As we bring another successful academic year to a close, our newsletter reviews the interesting work undertaken by students and faculty in WGS. In addition to the highlights that you will read about in the following pages, the core faculty of the WGS Program spent this academic year assessing and revising the undergraduate minor, which will be in place in fall 2012 for a new class of entering students. Changes include establishing a new system of pre-requisites for advanced courses, moving the introductory course to the 100-level, and introducing two new 200-level courses—WGS 211: Feminist Theory and WGS 212: Feminism in Action.

The WGS Program continues to grow in important ways. Our enthusiastic population of undergraduate minors has almost tripled in the last two years, and our second annual undergraduate symposium attracted a large and engaged audience from across the university. Our introductory courses continue to fill up and close, and our upper-level courses attract students from a range of backgrounds and majors. Meanwhile, a growing number of activist undergraduate and graduate students have fostered robust debates and created compelling campus events to connect the broader community to the multidimensional work of gender studies.

I would like to close by celebrating Marjorie Jolles’s recent tenure and promotion to Associate Professor. She is now the first full-time, tenured professor in WGS at RU. The majority of our dedicated (and tenured) core faculty members hold joint appointments. Therefore, just as this achievement marks a milestone for Marjorie’s career, it also marks an important institutional milestone for the program because it signifies RU’s support for and commitment to the important work of our program. Please join me in congratulating Marjorie on her success.

Looking forward to the fall semester, I would like to encourage all of our newsletter readers to mark their calendars for the Annual WGS Social to be held on Thursday, September 13 from 4:30 to 6:00PM. The social offers an opportunity for WGS faculty, WGS students, and other members of the university community to launch another academic year and to exchange information about the program and shared WGS interests. Look for updates on this and other events on our website: http://www.roosevelt.edu/wgs

Congratulations to all of our graduates and best wishes to all for a relaxing and enjoyable summer, and I will see you in 2012!

Ellen O’Brien
Director, Women’s and Gender Studies
On Friday March 30th the Women’s and Gender Studies Program hosted the second annual symposium for new undergraduate work entitled: Debates and Dialogues. The symposium was designed as a space for undergraduates to work on professional development in a small, familiar setting with a very supportive audience. It is also a nice way for students to see what their peers are working on and engage in discourse outside the classroom.

We were fortunate to experience a wide range of topics; from Henry Gerber and the Society for Human Rights, to restorative justice in Chicago Public Schools. The beauty of such an intimate event is the ample time allowed for discussion and the hashing out of problematic issues. Following a presentation on gender and the inmate identity, audience members engaged in a lengthy discussion of the prison industrial complex and the bodies of inmates that left everyone with something to think about.

The keynote address was delivered by Alexandra Moffet-Bateau, doctoral candidate at the University of Chicago, (pictured at right with WGS program director, Ellen O’Brien) and was entitled: “Developing a Vision: On Becoming a Black Feminist in Academia.” Alexandra’s talk focused on the process of becoming intentional- both as a scholar and a person. She discussed the importance of knowing the person you want to be and mindfully carving out that identity. Alexandra's talk was extremely relatable and provided insights that will be remembered long into the future.

Closing out the day was Carrie Brecke’s second-annual World Famous Trivia Lunch. Attendees divided up into three teams to compete in rounds of feminist trivia including: identifying famous feminist faces and music groups. In addition to being delicious, the trivia lunch allowed all involved to get to know each other and enjoy each others’ company outside of the classroom.

Overall, the event was quite successful and well attended. We cannot wait to see what next year will bring!

-Liz Stigler, WGS MA
9:00 Welcome: Ellen O’Brien and Jessica Weirman

9:15 to 10:00 Panel 1: LGBT Identity and Activism
Moderator: Anna Meyer
"The Story of Henry Gerber and The Society for Human Rights" by Christian Weber
"Representation in India: The National-Lesbian Identity" by Meg Gravelle

10:15 to 11:15 Panel 2: Body Politics
Moderator: Taylor Massa
"Dangerous Intersection: Gender and the 'Inmate' Identity" by Sydney Spicer
"Whose Body: Agency and the Abolitionist Depiction of the Black Woman in Slavery" by Haley Leibovitz
"School Safety for Girls and LGBT Students Through Restorative Justice in Chicago Public Schools" by Rachel Colias and Katherine Klotz

11:30 to 12:30 Keynote Address: "Developing a Vision: On Becoming a Black Feminist in Academia" by Alexandra Moffet-Bateau, Doctoral candidate in Political Science at U of Chicago

12:30 to 2:00 Lunch and WGS Trivia Contest

Student presenters and moderators (left to right): Sydney Spicer, Taylor Massa, Jessica Weirman, Anna Meyer, Rachel Colias, Christian Weber, Meg Gravelle.
IN THE CLASSROOM:
STUDENTS REVIEW COURSE TEXTS


In *Water Wars: Privatization, Pollution, and Profit*, Vandana Shiva- seed activist, author, eco feminist, and all around goddess extraordinaire- eloquently paints a picture of the dangers of the privatization of water and how local communities’ rights to water are being usurped in favor of profits and rapid globalization. Shiva bases her work on the principles of riparian rights (the natural right of dwellers supported by a water system to use the water) and usufructuary rights (the right to use or enjoy something) and argues that many modern day global conflicts which are often depicted in mainstream media outlets as religious or ethnic wars are actually fought over access to natural resources. In Prof. Carrie Brecke’s WGS 304/404 course “Race, Gender, and Environmental Justice”, we discussed our own personal connections to water, and how our easy access to it is a luxury that the majority of the world does not experience.

We also discussed private ownership vs. riparian and usufructuary rights, and how the belief that all people have the right to freely access, enjoy, and use clean water is disruptive to corporate capitalism which dictates that private corporations would best handle the management and use of communities’ water sources. Shiva boldly counters this pro-corporate stance by providing numerous examples of communally managed water systems in different regions throughout the world which have supported populations for centuries, most in arid and desert areas where water is scarce to begin with. *Water Wars* is a call to action, not just to put a stop to privatization of natural resources and unchecked corporate power, but for us to rethink our relationship to water and to begin to view it as a source of life, and not a commodity to be bought and sold.

-Linnea Kennedy, WGS MA student


In Professor Ann Brigham’s class on 20th Century American Women’s Fiction we had the pleasure of reading Willa Cather’s exceptionally crafted novel *My Ántonia*. Through subtly sophisticated prose we become a part of Jim Burden’s endearing memories and nostalgia for his childhood friend, Ántonia Shimerda- a Bohemian immigrant girl who ignites strength, perseverance and inspiration. We begin to follow Ántonia’s remarkable journey as she attempts to conquer the untamed Nebraska plains, experiencing the hardships of the uncultivated foreign land and battling the cultural perceptions of immigrants at end of the 19th century. With poignant mastery and skilful reminiscence, Cather manages to present Antonia as the epitome of love, commitment and family loyalty in the midst of immigrant struggles and gender restrictions.

The character of Ántonia Shimerda stands as a symbol of Western expansion and growth in America, of securing stability and happiness in a land of ethnic diversity and economic opportunity. However, Cather provides a noteworthy social commentary on the hardships of immigrants attempting to assimilate in a foreign culture that offers both hostility and limited access to political mobility. As Ántonia strives to transgress the gender boundaries and the social restrictions for women at the time with a dose of naiveté and a free-spirit, she emerges as a timeless beacon of strength, security, motherhood and a forever-inspiring zeal for life. *My Ántonia* remains as an enduring classic of American literature that has the power to transform its reader in the most sensational and humbling way. As Cather nostalgically incorporates Virgil’s words “Optima dies ... prima fugit” (The best days are the first to flee) in the novel’s epigraphic inscription, the reader is passionately drawn to sense the spirit of the American frontier following the life path of a young Bohemian girl who embodies a time of immigrant struggle with eternal vigor and never-fleeing reminiscence.

-Nela Taskovska, WGS MA student
STUDENT PROFILE: JULIE MYNATT AND MEDIA LITERACY

Julie Mynatt has a BA in film & video from Columbia College Chicago. In her WGS graduate studies, she is interested in the construction of female protagonists by female filmmakers and the off-screen representation of female filmmakers (particularly directors) in cinema discourse. She chose graduate study so that she can more closely connect her interests in cinema with relevant feminist and WGS theory and pedagogy. Her thesis project will be a curriculum design for a cinema studies course now tentatively titled “Through Her Lens: Female Protagonists, Female Filmmakers,” but that title could change, so don’t hold her to it.

In January, Julie co-designed and presented a media literacy module for Columbia College's Moving Image Arts Spring curriculum. The 90-minute discussion and lecture was delivered by Julie and her collaborator, fellow Columbia College adjunct faculty Katherine O’Brien, to more than 200 film and video students over the course of one week. The teaching module examined how cinematic archetypes and stereotypes of race, class, gender and sexual orientation work to affect off-screen perceptions, and asked students to consider how the work they would create as filmmakers will contribute to this discourse. In preparation for the module, Julie found herself referring time and again to readings and research from her WGS coursework. The module was successful and Julie and Katherine have been asked to present it again in the fall semester.

-Julie Mynatt, WGS MA student

STUDENT PROFILE: ELIZABETH STIGLER, WGS MA GRAD

My thesis, entitled: Who I Really Am: The Politics of Transformation Within the Makeover Show, examines two reality makeover shows in order to interrogate our current cultural construction of transformation. In the paper I make the claim that the transformations enacted on reality makeover shows are not authentic transformations, but rather carefully branded and sculpted images designed to perpetuate hegemonic cultural norms. By engaging in the rhetoric of authenticity the makeover show cleverly disguises its' own manipulative qualities, and convinces participants and viewers that they are discovering their “true selves.” By exploring the role of experts —personal trainers, cosmetic surgeons— I illuminate the disempowering nature of makeover shows where the participant is not afforded mastery over her/his own body. I also unpack the role of hyper-visible consumerism and branding as it relates to the creation of a "new me," paying particular attention to the way transformation is sold to viewers. I conclude with a discussion of the dangers of the pervading makeover culture which dictates that bodies must be in constant states of remaking and “becoming” in order to be considered culturally valuable. I hope to elaborate on this work as I further my research in feminist media theory.

-Elizabeth Stigler, WGS MA
IN THE CLASSROOM:
MARJORIE JOLLES’ FASHION: POLITICS OF STYLE
AS TAUGHT BY ALEXANDRA BEVAN

This semester, students enrolled in Marjorie Jolles’ popular course WGS 304/404 “Fashion: Politics of Style” were afforded the unique opportunity to experience the class as taught by two different instructors. For the first six weeks of the semester, students were taught by core faculty member Marjorie Jolles, who developed the course and has taught it many times before. Coming from a philosophical background, Jolles’ course focuses on the ethos of fashion and theoretical underpinnings of personal style. In the middle of February, Jolles went on maternity leave and adjunct instructor Alexandra Bevan stepped in to teach the remainder of the semester.

Bevan’s background is in cultural studies, television studies, and feminist media criticism. She is a PhD student at Northwestern University, and just finished defending her dissertation titled, “TV Nostalgia for the Boomer House and Housewife”, on the resurgence of retro in television and the politics of nostalgia and memory. She is interested in “how nostalgia is narrated through production design” and says the switch to teaching fashion studies was a natural one, since she found “fashion permeated every chapter” as she wrote her dissertation.

Bevan also teaches two courses at DePaul University: Intro to Media and Cultural Studies and a graduate level course on the history of the sitcom and how it has been used to address racial and gender politics. The Intro to Media and Cultural Studies course is particularly rewarding for Bevan because she gets to expose students to basic feminist theory, many of whom are encountering it for the first time.

When asked about the challenges of taking over teaching a course mid semester, Bevan noted the differences between her field of study and Marjorie Jolles’ background in philosophy. “I wanted to use the difference to our advantage,” Bevan says, and chose to structure the second half of the course as a cultural studies application of the fashion theory that had been covered by Prof. Jolles in the first half of the class.

Bevan’s future plans include “publishing aggressively in academic journals” and expanding the research in her dissertation to include a global perspective on retro nostalgia. “My passion is teaching,” she says, and hopes to secure a permanent position at the university level. When asked about her experience of teaching “Fashion: Politics of Style” Bevan cited the individuality of the students enrolled in the class. “Roosevelt students are unique in their social consciousness,” she observes, which has made for lively and enriching class discussion.

-Linnea Kennedy, WGS MA student
This semester, I had the pleasure to sit down with Prof. Jeff Edwards to interview him about his fall 2012 course WGS 307/407 “Queer Histories: Place, Culture, and Politics”.

This popular course was first offered three years ago, as a grad only seminar. Though it has been several years since Prof. Edwards first taught this class, he explains, “I have been teaching components of this course for 20 years.” He also teaches a political science course on LGBT politics.

The course examines the formation of queer communities in urban settings. According to Edwards, this course allows students to “see very concretely how socially constructed gender is… to be able to look back at a specific period of time and see this is what gender was”.

The course focuses mostly on 20th century queer history, and “how the urban context creates spaces for people to operate outside the patriarchal, rural environment.” This shift from rural to urban led to the “emergence of new genders, the creation of communities, and thinking about power in political ways,” says Edwards. The class will also look at how identities intersect with emergent class relations in this time period.

Students will be reading A Wide Open Town by Nan Boyd, a book about the founding and history of San Francisco and its reputation as “a magnet for deviancy”. “We’ll be observing change over time and change within localities,” notes Edwards. “[A Wide Open Town] charts a process of community building and political organizing” he explains, by taking a look specifically at lesbian bar culture as significant to the political process.

When asked about changes in teaching the course now as opposed to three years ago, Prof. Edwards cites a greater emphasis on looking at contemporary LGBT politics through the lens of community histories.

“I plan on conducting an extensive bibliographic search when the semester is over,” he explains, and then adds that any students who might have a specific interest or location that they want the class to spend some time on, to please feel free to contact him and make your suggestions known.

-Linnea Kennedy, WGS MA student

WGS graduate assistants and newsletter editors Elizabeth Stigler and Linnea Kennedy would like to thank all the students and faculty who contributed to this issue.
In addition to our second annual symposium for undergraduate work, the Women’s and Gender Studies program was involved in many events this semester:

CREATE (Chicagoland Researchers and Advocates for Transformative Education) teamed up with the Mansfield Institute for Social Justice, COFI (Community Organizing and Family Issues) as well as several other Chicago area organizations to present “Increasing Safety through Restorative Justice: Making Schools Safe for Girls and LGBTQ Students in Chicago’s Public Schools”. This lively panel discussion moderated by Chicago Sun-Times correspondent, Laura Washington.

WGS Minors Lucas Barnhill, Brendan Carlson, and Emily Wilkie, along with RU Proud, and a committee of Roosevelt Student Leaders hosted an Ally Training Workshop to educate students and faculty on LGBTQI issues. Workshops offered at the event covered topics ranging from the coming out process (hosted by members of the RU Counseling Center), to transgender identity, and creating safe environments for LGBTQI community members. The popular “Exes and Whys: Pseudo Humans” workshop was presented by community leader and intersex activist, Pidgeon Pagonis.

RU CAASE (Colleges Alligned Against Sexual Exploitation) was fortunate enough to host performer Donna Jensen’s one woman show “A Time To Tell: One Woman’s Way Through Incest”, as a fundraiser for various Chicago-area women’s organizations. RU CAASE is a relatively new student organization, founded last semester by Meggie Chambers, an international studies major. WGS MA students Ashley Blair, Jane Whitford, and Linnea Kennedy worked alongside Meggie to bring Jensen and her performance to Roosevelt. The RU chapter of CAASE is the first college level chapter of the city wide organization Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation. CAASE’s mission is to create a global community free from sexual exploitation.