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Women's Studies

University of Nebraska-Lincoln

NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2001

From the Director

Throughout the pages of this newsletter you'll see the evidence of our program's vitality in this 25th Anniversary year. One of the privileges of being the Director of Women's Studies comes from observing the outstanding work of our students and faculty and participating in the events that extend the Program into the university and surrounding communities. This includes seeing three Women's Studies majors on the Dean's List for their outstanding academic achievement: Kris Gandara, Cherisa Price, and Dan Titus; The Women's Studies Association production of *The Vagina Monologues*; our collaboration with other programs and departments in co-sponsoring outstanding visiting scholars and writers like Toi Derricotte, Susan Socolow, C. S'themble West, and Marta Wayne.

Graduates of our Women's Studies program also continue to distinguish themselves. We saw evidence of this in January. Margaret Fisher, Tina Giambastiani, and LeeAnn Pancharoen, all graduates of our program, joined Peggy Lawlis, a graduate of Columbia University's Women's Studies program, for a discussion of the question: "What can you do with a Women's Studies Major?" It was inspiring to see again the commitment to feminist scholarship and activism that these women continue to bring to their work in the community. This spirit was also evident in the excellent scholarly papers and creative work showcased at this year's No Limits Conference, organized by Tagi Adams, Women's Studies Graduate Assistant, and with faculty and graduate student presentations of scholarship like the Colloquium on "Extraordinary Women of the Renaissance" by Carole Levin and Stephanie Witham Donsig. We are all the beneficiaries of Melba Cope's continuing commitment to scholarship and activism with her generosity in establishing the Melba Cope Scholarship

and Outreach Fund. Melba graduated with highest distinction from Women's Studies in 1996. Faculty, students, and friends soon will receive an invitation to contribute to the Women's Studies Program Development Fund at the University of Nebraska Foundation. Please consider following Melba's example, and contribute to the program to mark the 25th anniversary.

Dr. Joy Ritchie, Director of Women's Studies

A Message from Melba Cope



*Melba Cope (right)
with her mother,
Lorena Van Hemert*

When my mother died July 19, 2000, I lost a best friend and mentor. However, her spirit lives on, and I am grateful for her undying love and support in the life choices that I make today. The Melba Cope Scholarship & Outreach Fund, to be used annually for student and faculty support in the Women's Studies Program, is a tribute to my mother's courage and the feminist example that she set for me, long before I graduated with my Women's Studies degree in 1996.

I did not always recognize myself or my mother as a feminist. Women's Studies professors and the courses that they taught provided me with a new pair of eyes through which to view the world. This vision gives me a different, more inclusive and accurate look at history and today's world, a sense of pride in the personal qualities that make up my definition of feminism, and a newly kindled passion to reach out into the community and make a difference.



In 2001, the Women's Studies Program is celebrating its 25th Anniversary Year, a time to applaud the efforts and successes of everyone involved in this process, as well as the many lives that this program has touched in such a positive way. I hope that by setting up this fund, others will be motivated to contribute to Women's Studies as well.

Melba

"Afraid to Major in Women's Studies?" by Peggy Lawlis

Afraid to major in Women's Studies? Fear not. Yes, the discipline (or, perhaps, *interdiscipline*) lacks pragmatic edge – it won't teach you to manage a budget, write a memo, or tolerate racist, sexist, heterosexist, ableist or classist workplace rhetoric – but it will, nonetheless, hold you in good stead after graduation. At the very least, you'll be a good person by the time you've completed your undergraduate studies. A Women's Studies education is a deeply moral one. It inculcates a communitarian ethic – or a commitment to understanding the social world and remedying unfairness – that is no less absolute or uncompromising for all its postmodern trappings. But if that's not enough for you, there remains the analytical training embedded in Women's Studies, which will help you to become an intrepid thinker, capable of understanding the systemics that underlie social or organizational problems, and adept at recognizing the multiplicity of strategies that can work to undo them. What does this mean professionally? It means that you'll be the kind of person who can "think outside the box," and "push the envelope," as the corporate folks say. It means that your perspective will always be fresh (and, sometimes, maybe *too* fresh), that you will always productively ask, "why?," and that while you might be frustrated a lot by television, movies, all mainstream publications, and most of the people you work or study with, you will always, always make people think harder and better than they did before meeting you. And, that, dear undergrad, will make you an asset wherever you go.

Peggy Lawlis is a graduate of Columbia University's Women's Studies Program and now works for Doane College as a coordinator for the Hansen Leadership Program.

"What to do with a Women's Studies Major" by Cherisa Price

As a Women's Studies major, I often hear the question, "What do you do with a Women's Studies degree?" I usually reply jokingly, "You go to graduate school." But that is not really true. I use my degree in my internship many times, relying on theory and literature to help people understand the complexity of issues of gender, class, race, and other salient politics of identity. I have counseled people who are struggling with issues of power and dominance in their personal relationships. I have shown men how they are responsible for rape, although they may not be rapists. I use my knowledge to explain to others the framework in which women and other marginalized groups are silenced and oppressed. I am able to give community resources and support to a friend who is raped, explaining to her that it is truly not her fault. I am able to understand my mother's frustration about trying to maintain a household and a full-time job. I also use this rhetoric in my daily life in conversation about politics.

In essence, I use this knowledge all the time. A Women's Studies degree promotes a way of examining the world through wider lenses. This understanding of the larger context of how the world works is a catalyst for activism and the application of knowledge.

One may have attended the Women's Studies first spring colloquium thinking that there would be a list of concrete occupations appropriate for a Women's Studies graduate. However, what the panel revealed is that there are unlimited possibilities of employment with a Women's Studies degree. Some have used it in the field of education to teach others. Some have used it in business settings to educate their co-workers. And this is what I have found in my own experience; one can employ knowledge from a Women's Studies degree in various settings and environments.

Cherisa Price is majoring in Women's Studies at UNL.



From the left: Margaret Fisher, LeeAnn Pancharoen, Peggy Lawlis, and Tina Giambastiani discuss "What to do with a Women's Studies Major?"

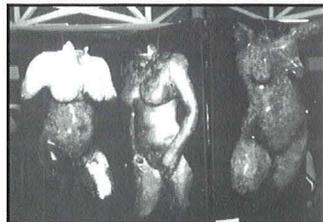


“The Vagina Monologues 2001” by Rachael Robinson-Keilig

With a cast of 27 and an audience of 600, *The Vagina Monologues* rocked Lincoln Nebraska for a second year in a row on Feb 13th and 14th. Raising awareness and money for women who are victims of sexual violence is once again an issue that Lincoln cares about. *The Vagina Monologues* is an award winning play performed all around the world on Valentines Day as a unified movement to educate the community about sexual violence against women, and raise money for local agencies.

Nebraska Wesleyan was the site of this year’s performance that drew 600 people to share in a truly unique experience. “Thought provoking” and “life altering” are just a few of the quotes from audience and cast members alike about this year’s performance. Composed of high school students, college students, professors and socially conscious community women, *The Vagina Monologues* drew a very unique and much larger cast this year.

Practice began last September, and brought women together not only to practice but to bond as women and share in our collective experiences. This year also brought the addition of artist Larry Kirkwood and his gift of making the human body an art form. He completed 14 body casts of *The Vagina Monologues* cast members, which were on display and for sale at the Feb. 3rd Art Show/Silent Auction to raise money for production costs. Through the hard work of many dedicated people, *The Vagina Monologues* was a success: entertaining, educating, raising awareness and money. *The Vagina Monologues* once again reached people all around the world and will continue to do so until the violence stops.



Larry Kirkwood’s “Casts of Cast”
for V-day

Rachael Robinson-Keilig is a graduate student at UNL.

“Until the Violence Stops” by Kellie R. Hall

Participating in *The Vagina Monologues* was one of the most meaningful experiences that I have had up to

this point in my life. Part of the personal growth I experienced came from having my body cast made by Larry Kirkwood. After removing the cast, I looked upon myself with awe. I was amazed and humbled by the beauty of this cast. I took back years of harmful criticisms that I had launched at my inner being. Seeing the space of my own body was the beginning of ending self-inflicted cruelty.

My role in the performance was also a gesture in reclaiming our collective bodies. The monologue I performed, “My Vagina Was My Village,” was a challenge for me because I thought myself to be so far from the Bosnian woman I depicted, a woman raped and brutalized in her safe place, her home village. An overwhelming feeling of powerlessness surrounded me. I could not possibly reach out to her.

During the last week before V-Day, I had a flashback to our months of rehearsals. I saw our cast working in a space no larger than a Midwestern Nebraska barn. Then I saw casts rehearsing across the Midwest reaching toward each coast, in theaters, on college campuses, in community centers, in people’s homes and continuing across the world. Each year, as more women participate and more people experience the performance, V-Day grows.

It occurred to me during this last week that there were hundreds of women in the world doing the same thing at the same time as we were. No amount of time or space could separate us at that moment, the evening of February 14, when we were joined together in a single cause – to stop violence against women.

I then realized that I could support the Bosnian women who have been raped like the one I depicted through my performance. During and after the production, I knew we had sent our message at least to this community, reminding them of the sexual violence that occurs daily to women, regardless of their race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, age, or geographic location.

Referring to Bosnian women like the one in “My Vagina was My Village,” Catherine MacKinnon states, “It is [rape] unto death, rape as massacre, rape to kill and to make the victims wish they were dead. It is rape as an instrument of forced exile, rape to make you leave your home and never want to go back... It is rape to drive a wedge through a community, to shatter a society, to destroy a people. It is rape as genocide.”

The day after the end of V-Day 2001, a guilty verdict was brought against Serbian officers for committing rape as a war crime. For the first time ever an international tribunal has condemned the act of rape as a weapon of war. I can’t help but think that Lincoln’s V-Day



2001 and the contribution of every cast member, was at least a small part of the process of raising consciousness that renders such verdicts possible.

Kellie R. Hall is a Women's Studies major at UNL.

"The Unnatural History of Rape" by Jocelyn Bosley



Dr. Marta Wayne

Evolutionary biologists Thornhill and Palmer contend that rape is not an act of power, as feminists have argued, but a reproductive strategy that once held a selective advantage in males with too few resources to attract a mate in the usual ways. Though Thornhill and Palmer do not make the claim that a genetic predisposition of males to rape

somehow makes it a more acceptable or excusable behavior, they do say in defense of their thesis that "evolutionary science cannot say what is right or wrong," but simply deals in "facts." Further, they argue that it is a social as well as a scientific mistake to speak of rape in terms of power rather than in terms of sex, as this "misdiagnosis" impairs our ability to treat the social problem of rape in a truly effective way.

Dr. Wayne first presented counterarguments to each of Thornhill and Palmer's main arguments, demonstrating in each case how their logic is either false or inconsistent with a feminist thesis. Responding to Thornhill and Palmer's observation that most rape victims are of reproductive age, for example, Dr. Wayne noted that most *women* are of reproductive age, so this same pattern would be observed if the model of rape as a random act holds. Thornhill and Palmer also hold that rape victims who experience more physical battery during their attacks actually experience *less* emotional distress afterward, and they interpret this response to have evolutionary origins as well, since a woman who could demonstrate to her husband that she struggled against her attacker is less likely to bear the reproductively disastrous consequence of abandonment. Pointing out the decidedly problematic notion that the severity and emotional distress of rape can be measured, Dr. Wayne further noted that this phenomenon is consistent with a feminist understanding of rape, which suggests that relatively greater social support and validation is offered to rape victims bearing visible marks from their attacks. Dr. Wayne also pointed out additional problems raised by the Thornhill and Palmer

thesis. If natural selection can produce a behavior as complex as rape, why can't rapists distinguish between the potentially fecund and others? Why is rape not limited to vaginal intercourse? How could rape have been successful in the hunting-and-gathering Paleolithic, when the survival of a child depended on the vital contributions of both mother *and* father to its care? Finally, Dr. Wayne critiqued the idea that because current thinking about rape has failed to produce a decrease in rape, such thinking is wrong. Rather, Dr. Wayne would posit the reason as being that the social context in which rape is occurring has remained unchanged.

Most fundamentally, Thornhill and Palmer's work and its uses to shape rape laws raises questions about the role of science as cultural authority. Thornhill and Palmer's arguments, which are not widely accepted by the scientific community, have nonetheless been influential in the formulation of legal responses to rape. In particular, Dr. Wayne says the notion that rape is an evolved behavior amounts to the elimination of intent from a legal conception of rape, effectively placing the burden of proof on the victim. Though Dr. Wayne believes Thornhill and Palmer to be genuinely well-meaning, she questions the wisdom and ultimately the ethics of their insistence that their science is "value-free" and of the notion of "value-free science" more generally, maintaining that scientists still have a responsibility to consider the consequences of their own work and how it is used by others inside and outside the scientific community.

Jocelyn Bosley majors in math and has a minor in Women's Studies and several other departments.

"Holly Hughes: Challenging Decency" by Carey Larsen

Recently, Holly Hughes, an internationally-known lesbian artist based in New York, visited Lincoln on a three-day residency sponsored by the UNL GLBT Concerns committee. Her stay was packed full of happenings. She gave talks, ran workshops, and visited classes, all in addition to her main event, delivering a moving solo performance titled, "Preaching to the Perverted," a play based loosely on her experiences of fighting censorship.

Before I go any further, let me give you some facts. In 1990, in response to political pressure from George Bush, John Frohnmayer, then chair of the National Endowment for the Arts, defunded the work of four solo performers whose work was found to violate the govern-



ments' "standards of decency." These artists sued Frohnmayer and the NEA for violating their First Amendment rights. As Holly explains in her performance, "two lower courts came to the startling conclusion that the First Amendment applies to government funding, but our good friend Bill Clinton had to appeal this decision to the Supreme Court." In 1998, they voted eight to one to overturn the lower courts' decision.

"So did you hear the one about the lesbian, the feminist, and the couple of fags who go to the Supreme Court?..." Holly asked her audience. With the use of a few jokes, a lot of talent, and a load of fierce courage, Hughes succeeded in turning her lived experience into an inspiring piece of politically-fueled art. In what she calls "an opportunity to out the Supreme Court," Hughes recreates how it felt to be within the walls of our nation's highest court: "It feels like detention hall, a time out. We're suppose to soak in our worthlessness until daddy gets home, all nine daddies including two female daddies, and then we'll be sorry!... I'm not here because I'm a citizen participating in an institution of a democratic country I'm here because I have been bad, very very bad." So what did she do that was so bad? What are these standards of decency? As you may have already guessed, just being a lesbian is enough to be considered indecent. Hughes told us that when the National Council on the Arts had its emergency meeting to discuss the four performers being recommended for defunding, "they never mentioned our work, they had never seen our work or read it, or watched videos. What they talked about was the fact that we were queer. Everyone in this room knows that decency is a big neon sign flashing NO QUEERS, NO QUEERS!!... So this is what it's like if you're a member of some minority in America; you can't express yourself. You can't have a voice. Unless you get a hall pass, there's only so many to give out, they're rationed. If this is what they mean by democracy, then lets destroy it! Let's start over!"

Obviously the attacks Hughes has endured have not silenced her, as a matter of fact, I believe they have triggered an instinct to scream even louder. That night, Holly Hughes not only entertained the crowd, I do believe she stunned them. She accomplished more than making her audience laugh, she made us think. Witnessing such an intense emotional account from one of our lesbian sisters was something no one should have missed. If you did miss this amazing spitfire, I highly recommend her book, *Clit Notes*, in which she gives the same kind of inspiring encouragement for our participation in the current culture war. I leave you with her words: "Up to this point, it's pretty much been their show. They've been writing the

script and directing their action. But we can interrupt their show at any point. We can break character and start acting out our own plots. I think you'll find it easier to perform acts of resistance than you think. I have a hunch you're a natural."

Carey Larsen is a Women's Studies major at UNL.

"Toi Derricotte on Consciousness and Race" by Venita Kelley

She began writing it in 1973. Twenty-five years, and a personally estimated "million pages of revisions" later, Toi Derricotte finished *The Black Notebooks: an Interior Journey*. Derricotte was the keynote speaker for Women's Studies' annual No Limits Conference on March 3rd, 2001. Her speech, entitled "Consciousness and Race; Interior Journeys Toward Identity," shared her personal quest to wrestle with the pain, confusion, joy and transcendence in discovering and knowing one's own identity. Derricotte, through essay and poetry and an extended discussion with an overflow audience, made clear that identity is a process which a person negotiates at both external and internal levels. External impositions come in the form of stereotypes and quick judgements from those who have little knowledge or experience to interact with you effectively. Or, from one's own family and culture, which affected by their repression, impose expectations that may not fit one's own internal longings and nature.

Admitting she was still wrestling with her presentation the night before her speech, Derricotte underscored that the process of understanding what creates your identity is continuous, makes one vulnerable and insecure, but is worthwhile. The goal, she seemed to say, is to maintain integrity and fortitude as you anchor yourself in your own background and experience yet strive to understand and overcome the limitations that oppressive systems (which may range from one's own family to the entire society) inflict upon you. Derricotte ended her speech urging the audience to maintain courage and "to take the journey."

Derricotte is a professor of English at the University of Pittsburgh with over 1000 poems published, numerous essays, and books. *The Black Notebooks* is being translated into several languages and is nominated for book of the year in France. The 2001 No Limits Conference theme was "Can We Dismiss Identity?"

Dr. Venita Kelley, Assistant Professor of Communication Studies, Institute for Ethnic Studies, and Women's Studies.



Announcements

Mary Beck, Animal Science, won the senior faculty, Holling Family Award for Teaching Excellence.

Mary Beck, Peg Bolick, and Kim Franzen will offer a course on the History and Philosophy of Women in Science in the first 5 week summer session. It will be offered for the first time as ASCI 496, WMNS 399, and MUSS 399. The course involves an in-depth exploration of the historical roles of women as scientists, and the societal constructs of gender in science, with an emphasis on feminist critiques of scientific methodology and interpretation.

Sidnie White Crawford received a College of Arts and Sciences Award for Distinguished Teaching.

Maureen Honey recently gave a talk on African American Women in World War II at the National D-Day Museum and Eisenhower Center of American Studies in New Orleans event "Fighting on Two Fronts: African American Soldiers in World War II." This was a nationally reported celebration that featured the actor Ossie Davis as parade marshall and banquet guest. It was broadcast on C-Span.

Christin J. Mamiya received the 2001 Annis Chaikin Sorensen Award for distinguished teaching in the humanities.

Venetria K. Patton recently had two essays published: "Policing Our Daughters' Bodies: Mothering in Africana Literature," in *The Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering* 2.2 (2000), and "Seen But Not Heard. . . The Racial Gap Between Feminist Discourse and Practice: A Dialogue," with Kimberly Nettles in *Frontiers* 21.3 (2000).

Charlene Porsild will be leaving UNL for a dual position with her husband at Montana Historical Society in Helena, Montana. She will be the director of the Library and Archives. We will miss her, but wish her well in her new position.

Linda Pratt is preparing a second edition of Midwestern radical writer Meridel Le Sueur's novel, *I Hear Men Talking*. The book will be published in the fall by West End Press.

Hilda Raz has a new book just out, *Best of Prairie Schooner: Fiction and Poetry*, ed. Hilda Raz. London and Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Joy Ritchie has been nominated for the 2001 Sue Tidball Award for Creative Humanity.

Susan Rosowski's *Birth of a Nation: Gender, Creativity, and the West in American Literature*, was awarded the Thomas J. Lyon award for outstanding book in literary criticism published in 2000.

Join us for the Women's Studies Graduation Reception & Awards Celebration

Celebrating Graduating Majors:

Leasha Benolken, Kellie Hall, Carey Larson, Dan Titus, Cherisa Price (Aug.)
And Minors: Lisa Vanderwerff,
Jocelyn Bosley, Kate Lindsay

Outstanding Achievement Award Winner:

Kris Gandara

Karen Dunning Undergraduate Award Winner:

Jocelyn Bosley

Honorable Mention Certificate:

Carey Larsen, Kris Gandara, and Kellie Hall

Karen Dunning Graduate Award Winner:

Gaynell Gavin

Runner-Up: Melissa Rigney

Thursday, April 26, 2001

3:30-5:00 p.m.

Wick Alumni Center

Refreshments will be served.

Your R.S.V.P. will be appreciated.
Please call the Women's Studies Office at
472-9392 or email gmoore3@unl.edu.



From the left: Carey Larsen, Em-Orn Dispanya, C. S'thembile West, Venetria Patton, and Wanda K.W. Ebright at the colloquim.



WS Professors from the left: Maureen Honey, Hilda Raz, Carole Levin, and Susan Belasco at the fall semester Graduate Reception



Toi Derricotte and Liz Ahl at the No Limits Luncheon table



Northeast High school Panel Discussion at the No Limits Conference

**Women's Studies Newsletter
Spring 2001**

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Women's Studies Faculty and Associates

Grace Bauer	(English)	Carole Levin	(History)
Mary Beck	(Animal Science)	Christin Mamiya	(Art History)
Susan Belasco	(English)	Adelaida Martinez	(Modern Languages)
Rashmi Bhatnagar	(English)	Ann Mari May	(Economics)
Christina Brantner	(German)	Julia McQuillan	(Sociology)
Sidnie White Crawford	(Classics)	Amelia Montes	(English & Ethnic Studies)
Mary Jo Deegan	(Sociology)	Helen Moore	(Sociology)
Barbara DiBernard	(English)	Ruth Nisse	(English)
Patricia Draper	(Anthropology)	Venetria Patton	(English & Ethnic Studies)
Gwendolyn Foster	(English)	Charlene Porsild	(History)
Amy Goodburn	(English)	Malea Powell	(English)
Maureen Honey	(English)	Linda Pratt	(English)
Lyn Kathlene	(Political Science)	Hilda Raz	(English)
Venita Kelley	(Communications & Ethnic Studies)	Joy Ritchie	(English)
Ann Kleimola	(History)	Susan Rosowski	(English)
Sharon Baum Kuska	(Architecture)	Anna Shavers	(College of Law)
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		Wendy Weiss	(Textiles, Clothing, Design)
Radha Balasubramanian	(Modern Languages)	Marcela Raffaelli	(Psychology & Ethnic Studies)
Margaret Bolick	(Botany & Museum)	Jenifer Watson	(Architecture)
Shari Clarke	(Spec. Asst. To Pres.)	LuAnn Wandsnider	(Anthropology)
Shelley Fuller	(Art)		

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