







In celebration of Women's History Month 2022, Jessica Simmons, senior graduate and intern in the Office of Marketing and Communications, interviewed Barton's female faculty, staff, and students to share their challenges and insights about their roles as women. HERstory features individual women and shares their personal stories of their proudest moments being women.



Yvette Richardson



***What makes you unique?***

“I like simple things. I like to think I’m non-judgmental and I have creativity. It’s my creativity that sees what can be done; sees about ways in which people can come together to help each other do things differently beyond what our system in society has already defined. Respecting other people. I invite women to come into my space. Sometimes women can look at each other differently because each woman is powerful and unique. That is empowering. We need spaces for each other.”

***What makes you feel proud to be a woman?***

“I feel proud as a woman in that I’m able to carry life and give life. That’s powerful. Women are more nurtur ing. I can nurture people, whether or not they’re my biological children. Nurturing is an innate characteristic that I have that allows me to help, support, feed other than myself. I’m proud of that as a woman. I have a voice and a perspective that men don’t have.”

***What are the moments you celebrate as a woman?***

“As a woman, I celebrate being a mother, a grandmother, a sister; and all of those roles. I can’t separate myself from those spaces. Being able to be independent and take care of myself because God’s taking care of me. I also celebrate finding my voice. I’m not afraid of things that people don’t like to talk about. Faced with fear, I found the courage to push past the fear to go after something I’ve never done. If I allowed the fear to dictate my actions, there would be things not done. Things like buying a motorcycle. At some point in my life, making the move from New York to North Carolina and all the apprehension behind it. I had to push past those fears, such as making different career moves.”

***What are the different roles you have as a woman?***

“All the roles are synthesized together because of whom I see myself to be. My role as a mother. With my role as an assistant professor, what comes with that is being a teacher and content expert. One thing I tell my students is that I am not here to just be your

professor. I invite you to be a thought partner with your peers so that we can learn from each other. I’m also a role model and a mentor to respect others’ opinions and thoughts. I’m also an advisor and a counselor for advice outside of the classroom.”

***What are some defining moments you’ve had as a woman?***

“When I graduated with my bachelor’s degree, I was the second woman and person in my immediate family to receive an educational degree. It was an achievement for me because I was an adult learner and it took me some time to finish that journey while being a full-time worker, mother, and wife. I wore all of these hats, and yet I did it, and I did it at the top of my class.”

***What does HERstory mean to you?***

“I think it’s important for us to understand women and the stories we have. Understand the common joys, challenges, and struggles. I can be challenged by an opportunity to grow in some areas. I think history also provides other women that understanding; of the capabilities, the potential that we have as women. Society doesn’t dictate what we do or where we go. We have the freedom to do things the way they work for us. The ability to show up in the skin, hair that feels good to us. I think that when we hear collective stories about women, it is some type of empowerment, learning, and connection that gives us power and inspiration.”

***Share a women’s empowerment moment that inspired you.***

“Moments with my friends just to talk and share our empowering moments. I think we must consider that the spaces we have and create for ourselves are also empowering, and it shows progress.”

***What would you change about the assumptions made by men of women?***

“I would change the assumption that we’re limited in our ability to think and do. Those gender roles say I shouldn’t be working. When we look and see the gender roles in other countries where women don’t have the same rights, we do and see how blessed we are that we have the opportunities. The idea is that a man’s work is better than my work, so if anybody’s going to make a sacrifice around a work schedule, it’s going to be because I’m a mom, and that’s what moms do. The assumption is that women are more emotional because men are emotional too. They just display it in different ways. The lack of respect I see and hear in media. We have songs that call women out by terrible names. We have too many videos that sexualize women.”

***Yvette M. Richardson*** earned her Bachelor of Social Work degree from Shaw University and her Master of Social Work degree from East Carolina University. She holds a Clinical Social Work and School Social Worker license. Prior to joining Barton, she worked as a school social worker for several years in Halifax and Nash counties. Richardson also offers community-based mental health assistance in Nash and Edgecombe counties. She has served as a part-time adjunct instructor at Barton College and East Carolina University for several years. Her passion and main areas of research are child trauma; resiliency; community crisis response and mental health; school social work; and diversity, equity, and inclusion.

***What makes you unique?***

Not to say people haven't gone through loss, but I feel like being 22, I've lost a lot of people to different things. So with that, I have a bigger capacity for empathy. I get along with all generations - My great aunt is in her 70s, and with my mother having cancer, my aunt would always be in the hospital so I would be with my aunt. I also get along well with people my own age or my adopted parents who were older than my actual birth mother was. I think that I'm comfortable with all ages where I know some people have a hard time doing. Everyone doesn't get along with everyone but I can understand other people's struggles and help them out because I know people who have lost someone close to them- I know not all experiences are the same and I don't know exactly what you're going through, but I can sort of know how you're feeling.

***What makes you feel proud to be a woman?***

I think what makes me feel proud to be a woman is watching other women, appreciating other women, and seeing how they handle the world can just be inspiring. I think that when you meet certain women, you want to imitate them in a way and it could also make you who you are. Not in a way that'll make you change your whole personality, but in a way where you're like, 'Damn. That woman is a boss. What is she doing to be a boss like that?' and you tell yourself, 'well if she can do that, I can do it too'.

***What are some defining moments for you as a woman?***

[One of Kerri's defining moments is rejecting society's expectations of body hair whether it be on your legs or head.] I remember being in 5th grade and getting made fun of because I had leg hair. That's like what women have to deal with - that standard of 'women have to be like this to be desired or to be respected'. I also think back to when I shaved my head in high school in honor of my birth mother having cancer who passed away and for a family friend who my adopted mom and I visited in the hospital. She was worried about shaving her head because she was about to have surgery so I did it with her and ended up surprising her. But seeing the comments I got from that such as, 'oh you're not as attractive as you were before because you don't have hair' or being called a lesbian because I had short hair. So kind of dealing with those things and comments of being valued by my hair.

***What are the many roles you have as a woman?***

[Kerri's roles are being a sister, the youngest daughter in her family, a role model for her nieces, best friend, and other underclassman girls on campus. In an academic setting, her roles are assistant stage manager for Barton theatre, treasurer for the Justice League, and president of Christ+.]

***Share a women's empowerment moment that inspired you.***

It's my mom being a minister. That's not something that's common. It's more common

nowadays having women as ministers depending on your religion or denomination. Growing up, I was proud of her and empowered to see her not be afraid to do what other people did. She definitely had people who did not appreciate her being a woman even at the churches she ministered at, but she knew what she wanted to do since she was 15 and she did it. She wasn't discouraged to be a minister. I know that in the classes she took, she was the only woman there. When she was getting her doctorate and ordained she was one of few to make it.

***What does Women's History (HERstory) mean to you?***

I like to think that having a collection of different people's views on a similar topic is always interesting and educational. It kind of breaks the stereotype of women having to be a certain type of way because of how different women are brought up with their own challenges; or just any challenge we women have just for having a vagina. I feel like this teaches boys and men something but it also could even be just a powerful moment for the women to relate to. For example, a woman might say, 'Oh I thought that was just a me thing' when all these other women have experienced the very same thing. [Women's HERstory,] could just be a way for women to connect and see that together, we do have some of the same struggles.

***What things do you strive for as a woman?***

[Kerri strives for making the world a better place and by doing so, she's doing her part which is to call things out as are. If they're wrong then Kerri will call it out and she's going to correct them. She is also trying to be a criminal prosecutor.] I definitely want my family to be proud of me. From my birth family, I'm the first person to go to college. Right now I really want to help out in the Justice League as well. One thing the Justice League is always doing on campus is striving to stand up for other people and not just correct but point out injustices. One thing that I want to do while I grow older, for example to be 30, is to pave the way to make it easier for when my nieces and even nephews turn 30 and not have them be in such a difficult world. I want the world to be a safer place for women. Things that we learned at such a young age to help protect ourselves, I want the world to get to a point where my nieces don't have to worry about that as much. I'm going to the criminal justice world so I want to make sure that I'm voting for the right laws and even protesting the wrong or unfair ones.

I strive to be more open, and a good friend. I want my friends to always have a good time, but I also want to make sure that they're taken care of. I strive to be a good daughter and make my family proud. I strive to have a good work ethic and even validation. Growing up I was kind of an outcast with what I had going on at home so I didn't make friends so easily. But as I got older I did. Even though I got more out of my comfort zone, I still struggled to be that secure little girl that had friends so I just have the validation that I'm doing good and my best.





Kerri Kinard





Alexis Lakey



***What makes you unique?***

If anything, I'd say it's probably my ability to be accepting of anybody. I'm very understanding; I try to see everything from other people's point of view and not just immediately go to, 'I don't understand this so I'm not going to try to'. So if any friends have an issue or they just want to rant to me then I'll listen to anything. I just try to be very open-minded with everybody no matter what.

***What makes you feel proud to be a woman?***

Probably other women because of just how they can empower each other. Just being around my friends and hearing them say, 'you go girl!' every time makes me so happy because I'm always like, 'yeah! I'm going!' ; it's just the pride we have for each other, especially while I'm swimming.

***What are the moments that you celebrate as a woman?***

If another female is excited about something I always try to match their excitement. Of course, I'm like that with anybody, but I just get proud of them for what they're proud of themselves for.

***What are some defining moments for you as a woman?***

Instantly one moment that I remember was when I was at this practice a few years back, with my club team. I had just joined this new team and it was with an old coach that I knew for a while. So a bunch of the male swimmers were not going the best times they were supposed to be and I was beating them over and over again. Of course, it was hyping me up a lot, but our coach was like, 'guys, you're letting this girl bet you right now? She should at least be tied with you. Come on, pick it up. You're letting a girl beat you,' and that boosted my confidence tenfold.

***What are the many roles you have as a woman?***

The first thing that comes to mind is being the mom friend of the group that everyone wants to look up to; being someone that you can go to and being very much that person I can be. You can come to me even when you aren't sad because I'm fun to hang out with. I will be there no matter what. If we're happy or if we're sad or angry. Whatever anybody needs, I'll be there. I definitely try to be there as much as possible. I try to make everything as fun as possible for my friends and even the little kids that I coach. With all my roles, I try to keep everything tied together, I try to be myself through everything. If it gets hard, for example in swimming, I try to remember that everything

gets hard and I try to remember what I tell my friends: keep pushing, keep your head up, keep moving forward.

***What does Women's History (HERstory) mean to you?***

Empowerment. Female empowerment is definitely important. Throughout history, we know that all stories in history can be twisted and turned around, and lied about. But knowing what intentions females have behind their focuses and views and seeing them keep reaching for things they want despite being constantly being pushed back always just does something for me. We still have the power to push them back.

***What things do you strive for as a woman?***

Being who I wanted to be when I was a kid. I wanted to be someone whom others could look up to no matter the situation. I wanted to be someone you could easily talk to and just be open and accepting to anybody because everybody needs a person like that. Everyone gets angry and everyone makes mistakes and it's important to handle those situations with care because it's a sensitive topic for others.

***Share a women's empowerment moment that inspired you.***

Just whenever I see women step up on stage to get an award. Like during the Olympics where I saw some of my favorite female athletes like Katie Ledecky step up there and talk about how proud they are of all the things that they accomplished because of the family members who've supported them constantly, friends who have been there, coaches and the people who have helped them push through no matter what.

***How do you succeed in a male-dominated environment?***

It's difficult. For swimming, we're very separate from the men but I do try and use the fact that we practice together to the best of my ability. I try to race them as much as possible along with my competitors because I don't want it to be that just because they are men that they automatically are going to be better than I am because it's very viewed that way. Of course, we see it in the Olympics and in sports that men typically tend to have better scoring, timing, and all that. But it doesn't necessarily mean that we're not as good as me because we're pushing and trying, it's just how our bodies are made. We're at a disadvantage but that's okay. It is just the fact that when we keep pushing, we prove that we're strong.

***What makes you feel proud to be a woman?***

I think one of the things is that women are really responsible for life in general. I think that without women, life will cease to exist. What makes me feel proud to not only be just a woman, but a Black woman, I think that naturally we're presented with challenges so instead of looking at it from a vulnerable perspective and treating myself as a victim or assuming that automatically I'm deemed as weak. Because I'm a woman and because I'm a Black woman, I take it as an area of opportunity. I take it on as a challenge and I think that it's just really important how I live my life and how I showcase my life being a woman and a woman of color.

***What are the moments that you celebrate as a woman?***

Being a woman. I think women are very influential in general and that people tend to take women's perspectives and really like, cherish them more. I think it's just because if you look back in time, a lot of people's influence on people in their life are women like your mom or your grandma. I was a sister at a time so I think that people tend to lean on women the most for guidance.

***What are some defining moments for you as a woman?***

Graduating from college was one of the highlights of my life. It was one of my biggest accomplishments because there were a lot of odds stacked against me: one: being a woman and woman of color and two: I was the first in my family to graduate. So the women in my family are kind of the foundation of my family so my mom was a single mom of three children. I'm the oldest and I have two brothers; so I think that my mom raising us by herself without our father in the picture showcased a strong woman and I think that I kind of took on that responsibility in my family. I'm being a strong woman because I have two younger brothers who look up to me and I'm being the person who took on the role- like I said being the first person to graduate college- I think really was an accomplishment for me as a woman and then two: in my career so I climbed the ladder pretty quickly in my industry. I was pretty young when I took on the role of director. I was the youngest at the time and had over 100 accounts accessed around the nation so that was a pretty proud moment for me. I did it at the age of 26. It was a challenge but I think that I just face it head on. I knew that there were a lot of people looking up to me, so I had no choice but to be successful. I had a lot to prove not just for myself but for the people looking up to me too.

***What are the many roles you have as a woman?***

As a woman I am a sister; I have two younger brothers. Back home before taking on this role and moving to NC I did a lot of mentoring things at my church so I helped with youth groups and I was also a praise dancer. There were a lot of young girls that I mentored in that group. Currently, I'm the food service director so I have a lot of people under me. I have a marketing intern and office manager who are both young women. These are my roles now because I'd rather be great in a few things than be good in a lot of things.

***What does Women's History (HERstory) mean to you?***

When I think about history, I never really thought about it literally says 'his story' and now as women are being showcased, it's interesting to hear 'her story' and I like it. It's important; I think for a lot of points in history women were kind of - it seemed like women's opinion didn't matter. If you look back in history, men cared for the family which is ironic because women actually gaffe the family life. But it seemed like only men's opinions mattered like when only men could vote, go into service or work in factories. I think even being a professional in my career it's kind of iconic because for a long time men were the ones who had to leave the house, have these career moments and be showcased in the job aspect or things and now it's taken a turn. For example, women aren't only for producing children or upkeep their households, women can do that and also be successful in their careers and be the person that carries forth their families.

***What things do you strive for as a woman?***

As a woman, I strive to be influential in general. I think that the way you live your life and showcase it is very important because you don't know you are watching you and you don't know at what point something you did or said changed someone's life, or inspired someone else to keep pushing forward, change their career path, or continue their education.

***Share a women's empowerment moment that inspired you.***

The empowerment moments that inspire me are from my grandma. So my mom had children when she was very young. She had me when she was 21 and I think that a lot of times we'll see grandmothers that have helped mothers with their children whether they're young mothers or mothers who are single and don't have that other person and I think a lot of times it ends up being the grandmothers that step in and kind of help them help their children then help their grandchildren. So I would say that overall my grandma has literally been the rock of our family.





Tranisha Anderson





Maureen O'Neill



***What makes you unique?***

Part of my job is to find in students what's unique to them so that they can make work that reflects their genuine interests as artists. I'm at an age now, when I don't worry or concern myself about being unique. I try to be authentic, real, and true to help my students so that they can do work that is potentially unique because it's theirs.

***What makes you feel proud to be a woman?***

As a woman, I feel proud of being able to conceive and give birth to my daughter, Mary Marshall Martin. I didn't think I was going to have a child, but I had her when I was 35. She's 19 years old now. My mother was the greatest role model for many reasons. She had 11 children, and I was the youngest. I love being a woman, but I think that things that are considered more feminine are in both sexes; men have it too. It is innate for women to have qualities like being intuitive, sensible, compassionate, nurturing – which men have, too.

***What are the moments that you celebrate as a woman?***

I think I celebrate each day that arrives. It's another opportunity to do my work and especially work with students. It's incredibly inspiring. I love celebrating young women and women who want to go into the arts, and I get that opportunity here to nurture, mentor, and help. I like to celebrate the students—to me, that is just the best thing.

***What are some defining moments for you as a woman?***

I was the first female of my siblings to get an advanced degree. My parents did not attend college and, as a first-generation graduate, I am proud of my completion of my master's degree. I'm proud of my career. As a teacher, I'm most proud of the relationships that I have with students, former and current, with my colleagues, other artists, and with my family. Other defining moments included completing my education and being able to recognize in college that I wanted to be a serious artist, the help I received from mentors and teachers, and my becoming a mother and having my daughter. That changed my life forever, getting married and making that commitment.

***What are the many roles you have as a woman?***

Being a mother, a daughter, and a teacher. Aside from teaching painting and drawing classes, I am the Director of the Barton Art Galleries, and I run the Artist-in-Residence program. I am also the coordinator for the ArtWorks Cohort

and help the Barton Art Galleries' interns. Every day, I am grateful for these roles that I have. Some roles take over and dominate more than others. For example, as my daughter is in college now, my role as her mother is shifting more; it is definitely different from what it was 10 years ago. We all have intense and complicated lives, and I think the thing about my roles is that I try to see it all as what I do.

***What does Women's History (HERstory) mean to you?***

I think that every month and day should be a celebration for women. The world wouldn't be here if it weren't for all the stuff that women do. March shouldn't be the only month, it should be today, yesterday, and every day. It makes me think about my mother and about the other women who have been incredible mentors to me in my life.

***What things do you strive for as a woman?***

I don't strive for perfection anymore like I used to. I think that a lot of women have that thing that happens where you think you have to do everything perfectly: be perfect, act perfect, work perfectly, all that kind of stuff. I think that letting go of the idea of perfection is necessary. I strive for authenticity. I strive to have a passionate presence and make artwork that is true and real. I strive for meaning, and I try my best to be present. Because I know every day is a gift and full of opportunities. I always remind myself of that. So, I want to have that role here at Barton for the students. The moment that things happen in the classroom and the experience of seeing the artwork in the galleries or listening to a lecture—there are so many moments that can change your life, so I strive to be present.

***Share a woman's empowerment moment that inspired you.***

It always comes back to my mother. She passed away a few years ago. The older I get, the more I think about her and all the challenges that she faced having 11 children. When she was working two jobs, she encouraged us to get an education, to have dreams and goals every time. I always think about how she returned home tired from work, she would still make us dinner or read the papers that I was working on, despite her busy schedule, she would still come to basketball games at night after working all day. She had the grace to just smile and love us, even though we were completely problematic a lot of times. My mother was beautiful and extraordinary. She was my hero. When I think about Women's History, there are all of these prominent women who have done such great things, but we all have ones who have done the most extraordinary things. A lot of times, it's those women who are closest to us, like our mothers, grandmothers, and sisters.

***What makes you unique?***

I was born in China and adopted by two American parents. As a swimmer athlete for many years. In 2021, I finally retired from swimming. While working as an intern in a cardio rehab, I meet with COPD and heart patients. It is an opportunity to meet different people and learn their life stories. I can have thought-provoking conversations with people and get to know them personally.

***What makes you feel proud to be a woman?***

Being strong, brave, and courageous are the proudest moments of being a woman. I have met a lot of mentors that have shaped my values and personality. The mother that gave birth and the mother who raised me are also influential to me.

***What are the moments that you celebrate as a woman?***

Every day I celebrate women. We recognize milestones that women have accomplished, for example, women's right to vote for their own life choices. As a lesbian, I appreciate women who do not romanticize womanhood and equate to gender-associated biases in viewing women as these beautiful creatures of the earth.

***What are some defining moments for you as a woman?***

I've defined myself by swimming. As athletes, my team and I celebrate wins and championships. Feminism is also defining. It has become more popular. It is important to see women generating big ideas in a domineering male society, and I like to say that I contribute to those bright ideas.

***What are the many roles you have as a woman?***

I am a lover not limited to a romantic definition. I am a daughter, granddaughter, mentor, teacher, and friend. While I may be retired, I am still an athlete and see myself as one because of the many friendships in my life and swimming has been a part of my life for so long.

***What does Women's History (HerStory) mean to you?***

It means everything. Commemorating Women's History Month shows women are worth celebrating. We deserve that respect.

***What things do you strive for as a woman?***

To strive to be the unique and authentic person I can be. I also strive for good grades. I am a perfectionist and reflective. I strive to be who I am and whatever I can do.

***Share a women's empowerment moment that inspired you.***

Most of the things that inspire me are LGBT+ movements and PRIDE rights. Everyone believes that there is just male and female, which is the only thing that exists, but I am one of those people with the LGBT+ community. There's not just male and female. You can be whoever you want to be and that is the thing I want women and everyone to aim for: to be authentically themselves.

My good friend, Claudia [Capellades Escolano], is another great inspiring woman. She believes in the individual's uniqueness in the way they express themselves through fashion, no matter what gender they may be. She and I didn't want to wear dresses and makeup, so we explored men's clothing. We wear clothes that feel the most comfortable and look the best to us.





Kaylee Davis





Jessica Simmons



## *About the Author*

Jessica Fatima Simmons is a 2022 graduate student of Barton that studied mass communication with a concentration in journalism and photography. Jessica has earned her Bachelor's degree of Science in Mass Communication. At Barton, she was involved in several clubs and organizations, as well as work study jobs such as being President of student advocacy club, The Justice League, a resident assistant, stage manager for Theatre at Barton, staff writer of student newspaper, The Collegiate, and member of both Black Student Union and Blue Flame. After college, Jessica plans to write for her local newspaper while building her photography business.

## *The Process*

This project lasted for nearly two months. In this project, I was able to showcase all of my skills such as photography, editing, graphic design, journalism, and campaigning under the Office of Marketing and Communication. In determining my participants, I originally had a limit of 10 women. However, after interviewing each person, I felt inspired to talk to more, resulting in 16 women total. I looked for women of all different backgrounds whether it be race, position, age, and personality. Instead of using women that I already knew, I looked for women that I never talked to. For each portrait, I traveled around the Barton campus scouting for locations to place my participants, and posed each one in a way that represented happiness and confidence. Technically speaking, I used the Canon EOS 60D for pictures, and edited the images in Adobe Photoshop. After edits, I used Adobe InDesign to map out each page of the book. For printing, I used three 13 x 19 double-sided semi-gloss paper and cut them in half for a smaller size. In binding, I followed the Japanese stab binding technique and sewed the pages together by hand.

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