

**Annual Report**  
**Institute for Research on Women, Rutgers University, 2017-2018**

Arlene Stein (Director) & Sarah Tobias (Associate Director)

**I. OVERVIEW**

2017-2018 was a year of consolidation and rich intellectual exploration at the Institute for Research on Women (IRW). Our core programming—the weekly seminar, Distinguished Lecture Series, and undergraduate learning community—explored the theme of “The Perils of Populism: Feminist Conversations.” We assumed leadership of the Rutgers Public Engagement Project and held a variety of different workshops and events throughout the academic year. IRW’s most recent book, *Trans Studies: The Challenge to Hetero/Homo Normativities* (Rutgers University Press) was awarded the 2017 Sylvia Rivera Award in Transgender Studies from the Center for LGBTQ Studies (CLAGS). The following report provides a brief summary of IRW’s activities and initiatives in the 2017-18 academic year.

**II. CORE PROGRAMMING**

**IRW Interdisciplinary Research Seminar**

As mentioned above, the theme for IRW’s 2017-18 interdisciplinary seminar—and for all of its core programming—was “The Perils of Populism: Feminist Conversations.” Throughout the year we used a feminist lens to examine the global emergence of rightwing populism and its tendency to scapegoat society’s most vulnerable populations. In addition to the IRW Director and Associate Director, a total of 12 individuals participated in this year’s seminar: 4 faculty members, 4 graduate students, 3 Global Scholars (originally from India, Romania, and the Philippines but now affiliated with US institutions), and one Douglass alumna. Scholars attending the seminar were associated with the Anthropology, Sociology, Political Science, History, Religion, Asian Languages and Cultures, and Women’s and Gender Studies departments. Seminar discussions showcased participants’ research on topics as varied as “Living Martyrs and the Violence of Ideology: The Legacies of Martyrdom without Death in Contemporary American Political Discourse” and “The Specter of the Libidinous and Unassimilable Foreigner: A Feminist Historical Analysis of Buddhist Nationalism, Racism, and Islamophobia in Burma (Myanmar).”

Seminar members attended a special workshop on scholarly publishing. Led by Mary Hawkesworth (Women’s and Gender Studies; former editor of *Signs*) and Peter Mikulas and Kim Guinta (Rutgers University Press), seminar members learned about the intricacies of publishing in academic journals and how this process differs from publishing scholarly monographs. We supplemented this event with a series of public engagement workshops that were open to seminar fellows and the entire university community (see later in this report for more information on our public engagement initiatives).

Final evaluations by participants praised the seminar for being “productive, respectful, [and] enlightening.” One seminar fellow noted that the seminar had not only “affirmed and strengthened” their approach to feminist scholarship and pedagogy but also reinforced “the vital importance of feminist practices of storytelling” which they will now prioritize in their writing and teaching. A graduate student stated that we had successfully created a feminist community characterized by “love and care,” something they wished they had discovered earlier in their Rutgers career. Several

seminar members have begun to participate with each other in activities beyond IRW's core programming, such as interdisciplinary working groups and writing groups; others noted that they would use readings and pedagogical techniques introduced in the seminar as part of their own classes. In short, the IRW seminar continues to provide a model interdisciplinary space that enables its participants to grow and thrive as intellectuals.

***IRW Seminar on The Perils of Populism***

*Comments from evaluations*

“[A] wonderfully stimulating and supportive environment in which to think through academic research, pedagogy, and public engagement.”

—*Faculty Member*

“This seminar has helped me rethink the way I structure and approach my own research. Reading and discussing work from other disciplines has been invaluable.”

—*Graduate Student*

“Stimulating, inspiring, generous.”

—*Global Scholar*

**IRW Distinguished Lecture Series**

During the 2017-18 academic year, IRW hosted six events in its Distinguished Lecture Series, blending lectures with panel discussions to create richly generative conversations. Our events featured scholars from within and outside the university as well as public intellectuals and members of the activist community. Each event attracted a large audience and was attended by faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates from a range of departments, as well as by members of the IRW's undergraduate learning community, representatives from the Institute for Women's Leadership, and local community members. Because we incorporated our events into the Douglass passport program we elicited the participation of undergraduate transfer students in the fall. Faculty teaching courses in several disciplines also encouraged students to attend or brought their classes to the events.

- In “From Progressive Neoliberalism to Reactionary Populism? Distribution, Recognition, and the Crisis of Hegemony” (October 5, 2017), Nancy Fraser (The New School for Social Research) argued that we are currently facing a severe crisis of political authority that entails a dramatic weakening of the credibility of established political classes and parties. She explored the eruption of progressive and reactionary populisms in 2016 after a period in which neoliberalism left many Americans without a voice. Describing the Trump presidency as a hyper-reactionary neoliberalism, she stressed that we are currently stranded in an interregnum in which, to quote Gramsci, “the old is dying and the new cannot be born.”

- In “Organizing, Resisting, Surviving” (November 2, 2017), Kenyon Farrow (activist, writer), L.A. Kauffman (author, organizer), and Robyn Magalit Rodriguez (University of California, Davis) discussed the extraordinary outpouring of popular resistance that has occurred in the United States since the election of Donald Trump. The panel began by considering the ways in which the Trump administration’s actions represent a continuation of or a break from the right-wing policies of the past. Thereafter the panel explored the history of grassroots organizing and the organizing strategies that have historically been most effective.
- In “Truth, Power, and the Media” (November 16, 2017), Jessie Daniels (Hunter College), Sarah Leonard (*The Nation*), and Bilge Yesil (College of Staten Island) considered the relationship between truth and power in a sociopolitical context marked by the rise of the Internet and a presidential administration seeking to discredit the press. Panelists explored how best to distinguish “real” from “fake” news in the digital age, and how to use the tools at our disposal to invigorate a democratic public sphere.
- In “Discursive Dispossessions: Gender as a Resource for the Construction of Authoritarian Us/Them Dichotomies” (December 7, 2017), Sabine Hark (Technical University of Berlin) described how the far right in Germany uses the discourse of “anti-genderism” to construct racist, neo-authoritarian us/them dichotomies. Her talk explored the paradoxical ways right-wing critics discredit Gender Studies for not being a “proper” academic discipline and simultaneously reject, attack, and discredit notions of gender while reclaiming them.
- In “Angry White Men” (March 1, 2018), Michael Kimmel (Stony Brook University) developed an intersectional analysis of the extreme right wing. Based on interviews with white nationalists in the US and ex-neo-Nazi skinheads in Sweden, he analyzed class backgrounds and racial ideologies through the prism of gender, and addressed the ways that masculinity helps us to understand both how young men get into extremist movements and how they can get out.
- In “The Perils and Paradoxes of Hindu Nationalism” (April 5, 2018), Amrita Basu (Amherst College) explored the remarkable popularity of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi despite his failure to execute economic reforms, his assault on democratic freedoms, and his advocacy of violence against minorities. Basu’s analysis revealed that unlike Mahatma Gandhi, who personified nonviolence and androgyny, Hindu nationalist Modi personifies violent masculinity. His appropriation of Gandhi’s performance of sexual renunciation is key to understanding his appeal to the Indian public.

## IRW Undergraduate Learning Community

### *IRW Undergraduate Learning Community on Feminism and Resistance: Politics, Peril, Power*

*Comments from evaluations*

“I learned that interdisciplinary feminist scholarship is vital to the progress of women in society and can be incorporated into anything.”

“Learning how to podcast was amazing! Doing research on my topic of interest and then turning that research into a radio story was so much more engaging than writing a paper.”

“I loved the style of the Learning Community. It provides an incredible opportunity to speak openly among peers and gain new perspectives.”

Since the 2007-8 academic year, IRW has pioneered the development of an undergraduate learning community based in a research institute, offering advanced undergraduate students an intimate yet rigorous environment for intellectual growth. With the support of the Office of the Chancellor at Rutgers-New Brunswick, IRW ran two semester-long learning communities (fall 2017 and spring 2018) led by Undergraduate Learning Community Coordinator Sara Perryman. Ms. Perryman is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Women’s and Gender Studies at Rutgers-New Brunswick, writing a dissertation entitled “Eco-Sensoriums and Geographies of Risk: Detroit, Michigan’s Affective Futurity.”

Under Sara’s guidance, a total of 33 students from a variety of majors, ranging from Economics and Animal Science to Geography and Comparative Literature, participated in IRW’s learning community during 2017-18. Participants attended IRW’s Distinguished Lecture Series, gathered to discuss related readings, and worked with mentors (faculty, visiting scholars or advanced IRW graduate student fellows) to develop their own research/activist projects related to the theme of “Feminism and Resistance: Politics, Peril, Power.” Instead of writing papers or creating poster presentations, this cohort of learning community students learned how to present their research in the form of podcasts. They met with Multimedia Lab Manager Stacey Carton in the Douglass Library and Molly Graham from the Rutgers Oral History Archive for classes specifically tailored to making podcasts related to this year’s theme and objectives. They also continued their work outside of class by taking a trip to the Leslie Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art in New York in the fall semester, and to the African American Museum in Philadelphia in the spring. Evaluations described the learning community as a creative and supportive feminist classroom that exposes students to a broad range of topics from multiple perspectives. In-class workshops on research methodologies and digital technology helped students build practical skills and develop innovative and exciting research projects. Students felt inspired by one another and formed close relationships that strengthened their ability to communicate and conduct collaborative research.

### **III. IRW PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES**

IRW assumed management of the Rutgers Public Engagement Project during 2017-18 and continued to extend its professional development initiatives in this capacity. In addition to the workshop on scholarly publishing that was organized in conjunction with the weekly seminar and described earlier in this report, IRW held 5 other professional development events that were open to the entire university community:

#### **A. Twitter Workshop with Mary Chayko**

On Thursday, September 28, 2017, Mary Chayko (School of Communication and Information) gave a Rutgers Public Engagement Project workshop on Twitter for academics. The workshop included an overview of the mechanics of Twitter, carefully calibrated to enable both beginners and experienced users to improve their social media skills. In addition, to instruction in hands-on skills, the workshop included a conversation about strategies and best practices for scholars to safely, productively, and effectively build a Twitter presence for academic purposes.

#### **B. Organizing 101 with Benn Marine**

On Thursday, October 19, 2017, IRW (through the Rutgers Public Engagement Project) and the Center for Social Justice Education held a nuts-and-bolts lunchtime workshop on community organizing. The workshop featured Benn Marine, a veteran organizer who has advocated for LGBTQ voter rights and single payer healthcare, and discussed best practices for organizing campaigns intended to improve communities by influencing public policy.

#### **C. Job Market Basics**

On Monday, November 13, 2017, IRW held a workshop designed to provide strategic advice for students contemplating a job market that is increasingly comprised of visiting positions and post-doctoral fellowships rather than tenure track jobs. The workshop covered topics including multi-year searches, transitioning from post-doc to faculty positions, and negotiating tips. The panelists were: Cynthia Daniels (Political Science), Sangya Varma (New Jersey Center for Biomaterials and Rutgers-Cleveland Clinic Consortium), Anjali Nerlekar (AMESALL: African, Middle Eastern, and South Asian Languages and Literatures), and Sylvia Chan-Malik (Women's and Gender Studies & American Studies). The event was moderated by Sarah Tobias (IRW) and co-sponsored by the Office for the Promotion of Women in Science, Engineering, and Mathematics.

#### **D. Op-ed Writing with Thaler Pekar**

On Thursday, February 15, 2018, Thaler Pekar, an internationally recognized pioneer in the field of organizational narrative, leadership storytelling, and persuasive communication, presented a Rutgers Public Engagement Project workshop on op-ed writing. Ms. Pekar led faculty and graduate students through a series of exercises designed to help transform academic work into 500-word opinion pieces aimed at a general audience. She also provided participants with resources on submitting and placing op-eds. Participants represented a wide range of disciplines in the Humanities, Social Sciences, and STEM.

#### **E. Persuasive Speaking and Storytelling Workshop with Thaler Pekar**

On Thursday, April 12, 2018, we welcomed back Thaler Pekar for a second Rutgers Public Engagement Project workshop, this time on storytelling techniques and how they can be used to persuade a wide range of audiences, ranging from foundations or grant-making entities to a room

full of skeptics. Ms. Pekar introduced participants to her Heart, Head & Hand© methodology and then engaged everyone in a set of activities designed to create compelling narratives.

#### IV. OTHER INITIATIVES , NEWS, AND PROGRAMMING

##### A. *Rejoinder* Journal

In May 2018, IRW published the third issue of its online journal, *Rejoinder*, a forum for feminist, queer, and social justice-inspired work. The theme of this issue was The Stranger Within. Contributors addressed the ethics, aesthetics, and politics of naming the strange—and the stranger. This issue of *Rejoinder* featured essays, fiction, poetry, and artwork by: Adina Andrus, Debjani Chakravarty, Ximena Keogh Serrano, Jana McAuliffe, Carrie Moran, Sueyoung Park-Primiano, Julia Reynolds, Rebecca Reynolds, Taylor Simpson, Emmy Waldman, Sheri Wells-Jensen, and Mary Anne Zammit. *Rejoinder* is edited by IRW Associate Director Sarah Tobias. The journal is a partnership with The Feminist Art Project. It may be viewed online at: <http://irw.rutgers.edu/rejoinder>.

##### B. IRW's *Trans Studies* Book

In August 2017, IRW's most recent book, *Trans Studies: The Challenge to Hetero/ Homo Normativities* (Rutgers University Press), was awarded the 2017 Sylvia Rivera Award in Transgender Studies. The award is given by the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies at CUNY for the best book or article on transgender studies each year. Edited by former IRW Director Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel and current IRW Associate Director Sarah Tobias, the volume grew out of IRW's 2012-2013 programming on the theme of Trans Studies. In addition to chapters by the editors, the volume features the innovative contributions of fifteen scholars and activists in the fledgling field of Trans Studies: Genny Beemyn, Susan R. Rankin, Pauline Park, Lucas Crawford, Keja Valens, Jian Chen, Toby Beauchamp, Nora Butler Burke, Aren Z. Aizura, Mickael Chacha Enriquez, Alexandra Rodriguez de Ruiz, Marcia Ochoa, Jody L. Herman, Sel J. Hwahng, and A. Finn Enke.

##### C. IRW Working Groups

IRW is currently supporting three working groups. Our group on *Feminist Pedagogies* is organized by Enmanuel Martínez (Ph.D. candidate in Comparative Literature, Rutgers-New Brunswick) and Dara Walker (Ph.D. candidate in History, Rutgers-New Brunswick) and designed to focus on material classroom practices as well as the theorization of feminist pedagogies. This working group had a quiet year but is actively planning events for fall 2018. Our working group on *Gender, Race and Disability Politics of Science and Technology* is led by Alison Howell (Political Science, Rutgers-Newark) and Daniel Asen (History, Rutgers-Newark). This group has had an active year, involving multiple group meetings to explore lines of connection between group members' research projects. The group also added new members, including Gabriela Kütting (Political Science, Rutgers-Newark) and has been busy planning events. The first of these will be a talk by Professor Carolyn Roberts (Yale University, Department of African American Studies) in fall 2018. Professor Roberts' work addresses medicine, race, and slavery in the Atlantic world and she will present on her book project: *To Heal and to Harm: Medicine, Knowledge, and Power in the Atlantic Slave Trade*. Finally, in April 2018, IRW began to sponsor a new working group on *Carceral Studies*. Led by former IRW Director Nicole Fleetwood (American Studies, Rutgers-New Brunswick) and Che Gossett (Ph.D. candidate, Women's and Gender Studies, Rutgers-New Brunswick) the group plans to read 3-4 texts and host 1-2 speakers each semester.

#### **D. University of Michigan’s Gender Research Institute Director’s Conference**

IRW Associate Director Sarah Tobias represented the institute at the University of Michigan’s Gender Research Institute Director’s Conference on April 16, 2018. The day-long series of workshops and conversations attracted participants from throughout the United States and Canada and drew attendees from 19 different centers and institutes dedicated to research on women, gender, and sexuality. It addressed topics including mission setting, fiscal sustainability, advancing diverse leadership, new directions in feminist research, and building cross-center research collaborations. In addition to providing networking opportunities, the conference also affirmed the value of IRW’s work, especially its well-balanced programming that both sets an agenda and supports feminist scholars, enabling the institute to have a significant impact beyond its small size. As a director of another feminist research center put it succinctly: “Rutgers gets it right.”

#### **E. Co-sponsorships**

As part of our commitment to collaborating with other units, IRW continued to co-sponsor a large number of events with a diverse spectrum of centers, departments and institutes, including the Department of Sociology, the Office for the Promotion of Women in Science, Technology and Mathematics, the Center for Women in the Arts and Humanities, the Center on Violence Against Women & Children, the Center for American Women and Politics, the Department of American Studies, and Rutgers AAUP-AFT. The Director and Associate Director continue to cultivate significant relationships and pursue possible collaborations with many Rutgers units. The range of our collaborative and co-sponsored activities in 2017-18 can be seen in Appendix B, IRW’s calendar of events.

#### **V. FELLOWS AT IRW**

During 2017-18, the Institute for Research on Women hosted three Global Scholars: Maria Cecilia Hwang (Brown University/the Philippines), Basuli Deb (Queens College, CUNY/India) and Voichita Nachescu (Rutgers/Romania). Dr. Hwang, who was also an IRW Global Scholar during the 2016-17 academic year, completed her project entitled *Mixing Work and Pleasure in Hong Kong: Women’s Migration, Sex Work, Border Control, and the Politics of Trafficking*. Based on thirteen months of ethnography conducted in Hong Kong between 2010 and 2013, Hwang’s study examined the migration and labor of women sex workers from the Philippines. Dr. Hwang left IRW in January 2018 for a postdoctoral position at Rice University. Dr. Deb, who first joined us in fall 2017, continued to work on a project entitled *Indigenous Lives and Diasporic Aspirations*. Her work addresses the heteropatriarchal politics of legislative and technological control of indigenous and immigrant communities in comparative settler colonial security regimes. Dr. Nachescu came to IRW to develop a project entitled *Populism, Transnational Whiteness, and Contemporary Eastern European Immigrants in the United States*. Noting that contemporary right-wing populism situates race at its core, her research examines the position of contemporary Eastern European immigrants toward whiteness and contemporary populism.

#### **VI. TOWARDS 2018-2019**

IRW’s annual theme for 2018-2019 is “Public Catastrophes, Private Losses.” Wars, genocides, forced migration, and terrorism, as well as health epidemics and natural disasters remake lives. A growing body of scholarship suggests that the impacts of catastrophic events vary across different contexts, bleeding into multiple domains. IRW will look at the ways public catastrophes imprint themselves on lives, how individuals, as members of groups, narrate, process, and grapple with

legacies of loss, and how states and non-governmental organizations address such events, serving the needs of some populations better than others. Inspired by feminism, we are particularly interested in the ways the personal and public are intertwined, and how, in the aftermath of catastrophe, families and communities become repositories for loss, silence, mourning, witnessing, reconstruction, and reparation. We hope that the School of Arts and Sciences will continue to support our infrastructure and programming as we undertake these important endeavors.

<b>IRW Staff 2017-18</b>	<b>About the IRW</b>
<p><b>Director</b> Professor Arlene Stein</p> <p><b>Associate Director</b> Sarah Tobias, Ph.D.</p> <p><b>Administrative Assistant</b> Meliseta Shand</p> <p><b>Undergraduate Learning Community Coordinator</b> Sara Perryman</p>	<p>At the forefront of feminist research for over forty years, the Institute for Research on Women (IRW) advances cutting-edge, interdisciplinary, feminist scholarship on gender, women and sexuality. Part of the School of Arts and Sciences at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, IRW was founded in the mid-1970s by faculty and administrators seeking to expand feminist scholarship and activism beyond the university's fledgling Women's Studies program. Today, IRW supports a broad range of programming designed to stimulate research on women and gender within and across the disciplines, throughout and beyond Rutgers. Promoting faculty and student connections and building intellectual community are also central to IRW's mission. Affiliate members of IRW currently include almost 900 faculty, graduate students, and advanced undergraduates drawn from a wide range of disciplines at the New Brunswick, Newark and Camden campuses.</p>