# Women’s and Gender Studies in Amsterdam

Dialogue has been edited for clarity.

Stephanie Nawyn (SN): Hi! This is Professor Stephanie Nawyn, the Co-Director of Academic Programs at the Center for Gender in Global Context and I oversee our Women’s and Gender Studies Program. I’m here today with Makailyn Boughton, who is one of our recent graduates who graduated with a minor in Women and Gender Studies. I asked Makailyn to come talk with me today because I wanted to find out more about her experience as a minor. I also think there’s misconceptions out there that Women and Gender Studies is not a useful major or minor and that it’s not a useful thing to study. However, Makailyn’s story illustrates that this is an interesting topic to study that can lead you into opportunities you hadn’t anticipated when you first came to MSU. Makailyn, tell me why you decided to minor in Women’s and Gender Studies?

Makailyn Boughton (MB): I decided to minor in Women’s and Gender Studies after taking your course, Stephanie, on sex and gender: SOC216. I loved the material and found coming to class ever day to be very enjoyable and helped me find my passion for the subject. My major was Human Capitol and Society which is a sociology version of human resources and management which is what I’m going into after graduation! I felt that being informed on gender and sexuality issues could only help me in the future in my life and to be a more inclusive human resources professional.

SN: That’s great! Tell me about some particularly interesting or pivotal experiences you had as a Women’s and Gender Studies minor at MSU.

MB: The first thing that comes to mind is the Amsterdam study abroad program I went on through my minor. We spent about a month to a month-and-a-half in Amsterdam and also went into Brussels in Belgium. This program was one of the most challenging things I did in my academic career, but also, I learned so much not only from the program but from the many different types of people on the trip and from being in a new city with a very different culture than I was used to. This pushed my comfort zone and even what I understood about the basics of sexuality and gender. It took my understanding of feminism and sex and gender studies to a whole new level which I could only get from having gone abroad and being in a different culture. The Amsterdam study abroad program is one thing I think has been super beneficial for the program, but also more generally, the Women and Gender Studies program gives you the opportunity to embrace new cultures both abroad and in the classroom with classes that stress multiculturalism and inclusive feminisms.

SN: I’m so glad you had all those great experiences! Tell me about what you’re doing now that you’ve graduated.

MB: I’m starting a human resources rotational program and for the first year I’ll be working in university recruiting which means I’ll be recruiting top talent from MSU, big ten schools, and other big universities around the country. One of the things I talked about in my interview for this job was my Women and Gender Studies minor and how it’s influenced my goals to increase diversity not only through the bottom level of an organization but also through leadership which is something I don’t think I’d be passionate about without having taken the courses I did and learning about the inequalities that exist.

SN: Do you think that your experiences as a Women and Gender Studies minor made you a more attractive candidate for your employer?

MB: I think so. Also, in all of my interviews, not just the one that got me my current job, I’ve talked about my multiple study abroad experiences. It surprised me that these international experiences and their challenges were almost more attractive to employers than my previous work experience.

SN: How do you think you’re going to use your education you got here at MSU and from going abroad in your new job?

MB: One way I think is simply starting from my perspective. I bring a unique perspective from the classes I’ve taken and the interested I’ve pursued from my Women’s and Gender Studies minor. For example, something as small as suggesting that we donate to charity like It’s On Us that combats sexual assault on college campuses or to a program that gets girls involved and interested in STEM may be something that someone who wasn’t a minor wouldn’t think of. I try to bring my minor into my job in lots of ways both in these small examples and throughout how I carry myself. I also bring my study abroad experiences with me as well. If I ever go abroad for work, I feel way more ready than if I hadn’t studied internationally in college. I also feel more equipped to interact with multiple cultures and ideas of thought. I don’t think Women’s and Gender Studies are ever without a debate or difference of opinion, so taking these courses you may not always see eye-to-eye with someone but you’re able to talk through those differences and hear their perspective in a respectful manner. This is an extremely beneficial skill to have in today’s society.

SN: That’s great. What would you say to a brand-new student starting at MSU this fall and what advice would you give them about starting to study Women’s and Gender Studies?

MB: I would definitely say to give the program serious thought. At MSU, I completed two minors, graduated in four years, and only took 10 credits my second semester senior year. So, it’s definitely doable to add the minor without taking extra time. Also, every degree includes elective credits which you can use to get the minor. The Women’s and Gender Studies minor is also beneficial because there are a lot of misconceptions about what it means to be a gendered person and broadly about sexuality. I think being educated on these subjects and comfortable talking about them is really beneficial in the long run, no matter your degree or career direction. Also, whether or not you agree with everything you learn in a Women’s Studies course, having different perspectives is something you’ll definitely use in your future and just being a more inclusive person is good — it’s also the Spartan way!

SN: It is! I couldn’t have said it better myself! Thank you so much Makailyn for your time and your perspective and for sharing it with me. For those of you listening, if you want more information about the Women’s and Gender Studies Program, both our major and our minors in Women’s and Gender Studies and LGBT and Sexuality Studies, you can visit [www.gencen.isp.msu.edu](http://www.gencen.isp.msu.edu) or email gencen@msu.edu. Thank you for listening, thank you so much Makailyn, and best of luck in your future endeavors.

MB: Thank you for having me!