15 years of WGS: Honoring Our Past, Present, and Future

In 1954 a women’s curriculum was established at LSU to prepare women for their “ultimate destination.” Classes were developed in the areas of homemaking, parenthood, and citizenship. Women who planned to work outside the home took courses in office and library work, applied music, and recreational work. Forty years later, the Women’s and Gender Studies has revolutionized the term “women’s curriculum” at LSU.

In 1988, Louisiana Woman did a story on the WGS program entitled, “Women’s Studies—An Awakening Giant at LSU!” The article highlighted the development of courses on the study of women, as well as the Women’s Studies Alcove and Browsing Room in Allen, which the article describes as, “only slightly larger than a closet.”

Three years later, the Women’s and Gender Studies Program was officially founded, and WGS moved out of the “closet” into its current location at 238 Himes Hall.

In 1991, Women’s and Gender Studies at LSU joined the then more than 600 already established WGS programs in colleges and universities across the nation. At the time, WGS was represented by approximately 50 faculty members representing 15 academic departments. It was the first year WGS offered a minor degree to LSU students.

The development of the program was further helped by two summer institutes funded by Louisiana Educational Quality Support Grants. In summer 1992, 16 faculty members from four different college and 6 graduate students participated in a summer institute focused on faculty and curriculum development. At that time, future goals were established, including the development and approval of a Women’s Center on campus.

This summer institute also featured noted feminist scholars in the field of WGS who consulted the burgeoning program and advised on the needs and future directions of the program. One such reporter, Hilda Smith of the University of Cincinnati, wrote that, “While at your institution, I was impressed with the amount of time and commitment devoted by a number of faculty to women’s and gender studies even before such a program exists.”

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Michelle Massé and Emily Toth in a photo from the Dec. 1988 edition of Louisiana Woman.

A women’s studies program is not just a series of courses. It’s a vision and reality that women have the same status as men.

—Emily Toth
Louisiana Woman
Dec. 1988
In March of 2006, representatives of the National Women’s Studies Association Journal (NWSAJ) will visit the Women’s and Gender Studies Program to consider LSU as a possible future site for the journal. If selected, WGS at LSU will utilize the breadth and depth of its faculty to continue developing a high-quality, international journal that reflects the interdisciplinary scholarship in our field. This on-site visit marks the culmination of months of work towards applying to host the journal on the part of WGS Director Becky Ropers-Huilman in collaboration with WGS Faculty Members Katrina Powell, Nina Asher, Kate Bratton, Margaret Parker, Angeletta Gourdine, Helen Regis, and Marybeth Lima as well as our prospective Managing Editor, Brenda Macon.

In 1993, WGS 2500 and 4500 were taught for the first time. The program continued to grow and attract LSU faculty members, leading to the first faculty retreat in 1994.

The following year, the WGS faculty elected to develop a major in WGS, a project that consumed much of the Program’s time and energy for the next six years.

In 1998, a proposal for a new B.A. in WGS was presented to the Board of Regents. Authored by Margaret Parker and others, this proposal described the significance of WGS: “As an interdisciplinary unit that draws upon faculty expertise across departments and colleges, WGS is a vivid example of the reconfiguration of knowledge—and departmental structures—nationally.”

After this approval, WGS continued to work towards the goal of establishing a Bachelor’s Degree in Women’s and Gender Studies. In 2001, WGS hosted a panel of external reviewers to assess and critique the program’s needs and potential. In the reviewers’ report, credit was given to an already thriving program: “This is the time to give recognition to an already operational program of study with broad participation.”

Months later, in 2002, the B.A. in Women’s and Gender Studies was officially instated. This was done under the condition that LSU would submit a progress report describing the efforts of the university to adequately address the resource needs of the program for two years. The next year, WGS graduated its first two students with major degrees.

Without the Women’s and Gender Studies Program, and the tireless efforts of the women and men who worked so hard to establish it, the climate and topography of LSU would be a much different place. The first fifteen years of the program have seen dynamic changes and advancement in the work of the WGS program. With the continued support and commitment of LSU’s faculty, students, and staff, the next fifteen should be equally as vibrant and exciting.
Remembering Ann Simon
By Michelle Massé

In celebrating our first fifteen years of existence, let us also remember someone who was key to WGS’s development: Ann Simon.

When WGS first began, undergraduate student workers and Ann, a graduate research assistant chosen as Coordinator, were the sole staff support for our new and busy unit. Ann was at the center of everything, whether stuffing envelopes or debating philosophy. Many of our courses and initiatives were shaped by her ideas as a member of the Coordinating Council and at the first WGS Summer Institute.

Ann completed her MFA at LSU in 1993 with a poetry chapbook, “My Life as a Mouth Breather.” When she died in 2003, she was working on a dissertation, directed by Judith Butler, about changing feminist interpretations of modernist novels by women, and had twice received Berkeley’s Eisner prize for creative achievement in literature.

Ann gave WGS a great deal. That legacy continues, as does the one passed down through the Ann Veronica Simon Outstanding Feminist Dissertation Award. Established by her family and friends, the award recognizes students who show some of Ann’s own critical acumen, creativity, and intelligence. In order to keep Ann’s memory alive through future years, please give generously when you get a letter asking for contributions or contact Michelle Massé to donate now.

Contributions can be sent to:
Ann Simon Award/WGS
LSU Foundation
3838 West Lakeshore Dr.
Baton Rouge, LA 70808

Margaret Parker has been a member of the WGS faculty since its inception 15 years ago, and served as the director of the program from 1995 until 1998. Dr. Parker teaches in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, specializing in the study of women in Hispanic literature.

How long have you been involved with the WGS program at LSU?
In the 1970s I was active in the Baton Rouge NOW chapter and in lobbying at the state legislature on issues that affect women. When Michelle [Massé] formed a committee to establish an organization of faculty members interested in Women’s Studies in 1991 I joined that group. I am a charter member of the unit that became Women’s and Gender Studies.

What do you see as the greatest achievement WGS has made in the last fifteen years?
The development of the unit as the premier interdisciplinary program at LSU, based upon the large number of faculty members from different disciplines involved, growth in the number of students, two successful grant proposals, and strong commitment and participation by the faculty.

What do you hope will be a future achievement for WGS?
More faculty lines, more majors, and more office space.

Any thoughts you’d like to share with WGS undergraduate students?
Students benefit enormously from the interdisciplinary methodology and pedagogy of WGS courses and develop critical thinking skills and awareness of diversity.

The atmosphere was charged with positive energy.
—Margaret Parker on WGS Summer Institute
UPCOMING EVENTS

March 2—NWSAJ Site Visit Reception, Vieux Carré Room, LSU Union, 3:30-5:00
March 2—WGS Film Series Presents “Mi Vida Loca,” 5:00 at the Women’s Center
March 8—International Women’s Day
March 23—WGS Film Series Presents “Hasta Certo Punto (Up to a Certain Point),” 5:00 at the Women’s Center
March 24—WGS Student Conference, LSU Union
March 30—WGS Film Series Presents “Tough Guise,” 5:00 at the Women’s Center
April 6—WGS Film Series Presents “Bride and Prejudice,” 5:00 at the Women’s Center

Don’t Forget!

NWSAJ RECEPTION
March 2
Vieux Carre Room, LSU Union
3:30-5:00
Refreshments Provided

WGS Student Conference
March 24
LSU Union
All Day

Please join us for the 10th annual WGS Student Conference! On the tenth anniversary of this conference, we will be joined by participants from colleges all over Louisiana. Make a date to attend some panels and celebrate Women’s and Gender Studies from around the state!

WGS Film Series
March 2—Mi Vida Loca presented by Sue Weinstein
March 23—Hasta Certo Punto presented by Solimar Otero
March 30—Tough Guise presented by Susan Gardner
April 6—Bride and Prejudice presented by Pallavi Rastogi and Carolyn Ware

**Films shown 5:00-7:00 p.m. at Women’s Center. All are welcome!