

FREE Center

Feminist Research, Education and Engagement

DEPARTMENT OF
WOMEN'S, GENDER AND
SEXUALITY STUDIES

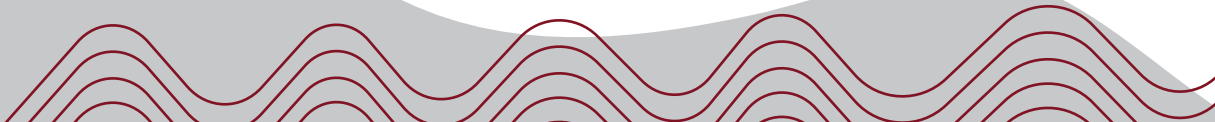
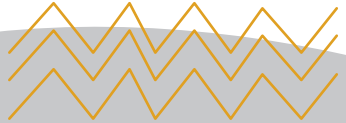
2023-2024 ANNUAL REPORT



trace layer play (tlp) is an arts-based research collective founded and sustained by woman-identifying and woman-identified researchers. Read more about our research and connection clusters on pg. 3.



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES





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Community. Collaboration. Impact.

These are perhaps the best words to describe the inaugural year of the Ohio State Center for Feminist Research, Education and Engagement (FREE Center). What began as a dream among colleagues has transformed into a full-fledged center led by a faculty advisory board and a team of staff that is actively building feminist community across campus and throughout central Ohio.

The FREE Center, housed in the Department of Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies, launched in fall 2023 thanks to a five-year, \$500,000 Good-to-Great Grant from the Office of Academic Affairs. The “Collaborative Dream Session” in November provided an opportunity for faculty to collectively imagine how the FREE Center could best serve the campus and Columbus communities. Feedback from this event spurred the creation and funding of 12 Research and Connection Clusters and provided the foundation from which programming and a series of campus and community events were developed.

The first section of this annual report – “By the Numbers” – provides a broad overview of the impact of the FREE Center during its inaugural year. Our community includes more than 100 feminist scholars across 20 academic departments. We held or co-sponsored 15 campus and community events with more than 300 attendees. Ten percent of our budget – \$10,000 – was allocated to supporting graduate student research.

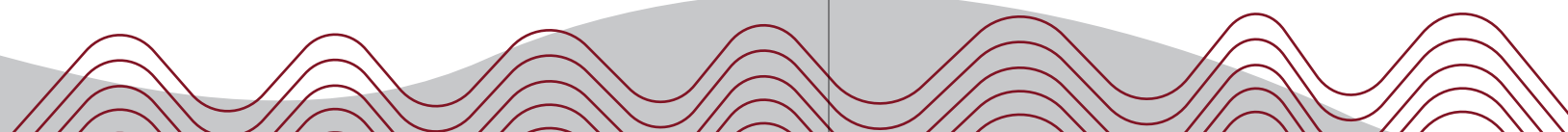
But these numbers only tell part of the story. As you flip through this report, you’ll have the opportunity to read about each of our 12 Research and Connection Clusters. The “FREE Center Feature” section will give you a closer look at the work of Dr. Shameka Poetry Thomas and the Maternal Health and Sickle Cell Disease for Women and Girls with Genetic Conditions Cluster. You’ll read more about our campus and community events, such as the “WTF (What the Feminist) is Happening in Ohio Politics?!” panel discussion that took place April 1.



We’re proud of what we accomplished in year one of the FREE Center, and we’re excited to build upon our momentum. This annual report is part of our efforts to increase our visibility within the campus and Columbus communities, foster connections and continue to build the foundation for sustained, steady growth.

As we work toward emerging as a leader in feminist research, education and engagement, we are grateful for the support of campus and community partners. From the beginning, the FREE Center has been about collective imagination and community building. It’s been a collaborative space of joy, a space where theory meets practice, a space that bridges divides.

Let’s keep dreaming, together.



100+
feminist
scholars

20+
academic
departments

\$10,000
supporting graduate
student research

12
funded Research
and Connection
Clusters

25
hours of
feminist writing
sessions

\$5,000
supporting
community
engagement
initiatives

300+
attendees across
15 campus
and community
events



Latinx Visual Feminist Culture

Latinx Visual Feminist Culture provides space for the Latinx feminist academic community at Ohio State to think about BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) feminist art perceptions. They seek to understand how the narrative aspects of various Latinx visual products, such as comics and graphic novels, challenge notions and understandings of Latinidad in the U.S.

Maternal Health and Sickle Cell Disease for Women and Girls with Genetic Conditions

This cluster holds team meetings to discuss bioethical challenges in cross-cultural perspectives, such as bridging the gap during data analysis and providing health researchers with an opportunity to participate in integrated data analysis training and focus groups.

Reproductive Justice

The Reproductive Justice cluster is made up of Ohio State scholars who wish to spend time in community as a truly interdisciplinary group, learning about each other's reproductive justice-oriented research.

Brain Injury from Violence CARE Alliance

The Brain Injury from Violence CARE Alliance is a network of individuals from various communities, organizations and systems that come together to understand and address brain injury from power-based violence, such as child abuse, gender-based violence, police brutality and human trafficking.



trace layer play (tlp)

trace layer play (tlp) is an arts-based research collective founded and sustained by woman-identifying and woman-identified researchers. Composed of Ohio State graduate students and alumni, the collective cultivates a collaborative, care-centered, non-competitive and non-hierarchical culture.

Progressive Research on Organizational Equity and Learning (PROPEL)

The Progressive Research on Organizational Equity and Learning (PROPEL) cluster is an interdisciplinary assembly of faculty dedicated to conducting research that addresses systemic limitations, failures and challenges faced by Women of Color in academia.

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Feminism in STEM

The Feminism in STEM cluster is a mix of faculty from biology, chemistry and English. The goal of the cluster is to develop conversations around feminism in STEM and other fields where women are still underrepresented and develop actions for the campus community and faculty to bring more women into these fields.

Queer and Trans (of Color) Research Network

Since the deactivation of the Sexuality Studies Program in 2019, Ohio State has not had a university-wide mechanism for bringing together campus members interested in discussing issues of queer sexualities and genders. This research cluster seeks to address this gap by building community.

Moving Toward Equity and Justice: Feminist Lenses to Expand STEM Discipline-Based Education Research

This cluster consists of faculty engaged in equity-oriented discipline-based STEM education research. Feminist Standpoint Theory (FST), feminist epistemologies and feminist methodologies advance equity and excellence in STEM education by problematizing heteronormative structures and expanding concepts of gender that impact how researchers cultivate scholarship in STEM learning environments.

Centering the Margins: An Intersectional Violence Prevention Collective

This cluster seeks to bring together a group of diverse faculty interested in violence prevention to engage with the theoretical framework of intersectionality while creating opportunities to apply intersectional feminist approaches to their research.

Spoken Word Poetry

The purpose of this cluster is to meet with community artists and activists who use spoken word poetry to reduce the psychosocial sequelae of trauma among youth. The goal of this cluster is to strategize with two spoken word artists about how to use their work to reclaim narratives of oppression and reduce the impact of trauma created by government-sponsored policies and practices and foster restorative justice.

Feminist Art Research (F.A.R.)

This cluster was created to help support and uplift work in the Department of Art by visiting artists with a feminist position, with a goal of bringing in feminist artists for studio visits and artist talks that are open to the public. ■

Support the FREE Center

GET INVOLVED

Are you a campus or community member who wants to get involved with the FREE Center? Visit go.osu.edu/freecenter to view a list of upcoming events and initiatives.

Interested in partnering with the FREE Center? Send us an email at free@osu.edu.



Subscribe to the FREE Center listserv by scanning the QR code to the left with your smartphone.

GIVE

Your gift helps build a feminist future.



Make a one-time or monthly gift to the FREE Center today by scanning the QR code to the left with your smartphone.

Are you interested in exploring a variety of giving opportunities? Contact Mario Hess-Winburn at hess-winburn.1@osu.edu.



Reproductive health scholar and bioethicist seeks to transform data collection and research capacity

Ohio State expert hopes wider scientific collaborations will lead to better patient outcomes

By Franny Lazarus, Ohio State News

Collaborations and team science are important values to **Shameka Poetry Thomas**, a global maternal and child health scholar in the Division of Bioethics in the College of Medicine at The Ohio State University. Not just collaborating with other researchers, she said, but patients as well.

“I say we conduct research ‘with,’ not ‘on,’” she said. “We conduct research with patients, not on patients.”

Thomas joined Ohio State after completing several years of postdoctoral sickle cell disease-related research with Black women in the United States and Ghana during fellowships with the National Institutes of Health and Harvard’s School of Public Health. She is now a tenure-track research instructor and provost’s fellow in bioethics, race and health equity.

Sickle cell disease (SCD), a genetic condition that affects the body’s red blood cells, giving them a sickle shape instead of the usual circular shape, affects populations of African descent at much higher rates. SCD not only is a debilitating condition, it can also exacerbate additional health problems such as strokes, eye issues, infections, chronic pain and leg ulcers.

Advancements in SCD treatment have led to options that are helping sickle cell patients live longer, expanding the possibilities of reproductive capacity among women and men. Thomas is specifically examining patient perceptions at this intersection of SCD and maternal-and-child health, such as delayed menstruation cycles among young women. Pregnancy can also trigger sickle cell symptoms, particularly intensifying pain episodes during labor and delivery.

“Imagine labor contractions without anesthesia or an epidural,” she said. “Patients in my research studies have confirmed how sickle cell pain is even worse.”

Medical care is often siloed, Thomas said, which can make the patient’s experience challenging. Practitioners tend to specialize in one field or another.

► Story continues on next page

“But patients with genetic conditions don’t experience these things separately,” she said.

Earlier this spring, Thomas’ Sickle Cell Women and Girls (SWAG) Lab was awarded \$500 from the university’s FREE Center, or the Center for Feminist Research, Education and Engagement. The funds are one of the center’s cluster research grants, which support interdisciplinary work across the campus.

“I think it’s always good to build across disciplines. These funding mechanisms show us how to do that effectively as an institution. When you put money behind it, you put power behind it.”

– Shameka Poetry Thomas

“I think it’s always good to build across disciplines,” Thomas said. “These funding mechanisms show us how to do that effectively as an institution. When you put money behind it, you put power behind it. You said that this matters to our academic environment.”

Mary Thomas (no relation), a faculty member in Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies who serves on the FREE Center advisory board, lauds this research as an ideal project to highlight the benefits of combining a feminist commitment to alleviating suffering with a community-centered methodology. “Black women’s pain is often tragically discounted in medical practice in the U.S., a discouraging factor in the quality of care they receive and a foundation of a patient’s loss of trust with a medical provider,” Mary Thomas said. “This research turns the head on the disregard of Black women’s experiences in health care, showing the power of inviting patients into the research process – not just as data points, but as experts on their own bodies and identities.”

Shameka Thomas aims to use the grant for a panel discussion that explores her data analysis methods. The majority of sickle cell patients are Black. In the United States, Black women are three times more likely to die from a pregnancy-related cause than white women. Now more than ever, accurately recording their lived experiences is crucial, she said.

Thomas hopes to transform the research process by being intentional in her own study designs.

“We invited patients to come code the data with us and analyze the transcripts,” she said. “We want to know if we’re capturing their voices correctly. We extract so much from patients, and we don’t invite them into the research process. [Having their participation] was phenomenal.”

“Everyone needs to be involved. If we only treat one part of the patient, we’re failing the patient.”

Research like this, which incorporates patients and colleagues from other fields, is key to what Thomas and others call “wraparound” care – collaborative care that incorporates different fields to provide holistic treatment for a patient.

“A sickle cell patient can go to a clinic and get treatment, but are we understanding the social experience of that treatment?” she asked. “Are we understanding the social experience of that patient? We need to bring in medical anthropologists, genetic counselors, medical sociologists, bioethicists, hematologists, OBGYNs. Everyone needs to be involved. If we only treat one part of the patient, we’re failing the patient.”

Working across disciplines leads to better outcomes for patients and researchers. It also results in something else, she said.

“It creates joy for everyone involved,” she said. “You don’t hear the word ‘joy’ often in research. I get a lot of fulfillment from the work that I do. When our work is seen and valued, it brings joy.” ■

Community ENGAGEMENT



With a commitment to building a hub for feminist research, education and engagement, the FREE Center spent the first half of 2024 hosting and supporting several unique programs. These included events both on and off campus that allowed the FREE Center to cultivate relationships with new community partners.

Closing Reception for *Abject/Object: Feminism, Art & The Academy*

On March 1, the FREE Center partnered with University Libraries to host the exhibition closing reception of *Abject/Object: Feminism, Art & The Academy*. FREE Center Advisory Board Member Dr. Alison Norris kicked off the event with brief remarks about the center, its mission and upcoming events. The FREE Center and Art and Design Librarian Courtney Hunt were then joined in the gallery by artists Annelise Duque, Brianna Gluszak, Carmen Winant, Dionne Lee, Gina Osterloh and Paloma Martinez-Cruz for a conversation about the potential of art as a site of feminist discourse and exploration.

Columbus Museum of Art Community Conversation

In May, WGSS Professor Dr. Joyce Chen and the FREE Center teamed up with the Columbus Museum of Art and colleagues to host a community conversation about the systemic conventions of gender explored in the exhibitions *Robin F. Williams: We’ve Been Expecting You* and *Marie Laurencin: Sapphic Paris*.

A Love Letter to This Bridge Called My Back

Throughout May and June, the Ohio State Urban Arts Space hosted an exhibition showcasing works from artists featured in *A Love Letter to This Bridge Called My Back*, an edited volume that celebrates the seminal work edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria E. Anzaldúa. The FREE Center was a co-sponsor of the exhibit.



WTF (What the Feminist) is Happening in Ohio Politics?!

On April 1, more than 50 faculty, staff, students and community members attended the FREE Center’s inaugural event, “WTF (What the Feminist) is Happening in Ohio Politics?!” The panel discussion, moderated by Senior Vice Provost for Inclusive Excellence and WGSS Professor Dr. Wendy Smooth, included four experts: Maria Bruno, Executive Director, Ohioans Against Extremism (former Public Policy Director, Equality Ohio); Jessie Hill, Judge Ben C. Green Professor of Law, Case Western Reserve University; Barbara Palmer, Professor of Political Science, Baldwin Wallace University; and Emily Quick Schriver, CEO, The Matriots. The panel discussed a variety of political issues impacting Ohio and beyond, from reproductive justice to gerrymandering to gender-affirming care. ■



During the spring 2024 semester, the FREE Center launched FREE Writes, a writing group for feminist scholars at Ohio State. FREE Writes provides a space for creativity, motivation and encouragement and includes both a faculty section and a graduate student section.

Faculty section

The FREE Writes faculty section held four hybrid writing sessions during the spring semester, with faculty from over a dozen different departments across campus participating. Monthly faculty FREE Writes will continue in fall 2024, along with the addition of FemSem, a weekly in-person cohort designed to give faculty devoted time for their academic writing, as well as for discussions and feminist community-building.

Graduate student section

The FREE Writes graduate student section held three hybrid writing sessions throughout the semester, with an average of eight students attending. In the fall, the FREE Writes graduate student section will hold biweekly sessions from September through November.

Summer Writing Retreat for Graduate Students

In May, the FREE Center hosted the inaugural Summer Writing Retreat for Graduate Students. The two-day event provided an opportunity for graduate students across the university to advance in their feminist research projects. Twenty-two students from a wide range of departments — including sociology, education and social work, to name a few — participated in the event. According to a post-event survey, graduate students found the event to be a valuable use of their time, with many making significant advances in their dissertations or article projects. Given the success of the May event, the FREE Center hosted a second Summer Writing Retreat for Graduate Students in August. Eighteen students attended the August event.



In February, the FREE Center announced the Graduate Small Grants for Feminist Scholarship program, a new funding opportunity for Ohio State graduate students engaged in feminist research and/or creative practice. After receiving more than 50 applications, the FREE Center awarded grants of \$500 to 18 graduate students from eight different departments. The FREE Center plans to continue to fund graduate research in this way during the 2024-2025 academic year.

Spring 2024 Awardees

Lily Mank

School of Environment and Natural Resources

Danielle Amezcua

Department of Sociology

Evangeline Warren

Department of Sociology

Dira Delpuch

Department of Engineering Education

Grace Mongeau

Department of Sociology

Lorna Closeil

Department of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies

Claudia Owusu

Department of English

Alyssa Stover

Department of Dance

Lily Blakely

Department of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies

Victoria Paige

Department of History

Julie Kim

Department of English

Mei-Yu Kuo

Department of Sociology

Sinem Esengen

Department of Sociology

Katherine Roos

Department of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies

Shurouq Ibrahim

Department of Comparative Studies

Jessica Tjiu

Department of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies

Katie Mueller

Department of Sociology

Abigail Corcoran

Department of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies

Meet the TEAM

FACULTY ADVISORY BOARD



Dr. Mytheli Sreenivas

Designated Professor and Chair, Department of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies

Professor, Department of History

Ex-Officio FREE Center Board Member, 2023-2025



Dr. Mary Thomas

Professor, Department of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies

Co-Director, Ohio Prison Education Exchange Project (OPEEP)

FREE Center Board Member, 2023-2025



Dr. Alison Norris

Professor, College of Public Health and College of Medicine

FREE Center Board Member, 2023-2025



Dr. Guisela Latorre

Professor, Department of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies

FREE Center Board Member, 2024-2025



Dr. Lori Patton Davis

Professor, Department of Educational Studies

FREE Center Board Member 2023-2024

STAFF



Laura Hennigan

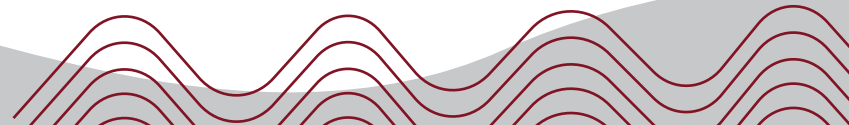
FREE Center Program Coordinator



Alyssa Bedrosian

FREE Center Graduate Associate, Spring/Summer 2024

FREE Center Graduate Student Representative to the Board, 2024-2025





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COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

FREE Center
FEMINIST RESEARCH, EDUCATION
AND ENGAGEMENT

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