As the following pages demonstrate, the students and faculty of the WGS Program have spent the first half of the 2010-11 academic year developing new program initiatives, engaging in activism, advocacy, and scholarship, meeting and mentoring students, and collaborating with members of the university community on a variety of events and projects. In addition to welcoming a wonderful new class of MA students, the WGS Program has spent the semester developing plans to serve our diverse, growing, and talented group of undergraduate minors. To that end, we have been meeting with current and prospective minors, learning about their experiences in pursuing the minor, their particular research and activist interests, and their suggestions for developing activities and curricula. These exchanges, from the less formal gathering at the Annual WGS Social to the more formal convening of an Advisory Board of Minors, have inspired new collaborations with student organizations, engagements with students interested in gender, feminist, and sexuality studies, and intellectual and social activities that highlight the excellent work of our undergraduate students.

Our core courses continue to reflect the field’s curricular and pedagogical innovations. This fall, Ann Brigham redesigned the graduate-level seminar for all first-semester MA students. Entitled “Feminist Modes of Inquiry,” this course considered how “different research processes are founded on either explicit or, more often, unexamined assumptions” and posed the question, “How do gender and feminist theories and politics influence the kinds of research questions we ask, the types of tools we use, and the character of the relationships formed between researchers and their subject, evidence, and writing?” Meanwhile, Marjorie Jolles’s “Global Feminist Ethics,” examined the “classical and contemporary systems of ethics that have dominated ethical debate” and “how those systems engage with transnational and feminist theory and practice.” And, Regina Buccola’s “Feminist Theories of Performance” combined analyses of a range of plays, performance art pieces, and films with recent feminist theorizing in order to consider “how gender is performed in both the theater and in life.”

As we look forward to an exciting spring semester, I would like to thank everyone who contributed to and participated in the WGS Program’s courses and events throughout the semester. I wish everyone a relaxing winter break, and a Happy New Year.

Ellen O’Brien
Director, Women’s and Gender Studies Program
What is your current research project and how did you become interested in this specific focus?

I am currently writing a book about the genre of the American road narrative. Examining the genre's earliest examples from the 1910s, its most recognized representatives like *On the Road* and *Thelma & Louise*, and recent offerings such as the film *Transamerica*, I am arguing that the road narrative's endurance as an American cultural form can be explained by its complex engagement with mobility as an ideological and spatial practice. In many ways, the quintessential American experience has been defined by the promise of mobility: the freedom to go anywhere and become anyone. In fact, the two have often been linked: spatial mobility—the movement between places or across space—has often been understood as a way to achieve a range of other mobilities, from the psychological and sexual to the social and economic. I can think of no better way to explore this linkage than through the study of the road narrative genre. By looking at different sets of road narratives produced in the last 100 years, I want to understand how meanings of mobility change not only across texts, but also in the American cultural imaginary. By analyzing the ways social and spatial mobility are repeatedly redefined, I want to understand the cultural work that this national myth of mobility performs in different historical moments.

I became interested in this project after reading road narratives from the 1910s, including Sinclair Lewis’ road novel *Free Air*, which was published in 1919. Early road novels repeatedly focused on the course of star-crossed lovers from different economic and ethnic groups. These novels represent mobility as the forging of intimacies across the yawning gap of social difference, and I started thinking about how this romance plot embedded a larger story about the tensions surrounding national unification and cultural assimilation. This definition is very different from the way that mobility is defined as a counter-cultural practice in texts from the post-World War II period, and I realized I was very interested in looking at how, and why, mobility was constantly redefined in the American cultural imagination.

In what ways does a feminist research methodology shape your research and writing experience?

In terms of methodology, this project focuses on the analysis of mobility as a dominant discourse or, to borrow a phrase from Susan Faludi, as a “structuring myth” of American national identity and culture. Although this approach is not exclusively feminist, in this case, my analysis is fundamentally concerned with the ways that national mythologies both produce and are produced by investments in heteronormativity, whiteness, and specific definitions of gender and gender relations. To me, cultural texts deserve our attention because they raise questions rather than provide answers, and I try to bring that model of inquiry to my own research and writing. Finally, I am employing an interdisciplinary approach; like my previous work, this project strives to deepen considerations of spatiality and geographical concepts in the humanities. In doing so, I want to show that that literary and cultural texts provide important and complex ways to understand, first, how space is produced, and second, how space shapes identity and social relations.

What advice do you have for students who are interested in pursuing similar projects in the future?

As obvious as this sounds, I would encourage students to keep asking questions, not only about your topic, but also about how to approach it. If you are interested in analyzing cultural texts and narratives, figure out ways to bring together questions of aesthetics with those of politics. I’m always thinking about why it is important to write about cultural texts and what it means to do interdisciplinary work. Taken together, these two concerns prompt me to bring together several different theoretical and critical frameworks in my analyses. Be constantly thinking of how you can use a multi-pronged analysis to enrich not only the analysis of your subject matter but also our understandings of research and the importance of textual analysis.
This semester, Professor Leslie Rebecca Bloom participated in a Fulbright Specialist project in Colombia. The Fulbright Specialists Program (FSP) promotes linkages between U.S. academics and professionals and their counterparts at universities abroad. The program is designed to award grants to qualified U.S. faculty and professionals, in select disciplines, to engage in short-term collaborative 2 to 6 week projects at higher education institutions in over 100 countries worldwide. The purpose of Professor Bloom’s grant was to meet with faculty and graduate students to develop social justice approaches to qualitative research scholarship at involved Colombian universities (Universidad de Antioquia, the Pontificia Bolivariana University, and the Corporación Universitaria Lasallista) and their various schools (i.e. Public Health, Medicine, Social Communication and Business Management).

How did you become interested in this particular project? What prompted you to apply for this grant?

I’m very active in the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry and a group of Colombian researchers who come to the Congress were interested in developing their skills at doing qualitative research. So, I was asked by the conference organizer, sociologist Norman Denzin, if I would be interested in doing a workshop for this group on qualitative research. I said, “Sure, that sounds like a lot of fun.” As I was putting the workshop together I realized that they already knew a lot about qualitative research, so I asked them if they would be interested in focusing more on social justice and activism in qualitative research. That was two years ago in May. The following year, they asked to do a continuation workshop at the Congress. That year—2010—we decided to write three articles based on our experiences and their work and, in order to do that, they said, “We’d like you to come to Colombia.” I found out that Fulbright had a program called the Fulbright Specialists Program, which is short term, for very specific projects. So, they wrote a request to the Fulbright Commission in Colombia for money to bring someone in and they basically described me. I wrote a proposal to do this specific kind of qualitative work and Fulbright matched us. It’s an interesting program because you can get matched with someone you already know as well as with an international institution that you don’t know.

What do you feel you and your hosts gained from this experience?

I think my most valuable contribution was in promoting social justice approaches to qualitative research at these Medellin universities and providing feedback for how to go about doing that for specific research projects.

I learned so much from this experience and found it to be profoundly meaningful. One thing I learned was how important it is for me to not generalize social justice activism based on a US context. While in Medellin and the Amazon, I learned about the ways that violence and narco-trafficking continues to disrupt Colombia, limiting activism. It was important for me to be there to learn about this safety issue for my colleagues. I also learned about how wide-ranging activism is, and how courageous my colleagues are in their efforts to fight poverty, gang violence, corruption, and racism despite the dangers of doing so.

Do you have plans for future collaboration with the group you worked with in Medellin?

The research team will continue to work together in two ways. First, we will meet in Urbana, Illinois at the Congress again this May and present papers together. Second, we are working on three articles, based on our experiences working and learning together, and we will be working on these articles for publication over the next year. I plan on continuing working with and being colleagues with this group for a long time. I am also helping one member of the research team to come to the US for his doctorate and will help another distribute a large survey for a research project that she wants to conduct in the US and in Colombia. Further, one of the Colombian faculty, Dr. Gloria Molina, may be coming to do research in Chicago this winter and, hopefully, she will have some interactions with colleagues and students through the Mansfield Institute of Social Justice and Transformation at Roosevelt University.
What course will you teach in Spring 2011?

I will be teaching "Comparative Feminisms: India, Morocco, and the US," a course that I first taught in Fall 2008. I am looking forward to improving on the original version and exploring some of the new research and writing that has come out in the meantime.

In 2008, you participated in the Fulbright-Hays Seminar in Morocco. How did this experience impact your approach to and the content of this course?

The Fulbright-Hays Seminar is a Department of Education program that organizes study and travel seminars abroad for US educators in order to support curricular development of international content. This is a pressing issue in WGS, and I was interested in using this opportunity to contribute to the diversity of our own program's offerings in these terms. Having participated in a Fulbright-Hays Seminar in India and Sri Lanka in 2003, I hoped to gain access to a program in a Muslim-majority country. When Morocco was listed as a possible site, I submitted my project proposal and was funded to participate in an 8-week seminar in 2008. My main goals were to explore the practices and discourses of feminisms in both academic and activist contexts and to consider those dynamics with respect to the organization of the state. The seminar was organized loosely around a theme of modernity meeting tradition (and vice versa), which opened up much discussion of gendered matters. Unlike the US and India, which, of course, are both secular democracies, Morocco operates as a constitutional monarchy, with the monarch retaining notably strong executive powers. This structure has particularly interesting implications for examining feminist encounters with the state and provides interesting comparative material for the course.

Who are some of the theorists students will read in the course?

Theorists and scholars will include a range of writers working in India, Morocco, and the US, including: Uma Narayan, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, Fatima Mernissi, Fatima Saddiqi, Leila Ahmed.

What do you hope students will gain from considering feminisms from multiple geographical and cultural locations?

Examining feminisms in multiple locations will, I hope, help students to explore how feminisms develop with respect to the specificities of particular locales and how feminisms travel across and between multiple sites. Invariably, such studies highlight the sometimes invisible contours of our own locations and assumptions. These particular locations also raise questions about how imperialist and colonialist ideologies circulate and how the category of "woman" and the "status of women" signify in postcolonial nation-state formations in both domestic and international arenas.
IN THE CLASSROOM:
STUDENTS REVIEW COURSE TEXTS


Global Feminist Ethics, one of this fall’s WGS 404 offering taught by Professor Marjorie Jolles, has examined systems of morality and where they intersect with feminist theory and practice across cultures. Each week, topics ranging from motherhood to pornography are discussed and debated, with readings ranging from Aristotle to bell hooks, from Nietzsche to Uma Narayan.

Among the many engaging texts, Judith Butler’s “Torture and the Ethics of Photography” captured my interest immediately and thoroughly. Having written about representations of torture in Guantanamo Bay in her 2004 book *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence*, in this piece, Butler turns her focus to the Abu Ghraib photographs, their dissemination and the implications they hold for the photographers, the subjects, and the audience. She discusses at length the concept of “frames,” whether the literal boundaries of a photography or the metaphorical boundaries of personal experience, and how audiences and subjects address the distance created by those frames. Butler’s voice is engaging, thoughtful, and rigorous; even while addressing deeply disturbing issues, she maintains a humanity in her writing that kept me interested in her words even when I was discomforted by what she was saying. By the end of the article, I came away with new ideas about how we document and preserve memory and how what we choose to document and preserve affects immediate and future audiences’ perception of those events.

—Julie Mynatt, WGS MA Student


In Regina Buccola's Feminist Theories of Performance class, we have examined plays and performance art written by (and about) 20th century Western women. We have also discussed the patriarchal representations of women on-stage, and the male-dominated world of playwriting. Megan Terry's play, *Calm Down Mother*, facilitated a discussion surrounding what it means to be a woman and whether or not being a woman (or the possession of eggs) is enough to compose and sustain a life. The play is essentially a series of vignettes where three women perform many roles, shifting fluidly through characters, distinguishing each by gestures and mannerisms. One of the themes we discussed was the idea of finding a voice and being worthy of an audience for that voice. Several of the scenes are concerned with not seeming so small, being able to hold it together, and having something to be proud of—all issues some women still grapple with more than 40 years after Terry penned this play. Both the loss of and the hyper presentation of sexuality is also a prevalent theme and the play closes as the three women chant that the "eggies in their beggies" are enough and, finally, shout "ARE THEY?" This ending seems to be Terry’s claim that motherhood and the ability to bear children are not all a woman is built to do. It is not enough to assume motherhood is the ultimate goal, and she forces her audience to leave the play contemplating that claim.

—Liz Stigler, WGS MA Student
STUDENT PROFILE:
JESSICA PALEK ON ACTIVISM AND INTERNSHIPS

Jessica is an undergraduate pursuing a BA in Political Science and a Minor in Women’s and Gender Studies.

What internships have you had in the past or do you have now?

For eight weeks over the summer, I participated in the Summer Leadership Program at Women Employed (WE). WE is a nonprofit advocacy organization dedicated to improving women’s economic opportunities through analyzing workplace issues, educating policy makers, and building educational and career development supports. I also spent two months working in the Policy and Advocacy Unit of the City of Chicago’s Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS). DFSS supports the City’s initiatives in many arenas such as children and youth services, homelessness, senior services, workforce development, human services, and also houses the city’s Division on Domestic Violence. In addition to developing and promoting a policy agenda that advances key priorities for Chicago residents most in need, the Policy and Advocacy Unit collaborates with other City departments and university partners to gather and disseminate data that identifies community needs, researches best practices and develops policy reports and publications, and evaluates and assesses program and policy effectiveness.

How did you become interested in or involved with these particular organizations or projects?

My interests lie broadly in social policy and women’s issues, so I sought to find organizations that spoke to both interests. My desire to work in the non-profit sector in the future brought me to Women Employed, whose Summer Leadership Program seeks to expose interns to all aspects of non-profit work while being dedicated to the pertinent issue of how low wage work affects women. Many believe that the progress women have made in the workplace means women have achieved equality, but in reality almost half of all women in the workforce still hold low-paying jobs and face critical challenges, an issue I think is vital to the goals of third wave feminism. I saw being an intern with DFSS as a great way to gain policy experience, make connections in Chicago, and take part in the Unit responsible for one of the nation’s best domestic violence response networks. Gender based violence is an issue that also impassions me and remains a battle we have yet to completely conquer, so I saw this outlet as a way to personally influence that fight.

What have the internships entailed?

The Summer Leadership Program is a unique program that offers real hands-on program work combined with an educational approach. I collaborated with seven other amazing young women on a number of projects including creating a professional newsletter aimed at donors and developing WE’s social media presence. I also participated in a campus organizing project for WE’s Student Advocates for Success. SAS is a program directed mainly at non-traditional female students that seeks to give students the tools necessary to advocate on their own behalf on issues like financial aid or student supports. I gained experience in database development, field observation, and survey implementation. I also took part in WE’s Clear Connections Project, a partnership between WE and Illinois community colleges that seeks to increase access and quality of support services, again mainly for non-traditional students. I acted as a “mystery student” for a day at a local community college, experiencing the assistance offered to new students, like entrance testing, registration processes, financial aid assistance and childcare services, to name a few. I then assessed the information I had collected and developed a concise report as a way to provide technical feedback to the participating community college. Additionally, the educational aspect of the Summer Leadership program sponsored a range of professional women working in the nonprofit sector, state government, and unions to come share their stories, answer questions about career paths and to offer professional advice. We also participated in grant writing exercises, fundraising and financial management seminars, political analysis and policy presentations, resume building workshops, advocacy and communications skill building and organizational leadership lectures.
As a Public Service Intern at DFSS, I was first involved in work on domestic violence and poverty. The Department is always concerned with the ways in which its response network can be improved and made more effective. Much of what comprises efforts to combat domestic violence is sound research, effectively educating others on the issue, and developing comprehensive responses and policies. My tasks thus involved synthesizing Chicago’s Policy Blueprint on Domestic Violence (DV) and Poverty into an easily accessible outline as a way to educate myself and to provide an overview to inform others. I was also able to take part in the Department’s work on food access issues. Chicago is riddled with food deserts, the term used to describe typically low-income and African-American neighborhoods that lack or remain isolated from mainstream grocery stores containing varied fresh produce. My efforts included extensive internet-based research on best practices from other U.S. cities. I was able to compile information on an interesting project from Baltimore, and serve as an intermediary between Baltimore’s Department of Human Services and DFSS. I helped to organize a teleconference between all interested parties in Chicago and Baltimore to share information on the project and then began working on ideas for a Chicago-based model.

How do you see women’s and gender studies intersecting with your internship experience?

I believe that Women's and Gender Studies is as much a mode of thought as a concrete practice. Applying a gendered lens to our policy approaches allows for a more intersectional and critical look at how we develop programs and initiatives and for whom exactly they are serving. The issues that WGS students learn about in class, like economic discrimination or violence against women, have the potential to be remedied in part by how we design our social policies. This conviction has influenced my work in my internships and is that which guides my career goals. Believe it or not, the paradigm for much of the sparse U.S. social safety net still leans on the assumption of a certain “place” for women, like in the traditional role of mother and homemaker. Policy makers can utilize feminist analysis to alter this perception and to guide policies in a direction that recognizes the advances women have made in the workforce and how families have become reorganized, to name a couple. Also, I think advocacy organizations like Women Employed provide a crucial voice for underserved women in the media, our communities, and the public sphere.

What have been the greatest challenges and joys of being an intern?

It is challenging to move from a supportive academic environment into the professional political world where not everyone shares your view. It forces you to be persuasive, deliberate and sound in your convictions and in the way you interact professionally. It has also been a challenge translating the research and writing skills I’ve learned in college into professional skills, albeit highly rewarding. Some things you just have to learn through experience, and it requires quite a bit of uncertainty- you just have to throw yourself out there, which can be terrifying. But in that way, my experiences have been highly empowering. One of the most salient rewards for me was the opportunity to meet and interact with so many dynamic, professional women who offered me so much powerful advice and mentorship. I’ve found that an internship is an excellent way to sort out what kind of meaningful work I want to funnel my studies and passions into.

STUDENT PROFILE: VAN BINFA DISCUSSES BEING A WGS MINOR AND TRANS ADVOCACY WORK

Van will graduate with a BA in English and Minor in WGS this December.

Why did you decide to get a degree in WGS at RU?

I transferred to RU after completing an Associate’s at Harper because of its two campuses, small classes, and its realistic commitment to social justice and diversity. When I transferred here way back in the fall of 2008, I knew my major, but I was torn between a minor in history or WGS. I took a class in each program to decide by the end of the semester. I realized that all my papers in my history class had a gender studies aspect. As I took more WGS classes in the Spring of 2009—and got to know the department and faculty better—I knew I had made the best decision.
What have you most enjoyed about RU's WGS program? Have there been any challenges?

I think what separates WGS from any other program at RU is that it’s small and personalized. Despite the relative smallness of WGS compared to a bigger department like history, there is always someone who can try their best to accommodate students within the program. You don’t just learn from a textbook, you learn from the other students in your class. Readings are great, but some of the most meaningful things I’ve learned have been from the people sitting right next to me.

The most challenging thing about being a WGS minor has been explaining to people why I chose this degree. People outside of (and even some within) academia demand to know what WGS is, why it’s important, and why I would want to spend time and money on “something like that.” I think a lot of people nowadays don’t see a value in liberal arts programs. So it’s been a process to try to explain WGS to others not familiar with it. It’s a challenge I know I’ll be addressing further on in my career (with English and WGS) but every question is a chance to educate.

What are your areas of interest?

I’m not a pro, but I love to cook and knit. I can only knit scarves at this point, but I hope to someday be able to produce my own socks. I’m an English Lit major, so my concentration is in literary criticism and analysis, but I enjoy working on a more creative level with poetry and short stories. I’m also a cartoonist and a very right brain person, in general. If I had more time and money I’d have also majored in Art.

Within WGS my interests are in LGBTQ and intersex theory/studies. And in that realm I like to examine areas of power, patriarchal influence, and how feminism and queer theory have helped or can help. I love working with the trans and intersex communities on ways to transform gender and identity—we’re truly evolving as a community and it’s wonderful to be a part of that.

What projects are you currently working on? What are your career goals? How will a degree in WGS be beneficial? What are your immediate plans after graduation?

I’m currently working on trans advocacy mainly in college and university communities. I’ve done two speeches this semester—at Harper and Benedictine—about my experience as a transman. Both audiences were incredibly respectful and receptive. My WGS background really helps me give comprehensible and well-rounded speeches to audiences that are fairly new to trans/gender topics. A degree in WGS—even as a minor—has provided me with the knowledge to tap into social issues, question, seek out answers, and convey my knowledge in a comprehensible way.

I’m currently working on a substantial piece of creative writing with Scott Blackwood this semester. My piece has a queer/transgendered aspect to it, in a series of vignettes. I’ve always been fascinated by the idea that identities are changeable. There’s so much awesome possibility there.

My immediate plans after graduation consist of getting as much sleep as possible. I think people underestimate how hard college students work; we really lose out on the whole rest and relaxation thing. I want to recharge my batteries a bit before continuing with graduate school in an English program with a gender studies concentration. For now, I’d like to get involved in the trans community—either through more speeches or as a writer—until I’m ready to dive into graduate school.

I’m going to miss RU—the wacky temperatures of the Auditorium building, the endless ambulance sirens on Michigan Avenue, the beautifully decorated Murray Green Library whose scenery always distracts me from what I’m doing, and all the wonderful and dedicated faculty. It’s been fun, RU!

Michelle-Marie Gilkeson, editor of the Women’s and Gender Studies Program Newsletter, would like to thank the students and faculty who contributed to this issue.

Michelle-Marie is a second year WGS MA student and the WGS Program Graduate Assistant.
“If you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem’: Feminist Qualitative Research”

In early October, faculty and students gathered to hear Leslie Rebecca Bloom, Professor of Education and Women's and Gender Studies, discuss what it means to do work on poverty and social class and her work in combining feminist research and activism. Professor Bloom shared her experience working with the organization Beyond Welfare in Ames, Iowa. Her interest in this kind of research and activism grew, in part, as a reaction to the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), signed by Bill Clinton in 1996. Professor Bloom explained the misogynistic assumptions on which the PRWORA was developed and described the kind of work groups like Welfare Reform have done and continue to do in order to foster community engagement and social networks to address and respond to local poverty.

"Applying to PhD Programs in Women’s and Gender Studies Related Fields”

Also in October, a panel of WGS faculty including Ellen O'Brien, Marjorie Jolles, and Ann Brigham discussed tips and strategies for applying to PhD programs. The panelists explained all requirements for PhD applications and provided detailed methods for approaching each requirement. Students across several disciplines, including WGS, Sociology, and English, attended and had the opportunity to ask questions about the PhD application process and PhD student experience.

"If I Should Die Before I Wake: Health Issues of Women Aging in Prison"

In November, The Mansfield Institute for Social Justice and Transformation, the Loundy Project on Human Rights, the Women's and Gender Studies Program, and the Sociology and Criminal Justice departments are co-sponsored a presentation and discussion on Women Aging in Prison. The lecturer, Kathleen O'Shea, is a leading authority on the subject of women on death row and addressed the impact of long term incarceration and life without parole on the aging female inmate. She encourages people to look at this in terms of the economy, psychological isolation, physical health, isolation from family and friends, and a sense of agelessness-while-aging unique to the prison experience. This event was part of the Cradle To College Pipeline project that addresses the problem of American children’s higher chance of going to prison than college.

2010 Matthew Freeman Lecture:
“Gender Dis-integration and the Discipline of ‘LGBT’: A Transfeminist Perspective”

The annual Matthew Freeman Lecture & Social Justice Award Ceremony was held in December. Anne Enke, a professor of History and Women's and Gender Studies at the University of Wisconsin, spoke on "Gender Dis-integration and the Discipline of 'LGBT': A Transfeminist Perspective." Themes of her talk included the processes by which certain aspects of historical events get recorded and remembered, while others do not; the various institutional ways gender presentations are policed; and the literal and political borders that are created in social movements, specifically the gay and lesbian liberation and trans liberation movements.

Professor Enke is the author of Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space, and Feminist Activism (Duke University Press, 2007), which examines feminist organizing in Minneapolis/St. Paul, Chicago, and Detroit from the 1960s to the 1980s. After the Matthew Freeman Lecture, Professor Enke met with WGS faculty and graduate students to discuss her experience as a researcher and historian, her strategy for finding moments in historical documents that motion to an alternative history, and the importance of using a transfeminist perspective as a methodology.

Women’s and Gender Studies Program at Roosevelt University

Associate Professor Ellen O'Brien, Director
eobrien@roosevelt.edu
Roosevelt University, College of Arts and Sciences
Mailstop: 724, 430 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL 60605

For more information about the program and to view course listings, please visit
http://roosevelt.edu/wgs