



NWSA Statement on COVID-19

As the nation's and world's attention is focused on how to contain COVID-19, protect our communities, and care for the sick, NWSA have been deeply troubled by the impact this crisis, which has exacerbated the inequalities that structure our society, has had on our membership and the broader constituencies that we represent.

COVID-19 intersects with a number of other inequalities and crises facing our world today: from precarious employment to lack of access to health care to a growing refugee population to people held in cages and prisons, to name just a few. This virus will have a disproportionate impact on those with vulnerable immune systems and those with a vulnerable political, economic, and social status. The questions of truth, transparency, social responsibility, and accountability that undergird the growing panic around COVID-19 makes our work as feminist and gender studies scholars committed to social justice even more important.

We have been considering how best to serve the feminist, women's, gender, and sexuality studies communities in light of the spread of COVID-19. In addition to our intellectual work that can help us understand the impact of this crisis, this moment has generated questions about how to make academic conferences more accessible. We believe that in-person meetings are vitally important. Our gatherings are a space where we can create community, talk informally, and see one another in our fullness, not just through the medium of text or social media. For many people, being at the NWSA Annual Conference is rejuvenating in a political world where our professional and political work doesn't always feel valued and recognized, where we have to fight to maintain the ground we have, and where social isolation too often translates into social marginalization.

At the same time, it is increasingly clear that conferences and other in-person gatherings need to adapt to a rapidly changing world. International travelers encounter travel bans or obstacles obtaining visas. Some people are employed by institutions that will not allow them to travel to certain locations. Individuals with care responsibilities find overnight trips burdensome or impossible. People with limited or no research budgets but want desperately to be a part of the NWSA community are either unable to come or end up stretching personal funds to make the trip. Some people are foregoing travel for ethical reasons related to climate change. People encountering physical accessibility barriers find travel difficult or insurmountable. Those with vulnerable immune systems are concerned about exposure to communicable diseases. In light of travel hurdles, climate change, and other challenges, it is imperative that we grapple with whether it is

necessary to insist that presenters be physically present to be a recognized participant. Are in-person meetings the only way we can engage with one another? What alternatives can we create?

Our November conference is still on and our review process is underway. But we are considering ways that NWSA can adapt and grow at this critical juncture. We intend, in the near future, to create options for people to participate in the NWSA Annual Conference without having to be physically present. It will require long-term planning, but we hope to pilot a few sessions this fall. This is a time of deep uncertainty but what is certain is that NWSA will continue to draw upon our traditions of community building, mutual aid, and feminist solidarities while remaining attuned to issues of justice and social change as we imagine the future for our 2020 conference. We understand that timely information is important and we will stay in close communication with our members and other constituents/supporters as we evaluate the role that this pandemic will play in shaping our Fall 2020 conference.

Stay tuned! In the meantime, please take care of yourselves and the people around you.

Sincerely,
Premilla Nadasen
President, NWSA (2018–2020)

March 2020