

Es Hethcox

WGST Capstone 485: *Sexual Violence and Women's Health in Fredericksburg, VA*

Abstract: *A journalistic analysis of intersections of oppression of women in Fredericksburg, VA through the investigation of sexual violence and health crises present in the lives of local women.*

Project description:

This project will examine intersections of oppression that women in Fredericksburg, VA face, such as sexual violence and health crises. With the use of information obtained from organizations specializing in these areas, city courts, and individuals themselves, I will compose a series of news articles varying from investigative, data-driven works to intimate profiles on the individuals behind these issues. I have chosen news writing as my methodology for this project because my goal is to actively investigate and depict the lives of marginalized women in a personal way that only Journalism can provide. Instead of writing a lengthy research paper in the walled confines of the Simpson Library, this project will provide me the chance to conduct real-life investigative work and show the role that Journalism can have in the lives of marginalized people. The field of Journalism is a vital method in the effort of heightening awareness of persons facing discrimination and marginalization. It is through various news outlets-- print newspapers, radio, television, online newspapers, social media-- that marginalized persons are given a platform where they can share their experiences not only with their community, but the community at large as well.

However, even though this is a role that Journalism should play and what I plan to accomplish in this project, it is not always acted out in the field. For years, the prominent voices in the newsroom as well as news writing have been those of one demographic: white males.

Women of different races and economic status have been dismissed and excluded in the one field

that should be bringing them recognition. Journalism is supposed to illuminate important issues in society, and it can play a major role in the lives of marginalized persons if utilized to its full potential. My articles for this course will provide a voice and outlet for marginalized populations in Fredericksburg and those who advocate on their behalf in the areas of sexual violence and women's health resources. I believe that through these articles, I can bring awareness to issues that are in dire need of attention and the women that these issues affect.

It is important to note that while Dr. Mara Scanlon in the English department is the instructor of record and provides the WGST focus for this project, the Journalism element of this project was designed and supervised by Professor Edythe Evans, adjunct professor of Journalism at UMW. With the contributions and supervision of both instructors, this project will not only be fulfilling requirements of a WGST-approved course, but also the requirements of a Journalism-approved course as well.

Important Note: There was a concern that since I will be interviewing members of the community that my project would require Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval in order to begin my project. However, after sending my proposal to the IRB department, they declared my project exempt due to it being a journalism project.

Preparation and Motivation for Project:

My motivation for this project stemmed from my early days as a WGST major. While taking Intro to Women's Studies taught by Professor Kate Haffey in the fall of 2016, I was introduced to many issues women face in contemporary society. I read numerous articles and textbooks that discussed the discrimination women face regarding sexual violence and health crises specifically harming women in their daily lives. I knew that I wanted to focus my capstone project on these two issues, but the idea of Journalism being my method of research did not

occur to me till this current semester. With my interest in the field of Journalism and my hope of obtaining a job in the field upon graduation, I knew I wanted my capstone to include what I am passionate about: giving marginalized persons in society a voice and an outlet to heighten awareness of their situations. I could have chosen to explore a different city or do extensive research on Journalism itself, but I chose Fredericksburg because several things have caught my attention in my readings of current events. For instance, though Fredericksburg prides itself on being a blue city and a center of liberal thought and beliefs, the public record indicates that women here still face considerable challenges regarding the issues of sexual violence and health resources.

My preparation for this project lies in my course studies as well as my active involvement in writing and communication at the university. I have taken numerous WGST electives that have provided me with an academic mindset on how to approach the issues my articles will focus on. The courses that I took allowed me to study extensively the intersections of oppression relating to gender, and I believe they will provide me with a unique mindset as I investigate these issues. A few of the courses that will benefit my investigations and writing are: WGST 101 Intro to Women's Studies, PHIL 220 Feminist Philosophy, ENGL 376ZZ 19th and 20th century British Feminist Novel, AMST 303 American Sexualities, and HIST 300B4 Race and Gender in American Science. These courses all dealt with the complex issues that women have historically faced and still do today in society, and I believe that these issues are prevalent in the city of Fredericksburg.

In addition to my studies for my degree, I am heavily involved in the growing field of Journalism in our university. Last spring, I took Newsgathering (the foundation class for aspiring Journalists) and quickly began writing articles for the school newspaper, the *Blue and Gray*

Press. Last April, I was elected to serve as online editor for the *Blue and Gray Press*, a position I will hold until my graduation this coming spring. With these experiences as well as my position as a student aide for Marty Morrison in University Relations, I am confident in my abilities to investigate and report accurately and clearly the issues stated above.

Goals and Objectives:

- Heighten awareness of women in Fredericksburg who are struggling against modes of oppression and discrimination in their lives
- Showcase organizations in Fredericksburg that provide safety and health resources for women in the area
- Demonstrate the role that the field of journalism has in the the lives of marginalized persons
- Work with different media outlets to publish articles in order to bring more recognition to oppressed women in the area
- Complete a portfolio of articles that reflects an in-depth study of local women and the modes of oppression they face in the city of Fredericksburg
- Gain a deeper understanding of the intersections of oppression present in the lives of women living in the city of Fredericksburg

Reading List: The reading assignments for this course will be a variety of articles, studies, and books that focus on issues of gender and race in the newsroom. Some of the readings focus on how biases regarding gender and race are still present in contemporary reporting, and the measures that journalists should take in order to report accurately and fairly. These articles will provide valuable insight and inform my reporting and writing techniques so that I'm certain my

work is not contributing to a long-standing problem, but rather promoting fairness, accuracy and inclusion.

In addition, some of the readings will focus on how to conduct interviews that focus on difficult subjects (such as sexual assault). The readings will provide me insight on how to ask the kind of thought-provoking, yet sensitive, questions that encourage interview subjects to speak from the heart, a skill that will be useful for several of the assigned articles. While the list may seem short, these readings are just the basis of the extensive reading I will be doing during the semester. The print world is constantly progressing and moving, and more articles and books pertaining to these subjects will emerge in media outlets. I will keep actively researching these subjects and add the new readings to my permanent reading list. In addition to these readings, I will actively peruse national and local news sources and keep abreast of current events happening nationwide as well as locally.

Abbady, Tal. "The Modern Newsroom Is Stuck Behind The Gender And Color Line." *National Public Radio*, National Public Radio, 1 May 2017, www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2017/05/01/52982066/the-modern-newsroom-is-stuck-behind-the-gender-and-colorline.

Green, Kristen. *Something Must Be Done about Prince Edward County: a Family, a Virginia Town, a Civil Rights Battle*. Harper Perennial, 2016.

LaFrance, Adrienne. "I Analyzed a Year of My Reporting for Gender Bias (Again)." *The Atlantic*, Atlantic Media Company, 17 Feb. 2016, www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2016/02/gender-diversity-journalism/463023/

Mencher, Melvin. *News Reporting and Writing*. WCB Brown & Benchmark Publishers, 1994.
(12th edition)

Mullainathan, Sendhil. "Sexism and Shopping: Female Players Get Most of the Odd Questions at the U.S. Open." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 8 Sept. 2017, www.nytimes.com/2017/09/08/upshot/sexism-and-shopping-female-players-get-most-of-the-odd-questions-at-the-us-open.html.

Ordway, Denise-Marie. "Women in News: A Collection of Research." *Journalist's Resource*, 22 Mar. 2017, journalistsresource.org/studies/society/news-media/women-in-news-female-journalists-research.

Pumarlo, Jim. *Bad News and Good Judgment: a Guide to Reporting on Sensitive Issues in a Small-Town Newspaper*. Marion Street Press, 2005.

Symonds, Alexandria. "How to Break a Sexual Harassment Story." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 15 Oct. 2017, www.nytimes.com/2017/10/15/insider/sexual-harassment-weinstein-oreilly.html.

Wihbey, John. "Gender Disparities and Journalism: Research Perspectives." *Journalist's Resource*, 8 June 2015, journalistsresource.org/studies/society/news-media/female-journalists-media-sexism-emerging-trends.

*The two following organizations are dedicated to expanding inclusion and increasing diversity in print news and online. These will be excellent references for me to keep abreast of in case new readings of these topics emerge.

Increasing the diversity of voices on Op-Ed pages:

<https://www.theopedproject.org/>

Intl. watchdog on gender and the media:

<http://whomakesthenews.org/>

Description of Assignments: With my two faculty mentors, I have designed a semester of steady work that will culminate in four separate articles as well as a final portfolio and presentation. While four articles may seem small for a 400 level course, a significant amount of time will be required to produce a well written, accurate piece. Journalists typically spend a notable amount of time contacting sources, conducting interviews, and additional researching that goes with the production of a well researched news piece. With that point in mind, I will begin my research of these articles in the beginning of the semester, so I can give myself ample time to do the research required for these pieces (especially since they cover sensitive topics). In addition to the time that goes into these pieces, each article will be a magazine-length piece, which many times goes over five pages in length. In addition, each of these articles will experience an editing process with the editor approving the publishment, which will require communication via email or phone between myself and the editor.

1. *Out of the shadows, Showcase Piece*- The goal of this assignment is to showcase the main resource for sexual assault survivors of the UMW community: the Talley Center. The Talley Center offers a sexual assault survivors group, which provides UMW students with therapeutic methods to aid them in their healing process. I will interview the two leaders of the group, Melissa Palguta and Catherine Smith about their goals and methods they use to help sexual assault survivors. In addition to showcasing the work the Talley Center does for survivors, I will also investigate the campus's efforts regarding the issue. I can obtain statistics from the FBI's United Crime Reporting and the U.S. Department of Education that provide incident info over a number of years in terms of the scope of the problem. This article will quantify the problem at UMW and on other Virginia campuses, as well as answer questions such as: What resources are available to students to address issues related to sexual assault, and what limitations remain?

2. ***Decades of resistance, Personality Profile-*** This article will focus on a well-known woman in Fredericksburg: Gaye Adegbalola. Adegbalola grew up sitting at Fredericksburg lunch counters and joining in other protests against segregation. As a member of the LGBTQ+ community, she's also worked on behalf of gay rights as well as equality for women. An accomplished folk musician, she has a unique perspective on what it's like to advocate for marginalized populations and Fredericksburg's history in that regard. Adegbalola will be an excellent subject for a feature story providing insight into issues that women in Fredericksburg have faced and are still facing today. Included in this assignment will be a sidebar with comments from other locals – faculty, students, residents, maybe alumni – on what progress has been made on behalf of women's rights and what more remains to be done. Some of them may be among the half million people who marched on Washington in 2017, or the 5 million worldwide, on behalf of women's rights. Those folks could submit their thoughts – no more than 200 words/each – via email to the *Blue & Gray Press*.

3. ***Women: The face of the opioid crisis, Investigative Piece-*** This article will focus on the opioid crisis present in Fredericksburg, part of a national public health emergency. The question I want to pose in this article is: What about women and the opioid epidemic? There are several organizations locally such as the Sunshine Lady House and Project Link at RACSB that try to address substance abuse issues for these women, who are often also in danger of losing their children to the foster care system if they can't get clean. The process of detoxing from a substance is complex and arduous and can run well beyond the 11-month federal timeline parents are held to when it comes to changing the behaviors that brought their children into foster care. Opioid use has now been declared a “public health emergency,” but what does that mean – if anything – to women in the situation who are fighting this addiction? This piece would be

investigative, because I will be researching statistics surrounding this issue and the resources provided for women trying to rehabilitate and keep or reclaim custody of their children.

The two sources below will provide a basis for my investigation.

This PubMed article notes that women are increasingly the face of this epidemic:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28697909>

Here's another interesting facts/figures page from the American Society of Addictive Medicine:

<https://www.asam.org/docs/default-source/advocacy/opioid-addiction-disease-facts-figures.pdf>

4. *The little non-profit with the big job, Feature/Analysis Story*- The Rappahannock Council Against Sexual Assault (RCASA) is the primary provider of services in Fredericksburg for sexual assault survivors. The organization has been around for more than 30 years, and this assignment would be a feature and analysis piece on the nonprofit. Some questions that will be answered in this assignment: What kinds of services are provided? What's still needed? How is it funded? What's the client breakdown (men, women, children)? Can they provide any perspective over the years on what services have been needed vs. provided and whether that's improving?

This article will be impactful since it would be told through the eyes of a real person (or several real people), a volunteer, a staffer and/or a client who would provide a valuable insight into how this group operates and where the gaps are in the system for victims and survivors.

Final Portfolio:

A final portfolio of all completed and revised articles will be the final assignment for this course, along with the presenting of my project at the English, Linguistics, and Communication symposium in the spring. The portfolio will include a 1-3 page introduction discussing my project as a whole, as well as a reflection of how my project deepened my understanding of the merging of Journalism and Women and Gender Studies.

Schedule for assignments: Note that this schedule may vary due to inclement weather or rescheduling interviews with sources. Below are the assigned days that my articles will be due to Professor Evans and Professor Scanlon. The articles will be due no later than 11:59 p.m. on the schedule days. However, actual publication dates will be developed in consultation with the editor of the chosen publication.

- ***Out of the shadows, Showcase Piece- February 2***

- This article will be due **February 2** and published in the *Blue & Gray Press* February 9. The Survivors Group begins a month or two into the semester, and persons cannot join after the first session (due to this being a sensitive subject, adding new members may make current members uneasy with disclosing). With that being said, an article in the beginning of the semester promoting and showcasing this group will serve students well. They will have adequate time to reach the Talley Center and meet with them about joining the group.

- ***Decades of resistance, Personality Profile-March 2***

- March 8 is International Women's Day. Since this falls over spring break, this article will be due **March 2** and will run in the *Blue & Gray Press'* March 15 issue. This provides me ample time during spring break to interview Adegbalola and work on my article before publication.

- ***Women: The face of the opioid crisis, Investigative Piece-March 23***

- Since all of March is National Women's History Month, an article regarding women's health would be timely to publish. In addition, this article will be an investigative piece and will require more time. This way I can begin working on it early in the semester and have a polished piece ready to turn in **March 23**. It

could run in the *Blue & Gray Press*, but the Free-Lance Star has a health section in their paper, and since this article is focused on a local issue they would most likely be interested in publishing this article.

- ***The little non-profit with the big job, Feature/Analysis Story-April 20***
 - April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month and the piece on RCASA will be due **April 20**. For me, this is the most important piece of the project. It is what inspired me to design this capstone, and I wish to have as much time as possible to work on it. Although it is due late April, I will be working on it throughout the semester. I hope to shadow members of RCASA several different times, and interview many sources so I can have various perspectives on the organization and topic I am researching.
- ***Final Portfolio /Presentation: March 14, April 26 and 27***
 - I will present my findings regarding this topic at two symposiums during the semester: The Women's Studies Research Forum (**March 14**) and the English, Linguistics, and Communication Kemp symposium (**April 26 and 27**).

Schedule for conferences: I will meet with Professor Scanlon once every other week and report to her my progress of my articles and my reflections of my weekly readings.

Description of terms of grading:

During this project I will produce no fewer than four well-researched, well-sourced, published articles, in the 1,000 to 1,500-word range, that examine critical health, safety and social issues faced by women in the UMW/Fredericksburg community. Each article will be graded on the following criteria:

- **Explanatory value.** Does the work provide value to the reader in terms of clarifying a problem, identifying solutions and/or educating the public about existing or still-needed services?
- **Context.** Does the work provide readers enough background information to fully appreciate the issue and understand why it should matter to them? Does it explain how they can participate in efforts surrounding this issue?
- **Sourcing.** Does the work rely on a diverse variety of reliable, trustworthy sources, whether human or physical, when it comes to providing key facts as well as personal anecdotes? Are all facts double-checked for accuracy? And are readers exposed to different voices through the use of insightful direct quotes?
- **Mechanics.** Does the work follow AP Style and established grammatical rules? Is it well-written, utilizing active-voice construction and appropriate transitions? Is the lead creative so as to engage the reader? Does the story keep its audience in mind throughout, and does the piece come full-circle?

In addition to published work, my portfolio will also include evidence of community conversations prompted by those articles, including but not limited to letters to the editor and any resulting public forums.

I will also keep a log throughout the semester, tracking hours spent on reading, researching and interviewing sources for these articles, as well as a source list of those interviewed.

The assignments will be weighted as follows:

- *Out of the shadows* (showcase piece), *Decades of resistance* (personality profile) and *Women: The face of the opioid crisis* (investigative piece) will each count as 20 percent of my grade (60 percent total).
- *The little nonprofit with the big job* (feature/analysis) will count toward 30 percent of my grade.
- The final portfolio and presentations will count as 10 percent.

Statement of reflection: This project's investigation and reporting of women in Fredericksburg who face multiple facets of oppression in their lives will more than adequately reflect my understanding of the implications of intersectionality. While some of the persons interviewed for this project are professionals providing help to oppressed persons, a majority of the women in my study are persons actively experiencing modes of oppression. These women come from different ethnic backgrounds, economic status', and sexual orientations. With these different backgrounds comes various different perspectives regarding the issues this project will focus on. These women's standpoints on the issues of sexual violence and women's health resources will be valuable perspectives to showcase in my findings to not only other scholars, but hopefully the Fredericksburg community as well.

In addition, I feel my project reflects my understanding that gender is one of multiple dimensions of identity, difference, power, and oppression through the particular issues that the participants in my study face. For instance, the issues these women are facing are all directly tied to their gender. The women I will be interviewing regarding the opioid crisis face the consequence of having their children taken away from them if they can not rehabilitate. These women are at risk of losing custody of their children, and the father is automatically granted sole

custody of the children. It is solely due to their gender that they are facing this mode of oppression.