

Congratulations Dr. Charlotte O'Kelly!



COLLECTED TESTIMONIALS
AND WELL-WISHES FOR DR.
CHARLOTTE O'KELLY UPON HER
RETIREMENT FROM
PROVIDENCE COLLEGE

Many thanks to the Women's and Gender
Studies, Sociology & Anthropology, and Black
Studies students, alumni, and faculty that
contributed to this compilation of tributes!

Dear Professor O'Kelly,

Congratulations on your retirement. I had a class with you in my sophomore year in 1987. Thank you for being so supportive. I was in awe of you and you truly inspired me. You are a strong and amazing woman and have paved the way for so many women by your strength, contributions and encouragement!

Best wishes,
Karen (O'Connell) Powers, Class of 1989
Sociology

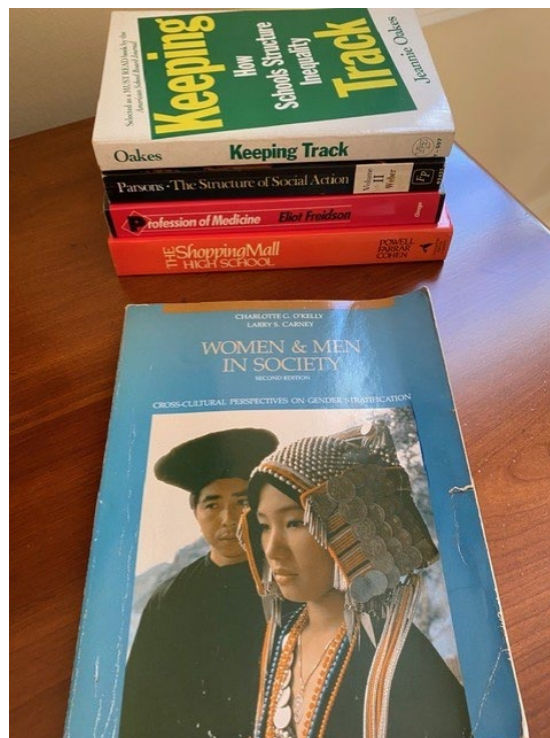
I have very fond memories of my time as Providence College as a member of the Class of 1989. I would be surprised if Dr. O’Kelly remembers me from so long ago, but she played a very big role in the wonderful college experience I had. And it happened almost by accident. When I arrived as a freshman, my adviser informed me that one of the courses that I had registered for had been canceled and that I would need to find an alternative. I recall that the choices were limited, and of course, I was worried. My adviser picked up the phone and made a call to Dr. O’Kelly, who very kindly agreed to let me into her Intro to Sociology class. I had no idea what sociology was, but I was so relieved to be enrolled. It turned out to be the most interesting class I had ever taken, and I loved it. Dr. O’Kelly was such a terrific instructor, I signed up for another class with her in the next semester, Sociology of Women and Men. (I still have her book, which is well-thumbed and highlighted!)

Because of Dr. O’Kelly, I became a sociology major and thoroughly enjoyed studying it. I remember her as an excellent teacher and lecturer who did intriguing research and who cared about her students. She introduced an unexpected dimension to my education, and I am so grateful for that. My two children are now in college, both at liberal arts schools, and I truly hope that they are lucky enough to find their own Dr. O’Kelly.

Congratulations to Dr. O’Kelly on an amazing career, and best wishes for her retirement!

Kristine George, Class of 1989
Sociology

These books (from some of my favorite classes with Dr. O’Kelly, Dr. Lena, Dr. Riordan and others in the department) are still on my bookcase!



I entered Providence College in 1990 with little understanding of systematic sexism and gender inequality. I remember individual instances of inequity but did not have the framework to connect them to systems. For example, I remember sitting listening to my high school guidance counselor trying to dissuade me from anything but a local college where most of the “girls” in our high school attend. When I entered PC I did not have the understanding to connect that (and other) experiences to larger gender beliefs that were institutionalized. (In fact, I probably had never even heard the word *institutionalized* in that context!)

That all changed when I took my first Sociology class in my sophomore year—*Sociology of Women*—with an amazing feminist professor, Charlotte O’Kelly. We read Susan Faludi’s *Backlash*—that book and class opened up a whole new way of thinking for me. I started to understand the sociological perspective. I began to understand feminism, intersectionality, and systems of inequality. Charlotte challenged us, encouraged us, and mentored us.

I admire Charlotte not only as teacher and role model, but also for her strength and determination to fight for social justice in our world and in our college. For over 3 years she led the charge for a Women’s Studies Program at PC-- facing a non-receptive and sometimes quite hostile administration and privileged students (both male and female) who thought we were anything from a joke to a threat. In my senior year Charlotte and other faculty established a Women’s Studies minor and I learned how critical alliances and collaboration across progressive groups was to social change and justice. And I will always treasure the moment at my graduation in 1994 when Charlotte gave me a teacher reading “We Did It!”

My time at PC was the opportunity of a college education that allowed for my growth as a feminist scholar. And it was Charlotte’s guidance that helped prepare me for a future profession—she introduced me to feminism and sociology; she guided my career thinking and preparations, and she supported my growth. Prior to college I had no idea what Sociology was, or even what a Doctorate offered. By the end of college, I had been accepted into a PhD program in Sociology—with the goal of one day returning to the classroom and modeling my teaching on what I learned from Charlotte’s classrooms.

Mary Gatta, Class of 1994
Social Science

I want to congratulate you on your retirement. You impacted the academic experience of so many of us at PC! I am especially grateful to you for introducing me to Black feminist thought and the giants of Black women's studies such as Angela Davis, Patricia H. Collins, Paula Giddings, Alice Walker and bell hooks. Because of our conversations and that class, my conviction to focus on the lived experiences of diasporic Black women and girls was validated and celebrated. You understood your positionality as a white woman and empowered me as a Black immigrant woman to pursue my dreams and academic career, unapologetically. For this I am forever grateful. Cheers to you for all the good you did and continue to do.

With love and admiration,

Terza Lima-Neves, Class of 2000
Political Science and Black Studies

I cannot overstate the impact Dr. O’Kelly has had on my life. I arrived at Providence College in fall 1998 after living in Singapore for six years. To say I was experiencing a version of culture shock was an understatement. From the first women’s studies class I took, I knew I had found a home at PC. Everything else about campus felt unfamiliar to me, including the pop culture the other students all seemed to understand, but the women’s studies faculty and particularly Dr. O’Kelly made me feel at home. As I progressed through the classes I realized I didn’t want to spend time fulfilling requirements for another major, I wanted to keep going with women’s studies. Dr. O’Kelly not only guided me through petitioning for this course of study but helped me through every draft of every document needed to make the case that this was legitimate scholarship in a legitimate field.

I was afraid that after leaving Providence I would lose touch with how empowered I felt during my time in the program. I went to live overseas again and was delighted that Dr. O’Kelly kept in touch and would respond when I sent her emails and sometimes drafts of my writing. Amy LeClair ’02 and I would often give each other pep talks with things Dr. O’Kelly had said to us, or when faced with decisions ask each other “Ok, but what would Charlotte do?” In the almost 20 years since graduation asking myself this has never steered me wrong.

I have described Dr. O’Kelly (as I will always think of her, though she has more than once invited us to call her Charlotte!) as a mentor but she was more than that. Dr. O’Kelly was a lifeline two decades ago and continues to be one today. While I am thrilled that she will be heading into a retirement she richly deserves, I am also very sad for all of the future Friars who will never have the good fortune to take a class with Charlotte O’Kelly.

Beth Stefanik, Class of 2002
Women’s Studies Major

Congratulations on your retirement, Dr. O'Kelly! I hope you leave PC knowing how many students you have impacted -- how many you have challenged to think critically inside the classroom and how many you have moved to make change outside of the classroom.

You were one of the first professors to pull me into the sociology major, and you were also one of the first to expose me to the overlap between sociology and women's studies. The merger of both programs has defined much of my professional career since PC, and I have you to thank for setting me off on that path.

When I think back on your classes, I think about "lenses." Your teaching gave me a new lens through which I could examine my life and society as a whole. It gave me a framework to analyze and question my experiences, and it exposed me to issues that I simply would not have been aware of before walking into your seminars. Your classes taught me —*you* taught me—how to articulate and defend a point of view. You taught me how to write, and you taught me how to thoughtfully read (and read a lot!). You taught me how to approach situations with a healthy dose of skepticism and a critical eye, and you taught me to always consider who was telling the story and who was left out.

Sociology and women's studies are unique in how they align with a liberal arts education. As a sociology and women's studies professor, your job was not to teach us how to design widgets or how to prepare for a technical career. You instead had to give us space to grow as individuals and to discover what was important to each of us, whether that was questioning pinkwashing in self-serving breast cancer awareness campaign, saying the word "vagina" out loud when the campus wanted to erase it from our vocabulary, or, more critically, pushing for racial and gender equity on and off campus.

You have spent your life not shaping the minds of your students, but providing space and support for us to do it ourselves. Empowering students in this way — teaching them to recognize and articulate their own value — is a true testament to your teaching ability. I'm sure it would have been easier to simply tell us what to do or to have us memorize facts and figures for our tests. But you took the more difficult path, and it has made all the difference in the students you have mentored and taught.

When I mention the students you have impacted, I include those who you did not instruct directly. In fact, I only took a few of your classes myself. Your presence, however, was known outside of the classroom, and your actions — welcoming someone into a major when you were chair, sponsoring an insightful lecture, or connecting us to alumni — created a community within the women's studies and sociology programs. I have walked away from my time at PC intimately aware of the value of community and the need to seek it out, or create it, wherever I go. (And watching you interact with the other "founding mothers" at anniversary celebrations makes me confident in saying you have been building community since you first stepped foot on campus).

In one of my last years at PC, a group of undergraduates began a program called Thank a Feminist. It was our Thanksgiving celebration and meant to be an acknowledgement of the women who have come before us. I hope that the tradition of thanking our feminist foremothers is one that has continued in some way, but in case it has not, let me be sure to carve out space to

say THANK YOU one last time. Your fight against the patriarchy – and sometimes against the administration – is one that I know future generations will carry on in your honor.

Michelle Sagan Goncalves, Class of 2004
Women's Studies and Sociology

i stand
on the sacrifices
of a million women before me
thinking
*what can i do
to make this mountain taller
so the women after me
can see farther*

legacy - rupi kaur



It is hard for me to find the right words to express the full extent of my gratitude to Dr. O'Kelly, who has shaped my life in such big ways. As a sophomore in college I took her Power of Whiteness course and it changed the trajectory of my college experience and career. Learning about structural racism and whiteness gave me the opportunity to start building my critical race lens and it lit a fire inside of me. I took every class she taught, looking forward to the readings and discussions, some of which I still think about to this day. I eventually changed my major to Sociology and earned a minor in Black Studies as well. I told everyone about my favorite classes. I wasn't sure what my career would be, but I knew what I was excited about -- helping people and making the world a more just place. After realizing that social work may not be the avenue for me, Dr. O'Kelly suggested I might be interested in getting my PhD in Sociology. A moment that changed my future. While I graduated from Providence, I kept in touch with Dr. O'Kelly and she continued to share her wisdom, including sharing teaching resources and advice. I am now a sociology professor myself and in 2015 I taught my own course on whiteness. A full circle moment. Dr. O'Kelly (I still have a hard time calling you Charlotte!), thank you for your encouragement and guidance over the years. At 19 years old, I could not have imagined the wonderful life and career I have now. I have no doubt your classroom and mentorship were pivotal to me getting here. If I have a similar impact on even one student I will consider my career a success. Congratulations on your retirement!

Sarah Mayorga, Class of 2006
Sociology and Black Studies

If I could summarize in a few words what Dr. O’Kelly taught me, it would be: *continued curiosity*. I was always impressed with Dr. O’Kelly’s vast and expansive knowledge. However, I realize now that what I most appreciate about Dr. O’Kelly is her desire to keep learning. She approached every lecture not only with a goal to teach her students, but also with an openness to learn from them. She had an amazing ability to challenge her students and herself to widen their perspective.

I had the privilege of participating in many of her classes, including my capstone- Globalization and Women. I remember clearly how this class forced me to confront my viewpoints and aspirations for the future. This class and my conversations with Dr. O’Kelly guided my decisions even after I left PC. Most specifically, it propelled me to join AmeriCorps and work with women who were incarcerated or recently released into the community. So often when I worked with these women and saw the multitude of hurdles they faced, I remember Dr. O’Kelly’s challenge for all of us to think globally and stay curious about how individual struggles speak to global injustices. I strive to continue coming from this place of curiosity in my personal and professional life.

Importantly, I believe all of us have, more than ever, been challenged to examine our own biases. The world is talking about racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism in a way we never have before. Yet, Dr. O’Kelly has always been having these conversations. None of the issues our world is facing today are new, recent events have forced us to stop ignoring them. I am forever grateful that Dr. O’Kelly challenged me, and all the students she worked with, to be courageous and curious enough to step out of their comfort zone and ask the necessary, but hard questions, about the depth of the injustice the world is facing. I thank Dr. O’Kelly for being vulnerable enough to talk openly about her blind spots, as it made her students feel safe enough to confront their own.

I wish Dr. O’Kelly the happiest of retirements. I know she will continue being curious and learning all she can about everything! But I hope she can do this at a slower, more relaxed pace. I hope that she always remembers that the work she did and the amazing person she is, changed countless students’ lives for the better. I know mine was.

Best wishes!

Frances Ford, Class of 2007
Women’s Studies and Psychology Major

Each time I walk past the bookshelf in my apartment, I see the texts from Dr. O'Kelly's Women and Globalization capstone course. That course was the culmination of my Women's Studies major, and it inspired me to find a career through which I would be directly involved in a community. I became a teacher, and in my first years with TFA, I reached out to Dr. O'Kelly as I was grappling with whether my involvement with this organization was aligned with my own personal values. Dr. O'Kelly encouraged me to focus on developing my instructional skills so that I could best serve the community where I was placed. Fourteen years later, I'm still in the classroom. Attending the celebration for Dr. O'Kelly, it was truly inspiring to hear about the ways in which you've touched so many lives. Congratulations on your retirement, and thank you-- you've inspired so many to dedicate themselves to addressing the inequities in our country and world.

Natalie Scheidt, Class of 2007
English and Women's Studies

I was lucky to have Dr. O'Kelly as a professor during my time at Providence College. It has been 14 years since I attended Dr. O'Kelly's class. Her lectures made such an impact that I still reflect back to her teachings. The lessons I was taught by Dr. O'Kelly not only made an impact in my day-to-day life but it will make an impact on my children since I too will pass down Dr. O'Kelly teachings. It is rare to find professors that years after graduating college you still think about them and their lectures. This is evident that Dr. O'Kelly was a one of a kind professor that has forever made an impact on her students like myself today, tomorrow and always.

Patricia Graciano, Class of 2007
Political Science and Black Studies

Dear Dr. O'Kelly,

Congratulations on your retirement! While I am so sad for students and the department more broadly, I hope this will be a restorative chapter to celebrate your incredible contributions to the PC community.


I wanted to take this long overdue opportunity to thank you for challenging me in such profound and necessary ways as an undergraduate. I will never forget sitting in your office when you encouraged me to declare a second major in Sociology. I can say definitively that courses with you were turning points in my maturity, growth, and social awakening. You called on us to look the most difficult topics in the face with curiosity and empathy. Especially in this last year, I have leaned into those lessons daily. I have revisited your syllabi and I have shared resources from your courses with family and friends who have struggled to understand their own privilege. I also feel so grateful to still be deeply connected to many friends I made from your classes. We have reconnected in such meaningful ways since graduation and our shared allyship has also been a gift in otherwise difficult times.

I can't thank you enough for the imprint you have had on my life. I am sending you and your loved ones best wishes for health, happiness, and peace in this next chapter.

Hugs,

Caroline Rende, Class of 2011
Sociology and English

A poem to Dr. Kelly from Regina Etienne because you introduced me to mental, spiritual, and soul freedom



Fly to the Land of Freedom

*Fly to the land of freedom
A little birdie came chirping to my courtyard,
Vibrant its wings were,
Tangerine, green, and white,
A golden hue all over.
An impeccable hymn it sang.
I looked at her fervently,
Her hymn and charisma had struck a chord.
felt she was mine and had come to see me
from a distant land of absolute freedom,
sans shame and fear
Where my heart pined to go!
She chirped, hopped and fluttered her dazzling wings,
presumably she desired to show how thrilled she too was!
My heart sang aloud,
Tears flooding my eyes.
Yes, thrilled I too am to see such an enchanting beauty and hear your
mellifluous song.
Giving the woman in me a new reason to dream of the land my heart yearns to go!
Oh! enchanting lill visitor you came for me I know.

And my heart says lill birdie you are mine evermore.

Wish you lead me to that distant land of absolute freedom sans shame and fear!*



Chitra Arun

Dr. O'Kelly,

Congratulations on your retirement! It's hard to imagine PC without you -- especially the Sociology department. I've been thinking about what to write to you for weeks: it's been hard! At the risk of sounding silly, I thought it best to be genuine. I hope you know how much you, and of course your classes, worldview and our conversations, shaped the person I am today. I can vividly remember my first semester sitting in your class (amongst all seniors -- why was I there?!), and feeling nervous and completely mind blown. You shaped the way I view the world (always critically!) in ways I can't even begin to articulate.

Now, as an administrator, a pseudo-professor, yet still a lifelong learner, I feel I am always talking about building critical thinking skills in college students, and I truly feel you sparked this passion within me as a young, and very naive, college student. You challenged me and pushed me way outside my comfort zone. My only regret is not taking ALL of your classes (I think I took one every semester) or even an independent study (re: I was too naive to even know what that was!). A sincere, and very, very heartfelt, thank you for all you have done.

I wish you all the best in this next chapter! I hope we can stay in touch, now as colleagues, and you fully enjoy every minute of this final semester and all to come.

All the best, always,

Sara Squeglia, Class of 2012
Sociology and Women's Studies

Dr. O'Kelly, please accept my hearty wish of thanks to you for all of your intentional and meaningful contributions to my education. I took The Consumer Society with you in Spring of 2012 when I was sophomore at PC. To say that the concepts touched upon through your syllabus, and their intersectionality and weight, changed my career path would not be a dramatic overstatement. From grass to disney, diamonds and choice, my mind was blown week after week in your class. To this day, I find the work of Jean Kilbourne, Juliet Schor, and Barry Schwartz, to name a few, incredibly useful for my nonprofit career. From fundraising to philanthropy, I must hold the powers that be accountable (including my own privilege and power) if I want to make any substantive and sustainable change. Thank you, Dr. O'Kelly, for your service to sociology and the Providence College community.

Brooke Petit, Class of 2014
Sociology and Theology

Formative and influential are words I would use to describe the impact of Dr. O'Kelly's courses on my development as an individual and independent thinker. Books we read, documentaries/films that we watched, and perhaps most importantly, discussions we had in class, all opened my eyes to important truths about our world. I recently graduated from medical school and am almost done with my first year of psychiatry residency. Dr. O'Kelly wrote me a letter of recommendation for medical school admission! I am so grateful! I remember for one of your courses Dr. O'Kelly, I wrote a paper about the experience of women as patients medicine. This was the first time I learned about the historical injustices that women of color have faced at the hands of physicians in a paternalistic and inequitable medical establishment. How important and relevant to know this history. Your courses laid the foundation for my approach to recognizing the significance of the social determinants of health and the social determinants of lived experience, principles I use everyday now as a physician.

Thank you for your dedication to teaching and to supporting your students! Congratulations on your retirement!

Sincerely,

Faith Donaghey, Class of 2014
Sociology and Biology

Dr. O’Kelly,

I learned so much in the African American Women course, and it was one of my favorite classes. I learned about some history I never learned before and probably wouldn’t have if I didn’t take the class. It was also a great way for me to engage in thoughtful conversations with students I wouldn’t have had the pleasure of being in a class with otherwise.

I also have fond memories of the 2015 women’s studies banquet. Honestly, the Sociology and WMS departments had some of my favorite classes and professors. Intelligent and fun people, thought-provoking and engaging classes, an amazing 2015 WMS majors and minors cohort...all around fantastic.

You will be missed, Dr. O’Kelly, and I wish you the best in your future endeavors!

Thank you,

Danielle Watkins, Class of 2015
English/Creative Writing
SOC and WMS minors

Dr. O'Kelly,

Many congratulations on your well-deserved retirement!

It was a great privilege to have you as a professor during my time at PC. In my three classes with you, my perspectives on the world were shaped and I learned to think critically and speak confidently about social issues. And even after graduation, I am so grateful for all the support you provided as I applied to graduate school. I am also thankful for you introducing me to *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*. :)

Your teaching style coupled with your intellect (I'm not sure there is a topic you don't have an incredible amount of knowledge about) provided me with some of the best learning experiences as a student at PC. I've carried the knowledge and skills I gained in your classes through graduate school and into my professional life.

You will be greatly missed in the Sociology department. But I hope you will be able to enjoy more free time for hobbies, relaxing, and spending time with family and friends.

Sending my best wishes as you begin this next chapter.

All the best,
Kathleen McGreal, Class of 2015
Sociology and English

Dr. O'Kelly,

You helped make my educational experience at Providence College. You were a great professor and you helped me expand my way of thinking. You taught me how to ask the important questions. I am also grateful for senior year when you allowed me to enroll in your class, even though it was already over a week into the fall semester. I hope you enjoy retirement. Thank you.

Terrence Harris-Hughes, Class of 2016
Sociology and Spanish

Thank you for your dedication to the students at PC. As a SOC alumna, I wanted to tell you how greatly you impacted my experience at PC. Thank you for your wisdom, invaluable life lessons, and kindness. Congratulations on your well-deserved retirement, Dr. O'Kelly!

Jasmine Hamm, Class of 2016
Sociology

Congratulations on your retirement Dr. O'Kelly! I will always remember your stylish attire, and your ability to push your students to be independent, critical, but thoughtful thinkers. You are a one-of-a-kind educator and I will continue to hold your lessons close to my heart.

Kimberly Stephenson, Class of 2016
Women's and Gender Studies and Health Policy Management

The best classes I took at PC were the ones that taught me to question what I believe and more importantly what is truth. Dr. O'Kelly's classes did that. The environment in which Dr. O'Kelly cultivated for her students- one of academic rigor, curiosity, but ultimately of respect, was one that I deeply appreciated and needed as an undergraduate, and one that I wish more students had the privilege of taking part in. In her class on African American Women, Dr. O'Kelly taught me how to listen, reflect, critique, analyze, and convey some of the most challenging and timely topics including: classism, sexism, racism, discrimination, and exploitation. Dr. O'Kelly always challenged her students to not only consider what they had been taught previously or experienced personally, but also what they had *not been taught* or *had not experienced*, and *why*, urging us to consider interconnectedness of the topics we discussed, and how our own forms of privilege influenced those experiences and perceptions. I would like to congratulate Dr. O'Kelly on her well-deserved retirement and thank her for teaching me during her time as a professor at PC. It was an honor to be a student of yours!

Joanna McDonough, Class of 2017

Health Policy & Management Major, Women's and Business Studies Minors

Class taken with Dr. O'Kelly: SOC/WMS/BLS 325 African-American Women, Fall 2016

Dear Dr. O’Kelly,

I wanted to thank you so much for being such a wonderful professor, whose courses really broadened my perspectives of the world and people around me.

My sophomore year at PC, I took your Globalization and Social Justice course and vividly remember through various readings, such as *Tangled Routes* and *The Shock Doctrine*, learning concepts about capitalism and U.S. history that I was not learning in any of my other courses including my political science and history classes! My senior year, I took African American Women where I was able to learn and listen about the intersectionality of race and gender, that has helped me better understand, empathize, and to overall be a better ally.

Although particular topics and readings could be difficult at times, I appreciated feeling challenged and enjoyed pushing the boundaries of my own comfort zone in new ways, as well as being able to process and articulate my own thoughts and feelings after class through our journal reflections.

I bring with me so many of the lessons from your courses into my everyday life. As many of the issues we discussed in your class have become perhaps timelier than ever, I feel prepared to participate in meaningful discussions on these topics, whether it be with my family and friends, in the workplace, or with my fellow peers at law school, which I am now attending. I appreciate all of your hard work that not only made us all better students during our time at PC, but better citizens of the world thereafter.

Thank you for everything and I wish you a happy and wonderful retirement!

Meaghan Callahan, Class of 2017
Political Science major and Women’s Studies minor



I am very excited to have the opportunity today to express my gratitude for Dr. O’Kelly in celebration of her retirement. When I started writing this reflection, I laughed because I’ve probably written hundreds of reflections for Dr. O’Kelly. Then, I started to think of the titles of her courses that I have taken, which caused me to laugh again because I think it would be easier and faster for me to list the courses that I did NOT take. I remember working my semester’s schedule around hers to ensure I would have the opportunity to learn from her again. One time, my schedule was too full, but that didn’t stop Dr. O’Kelly from trying everything to give her students every chance to learn. In that situation, she let me take her course as an independent study so that I could learn all about the consumer society, something I still to this day rant about to my friends and family. This independent study also helped me achieve enough credits to make Women’s Studies my double major. The word “thankful” just doesn’t feel like a strong enough word to express my gratitude. Dr. O’Kelly has made such a significant impact on my learning as well as who I have become as a person. Dr. O’Kelly is one of the most passionate, knowledgeable, hardworking, and approachable professors I have ever met. She fueled a fire in my heart for social justice that led me to pursue my master’s in social work so that I could become a school counselor in my hometown of New Bedford, Massachusetts. I use knowledge and skills I learned from her courses everyday in my work with my students and families. She helped me learn to “zoom out” and see the bigger picture. She helped me learn to think about systematic issues and intersectionality when working with individuals, groups, and families. She helped me bring empathy, care, and kindness into my work because that is exactly what she showed me when I was her student. She helped me forget about perfectionism and working for the sake of a good grade; rather, she helped me see how I can work hard for the joy of learning. I am not sure what the future will hold for me, but I definitely have it on my mind to go back to school to pursue a PhD or doctorate so that I can become a professor, hopefully half as good as her.

Molly O’Leary, Class of 2017
Women’s Studies and Social Work

Thank you to Dr. O’Kelly

Dr. O’Kelly is one of my sociology heroes. I only had the chance to take one course with her- African American Women. Yet, her teachings on race, gender, and the impacts of their intersection proved to be indispensable to growing my passion for sociology as well as advancing my abilities to think critically about and acknowledge the effects of my positionality as a white woman in the world around me. While I would have loved spending more time with Dr. O’Kelly in the classroom, the most powerful lessons she taught me came from outside of the classroom. For four years, I watched Dr. O’Kelly consistently show up, stand up, and when appropriate, step to the side, during moments of injustice on- campus. Because she showed up to every march, protest, sit-in, and conversation with the utmost passion and dedication, I was able to learn how academics and researchers can navigate their privilege to partner with activists to enhance and protect human rights in a non-destructive way. As I begin my own career in social policy research and advocacy, I hope to follow in Dr. O’Kelly’s footprints by disrupting systems of oppression and moving social justice forward at every opportunity before me. Thank you, Dr. O’Kelly, for sharing your knowledge with me over the years.

Sarah Trayers, Class of 2017
Sociology and Psychology

Hi Dr. O'Kelly!

When Dr. Outlaw and Dr. Brookes emailed about your retirement celebration, I knew I had to write something wishing you well and to thank you. I am naturally the quiet person and I have always hated speaking up, especially in seminars. It gave me such anxiety thinking about raising my hand to answer anything or to give my opinion on a reading. Your classes made me feel safe and welcome to share my thoughts and analysis on the topic at hand. I learned so much from you, not just about how our history has been white washed or how far we still have to go, but also to be strong in my beliefs and to not be afraid to use my voice.

I am very thankful to have gotten to meet you and to have taken your classes. I appreciated our talks we would have when I came to your office for office hours and for the articles that you sent to me about current events or something that we had previously discussed. You made me feel seen, heard, and important. I have taken that with me since graduation and I have never felt more confident. I speak up at work and am able to contribute. I just started my Master's degree and I always remember how I felt in your class and channel that whenever I am afraid to speak up! I wanted to thank you for everything that you have done for me and for your students in general. Your enthusiasm for the material and classes that you teach is unmatched and it makes everything even more interesting because you love it and everyone can tell. You have imparted your wisdom upon us and I can't thank you enough. You as a person are selfless, kind, determined, and brave and being able to see that as a young woman in a woman who is a mentor and someone who we can look up to is something that I will always carry with me. It is priceless. Thank you for everything and I wish you nothing but the best in your retirement. You deserve it. And if you ever want to chat about the happenings in the world I am always available!
😊

All my best,

Courtney Krakowski, Class of 2018
Women's and Gender Studies, Black Studies, Sociology

Dr. O'Kelly taught by far the most impactful classes I had during my time at PC. Not only were they eye-opening and informative, they were challenging and caused me to stretch my thinking for growth. I truly believe they made me a better version of myself in a safe environment.

Even though the last class I took of Dr. O'Kelly's was in the Spring semester of 2018, I still often find myself referencing the books we read and conversations we had in the present day, whether it be with coworkers, friends or family. I'm extremely grateful to have had the opportunity to learn from Dr. O'Kelly and feel as though her class served as a foundation for a continued learning experience for myself - that continues today. I have reread many of the books we read in class and find a new lesson and appreciation in them each time.

Thank you to Dr. O'Kelly for teaching me what it means to push myself towards growth at a time in my life when I needed it and showing me that there are always steps we can take to further our education long beyond school finishes.

I wish you all the best in your retirement!

Lauren Coulombe, Class of 2018
Sociology and Marketing

Dr. O'Kelly is one of those professors that reminds you why you stay at a school like Providence College. With all of its glaringly obvious social problems and systemic errors, Dr. O'Kelly was a beacon of hope that helped me remain sane navigating a private catholic college. Her class, The Power of Whiteness, stands out as one of the best I took in all my four years. In school I told everyone I knew to take it and I still talk about it now two years out. She is not only passionate about what she teaches but is also passionate when it comes to being an educator. Her lessons were never easy for the majority of PC's demographic to swallow, but she mixed appropriate outrage with research and experience that never came off as condescending. I feel sorry for all the future students that won't get to learn from her, but she more than deserves the rest. I can not thank her enough for all that I was privileged to learn from her and I wish her nothing but a wonderful retirement!

Maggie Burke, Class of 2019
Women's and Gender Studies and Sociology

Dear Charlotte,

First of all, congratulations on your retirement! I am so excited for you to get to enjoy the rest that you so greatly deserve - and I must admit, I am selfishly relieved that you waited until after I graduated to make this big step. I cannot imagine my undergraduate education without your teaching and your service, and I feel so lucky to have learned from you for four years.

Your Power of Whiteness class was the second Sociology class I ever took, straight out of Intro. I was the only freshman in that class, and I was intimidated. I had never seriously thought about racism, power, or privilege until that moment. I remember looking around at my wiser peers and comparing their insightful thoughts to the reactions my friends and family had when I talked about this course - Why are you taking that? What's it about? Is it just more liberal propaganda? - and feeling lost. What did I get myself into?

Looking back at that experience now, though, I consider Power of Whiteness to be a major turning point in my life. It was under your facilitation that I learned to think like a sociologist. I learned how to be critical of the power structures around me, I learned how to identify injustice in the world, and I started to learn what my place was in all of this & what I could do about it. Without your teaching, I don't know if I ever would have made that shift, and now I can't imagine my life without it. It is on this foundation that I have built my life, my values, and my career.

As a teacher myself now, I admire your skills even more. Pushing students to learn about hard history is an incredibly complicated and nuanced task, and I have a deep appreciation for the time and care that you took with your students. Whether or not the institution realizes it, PC is losing a model teacher in your retirement, and it is my hope that all of us who learned under you will do our best to continue your legacy in education. I know I will be using your knowledge - especially my favorite concept, 'pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will' - for years to come.

Sending you all of my love in your retirement,

Caleigh Rockwal, Class of 2019
Sociology, Black Studies, and Political Science

The first class I ever took with Dr O’Kelly was African American Women in Spring of 2019. This was my first semester as a Women’s & Gender Studies major and I thought that it would be interesting to learn more about the stereotypes and stigmas associated with black women and how that impacts our place in society (especially being a black woman myself). I had a similar outlook with Haiti: Globalization, Race, & Gender as well because I wanted to learn more about my culture as a Haitian American woman. I think what drew me to both courses was feeling like I would be able to apply my own experiences to the content that I was learning. And to a large extent, I was able to apply the content to my life, but something that is so unique about Dr. O’Kelly is how thorough she is in the material she teaches. To some students, it may be “easier” to take a course that doesn’t have much material to grasp, but I found it inspiring that she was confident and extremely knowledgeable in both of the classes I took with her. She was able to evoke opinions and conversation with all of her students and truly gave us the opportunity to fully learn the material and apply it. At times the workload would be heavy, but I knew coming out of both classes that I would leave with knowledge that I knew would stay with me forever. Dr. O’Kelly, thank you for being such a wonderful professor! You will always be someone that I feel like I will mention when I talk about someone who’s had such a positive impact on my Providence College career!

Thalea Gauthier, Class of 2020

Women’s & Gender Studies Major, Political Science Minor

Classes: African American Women, Haiti: Globalization, Race, & Gender

Dr. O'Kelly, although I never got to the privilege of taking one of your classes, the hard work dedicated and the impact you left on Providence College will never be forgotten. Your name will always be remembered. Thank you for bringing change to our campus and to the larger society. Best of luck!

Estarlyn Hiraldo, Class of 2021
Sociology Major, Film/Video & Business Innovation Minors

Dr. O'Kelly,

I am very thankful for having the opportunity to take not one but two of your courses. I would be lying if I didn't say that you're the reason I changed my minor from philosophy to wgs. I remember one day you asked me what my minor and major was and when I told you that I was a philosophy minor you replied back "hmm" which makes me laugh thinking about it now because I really questioned my choice after that. After taking your courses I felt awakened to all of the inequalities and systematic problems we face on the daily that I was trying to ignore. I realized that wgs allowed me to be more myself than philosophy ever could. You made me feel comfortable in expressing my views and I think more importantly you made me feel important. I didn't even really know what a feminist was while declaring a wgs minor but I knew I wanted to be your kind of feminist. You know this program has changed me so much and I thank you for helping me find a part of my identity. I wish you nothing but the best.

Sincerely,
Tatiana Silva, Class of 2021
HPM Major, WGS Minor

Hi Dr. O'Kelly,

I just wanted to say thank you for teaching such an interesting and inspiring Global Food Systems course. I really learned a lot about the way the world works and how so much needs to be done in order to see change. Your class, along with other sociology courses, has encouraged me to find a career where I can seek some of the change we need to see in the world. Thank you for continuing to send us interesting articles regarding the food systems, I enjoy being kept up to date on topics we discussed in class. I am sad to hear of your retiring but wanted to say congrats on a wonder teaching career at PC!

Thank you,

Marley Herard, Class of 2022
Psychology Major, Mathematics & Sociology Minor

Friday, April 16, 2021
Celebration in Honor of Dr. O'Kelly's Retirement
Welcome and Tribute Remarks Delivered Live (via zoom)

Hello and Welcome to Students, Alumni, Faculty (inclusive of retired and emerita) and Friends,

My name is Abigail Brooks, and I direct the Women's and Gender Studies Program here at Providence College.

We are so very glad you that you are joining us for this momentous occasion—to honor, celebrate, and pay tribute to Dr. Charlotte O'Kelly, Professor of Sociology and Anthropology, Women's and Gender Studies, and Black Studies, beloved teacher, mentor, friend, and colleague, who is retiring after serving the Providence College community in infinitely progressive and impactful ways, since 1975. That's forty-five years!

Before I proceed, I would like to give special thanks to Cindy Walker, of Women's and Gender Studies, and to Kara Berlin-Gallo—senior WGS-HIST major and WGS student intern--for their expert assistance in making this event a reality.

Dr. O'Kelly's brilliance, enthusiasm, energy, dedication, expertise, research, and teaching have been instrumental to the growth and flourishing of the Sociology-Anthropology Department, as well as to the founding, growth, and flourishing of Women's and Gender Studies, Black Studies, and Global Studies, here at Providence College. Indeed, most, if not all, of Dr. O'Kelly's beloved courses—rigorous, demanding, even if intensively reading and writing and documentary viewing heavy!!!—are cutting edge—always inclusive of the newest research, books, and articles, interdisciplinary, intersectional in lenses and scope, centering current/in real time/here and now lived realities and injustices, yet always deeply grounded in history.

I am consistently amazed and inspired by how much Dr. O'Kelly reads and researches in preparation for every one of her courses, always the newest, just out books, always developing new and timely courses, often rooted not only in rigorous and multi-faceted research, analyses, work and contributions of leading scholars, writers, artists, and activists, but also in her own lived, first hand experiences and knowledges gleaned through her intensive, extensive, social justice centered visits with researchers, educators, and activists in Haiti, Columbia, and other nations and regions in Central and Latin America, in Asia, in Europe and other points across the Globe. Just a sampling of some, but not all of her beloved courses by title: Globalization and Women, Global Food System, Haiti: Race Class and Gender, Power of Whiteness, Consumer Society, African American Women.

Dr. O'Kelly was a crucial member of the group of faculty who founded the Women's Studies—now Women's and Gender Studies—Program in 1994 at Providence College. She has been instrumental in its continued growth and impact since then, spearheading and shepherding the addition of the Women's and Gender Studies major, in 2004, continuing to develop and teach brilliant core and upper level courses in WGS, organizing phenomenal conferences and programming, and continuing to serve in multiple mentoring and leadership roles that have been instrumental to the continued expansion of WGS courses, faculty, and students.

For me, personally, and collegially, Dr. O’Kelly has been—and will continue to be—a most treasured mentor, friend, and colleague in both WGS and Sociology and Anthropology. She is always so generous with her time, her insights, guidance, and expertise—she is the person I turn to most when in need not only of input and advice, but also strength and inspiration. And, every time I speak to her, literally every time I speak with Dr. O’Kelly, I learn new things—just an hour ago when we spoke on the phone I learned about the devastating crop frosts in Europe and the new push by TikTok to create a TikTok for children! And, last but not least, Dr. O’Kelly’s wonderful sense of humor never fails to make me laugh, which is so needed, especially these days.

I treasure my relationship with Dr. O’Kelly, and I trust that I will continue to learn from her, and to benefit from her infinite knowledge and expert guidance.....even after she retires! She will not be rid of me easily....I will be coming by her lovely home and demanding catch up chats and visits in her beautiful garden, sharing a glass of vino verde in Charlotte’s flower garden sounds like heaven right about now....something to look forward to!

Speaking of relationships—the outpouring of love, admiration, appreciation, reverence, gratitude and affection for Dr. O’Kelly, expressed as people have learned of her retirement—has been overflowing and overwhelming in the best of possible ways!!!

From the waves, upon waves of alumni who lives as students, and life paths and courses, were and have been continuously and most positively shaped by Dr. O’Kelly’s teaching and mentorship, to the current students who speak about Dr. O’Kelly’s courses changing their lives/opening up and expanding their worldviews, knowledges, and perspectives towards social justice, to the faculty and staff whom Dr. O’Kelly has supported, nurtured, empowered, mentored and guided—we are all so grateful to know you, Dr. O’Kelly. We thank you for the knowledge, for the ceaseless learning and consciousness-raising, for the fun, the humor, the inspiration.

From the Women’s and Gender Studies community, we say thank you for founding us, thank you for your instrumental role in our growth and flourishing, thank you for providing us the tools and solid foundation for our continued growth and flourishing now and into the future. Your legacy now, and always, will be remembered, and cherished.

We will now hear from Dr. Eric Hirsch, Chair of Sociology and Anthropology, Dr. Zophia Edwards, Director of Black Studies, and then we look forward to hearing from additional Women’s and Gender Studies Faculty, current, retired, and emerita, and from students and alumni—many of whom reflect not only Women’s and Gender Studies majors and minors, but Sociology and Anthropology, and Black Studies, as well.

We love you Dr. O’Kelly!

Dr. Abigail Brooks
Director, The Women's and Gender Studies Program
Associate Professor, Department of Sociology and Anthropology

Charlotte, we're all sorry that you won't be teaching with us in the future. You've meant a lot to me and to all of the faculty and students in the department. You've modeled what a great teacher and colleague is, with your incredible breadth of knowledge; your critical mind, your understanding of the relationships between class, race, and gender; and your experience as a world traveler. We've all learned so much from you. We'll miss your book and documentary recommendations. Your support of Black Studies and Women's and Gender Studies, as well as our department, has been strong and consistent. You live your values, even if you occasionally buy some new clothes.

I hope you have a wonderful retirement and get to travel as much as you want to. We will all visit you. It's not far, not even by Rhode Island standards.

Eric

Dr. Eric Hirsch
Professor of Sociology and Anthropology
Chair, Sociology and Anthropology Department

Thank you so much, Charlotte for your passion, commitment, and central role in the Black Studies program at PC. In the course of your vibrant career, you have graciously lent your expertise and generosity to so many students and faculty alike. We see you as a sharp, committed, critical reader who is a vigorous advocate in faculty deliberations about the college's direction, and a staunch supporter of marginalized groups on this campus. You have been central to the Black studies program at PC. Your courses have brought in so many minors over the years. You have served on the Black Studies Advisory Board for many years, fighting to expand the program and protect it from consistent attempts to minimize and/or erase it. You've actively participated in BLS events, despite being extremely busy and despite having commitments to so many other programs on this campus. You were always present and engaged and involved.

On a personal note, you have been such an amazing colleague. It has been such a pleasure to get to know you. You have always been so supportive of me. You backed me when I needed support as a junior faculty member, and as a Black woman on this campus attending meetings with administration, writing letters, signing letters to pressure the administration to remedy the various ways in which this institution fails the communities that it marginalizes on this campus and beyond. You advised me with your tremendous wealth of knowledge about this institution and the history of Providence. I have learned so much from you. Your no nonsense, no beating around the bush, cut through to the heart of the matter style was invaluable in so many meetings and on all the search committees we've been on together. You have a special ability to see through the nonsense and I hope that I have inherited this from you during our time working together. I'm going to miss you and on behalf of everyone in Black Studies, students, faculty, and staff and people present, past and in the future, we value you, we appreciate you so much, and we will miss you tremendously.

Happy Retirement!

--Zophia

Dr. Zophia Edwards
Assistant Professor, Sociology & Black Studies
Director of Black Studies

I still can't believe Charlotte is retiring. I am not going to say goodbye to her but thank you! Thank you for being the most brilliant mind in the room. Always. Thank you for your leadership as Founding Mother. Thank you for always having the right solution to any problem we as a Program faced. Thank you for your teaching and for being our students' most loved and respected professor; for teaching them the content, the critical skills and empathy that are so urgently needed in the world today. And thank you for being the kind of colleague you could count on whenever you needed her.

I'm going to miss you. Not only your weekly email messages about the latest news relevant to my courses, but your presence and praxis at PC always holding the space for all of those who have needed it at some point in our professional or educational lives.

Con mucho cariño,
Carmen

Dr. Carmen Rolón
Associate Professor of Secondary Education & Women's Studies

Dear Charlotte,

I know we have said you are the heart and soul of our department – but you are.

From the moment I arrived on campus, I knew you had my back.

You would not let others exploit me.

You would support my professional identities.

You would be a cheerleader, a mentor, and a confidante.

I would tell my graduate student peers who had taken jobs that year about my experience at PC and their mouths would drop. I realized I had something special – that I had joined a special department with a special chair. I was teaching courses I wanted to teach and everytime I was introduced on campus, you built me up to your colleagues! I remember you introducing me to WGS faculty and nominating me for a panel on intersectionality within a few weeks of being on campus! And telling Poli sci faculty – “this is our new faculty member, Kara, and we are so lucky she has joined us! She is amazing!”

That meant the world to me as a new faculty member. It truly made me feel like I belonged. And gave me confidence.

I cannot imagine our department without you. When I became Chair, you continued to mentor and support. You didn’t take bullshit from anyone, and you instilled that no-nonsense approach in me. Although I don’t think I have quite risen to the Charlotte standards yet! But I do hope to have emulated you. In pushing students to be more critical. To have high standards. To cheerlead our colleagues. To push back against bullshit. And to protect others from exploitation, including in the academy.

You will never know the influence on me. But by far, you have truly been the biggest influence on me since my arrival at PC. I have grown so much because of you, especially in my leadership roles.

You will be so missed. By me as an individual and by our community. You were such a stabilizing force in our department. I can only hope that me – and others – will create the same kind of collegiality and norms with your departure.

You are the fourth retirement since my arrival. But your retirement is the first one that has brought me to tears. I feel a profound sense of loss, even as I am relieved for you. I’ll be frequenting your garden! And you are always welcome back for a guest lecture. Or, you know, to teach a whole class☺

Lots of love and admiration,
Kara

Dr. Kara Cebulko
Associate Professor, Departments of Sociology/Anthropology and Global Studies
Campus Immigration Liaison

Dear Charlotte,

While your work spans multiple areas at Providence College, I mainly know you as an unwavering supporter of the Black Studies and Women's and Gender Studies Programs and as an exceptionally hardworking contributor to them. You have been a wonderful colleague; you have shown us, through your example, what it means to be a dedicated college professor who puts her students first. I have learned a lot from you and will miss you terribly. Thanks for everything. Enjoy your retirement – you deserve it!

Dr. Tuire Valkeakari
Professor of English
Affiliated faculty, Black Studies

Dearest Charlotte,

It has been a pleasure working alongside you these past three years! In these three years I had the privilege of witnessing your brilliance, generosity, passion, and sharp and fun wit. I loved hearing about your travels and thirst for knowledge and new adventures— you are an inspiration! You will be greatly missed in the Department, but your mark and legacy will be with us forever. I am sure that this new life stage will be filled with even more adventures, trips, and opportunities to continue enjoying the world, and I look forward to hearing those stories.

With greatest respect, admiration, and cariño,
Mintzi

Dr. Mintzi Martínez-Rivera
Assistant Professor of Anthropology

My first memory of you, Charlotte, is of you talking to anyone and everyone you could to ensure I could have a business class ticket (to ensure my pregnant self would have a seat) on my ticket back to NJ when a snowstorm cut my interview at PC short. Looking back now, that event encapsulated nearly everything I would come to learn about you in the following 18 years. You were motivated by care and concern, you were my fierce advocate, and you did not stop until you achieved your purpose. Although words are woefully inadequate, I am hoping in this tribute to thank you for all of the ways in which you gifted me with those qualities throughout my time at PC.

I will admit to you, as I have done in jest many times, that I was extremely intimidated by you initially. Don't misunderstand me--I felt entirely valued, welcomed, and supported by you and the rest of the department. But I didn't know how I could ever impress someone so well-read, so well-informed, and so passionate in her social justice advocacy. It felt like you knew everything. I remember, also, looking at all the running and biking medals you had in your office and being completely blown away at the extensiveness of your bad-ass-ness ☺.

That said, for all of your impressiveness, I have also never encountered anyone so humble and so generous with their time and knowledge. You freely share your knowledge, your wisdom, and your kind heart, without ever expecting anything in return. You make it clear that the knowledge will come if you seek it, and when you lead with kindness, you will succeed. I remember your words of wisdom as I took on too many teaching preps and too much service as I was coming up for tenure (Stop. Wait. You have time). You took me under your wing and got me involved with Women's Studies, even helping me navigate a not-entirely-friendly executive committee ☺.

In the time I have known you, we have built a department together and ensured the survival of the Women's (and Gender) Studies program. You and I have both experienced triumphs and personal tragedies. Through it all, you have remained a person I look to as a colleague, a mentor, and a friend.

The hole you leave in our department and at the college will never be filled by one person. But, as sad as I am, I am not worried. You have shown us all how to walk the walk. You have modeled and embodied the type of teacher-scholar-colleague we can all be proud to be. You have taught us well and we are ready to take what you have taught us and move forward.

Thank you for your kindness, your mentorship, and your example. I will treasure it and keep it with me throughout my career. I will also, I suspect, be a frequent visitor to your backyard garden!

All my love and best wishes for a restful and adventure-filled retirement,

Mo

Dr. Maureen Outlaw
Associate Dean, School of Arts & Sciences
Associate Professor, Dept. of Sociology & Anthropology
Affiliated faculty, Women's and Gender Studies