

**Annual Report**  
**Institute for Research on Women, Rutgers University, 2021-2022**

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

**I. OVERVIEW**

2021-2022 was a busy, if transitional, year at IRW. Our core programming—the weekly seminar, Distinguished Lecture Series, and undergraduate learning community—explored the theme of “Futures.” We also ran three events in the Rutgers Public Engagement Project, which IRW organizes. We continued to work on IRW publications, especially the first and second volumes in our *Feminist Bookshelf* series with Rutgers University Press. We also launched a new podcast series, *Mnemosyne*, and the seventh issue of *Rejoinder*, our online journal (the first issue to be created by a guest editor from outside the university).

The year was marked by COVID-related shifts as we resumed an in-office presence and in-person undergraduate programming. It was also marked by staff changes. Andrea Zerpa, our administrative assistant, left IRW in early January and was not replaced before the semester’s end. And in a momentous finale to the academic year, we said goodbye to IRW Director Arlene Stein who has spent the last 6 years at IRW’s helm. We welcome historian Chie Ikeya who will serve as IRW Director between 2022 and 2025. The following report provides a brief summary of IRW’s activities and initiatives in the 2021-2022 academic year.

**II. CORE PROGRAMMING**

**IRW Interdisciplinary Research Seminar**

As mentioned above, the theme for IRW’s 2021-2022 interdisciplinary faculty/graduate student seminar—and for all of our core programming—was “Futures.” In addition to the IRW Director and Associate Director, a total of eighteen individuals participated in this year’s seminar: five faculty members, five graduate students, three visiting scholars, five postdoctoral associates, and one Douglass alumna. Scholars attending the seminar were associated with the Anthropology, French, English, American Studies (Newark), Political Science (Newark), Comparative Literature, and Sociology departments, the Institute for Women’s Leadership, and Rutgers Law School (Camden). Seminar discussions showcased participants’ research on topics as varied as “Haitian Futures: Afrofuturism, Vodou, and Contemporary Art,” “The Future of the Family: Using Family Law to Advance Autonomy in an Era of Demographic Shifts,” and “More-than-Human Worlds: The Cosmopolitan Potential of Genre Fiction.”

Seminar members attended a workshop on scholarly publishing. Led by Angelique Haugerud (Anthropology; former editor-in-chief of *American Ethnologist* and *Africa Today*) and Peter Mikulas and Kim Guinta (Rutgers University Press), they learned about the intricacies of publishing in academic journals and how this process differs from publishing scholarly monographs. They also attended IRW’s three public engagement workshops that were open to 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 “respectful,” “supportive,” “generous,” and “engaged.” A cluster of four seminar fellows now “consult[s] each other on research and writing.” Several participants talked about how the seminar helped them learn how to communicate with an audience comprised of individuals who are not in their own discipline and who have different levels of expertise. Many appreciated the online format, and the accessibility that ensued. One of our seminar fellows joined us every week from Spain, and a visiting scholar Zoomed in from Nigeria. As another seminar fellow put it: “I loved having the online option, because due to living with 3 unvaccinated family members and due to my parenting responsibilities I would not have been able to participate in person.”

***IRW Seminar on Futures***  
*Comments from evaluations*

“Phenomenal! I learned so much and took my research to a new level”

“I especially appreciated that it helped keep me connected to colleagues and . . . [their] interests . . . during a time when academic work has felt particularly isolating . . . it helped keep me curious about and engaged with ideas beyond the scope of my own work”

“I wouldn’t change a thing!”

### **IRW Distinguished Lecture Series**

IRW held seven events in its Distinguished Lecture Series during the 2021-2022 academic year. All events were held on Zoom, which enabled us to attract large audiences. In addition to Rutgers faculty, students, and staff, audience members came from schools and colleges throughout the United States and Canada, including: Howard University, the University of Miami, Macalester College, Centenary College, McMaster University, Northwestern University, University of Michigan, Drexel University, Temple University, University of Oregon, CUNY, and University of California, Berkeley. Other attendees came from universities in the United Kingdom, Spain, the Netherlands, Trinidad and Tobago, and Italy.

- In **“The Future of the Environment”** (November 11, 2021), Farhana Sultana (Syracuse University) discussed the importance of addressing the future through a feminist climate justice paradigm which focuses on the social impacts and outcomes of climate change. As an intentionally ethical approach, a feminist climate justice paradigm demands that we redress climate-related inequities confronting marginalized communities, especially those in the Global South who have contributed least to the climate breakdown and yet are disproportionately burdened by it.

- In **“The Future of Debt”** (November 18, 2021), activist Astra Taylor described her work with the advocacy organization The Debt Collective to abolish debt, and prevent capital accumulation derived from debt collection. She argued that wealth and debt are ways in which the past lives on in the present. While inherited wealth can expand future possibilities, debt, which is often a legacy of political and economic marginalization, exerts an outsized influence on future generations. Debt also exacerbates inequality in the present because one person’s debt is invariably another, more affluent person’s asset. To abolish debt would therefore help create more equitable and democratic futures.
- In **“The Future of Immigration”** (December 2, 2021), Lynn Stephen (University of Oregon) emphasized that US immigration policy has historically been exclusionary and resulted in slow and difficult access to the US for those who need to leave their countries of origin. She advocated instead for expansive immigration and asylum policies based on the “real world,” where violence, poverty, climate change, and unemployment are experienced collectively, and shaped by US foreign policy. Claiming that, “the future of immigration is the future of our planet,” she suggested that the US should allow asylum seekers to immigrate in families or groups and that governments should design immigration and refugee policies in tandem with policies related to the climate crisis.
- In **“The Future of Democracy”** (February 3, 2022), Claire Potter (The New School for Social Research) considered whether the internet might be a symptom, rather than a cause, of democratic fragility in America. While there is a widespread belief that social media hastens the demise of democracy, Potter noted that there is also an irony to this critique. Underpinning the emergence of the internet are democratic ideals of freedom of thought, speech, and assembly. Potter posited that a focus on reforming the internet diverts from the refusal to create an equitable society. Failures of economic, social, racial, and sexual equality undermine democracy. Government policies that reflect fairness and economic redistribution could help sustain a truly democratic future.
- In **“The Future of Race”** (March 24, 2022), Michelle Stephens (Rutgers) argued that the future of race rests upon how we engage with its past. Two forces govern the racial order in the United States: white supremacy and anti-blackness. Together, these intersecting dynamics also determine what it means to be human. Racialization entails both the overrepresentation of whiteness and a violent “splitting of the social” that dissociates deeply held cultural beliefs about racial superiority and subordination while ensuring they remain omnipresent guides to action. Our full humanity can only come into view through each other’s eyes, when two or more people mirror images of the racialized self and other in a struggle to withstand the mutual gaze.
- In **“Imagined Futures”** (April 7, 2022), Saya Woolfalk (artist) described the imaginary worlds she creates through art. Her multi-year projects include *No Place*, a fictional future where plant and humans change gender and color and transform into the landscape when they die; *The Empathics*, women who undergo metamorphoses across species and identities; and *ChimaTEK*, a corporation the Empathics establish to sell chimeric products. Woolfalk creates narratives about these complex entities and their worlds as she explores possibilities for futures shaped by cultural hybridity.

- In “**The Future of Health**” (April 21, 2022), Steven Epstein (Northwestern) observed that the idea of “health” is a dominant injunction at a moment when public health is failing. “Health” is also the province of distrusted “experts” who repeatedly measure us against norms. But Epstein argued that we should “avoid a simple, anti-normative stance of resistance.” Rather, we should explore the rich spectrum of norms about health, focusing particularly on the ideas and practices of lay activists. These varied approaches enable us to advocate for a future that incorporates, rather than excludes, marginalized communities and their perspectives on health.

### **IRW Undergraduate Learning Community**

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. During 2021-2022, IRW ran two semester-long learning communities (Fall 2021 and Spring 2022) led by Undergraduate Learning Community Coordinator Sara Perryman. Ms. Perryman is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies at Rutgers-New Brunswick, writing a dissertation on critical university studies and decolonizing composition pedagogies.

#### ***IRW Undergraduate Learning Community on Futures! Another World Is Possible*** *Comments from evaluations*

“I love the sense of community that was fostered by this class and the instructor is the best. Everyone in the class is genuinely so supportive of the work each of us is creating. There is lots of room for discussion, feedback, and idea sharing.”

“I liked being introduced to a new art form that I previously was afraid to approach. This class helped others and me express ourselves in a different way and the fact that the professor kept the room a judgement-free zone was really magnificent.”

“This course was unlike any college class I’ve ever taken, and it was such a relief to feel like I was in such a tight knit community despite Rutgers being such a large and overwhelming University at times. I enjoyed the dinners, class discussions, and the way Sara really allowed the students to shine. Sara did a good job of facilitating discussions without overpowering them.”

Under Sara’s guidance, a total of 36 students from 19 majors, ranging from Cognitive Science and Biomedical Engineering to Philosophy and Classics, participated in IRW’s Learning Community during 2021-2022. Students attended IRW’s Distinguished Lecture Series, gathered to connect and discuss related readings, films, and other classroom materials, and actively engaged in the course Canvas site, as they developed their own research/activist projects related to the theme of “Futures! Another World Is Possible.” These projects culminated in an array of audio, visual, and written work through which students learned about public scholarship and how to tell their research stories through art, sound, and storytelling. Podcasting was the primary focus, and in-class workshops taught research skills, interview and recording techniques, and how to use podcast-editing software.

“Futures! Another World Is Possible” asked students to imagine what lies ahead through a variety of weekly themes, including ecological sustainability, Afrofuturism, gender and sexuality, virtual worldmaking, biohacking, and more. Topics were explored through a range of activities both inside and outside of class. For example, students built tiny terrariums with live plants and found objects as a way to think about green technologies and low-impact living, and attended a film screening of *Dune* after reading about rising seawaters and global clean water shortages. In conjunction with a viewing of the film, *Black Panther*, students visited the Zimmerli Art Museum to see the exhibit, *Angela Davis – Seize the Time*, as a way to think about both the past and future of race. Field trips also included a hike and picnic at Rutgers Gardens, as well as a visit to Wonderspace Art Venue in Philadelphia.

Evaluations described the learning community as a creative and supportive feminist classroom that exposes students to a broad range of topics from multiple perspectives. 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 continued to organize events for the Rutgers Public Engagement Project during 2021-2022. The lifting of the hiring freeze for service providers enabled us to arrange two workshops led by external hosts and one additional workshop led by a Rutgers faculty member.

- On November 4, 2021, Mimi Schwartz led a workshop entitled, “Widening the Lens: How Other Perspectives Enrich Our Own.” Schwartz, the author of *Good Neighbors, Bad Times Revisited* (2021), used writing prompts and discussion to explore the benefits of incorporating multiple points of view in first-person nonfiction.
- On December 2, 2021, Deborah Cohan led a workshop entitled, “Forging a Creative Life as an Academic.” Cohan, a sociologist and author of *Welcome to Wherever We Are: A Memoir of Family, Caregiving, and Redemption* (2020), discussed techniques to unleash creativity in daily life.
- On March 31, 2022, Rutgers journalism professor Chenjerai Kumanyika led a workshop entitled, “From Voice to Power: Using Podcasting and Audio Documentary to Engage, and Amplify Hidden Histories and Contemporary Social Justice Struggles.” Kumanyika, a Peabody Award-winning podcaster for Gimlet Media’s “Uncivil,” discussed best practices for choosing topics, characters, and voices, and for crafting dialogue about gender, race, class, and disability.

### IV. IRW PUBLICATIONS

#### IRW Book Series: *The Feminist Bookshelf*

IRW continues to make progress in developing its new Rutgers University Press book series, *The Feminist Bookshelf: Scholarship for the 21st Century*. The first volume, *The Perils of Populism*, is in

production and has a September 2022 release date. The book is an interdisciplinary collection of essays featuring the work of feminist scholars and activists who were part of IRW's 2017-2018 Distinguished Lecture Series. Contributors include: Nancy Fraser, Amrita Basu, L.A. Kauffman, Sabine Hark, Cynthia Miller-Idriss, and Valentine Moghadam.

The second book in the series, *Feeling Democracy*, is based on presentations from IRW's 2020 spring conference on this topic. This volume will feature essays by Noelle McAfee, Kathryn Abrams, Nermin Allam, Deborah Gould, Ileana Nachescu, Kirin Gupta, and Ciara Torres Spelliscy. We submitted a proposal for this volume in fall 2021 and it was accepted for publication. We anticipate submitting the full manuscript to the press very soon. We also have several essays in hand for two additional volumes: on *Public Catastrophes, Private Losses* (based on IRW's work in the 2018-2019 academic year), and on *Knowing Bodies, Science and the Sex/Gender Distinction*, based on last year's annual theme.

### ***Rejoinder* Journal**

In May 2022, IRW published the seventh issue of its online journal, *Rejoinder*, a forum for feminist, queer, and social justice-inspired work. The theme of this issue was "Trauma," and the issue was guest edited by Bridget Keown, a scholar from the University of Pittsburgh. This issue of *Rejoinder* features essays, poetry and artwork by: Kathy Bruce, Okolo Chinua, Jennifer Griffiths, Emily Irvin, Mahaliah A. Little, Ravy Puth, Celia Vara, and Gail Winbury. IRW Associate Director Sarah Tobias is *Rejoinder's* founding editor and editor-in-chief. The journal is a partnership with The Feminist Art Project. It may be viewed online at: <http://irw.rutgers.edu/rejoinder>.

## **V. OTHER INITIATIVES, NEWS, AND PROGRAMMING**

### **IRW Podcasting Project**

In Fall 2021, IRW launched its new podcasting series, "Mnemosyne." Mnemosyne is the Greek Goddess of memory and IRW's podcasts are designed to preserve feminist pasts by capturing feminist stories. The first season of "Mnemosyne" featured ten, 30-minute conversations about feminist activism and/or interdisciplinary research with members of IRW's community, including: IRW Director Arlene Stein, former IRW Director Nicole R. Fleetwood; former seminar fellows Sahar Aziz (Rutgers Law School), Stacy Klein (English), and Smruthi Balakrishnan (Childhood Studies, Rutgers-Camden); and former IRW Global Scholars Leslye Obiora and Basuli Deb.

Former IRW Administrative Assistant, Andrea Zerpa spearheaded this project along with Ameena Qobrtay, an IWL Leadership Scholar who was an intern at IRW during Spring 2021. Andrea Zerpa first learned to podcast as a member of IRW's undergraduate learning community in Fall 2017.

### **Co-sponsorships**

In another atypical year with far fewer opportunities for co-sponsorship than usual, IRW collaborated with the Center for Women in the Arts and Humanities, the Center for American Women and Politics, the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Department, and the Slavery and Freedom Studies Working Group at the Institute for Global Racial Justice. The Director and Associate Director will continue to cultivate significant relationships and pursue possible collaborations with Rutgers units and entities beyond the university.

## **VI. VISITING SCHOLARS AT IRW**

We were joined in the fall by Dr. Niina Vuolajarvi, a postdoctoral fellow at the Zolberg Institute on Migration and Mobility at The New School of Social Research. Dr. Vuolajarvi now holds an appointment as Assistant Professor in International Migration at The London School of Economics. In addition, two former IRW Global Scholars, Dr. Basuli Deb (Queens College, CUNY/India) and Dr. Leslye Obiora (University of Arizona/Nigeria), joined our seminar on “Futures.” Dr. Obiora attended from Nigeria in the fall, and Dr. Deb joined us online for the entire year.

## **VII. TOWARDS 2022-2023**

IRW’s annual theme for 2022-2023 is “Care.” Care has long been a focus for feminists. In the 1980s, psychologist Carol Gilligan argued that women and girls were more likely to employ an “ethic of care” which made them attentive to the needs of others. Similarly, Sara Ruddick argued that “maternal thinking,” a set of values and ethical judgments derived from the ties between mother and child, should inform feminist models of ethics, politics, and policy.

Another strain in feminist thinking about care foregrounds women’s domestic labor. According to feminist economist Ipek Ilkkaracan, women’s unpaid care work, including household production, and volunteer and community work, encompasses over 16 billion hours per day, or approximately 2 billion full-time jobs. The language of care can obscure the racialized and gendered power relationships that structure domestic labor and are residues of slavery, writes feminist historian Premilla Nadasen. Recently, some have described a “care crisis,” precipitated by the growing pressures on family life, specifically mothers, and exacerbated by the COVID 19 pandemic. This crisis emerges in relation to the high cost of childcare, the shortage of childcare workers and caregivers for elderly and disabled populations, and the absence of a national childcare policy in US.

Care work is essential work. It enables us to raise children and support the sick and disabled. It is the hidden backbone of our economy and our society. While care is necessary for the survival of our families, our communities, and the species, national leaders rarely prioritize care, and many are downright hostile to it. We hope that the School of Arts and Sciences will continue to support our infrastructure and programming as we explore the important issues that our annual theme raises.

<b>IRW Staff 2021-2022</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>Undergraduate Learning Community Coordinator</b> Sara Perryman</p>	<p>At the forefront of feminist research for nearly fifty 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, gender, and sexuality 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>