

WGSS Alumni Q&A: Introducing the Alumni

In the time of social distancing, we wanted to catch up with our alumni! We asked them about their time at UConn and in the WGSS Program, their current endeavors, and what advice they have for WGSS students. Check out their responses below!

If you are a WGSS graduate (major, minor, or Feminist Studies Certificate graduate), please join our [Facebook Group](#) for WGSS Alumni!

Paola Pérez (she, her, hers)

Paola is a member of the class of 2017. She majored in WGSS and Latino and Latin American Studies (LLAS) and minored in French Studies. She currently is a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania.



Wafa Simpure (She,her, hers)

Wafa is a member of the class of 2016. She majored in WGSS and is currently completing a Masters in Social Work at Simmons College.



Julia Wilson (she/hers)

Julia is a member of the class of 2018. She majored in WGSS and Human Development and Family Sciences (HDFS) and is currently a graduate student at the University of Chicago.



Matthew Gray Brush, MPH (He/Him/His)

Matthew is a member of the class of 2017. He majored in WGSS and Human Rights. He is currently a graduate of the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) Fielding School of Public Health in the Department of Community Health Sciences with a specialization in Health Education and Promotion.



Adam Kocurek (He/Him/His)

Adam Kocurek is a member of the class of 2016. He graduated with dual degrees in History and WGSS and a minor in English. He is currently a PhD candidate at the CUNY Graduate Center.



Samantha Rogers (She/Her/Hers)

Samantha is a member of the class of 2018. She majored in WGSS and is currently a student at the Catholic University of America Columbus School of Law



Q: Why did you choose to major in WGSS?

I chose this interdisciplinary major because it taught me to engage in critical thinking and effective communication. More importantly, WGSS taught me to analyze the ways in which gender and sexuality intersects with class, race, and ability.

- Paola, Class of 2017

I chose this major because it aligned with my beliefs, fed my need for advocacy, encouraged my need to help other, and embraced solidarity along with analytical thinking with everything put in front of me.

- Wafa, Class of 2016

I took an introductory WGSS course my first year of college and it changed my life. From there I started taking more WGSS classes, got involved in campus organizing, worked at the Women's Center... it was a snowball!

- Julia, Class of 2018

During my time at UConn, I officially changed my major three times, and several times more in my head. I was convinced as a first year that the only way I could successfully enter the medical field was to have a STEM major and pursue the "pre-med" route. I chose to major in WGSS because I saw a need for knowledge of humanity in fields based on scientific research and fact. WGSS helped me find my niche in public health by revealing to me the extent to which social forces shape our lives, and ultimately how to investigate and address the foundational causes of health inequalities.

- Matthew, Class of 2017

I chose to major in WGSS for a number of reasons—the big ones being that in WGSS, I had my identity validated and I found a community, both scholarly and platonic, that enriched me as a scholar, as an activist, and as a friend. WGSS gave me the tools and the skillset to become a more critical citizen and educator. It also complemented my other degree and minor.

- Adam, Class of 2016

I took Gender and Globalization as a freshman with Barb Gurr and I loved the class and everything we talked about. The topics we talk about in WGSS are something I am passionate about and care about, and I wanted to major in something I was passionate about. I also really admired the faculty in WGSS and was excited about learning from people who were involved and passionate about what they taught.

- Samantha, Class of 2018

Q: What kind of work do you do professionally? How does WGSS relate to your current career or career goals?

Currently, I am a Master of Social Work candidate at the University of Pennsylvania. My degree in WGSS, combined with social work, provides the essential tools of social change on systematic problems of injustices.

- Paola, Class of 2017

My work current goes with clinical therapy as a future social worker. As well as a proud member of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority Inc. who encourages sisterhood, service, and scholarship. Both of those aspects of my professional life was started with my major as a WGSS student by learning the history of those who came before me and what mountains they could move. My major as a WGSS student also reminds me to ground my work in intersectionality so all aspects of others identities can be considered, which is extremely important as a social worker.

- Wafa, Class of 2016

I am currently in graduate school for social work. I have worked at a shelter for women experiencing homelessness and now provide counseling for adult and child survivors of domestic violence. WGSS gave me a passion for doing gender equity work with an intersectional lens.

- Julia, Class of 2018

While I was a grad student at UCLA, I worked as a college academic mentor, where I advised undergraduates through the multitude of challenges they face personally and academically. My work in the public health field centers the sexual and reproductive health needs of transgender and gender non-conforming communities. I am a Certified Family Planning Health worker, and am also seeking a Certified Health Education Specialist certification. I hope to work in the medical field where I am able to contribute to whole-person, culturally sensitive care for trans people by helping providers learn how to better serve these communities.

- Matthew, Class of 2017

I am a PhD candidate at the CUNY Graduate Center in the History department. I am a Modern Americanist studying 20th century history of gender and sexuality, LGBT history, labor history, and history of activism and radicalism. I have completed the coursework necessary to receive the Certificate in Women's Studies in the Women's Studies department there. In addition to teaching courses in Modern American History at Hunter College, I also work in student government, as a peer mentor in my department, and as a public history tour guide of New York City. WGSS has informed everything I do, from my pedagogy as an educator to my research and activism.

- Adam, Class of 2016

I'm currently in my second year of law school. When I graduate and pass the bar exam, I want to practice in the public interest law world, specifically working with domestic violence and family law. I knew I wanted to use my degree in my career and I wanted to help people, so law school seemed like a logical next step. WGSS has given me the tools not only to be aware of domestic violence and how it affects survivors/victims, but also has given me tools to think and approach situations with an intersectional lens. For instance, a client's reservations about asking the police to assist with service of process or calling the police at all for help are completely understandable when we consider race or if someone is undocumented. Even asking for certain remedies from the court in a civil protection order petition may have consequences based on status; for instance, asking for child support may affect other public benefits, creating a choice between asking for child support or continuing to receive public benefits.

- Samantha, Class of 2018

Q: Are you involved with any initiatives or organizations within your community?

I volunteer for the Philadelphia Domestic Violence Hotline as a bilingual hotline counselor. I provide crisis intervention, safety planning, resources and referrals within the city.

- Paola, Class of 2017

I started recently becoming more involved with the organizations in my community through my work as a member of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority Inc.

- Wafa, Class of 2016

Yes— I am a steering committee member in the Doctoral Students' Council at the Graduate Center, meaning I serve as a student leader and advocate in our university's graduate student government. I am also a peer mentor coordinator in my department, and am an active member of our union. I also am a member of CLAGS, the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies, at the Graduate Center.

- Adam, Class of 2016

I am involved in some student groups on campus, including Students for Public Interest Law and Women's Law Caucus. I am also involved in pro bono work, volunteering my time teaching about law and social justice to high school students through the Street Law program and through doing client intake at a Worker's Rights Clinic. Additionally, I am working as a certified student attorney in one of my school's in-house legal clinics Families and the Law representing survivors/victims of domestic violence with family law and immigration law matters.

- Samantha, Class of 2018

Q: What is one favorite memory from your time in WGSS?

Creating lasting friendships with other WGSS students.

- Paola, Class of 2017

Exploring the greater world as a WGSS student through an alternative spring break. It brought value to the studies I'd put work into.

- Wafa, Class of 2016

Meeting one of my best friends in the world!! WGSS has so many awesome people and I wish that I had made more of an effort to get to know others in the major sooner.

- Julia, Class of 2018

One of my favorite classes in WGSS was Feminisms, which for some reason was taught in the basement of one of the chem buildings (if I remember correctly?) by Dr. Breen. We read so many great works in that class including Stone Butch Blues, my annotated and tear-stained copy of which I still have on my bookcase today.

- Matthew, Class of 2017

It's so hard to pick just one! I loved having deep and meaningful academic discussions with people who would ultimately become life-long friends.

- Adam, Class of 2016

One of my favorite memories from WGSS was attending a lecture with Laverne Cox! She is an amazing and engaging speaker and it was wonderful to hear her speak about her life, experiences, and advocacy.

- Samantha, Class of 2018

Q: What advice do you have for recent and soon-to-be WGSS graduates?

Apply for those jobs and/or graduate programs that seem "out of reach." You may never know what life has in store for you.

- Paola, Class of 2017

Become a sponge to the experiences and wealth of knowledge given to you as a WGSS student at UConn. Your time and knowledge is so much more valuable than you might realize and a pleasure to call yourself some of the few (and lucky!) to accomplish a degree in the discipline.

- Wafa, Class of 2016

Be proud of your degree! I spent too much time letting other people tell me that WGSS was dumb/a waste of money/useless, etc. WGSS was one of the best decisions I ever made and has continued to aid me personally and professionally. I'm so proud of my education and wouldn't trade it for anything. Also not caring what other people think is a great skill :)

- Julia, Class of 2018

Try to remember that everything in your life thus far has led you to this moment, now— and that each obstacle and challenge has shaped you into the person you are today. Even what you consider to be your greatest failures have helped you grow and improve. As you emerge from college into a world of great unknowns, know that you hold great power simply just by being you. Seek out a place and persons in this world that makes you feel like everything you have been through has led you to exactly where you are supposed to be.

- Matthew, Class of 2017

Keep your chin up! Never forget the importance of the humanities, arts, and social sciences. There will always be people who will hear your major and make a negative judgement of it and you— tone them out. WGSS can take you anywhere. Furthermore, college should not just be about finding a job— it should also be about making better, more well-informed and responsible citizens in a global community, and that's exactly what WGSS does for its majors and minors. Be brave, be grateful, be angry, and be kind!

- Adam, Class of 2016

My first piece of advice for WGSS graduates is no matter what you do, love what you do. WGSS offers so many different opportunities to use our degrees and no matter what you do with it, you have to love what you're doing and be passionate about what you're doing. My second piece of advice for WGSS graduates is if you are working in a field or want to work in a field that requires you to help others with their traumas, it is okay and necessary to take care of yourself, too! Vicarious trauma is real, and you need to take care of yourself first before you can help others cope with their traumas. Self-care is not selfish, it is necessary. It is good to know your prospective employer's attitudes about self-care and vicarious trauma and how they work to support you.

- Samantha, Class of 2018