

INTERSECTIONS

FALL 2003

Newsletter of the Macalester College Women's and Gender Studies Program

WGS NEWS



Sustainable Feminisms
Conference Reflections

Ford Grant Updates

Leadership Conference

Co-Sponsored Events

Upcoming Events

Alumni Shot-Spots

Student Group

A Word from our
new Coordinator

THESE ARE STRANGE TIMES

A couple of years ago, this newsletter discussed the links between theory and practice. This year, our department translated that discussion into an experience. The "Sustainable Feminisms" conference (October 3-5, 2003), supported by a Ford Foundation grant, took over a year to plan, months of endless detailing, two days to run, 70 presenters from more than 12 countries to host, and left our students and faculty excited, inspired, and energized. At least, that's all I've heard so far from the emails and the hallway conversations. And it's left me hopeful...

These are strange times. Wars continue—on bodies, on countries, on rights—and so do our efforts to re-create and sustain. Our small but busy WGS department is located in, as well as changed by, the events that flow around and through it. Our classrooms, courses, and now this conference, become ways to teach, learn, and enact carefully considered legacies that we must know well in order to shape. Questions such as "how do we practice interdisciplinarity?" generate creative responses that put WGS firmly in the context of campus-wide curricular renewal. Also, as is a habit within our field of study, these responses prompt a search for other, newer questions to ask about ourselves, our communities, and our accountabilities.

Last year, students and faculty went into 'retreat' and emerged with a new curriculum. We also launched the student stipend competitions for the duration of our two-year Ford Foundation grant "Emerging Leaders, New Directions" (2002-2004); stipends that encourage both civic engagement and plans for graduate school. Summer was busy, to put it briefly. This year, the conference sparked off plans for a book now in progress, and we're now headed into department review. Scott, my partner in WGS, began his leadership of the year-long "Race, Sex, and the Transnational" seminar, funded by the Mellon Foundation, which includes colleagues from Macalester College, the University of Minnesota, and Carleton College. Just visit our website and see what is happening!

These are strange times that are also exciting because Scott and I are able to offer our WGS students and colleagues so many ways to become architects of our department. Invoking our place at the intersection of multiple personal and larger histories, past and current, we gather with them to run our conference (45 volunteers and 150 attendees!), and not only discuss leadership (the September workshop) but invite our students to play a leading role in running the department review with us. The review, beginning this semester and culminating with the reviewers' visit in March 2004, is our opportunity to be in the present, self-consciously and critically aware of where we are, while tying our past to our imagined future. We invite you to share and help us.

Movements that bring crises have also brought an impetus to re-create our department. In this issue, you'll see the number of ways we keep trying ...

Sonita Sarker

SUSTAINABLE FEMINISMS CONFERENCE

By: Scott Morgensen

The Sustainable Feminisms conference was a rousing success. The conference hosted over seventy presenters, and panels regularly filled to capacity with presenters, Macalester affiliates, and people from the Twin Cities. This level of activity would never have been manageable without the help of our fabulous student volunteers who excellently handled the moment by moment work of making the conference flow.

Presentations during the conference addressed a host of interrelated themes, including: grassroots activism, women's activist responses to racial, economic, and state violence, problematic relationships among movements, foundations, and states, the work of linking scholarship and activism, and cultural work and social change.

The first plenary session included heartfelt welcomes to a packed John B. Davis Lecture Hall by Jan Serie (Director, Center for Scholarship and Teaching), Joi Lewis (Dean of Multicultural Life), and Sonita Sarker. Plenary speakers Judith Halberstam, Charlotte Pfeifer-Gillam, and Layli Miller-Muro then addressed questions from the conference call regarding the nature of academic work, activism, and advocacy, and their interconnections. Each talk stimulated active reflection in the audience. The need to continually bridge conversations among scholars and social change organizers became a theme of discussion, echoing parts of Halberstam's call to activists and academics to sustain communication and recognize a need for multiple kinds of work in creating an effective movement. Teachers in the audience spoke of how activism occurs when theory awakens marginalized students to their ability to take action in their lives. Researchers in the audience reminded that for activist scholars, scholarship and community-based organizing occur in tandem and make academia directly responsive to social change while offering important space for new reflection and change.

Linked themes echoed throughout the weekend and appeared in talks by the closing plenary speakers, Surina Khan and Norma Alarcón. Both spoke as scholars and organizers: Khan in the world of non-profits and knowledge production within social movement; Alarcón in the world of teaching, independent publishing, and academic scholarship. Both asked us to consider how our work for social change may be situated already inside institutions that are historically colonial and increasingly wedded to neoliberalism. In Alarcón's words, a feminist critique of neoliberalism will evaluate links among white supremacy and bourgeois politics, including in the education of professional elites. Khan encouraged a critique of the colonial constraints on autonomous movement, when local agendas get bound to the terms of a state-regulated non-profit sector. These claims reminded that feminist work of any kind can become bound to the very power it ought to critique, unless we are willing to disinvest in received models of organizing and invent new forms that support the autonomy of marginalized people.

Plans are underway to prepare a publication based on papers delivered by conference presenters. Students are encouraged to participate in the publication process; opportunities for assistance in collecting and editing the volume will be announced.



CONFERENCE COMMENTS . . .

FROM PARTICIPANTS . . .



Surina Khan, one of the plenary speakers: Thanks again for inviting me to participate in the conference last weekend. It was a wonderful conference and I'm glad to have been a part of it.

Stephanie Mbanzendore, Netherlands: "Dear Sisters, I take this opportunity to thank you everyone...I tried to shake the hand of every participant, but I am not sure [I met] everybody...I suggest that any other woman who is able, must follow this example, and organize a seminar, a workshop or a similar Meeting, for the fulfillment of women's and gender studies."

Christine George, Loyola University in Chicago: "Dear Sisters, I too want to say how wonderful the conference was--for new ideas, new friendships and lines of communication and renewed energy and passion--in the head, heart and gut.

I agree with Stephanie that we must continue the communication and reach out. As an "older" hand I realized that I have often relied on past relationships, perspectives, history and forms as what defined us as feminists and the importance of continuing to make new connections and forms."

Jill Petty, South End Press: "Thank you so much for your Herculean efforts to bring such a varied and intense bunch of scholars/thinkers/activists together...I had a wonderful time at Macalester."

Norma Alarcón, University of California at Berkeley, one of the plenary speakers: "Dear All and most especially Sonita and all of the students that assisted in organizing the Conference: I thank you for your presence, your optimism and hard work in all manner of fields. It was inspiring to me."



FROM STUDENTS . . .

Megan Stevenson - '04 : One of the most stunning aspects of the Sustainable Feminisms Conference was the presence of dynamic thinkers, scholars, and activists at Macalester having traveled from all over to engage with one another, and with us-thinkers, scholars, and activists on this very campus. It brought something alive: a sense that the WGS department and its students and faculty are connected to something larger. The discussions that take place on the bottom floor of Old Main are the same discussions being published by University Presses all over the country. The conference brought the liveliness and energy along with the contestation and struggle of sustainable feminism, feminist organizing, and scholarship to Macalester.



Heidi Zimmerman - '04 : I think that I was largely unaware of the true range of work done in the name of feminism aside from the more academic work. It was really interesting to listen to the variety of topics, positions, and value-frameworks that people who identified themselves as feminists spoke from. I think the juxtaposition of feminists speaking from different positions on a panel together and in conversation with each other really pointed to the inseparability of theory and practice, activism and academia, and how they are seen to be conflicting from particular theoretical/practical frameworks.

Jessie Buendia - '04: Sustainable Feminism Conference was an incredible culmination of my four years of education, activism, and personal growth. As a senior, it was really inspiring to see women and men from a variety of fields networking to bridge the gap between theory and practice under the common theme of feminism. It made me realize that I have the potential to actively work against systems of oppression in a variety of different ways, as an academic and activist, a policymaker, a social worker, a non-profit worker, or most likely as a variety of all the fields.

What captivated me the most from the sessions was the common use of the notion of 'hybrid feminism' which I realized at the conference could only happen in spaces like the Sustainable Feminisms Conference when people can share experiences, theories, and strategies to re-envision sustainable feminism.

SEPTEMBER LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

Sonita Sarker

On Saturday, September 13, 2003, I had the privilege of attending the Leadership conference at Macalester. There were about 20 students, from first-year through senior, waiting expectantly to hear what Scott and I would say. It made me a bit nervous: who was I to talk about 'leadership'? Did I see myself as a leader? Wasn't I just doing my job at school by chairing the department and teaching courses? I started simply by saying what qualities inspired me in a leader I admired. From that point on, it seemed easy to talk about the places where leadership happens (in the home, on the street, out of coalitions, and yes, in classrooms), what kinds of situations call for leadership (conflict, mediation, facilitation, crises, and causes dear to our hearts), and who is always potentially one (the student!). The assigned hour passed very quickly. Students wrote enthusiastic evaluations.

Scott Morgensen

My biggest treat from the Leadership Conference was being surrounded by students who were committed not just to campus organizing, but to learning to do it better. As a product of student organizing at California universities—in the overlapping worlds of community building, union organizing, and coalition politics—I know that work was crucial to my education and personal growth. But the most vital times were like this conference, when we gathered to reflect on what we had learned by taking public roles.

The words I prepared to speak were matched and transformed by threads spun by the students. I appreciated our acknowledgment that leadership arises not from deciding to run other people's lives, but from pursuing a passion for social change and finding that others are drawn to what you do. I also appreciated our discussion that leadership is an act of communication, whether in the form of dialogue, or learning to facilitate the ideas of others.

While this event inspired me to get back into student organizing, I now recall Charlotte Pfeifer-Gillam's words in her speech to the "Sustainable Feminisms" conference: I can find joy in my new role of passing the torch and learning from how today's student organizers respond to the needs of these times.

RACE, SEXUALITY, AND THE TRANSNATIONAL

The Center for Scholarship and Teaching has awarded a grant from the Mellon Foundation to support a 2003-04 faculty seminar, "Race, Sexuality, and the Transnational," convened by Scott Morgensen and other Twin Cities area faculty.

The seminar supports faculty who study or who are interested in studying race and sexuality in transnational perspective. The seminar arises from the scholarly and political interventions of queer of color and feminist of color critics and their interlocutors. Participants will examine how racialized sexualities and the sexual politics of race cross and disrupt the nation by describing dynamics of displacement, migration, and cross-border alliances. Seminar faculty are working to set new directions in studies of race/ethnicity, sexuality, feminism, and transnationalism, and their academic interlocutors (such as American studies, anthropology, education, history, global studies, literature, political science, sociology, theatre, and women's studies).

Macalester faculty including Sonita Sarker and Scott Morgensen will join faculty from Carleton, UM/Twin Cities, and other area colleges in activities that support faculty scholarship. In addition, the seminar will create programs in which students are encouraged to participate. The seminar will cosponsor intercampus visitors to present their work on seminar themes. The seminar will conclude in fall 2004 with a Teach-In at Macalester that will join local organizers with seminar members. A publication is planned from submissions by seminar participants and guests.

CO-SPONSORED FALL EVENTS

SEPTEMBER . . .

Galia Golan came to speak on Gender and Cross-Cultural Dialogue focusing on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. She is a professor at the Interdisciplinary Center in Herzlia, Israel, Professor Emerita of Political Science and Russian Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and founder of the Israeli peace movement, Peace Now.

Cross-cultural dialogue has been going on for many years between Israelis and Palestinians in mixed and in purely women's frameworks. In the course of this experience, significant gender differences have been noted; for example, that women, particularly in women's dialogues, behave in ways different from men and achieving different results. Experience has shown that while women may not necessarily be "more dovish" than men, they do relate to the other differently, and in a way that may provide greater potential for conflict resolution.



OCTOBER . . .

On October 8, a wide array of campus units including WGS hosted Sandi DuBowski and his film, "Trembling Before G-d," convened in the John B. Davis lecture hall. The film tells the personal stories of Hasidic and Orthodox Jews who are gay or lesbian. By describing their efforts to reconcile their love of Judaism with drastic Biblical prohibitions of homosexuality, DuBowski's film explores the meaning of religious identity and tradition in the contemporary world.

WGS co-sponsored two events on October 15 with Kathy Kelly, founder of Voices in the Wilderness. Since 1996, Voices in the Wilderness has acted to end UN sanctions against Iraq by arguing that sweeping trade and travel embargoes in the 1990's devastated the Iraqi people, including causing the deaths of over 500,000 children. Kelly met with students from CSO, the Lilly project, and WGS to discuss her experience as an activist and how students can become agents for social change. At 7 pm Kelly gave a public lecture on past and present U.S. involvement in Iraq. More information: <http://www.nonviolence.org/vitw/>.

Also on October 15, WGS co-sponsored a memorial for Edward Said at Weyerhaeuser Chapel. Said, who passed away September 25, was a world-renowned scholar (author of "Orientalism"), critic of social injustice, and activist for the Palestinian people. The memorial was organized by faculty from Macalester and the University of Minnesota along with members of the local Arab American community. Featured speakers included a 2002 WGS Forum speaker, Arab-American feminist activist Joanna Kadi. All guests encouraged us to sustain Said's example by critically theorizing power in the context of passionate struggle against oppression.

UPCOMING EVENTS

November 6th

12 - 1 pm

Old Main 4th Floor Lounge

Co-sponsored with The Center for Scholarship and Teaching

Annie Janeiro Randall is an associate professor (Musicology) at Bucknell University where she teaches a variety of courses ranging from "Music and Protest" and "Popular Music in the USA" to "Puccini's Operas" and "Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel's Life and Works."

The Trouble with Minnie, Puccini's Exotic American Heroine: This paper surveys the work's reception with regard to its handling of the American Other (Native Americans, Mexicans, European Americans, immigrants, and the unseen Chinese population) and pays particular attention to the leading character, Minnie.

November 6th

7 pm

John B. Davis Lecture Hall

Sharon Preves, professor of sociology at Hamline University, is author of the new book *Intersex and Identity* (Rutgers U. Press, 2003), which is the first monograph to foreground testimony by intersexed adults in examining the stigma produced by medical intervention in the lives of intersexed people. Preves will address how people with intersex conditions cope with being labeled sexual deviants, by managing and creating their own identities often in conflict with medical diagnosis.

Career Night

Nov. 13th

8:30-10 pm

Harmon Reading Room – Library

Join us to hear what WGS Alumni are doing!

FEATURED ALUMNI SPEAKERS:

Venessa Engel-Fuentes – The Loft Literary Center
Anna Stern – Casa de Esperanza

*** Read more in the Alumni Shot-Spot ***



December 4th

12 -1pm

Old Main 4th Floor Lounge

Co-sponsored with Political Science, Sociology, International Studies, and History

Afsaneh Najmabadi, Ford Foundation-sponsored consultant for our department self-study, as well as featured speaker on "Challenges of Gender for Secularism of Modernity in Contemporary Middle East."

Alumni Shot-Spots

Venessa Maria Engel-Fuentes – ('97 graduate)

For six years, I've worked at the Loft Literary Center. The Loft is the nation's most comprehensive literary arts organization, offering readers and writers of all levels classes, workshops, space to hold meetings, public readings, and grants. I graduated from Mac on a Thursday, and by the following Tuesday reported for duty as Registrar and Receptionist at my first "Real World" job. I remember feeling a little bitter at the time, as many of my friends were still recovering from an extended weekend of partying. For the record, I haven't lost much sleep over that bitterness. My first year on the job brought the opportunity to serve as a visiting poet in a St. Paul elementary school. Having always considered myself a writer but never a teacher, I was nervous. This nervousness was rooted in the realization that I was now on the other side of the "the personal is political" mantra so familiar to Women's and Gender Studies students. I'd spent my college years studying this phrase. But now I was now on the Real World side. I thought that part of life wouldn't happen to me for at least another couple of years. Once I recalled everything I worked for, not only at Mac but also throughout my life, I took the challenge. Working with those third graders and their poetry was one of the most enriching experiences of my working life thus far. I became more interested in working with youth because of that experience. I let my desires be known, and today I'm the Loft's Coordinator of Youth Programs. About a year and a half ago funding was secured for me to develop an ongoing youth-serving program. This was a position I helped create (not unlike my Independently Designed Interdepartmental Major thru Mac), and while it's abstract at times, I still say a little word of thanks everyday when I walk through my office door. That must be a good sign. Being able to combine a personal passion like writing poems with my degree in Women's and Gender Studies probably hasn't guaranteed me my job at the Loft. But I'm positive it's helped.

Venessa Maria Engel-Fuentes can be reached at:
venegel-fuentes@loft.org

Alyssa Vangeli - ('03 graduate)

I am working as the Community and Youth Leadership Fellow in the Community Division at a non-profit health advocacy organization named Health Care For All in Boston. Currently I am developing a youth political advocacy project in which lower income youth from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds, including Haitian, Latino, African-American and Caucasian, learn about the health care system and the current policies and political dynamics that created the current system. They then develop an educational campaign around a particular health-related social issue that affects them, their families and communities, and have opportunities to voice their opinions to key public policymakers and teach their communities about how to get involved in the policy decision making process. I feel that my work connects to what I was doing in WGS at Macalester because I am teaching teens critical thinking skills to examine their local situations and place them in a larger socio-economic and political context. I am hoping that these teens will then bring back these critical thinking skills to their families and communities. I am also hoping that this project will increase young people's belief that they have the ability and means to effect social change. My work at Health Care For All additionally consists of developing initiatives to increase interpreter services in hospitals and to raise other standards of health care through policy changes for immigrant communities in Boston. I especially appreciate that my current position allows me to translate the skills I learned through my WGS major and "put theory into practice."

Alyssa Vangeli can be reached at: vangeli@hcfama.org

JOIN US FOR CAREER NIGHT!

NOV. 13TH

8:30 – 10 PM

HARMON READING ROOM - (LIBRARY)

Guest Speakers:

Venessa Engel-Fuentes & Anna Stern

Anna Stern ('01 graduate)

Sitting down to write this article, I was surprised to find that, for the first time, my life makes sense. Check it out: I studied women and gender in order to develop the bases of feminist analysis, race theory, and post-modernist, post-colonialist thought that now focus and inform my work as a battered women's advocate. After graduating from Macalester, I moved to Mexico to improve my Spanish, came back reasonably fluent, and now work for Casa de Esperanza, a smart and well-established organization that mobilizes the Latino community around domestic violence.

But I figured all that out just now. Four years ago, in Shiva Subbaraman's Third World Feminisms course, my battle cry was "theory is dumb and I hate it." Two years later in senior seminar with Sonita Sarker, I hadn't stopped struggling in the spaces between practice and academic discourse. However, thanks to my once-reluctant interest in feminist, post-colonialist anti-racist discourses, I had begun to learn "to make my mind large, as the universe is large, so that there is room for paradoxes" (Maxine Hong-Kingston).

Today, that old conversation between theory and practice has grown into a conversation between my life within and without Macalester. There I was, twenty years old, whining about hating theory before I read any of it. And here I am today, revising database forms at my desk at the shelter and knowing, thanks to all that once-despised "theory," that what I am doing here has a place in the history and future of feminisms, of America, and in the story of my life.

Anna Stern can be reached at: astern@casadeesperanza.org

STUDENT GROUP:

WOMEN'S SEXUALITY DISCUSSION GROUP: PLEASING FOLKS CAMPUS-WIDE

By Danielle Nelson

This semester has been very active for the Women's Sexuality Discussion Group. For those of you who don't know, the Women's Sexuality Discussion Group is a posse of women who gather weekly to discuss and learn about sexuality in a safe space. Discussion topics are usually open and vary from the topic of sadomasochism, to masturbation, to fantasies. These events are always confidential. In general we like to have monthly all-gender events, but so far this semester, the gatherings have consisted of only women.

Not including the woman-friendly and produced, sexually diverse pornography night we hosted, another well-attended and exciting event was the field trip to a newly opened feminist sex toy shop in Minneapolis called the Smitten Kitten. The three owners of the store organized a workshop for the 23 women from Macalester who attended, offering space to ask questions like, "Are anal plugs pleasurable to female bodies?" and "What are packies?". Nearly everyone who attended left with a gift for themselves, partners, or friends, not to mention a lot more knowledge regarding the breadth of sex toys available to please a wide range of preferences.

The Women's Sexuality Discussion Group is a safe space to ask questions, get things off your chest, or simply to listen. We understand that not everyone is at a point where they are ready to talk about their sexuality, but we also understand that there are some people who want to share every intimate detail of their sexual lives and selves. We have space for and welcome all. Please contact Danielle via email if you have questions, comments, or suggestions -- dnelson@macalester.edu.

From the desk of... Betsy Salvatore



It's hard to believe that I have been in my new position as Department Coordinator for only three months. I have experienced the warm "Macalester welcome" from so many kind and helpful people, that I already feel at home.

Managing a household of four *very busy* children helped to prepare me for the task of assisting in coordinating the conference. *It was an exhilarating ride!* I gained a greater appreciation for humankind when I learned of the great works of participants from all over the world, and knowing that they anxiously wanted to be a part of the Sustainable Feminisms conference.

I was glad that I was available for the opening plenary speakers. Each speaker brought valuable information to the forefront. Although it may not be a well-liked view, I agreed with Layli Miller-Muro's point of including men as allies of feminists. I think we already have "allies" (fathers, brothers, spouses or friends) in our lives, and we need to work *together* for the common good of our world. It is exciting to discover the important role of the WGS program at Macalester. I see a program that is preparing young adults to be involved in their community and to become a positive influence in the changing world around us.

There are many positive activities happening in our area. One noteworthy change will be the changing look of the WGS website. I am currently working on updating the entire site to create a uniformed, user friendly site where students, staff, faculty, and outside organizations can keep up-to-date on Macalester WGS happenings.

I am thrilled to be a part of this exciting group!



WOMEN'S & GENDER STUDIES
MACALESTER COLLEGE
1600 GRAND AVENUE
ST. PAUL, MN 55105