

MIT Program in Women's and Gender Studies

Now in its 37th year, the [MIT Program in Women's and Gender Studies \(WGS\)](#) continues to build on its success as an interdisciplinary undergraduate program, providing a community for students, faculty, and staff to participate in scholarly inquiry focusing on women, gender, and sexuality. Through teaching, research, and programming, WGS provides a structural framework specifically focused on examining and analyzing the intersections of gender, race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality. WGS faculty members engage in cutting-edge research on a range of subjects related to historical and contemporary questions of gender and sexuality in the United States and across the globe. The mission of WGS is to educate undergraduates on the importance of gender equity and to promote critical thinking about the role of gender across disciplines, not only in the humanities, arts, and social sciences but in science, engineering, and technology as well. WGS also plays an important role at the Institute in organizing rich and stimulating programming to facilitate examination and discussion of women and gender among faculty, students, staff, and the broader MIT community and to support women and queer and gender-nonconforming students. In these various aspects of its educational mission, whether through teaching, research, or programming, WGS seeks to support the Institute's efforts to promote community, equity, and inclusion.

As national attention to justice and activism regarding gender, race, and sexuality increases, WGS has been involved in fostering discussion of and engagement with these issues and has conducted outreach to women students of color and to queer and trans students through programming and collaboration with organizations across the Institute.

Student outreach and development of courses that meet students' needs and interests have been ongoing goals for the program. Interest and enrollments in WGS subjects continued to be high this year, with 426 enrollees in the 26 undergraduate subjects offered. During the year, WGS had three active majors, 40 active concentrators, and 11 active minors (eight minors were awarded in May 2021).

Along with teaching and research, programming is essential to the WGS mission. WGS regularly collaborates with other academic units, student groups, and offices across the Institute to create events on myriad topics, such as the history and current status of women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM); gender equity; queer and transgender issues; racial inequality; global development and migration; medicine and health; harassment and violence prevention; and women's contributions to literature, arts, and the media. The goals of such programming are to foster crucial conversations on equity and issues related to gender, race, and sexuality; support students; build the WGS community; and attract students to WGS classes.

The WGS commitment to the study of women, gender, and sexuality extends beyond MIT to reach the broader Cambridge and Boston-area communities. In academic year 2021 (AY2021), WGS continued to work with the Consortium for Graduate Studies in Gender, Culture, Women, and Sexuality (GCWS), which is currently based at MIT. Founded in 1992, GCWS consists of nine local universities (Boston College, Boston University, Brandeis University, Harvard University, MIT, Northeastern University, Simmons

College, Tufts University, and the University of Massachusetts Boston) whose faculty members offer interdisciplinary, team-taught graduate courses. WGS affiliate professor Catherine D'Ignazio served as the MIT representative to the GCWS board in AY2021.

The current goals of WGS are as follows:

- Foster diversity within the program
- Extend outreach and support to traditionally underrepresented students
- Inspire engagement and activism regarding social justice issues
- Strengthen collaborative and interdisciplinary research initiatives
- Build on the success of the Intellectual Forum and WGS-sponsored programming to foster intellectual community across academic units at MIT
- Recruit new faculty affiliates
- Continue to update and reinvigorate the WGS curriculum in alignment with current directions in the broader field of women's and gender studies, with special attention to underdeveloped areas of the curriculum such as gender and health, gender and public policy, gender and race/ethnicity, and gender and socioeconomic class
- Continue to collaborate with other units and offices such as the Office of Multicultural Programs (OMP), the Office of Minority Education (OME), the Institute Community Equity Office and MindHandHeart, the Student Affairs Office (including LGBTQ+ Services, the Social Justice Programming & Cross Cultural Engagement Intercultural Center, and the Cheney Room), the Office of Graduate Education, the Institute Discrimination & Harassment Response Office, Violence Prevention and Response, the MIT Libraries, the Priscilla King Gray Public Service Center, the Development Lab (D-Lab), the List Visual Arts Center, and the Accessing Resources at MIT (ARM) Coalition
- Continue to collaborate with and support student groups including the Black Student Union, the Black Women's Alliance, Class Awareness Support and Equality (CASE), Mujeres Latinas, the F-Word campus group and the annual Valentine's Day production of the *Vagina Monologues*, the Black Graduate Student Association, and Graduate Women at MIT

Personnel

In AY2021 Professor Helen Elaine Lee served the second year of a second three-year term as WGS director. Professor Lee serves as chair of the OME Faculty Advisory Committee. She is also a member of the Creative Arts Council, the editorial board of the Faculty Newsletter, and the All-Gender Restroom Working Group. She is a founding member of the Senior Women Faculty Council, established in fall 2019. She continues to chair the My Sister's Keeper governing committee.

Over the past year, Professor Lee spoke across the Institute at events including a talk on the poetry of Robert Hayden presented to Chemical Engineering students, staff, and faculty; Liberating the Gospel of Black MIT with the Black Student Union; and the Blackademics event, also organized by the Black Student Union.

Professor Lee received the 2021 Faculty MLK Leadership Award in recognition of her inspiring vision, mentoring, and truth telling. She also received the 2021 faculty Recognizing Individuals Supporting Equity (RISE) Award for her advocacy and tireless work for equity on campus.

In AY2021, program administrator Sophia Hasenfus was the only staff person in WGS. Due to Covid-19, WGS has not hired a new program assistant.

In her capacity as program administrator, Hasenfus single-handedly manages the budget, daily finances, student staff, lecturer appointments, academic administration, and event planning for WGS. In addition to the work of managing the program, Hasenfus was a member of the following committees and groups in AY2021: the WGS Steering Committee, the My Sister's Keeper board, the Hermanas Unidas board, the Diversity Think Tank, the ARM Coalition, the Equal Pay Working Group, and a committee to renovate the Margaret Cheney Room. Also, she provided administrative support for the Senior Women's Faculty Council and participated in search committees across the Institute.

As a result of the influx of requests for equity-based facilitation, training, and workshops from departments, labs, and centers (DLCs) across the Institute, MIT Human Resources provided an eight session "train the trainer" workshop. Hasenfus participated in the training and subsequently has facilitated conversations about equity and inclusion at MIT, including with the Department of Economics and the Office of the President.

WGS continued to employ an active group of lecturers this year. Karl Surkan taught WGS.181 Queer Cinema and Visual Culture, WGS.111J Gender and Media Studies, and WGS.101 Introduction to Women's and Gender Studies. Brittany Charlton returned for a seventh year to teach her popular WGS.151 Gender, Health, and Society course. Elizabeth Janiak returned for a fourth year to teach WGS.224 Race, Gender and Social Inequality: Reproductive Health Care in the United States. Joaquin Terrones (who also teaches in Literature) offered WGS.245 Identities and Intersections: Queer Literatures for a fourth year and WGS.250 HIV/AIDS in American Culture for the third time. Chivi Kapungu returned to teach WGS.228 The Psychology of Sex and Gender and WGS.229 Race, Culture and Gender in the U.S. and Beyond: A Psychological Perspective; Abha Sur taught WGS.109 Women and Global Activism in Media and Politics and WGS.226/STS.023 Science, Gender and Social Inequality in the Developing World; and Andrea Walsh continued to teach WGS.101 Introduction to Women's and Gender Studies.

The WGS committee structure consists of the Steering Committee, the Curriculum Committee, and the Committee for the Louis Kampf Writing Prize in Women's and Gender Studies. Members of these committees in AY2021 are listed below.

Steering Committee

- Director: Helen Elaine Lee (Comparative Media Studies/Writing [CMS/W])
- Senior faculty representative: Manduhai Buyandelger (Anthropology)
- Senior faculty representative: Edmund Bertschinger (Physics)
- Junior faculty representative: Justin Steil (Urban Studies and Planning)

- Lecturers' representative: Joaquin Terrones (Literature)
- Lecturers' representative: Abha Sur (Science, Technology, and Society)
- Graduate student representative: Lupe Cruz (Brain and Cognitive Sciences)
- Jennifer Greenleaf (WGS liaison, MIT Libraries)
- WGS program administrator: Sophia Hasenfus (WGS)

Curriculum Committee

- Helen Elaine Lee (CMS/W)
- Elizabeth Wood (History)
- Andrea Walsh (CMS/W)
- Abha Sur (Science, Technology, and Society)

Kampf Prize Committee

- Chair: Helen Elaine Lee (WGS and CMS/W)
- Jennifer Greenleaf (MIT Libraries)
- Mary Fuller (WGS and Literature)

Research Activities

WGS faculty affiliates conduct research on a broad range of topics, extending from theories of justice and feminist philosophy to the anthropology of reproduction, French adoption policy, the connections between STEM and literature, the implications of domestic de-industrialization and long-term unemployment, the politics of the production and consumption of food, the impact of the caste system and gender in the scientific community in India, women in Mongolian electoral politics, South Asian immigrant communities in the United States, gender and technology, Vladimir Putin and Russian masculinity, Taiwanese women politicians, the history of Turkish and Armenian feminism, the changing cultural politics of nature and citizenship, and fiction writing. Faculty affiliates continued to make active contributions to their individual disciplinary fields as well as to the interdisciplinary field of women's and gender studies. Their accomplishments and service are listed in the reports of their home departments.

Teaching and Curriculum

WGS offered 26 subjects during AY2021, including WGS.101 Introduction to Women's and Gender Studies, and enrolled a total of 426 undergraduate students. Many of these subjects were cross listed with other units: Anthropology, CMS/W, D-Lab, Global Languages, History, Linguistics and Philosophy, Literature, and the Program in Science, Technology, and Society. Students can concentrate, minor, and major in women's and gender studies. The women's and gender studies major is either a joint degree with science (21S) or engineering (21E) or a Course 21 humanities degree.

WGS subjects during AY2021 were as follows:

- WGS.101 Introduction to Women's and Gender Studies
- WGS.109 Women and Global Activism in Media and Politics
- WGS.110/21H.108 Sexual and Gender Identities
- WGS.111J/CMS.619J Gender and Media Studies
- WGS.125J/CMS.616J Games and Culture
- WGS.145J/21L.020J Globalization: The Good, the Bad and the In-between
- WGS.151 Gender, Health, and Society
- WGS.160/STS.021 Science Activism: Gender, Race, and Power
- WGS.181 Queer Cinema and Visual Culture
- WGS.190/21H.106/21L.008/ 21W.741 Black Matters: Introduction to Black Studies
- WGS.220/21H.263 Women and Gender in the Middle East and North Africa
- WGS.222J/21H.381J Women and War
- WGS.224 Race, Gender and Social Inequality: Reproductive Health Care in the United States
- WGS.226/STS.023 Science, Gender and Social Inequality in the Developing World
- WGS.228 The Psychology of Sex and Gender
- WGS.229 Race, Culture and Gender in the U.S. and Beyond: A Psychological Perspective
- WGS.231J/21W.742J Writing About Race
- WGS.236/21G.030 Introduction to East Asian Culture: From Zen to K-Pop
- WGS.245/21L.480 Identities and Intersections: Queer Literatures
- WGS.250 HIV/AIDS in American Culture
- WGS.275/21A.407J/21G.057J/STS.022J Gender, Race, and Environmental Justice
- WGS.276/11.133/21A.302 Cultures of Computing
- WGS.277/ EC.718J Gender and Development
- WGS.301/17.007/24.237 Feminist Thought
- WGS.301/WGS.310/21H.109J Gender: Historical Perspectives
- WGS.S10 Black Feminist Health Science Studies

MLK Visiting Professor Moya Bailey taught Black Feminist Health Science Studies, a very popular new class exploring a number of intersecting arenas of scholarship and activism including feminist health studies, contemporary medical curriculum reform conversations, and feminist technoscience studies.

Three WGS courses include content that prepares students for application to medical school: WGS.224 Race, Gender and Social Inequality: Reproductive Health Care in the United States; WGS.250 HIV/AIDS in American Culture; and WGS.151 Gender, Health, and Society. In addition, two courses support the preparation of pre-health students for the Medical College Admission Test requirements on gender/race analysis instituted in AY2015: WGS.228 The Psychology of Sex and Gender and WGS.229 Race, Culture and Gender in the U.S. and Beyond: A Psychological Perspective. These five courses will all be offered again in AY2022.

Program Highlights and Accomplishments

WGS programming addresses a wide spectrum of academic disciplines and issues related to the field of women's and gender studies and reflects the program's commitment to collaborative work with groups across the MIT campus and the Cambridge/Boston community. In AY2021, WGS collaborated with DLCs across MIT and supported the programming efforts of many student groups including the Black Women's Alliance, the F-Word campus group, Sakata Afrique, the Latino Cultural Center, and the Asian American Initiative. Programming highlights from AY2021 are outlined below.

The biannual McMillan-Stewart Lecture Series on Women in the Developing World, curated by Professor Lerna Ekmekçioğlu, continued to draw audiences from across and beyond the Institute. The fall semester lecture was given by Jennifer Rose Denetdale, citizen of the Navajo Nation, professor of American Studies at the University of New Mexico, and director of the university's Institute for American Indian Research. Her talk was titled "Building the Perfect Human to Invade: An Indigenous Feminist Queer Analysis of the Pandemic on the Navajo Nation." In addition to her lecture, she spoke to Professor Ekmekçioğlu's Gender: Historical Perspectives class. Because of Covid-19 and the challenges of virtual planning, no McMillan-Stewart Lecture was held in spring 2021.

WGS partnered with GCWS to organize Boston's 12th Women Take the Reel Film Festival, held annually during Women's History Month. This year, due to Covid-19, WGS joined forces with GCWS member institutes to virtually screen two films and host panel discussions. The films were *The Forty-Year-Old Version*, starring and written, directed, and produced by Radha Blank (followed by a panel discussion on building an anti-racist theatre system), and *13th*, directed by Ava DuVernay (followed by a panel discussion on mass incarceration).

My Sister's Keeper, established in 2015, is an organization of Black women students, faculty members, and staff members administered in WGS. It was initiated as a collaborative effort of Professor Lee, OME director DiOnetta Jones Crayton, OMP director La-Tarri Canty, former counseling dean Ayida Mthembu, and former assistant dean for graduate education Eboney Hearn. In AY2021, it was governed by a board consisting of the founding members, Acia Adams-Heath (Office of the Vice President for Finance), Suraiya Baluch

(Office of Graduate Education), Professor Amah Edoh (Anthropology), Kelcey Gibbons (graduate student), Elissa Gibson (undergraduate student), Daria Johnson (Literature), Dyan Madrey (Human Resources), Mercy Oladipo (undergraduate student), Raspberry Simpson (graduate student), and Sophia Hasenfus (WGS program administrator).

My Sister's Keeper was established to foster community among MIT's Black women and to support black women students with social, professional, and mentoring relationships. MSK hopes to provide emotional and psychological support, foster kinship and community, strengthen academic performance, and cultivate engagement in social, political, and cultural matters beyond the classroom.

In AY2021, MSK adapted to virtual community building during the Covid-19 pandemic by hosting online events including the annual Alumnae Career Panel, a day of workshops and conversations focusing on self-care as a transformative practice to deal with misogyny, a new storytelling series titled Sisterly Wisdom, and book club events culminating in a fireside chat with author Mikki Kendall, author of *Hood Feminism*.

Hermanas Unidas (HU) is an organization of Latina students, faculty, and staff members administered through WGS. It was established in 2017 by students who wanted to create an organization modeled on the structure of MSK to support Latinas at MIT. It is governed by a board composed of an undergraduate student (Isabella Salinas), graduate students (Diana Flores, Erica Salazar, and Sharon Jacqueline Velasquez), an administrative staff member (Beatriz Cantada), a lecturer (Nilma Dominique from Global Languages), a professor (Tanalis Padilla from History), and WGS program administrator Sophia Hasenfus. The goal of HU is to create a supportive, enduring, and inspiring community.

HU received MindHandHeart funding to support two virtual author events in AY2021 and hosted fireside chats and Q&As with Cristina Henríquez and Sandra Cisneros that were open to the entire community. HU also held a Dia de los Muertos event with Ellen Riojas Clark, who led a discussion about the history of Dia de los Muertos, papel picado, and calaveras. Participants received supplies in the mail to create their own papel picado.

In addition, Sidnei Nogueira, a leading Black queer scholar, activist, and community leader in Brazil, joined WGS for a lecture and conversation in July 2020 titled "*Èṣù's* Crossroads Cry: Black Epistemologies and Anti-Racist Struggle."

In October 2020, WGS hosted director Elizabeth A. Castle for a Q&A and virtual screening of her film *Warrior Women*, which explores what it means to navigate social justice movements and motherhood from the American Indian movement to present-day water access advocacy.

Also in October, WGS co-sponsored (with the MIT Libraries and other groups) an MIT Reads Community Discussion with Tommy Orange, author of *There, There*.

WGS held a virtual conversation with Kia LaBeija, a contemporary queer Black artist whose work explores the intersections of art and activism through photography, performance, collage, and film, in November 2020.

WGS MLK Visiting Professor Moya Bailey organized the Black Feminist Health Science Studies (BFHSS) Symposium in March 2021. BFHSS highlights the necessity of incorporating social justice into medical science. This half-day symposium included two expert panels and showcased student podcasts investigating historical and contemporary conflicts between Black women and medical and scientific institutions. BFHSS aims to challenge and transform the existing relationships between Black women and these institutions.

In May 2021, WGS held a conversation with Professor Bailey and Demita Frazier, a founding member of the Combahee River Collective, about Bailey's new book *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance*.

Also in May, WGS hosted a talk with Shameka Powell from Tufts University on "Academic Afterthoughts: Black Girls, Misogynoir, and Schooling."

The final virtual WGS event of AY2021 was a June panel discussion (co-sponsored with the MIT Biological Engineering Graduate Student Board) titled "Intersections of Art/Activism/Research in HIV/AIDS Advocacy."

WGS presented its annual Kampf Writing Prize to Ivy Li for her collection of poems *Metamorphosis* and Laura Liao for her essay "Delivering Access to 'Contraception Deserts': The Impact of Telemedicine on Reproductive Justice." Ivy and Laura both graduated from MIT in 2020, Ivy with a double major in Course 8 and 21L and Laura with a major in Course 7 and a minor and concentration in women's and gender studies.

The WGS Intellectual Forum was suspended due to Covid-19 and will be renewed in fall 2021. In this monthly series, faculty members, lecturers, predoctoral fellows, and local scholars and artists share their work in progress.

Administrative Initiatives

Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity Initiatives

WGS partnered with a small committee composed of individuals from the Office of Engineering Outreach Programs, OME, and OMP to work with the Office of the President on establishing two professional development funds: the Women of Color Professional Fund (for currently enrolled MIT women of color undergraduate students) and the LBGTQ+ Professional Fund (for currently enrolled MIT lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender, queer or questioning [LBGTQ+] undergraduate students of color). Students can apply for resources to support professional development such as graduate school applications, exam preparation and tutorials, conference attendance, and legal name changes for LBGTQ+ students. The program has been well received by students. WGS is temporarily administering the funds.

WGS continued work with the committee responsible for renovating and reconfiguring the Cheney Room as a women's resource center. This new, transformed space, with expanded functionality and ability to serve women and women-identified members of the MIT community, will continue to embody the vision of Margaret Cheney. The room will allow space for initiatives and programs that educate all members of the MIT community around issues of gender and gender equity. Renovation plans are in motion, although construction has been delayed due to Covid-19.

WGS worked with student groups, other units, MIT organizations, and members of the community beyond MIT on issues related to equity, inclusion, and diversity. WGS also continued its outreach and programming for queer and trans communities.

WGS continued to support My Sister's Keeper and Hermanas Unidas in addition to sponsoring MLK Visiting Professor Moya Bailey.

Issues of equity, inclusion, and diversity are inextricable and foundational aspects of the WGS curriculum. Analysis of the intersections of gender, race, class, sexuality, and other identity categories is fundamental to the approach of WGS subjects. Examples of such courses during AY2021 include WGS.S10 Black Feminist Health Science Studies; WGS.190 Black Matters: Introduction to Black Studies; WGS.224 Race, Gender and Social Inequality: Reproductive Health Care in the United States; WGS.229 Race, Culture and Gender in the U.S. and Beyond: A Psychological Perspective; WGS.231 Writing About Race; WGS.245 Identities and Intersections: Queer Literatures; WGS.250 HIV/AIDS in American Culture; and WGS.275 Gender, Race, and Environmental Justice.

Reenvisioning and Reorganization

WGS has continually worked to become more inclusive and to strengthen and broaden its community. It has reached out to underrepresented communities and both expanded and diversified its programming. It has created a welcoming, inclusive, and supportive place to attract faculty, students, and staff and build community. This work will continue and expand.

WGS plans to continue work with the CASE student organization and the ARM Coalition to support low-income and first-generation students at MIT. WGS also plans to develop a new course that addresses the intersections of gender, labor, and class politics.

Finances, Funding, and Space

In addition to its base budget, WGS receives support from the School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (SHASS) dean's office for classes, conferences, and other annual programming and for operational expenses. In AY2018, WGS received a five-year commitment of additional funding from the provost to develop new courses designed to meet the changing needs and interests of the student body. WGS also benefits from co-sponsoring programs with various units across MIT (as noted above). Another source of funding is the Geneviève McMillan-Reba Stewart Foundation, which supports the McMillan-Stewart Professorship in the Study of Women in the Developing World and the McMillan-Stewart Lecture Series on Women in the Developing World. These initiatives were established in 1996 and endowed by Geneviève McMillan, a passionate believer in equal justice and opportunity. The McMillan-Stewart Chair is held by Lerna Ekmekçioğlu, who teaches two WGS courses (WGS.222J/21H.381J Women and War and WGS.220 Women in the Middle East and North Africa) and a graduate-level course (WGS.310 Gender: Historical Perspectives, with Elizabeth Wood). As chair, Professor Ekmekçioğlu organizes and curates the McMillan-Stewart Lecture Series.

WGS looks forward to continuing to work with the SHASS development office to identify potential donors and to help make the Capital Campaign a success.

With its expanding curriculum, programming, and support for student organizations, WGS continues to advocate for including the salary of an administrative assistant II in the program's base budget.

In AY2021, the SHASS dean's office worked with WGS to create a plan for moving WGS offices to an expanded space on the second floor in Building 14 to accommodate lecturers, staff, and visiting scholars. Renovations should be completed in fall 2021.

Helen Elaine Lee

Director, MIT Program in Women's and Gender Studies

Professor, Comparative Media Studies/Writing