



Women's Studies



UNIVERSITY OF
Nebraska
Lincoln

NEWSLETTER

Spring 2003

From the Interim Director

-- Susan Belasco

Serving as the interim director of Women's Studies during this semester has been a delightful experience for me—the chance to participate much more fully in the many activities of our program, get to know our wonderful and dedicated staff, meet current and prospective students, and observe firsthand the impressive leadership of our director, Joy Ritchie, who is on Faculty Development Leave this spring.

The semester has been a busy one in Women's Studies. Our Women's Studies Colloquium series included "What Do You Do with a Women's Studies Major?" featuring Kris Gandara, Gretchen Obrist, Cherisa Price-Wells, Keri Wayne, Rachel West, and moderated by Professor Elizabeth Suter in Communications Studies. Our second colloquium featured Radka Donnell, a contemporary quilt artist and a participant in the Wild by Design Symposium. Her works were featured in a marvelous exhibit at the Robert Hillestad Textiles Gallery here at UNL. Our third Colloquium, "When We Begin with Women: Graduate Student Research on Women and Gender," features a number of graduate students from several departments who have undertaken projects specifically designed to advance our knowledge about women in history,

literature, and the workplace. Many of our students and faculty participated in the annual No Limits Conference held this year at UNO. Plans are well underway for No Limits 2004, which will be held here at UNL and which will feature the experimental documentary filmmaker, Lourdes Portillo, one of Ms. Magazine's Women of the Year for 2002.

Thanks to the efforts of Joy and our staff, Women's Studies now has a reading room, adjacent to the offices in 1214 Oldfather. The Women's Studies reading room and offices (which already feature the artwork of staff member Glenda Moore) are filled with the artworks of The Nebraska Women's Caucus for Art. The show, "Storefront Window Dressing: Women Dressed/Women Addressed," opened on March 7 with a reception in the Women's Studies offices.

My term as Director ends in May, and I will treasure the experience of working closely with the faculty, staff, and students involved in Women's Studies at UNL. This semester has been a valuable learning experience for me and has provided me new opportunities for contemplating the many directions of Women's Studies. Thanks to all of you for your help and support.

**Check out our
web site at:**

www.unl.edu/womenssp/wshome.html



Congratulations to:

Megan Spilinek (Women's Studies Minor) has been named a 2003 Truman Scholar. The honor comes with a \$30,000 scholarship – \$3,000 for Spilinek's senior year and \$27,000 for graduate study – and recognizes her commitment to a career in public service.



Megan Spilinek

Katherine Acosta (Women's Studies Graduate) has been selected as one of three recipients for a UNL College of Arts & Sciences Teaching Assistant Award.

No Limits Conference 2004



Agents for Change Global Feminisms

March 5-6, 2004
University of Nebraska –
Lincoln

For More Information contact :

Women's Studies Program
1209 Oldfather Hall
University of Nebraska – Lincoln
Lincoln, NE 68588-0341
(402) 472-9392

* The conference is free and open to all interested

“Taking Feminist Sociology Public”

A Review by Crystal Edwards

On a pilgrimage to harness my strengths and weaknesses, I journeyed to chilly seaside Wrightsville, North Carolina for a retreat hosted by Sociologists for Women in Society. The retreat theme was “how to be a public feminist/sociologist.” I want to share three things I learned with you. First, keep it simple. Public forums rarely allow the space and time to share information in detail. Adopt what Stephanie Coontz calls the “spoiler role.” The spoiler challenges notions about claims of truth and fact. She suggests complexity, when the opponent suggests simplicity. Second, reach out to others and give them what they want, usually recognition and validation of ideas. At this point your audience can relax knowing you are not attacking their beliefs, then you can move on to disagree. Coontz suggests that appropriate use of this technique can make you sound like a sleepy moderate when you are really a radical. Three, do not be an ostrich! When performing as a public intellectual you seldom have the authority to set perimeters around the discussion. Judith Stacey explained how her decision to support Canadian legislation for homosexual marriages was influenced by conflicting forces. She disdains marriage and positivism yet supports gay rights. In a bind she was forced to compromise her ideals. Know these perimeters and determine your priorities.

I encourage anyone interested in social sciences and women's studies to join SWS and take advantage of this intimate and dynamic group of intellectuals striving for social justice. The conference has clarified my career goals, and renewed my confidence, energy and purpose for my final year of graduate school. This is something I had to reach beyond my program to find and I encourage other graduate students to do the same. Meeting established scholars in such a supportive feminist environment was a thrill.

Crystal is a graduate student in sociology whose primary focus is stratification. Currently she is defending her dissertation proposal which assesses the processes and patterns of mental health related child removal in the state of Nebraska.



Radka Donnell:
A Review by Rachel Peterson

In preparation for seeing Radka Donnell's exhibit, "The Work of Touch", I read her book, Quilts as Women's Art, A Quilt Poetics. A collage of poems, personal reflections, theory, information and photographs of women quilters' work, the book speaks to the power of women's art, bodies, and community. The quilt's traditional place on the bed signifies powerful life forces, as the bed is the place where most of us are born, have sex and will die. As an everyday source of comfort and warmth, quilts reflect women's traditional roles as caregivers and as ongoing sources of love in any society. In her artist's statement Donnell says, "In my work in cloth I not only work out my longing for a more perfect contact and union with other persons, but also strive to express universal human fears of oppression and death."

I was moved by Donnell's writings, and I was dazzled by her quilts: bright turquoises and yellows, reds and purples in complex geometric patterns. Several quilts held very personal meanings for Donnell: one quilt was a memorial to her sister, another a celebration of her two daughters. Bodies – her body, woman's bodies, and the body of the quilt – are explicit in Donnell's work.



Radka Donnell & Michael James

Eager to learn about Donnell's quilting process, I was surprised at the colloquium to hear Donnell say, "I am not a quilter." Instead, she talked about her design process, and about Claire Mielke, who quilts the designs by machine. My image of quilting circles and hand-stitched quilts was shattered by my realization that the quilt has been removed from modern woman's "hoop" and replaced with work outside of the home. In a way, Donnell has appropriated the loaded meanings of hand-sewn quilts to express her point: that women as a group are oppressed and must join together.

The community that quilts communicate to is here. As we left the gallery and went into a classroom to help sew a quilt square, several students and I talked nervously as we became aware of our inefficient sewing skills and tried to nonchalantly move away from the sewing. But it's not the actual sewing that matters; what matters is that we came together in community to express the creativity and warmth of women. As Donnell continues to piece fabric together in her quilts she inspires us to continue to touch each other's lives, and our community perseveres.

Rachel is a senior English major and Women's Studies minor. She will graduate in May.

*Congratulations to the following
Women's Studies Major and Minors
who will be graduating:*

Major: Spring Williams
Minors: Jeannie Shaw
Rachel Peterson

*Graduation Reception
and Awards Ceremony*

*Thursday, May 1, 2003
3-5 pm*

*City Campus Union
Room to be posted*

Everyone Invited to Attend!

The Vagina Monologues: A Review by Miranda Swanson

Can you imagine a world without violence? What would it look like? How would women and girls be treated? That was the challenge that Eve Ensler, the author of The Vagina Monologues, presented to the Lincoln community.

Under the direction of Judith K. Hart and the production of Pat Tetreault, the cast began meeting in early October to discuss the program for this year's performance. Our mission was to represent the two hundred women that were interviewed for Eve Ensler's book. The play invited us to represent "older women, young women, married women, lesbians, single women, college professors, actors, corporate professionals, sex workers, African American women, Asian American women, Hispanic women, Native American women, Caucasian women, and Jewish women."

Our diverse cast played to three sold out audiences on February 23rd, 24th, and 25th at the University of Nebraska's Johnny Carson Theater. In addition to the original show, Community Monologues were voiced from three men as well as women from the

Friendship Home and the Rape Spouse Abuse Crisis Center of Lincoln (RSACC). These monologues expressed what the world would look like without violence. The money from the production will be donated to Fresh Start and RSACC.

The Vagina Monologues gives voice to women's experiences, raises awareness on important issues related to gender and sexuality, and the impact of violence on individuals and society as a whole. The production gave me the opportunity to meet many amazing women that envisioned the same world that I envisioned. Together we helped bring a violence free voice to the Lincoln community.

Miranda was a cast member of the recent performance in Lincoln of the Vagina Monologues, and a Women's Studies major.

WS Program Newsletter
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