

# Women's & Gender Studies News

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**Becky Ropers-Huilman** has been a faculty member at LSU since 1996, and has been a WGS faculty member since her first semester

## Meet New WGS Director Becky Ropers-Huilman

As the new Director of Women's and Gender Studies at LSU, I want to welcome all of you to the academic year. I am enthusiastic about what our collective efforts will yield. Through our active involvement in research, teaching, and service, we are an integral part of Louisiana State University.

For those of you who do not yet know me, let me share that my research interests have largely focused on gender and activism in higher education, as well as on college teaching. In the past several years, I have become increasingly interested in the connections between universities and their diverse communities. I trust that I will be able to draw on this research in my service to WGS.

During this first year, I will spend time engaging in ongoing conversations about the directions we want to take to continue developing a truly outstanding Women's & Gender Studies Program. Some of the ways previous directors have framed our goals can be encapsulated in the "Three Rs": Research, Recruiting, and Resources. In my view, these continue to be important.

**Research** is clearly an important focus of our work. It is likely one of the largest reasons we all were attracted to our roles as faculty members. We have a tremendous opportunity in our unit to forge interdisciplinary connections that strengthen our research efforts. I encourage each of us to look for those connections and pursue them.

**Recruiting** must continue to be a priority for our unit. We get amazing and engaging students, but we get too few of them. We have already generated several ideas; for example, we plan to develop unique programmatic niches, visit select classes, and connect with students earlier during their time at LSU. While we hope these strategies will be effective in getting the word out about our high-quality program, we welcome all additional ideas and suggestions you may have. We also hope that each WGS member will be an active spokesperson

about the opportunities available for students who choose to major or minor in WGS.

**Resources** continue to be important, as well. We are clearly at a time in this university's history when innovation is possible. It is much easier, however, to innovate if we have resources to support our efforts. Collectively, we have ties to people throughout the nation and world. We also have the expertise and creativity to write grants that would be supportive of our work. It is my hope that we can find more ways to engage available resources to strengthen our program.

I would like to add a fourth "R" to our list: **Revisiting Curriculum**. I am convinced (and students have told me) that WGS has some of the best faculty members and courses on this campus. However, I am not convinced that we are doing everything we can to ensure that students see the connections between various aspects of their WGS experience. I hope to consider ways that we can work toward a connected curriculum, as well as develop and support graduate offerings.

One recent initiative addresses several of these goals. At the urging of the faculty, and with the assistance of **Katie Henninger**, three WGS faculty members have recently submitted a Board of Regents grant focused on enhancing Women's & Gender Studies. **Nina Asher**, **John Larkin**, and I worked collaboratively to develop a proposal that focuses on the areas of Science, Technology, & Gender; Gender & Place; and Leadership & Activism. We asked for funds to sponsor a two-year speaker series, a series of faculty workshops focused on program development, and a national conference. If our proposal is funded, we look forward to an exciting opportunity to engage with all WGS members as well as outstanding external consultants to strengthen our program in ways that promote excellence within our faculty, WGS, and Louisiana State University.

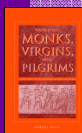
I look forward to engaging with all of you and to working collectively toward our common goals in the upcoming year.



# WGS Faculty Accomplishments

## Books

**Carolyn Ware's** *Cajun Women and Mardi Gras: Reading the Rules Backward*, will be published by the University of Illinois Press next year.



**Maribel Dietz** recently published her book, *Wandering Monks, Virgins, and Pilgrims: Ascetic Travel in the Mediterranean World, 300-800 AD*, from Penn State University Press.

**Eileen Meehan's** book, *Why TV is Not Our Fault: Television, Viewers, and Who's Really in Control*, will be published in November by Rowman & Littlefield.



**Lillian Bridwell-Bowles** published *Rhetorical Women: Roles and Representations*, from the University of Alabama Press.

## Articles

**Claudia Eppert** published "Leslie Silko's Ceremony: Rhetorics of Ethical Reading and Composition" in *JAC*, Volume 24, No. 3: 727-754.

**Daphne Cain** published "The effects of religiousness on parenting stress and practices in the African-American family" in *Families in Society*, and "Family structure effects on parenting stress and practices in the African-American family" in *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*.

**Petra Hendry's** article, "Disrupting the Subject: Julian of Norwich and Embodied Knowing," appeared in *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, 21(1), pp. 95-198.

## Grants and Research

**Amy Westbrook** was recently awarded \$454,000 for a U.S. DOE grant that will extend 3 years and focus on leadership development in East Feliciana Parish. The grant was co-authored by Dr. Jerry Willis.

**Kate Jensen** received a Council on Research summer grant in 2005, and gave an invited lecture at the University of Wisconsin at Madison.

## Conference Presentations

**Sue Weinstein** presented "I shine with the rhythm: Rap writing, literate identity, and academic achievement" at the International Learning Conference in Granada, Spain, as well as "Free Style: The Role of Play in Rap Composition" at the Creative Engagements: Thinking with Children Conference in Oxford, UK.

## Katy Powell Receives NEH Grant



**Katy Powell** is currently on research leave, through a Fellowship grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. During her year-long leave, Katy will be completing her book, *Rhetorics of Displacement: The Politics of Literacy, Letters, and Relocation in Shenandoah National*

Park, which is scheduled to be released from University of Virginia Press in 2006.

Analyzing hand-written letters by mountain residents written in the 1930s, this project examines the multiple dimensions of literacy surrounding the development of the national park in the Blue Ridge Mountains. The letters, recently available in the park's archives, reveal a complex identity negotiation of the women and men living within park boundaries who were typically represented as illiterate, isolated, and incapable of making their own decisions. Based on discourse, rhetorical, and gender analyses of the letters, in addition to oral histories and other contemporary and historical documents, this project suggests that the identities of mountain residents resist the identity constructed for them by those in positions of power. Despite the inevitability of their displacement, mountain residents engaged in an act of social participation by writing letters and asserting their agency in the face of seeming powerlessness.

"This is the story of the park in their words. It adds a dimension we haven't heard before."

—Katy Powell

*The Advocate*, July 1 2005

## WGS 2500 Inspires Students



Students in Dr. Egéa-Kuehne's WGS 2500 class present their final projects.

Every semester, the Women's and Gender Studies Program offers WGS 2500, *The Introduction to Women's and Gender Studies*, to undergraduate students. The class has become increasingly popular over the semesters and fills up within hours after registration is opened each semester.

The class is positive for most students. In evaluations filled out by students at the end of each semester, they often express how the class has been a powerful one for their education. "I see the world differently," writes one student, while another writes that the class "has me think about how women speak to and for themselves—a brilliant way to introduce this kind of academia."

**Denise Egéa-Kuehne**, who has taught the course many times, writes, "I thoroughly enjoyed teaching that course, with each one of the groups."

**Leigh Clemons**, who has also taught WGS 2500 many times, believes the class is valuable for students and teacher: "Every time I walk into a WGS 2500 class, I learn something new about myself as an individual and about our students. They are bright, savvy, and aware of the gender issues relevant in today's society. What they lack is a forum where they can learn to articulate their ideas and apply them to the world outside the classroom, and my WGS 2500 class gives them this opportunity." She adds, "WGS 2500 not only provides a valuable service to the students of LSU, it also helps shape them to be the adults and parents of tomorrow."





## Interview with Stacey Simmons



**Stacey Simmons** is an assistant professor in the Centers for Computation and Technology. She has been a faculty member for WGS since 2004.

*How did you become interested in Women's and Gender Studies?*

I had the same problem that many third wave feminists had. I grew up in a world where women's rights were a part of history; in short, I expected equality. It did not occur to me growing up that there was anything different about my orientation to the world than someone of another gender. I learned quickly that this was not always the case, though it didn't really hit me until I got involved with feminist religious movements in the late 1980's. As I grew to participate more in those aspects of feminism I learned how recent the history of change was, and understood my place in history and spirituality in an entirely different light. Feminism, women's rights, gender rights, and varied experiences of social reality became very important to me.

*How do you see yourself contributing to the WGS program at LSU?*

I work at the Center for Computation and Technology at LSU. The traditional areas affected by CCT are typically underrepresented by women—Science, Technology, Engineering and Medicine (STEM). But CCT is an interdisciplinary program. We work to build bridges between disciplines to solve problems that can only be solved by complex groups of people. I feel privileged, (especially as someone with a social science background) to be in a place where I can help raise consciousness

and participate in research on the effects of gender in the STEM disciplines. There is a groundswell of interest in these areas around the country. Gender is a complex issue that we as researchers have made great strides in understanding. However, gender as a social construct in the sciences is a rather taboo subject. I think women have to be careful to not fall into a trap of assigning gender as a sole indicator for the STEM disciplines. The construct of gender itself is more the issue, and how organizations and disciplines re-produce gender within their boundaries is something that we desperately need to understand on a deeper level.

*What's your favorite part of Women's and Gender Studies?*

The discipline itself is fascinating because there are so many undiscovered areas. In the U.S., we live in a world with so much privilege, and it is very easy for us to forget the complexities of so many things we take for granted. And gender studies is one of those areas that has the most opportunity for deeper understanding. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we can answer questions of the unseen, like: "how many chromosomes do people have?", "what are the complex physics processes of black holes?", but we still have a hard time answering questions like "what does it mean to be a woman or a man? How does culture or space affect our definition of what it means to belong to a gender group, whether traditional or non-traditional?" I am excited by the adventure of that undiscovered terrain, and especially the opportunity to bring students on that journey with me.

*Any thoughts you'd like to share with our undergraduates?*

Mostly I would like to encourage the students to challenge EVERYTHING! The concept of a university is a place where all points of view must be argued, challenged, debated, and worked out. Students should be here to expand, include, and interpret. The university shouldn't necessarily change what you accept, but it should CHALLENGE you, make you examine, ponder, re-entrench when necessary, and change if need be. One of my favorite days of class, when I teach, is forum day. At least twice during the semester, the students debate and discuss. I act only as a moderator- the purpose is so that they can engage each other, and see that even in their classroom there are a myriad of interpretations and experiences. I would hope

that students would take that challenge to their peers and professors, and become deeply, intellectually engaged while they are at LSU.

*How do you see feminism and technology working together?*

I think traditionally feminism and technology have not worked well together. Over the last twenty years or so this has begun to change. There are important people making decisions at the university, funding-agency, and research levels who are women. But overall, the history of technology does not include women's input. There has been a divide between women's technology and men's technology, with most of the technology having been created by men. I saw a wonderful presentation on refrigerators once at a conference. I would never have gone, (my own gender-bias would have prevented me) but the presentation was amazing. How refrigerators were marketed to women, how women were represented with them, how they were used, it was fascinating. I think things are changing, but they require a deeper engagement, and a lot of courage on the part of women and men. Currently women typically get discouraged easily by the STEM disciplines- some of that discouragement has nothing to do with gender-discrimination, but with the life-choices that are more frequently, (or earlier) faced by women than men. The more women become engaged and empowered by their ability to affect change and make strides in these disciplines, and the more we stand up for the rights of women, men, and all people along the gender continuum, the more equity there will be in the disciplines themselves.

**"The construct of gender itself is the issue, and how organizations and disciplines re-produce gender within their boundaries is something that we desperately need to understand on a deeper level."**

## WGS AT LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY

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[www.lsu.edu/wgs](http://www.lsu.edu/wgs)

## Fall 2005 Calendar of Events

**October 12**—WGS Brown Bag Seminar, *Sexuality in the Age of Technological Reproducibility: Oscar Wilde, Photography, and Identity*, given by Daniel Novak, 12:30-1:30, 212 Audubon Hall

**October 12**—“Getting what you want from Partying” Women’s Center, 7:00 p.m.

**October 13**—WGS Film Series presents *Stage Beauty* in 234 Prescott Hall, shown by Kristin Hanson, 5:30-7:30

**October 16**—Take Back the Night March

**October 19**—WGS Brown Bag Seminar, *An Attached-Based Parenting Intervention for Maltreating Parents: The Circle of Security*, given by Daphne Cain, 12:30-1:30, Women’s Center

**October 27**—WGS Brown Bag Seminar, *Bitches, Bling, and BabyMamas: A Contradictory (Hip Hop) (Con)Text*, given by Nichole Guillory, 12:00-1:00, Women’s Center

**October 27**—WGS Film Series presents *Redupers: The All-Around Reduced Personality* in 234 Prescott Hall, shown by Irene Di Maio, 5:30-7:30.

**November 9**—“Getting what you want from sex” Women’s Center, 7:00 p.m.

**November 10**—WGS Film Series presents *Salt of the Earth* in 234 Prescott Hall, shown by Katherine Henninger, 5:30-7:30.

**November 17**—WGS Film Series presents *The Nasty Girl* in 234 Prescott Hall, shown by Claudia Eppert, 5:30-7:30.

## WGS GO!



Pictured from left: Robin Toler, Jennifer Rickerby, Tanja Stampfl, Lisa Costello, Elizabeth Domangue, and Kristin Hanson

This year, several graduate students at Louisiana State University have created a group called the Women’s and Gender Studies Graduate Organization, or WGS GO. The group has had two meetings so far this semester. The group is intended to provide professional, academic, and social support for graduate students interested in Women’s and Gender Studies at LSU. The group plans to organize a WGS contingent at the Take Back the Night March on October 16, which will be the group’s first official project of the semester. The group also plans to submit presentation proposals to the upcoming National Woman’s Studies Association Conference in June of 2006.