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# UA68/18/1 Women's Studies Newsletter, Vol. 1, No. 1

WKU Women's Studies & Support Program

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"You can stand tall without standing on someone. You can be a victor without having victims." Harriett Woods

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November 1996

## *From the Director's Desk*

From my vantage point, the Women's Studies office is a hectic, challenging but exciting place to work at present. Several important developmental milestones have recently occurred. Women's Studies hired its first joint-appointed faculty member in late spring. In June, the Women's Studies office moved from Wetherby Administration Building to permanent housing in VanMeter Hall.

Our new suite of offices includes space for each of us: director, assistant director, secretary, and student worker. We have large windows so our space is bright and cheerful. We also have a conference room on the second floor, which we've furnished with a large seminar table and enough chairs for large meetings.

In early fall, we initiated our first film/video series, a new reading discussion group, this newsletter, and co-sponsored The Clothesline Project along with other University and community groups. The Special Events Committee is busy planning

## *First Joint Appointment*

On August 12 Jane Olmsted, Ph.D. in English from the University of Minnesota, began her duties in a jointly appointed position with English and Women's Studies. This appointment is the first of its kind for our program.

Jane has specialized training in American literature, with an emphasis in African American and American Indian traditions, creative writing, and women's studies. Foremost among

activities for spring and early next fall, and the Publicity Committee is redesigning the program brochure. The Awards Committee will soon announce a call for nominations for the Catherine C. Ward Feminist Action Award and the Seneca Falls Personal Empowerment Award. Recipients will be announced at the Annual Awards Luncheon in March. The Steering Committee has decided to focus on strategic planning, both long and short term goals, and will be working with the newly organized Fund Raising Advisory Council to develop fund-raising protocols.

Thanks to the productive, talented work of our women's studies faculty, staff, and students, lots of interesting new happenings will occur in the months ahead. After years of struggling, we have much to look forward to.

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*Jimmie Price is a professor of Public Health.*  
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Jane's strengths is her formal training in feminism as evidenced by her doctoral minor in women's studies coupled with her ongoing editorial work with scholars at the Center for Advanced Feminist Studies at Minnesota. Jane is married to Ken Casey. They have 3 sons: Galen, 14; Adrian, 12; and Casey, 7. Although a diverse family group, family interests include camping, watching movies, traveling, and swimming.

## *Gender Images Film Series*

This fall, we initiated our first film/video series, which, thanks to the interest of students and faculty and the hard work of the film committee, had a good turn-out. First we showed *Daughters of the Dust*, a beautiful film about a Gullah family in the early 1900s. Our second film evening included several short animated films as well as a documentary on women who work in fast food restaurants in eastern Kentucky. Our third film, *Camille Claudel*, was about a woman's attempt to become a sculptor in the shadow of the great male sculptor, Auguste Rodin. Our last film of the semester, *Christopher Strong*, was directed by Dorothy Arzner, the only woman director in a major studio in 1933, and starred Katherine Hepburn in her second feature film. (See the announcement about spring term on page 4.)



## What Is Women's Studies

by Sharon Walker-Carver

What is women's studies? Why is it needed? What impact can it have on my future? These are just a few of the seemingly unending questions concerning the purpose of women's studies. In theory, women's studies is an innovative approach which examines, challenges, and attempts to dismantle the interlocking attitudes, prejudices, and systems of oppression that have framed the lives of women for decades. In practice, women's studies places women center stage in the educational process, thus reshaping the traditional methods and contents of a curriculum that has historically made women's contributions to society nothing more than a footnote. As part of that same learning process, women's studies encourages its students to examine their own belief systems in an attempt to help them determine how their lives are affected by a culture that either challenges or maintains traditional female roles.

In order to learn about, understand, and change the condition of women's lives, the interdisciplinary study of women was created. Women's studies courses were first introduced in this country in the 1970s and have continued to spread rapidly across the nation. Scholars of women's studies recognize that changing the way in which girls and young women are educated directly affects the level of personal empowerment they achieve as adult women. Women's studies provides a forum for critical analysis of the inequalities of race, class, ability, sexual orientation, and age that affect women. Women's studies relies upon the intellectual achievements of feminist scholarship to appraise and realign established academic disciplines. By exploring other perspectives as well as scrutinizing its own missions, goals, and methods, women's studies offers a new approach to teaching traditional disciplines and expands the framework for new research.

As universities actively recruit women and men to research and teach in the area of Women's Studies, a major or minor in the discipline is proving increasingly useful in various employment arenas that serve or employ large numbers of women, such as social services, health care, research, education, cultural and artistic fields. Although women's studies will affect each individual differently, it offers each student a springboard for critical analysis and evaluation of issues that impact the lives of women. No matter what career path one follows, women's studies equips individuals with the knowledge to identify marginal treatment and the skills to challenge limiting viewpoints.

I spoke with several of our women's studies minors to find out what sort of impression or experience they have had with women's studies so far in their academic journey. "After taking Introduction to Women's Studies, I realized

that everything I had based myself on, I had never questioned. I had never tested its validity. I expect women's studies to give me the information and to challenge me so that when I come out the other end, my beliefs will be based on more complete knowledge. My impression of women's studies is that it's valuable, necessary, and challenging," said Millie Jessup, a nontraditional student. Danny Fortier, a junior majoring in Social Work, gave us his take on women's studies from a male's perspective. He said, "More men need to get involved. Men are responsible for most of the issues women face." Fortier plans to work with spousal and sexual abuse victims. "I know that men are also abused, but men are responsible for raping and we can't seem to stop them. If more men got involved with women's studies it would make them more sensitive."

Choosing to become involved in women's studies can be a life-altering decision. With knowledge and enlightenment comes a responsibility to make a difference in your life and in society. You feel compelled to commit yourself to change and equality. "I chose to minor in Women's Studies to learn more about myself, the issues that I care about, and to find out what other women through history have thought and said about these issues," says Erin Cook, who is majoring in Radio Broadcasting. "Women's Studies is the most interactive minor I could have chosen, but it's more than a minor. It's a bigger commitment than that, and that means a lot to me."

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*Sharon Walker-Carver, secretary of the Women's Studies program, is one of our minors. Her major is Sociology.*

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### Did you know?

The original incident that inspired the epithet of "bra burning feminists" contained no bra or girdle burning. According to Flora Davis' *Moving the Mountain: The Women's Movement in America since 1960*, protesters at the 1968 Miss America Pageant threw "curlers, girdles, high-heeled shoes, women's magazines, and the odd brassiere into a 'freedom trash can,'" as a way of protesting women's status as sex objects. The media reported that the women had "burned their bras" and the erroneous charge stuck as a way of trivializing feminist organizing. So great was the concern of some Chinese officials at the Beijing global women's conference that they had blankets to throw over women whom they feared had come to disrobe and burn bras. (Thanks to B. Winkler and B. Weinbaum of the WMST-L online discussion list for this information.)

## **The Clothesline Project**

by Karen Schneider

The Clothesline Project, a display of color-coded t-shirts documenting specific instances of violence against women, began in 1990 in Massachusetts. Since then communities across the country (and in other countries) have sponsored similar projects. Bowling Green now has its own Clothesline, thanks to the work of the Anti-Violence Coalition of Kentucky (ACK), founded by Elizabeth Wilson-Compton, a WKU student. The goals of the Project are to bear witness, to help with the healing process, to raise society's awareness of the extent of the problem, and to provide a nationwide network of support and information. Because women are not the only victims of such violence, ACK decided to expand the scope of the local Project to include male victims/survivors of violence.

Funded by WKU and community sponsors, representatives from eight university and community organizations coordinated t-shirt making sessions and clothesline displays and vigils. Survivors/victims were given the opportunity to break the silence that so often shrouds such violence—to

speak out by decorating t-shirts to express emotions that tend to be repressed or invalidated.

The color-coded t-shirts (white for those who died from abuse; yellow for those who have been battered by a partner; red, pink, or orange for those raped or sexually assaulted; blue or green for survivors of incest or child sexual abuse; purple for those who have been attacked because of sexual orientation; and black for those abused because of their cultural or racial identity) were displayed at the International Festival on October 12, the BRASS candlelight vigil on October 17, and at DUC all day on October 30. Encouraged by favorable responses, ACK has decided to sponsor another Clothesline Project next year.

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*Karen Schneider is assistant professor of English and Women's Studies.*

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## **First Women's Studies Newsletter!**

This is the first issue of the Women's Studies newsletter. Its first purpose is to keep you informed about the Women's Studies program at Western, but we also want to provide information about the field in general. If that sounds ambitious, we are. We hope to grow beyond our current plans to publish once a semester, and we hope to be able to include a great variety of material in every issue.

In this issue, you will find a number of items that will be regular parts of the newsletter: communication from the director, news about the program, and announcements of upcoming events. Our article about the field of Women's Studies is the first of many issue-oriented features to come. We will have reports on committee work, research in progress, publications and presentations. . . .

In short, we are planning on this being a useful newsletter. There is a catch, though: we can't do it without your help! We solicit your contributions. Let us know what you're up to, what topics you'd like to see us cover, and don't be surprised if you get a call inviting you to be a guest writer! Send your suggestions, news, announcements, and brief articles to 103 VanMeter, or e-mail Jane Olmsted, this year's chair of the newsletter committee, or another committee member: Pauline Jones, assistant professor of English; or Sharon Walker-Carver, secretary of Women's Studies.

## **New WS Minors and Graduates**

This semester we have several students who have applied to the Women's Studies Program. Millie Jessup, president of WIT, is majoring in Horticulture. Marigold Clark, Erin Feist, Jennifer Hardy, and Olivia Culver are majoring in English. Evelyn Scharf has a double major in English and History. Erin Cook is working on her degree in Radio Broadcasting. Terri Douthitt is majoring in Psychology. Heather Byers is majoring in Sociology, and Danny Fortier in Social Work. Welcome! We're excited to see the program growing in this way (but remember, if you haven't turned in your degree program, you aren't an official minor yet). We're also glad to see some of our graduates move on to the next stage in their lives, even though we'll miss them. About to graduate are Cathy Mounce (Sociology), Epha Good (Journalism), Amber Fox (Communication), and Kerry Basham (Sociology). Best wishes to all of you!

## **NEWSLETTER CONTEST**

Want to win \$100? Come up with the best name and masthead for this newsletter. We want the kind of name that will make us wonder why we didn't come up with it! All entries must include the phrase "Women's Studies Newsletter" and the WKU logo. A Women's Studies logo is desirable. Send your entry, marked "Contest," to Women's Studies, 103 VanMeter. Deadline: February 15.

## Announcements~Look for an Exciting 1997!!

### Val Scott Donation

Our primary benefactor, Valere Scott from Oakland, California, sent a \$10,000 check in September. Given this donation, Val has given \$75,000 to Women's Studies since 1991. Jimmie and several Development representatives, including Vice President Hensley, visited Val on November 16-17 to express appreciation for her continuing financial support and to discuss ongoing needs of the program. The visit went well! More news forthcoming.

### Ars Femina Ensemble

This 5-member performance group specializes in music written by women before 1800. They'll be performing here at 7:30 p.m., on Thursday, February 20, in the Ivan Wilson Fine Arts Center Recital Hall.

### Women's History Month

Our keynote speaker, Dr. Rayna Green, is director of the American Indian Program, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institute. Her talk will be Thursday, March 27, at 7:00 p.m., in Garrett Auditorium. Dr. Green will also be available for meetings with classes March 28.

### Women's Alliance Spring Workshop

Topic: "Working out the Conflict Within: Resolving Personal and Professional Conflict." March 27, 11:45-3:30, Institute for Economic Development (co-sponsored with Women's Studies).

### Backtalk! New Reading/Discussion Group

This fall Women's Studies initiated a reading and discussion group, which considered the topic of race in articles by Ann duCille, Ann Russo, and Elizabeth Spelman. This spring, *Backtalk!* will focus on the recent collection, *Anti-Feminism in the Academy*.

### Gender Images Film Series

The Women's Studies Film/Video Committee will be coordinating two exciting projects in the spring of 1997. First, the committee will continue the Gender Images Film/Video Series. Look for future announcements on this exciting and diverse series! Second, for the second consecutive year, we will survey Women's Studies faculty for recommendations for films and videos to be purchased by the program for classroom use. Last year, we purchased every title that was strongly recommended. If you are interested in film or have suggestions for the survey or the film series, please contact the Women's Studies Program.



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