

# WOMEN'S & GENDER STUDIES

## at Louisiana State University

### A Letter from the Director



Rita Culross

Seeing the flyers throughout Peabody Hall about the WGS Graduate Student Conference, one of my colleagues in Education asked me, "Why major in WGS?" His question made me think about why a student should choose Women's and Gender Studies as a major (or minor) and what WGS can offer students at LSU.

Women's and Gender Studies is an Interdisciplinary Program that examines the multiple roles gender plays in everyday life and how race, gender, sexuality, class, and culture intersect to influence behavior. As such, WGS offers excellent preparation for students preparing for graduate work in health care, law, or social work or for pursuing careers in education, sports, business, the arts, or the nonprofit sector. A recent list compiled by Michigan State University found Women's Studies majors coaching college basketball, owning women's clothing stores, practicing as an obstetrician/gynecologist, managing AIDS-related community services, directing a battered women's shelter, serving as a state legislator, and counseling LGBT students in a high school.

Women's and Gender Studies at LSU offers a high quality liberal arts education with an abundance of communication

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## Crossing Boundaries, Transcending Borders



Sharbari Dey, PhD Student in Social Work, gives a presentation as part of the panel:  
*Transported Beyond Borders: Vignettes from a Study Abroad Tour to India*

Students presenting explorations of unstable gender categories in film and literature. The bright red cover of a zine entitled "LSU Feminist Survival Guide." A presentation of the results of a study identifying gender in Internet Chat Sessions. A performance piece with a woman dressed in nurse scrubs barking orders through a speculum. A group of undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty discussing women and healthcare over lunch. These were the sights and sounds in Peabody Hall on March 6th and 7th, which marked the 11th Annual **Women's and Gender Studies Graduate Student Conference at LSU**. The theme, "Crossing Boundaries, Transcending Borders" observes the significant and innovative contributions of Women's and Gender Studies scholarship in terms of expanding the traditional boundaries of academic disciplines by incorporating a multitude of methods, approaches, theories, source materials and subject matters, examining socially constructed boundaries such as gender, race, class and sexuality, and addressing issues of identity and affiliation within and across geographical boundaries. Panel topics ranged from feminist literary theory and psychological studies to digital video methodology and curriculum theory. Both quantitative and qualitative research was presented and papers were read and delivered performatively. Presenters and attendees all agreed that it was the multiplicity of form and content, coupled with the diversity in discipline and the blending of undergraduates, graduates, alumni, and faculty, which contributed to the success of the conference.

The conference was framed by a keynote talk by **Dr. AnaLouise Keating**, a Women's Studies Professor at Texas Women's University, and readings from the **Under the Radar Speakers Series Celebrating Queer Issues and Diversity**. Drawing on the work of Gloria Anzaldúa and transformational multicultural teaching, Keating addressed connectionist perspectives on academic identities, boundaries, and lives.



## FRIENDS OF WGS

### Director's Note Cont.

intensive and service-learning courses. Opportunities abound to participate in study abroad programs and (hopefully next year) an honors section of WGS 2500. Average class size is 43 with the majority of courses taught by full-time, tenure-line research faculty.

Faculty research interests include gender and politics, nontraditional parenting, and human rights work—topics that are frequently discussed on nightly cable news programs. Indeed, in our global world the skills of critical thinking, superior oral and written communication, and organization—all highly valued by employers—are the cornerstone of a WGS education.

Finally, WGS is not just about women any more! This Fall we will offer our first course devoted to men: WGS 4500 Men and Masculinities. This new course reflects the expansion of both our scholarship and our ongoing efforts within the program to diversify WGS faculty, teaching, and programming. Come; see what WGS has to offer. You might just find yourself in WGS.

A February luncheon at the Faculty Club marked the first Friends of WGS event. Political Science/WGS faculty member Dr. Heather Ondercin gave a talk on voting patterns among women. Interim Director Dr. Rita Culross gave an overview of the purpose and activities of the Friends Group. Members of this group are interested in providing internship opportunities for students, mentoring students, giving guest lectures for WGS classes, attending WGS functions, helping with publicity, co-developing programs or events, or providing other resources.



*If you or someone you know is interested in joining the Friends of WGS group, please let us know at [wgs@lsu.edu](mailto:wgs@lsu.edu)*

### WGS Spring Co-Sponsored Events

WGS co-sponsored several events this spring including the New York-based poet Hettie Jones and South African poet and literary critic Dr. Gabeba Baderoon. Hettie Jones was one of very few Beat Generation poets and spoke about her time among the Beats. Dr. Baderoon presented a talk on slavery, Islam, and the construction of race and sexuality in South Africa and at a separate event, she gave a poetry reading. The last co-sponsored event of the spring will be Dr. Linda Tillman's talk on the Public University April 29th at 5:45pm in 225 Peabody.

### Under the Radar: A Speakers Series Celebrating Queer Issues and Diversity

The successful Under the Radar series, started by English professors Myriam Chancey, Kristen Hogan, and Eldon Birthwright last fall, continues to bring dynamic speakers to campus. For March's event, Haitian-American poet, playwright, and performance artist **Lenelle Moïse** read from her latest work, *MADIVINEZ* and from her journal, while **Ana-Maurine Lara**, a Cave Canem Fellow and a member of The Austin Project—a collaborative workshop between artists, activists and scholars out of UT-Austin—read from her latest book, *Erzulie's Skirt*. Opening the event, LSU English professor Solimar Otero read poetry from her chapbook.

Lenelle Moïse, Solimar Otero, and Ana-Maurine Lara. All Photos Credit: Eddie Harris



### LSU's First NWSA-J Coming Soon

The first issue of the National Women's Studies Association Journal to be published since the journal's arrival at LSU will soon be available. Articles in the spring 2008 issue include "The Missing Story of Ourselves: Poor Women, Power, and the Politics of Feminist Representations" by Vivyan Adair; "Sometimes It's a Child and a Choice: Toward an Embodied Theory of Abortion" by Jeannie Ludlow; "Gracious Submissions: Southern Baptist Fundamentalists and Women" by Susan Shaw; "Shahrazadian Gestures in Arab Women's Autobiographies" by Pauline Homsy Vinson; "Gender, Religion, and Medicine" by Elisabeth Poeter; "Representing Feminism" by Catherine Harnois; and "Cost of Being a Girl" by Yasemin Besen-Cassino. The issue also includes a new section, titled "With/in the Academy," with articles by Jyoti Grewal and Jeni Hart.

The summer 2008 issue will include a special section on women and prisons, with art by incarcerated women and advocates for female prisoners. Also, we anticipate that the fall 2008 special issue, "New Orleans: Gender, the meaning of place, and the politics of displacement," will be a must-read for those who are interested in activism in the New Orleans area and in the future of the city.

We also welcome your manuscript submissions for the journal. You can find submission guidelines on our website: <http://www.nwsaj.lsu.edu/>

## Four Questions With...

### WGS Core Faculty Member *Challen Nicklen*

**PhD:** Political Science and Women's Studies, Penn State



**Dissertation:** Rhetorics of Connection in the United Nations Conferences on Women, 1975-1995

*Describe the relationship between your research interests & methods.*

My research focuses on the ways in which women who participated in the UN Conferences on Women, specifically the parallel NGO forums, described their connections with one another and how the context of those events shaped their descriptions. Thus far, I've explored this question through archival research. I'd like to expand this by doing an oral history project of those who attended these events. I'm interested in not only preserving knowledge about the NGO forums, but just hearing these women describe their experiences. Many participants have noted the significance of these events to their lives, so I want to be able to capture that.

*Describe the Global Feminist Activism course that you are teaching.*

The course looks at women's activism that stretches across national borders. It emphasizes the challenges as well as joys that women experience in working with women from different contexts and backgrounds. In the course, we've considered this activism from a historical as well as contemporary perspective. Throughout the course we've looked at a variety of kinds of organizing including women's efforts to shape international policy through the United Nations, anti-war activism through organizations like Women in Black, and activism surrounding the murders of the women of Juarez, Mexico to name a few. The objective is to draw students attention to the varying concerns women target with their activism as well as the different forms that activism takes. It's my hope that students leave the course with a good sense of the many activist projects that feminists are undertaking throughout the globe.

*What activist communities/actions are of particular interest to you?*

There are so many interesting groups and organizations out there. Right now, I'm particularly interested in women's role in the global justice movement. The global justice movement is perhaps one of the most dynamic movements, and it seems that feminists are still trying to find, as well as insert, their voice into it. Feminist critiques of economic globalization are really important at this time.

On a national level, I'm interested in the motherhood movement especially through organizations like MomsRising. Being a sort of new mom, I feel a connection to this activism.

*What book are you reading right now?*

Currently I'm reading Alice Echols' *Daring to Be Bad*. It's a look at the history of second wave radical feminism in the United States. It's an older book but covers material that I had not been exposed very much. The history of radical feminist activism is fascinating.

LSU's 2008 Summer Reading Program selection marks the first woman author and artist as well as the first graphic novel!

Persepolis tells the story of Marjane Satrapi's youth in Iran in the 1970s and 80s, of living through the Islamic Revolution and the war with Iraq.



If you are interested in leading a discussion group for incoming LSU students, contact the SRP office.

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

### Congratulations to 2007-2008 WGS Award Winners

Ann Veronica Simon Outstanding Gender Studies Dissertation Award: Lori Knox, French Studies

Award for Outstanding Feminist Activist: Dr. Elaine Maccio, Social Work

Beatrice Remillard Award for Outstanding Returning Student: Ms. Dilek Suslu, Education

Outstanding Faculty Contribution to WGS: Dr. Rita Culross, Education

Outstanding Contribution to WGS by a Non-Faculty Member: Dean Christian Molidor, Social Work

## Women's & Gender Studies

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accomplishments  
of our faculty  
and our program  
this year.

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## .WOW and WGSGO.

Women Organizing Women (WOW) is an undergraduate organization who promotes feminist awareness and community activism on the LSU campus. This semester WOW organized a benefit production of Eve Ensler's The Vagina Monologues to raise funds for the Louisiana Foundation Against Sexual Assault. Other events this year included: The Clothesline project, a domestic violence awareness activity, the Gender on Film Series which WOW cosponsors with WGS, WGSGO and the LSU Women's Center, a Period Week to challenge the stigma attached to menstruation and to promote alternative menstrual products and a Women in Politics Week to inform the campus of the underrepresentation of women in politics. WOW is open to all students seeking enlightenment, involvement, and a great way to meet fellow activists! [wow@lsu.edu](mailto:wow@lsu.edu)

In March, WOW put on a V-DAY performance at LSU.



WGS Undergraduates glam it up for the Vagina Monologues...



Monthly socials, biweekly writing groups, and a CV and clothing swap are just some of the spring activities sponsored by WGSGO: **The Women's & Gender Studies Graduate Organization.**

The biggest event of the semester was the Women in the Performing Arts Night, held on March 28th. The event featured slam poet Tasha Weatherspoon, The Casuals, Dynamic Duo J. Dansa and Tight Kryl, performer Cora Leighton, poet Penelope Dane, classic Indian dance by Nandini Bandyopadhyay, and was hosted by stand-up comedienne Ambera Dodson. The event was a smashing success; big thanks to Laura, Casey, and Elizabeth!

To find out more information, email [lsuwgsgo@gmail.com](mailto:lsuwgsgo@gmail.com).