The spring newsletter offers us an opportunity to appreciate the program’s development over the past academic year. As the following pages detail, the program, its students, and its faculty have been engaged in a range of new activities that have contributed to the intellectual and social dimensions of our program. In addition to the various non-classroom activities that you will read about in the following pages, our faculty and students continue to come together in core WGS courses that reflect recent developments in the field and foster important explorations of feminist analysis. Attracting students across disciplines, these courses contribute substantially to RU’s mission by highlighting questions of gender justice within a broader institutional framework of social justice. This semester, Leslie Bloom, who joined the core faculty of WGS in 2010, offered her first course, “Women, Social Class, and Social Policy,” which linked qualitative research methodologies to transformational service learning projects. My course, “Comparative Feminisms: India, Morocco, and the U.S.,” explored how “feminism”—as a term and a practice—is deployed, defined, and/or rejected in specific national and cultural contexts. Heidi Truax reprised her popular undergraduate course, “Queer: Sex, Theory, Activism,” which foregrounded connections between theoretical models and activist work.

I want to express my sincere gratitude for everyone who contributed to the academic work and the collegial spirit of the WGS program this year. Special thanks are also due to the program’s graduate assistant, Michelle-Marie Gilkeson, who has worked with dedication and imagination to strengthen the program and support its community in crucial ways.

Congratulations to our graduates, and best wishes for a relaxing summer.

Ellen O’Brien
Director, Women’s and Gender Studies
For her course, "Women, Social Class, and Social Policy," Dr. Leslie Rebecca Bloom incorporated a transformational learning component in order for her students to gain practical experience doing qualitative research that would support the work of an exciting local non-profit organization. Dr. Bloom contacted Women Employed (WE), a Chicago-based organization that aims to “improve the economic status of women and remove barriers to economic equity” (Women Employed, “Our Mission”). The organization expressed a desire to develop their Students Advocates for Success program (SAS) and to gain a richer understanding of the barriers community college students face when simultaneously trying to get an education and juggle additional life responsibilities. Since SAS is a program designed to organize students interested in becoming advocates for improved financial aid policy, Sarah Labadie, Policy Associate at WE and liaison to the RU student researchers, requested the study focus on financial aid.

After spending several weeks reading texts, the class had an historical and theoretical foundation with which to ground their research design and approach. Under the direction of Dr. Bloom, the students developed a feminist research methodology that informed the way they created interview questions and interacted with the interviewees. Scholars such as Luttrell, Anderson and Jack, and Glesne were integral during the process of developing a research design. As feminist qualitative researchers, the students grounded their work in the belief that “the very act of interaction between a researcher and a subject works to produce knowledge, and this knowledge is comprised of the complexities of individuals and their self-understandings.” They saw this type of methodology as a form of activism in itself.

Through the study, the students examined the issues of access to and use of financial aid for low income women. They collaboratively wrote a report, drawing on the interviews of three community college students (all SAS members) and three community college financial aid staff within the City Colleges of Chicago system. The interview data reveals the perceptions of these two groups of interviewees as they reflect on what it means to be a financial aid recipient at a community college and what it means to serve those seeking financial aid. The presentation of data is organized with the intent to support WE’s work as they continue both their advocacy for better financial aid policies for low income women and their development of the SAS program.

Originally, the intent was to only conduct student interviews, but after having difficulty getting enough students to agree to participate, the researchers shifted course and engaged with financial aid staff. Ultimately, this change in research design served the researchers and WE well. During the presentation of the study to WE, Sylene Isaac, one of the researchers, shared that because of the inclusion of staff, the study “turned out even better.” Another researcher, Michelle-Marie Gilkeson, agreed and said, “the report reflects a more comprehensive and complex picture of the relationships between financial aid policy makers, frontline staff, and aid recipients.” Because of the similarities and differences evident in the perspectives of students and staff, the researchers made a key recommendation to WE. They cited the importance of open communication between financial aid staff and students and advised, “It would be helpful if SAS members who have an interest and ability in investing more time to the program would hold student ambassador positions that specifically address the needs of their school. SAS ambassadors should be trained and then used to facili-
WGS STUDENTS FACILITATE “GIRL TALK” AT COOK COUNTY JUVENILE TEMPORARY DETENTION CENTER

Four Women's and Gender Studies students—Rose Tauke, Michelle-Marie Gilkeson, Rachel Colias, and Liz Stigler—are participating in a program that facilitates film screenings and creative projects for girls, ages 12-17, who are detained at the Cook County Temporary Juvenile Detention Center (JTDC). The students began their involvement in October 2010, when they attended an orientation meeting. They participated in trainings before spending numerous Saturdays with the girls at JTDC. Girl Talk, in its current form, is a reprise of a program started in Chicago in 1993, under the same name. The program was initially sponsored by the Children and Family Justice Center of Northwestern Law School (CFJC) and Chicago Women's Health Center. At the time, CFJC conducted a survey of the girls and “found that they faced a number of serious concerns on a daily basis, including sexual assault and other forms of violence, relationships and conflict resolution, education and employment, legal rights, and a wide range of health issues.” In addition to these concerns, “programming and services related to these issues were almost non-existent through the detention center, and Girl Talk, a name chosen by the girls themselves was one answer. Girl Talk started as an eight-week pilot project and quickly grew into a weekly year-round one.” Girl Talk grew and was eventually led by Wenona Thompson who had spent time detained at JTDC when she was an adolescent. For various reasons, the program dissolved in 2005 and, three years later, Wenona Thompson tragically died at the age of 32. January 2011, marked the first workshop held at JTDC by the revived Girl Talk program, currently under the guidance of Project NIA. The Girl Talk blog reads, “We are calling this initiative Girl Talk as a way of continuing and honoring the legacy of that program.” Girl Talk is coordinated by a leadership team of young women of color and facilitated by volunteers.

WGS MA student, Liz Stigler, who is a facilitator and the Girl Talk Intern, describes her experience with Girl Talk as an interesting one. She says, “Being the intern provided me with valuable insights which allowed me to approach my work with the girls at JTDC with a new perspective. At first, I was a bit skeptical about the project because the goals seemed very lofty for the type of institution (a temporary holding facility) that we would be working in. I expressed my concerns during a leadership team meeting, and was given a piece of advice that has stuck with me, ‘Don’t worry about the take-away, when you’re in there with the girls, let yourself be fully in there.’ That advice is yet another thing being a member of the Girl Talk leadership team has taught me.” Michelle-Marie Gilkeson remembers a similar piece of advice from one of the training sessions. She recalls Miriame Kaba, a member of the leadership team, saying that it is not the responsibility of

Sources:
the facilitators to try to go into JTDC and critique the structure and staff, or try to change the entire prison system, rather our goal is to provide a space in which the girls can interact with young women from the Chicago community and spend some time exploring their creativity. Michelle-Marie said this was possibly the best advice Miriame could have given: “It allowed me to let go of some of the more theoretical and political beliefs I hold about the prison industrial complex in the U.S., and to really just focus on the present moment with the girls. And, of course, that is a political act with that has an immediate effect on the lives of the girls and the facilitators.” Liz noted, “The amount of paperwork and red tape the leadership team deals with continues to astound me. Without constant monitoring and aggressive follow up this program would have never been allowed inside JTDC, which creates a problematic situation where policies seems designed to prohibit programs from entering the space. I am also very grateful for the passion and confidence with which the other members of the leadership team enact their duties. Being around such strong and committed women served to assuage many of my fears about personal effectiveness and allowed me to really see the deeper meaning in this work.”

Michelle-Marie recalled her favorite creative project she helped to facilitate with the girls. After screening the film *Ruby Bridges*, which portrays the real-life event of the first African American child to attend a formerly all-white school following desegregation, the facilitators led the girls in an art project that consisted of making original “protest posters.” “This was the most excited and lively I’d seen the girls,” Michelle-Marie recalled. “The diversity of the activist causes they chose to highlight and the passion they exhibited about their personal convictions was inspiring to me. It was very clear that these girls have a lot to say and it felt good to be one of the people there to hear it.”

To find out more about Girl Talk and how to become a volunteer facilitator, please visit: http://chicagogirltalk.wordpress.com/2011/04/14/interested-in-volunteering-with-girl-talk-join-us-on-may-14th/. The next volunteer information meeting will be held on May 14, at UIC.


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**WGS MA STUDENT, SAM EAGAN, REPORTS ON FALL SEMESTER INTERNSHIP AT CHRISTINE ANN DOMESTIC ABUSE SHELTER**

Working at the Christine Ann Domestic Abuse Shelter (CADAS) has really opened my eyes to what is happening in my community and what I can do to help. They are a Wisconsin non-profit domestic abuse shelter that helps victims in both Winnebago and Green Lake County, Wisconsin. However, they have enhanced their approach to be individualized based on which region the victim is from. Due to the many rural areas in Green Lake County, the center takes extra steps to provide additional services to victims in that area.

I chose this location because, after moving back to rural Wisconsin, I became extremely aware of the challenges victims face when seeking help in my small town. This internship has honestly given me a new perspective on the region where I live and has given me the tools to handle each situation that arises at both the shelter and in my community. Playing a part in the education and advocating of non-violence was extremely challenging and rewarding.

During my time at the shelter, I developed very strong relationships with the other advocates who care for the community as much as I do. I had the opportunity to see numerous victims walk into the shelter scared and broken, only to see them leave as strong survivors who are ready to take on the world. As I continue to work with the shelter, I’m sure it will be just as gratifying as my fall semester internship.

—Sam Eagan, WGS MA Student
In March, the Women’s and Gender Studies program held a symposium for undergraduate student work, titled “Making History.” One of the WGS Program’s goals this academic year has been to help foster connections between the WGS Minors and Master’s students. The first step in emphasizing the importance of the undergraduate WGS students was the creation of a Board of WGS Minors in the fall semester. Various Minors, including Jessica Palek, Anna Meyer, Rachel Colias, Van Binfa, Holly Yacoumakis, Taylor Massa, and Haley Leibovitz, and faculty members Marjorie Jolles and Carrie Brecke came together at meetings held by Ellen O’Brien and Michelle-Marie Gilkeson (the WGS Graduate Assistant) throughout the year. Together, the group developed ideas for a symposium that would offer professional experience to undergraduates and welcome the RU community at large to learn about the work WGS students do each year, both in class and independently. Women’s History Month seemed an appropriate time to hold such an event since the work presented at the symposium builds on past theories and activist work and contributes to the future of feminist scholarship.

The symposium consisted of three panels highlighting undergraduate work and one panel of graduate students. On the panel “Constructing Women: Intersections of Race, Class, and Gender,” Charis Chaputo presented, “Elizabethan Bodies: Constructions of Gender and Race in Early Modern England, 1558-1603” and Oneka Ijeoma presented, “Deconstructing the Myth of the Strong Black Woman: Society, Media, and Psychology.” Both Charis and Oneka discussed how specific historical moments dictated the ways women of various class, ethnic, and geographical locations were perceived and treated, and connected these moments to present day treatment of women. A panel titled “Transgender Activism and Advocacy,” featured speakers Van Binfa and Kai Barnhill as they discussed the work they have done on various college campuses, including Roosevelt University’s Chicago campus, to foster networks of allies for transgender students and to identify areas where colleges and universities can improve policies in order to respect gender variance. Jessica Palek, Rachel Colias, and Olivia Kaplan represented students in Leslie Bloom’s WGS 304/404 course in their presentation “Feminist Qualitative Research and Financial Aid Advocacy” that discussed the, at the time, study-in-process for the local non-profit, Women Employed. In the afternoon, a panel of WGS graduate students discussed the paths that led them to the RU WGS Program and their experiences as feminist activists and scholars.

For many, the highlight of the event was the WGS Trivia held during the luncheon. Carrie Brecke, WGS core faculty member and director of the Writing Center, hosted the trivia which consisted of a range of topics, including women athletes, writers, and musicians. Carrie is a veteran pub quiz participant and her enthusiasm for trivia shone through and was appreciated by all.

The symposium made visible the exciting academic and activist work Roosevelt students do. Professor O’Brien intends to hold the symposium annually and looks forward to the thoughtful and innovative work students will present at future symposiums.
In addition to the presentations made at “Making History: New Student Work in Women’s and Gender Studies,” faculty and students continue to bring exciting work to conferences across the nation. Below are some highlights from this academic year.

In September 2010, Professor Regina Buccola attended Kentucky Women Writers, where she was selected to participate in Mary Ann Taylor-Hall’s fiction workshop.

In November 2010, Professor Marjorie Jolles presented “Going Rogue: Fashion Rule-Breakers and the Rhetoric of Feminine Authenticity” at the 2010 National Women’s Studies Association (NWSA) conference in Denver, CO. This paper represents Marjorie’s new research project in fashion studies, examining an emerging cultural rhetoric of feminine authenticity: breaking fashion rules. She observes that in contemporary middlebrow fashion culture (on line and in print), breaking conventional rules of fashion is uncritically celebrated as a creative expression of feminine empowerment. Her research examines the embedded assumptions, particularly about class as a form of distinction from rule-followers, in this version of iconoclasm.

Also at NWSA, Professor Ellen O’Brien organized a panel, entitled “The Politics of Nations and the Internationalization of the WGS Curriculum,” which considered how the politics of nations inform strategies for internationalizing WGS curricula. On this panel, she presented “Student Authority and International Contexts in the WGS Classroom,” examining course content, classroom practices, and writing assignments that ask students to interrogate their own U.S. feminist locations while encountering unfamiliar histories.

In February 2011, Regina Buccola attended The Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture Since 1900, where she did a poetry reading from her chapbook, Conjuring.


MA Student Liz Stigler attended the University of Wisconsin Women’s Studies and LGBTQ Conference, in Madison, in March, and presented “The Follicle Fixation, How we look at hair and how it looks back.” The presentation examined images of hair in the current Absolut Drinks campaign; in particular the kinds of hair represented, the messages it sends, and what that means for those not visible in this campaign.

In April 2011, Liz went to both the Florida Atlantic University Women’s Consortium Conference, “Moving Discredited Knowledges from the Margin to the Center,” and the Popular Culture Association and American Studies Association National Conference, where she presented, “Trans on the Track: the Policing of Gender in the All Woman Space of Flat Track Roller Derby”—this presentation is based off a larger paper examining the trans-exclusionary policies employed by various roller derby leagues nationwide. It takes a closer look at the reasons for these policies and ultimately argues that fear is being masked as a false concern over legitimacy.

In May 2011, Professor Leslie Rebecca Bloom will present five papers at the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry in Urbana, IL, including: “The experience of the Interdisciplinary Network on Research and Social Justice, Medellín, Colombia;” “Qualitative research from an ethical reflection: A requirement to promote social justice;” “Research from a social justice perspective: Reflections and experiences from Colombia”—in which she discusses three papers she co-authored with colleagues from Colombia that detail (1) the experiences of the two year group process, (2) how they theorize qualitative research, ethics, activism, and social justice and (3) how they practice the integration of social justice activism into their individual qualitative research projects; “Interpretive Conflict and Authorial Privilege in Community Research”—in which she discusses how, as a qualitative researcher committed to advocacy as a foundation for and outcome of inquiry, she grapples with how to portray those she researches when her interpretations conflict with their own self-understandings; and “New Borders to Cross: Rethinking Interdisciplinary and Intercultural Research for Social Justice” which explores how the experiences of crossing disciplinary and cultural borders in her work with colleagues in/from Colombia have enhanced her learning about what it means to do qualitative research for social justice.
In June 2011, Martinique Haller, Head of Information Literacy & Instruction Services at Roosevelt, and Professor Marjorie Jolles will give a presentation at the CARLI (College and Academic Research Libraries of Illinois) Instruction Forum in Normal, IL. This presentation will describe the ways Martinique and Marjorie have collaborated in teaching information literacy and library research to undergraduates—specifically students in WGS 210: Introduction to Women's and Gender Studies.

In June 2011, MA Student Michelle-Marie Gilkeson will present “Interrogating the ‘Cycle of Dependence’: Racism and Heterosexism in the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996” at the 2011 Working Class Studies Association Conference in Chicago. This paper draws on work from Linda Gordon and Nancy Fraser in order to trace a genealogy of “dependence” that Michelle-Marie uses as she analyzes the rhetoric of specific political addresses given in 1995 and 1996. The paper argues that the rhetoric that foregrounded the PRWORA, as well as the Act itself, is both racist and heterosexist as it promotes normative (white) “family values” and ignores the possibility for or desirability of diverse sexualities and lifestyle choices.

In July 2011, Marjorie Jolles will present "Narrative Ambiguity and Moral Clarity in Public Abortion Rhetoric" at the 2011 North American Society for Social Philosophy conference at Marquette University in Milwaukee, WI. This paper represents a new project of Marjorie’s in the area of body narratives, in which she studies contests over moral meaning in competing narratives of bodily experience. Here she analyzes two opposing abortion narratives told during the February 2011 vote by the US House of Representatives to defund Planned Parenthood, to argue that narrative ambiguity, spontaneity, and areas of ideological overlap with one's opponent may be valuable (and overlooked) resources for feminist narrative agency.

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**GRADUATING MA STUDENTS’ THESSES AND PROJECTS**

**Michelle-Marie Gilkeson**

**Project Title:** Becoming Narration: An Exploration of Memory-Making, Subjectivity, and Truth through Writing Fiction

**Project Chair:** Ann Brigham

**Second Reader:** Ellen O’Brien

This project consists of a fiction manuscript and companion analytical essay that take a look at the ways victimhood and survivorship are constructed through processes of memory-making, story-telling, and Truth-seeking. Feminist interventions in psychoanalytical theory, social philosophy, literary criticism, and qualitative research inspired and informed this project. The concept of writing as a “method of knowing,” rather than a display of already intact conclusions, is central to both the fiction piece and the analytical essay.

**Dalice Marie Spitzer**

**Thesis Title:** Understanding My Body as Monstrous: Feminism, the Transsexual Body, & the Rhetoric of Monstrosity

**Thesis Chair:** Carrie Brecke

**Second Reader:** Jeff Edwards
This work focuses on how the transsexual body is rendered monstrous within certain discourses. In our ciscentric world, the transsexual body, one of medical mediation and technological intervention, is read, seen, and depicted as a monster. It is a body that refuses to conform to social conventions; hence, it reigns as a frightening example of the mutability of the human body and the human imagination. Specifically, my work is interested in how the transsexual body is turned monstrous through the rhetoric of essentialist feminism, predominantly through the work of Mary Daly.

**Rose Tauke**

Project Title: Good and Bad Women: A Feminist Response to Representation and AIDS

Project Chair: Jeff Edwards

Second Reader: Ellen O’Brien

This paper examines women’s representation in the AIDS epidemic. AIDS, as we know it, does not exist apart from surrounding metaphors and predetermined representations. For example, a woman who contracts HIV by way of blood transfusion is viewed as a passive victim; a prostitute who contracts HIV is seen as a conduit for infection and receiving the inevitable. These preexisting stereotypes put women into categories of good and bad.

**Heather Wilberg**

Thesis Title: What's in a Game?: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation in Video Games

Thesis Chair: Jeff Edwards

Second Reader: Ann Brigham

What little research there is into character demographics in video games reveals a pronounced absence and stereotyping of women and racial or ethnic minorities but ignores queer content altogether. This work explores VG demographics through quantitative analysis of the demographic composition and stereotyping of characters from 30 popular VG titles, evidencing a relative absence and stereotyping in racial minorities, women, and queer characters. While past research has largely treated race and gender separately, ignoring sexual orientation altogether, this study shows that multiply marginalized groups, including queers, are even more underrepresented and stereotyped.
WGS Faculty and graduating MA students at the 2011 Women’s and Gender Studies Master’s Graduates Celebration on April 29, 2011. From left: Professor Leslie Rebecca Bloom, Professor Jeff Edwards, MA Student Rose Tauke, Professor Gina Buccola, MA Student Michelle-Marie Gilkeson, Professor Marjorie Jolles, MA Student Dalice Marie Spitzer, Professor Ann Brigham, Professor Ellen O’Brien, Professor Carrie Brecke.