

# WGSS Class of 2020 Q&A

We asked some of the WGSS Class of 2020 graduates about their time at UConn and their plans now that they've graduated.

**Fatima Ali**  
(she, her, hers)



Fatima is a Human Development and Family Sciences major with minors in WGSS, Human Rights, and Business Fundamentals from Stratford, CT.

**Rachel Breault**  
(she, her, hers)



Rachel is a WGSS and Human Development and Family Studies double major with a minor in English from Essex, CT.

**Sara DeFazio**  
(she, her, hers)



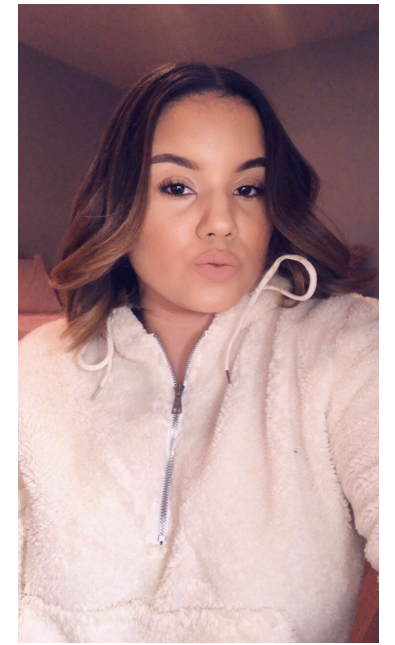
Sara is a Sociology and WGSS double major from Riverside, CT.

**Olivia Emmanuel**  
(she, her, hers)



Olivia is a Nursing major with a minor in WGSS from Rocky Hill, CT.

**Gabby Ferrell**  
(she, her, hers)



Gabby is a Journalism major with minors in WGSS and Sociology from Manchester, CT.

**Destini Hall**  
(she, her, hers)



Destini is an Economics major with minors in WGSS and Healthcare Management and Insurance Studies from Wethersfield, CT.

**Katie Hare**  
(she, her, hers)



Katie is a Sociology major with a WGSS minor from Mansfield, CT.

**Emilie Hryszko**  
(she, her, hers)



Emilie is a WGSS and Psychology double major from Glendale, NY.

**Stephanie Kaesmann**  
(she, her, hers)



Stephanie is an English and Psychology double major with a minor in WGSS from Stratford, CT.

**Kaycelee Klein**  
(she, her, hers)



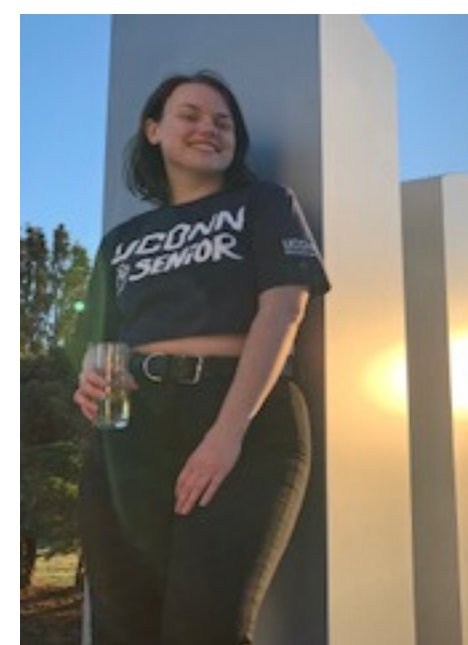
Kaceylee is an English and Political Science double major with a minor in WGSS from Monroe, CT.

**Molly Kozlowski**  
(she, her, hers)



Molly is a Finance major with a minor in WGSS from Westbrook, CT.

**Pheobe Ploof**  
(she, her, hers)



Pheobe is a Political Science major with minors in WGSS and Africana Studies from Norwich, CT.

**Hannah Smith**  
(she, her, hers)



Hannah is a History and WGSS double major with minors in Spanish, Political Science, and Human Rights from Orange, CT.

# Q: Why did you choose to major or minor in WGSS?

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I believe that it's important to know, be aware, understand, and work with all people of all backgrounds/identities and learn about their experiences. Diversity is important. WGSS is the perfect minor to help me achieve that.

- Fatima

I chose to make my second major WGSS because I think the topics are incredibly applicable to both daily life as well as in any career. As a future higher education professional I think it is important to understand diverse identities and how they affect a person's experience.

- Rachel

The first WGSS class that I took was the Seminar on Rape Education and Awareness, taught by Lauren Donais. Throughout the semester, she created a space that fostered community, open conversations, and learning. The topic was difficult to discuss at the beginning but the more comfortable we became, the more we realized how deep issues of gender inequity really were. I decided to take another WGSS class the following semester, where the same thing happened. Four WGSS classes later, I decided that it was what I wanted to study.

- Sara

I chose to minor in WGSS after I took a class as a gen ed and I saw that it allows you to see the world through a different lens.

- Olivia

2016 was my first year at UConn. This was also the year that Trump was elected president, and I hadn't heard women, gender, or sexuality issues brought up that much before. More than I've ever seen, people everywhere were advocating for the rights they felt were being swept away from them. After doing research and having many conversations with the people around me, I grew inspired to further my education in this area by taking some courses. My passion grew which led me to making it one of my minors and is the best decision I've made during my time at UConn.

- Gabby

I wanted to minor in something that I was interested in but not too well versed in— WGSS was perfect to me because I could be in an engaging environment with like minded peers who I could have those conversations with and actually learn more about the society we live in— past, present, and future.

- Destini

It's an important topic to be knowledgeable about and it has countless applications to the world around us.

- Katie

I chose to major in WGSS because I am very liberal in my views and believe that everyone deserves to have a voice. I wanted to work alongside those who are often denied rights due to their gender identity, sexual orientation, race, and religious affiliations.

- Emilie

I had always been interested in women's studies but it wasn't until I had taken a few English courses that double-dipped in WGSS that really prompted me to take the minor. It was the best decision I made in college (even better than dropping my math major!) because it opened my eyes and taught me so much.

- Stephanie

WGSS was the most interdisciplinary program I could find, and it helped fill in the gaps that were missing in both English and polisci.

- Kaceylee

My first class was primarily discussion based so all of us were encouraged to share our thoughts on class content. I felt very comfortable engaging in these conversations, and as a result grew more confident with my ability to speak up in all my classes. Focusing more on the content, each of these classes challenged my understanding of feminism and the world in a unique way. I'm very grateful for the WGSS department and their classes!

- Molly

WGSS is such a dynamic and intersectional study, I found it really applicable to the other areas I am interested in and it provides a rounded lens with which to approach humanity topics and research in my future.

- Phoebe

The courses in WGSS at UConn are so diverse and intersectional. I have been able to apply everything I have learned in WGSS to my other studies. The WGSS professors at UConn are also so passionate about this work!

- Hannah

# Q: What did you enjoy most about WGSS classes? What was one favorite memory from your time in WGSS?

Going to the Franklin Street Works was a great time with Professor Smith. I loved the kind approach to learning and the safe space environments that have been created in these classes. It is a comfortable community that's very inclusive.

- Fatima

I enjoyed the discussion aspect. It's really interesting to hear different perspectives. One of my favorite things I did during WGSS was making a project with my roommate and fellow WGSS major on issues with hospital births and high c-section rates as well as alternative birthing options. We made a video that was informative, fun to do some acting for, and we interviewed some people for it and it was interesting to hear their thoughts.

- Rachel

I mostly enjoyed the sense of community learning that happened in all of my classes. I always felt like I was a part of something bigger than myself and I was happy to be making deep long-lasting connections. My favorite memory from a WGSS class happened last year. Without any prompting from our professor, my entire class showed up to the Take Back the Night event. We all marched together to bring awareness to sexual assault on campus. Even a few WGSS professors were marching with us. I felt connected to everyone and supported by the department as a whole.

- Sara

Sherry Zane was gracious enough to let me independent study under her after I had her in a course. I was able to delve more into what interested me, midwifery, under great leadership.

- Olivia

What I enjoyed most about the WGSS classes was the chance to discuss important issues that are uncomfortable to talk about in public. Not many people feel encouraged to bring up issues like abortion, gay rights, sexual assault, colorism, etc., but in these classes I experienced students speak their mind. It's therapeutic to have these open, safe spaces to talk out our thoughts in guided discussions in a climate where everyone is against each other.

- Gabby

My professors made it so easy to love the material and love learning. I have not had a WGSS professor that I wouldn't be able to speak to again in post-grad for advice or just catching up on life. My favorite memory was when Professor Powell did her music unit within one of my feminism courses because it was so fun to relate stuff I listen to and what I was brought up around and see where women are imprinted in that puzzle. Music truly is a big part of my life and a way to spread a powerful message if you use the platform to its full potential.

- Destini

I enjoyed intersectional learning, and the variety of topics covered by the classes. I especially enjoyed WGSS film and arts related courses.

- Katie

I enjoyed how open-minded and accepting all my WGSS professors were and how every opinion was treated respectfully. My favorite memories are in Barb Gurr's class because she truly encapsulates what it means to put feminist theory in praxis.

- Emilie

Personally, I loved becoming friends with my professors and having understanding and thoughtful mentors who really empathized with my struggles. I can't pick just one memory, but I can say my favorite class was Women and Health with Ingrid Semaan. It was the most informative and interesting class I've ever taken. I recommend it to every student I meet.

- Stephanie

I loved all the readings in Ingrid Semaan's classes, as well as the workshops she brought in to break up the lectures. My favorite memory from a WGSS class was watching the shock of all the students' who hadn't taken a class with Ingrid before when she recommended "Why Women Have Better Sex Under Socialism: And Other Arguments for Economic Independence."

- Kaceylee

My classmates and professors both come from a very diverse background. I enjoyed hearing what each of them have to say, and learning about their perceptions on the world, as well as their life experiences. As a part of my minor, I got the opportunity to intern with a non-profit organization, BRAVE Girls Leadership Inc. That by far was my favorite memory/experience from my time in WGSS (and perhaps at UConn).

- Molly

WGSS classes are really inclusive places, I found a lot of the time I was able to learn from both my professors and my peers which is rare. They are places where students are encouraged to speak out and to discuss in an open environment, WGSS classes always feel less structured and restrictive than classes in my other disciplines.

- Phoebe

## **Q: How did you incorporate what you learned in WGSS classes into your time at UConn (i.e. clubs, jobs, and other activities)?**

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I have overall become a better person through this minor, as it has helped me be around diversity. I am more knowledgeable and aware of my own struggles as a woman.

- Fatima

I was lucky enough to work at the UConn Women's Center for the past three years. I took what I learned about gender based violence into both of my roles as a Violence Against Women Prevention Program Peer Facilitator and as one of the Co-Facilitators for In-Power. I learned so much about intersectionality, oppression, and activism through my WGSS courses. That knowledge helped me create more inclusive dialogues on campus. The learning I did made me a better facilitator and activist over all.

- Sara

The knowledge I have obtained in my WGSS classes has already helped me connect and interact better with my patients and I know it will continue to do so my entire career!.

- Olivia

What I learned in my WGSS classes directly infiltrated the way that I mentor youth girls. I took the ideas I learned about society's standards of image, the patriarchy, the glass-ceiling and made it comprehensible for these girls that were being affected by it but couldn't really understand why or how. These courses were empowering not only for me but for the people I was able to share the information with, including family members and friends.

- Gabby

I definitely spoke to my friends about what I was learning and would often find myself pointing out things I learned in my WGSS courses that happened around me during everyday life. I was able to find these personal connections in class and bring them to my close family and friends— and that's the best type of learning because then I was learning and teaching what I was taught.

- Destini

WGSS helped me to think more critically about what is going on around me, and be compassionate to others. As a sister of Pi Beta Phi, it is important to me to represent the best that women can be and let the women around me shine.

- Katie

During my time at UConn, I was an active member of Between Women, a group aimed at creating a safe community for those who identify as women and are members of the LGBTQIA+ community. I participated in as many protests and rallies I could, and I never silenced my beliefs in the face of opposition.

- Emilie

I staged a protest set to Hairspray's "I Know Where I've Been" after one of my performing arts club's shows about women in theatre. I also themed another show around intersectionality in order to include diverse storylines in a very white-washed and male-dominated craft. In my classes, I was able to see a more complete picture when looking at psychological research and English literature characters.

- Stephanie

I completed an honors thesis that was founded on the principles of intersectionality I learned in WGSS. I focused on the narratives of incarcerated women and made sure that I read widely, deeply, and diversely.

- Kaceylee

Last year I was a part of an organization that required us to do community service. As a leader in that organization, I encouraged members to not only attend BRAVE sponsored events, but also events hosted by the WGSS department. It was great seeing multiple worlds in my life collide!

- Molly

I got involved at the women's center through friends of mine also in the WGSS program and I integrated a lot of the knowledge gained in my WGSS courses into my other studies.

- Pheobe

# Q: What are your plans after graduation and how do you see your major or minor in WGSS supporting your future goals?

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WGSS is a crucial minor for me as I plan to work with people of all backgrounds and identities in Human Rights. It has allowed me to understand individuality in terms of care and needs.

- Fatima

I'm going to UMaine to get my Master's in Higher Education and I've noticed that their curriculum is very social justice based and really makes sure when discussing topics to keep in mind identities and how they interest. That is a core concept of WGSS as well so I am very used to doing that and thus comfortable speaking on such things as well as have factual knowledge to bring into play.

- Rachel

I am currently planning on attending NYU Silver, in order to obtain my Masters in Social Work. My time in WGSS has become fundamental to my understanding of the way that trauma and oppression work to keep people down. It has also been fundamental to my understanding that community and healing can work as a way to uplift those that may need it.

- Sara

I will be going into the nursing field during a difficult time for healthcare in our country. I know that my knowledge of people will help me to remember to treat the person, not just the disease.

- Olivia

My plans after graduation are mastering in WGSS. My undergraduate courses have influenced me so much that I want to take my research further to be able to make a deeper impact in my career. I plan to combine my major and masters to create a unique position where i'm able to combine both of my skill sets. A major thank-you goes out to every single WGSS staff— from the professors to the student interns— that advocate for this field in their everyday work. Your impact is larger than you can imagine.

- Gabby

I plan to work in the healthcare sector so I love being able to learn about all identities because everybody deserves the human right of self-identity and also the right to healthcare. And being able to understand this all allows me to advocate for my patients and be able to educate others on the ignorance that may come with social norms.

- Destini

I will be moving to Boston to pursue a career in museum development and administration, and hope to bring my understanding of diverse issues in as they apply to the institutions I will be a part of.

- Katie

After graduation, I will be studying for a master's degree in Criminology and Justice. This field is oftentimes very discriminatory, and I truly believe I can work towards the inclusion of all identities and promote feminist teachings to transform the criminal justice system.

- Emilie

I plan to get my Ph.D in English with a focus in rhetoric and composition. With my background in WGSS and psychology, I will be able to look at the study and practice of writing with more scrutiny. I plan to do research on the differences in men and women's writing and those in underserved communities who don't have the advanced access to language arts education that privileged communities do.

- Stephanie

I am heading to the University of California, Davis to complete an English PhD and a JD. WGSS created the foundation of my academic thought, and I will continue to be intersectional and interdisciplinary in everything I do.

- Kaceylee

I will be working at Travelers in their Financial Management Leadership Development Program while pursuing my Masters in Financial Risk Management at UConn (Go Huskies!). Although the majority of my work will consist of number crunching and financial analysis, I also plan on continuing my involvement within their Women's Mentor Program. I hope to integrate what I learned in these classes into this Employee Group!

- Molly

I plan to go on to a masters program in Political Science in which I will utilize my WGSS knowledge everyday to keep an interdisciplinary lens in my research and my studies.

- Pheobe

I will be pursuing my Master's degree in International Relations at the London School of Economics. I intend to combine my studies of WGSS and bring an intersectional perspective to my master's program.

- Hannah

# Q: What do you want to take with you from your time in WGSS?

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I want to take the community, support, knowledge, and love with me after I graduate. I hope to come back and spend some time reconnecting with people in the future.

- Fatima

I want to take with me not only the applicable skills but the knowledge that there are so many wonderfully talented people out there, such as my peers, who have taken the time to study these topics and will be moving into their varied respective careers, thus bringing the knowledge into a variety of fields. I also really enjoyed the people, discussions, and overall connection that has come from it and want to take that and keep an openness and curiosity moving forward in how I approach my relationships with others.

- Rachel

A sense of community and an understanding of the complexity of oppression, intersectionality, and the construct of gender as a whole.

- Sara

I came into WGSS classes completely unaware of many things we talk about, like intersectionality. I come out knowing that I bettered myself and that I believe a WGSS class should be a gen ed requirement for all students!

- Olivia

What I plan to take away from my time in WGSS is the ability to remain open-minded. Coming into these courses, there were a lot of things that I had to learn. I came from a place where I knew I supported women and everyone in the LGBTQ+ community, but still was uneducated about the specifics of the oppression and marginalization they faced. If it wasn't for letting go of my misconceptions and hegemonies from my culture, family, and society that I took on, I would not be where I am today. I can only pray that more people will do the same and realize that there is so much work to be done for these communities, but also so much hope for our world.

- Gabby

Definitely a more analytical side when looking at other's point of view. It is sometimes hard to understand what others are going through or experience if it is not in your own realm. Hearing of all identities and many strifes that everybody goes through allows me to be even more empathetic than I considered myself to be before learning so much through WGSS.

- Destini

I want to take the ability to think of the needs of others and to be an ally to communities that may not directly apply to me. It's important to not only find solutions to your own disparities, but to raise others up as well.

- Katie

I want to take with me the accepting nature of WGSS and the open-mindedness to realize that there is not one universal identity a person should bear, despite what society deems is "normal." Most of all, WGSS has taught me to live my truth, even if it may not be accepted by those in power.

- Emilie

Everything! I can't see myself doing anything without using WGSS. It's impossible to get a complete view of anything when you don't take an intersectional approach.

- Stephanie

I want to remember to be empathetic to a variety of identities, but also to fight tooth and nail to support the most vulnerable populations.

- Kaceylee

In all of my classes, my professors encourage me to look at situations from an intersectional lens. It's made me realize that most things in life are multi-dimensional. I feel as though analysis from an intersectional lens is applicable and crucial across all sectors in life, and that's a major skill I want to take with me as I enter into the adult world!

- Molly

I want to take all the friends that I made, the things I learned about people from all walks of life, and the atmosphere of real personhood that WGSS grants each and every student.

- Pheobe