Director’s Note

As another lively academic year comes to a close, I hope you enjoy reading about our student and faculty endeavors and achievements detailed in the following pages. Our semi-annual newsletter affords us the opportunity to glimpse how the members of our WGS community innovate in academics and activism and to report on the growth and development of the program. The variety and scope of this work demonstrates the dynamic nature of the field and the impact of the WGS community at RU. I am happy to report that over this past academic year, we have seen three significant examples of this vitality and influence.

The first example is the success of a student-driven effort to develop a Gender Inclusive Housing option for residential students. A task force assembled by the Office of Residence Life, in response to student activism around this issue, included several WGS student leaders. The task force researched and deliberated the best model for RU and proposed the following mission: “Gender Inclusive Housing reflects Roosevelt University's social justice mission through support of our diverse student body. This community promotes ethical awareness by providing a safe and supportive environment for students of all gender identities, gender expressions, and sexual orientations.” This concept and the accompanying proposal were supported by the university, and the fall semester begins implementation of the plan. The housing option will be centered on a learning community, through which students will enroll in common courses and participate in related co-curricular activities.

Generous support from core faculty members has allowed us to establish two awards with which to recognize student work. The WGS Writing Award highlights students’ intellectual contributions to the field and the WGS Activism Award highlights students’ community impact on issues relevant to WGS. This year’s award winners are announced on the last page of the newsletter.

The WGS Program has gained a new, multi-use space, the Gender Justice Space, for both informal and formal gatherings. The space will provide opportunities for community building, intellectual exchanges, film screenings, and academic talks. It will also house program office space for graduate assistants and a small lounge area. The finalized plan for the space is now in place, and it should be open to all by the start of the next academic year.

Please mark your calendars for the annual WGS Social to be held Thursday, Sept 12, 2013 from 4:30 to 6:00. Thanks to everyone who contributed to our courses and events this past year, and best wishes for a relaxing and warm summer!

Ellen O’Brien
Director, Women’s and Gender Studies
Friday March 1st marked the third annual Women’s and Gender Studies Symposium for Undergraduate work. The theme of this year’s symposium was Transformations, and it consisted of two panels of seven students presenting their original work in a range of disciplines, including Integrated Marketing & Communications, Psychology, Journalism, and Political Science. The symposium is designed for undergraduate students to gain experience presenting their work in a conference setting, and to allow them the chance to network with fellow students and faculty who are engaged in related work across different majors.

This year, the third panel of the symposium was an open dialogue with four student leaders from varying campus organizations (pictured below). The featured panelists are engaged in a range of activist work, from developing a plan for gender inclusive housing at Roosevelt, to advocating on behalf of victims of sex trafficking and prostitution. Students on the panel also discussed how their academic majors relate to social justice and what plans they have for the future.

Immediately following the three panels was Professor Carrie Brecke’s renowned trivia lunch! Symposium attendees were divided into five teams to answer trivia questions across a variety of topics, including Academy Awards history, female singer songwriter trivia, international politics, and current events. The trivia lunch is always a highly anticipated part of the symposium each year, allowing students the chance to socialize with their peers and faculty members outside of the classroom.

Post-lunch, Lucas Barnhill introduced our keynote speaker, Owen Daniel-McCarter, co-founder of the Transformative Justice Law Project (TJLP). TJLP provides free, gender affirming legal services to transgender individuals incarcerated in the Cook County prison system. Special thanks to Professor Jeff Edwards for securing Owen as the keynote speaker!
9am-10am - Panel 1: Doing Gender
Moderator: Taylor Massa
Brenden Paradies - Analyzing Gender in the Marketplace
Karissa Martin - Beauty: The Never Ending Ideology
Jennifer Schoolcraft - How Emotion and Communication are Gendered Among Male Adolescents: Breaking Down the Idea that “Real Men Don’t Cry”

10:15-11:15am - Panel 2: Transformations & Revisions
Moderator: Rachel Colias
Eleanor Peck - Republican Women in the U.S. Congress
Alicia Fedro - Shakespeare in Film: Representations of Women in Adaptations and Offshoots
Taylor Massa - “Yes, Mistress”: Examining the BDSM/Fetish World as a Queer Space
Lucas Barnhill - Treading the Silent Path

11:30am-12:30pm - Panel 3: Student Activism at Roosevelt - Transforming Campus
Moderator: Caitlin Hill
Meggie Chambers - Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation
Gianna Chacon - Coalition of Responsible Education
Kaitlin Vens - RU Proud & Gender Inclusive Housing Committee
Anna Rangos - Feminists United

12:30pm-1:30pm - Carrie Brecke's World Famous Trivia Lunch!

2pm-3pm: Keynote Address
“Police, Gender, and Detention: Changing Laws for Transgender People in Chicago”
Owen Daniel-McCarter
This upcoming fall semester, Prof. Ann Brigham will be taking a research leave, to study the genre of the road narrative. In April, I was able to ask Professor Brigham more in-depth questions to learn more about her research. -Molly Barnard, WGS MA student

What will you be researching during your leave?
I will be working on a scholarly analysis of the non-fiction road narrative *This is My Country, Too* by African-American writer John A. Williams. The text offers a rare perspective in a genre that historically features stories of white travelers. Originally published in 1964, this text is out of print. My goal is to produce a new scholarly edition of this text with critical commentary that conveys the book’s literary, historical, and cultural significance, especially in relation to the politics of spatial and social mobility. My aim is also to demonstrate the ways that definitions of mobility are shaped by their historical moment. As made evident by his book, Williams’ cross-country road trip—an adventure so often associated with freedom in American culture—was perceived by many to be an act of transgression. My focus, then, is on the ways that the text illuminates the racial and gendered dimensions of a postwar consumer culture. The tensions surrounding this issue are apparent just by looking at the original publication’s front cover. The 1964 Signet edition splashes a question across the entire top half of the cover: “What is it like for a Negro with a fistful of credit cards driving a shiny new car across White America???” Arming Williams with his credit cards in his “shiny new car,” the cover text presents the black male consumer as a confrontational figure of conspicuous consumption. The image of “a fistful of credit cards” both juxtaposes and collapses the language of mass consumption with that of a militant black civil rights movement, thus producing an agitated vision of black spatial and social mobility in “White America.”

How did you become interested in the topic(s) you are researching and how does it relate to your work in the Women’s and Gender Studies program?
Re-introducing Williams’ text continues my interest in studying the road narrative as an important indication of how mobility functions as a persistent and complex American phenomenon. This scholarly edition will draw on my argument developed in my current book project *Constructing Mobility Shifting Pursuits in The American Road Narrative* that mobility is not a method of freeing oneself from space, society, or identity, but instead a mode of engaging with explicit and changing social issues. In both of these projects, I maintain that the road narrative offers an opportunity to examine how the American, or perhaps more accurately, the Anglo-American national imaginary has been profoundly shaped by the promise of mobility: the freedom to go anywhere and become anyone. My argument is that mobility functions as an ideological and a spatial practice that both thrives on and tries to manage points of cultural and social conflict. Those conflicts develop around productions of gender, race, and class. In WGS, I am always interested in the analysis of narratives that shape and are shaped by formulations of gender, race, and class, especially when they are produced in relation to narratives and practices deemed quintessentially American, like mobility.

What do you think will be the most enriching part of doing research during your leave?
I am very excited about working with primary sources, especially Williams’ papers, which are housed in Special Collections at the Syracuse University Library as well as primary sources concerning African-American travel and the spatial politics of civil rights protests such as freedom rides and sit-ins. In addition to working on this project, I’m also looking forward to developing my new WGS course on women and food, which I will teach in the Spring 2014 semester.
How do you know your co editor, Shira Tarrant?
Shira and I met in 2008 at the National Women's Studies Association's annual conference. We were on a panel on feminism and fashion together, and we found we had a real intellectual kinship when it came to thinking about fashion as a force of both power and constraint when it comes to self-expression, self-determination, and ethical living—all of which are central feminist concerns. Shira suggested the topic would make for a great anthology, and I immediately jumped at the chance to co-edit with her.... I've always loved the genre of the anthology and had been wanting to edit one for a while. Co-editing with a colleague, who's also a friend, made it more fun.

How do you go about soliciting submissions for a collection like this?
In addition to reaching out to specific scholars who work on feminism and fashion and inviting them to submit a chapter, we circulated a call for papers on every listserv we could think of! We specifically asked for submissions that would engage with fashion as both enabling and constraining -- the philosophical puzzle of fashion that we find to be such a rich tension. We got about 80 submissions on a wonderfully wide range of topics, and narrowing that pool of submissions down to a reasonable size was very challenging, but it also helped clarify our vision. We considered many different versions of our table of contents, imagining the book organized by a variety of themes. Eventually we settled on our 14 chapters and organized them into two thematic parts: Part I, "Dressing the Body: The Politics of Gender and Sexuality," and Part II, "Fashion Choices: The Ethics of Consumption, Production, and Style."

In what contexts do you envision Fashion Talks being used? For what audience was this collection intended?
The ideal audience for Fashion Talks includes anyone who thinks critically about style and fashion, and in particular, those who have an interest in how fashion works to both disrupt and protect culturally accepted notions of gender. We hope the book will be used in college courses on fashion theory and philosophies of style, gender and popular culture, and gender and material culture. We also hope the book appeals to non-academic readers interested in fashion and gender. We thought about that audience a lot as we conceived of the book and shepherded the chapters to completion.

About how long was the entire process of collecting, editing, writing, publishing, etc?
Academic publishing is a lengthy, time consuming process! SUNY Press offered us a publishing contract in early 2009, on the basis of a few sample chapters (the full collection was not yet written). The first draft of the book was submitted to SUNY Press later in 2009; the manuscript was then sent out for peer review. The peer review process took about 1 year to complete. Each author then revised their chapter, based on reviewer feedback, from 2010 to 2011, with close editing by Shira and me. It took us another six months to write the Introduction, put the final touches on the manuscript, and assemble it with all its images. We submitted the final draft to SUNY Press in June 2011, and the book was in production for a little over a year. It was published in September, 2012.
Can you tell us a little about the essay your contributed to the collection?
My essay, "Stylish Contradiction: Mix-and-Match as the Fashion of Feminist Ambivalence," analyzes the popular trend of deliberate, often ironic clashing in women's fashion. I argue that the style of self-consciously clashing looks shares a rhetorical kinship with post-structuralist feminist theories of the self as a collage. In fashion editorials as well as imagery, the concept of contradiction is frequently celebrated as setting women free from a singular identity, which is perceived as inherently oppressive. I offer a Marxist reading of this trend of contradictory fashions as indicative of a cultural moment in which women are ambivalent to claim a particular identity, choosing instead to present themselves as hybrid, constantly changing, shifting selves. My chapter is intended to prompt critical reflection on what we can learn from the characterization of the self as inherently contradictory -- should we celebrate contradiction for its own sake, or consider contradiction as a sign of political stagnation, and use it as a catalyst for change?

Do you have any other big projects coming up?
I'm currently considering writing a college-level textbook surveying the field of feminist body studies. It's a bit daunting to begin another book project so soon after completing Fashion Talks, but I feel so strongly that such a book ought to exist that I just may need to write it myself!

GRADUATE PROFILE: JULIE MYNATT

"Female Protagonists/Oppositional Viewership: A Course in Post-Auteur Cinema Criticism" is an undergraduate college-level cinema studies course that uses various critical frameworks as a way to look at films featuring female protagonists in order to discuss how on-screen and off-screen elements work to construct on-screen and off-screen ideas and perceptions about women and womanhood. This course uses feminist, critical race, queer and materialist critical frameworks to examine the portrayal of female protagonists in a selection of Hollywood and foreign films. Creating a curriculum that introduces various modes of critical examination of cinema is important in that it spotlights ways of examining films that are often pushed to the margins of cinema studies. The use of filmic texts that feature non-canonical storylines and character archetypes in such a curriculum moves those stories and characters from the margins and into focus. Through the work of such a course, students become exposed to works about and by people with whom they can identify, which can engage their participation as active consumers and producers of media. The course practices feminist pedagogy, with a sharp focus on student-centered and discussion-driven modes of engaging with the course materials. The making of motion pictures is a communal effort, similar to the communal work of knowledge construction, and the course is constructed in order to illuminate these similarities.

-Julie Mynatt, WGS MA student
In 2011 rumors circulated among online film communities that the independent film *Tiny Furniture* was slated for home video release by the prestigious Criterion Collection label. What followed was an online backlash directed at the critical devaluation of the film’s creator and star Lena Dunham. Noted for its high levels of animosity and vitriol, this backlash has maintained a presence throughout Dunham’s meteoric rise to stardom. By evoking issues of personal artistic tastes, members of one online cinephile community, Criterionforum.org, rhetorically construct Dunham as an effeminate middlebrow figure that threatens the established hierarchies of masculine autonomy and distinction. Dunham’s transformation from a filmmaker and performer into a rhetorical embodiment of gender and class anxieties reveals prevalent notions of gender and class that circulate within cinephile communities. Through the work of Pierre Bourdieu and a feminist lens examining taste as a method of social distinction, this thesis examines the discourse that circulates Dunham as a gendered middlebrow figure.

-Andrew Gilbert, WGS MA Student (Thesis Title: “Gender, Taste, and Cinephile Culture.”)

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**GRADUATE PROFILE: NELA TASKOVSKA**

My thesis “Why Diplomacy Needs To Be More Feminist: The Creation of a New Approach to Political Mediation”, provides a feminist analysis on the sphere of political diplomacy by reassessing the canons of mediation and uniquely situating the types of feminism that can coexist within its traditional structure. This thesis considers the patriarchal foundation of diplomacy and the subsequent exclusion of a feminist approach to this highly relevant field. Furthermore, the case study of the most affluent female diplomat, Hillary Clinton, focuses on the effects of her hyper-visibility on the global political stage and the level of political autonomy she displays through her policy decisions. This project also answers the question of whether female diplomats need to assume masculine traits and become normalized within the state-centered system in order to progress in the mediating sphere. As a remedy to the androcentric structure of diplomacy, this study offers feminist methodologies that should be incorporated into the basis of diplomacy in order to advance its political platform.

-Nela Taskovska, WGS MA student
GRADUATE PROFILE: ASHLEY BLAIR

For my MA project, “Gurlz Talk Back: Resisting Popular Culture”, I put together an activist project working with teen girls. I wanted to put together a collection of poetry and other reflections about popular culture. The goal was to discover how much popular culture images have affected their lives. I also wanted to discover how they truly felt about these images. I found a non-profit organization in Park Ridge called The Harbour. This organization caters specifically to teen girls in need of immediate shelter and protection due to a variety of reasons. Part of the organization’s goal is to teach girls life skills, including public speaking and critical thinking. Once a month I met with the girls and introduced them to various concepts including intersectionality, media literacy, and heteronormativity. After watching a DVD such as, The Bro Code: How Popular Culture Creates Sexist Men, specifically analyzing a part of popular culture the whole group would have a discussion. This discussion started by the girls first writing their own personal thoughts on paper. After the personal writing time, the girls would share their thoughts with the group. Our discussions ranged from girls agreeing with the negative effects that the problematic images of popular culture have to those who thought that popular culture is simply mirroring what society is really like at any given moment. The project was a success. The girls learned media literacy and how to analyze and be critical of the images and information that popular culture offers them on a daily basis. I learned how to teach those concepts and how to facilitate a discussion between often very different opinions and ideas. It was most encouraging to see the ways that the girls resist and negotiate with popular culture and how they weave its influence into their lives and identity formations. The anthology beautifully brings together the words of teen girls who have not had many opportunities in their lives to speak up for themselves and be taken seriously.

-Ashley Blair, WGS MA student

GRADUATE PROFILE: LINNIEA KENNEDY

"A Feminist Rhetorical Analysis of Organized Responses to Street Harassment", examines the practice of street harassment as part of a larger network of violence against women, also known as rape culture. Incidents of street harassment can be understood as sites of identity creation in which women are socialized as sexual objects and men as commentators upon said sexual objects. Attempts to dismiss catcalling, groping, whistling, sexual propositions, or whatever form the harassment may take as complimentary, harmless, or a self-evident fact of city life, eschew the point that the practice of street harassment is symptomatic of larger cultural narratives which portray women’s bodies as sexualized objects available for scrutiny, evaluation, and appraisal at any given time. The purpose of my paper is to analyze the rhetoric in educational materials disseminated by four different anti-harassment and/or anti-violence nonprofit organizations: Hollaback, Stop Street Harassment, Men Can Stop Rape, and Walk A Mile in Her Shoes. In analyzing the rhetoric employed by these four organizations, I looked at a number of factors to determine the effectiveness of their efforts at interrupting the heteronormative ideologies that circulate in instances of street harassment. My hope is that this project will foster a more comprehensive approach to addressing street harassment, and denormalizing it as an accepted social practice.

-Linneia Kennedy, WGS MA student
IN THE CLASSROOM:
STUDENTS REVIEW COURSE TEXTS


Playing with Fire is an excellent personal narrative told by seven women activists in India, which we read for Prof. Ellen O’Brien’s class, Comparative Feminisms: India, Morocco, and the U.S. The seven women met doing non-governmental organization (NGO) work and formed a writing group, which culminated into Playing with Fire. In writing the book, the women tell stories of their childhood, adolescent years, marriage and child bearing years, and up to present day with their activist work. The book takes readers on a journey through these women’s lives and the gender specific experiences and struggles they encountered on their way to feminist activism. Readers get glimpses of the women’s experiences growing into their role of a feminine woman in Indian society. Each woman faced specific struggles, making it difficult to navigate their position as a woman in Indian society. For example, one of the women is Muslim living in a predominately Hindu state, six of the seven women had their marriages arranged, many came from abusive households or married into one, and all of them dealt with personal issues of class and caste—an extremely dividing factor in Indian culture. Their final chapter of the book gives readers a critical look at NGOs in India and locating themselves and others within this sector, finding both strengths and weaknesses. This book is an engaging read, especially for those interested in personal narratives or learning about Indian culture or activism in India.

- Molly Barnard, WGS MA student


For Carrie Brecke’s class, WGS 406: War on Women: Rhetorics at Home and Abroad, we read the novel Fledgling by the feminist science fiction writer Octavia Butler. Butler managed to turn vampire lore into a story dealing with issues about race and family. The protagonist is Shori who looks to be about twelve in human years but is actually a 53 year old vampire or Ina. The novel opens with Shori suffering from a serious case of amnesia after an attack on her family’s community. Slowly she remembers bits and pieces of her past and that her dark skin is the result of an experiment. Because of her darker skin tone, Shori is able to be out in the sun and stay awake during the day, unlike other Inas. Shori’s dark skin has a group of bigoted Inas upset and they are out to exterminate Shori and her whole family. When Shori meets up with her father, she learns that as an Ina she needs to have a group of humans (called symbionts) to feed and support her. Her first symbiont, 23 year old Wright, is confused by the fact that he is so attracted to a girl who appears to be only twelve years old. The symbionts become dependent on Shori, needing her venom to keep them alive and young. In Ina culture, symbionts are expected to live with their Ina creating a polyamorous type household. Butler’s novel allows us to imagine a different culture where households are organized in a communal type living. I would recommend Fledgling to anyone who is interested in reading vampire lore with actual relatable themes and issues.

-Sarah Dzurkovich, WGS MA student
IN THE CLASSROOM:
EXHALE VISITS MARJORIE JOLLES’ GLOBAL FEMINIST ETHICS CLASS

Last fall, Professor Marjorie Jolles was contacted by a unique organization that is embarking on their first national tour this spring. Exhale is the nation’s leading organization that addresses the emotional health and wellbeing of women and men after abortion. Rather than taking a stance in the pro-life versus pro-choice abortion debate, Exhale identifies as pro-voice, focusing on sharing personal abortion stories without judgment to shift the public dialogue to a more supportive and respecting abortion discourse.

When asked how Professor Jolles saw Exhale’s mission in alignment with the goals for the Global Feminist Ethics course, she said, “One of the goals of the Global Feminist Ethics course is to expose students to how ethics—the study and practice of assigning value to our behavior with others and with ourselves—has been theorized by traditional ethicists and feminist ethicists. We look at how ethical decision-making has been understood; for example, by positing ‘justice’ in opposition to ‘care’, or by positing ‘self’ in opposition to ‘Other.’ Feminists have observed that these categories, on which traditional ethics depends, sometimes fail to adequately capture the moral dimensions of decisions women face. One such decision is abortion, a situation in which ‘self’ and ‘Other’ become extremely politicized terms… Because Exhale is working to enact an ethical shift in public discourse on abortion, they fit in with the Global Feminist Ethics course seamlessly.”

Exhale’s visit was run both as a presentation and an engaging open dialogue and discussion. Natalia and Mayah (pictured at left with Prof. Jolles) began the workshop by telling students about their own abortion stories. The workshop also included a free association exercise of rhetoric surrounding the phrases “pro-life” and “pro-choice” and open dialogue between classmates about their experiences with abortion. The presenters were careful and deliberate in explaining pro-voice as a respectful and humanizing movement that promoted self-care as one of its main tenets.

Professor Jolles says she is always searching for guest speakers whose work fits well with the course material. She notes that guest speakers are beneficial for students in many ways, including giving students “new ways of talking about course topics with strangers who haven't read the texts we've read or been a part of our conversations to date. So students must then discuss course material in lay terms, and that practice strengthens students' sense of ownership of the material.”

For more information about Exhale, visit their website: exhaleprovoice.org, or their Facebook page at: facebook.com/exhaleprovoice. To call the Exhale hotline, dial 1-866-4-EXHALE.

-Molly Barnard, WGS MA student
On April 18th, the WGS Program co-sponsored an event bringing University of Illinois-Chicago professor and author, Dr. Beth Richie to Roosevelt's campus. Dr. Richie gave a talk about her book, *Arrested Justice: Black Women, Violence, and America's Prison Nation*, which was published in 2012. Dr. Richie takes her activist background and neatly combines it with her career in academia, focusing on the intersectional issues of gender, race, class, and interpersonal violence. *Arrested Justice*, as Dr. Richie spoke of it, was written in three parts. The first chronicles her journey as an anti-violence activist; the second focuses on how the U.S. anti-violence moment ran into the U.S. prison nation (also known as the prison industrial complex); and the third, is how the increased attention to violence against women has disadvantaged black women. This event was well attended, and a robust question and answer session followed Dr. Richie’s lecture.

The Women's and Gender Studies Program is pleased to announce the winners of our first annual Awards for Student Writing and Activism!

Nela Taskovska won the writing award for her MA thesis, "Why Diplomacy Needs to be More Feminist: The Creation of a New Approach to Political Mediation."

Andrew Gilbert won honorable mention for his MA thesis, "Gender, Taste, and Cinephile Culture."

Lucas Barnhill won the WGS Activism award for his role in organizing the RU Proud month of Trans* events.

The awards were presented at our May 2nd graduation ceremony.

WGS graduate assistants Molly Barnard and Linnea Kennedy (pictured at right) would like to thank all the WGS students and faculty who contributed to this newsletter issue.