



FALL 1999

Women' Studies Program Newsletter

Volume 7, Number 1
University of Nebraska-Lincoln



In this Issue...

Farewell letter from
the Director... 1

“We Will All Miss You”
Gretchen Obrist.... 2

“The Vagina
Monologues”
Keri Wayne ... 3

Gretchen Obrist’s
Honors Thesis
Abstract ... 4-5

Barbara Smith
comes to Lincoln ... 6

An Open Letter... from
Sharon Kennedy ... 7

WS Program Newsletter

Yeaji Shin,
editor and designer
(yshin@unlserve.unl.edu)
Keri Wayne,
assistant editor
(keriwayne@hotmail.com)



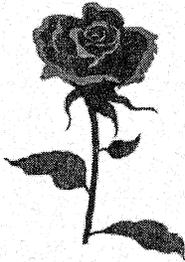
Farewell Letter from the Director Christina Branlner

Dear Readers:

In times of budget cuts, de facto hiring freezes and ongoing attacks of the Women's Studies Program, it seems most appropriate to take stock, look around at who we are, what we are doing and where we are heading---and take comfort and be proud! This fall, the “old hands” of Glenda Moore (our steady spiritual and real support as program secretary) and myself were joined by Tagi Adams (wonderful graduate of our own program!) and Yeaji Shin as graduate assistants and a WS major, Keri Wayne, is helping out as work study. Yet again we have a creative and spunky team in our offices! Groundwork for our curricular and programmatic development is being laid, the work thesis was successfully defended, and our Schedule of Events (thanks to Tagi) was presented by the Dean as a model to be emulated by the rest of Arts and Sciences. The program is solid; majors and minors are growing. And I am leaving the job as Director by the end of this semester--with a bleeding heart, as we say in German. The reasons are manifold and I would gladly discuss them with anyone; they have nothing to do with the strengths of the program or its people. I want to thank all of you who have supported me so strongly, thank who have helped me grow through your constructive criticisms, and thank all of you who are active in the program in spite of too many other commitments. I am not leaving town; I will be around and stay involved. Let me end my last letter as Director with a plea for your continued enthusiastic support for the next Director!

Visit our Women's Program Web Site at
<http://www.unl.edu/womenssp/wshome.html>

"We Will All Miss You, Christina..."



By Gretchen Obrist

I'd like to express my gratitude to and respect for Christina Brantner as she finishes up her last semester as Director of Women's Studies at UNL. I have had the privilege to get to know Christina over the past few years as someone who is dedicated to her work and her students. She and I first spoke almost 3 years ago when I was looking for an internship in Women's Studies. She told me then about the "Deutsch in Deutschland" program, which she helped create in conjunction with a language institute in Berlin. She (easily) persuaded me that I could manage in Berlin for 7 months with no prior knowledge of German and be an intern at a women's center there. She has been, ever since that day, a person who I could always talk to about school, life, and the future with the confidence that I would get honest and sincere attention and responses. Christina personally sought out a women's center in Berlin for me to do my internship in. She has pushed me to dive into new things, scary things, like few others in my life have. She has been present for some of my most difficult and triumphant moments, including major culture shock and thesis writing in all its stages. I will be graduating this December and leaving Women's Studies at UNL at the same time Christina will be finishing her directorship (although I'm

sure we'll both still be hanging around nearby.) Christina has been instrumental in shaping my experience as a Women's Studies soon-to-be graduate by encouraging and demonstrating feminist scholarship and activism. She has also been a good friend. Many people in Women's Studies have touched my life in my time here, and Christina is one of them who presented me with new and amazing opportunities and who asserted without question that I could handle it, whatever "it" was. She still says, "of course you can" followed by some words of wisdom in German, and I know that any protest will simply not be seen to represent any sort of un-overcomeable obstacle. *Christina, for the work you've done and the time you've given to the program and to us, your students thank you. You will be missed! And thank you for your friendship.*

WS Program Colloquium Series

WS program's 1999 colloquium series has been launched under the theme of "Gender, Ethnicity and Diversity in American Academia." The first colloquium series was presented by three Asian (-American) Women Scholars, Alpana S. Knippling ("Teaching against the Grain: Being Asian and Woman"), Jung Hi Rhee ("Experience of Teaching Fashion Design in Korea"), and Em-Orn J. Dispanya ("Women in Thailand: Their Status and Working Opportunity"). WS Program has a goal to expand the issue of "Gender, Ethnicity and Diversity..." throughout our colloquium series. In the coming Spring semester, we will invite African American women scholars in January, Latina/Chicana women scholars in February and Native American women scholars in March. There will be more announcements about the specific schedule and speakers. For suggestions or questions, contact Yeaji Shin at 472-9392.

Vagina, Vagina, VAGINA!!!

By Keri Wayne

-UNL signs on to the V-Day 2000 College Initiative-

What do you get when about 85 feminist women and a handful of feminist men come together to discuss and re-claim their vaginas? An energy source so strong it can bring even New York City to its knees. This last weekend (Nov 5th-7th) I attended the V-Day 2000 college initiative empowerment workshop in the "Big Apple," and let me tell you, I am more than empowered- I am high on female energy!

This workshop, complete with Vagina chants and group *triple-surprise-orgasm* moans, was an opportunity for college students from across the US, and one from Canada, who are directing/producing/performing the play "The Vagina Monologues" on Valentine's Day 2000.

What is V-Day and "The Vagina Monologues?" V-Day is a national/international campaign to stop sexual violence against women and to proclaim Valentine's Day as a day to celebrate women and to demand the end of sexual abuse.

V-Day became a college initiative in 1999 when about 100 colleges and universities from across the US performed "The Vagina Monologues" at their schools on Valentine's Day in an effort to raise awareness and money in a campaign to end the sexual violence that has become a



world-wide epidemic. V-Day is based on the award winning play "The Vagina Monologues," written by Eve Ensler. The play evolved from interviews Eve has done with hundreds of women about their vaginas. It takes the audience to lost, disconnected

parts of themselves and, guiding them through a difficult process, encourages them to moan, to weep, and finally, to erupt with the kind of laughter that comes from deep within the soul.

This year, UNL will join about 300 colleges and Universities from the US and around the world, in performing "The Vagina Monologues" on Valentine's Day 2000. The event will take place at the 7th Street Loft, time TBA, and will be followed by a reception/celebration. Proceeds will go to the Rape Spouse Abuse Crisis Center (RSACC).

Not only is this a chance to see a wonderful play and to support RSACC, V-Day gives us the occasion to transform the conventional ways of observing Valentine's Day into a very empowering and uplifting event which celebrates vaginas and demands the end of sexual violence. Mark your calendars and watch for more information about this very exciting and important event!

Women's Center 1:

*Sister Circle

An informal discussion group for African American women of all ages. Sharing women's experiences on yesterday's continued concerns and discussing today's issues on all the obstacles women face as African American. Meetings are held weekly on Mondays nights from 6:00 to 7:00pm, 340 Nebraska Union. No registration required, call Christine or Janice at 472-2579 for more info.

Women's Studies Honors Thesis Abstract

By Gretchen Obrist

Gretchen Obrist, graduating Women's Studies major, successfully defended her Honors Thesis this semester. The committee hearing her defense consisted of Women's Studies Faculty members, Christina Brantner, Helen Moore, Michelle Miller and Anna Shavers. The following is an abstract of this remarkable piece of feminist scholarship.

This project focuses on how East German women's experiences with abortion law (and all aspects of life) in the unified Germany are shaped by the western, capitalist, and male institutions that have policy-making power there. These institutions include the legal, legislative, judicial, and religious entities that have limited choices and access to abortion (among other things) for women in West Germany and for all women in today's unified Germany. Although *all* German women are affected by these institutions, the impact on East German women is more intense. This is due to the drastic changes that have taken place in the transition to a western and capitalist society. East German women are also impacted by the influence of male institutional power in (West) Germany, which is imposed differently than it was in the GDR.

In the GDR East German women's history included a much more liberal law than they are now forced to follow. Their voices were silenced during the unification proceedings and the subsequent development and writing of abortion law. ExGDR women's marginalized status regarding abortion is, however, just one issue among many that are either newly present or have intensified negatively in their lives since unification. East Germans face a disproportionate rate of unemployment in Germany and this is even worse for East German women. There has also been a rise in racist and anti-foreigner violence since unification. East Germans are easily discriminated against and rarely protected or supported by a system of "justice" that was not designed to protect or support their interests. East German women have lost what elements of reproductive and relative economic freedom that they had gained in the GDR, including free contraception and abortion and support for working mothers. Although the GDR system produced a double burden for women as mothers and workers, in its context it provided for more reproductive freedom than was available to most western women. East German feminists sought to rid their society of its sexist practices before the Wall came down. In fact, they were instrumental in bringing down the Wall. But due to unification they were not able to push for reforms in their own system. They were instead thrust backward into the West German system. Ever since 1990 they have watched as their rights have diminished and their social services and family policies have disappeared. Their reproductive freedom has suffered on paper, and even

women with more economic power and resources more options. ExGDR women have significantly less economic leverage than their western sisters and so are the major losers in German abortion policy.

I will analyze these circumstances using several feminist approaches, drawing on work that has already been done in many of these areas of East German women's lives. I will also discuss the institutional dynamics that marginalize East German women. These same dynamics are present anywhere that gendered and discriminatory institutions exist, including the United States. I make some comparisons between the experiences of women in Germany and in the United States and use these broader comparisons to discuss how reproductive freedom including access to abortion is curtailed within such institutions. I will argue that without a structure that provides for holistic choices for women, there is really no "choice" for abortion and motherhood. Reproductive rights must occur within a framework where women truly have life choices. This can only occur when women are free from economic oppression, racism, homophobia, sexism, and rigid paradigms that dictate women's role in any particular economic system. East German women's experiences with abortion law since unification provide an excellent example of how damaging and oppressive these complex institutional and societal forces can be and how their activism holds potential for changing the systems they are disadvantaged by.

Visit our Women's Program Web Site at <http://www.unl.edu/womenssp/wshome.html>

Women's Studies Major Graduate List

**Congratulations on graduating
December 1999**

♀ **Anderson, Heather Corinne**

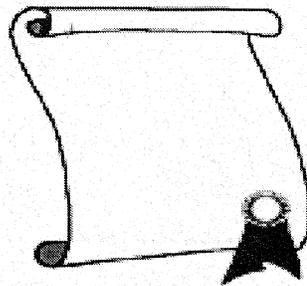
♀ **Lighter, Amanda Jane**

♀ **Obrist, Gretchen Suzanne**

Summer 1999 Graduates

♀ **Devoss, Angie**

♀ **Matlock, Jill**



Recent Publications

Susan Rosowski's new book, *Birthing a Nation: Gender, Creativity, and the West in American Literature* was published in October by University of Nebraska Press.

Hilda Raz's *Living On the Margins: Women Writers on Breast Cancer* was published by Persea.

Venetia Patton's new book, *Women in Chains: The Legacy of Slavery in Black Women's Fiction*, is out this month from SUNY.

Noted African American Scholar Barbara Smith to Visit UNL!

Barbara Smith, an author and independent scholar who has played a groundbreaking role in opening up a national cultural and political dialogue about the intersections of race, class, sexuality, and gender, will visit UNL on March 30, 2000, as a guest of the Women's Studies Program and the UNL Committee on Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Concerns. Smith's reading and lecture will be at 7:30 p.m. in the Nebraska Union, followed by a reception and book signing.

Smith has edited three major collections about Black women:

Conditions: Five. The Black Women's Issue (with Lorraine Bethel); All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies (with Gloria T. Hull and Patricia Bell Scott); and Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology. She is also co-author with Elly Bulkin and Minnie Bruce Pratt of Yours in Struggle: Three Feminist Perspectives on Anti-Semitism and Racism. Recently, Smith has been the general editor of "The Reader's Companion to U.S. Women's History" with Wilma Mankiller, Gwendolyn Mink, Maryse Navarro, and Gloria Steinem.



Barbara Smith

Her new book, The Truth That Never Hurts: Writing on Race, Gender, and Freedom, has just been published by Rutgers University Press. Barbara Smith was co-founder and publisher until 1995 of Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, the first U.S. publisher for women of color. Everyone is cordially invited to join Women's Studies and the UNL Committee for GLBT Concerns for this important event.

For more information, contact Barbara DiBernard at 402-472-1828.

Barbara DiBernard

Visit our Women's Program Web Site at
<http://www.unl.edu/womenssp/wshome.html>

2000 No Limits Conference

UNL's Women's Studies Association with the Women's Studies Program, is in the midst of planning our 7th annual *No Limits* Conference. Started in 1993 by Women's Studies students Mary Carol Bond, Nell Eckersley, Karen Hindhede, Kristin Mapel-Bloomberg, Jennifer Putzi, and Thelma Ross, the *No Limits* Conference has been a successful annual event, hosting in all, more than 200 presentations by undergraduate and graduate students from UNL and other regional institutions. The *No Limits* Conference continues to adhere to these founding members' feminist initiatives in providing accessible space for the serious contemplation, appreciation, and critique of women's work across disciplines, facilitating relationships and networking within the community and region, and fostering critical work related to women's issues, lives, and cultures. Past conferences have hosted keynote and featured

continued on page 7

An Open Letter to My Younger Sister Students at UN-L:



As an "older" sister student on campus, I felt the need to write and tell you how happy I am to observe your collective sense of presence and confidence in your futures. As I reflect back on my traditional college days when I was your age, I don't recall that I displayed the same demeanor. You see that was before the Women's Movement exerted its influence on the country. Women back then were not expected to go to college; if they did, it was presumably to

meet their future husband, certainly not to pursue any career or profession of their choosing! As I speak with you and eavesdrop a little on your conversations, I hear your dreams and plans reflecting all of the options you have before you. Not one of you speaks of being at UN-L to meet your future husbands (although many of you speak of the men in your lives). Most of you are here to learn, with a goal in mind...to enter the field of your choosing. Many of you expect to go into fields that, just 30 years ago, were not open to women. It is as if you perceive no obstacles to your future endeavors. Some of my female contemporaries would begrudge you this optimism about your future. They say women your age take everything for granted. In the 1980s, Annie Gottlieb wrote a book and addressed this issue. In *Do You Believe in Magic: The Second Coming of the 60's Generation*, she used surveys and interviews with members of the 60s generation to see how many were still interested or involved in "changing the world" now that they were in their 40s. There weren't very many. But there were some women of that era who perceived younger women were unappreciative of the efforts made to gain equality for women. However, the reason we stood on those picket lines, lobbied legislatures, stepped on toes, made noises and make some people mad was so that you could take your future for granted in the same manner as young men do. It would not occur to young men that obstacles existed to stop them from achieving goals because they were males. Neither should your enthusiasm for the future be dampened by artificial barriers based on gender. God knows life itself will confront you with enough struggles. With these, my dear sisters, I am afraid no amount of activism can help. So carry on with your goals and dreams for the future, whether it be in the home or the workplace or both. I am delighted you have these choices. I would hate to think all of my efforts and those of my contemporaries have been for naught!

Your older sister,

Sharon A. Kennedy
Doctoral student
Education Administration

**2000
No Limits
continued
from page 6...**

speakers of great range and diversity, including transgender artist and activist Loren Cameron; Iranian politician and activist for Muslim women's rights, Mahnaz Afkami; writers such as Judith Ortiz-Cofer; and our own WS program faculty members, scholars, writers, and activists. The 2000 *No Limits* Conference will take place March 3 and 4 at UNL's East Campus Union. The conference is free and open to the public and we invite all of you to attend and participate. We also invite you to submit proposals for presentations (we accept and encourage proposals from a variety of areas including creative writing, visual arts, film, music, performance, and academic papers. See our call for papers for details). This year our theme is "Feminist Visioning: Re-Imagining, Re-Creating and Re-Telling."

Tagi Adams

Women's Center 2:

*Spirituality Group

Meeting held Friday
afternoons from 11:30 to
1:00pm in 340 Nebraska
Union. Call Christine at
472-2579 for more details.

Call for Papers Call for Papers

No Limits:

Feminist Visioning: Re-Imagining, Re-Creating and Re-Telling

Regional Women's Studies Conference
Sponsored by the Women's Studies Association
of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln
3 & 4 March 2000

No Limits is an annual conference dedicated to crossing boundaries between disciplines and exploring a wide range of women's issues.

We invite proposals from undergraduate and graduate students on any topic and from any discipline related to women's issues, lives, and cultures. Creative writing, visual arts, film, music, performance, and academic papers are welcome.

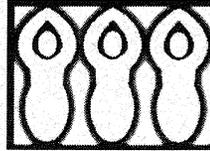
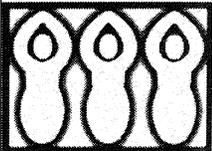
The 2000 *No Limits* Conference is free and open to the public. We invite everyone to attend and participate.

Please submit one 500-word abstract outlining your proposed paper, workshop, creative reading, film, or project by Monday, 17 January 2000 to:

No Limits Conference
c/o Women's Studies Program
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
307 Avery Hall
Lincoln, NE 68588-0136

Phone 402-472-9392
e-mail inquiries to:
radams6@bigred.unl.edu
(abstracts by electronic mail are welcome)

Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope with your proposal for notification



Nonprofit Org.
US Postage Paid
Permit 46
Lincoln, Ne

Women's Studies Program
307 Avery Hall
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Lincoln, Ne, 68588-0136

The University of Nebraska is an affirmative action/equal opportunity institution.

