

2005

Gender and Women's Studies Newsletter for March 2005

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Women's Studies Newsletter

Volume 11,
Issue 4
March 2005

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Women's Studies Student Advisory Board is now being formed. Students: here is your chance to have a say in the program and help the WMS Program plan events, develop new courses, meet faculty and other students informally, and become more a part of WMS.

Why Women's Studies Now? By: Karen Stein with Katherine Tanner and Jan Wenzel

How often has the media announced that feminism has come and gone! Many people believe that women and men now have gained equal status so there is no need for feminism or for women's studies programs on college and university campuses.

While it's true that women have made many advances, they have not yet achieved equality. It's a good time to ponder some of the lingering issues as the University of Rhode Island Women's Studies Program--one of the first such programs in the country --celebrates its 25th anniversary,.

In the workplace, women have gained ground, but the promise of equity has not yet been fulfilled. In the 1960s women earned an average of 55 cents for every dollar a man earned, women now make about 76 cents. According to the AFL-CIO, over a lifetime of work, the average 25-year-old woman who works full-time, year-round until she retires at age 65 will earn \$523,000 less than the average working man.

So why is this wage disparity happening despite laws that guarantee equality in the workplace? One of the causes of salary differentials is occupational segregation: women work in lower-paying jobs, as nurses rather than as physicians, or as service workers rather than professionals. Additionally, across all segments of the workplace, women advance more slowly up the career ladder. Today, there are a mere eight female CEOs at Fortune 500 companies.

Wage disparity and other inequalities, are due in part to widely held, often unconscious, stereotypes that are detrimental to women. For example, the erroneous belief that women and men differ in their innate abilities. Harvard University's president recently questioned women's innate mathematical abilities. Since a "math gene" has yet to be discovered, innate abilities cannot be measured. However, we do know that we are all born into cultures, and are shaped by our interactions with those cultures from the day we are born, and perhaps even before birth.

The glass ceiling, therefore, remains intact in most professions, even in politics. While other countries have women presidents and prime ministers, the U.S. has yet to elect a woman President, or even nominate one as a candidate for the post. While there have been numerous advances in women's health in the past three decades, there remains a void of information, since most previous medical investigations

have involved only men. Thanks to more recent studies, conducted at the insistence of women's organizations, we now know that women suffer heart attacks differently than men. In fact, heart disease alone is the leading cause of death among women, killing more women than all types of cancer.

Menopausal women have received ping-pong medical advice about the use of hormone replacement therapy. Before the Women's Health Initiative, the largest health study of women conducted in this country, women were routinely prescribed and encouraged to take the hormone replacements to prevent heart disease and other effects of aging.

The initiative's 12-year study of 161,000 volunteers showed that hormone-replacement-therapy after menopause INCREASED—not decreased—the risk of heart disease by 81 percent in the first year.

Advances in knowledge about women's health have been threatened recently, as the Bush administration has removed crucial information about abortion, teen sexuality, and contraceptives from government web pages. Key government health policy makers seek to curtail women's access to contraception and to reproductive choice.

Another area of concern is the widespread global practice of sex trafficking. Young women and girls in countries traumatized by poverty, war, or natural disaster are often lured by promises of jobs and then treated as sexual chattel. Women's studies researchers and activists are working to track these victims, to curtail the practice of trafficking, and to bring awareness to the issue.

The mission of women's studies includes not only women's issues, but social justice. Its vision is of a world in which all persons can develop to their fullest potential, free from all forms of bias, exploitation, and persecution.

Women's Studies courses use the tools of history, the social and natural sciences, and the humanities to analyze and critique the body of research and conscious and unconscious beliefs surrounding privilege and oppression in society.

Last week I bought two greeting cards for new babies. The card for a boy talks about the adventures waiting for him and how he can use his talents as he grows. The girl's card talks about the happiness she has brought her family, and about how she can be loving and kind as she grows up. Women's studies strives to bring about a world where both women and men can be loving and kind, can use their talents, and share in the joys and adventures of life.

Calendar of Events

March is Women's History Month

February 24 - March 31

"Celebrating 25 Years of Women's Studies at URI"

This year, the URI Women's Studies Program celebrates its 25th anniversary. Since its inception in 1980, the program has been host to more than 100 visiting lecturers. These speakers have ranged from scholars in numerous disciplines to writers of feminist prose and poetry, social activists, artists, scientists, medical professionals, and more. Throughout the month of March, the University Library lobby display will feature samples of books, articles, and other materials authored by these inspirational speakers, as well as an array of images, faculty publications, and program information. A bibliography of works by the authors, keyed to what titles are included, accompanies the display.

March 6

Martha Stewart Prison Release Date!

March 23, at 7:30 pm

25th Annual Fredrika Schweers Memorial Lecture on Women and Health featuring Judy Norsigan (Our Body, Ourselves): "The Media and Women's Health: Sorting Fact From Fiction." White Hall Auditorium, Kingston. (see page 3 for more details)

March 30, at 12:00 pm

"Knitting? Are You Kidding?" Marie DeRoy offers the basics of knitting.
Room 261, CCE

April 9, 12:00-2:30

Planned Parenthood of Connecticut invites you to the 1st annual Reproductive Health

and Rights Career Networking Event. Do You... Have an interest in reproductive rights or health issues? Or are you... Wondering how to apply your Women's or Gender Studies degree? Whether you have a passion for reproductive rights or are wondering how you will apply your degree this is the networking event for you! 345 Whitney Avenue, New Haven, CT 06511. Space is limited. To reserve your space, contact Shanta L. Evans at (203) 752-2853 or email shanta.evans@ppct.org. RSVP by April 1.

April 11, at 5 pm

Annual Dana Shugar Women's Studies Spring Colloquium; Valerie Karno presents "Shameful People, Shameful Punishments: Law and the Production of Disgust." Women's Center.

April 16, at 4:30 pm

Women's Studies 25th Anniversary Celebration; Hors d'oeuvres at the Women's Center at 4:30 pm, followed by a buffet dinner at the University Club at 6:00 pm Tickets \$40, Students \$25. (see page 3 for more details)

May 20 at 3:00 pm

APAW Woman of the Year Award. University Club, Kingston.

Updates

Our Bodies Ourselves executive director to speak about women's health at URI March 23

Access to accurate information about women's health is a critical issue these days, in part because the federal administration has removed information about teen-age sexual activity, condom use, and abortion from government websites, according to Karen Stein, director of the University of Rhode Island's Women's Studies Program.

Norsigian, a co-author of the landmark book *Our Bodies, Ourselves* which helped to launch the women's health movement, speaks and writes frequently on a wide range of women's health concerns. She has appeared on numerous national television and radio programs, including "Oprah," NBC's "Today Show" and ABC's "Good Morning America."

She is a founding member and the current executive director of the Boston Women's Health Book Collective, a non-profit, public interest women's health education, advocacy, and consulting organization, which is now known as Our Bodies Ourselves

Norsigian's talk will be held in the auditorium of White Hall at 7:30 p.m. and is free and open to the public.

25th Anniversary Celebration!

Everyone is invited!

A chance to join with faculty and alumnae of the WMS program, to celebrate 25 years of WMS at URI.

Alumna Jennifer Minuto will perform jazz and American songbook music during the hors

d'oeuvres reception at the Women's Center.

Program includes: welcome by Provost M. Beverly Swan, WMS Director Karen Stein, and Dean of Arts and Sciences, Winifred Brownell

Master of Ceremonies: Prof Emerita of English and Women's Studies, Lois Cuddy
a short video interview of the mothers and founders of WMS at URI, produced by Prof Stephen Black-Grubman.

Brief remarks by our first graduate, Dawn Paul, other alumnae, and a current student (still to be determined).

A silent auction of WMS memorabilia, books by WMS faculty, etc.

A good friend of the WMS Program has donated four tickets for students to attend the April 16 anniversary dinner at the University Club.

The WMS Program will pay 1/2 of the ticket for 5 additional students.

To apply for the free or reduced price ticket, please e-mail your request to:

wms25years@yahoo.com

First preference will be given to students who include a brief statement (200 words maximum) on "Why women's studies now?" --this could either be why the world needs WMS OR what WMS means to you.

Lisa Bowleg at the Women's Colloquium **By Tamar Weinberg**

Originally Reported in the Cigar

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Women's Colloquium discusses effect of AIDS and oppression

By Tamar Weinberg

Published: Wednesday, February 2, 2005

02/02/05 - Links between oppression and ignorance to the rising AIDS epidemic were presented to University of Rhode Island students and faculty during Oppression Embodied: Women, Ethnicity, Class and HIV/AIDS.

"Remember the HIV/AIDS epidemic?" Lisa Bowleg, associate professor of psychology at URI, said. "A disproportionate amount of women, especially Hispanics and Blacks have contracted the disease. Because of that, it has faded from the media spotlight."

Bowleg spoke to a nearly full audience yesterday evening in the Galanti Lounge to kick off the Dana Shugar Women's Studies Spring Colloquium. She said her purpose was to "disrupt" and "discomfort" by reflecting upon oppression within social psychology.

Bowleg's presentation focused mainly on the lack of research psychology done to investigate the role of oppression in the spread of HIV and AIDS.

"Issues such as oppression are avoided by psychology," Bowleg said. "Dramatic social change has been made over time, yet the word oppression is not in the lexicon of most clinical psychologists."

In order to stress the severity of the situation, Bowleg cited the lack of case studies clinical psychologists have made in regards to the psychological factors that help spread AIDS to people of different races, women, homosexuals, and those who are impoverished.

"As with oppression, poverty is another word psychologists have avoided," she said.

"Studying oppression is critical in finding risk and prevention."

In her research, Bowleg found that poverty could lead to depression, which then leads to drug use and unsafe sex, especially for women. She said that in a sexual relationship, women have the responsibility to recommend that the man use a condom, whereas the man has the ultimate decision to put it on. She said that factors such as depression from poverty, discrimination and violence put women at a disadvantage over the use of condoms.

One of Bowleg's most critical stances during her presentation was about the lack of funding for education about AIDS prevention through the use of condoms. She criticized the Bush administration for pushing abstinence and ignoring education about preventative measures.

"Abstinence over condoms shows ignorance instead of prevention," Bowleg said.

Bowleg said that there are many steps that people in the psychological profession need to do in order to understand the nature of the AIDS epidemic and how it spreads to women, minorities, and those who live in poverty. She said psychologists need to become more fluent in the language of oppression, and go beyond their disciplinary myopia.

"We need to introspect on our own social identity and how we foster discrimination," she said. "We need to focus on the qualitative not the quantitative."

Bowleg said that the future looks grim, but on a micro-level it has been the efforts of people who have the passion to spread awareness to their communities that have made the situation a little less bleak.

"You have to become aware of what's out there," she said. "You need to mobilize and organize prevention."

Congressional Updates

1/24/2005--Introduced.

Constitutional Amendment - Marriage Protection Amendment

Declares that marriage in the United States shall consist only of the union of a man and a woman.

Prohibits the Constitution or any State constitution from being construed to require that marital status or its legal incidents be conferred upon any union other than that of a man and a woman.

Current status: Senate Judiciary committee

Background:

Violence in the form of sexual abuse, assault, incest and rape is an urgent issue with devastating consequences for women – and men – and their children and families. The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) was passed in 1994 and reauthorized in 2000 and funds for its programs and services are administered by the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Justice.

Every year Congress has to appropriate money to these cabinet agencies to fund VAWA, and for the last several years they have cut away tens of millions of dollars in vital anti-violence funding.

VAWA provides funding for safety programs on campuses and in communities, as well as critical services and programs for survivors of sexual abuse, rape and domestic violence. In the ten years since we won passage, VAWA has funded an effective safety net for millions of women and their children. Through research grants, education, legal assistance, community initiatives, national and local hotlines, assistance for immigrant families, quality medical treatment and evidence gathering, attentive law enforcement, transitional housing, and more, victims of violence have been helped and in many instances have found healing and have escaped the abuse and rebuilt their lives. In order for these programs to be fully effective they need to be fully funded

Current Status: In Committee

Take Action:

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), a division of the Department of Labor, has announced that it will stop collecting employment data on women. Please tell the BLS and your Members of Congress that this information is absolutely essential, and its elimination will ultimately lead to an increase in workplace inequality. The BLS claims that the decision to eliminate collection is related to the lack of demand for the numbers, but the real reason relates to conservatives' intention to downplay women's important economic role and the disparities in their pay, promotion and job assignments. By sending messages to your representatives and directly to the BLS, we may be able to stop this conservative move to "disappear" women.

Timing, as always, is vital. The comment period ends on Feb. 22 and we need you to contact the Bureau of Labor Statistics as soon as possible. We cannot allow the government to eliminate this important source of economic data that informs good public policy.

Background:

Women's growing influence in this nation's economic life is undeniable, and we know this because of information collected by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). From BLS data we can see that women hold nearly half of the nation's non-farm payroll jobs -- 63.7 million jobs to be exact -- up from almost a third in 1964.

The BLS announced in late December its intention to stop collecting this important information. The BLS claims that one factor in their decision is the burden the data collection places on employers. The Bureau fails to inform us, however, that the Current Employment Statistics (CES) Survey is hardly burdensome - it is mandatory in only five states: California, Oregon, Washington, North Carolina and South Carolina.

The CES survey compiles information from over 300,000 businesses, and is considered to be the most reliable data for tracking month-to-month changes in employment. Also, the CES is critical to lawmakers, providing information necessary to crafting public policy that is beneficial to all women.

The federal government's plan to dispense with this routine data collection is an attempt to erase the statistics that identify the glaring inequalities between men and women in the workplace. NOW also notes that this decision is part of a larger effort to erase socio-economic data about women from federal web sites - as well as from government agency concerns in general.

Current Status: Passed

Comment on BLS

It is interesting to note that on February 24, 2005, MSNBC published a story on the pay penalty that women incur when they take maternity and/or family leave. It has been estimated that women earn up to 18% -28% less upon their return to the workforce. This drop in pay is credited to two different factors: women returning to the workforce may be opting for part-time work, and timing. Generally speaking,

the most opportune time for a woman to bear a child is also the most opportune time for a woman to undergo career advancement. Such information would be unknown if our society were without the proper agencies to track, record, and analyze available data about workforce demographics.

The Department of Labor, which supports the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), contends that no harm will come from their decision to "streamline" costly tracking data pertaining to women. According to the agency's website, the Bureau of Labor Statistics will not cease the tracking of women and employment; they are only eliminating a costly statistics compilation agency entitled: Current Employment Statistics (CLS). However, upon review of the CLS's publications, one finds some very important data pertaining to the employment of women. The CLS not only tracked employment data by gender, but also included information on race, and analyzed the data in a meaningful manner. The CLS provided analysis about which professions were gender dominated: i.e. - 11% of engineers are women; 98% of kindergarten and preschool teachers are women. Conversely, the BLS provides employment data in worksheet form, which groups classes of workers into blanket categories: i.e. - professionals, or education and health services. Without a thorough breakdown of the data, it is impossible to ascertain who is working in what field.

Vagina Monologues

This semester, the University of Rhode Island's Violence Against Women Protection Program hosted the Vagina Monologues. The production this semester is one of the best I have seen, and left me in awe of the women who were brave enough to get on stage and shout, talk, commiserate, sob, and laugh about their vagina's.

It was wonderful to see the diversity of students, professors, friends, and family that were present at the Monologues. Whenever I go to a production of the Vagina Monologues, I find that the group I traverse with tends to be a mixed lot. This time around, I was accompanied by my mother, and four friends that ranged in age and life-style. I am always apprehensive about their reactions to the Vagina Monologues, for I am never sure if everyone will be receptive to the varied stories and experiences that will occur. Throughout the show, I find myself paying close attention to those I am with; gauging their emotional reactions and watching as their faces alight with laughter, or grimaces, or sympathetic frowns. I am ever amazed at how all women, regardless of background, are able to instantly submerge themselves into a discourse about their vaginas. This is a topic which truly knows no societal boundaries.

Aside from providing a safe place for women to engage in a discourse about a topic which is uniquely female, the Vagina Monologues are hosted with a loftier goal in mind. All proceeds from the production are earmarked for the Violence Against Women Protection Program (VAWPP). As noted on pages 5-6, the Violence Against Women Act is slated to lose Congressional Funding this year, and the VAWPP will lose funding on June 1, 2005. And so, what should be an opportunity to relish in a shared experience, has become a multi-tasked fund-raiser for a worthy cause. A worthy cause which has been abandoned by an administration which calls itself "pro-woman."

-Corin Tasso

Could Game Night be the Next Move for Feminists here at URI?

My very first Game Night!!! Ooh, how excited I was! One of the reasons I was so anxious for this night was because I could not wait to be in a social setting with some really great minds. Sometimes when people meet one another it isn't always possible to meet on a social level for whatever reasons. Throughout my life there have always been those people that I really wanted to get to know, but it just didn't happen. However, this night was giving me a chance to talk with some people outside of class. Game night was going to be a night that I got to know other feminists that I've only talked with in classes. Also, it isn't all too often that students get to sit down with their professors and talk about everything *but* course work. This was going to be a night that was filled with feminists just being themselves, rather than these people being stuck in their titles as student and professor.

I was also eager for this event to happen because the Women's Studies Department was going to be practicing what it preaches. We were going to be building a community! I was hoping that this would be a night where the feminists that make up the Women's Studies Department would be able to break the invisible barrier between us all. I wanted the night to be a night where we just discussed things that were on our minds while playing games and hopefully laughing a bunch.

I invited a very dear friend of mine, Katie, to come with me to help me relax and be myself. I wanted the Game Night experience to be completely comfortable for myself so I could hopefully help others that felt uncomfortable become comfortable. I was hoping I would make a fool out of myself before anyone else did so they wouldn't feel too silly. So Katie and I headed to the Multicultural Center with another friend of ours, Alexis, who happens to be a Women's Studies student also. We were one of the first people there, which I was surprised about for no particular reason. As the night went on we played games, laughed a bunch, and ate some pizza. Katie, Alexis, and I all had a very good time and I believe the others did as well.

After Game Night had ended and my friends and I headed home I realized I was left unfulfilled. The night did not go as I had planned! I knew I did not socialize too much because I felt uncomfortable, but while I was there I was not sure why I felt that way. I later realized it was because my peers that are in my classes did not show up, most of my professors were not there, and we did not discuss things that were on our minds, at least I did not. I felt as though we were not one step closer to building our beloved community as I had hoped. I felt let down and a little disappointed in my friends and professors that told me they would be there. I felt like everyone that I have ever talked to about community building and activism were all really a bunch of 'all talk no action' kind of people.

Well, any of you who know me understand that I can be quite, how do I say, angry and fervent, so I decided to sit back, relax and ponder the pickle I was in. After I forced myself to calm down I understood that this night, this community building project, was just like any other activism project I have been a part of. This project was going to take some time and effort. I realized that my peers and professors have many other things going on in their lives and must make choices between certain events or projects so I decided not to turn my back on Game Night, which is what I think could be a great way to build unity and solidarity amongst students and professors.

I guess why I was first really angry was because I'm sick of hearing people talk about things and not seeing them DO anything!!! As a senior Women's Studies student and a devoted tired activist I believe that we all need to do our share no matter what. So let us give this community building idea that we talk about so much another try! I hope to see you all at the next Game Night!!!!

Peace and solidarity,

Heather Kinlin

Source List

Information for this newsletter came from:

NOW Legislative Action Center
www.capwiz.com/now/home/

U.S. Census Bureau
"Women's History Month"
www.census.gov/Press-Release/www.2003/cb03ff03.htm

U.S. Department of Labor
Bureau of Labor Statistics
www.bls.gov

"Women Fall Victim to Salary Penalties"
AP Article published on February 24, 2005 on
www.msnbc.msn.com/id/7019527/

Great book to check out:

The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets
By: Barbara G. Walker

Ms. Walker demystifies society in her Encyclopedia by breaking down religious dogma and illustrating how much of our lives are influenced by the various world religions. Ever wonder about the significance of "flipping" someone off? Or how it came to be that Adam "gave birth" to Eve? It's a big book (1116 pages), it's an expensive book (\$34 US), but no feminist should be without it.

A heartfelt "Thank You" to everyone who helped and contributed to this month's newsletter.

-Corin Tasso

W.I.S.T.

The URI Women's Center has developed a new Women in Science and Technology Program. A building on Upper College Road was recently renovated and serves as a living environment for undergraduate women in the science and technology majors. If you want to live in a place with many amenities, with people sharing similar interests and want to try a new living option near your classes this may be the place for you.

WIST residents and The Women's Center Staff work as a team to care for their home at 22 Upper College Road in order to ensure their safety, the security of the building, and to cultivate a sense of community that enhances the living and learning experience for all the residents.

For more information on the W.I.S.T. Program or to complete and submit an online application please access our website at http://www.uri.edu/women_center/ or contact Kristin Strange at 401-874-4042 or strangek@mail.uri.edu.