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What I'm Doing With My Women's Studies Degree

In its Spring 2007 issue, Ms. posed the question, "What can you do with a women's studies degree?" We received many letters from Ms. readers telling their stories about how they are using or plan to use their women's studies degree. Here is a sampling of the stories we received – read more in the Summer 2007 issue of Ms., on newsstands July 31.

I graduated from California State University, Northridge, with a double major in women's studies and communication studies. Because of my strong background in feminist theory and feminist political rhetoric, I was hired as a teaching associate and assistant debate coach.

Competitive college debate has traditionally been an all-boys club full of the conservative, racist, misogynistic dogma of traditional political discourse. But with my degree in women's studies, I [help design] winning arguments based in feminist theory, and coach the next generation of politicians in the intricacies of feminist struggles.

Rachel Levitt
Northridge, California

I have had great experiences and opportunities afforded by my masters degree in women's studies and public policy earned at George Washington University in 1990. For the last eight years I have been a project/senior program manager at the International Association of Chiefs of Police, responsible for several million dollars of federal funding aimed at enhancing law enforcement's understanding and response to crimes of violence against women. This work has included the publication of three national model policies for law enforcement agencies on the proper investigation of the crimes of sexual assault, domestic violence and domestic violence by police officers. Most recently we created a guidebook and roll-call training video for first responders on the crime of human trafficking, thus influencing the ability of individual officers to recognize and investigate these crimes in a manner that protects the dignity and rights of the victims while holding perpetrators accountable.

Before this, I was employed by the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence as their (only) public policy advocate working to involve the grassroots network of advocates in the passage of the original Violence Against Women Act. I also worked in a nonprofit shelter program creating a transitional housing program for battered women and their children. I also serve on city commissions (as a volunteer) addressing human rights, HIV/AIDS and mental health—all issues related to violence against women.

Thanks for asking this important question. It felt good to reflect on how important it was that I chose, so many years ago, to prioritize women's studies in my life.

Nancy A. Turner
Alexandria, VA

I was one of the first women's studies major graduates at the University of Michigan, but in 1977 there were not many jobs available in fields where I could use my newly minted knowledge. My parents looked distressed; I was frightened. As the years went by and Reagan became president, my prospects seemed to dim even more. I was employed in two hospital settings, performing clerical work and organizing women into unions. When I had my son, I left the paid workforce and chose to stay at home with him for a few years.

Fifteen years ago, when I decided to return to work, I wanted to make use of my

academic and practical women's studies skills. I applied for and was offered my current job, directing a women's resource center at a community college. I have utilized all I learned back in the 1970s ... and living my dream job—to work to empower women.

Arlene J. Frank
Farmington Hills, MI

After graduating from George Washington University in 2003 with a double major in history and women's studies, I was hired by Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska. As a member of her staff, I worked on a number of legislative initiatives, including recognizing Rosie the Riveters, legislation to authorize the Women's History Museum to use a building in Washington, D.C., and the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act.

I worked for Sen. Murkowski for four years before taking a job at a local lobby/litigation firm in Washington, D.C. The client focus is primarily Alaskan, and I am the firm's legislative director.

Edwina Langenberg-Miller
Washington, D.C.

I will be graduating from the University of Minnesota, Duluth, with a double major in women's studies and anthropology. I have been accepted to grad school at New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, in Mesoamerican archeology. I know it sounds like it has nothing to do with women's studies, but the majority of the NMSU's faculty are women and they have a background in Gender Studies. One professor, Dr. Christine Eber, currently has an ongoing project called the Chiapas Connection, which has students go down to Chiapas and become involved with some of the local weaving cooperatives run by indigenous Maya women. My goal at NMSU is to become involved in this project and conduct further research on the gender roles in Mesoamerican societies, especially among the Maya.

Iztla Castaño
Las Cruces, New Mexico

After I graduate from the great, glorious women's studies facility at Stony Brook University in New York, I will be attending law school in Indiana. Women's studies has brought me to a point where I feel that I can give back to people and truly share my knowledge and intelligence, I will be pursuing a J.D. with foci in international human rights and environmental law. I feel that these resources will help me utilize the vast knowledge that I have gained through my amazing university experience and my relationship with feminism.

Katie R. Sheean
Stony Brook, New York

I'm just finishing my sophomore year as a women and gender studies major at Washington University in St. Louis, and I couldn't be happier. However, I get questions all the time about the major, like "What can you do with that?," or, more often, "What is that?" It's troubling to me that a lot of people don't know what the field of women and gender studies is. As for what I plan to do with my degree, the possibilities seem endless. I could go to law school, teach, go into business, etc. Right now, I'm thinking of getting a Ph.D. in professional counseling and developing feminist methods of therapy for eating disorder patients.

Caitlin Gaskell
St. Louis, Missouri

We want to hear from you!

Are you working toward a degree in women's studies or already have one? Please let us know what you are doing with it, or plan to do; we'll include your answers in an upcoming Ms. report. Email us: womensstudies@msmagazine.com

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