study in the conference room when it’s unoccupied, use our gender-neutral, single occupancy bathroom, Introduce yourself to the new faculty and staff.

**DIGITAL Panel Discussion:**
Fri., August 29th, 2014 @ 6pm

**Fifth Annual Crenshaw Lecture:**
Wed., Nov 19th @ 12pm Student Commons

**Fall 2014 Art Show Opening:**
Thurs, Nov 21st @ 6pm

We need you. The GSWS Student Advisory Committee needs new and returning members to get the ball rolling for this school year. If you want to help to grow and create progress for your department, this is a great way to be engaged as a student. There are a few main goals of the committee, such as recruiting new GSWS majors and finding creative ways to encourage departmental growth. We will also be creating programming through GSWS that will be open to the entire VCU community (a great way to get more folks involved with the department!), and most importantly you will be the voice for the GSWS student body. Email gsws@vcu.edu if interested.

**Donate**

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