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THE UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND WOMEN'S STUDIES

uri.edu/artsci/wms

NEWSLETTER

Winter 2008

Director speaks to future planning and Women's Studies challenges



Greetings from Roosevelt Hall. As we move through the post-election, pre-inauguration period, Obama's planning mirrors our own planning here in Women's Studies where we are facing, though on a much smaller scale, equally pressing financial constraints, judicious decision-making, and hopes for the future.

In listening to some of Obama's press conferences, one of the things that has buoyed me has been the diversity of his appointments and his willingness, as the saying goes, to "reach across the aisle."

I am glad Obama is honoring Hillary Clinton by naming her Secretary of State, extending for her and for us her expertise in government and her commitment to peace-making.

I am also thrilled about the appointment of Governor Bill Richardson as Commerce Secretary. Listening to Richardson address the press in Spanish, and knowing of his long history serving the Latina and

Latino community, is inspiring.

I am most excited, however, about Dr. Susan E. Rice being named Senior Foreign Policy Advisor. Her appointment brings the UN back to the President's table.

Many years ago, listening to Canadian General Romeo Dallaire discuss the frustration he faced trying to get the UN to act against the 1994 Rwandan genocide, I bemoaned how the UN served as the scapegoat for the U.S. government: when things went awry, the U.S. government blamed the UN. But the U.S. government exerts considerable control over the UN.

Six years later, the UN also "prevented Dallaire from testifying about his experiences to the international tribunal... and when he finally spoke, his evidence was not made public" (*BBC News*, July 5, 2000).

Dallaire's experience speaks to something Susan Rice will not tolerate. Rice, an African American, brings to the table not only her "tough-in-exactly-the-right-way" (*NYTimes*, Nov. 30, 2008) desire to make the truth known, but also her extensive knowledge of Africa and peacemaking strategies.

Obama's "reach across the aisle" and commitment to human rights and equal access also speak to Women's Studies right now. Facing a financial crisis, the administration is asking each department to streamline and/or drop low-enrolled courses. This exigency invites departments to reach across the aisle and cross-list courses so as to run courses without duplication. It

means stretching where we don't always stretch.

This crisis also looms over smaller programs that risk being "folded" into other programs. WMS – which serves more than 1,500 students a year and has about 30 majors and 30 minors – graduates (so far) only 9-10 majors each year. Faced with these numbers, I hope students and faculty continue to voice the important role Women's Studies plays at URI as the Program invigorates policy- and life-changing discussions about equality, justice, sustainability, and peace.

Jody Lisberger

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Jody Lisberger. *Remember Love: Stories.* Fleur-de-Lis Press, 2008; “DES and Diflucan: Pharmaceutical Marketing Choices—Why Women Should Take Heed,” forthcoming in *(Re)Interpretations: The Shapes of Justice in Women’s Experience*. “‘Payback is a Mother-Fucker’: Women and the Vietnam War: A Story,” Mothering, Violence, Militarism, War and Social Justice Conference, York U., Toronto, Oct. 25, 2008. “This I Believe” essay selected by Rhode Island NPR affiliate, WRNI.FM, aired July 2008; Fiction Presentations: “Dramatic Tension and the Seeds of Fiction,” “Powering the Unseen in Fiction,” “Writing Fiction and Being Brave,” “Fiction 101, 201, 301, 401: Going Deeper,” “My Truth, Your Truth, and the Truth,” “Taking Place (and Time).”

Donna Hughes. “Response to Chang,” *Violence Against Women* 14.3, Mar. 2008. 364-365; “Modern-Day Comfort Women: The U.S. Military, Transnational Crime, and the Trafficking of Women,” with Katherine Chon and Derek Ellerman, *Violence Against Women* 13.9, Sept. 2007, 901-922; “The Demand Side of Sex Trafficking,” Online Seminar, Sex Trafficking: Best Practices to Combat Demand, Carr Center for Human Rights Policy and the Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation, Harvard University, Nov. 2008; “It’s More Than Modern Day Slavery: A Perpetrator Focused Approach to Combating Sex Trafficking,” No More Slavery, Storrs, Connecticut, Nov. 2008; “Sex Trafficking: The Demand and the Profit, A Perpetrator Focused Approach,” The Economics of Trafficking, The Protection Project, Johns Hopkins University, Nov. 2008; “End Sex Trafficking in

Rhode Island, Take Back the Night March, Providence, Rhode Island, Oct. 2008; “Combating Sex Trafficking: A Perpetrator Centered Approach,” 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Carr Center for Human Rights Policy, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, Oct. 8, 2008; “Combating Sex Trafficking: A Perpetrator Centered Approach,” Human Trafficking: Global and National Responses to Cries for Freedom, *University of St. Thomas Law Journal* Fall 2008 Symposium, Minneapolis, MN, Sept. 25, 2008; “Sex Trafficking and Sex Tourism: Foreign Demand,” Human Trafficking Symposium, U.S. Customs and Border Protection and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Washington, D.C., Sept. 9, 2008

Karen Stein. *Reading, Learning, Teaching Toni Morrison*, forthcoming Peter Lang Press. “Commodifying Women: How Margaret Atwood’s Heroines Resist,” forthcoming NEMLA Feb. 2009; “It’s About Time: Temporal Dimensions in Margaret Atwood’s Life Before Man,” under contract in a book, Cambridge Scholars Press; Book Review: “Self-Fashioning in Margaret Atwood’s Fiction: *Dress, Culture and Identity* by Cynthia G. Kuhn. *University of Toronto Quarterly* 76.1 (2007) 595-59; “The Cleavage Commotion: How the Media Covered Senator Hillary Clinton’s Campaign,” under contract in *Cracked but not Shattered*, ed. Ted Schekels; “Margaret Atwood’s Oryx and Crake: A Post-Modern Prometheus” invited for a book edited by J. Brooks Bouson; 2007 Woman of the Year, Rhode Island Commission on Women; “Doris Lessing, Nobel Prize in Literature,” URI Phi Beta Kappa

and English Department Read/Write, Mar. 2008.

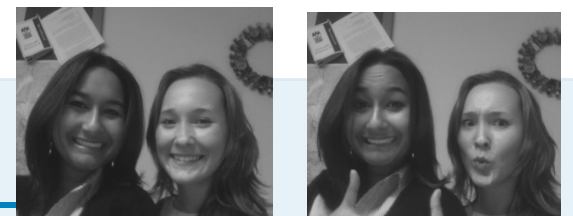
Bernice Lott. *Psychology and Economic Injustice: Personal, Professional and Economic Injustice* (2007) winner of Outstanding Academic Titles Choice Award from American Library Assoc., and Distinguished Book Award from Association for Women in Psychology. Co-authored by **Heather Bullock**, a former URI Women’s Studies graduate assistant.

Jenn Brandt. “Hot, Nude Ladies: Gender, the Body, and Humor in Campus Ladies,” presented at The Graduate Consortium in Women’s Studies Conference: Who’s Laughing? The Politics of Humor! MIT, Cambridge, MA. Apr. 2008; “‘Freaks and Cheeks’: The Pussycat Dolls, Neoburlesque, and the Commodification of the Female Body,” presented at “Battleground States: The Body and Culture.” Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH. Feb. 2008.

Alexia Kosmider. “Conjuring up Alex Posey in the University Classroom” forthcoming in *The Legacy an Influence of Fus Fixcio and Alexander Posey*, Ed. Suzan Shown Harjo, Fulcrum Press.

Alison Rose. *Jewish Women in Fin de Siècle Vienna.* Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008; “50 Years of Night: The Gaps between Memory and History.” *Jewish Voice & Herald*, Feb. 22, 2008; “The Interaction of Gender and Modernity in the Salons of Vienna.” Conference on Gender and Modernity in Central Europe: Ottawa, May 16-18, 2008.

Editors Note



Welcome back! This newsletter focuses on covering the macro, meso, and micro aspects of a story. I am proud of our article on the water issue here at URI. The privatizing of water is a global concern, versus just concerning the students at this university. On a national level, we are in a recession. Therefore scientists and strategists are continuously trying to come up with ways of being more energy efficient, cost effective, and more beneficial to the environment. How will this affect our natural resources such as water?

A topic of concern that is not included in this issue but is extremely important is the war on terrorism. With the recent attacks in Mumbai, India, we can see that the war on terrorism is far from over. I have high hopes for our new administration to ease the various hostile situations developing abroad. In the meantime, we should all be paying close attention to global developments.

Lastly, as we approach Christmas, many of us are being greatly affected by our current economic status. We are all struggling one way or another this Christmas. I urge everyone not to forget the true meaning of Christmas. As much as we truly needed Black Friday sales, there is zero excuse for the recent death of a Wal-Mart worker in Washington. Jdimytai Damour was trampled by shoppers determined to get a sale on plasma televisions. Let us not get so deeply consumed by materials that we lose our humanity. Consumerism may benefit our economy, but a careless mob mentality does not.

Although Washington State has started saying “Reasons Greetings,” I say: Merry Christmas! – Kara Lafferty

Hello everyone! As my co-editor says, we are proud of covering issues from the micro, meso and macro levels. As university students, we are all too notorious for thinking only of the individual. Whether it comes to environmental conservation, the right to choose, and of course the ever-dwindling economy, many people don’t care until the issues hit too close to home. Learning about the issues and examining them from different perspectives offers a chance to care, and – we hope – to fix the wrongs in the world.

The first step to solving problems is awareness. Instead of worrying about one’s next exam so much, take a step back and think about the issues plaguing people around the world. Civil wars, poverty, hunger, the erosion of women’s rights ... the list continues. We might think that the United States has had a turn for the worse, but there are places out there that also need help.

With the holidays upon us, it is natural to go two routes: To start making your list (and checking it twice!) and crossing your fingers for a new car, or to bundle up old clothes and canned goods and head to your local shelter.

But why wait until the holidays? Along with the Christmas and Hannukah spirit, there comes a lovely time I like to call New Years. So why not make your resolution something productive? Volunteer your time, check out a few informative Web sites, or flip on your local news station. There are people out there who need your help. Keep the holiday spirit going all year round.

– Chloe Thompson

Being a woman on the road to opportunity

By Danielle Henderson



Before returning to school last semester at 31-years-old, I spent the majority of my adult life working and traveling.

I've lived in Boston, San Francisco, Anchorage, and New York City. I've had several jobs, including (but not limited to) bookseller, credit card debt collector, optician, forklift operator, receptionist, barista, and writer.

In New York City, I worked for the United Nations. In Alaska, I worked in a fishing village on the Aleutian Islands before coming back to the mainland and working for the University of Alaska.

While my family has always been

supportive—if not wary—of my choices, the move from New York City to Alaska was the one that freaked them out the most.

Not only was I leaving a secure job with a well-known organization, but I was also embarking on a two-month, solo, cross-country road trip in order to get there.

When I asked them why they were so worried, the main reason was because I was a woman, my safety was compromised more than that of a man.

I don't disagree that many problems can arise during a road trip, whether by yourself or in a van filled with eight people, but it was odd they were more fearful of my solitude out on the open road in the safety of my vehicle versus my taking the N train home at 1 a.m. in a city with an impressive crime résumé.

It was not the first time I thought of myself in terms of my gender, but it was the first time I thought about how others viewed my trajectory in life as it related

to my gender.

Being a woman, I felt I'd been afforded a certain amount of space to navigate with; but once I ventured out of the allotted comfort zone, I was viewed as strange, dangerous, or unpredictable.

Taking that road trip, moving on a whim, and experiencing several different jobs during the past decade has prepared me for college in a way that I was previously lacking, particularly as it relates to my feminist sensibilities.

After asking directions in many foreign locations from the locals, I am not shy about asking questions in class. Writing a 10-page paper is a welcome change to repetitive office tasks. Being chased by a bear is only half as frightening as Professor Carolyn Betensky's theory class.

In telling other women about my story, I hope to inspire them to want to get out in the world, too; to not just observe but also be an active participant in their own lives.

Former WMS director writes book on Toni Morrison

By Chloe Thompson



After four years as the Director of the Women's Studies Program, Professor Karen Stein has taken a sabbatical. Her sabbatical research project is a book, *Reading, Learning, Teaching Toni Morrison*, one book in a series called *Confronting the Text, Confronting the World*, edited by Paul Thomas.

Stein, who has previously written a book on Atwood, said she has long been interested in Morrison and avidly read her novels from the beginning of their publication. She has written several articles on Morrison, and presented conference papers about her.

"Years ago, when *The Bluest Eye* came out, it was one of those things that people

passed around to each other saying 'You must read this,'" Stein said. "So I did, and I was hooked."

Stein's book—which is limited to about 175 pages—will explore recurring themes in Morrison's literature and act as a teaching guide for those in the academic world. Stein said her book is addressed chiefly to high school and college teachers.

One theme Stein is discussing involves the role of mothers and daughters in Morrison's books as related to central literary myths and themes, such as the tale of Demeter and Persephone.

"I think the larger meaning of this story of Demeter and Persephone has to do with love and loss and what it means for women to be mothers and daughters," Stein said. "[Mothers and daughters] have to deal with separation and to learn about life through that. I think Morrison is doing that in the book *Beloved*."

Stein said she believes Morrison has a message for society about the "myths" of American history.

"She's rewriting American history from the point of view of an African-American.

She's reclaiming the pieces that have been lost," Stein said. "It's a voice we really need to hear."

Stein is rigid in her work ethic. She keeps a log of the word count per day, and the time she started working each day.

"I give myself a goal of 1,000 words a day, and I'm sticking to that," she said.

Stein also uses a dictation program for when she's "pacing around" her office in Swan Hall. All together, she spends more than 40 hours per week working on her book.

It seems it has paid off, since Stein is ahead of schedule. The book has recently been accepted by her publisher, Peter Lang Press, and is now in the copy editing phase. Stein is unsure when it will officially appear in print, but expects it to be out by the summer or fall 2009, perhaps in time for her course on Morrison in the fall semester.

"It's not going to make me money and it's not going to be a bestseller, but it's a project that I've really loved working on, and I hope it will help the people that it's targeted for," she said, smiling.

Dana Shugar Colloquium Spring '09

4: 30 p.m. Lippitt Hall Room 402

February 3 Rob Widell (History) – "Familiar Issues, New Directions: Black Women and the Long Civil Rights Movement in Birmingham"

February 17 Vanessa Quainoo (AAF) – "Cry Elmina" excerpts from her spoken word epic poem about African slave women

April 7 Stephen Barber (English) – Reading from and talking about his new book on Virginia Woolf

April 21 Annemarie Vaccaro (HDF) – "Using Critical Race and Feminist Perspectives to Explore the Intersections Between the Race, Gender, and Educational Engagement of Non-Traditional Age Undergraduate Women"

ALSO SPRING '09: Cosponsor for Read/Write (with the English Department)

March 5 International Women's Day – Jane Lazarre and Jan Clausen, fiction and creative nonfiction

Breastfeeding: What's the big deal?

By Kara Lafferty

A controversy regarding the rights of a woman to breastfeed in public has caused a public outcry enough for the lawmakers of Rhode Island to notice. Many people find women who breastfeed in public to be offensive and obscene because a part of their breast may be revealed to onlookers.

According to Rhode Island's Department of Health, "Rhode Island is committed to promoting breastfeeding, protecting a woman's right to breastfeed her child, and ensuring the availability of quality health care services for breastfeeding mothers.

"The Department of Health collaborates with and supports health care professionals and community groups working to increase breastfeeding rates in Rhode Island."

Rhode Island has also formed a Breastfeeding Coalition, which holds trainings for health care providers to learn strategies to aid breastfeeding mothers.

I argue the reason why public breastfeeding may be deemed as offensive is because many people view breasts as sexual objects. This view is deeply rooted in the popularity of porn and the objectification of women's body in the media. We seem to have to remind ourselves why women have breasts in the first place.

When a woman nurses a child, her breasts are literally feeding bags for the baby. This involves the idea of breasts not as sexual objects, but as a way for a woman to deeply bond and provide for her baby in a way that has nothing to do with a man.

The desexualization of the female body during the period a woman breastfeeds seems to be a difficult transition for many men to grasp and understand. Many a woman has had to endure criticism and disapproving looks as if she is doing something wrong. As if she should never have left her home with her baby in the first place.

URI GETS INVOLVED

The University of Rhode Island is also following Rhode Island's new policies by adding a few of their own.

Thanks to the support of the Elsevier Foundation, the National Science Foundation, and the URI Administration, ADVANCE and its Work-Life Committee (which is now institutionalized as the URI Work-Life Committee) launched a lactation program during the spring of 2008.

(continued on page 5)

RHODE ISLAND BREASTFEEDING LEGISLATION

On July 8, 2008, Rhode Island enacted the law, "Relating to Health and Safety – Breastfeeding—Promotes the Interests of Maternal and Child Health." The legislation, according to the Rhode Island General Assembly Web site, states:

Introduced By: Senators Perry, Moura, Sosnowski, Gallo, and Pichardo
Date Introduced: February 07, 2008

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

SECTION 1. Title 23 of the General Laws entitled "HEALTH AND SAFETY" is hereby amended by adding thereto the following chapter:

CHAPTER 13.5 BREASTFEEDING IN PUBLIC PLACES

23-13.5-1. Breastfeeding in public places. – A woman may feed her child by bottle or breast in any place open to the public.

23-13.5-2. Remedies. – In any civil action alleging a violation of this chapter, the court may:
(1) Afford injunctive relief against any person, entity or public accommodation that commits or proposes to commit a violation of this chapter; and
(2) Award compensatory damages and reasonable attorney's fees and costs to a prevailing plaintiff.

SECTION 2. This act shall take effect on March 1, 2009.

Gay rights: A response to Proposition 8

By Melanie Shapiro



As a gay woman who is engaged to my partner of three

years, I feel compelled to respond to California's Nov. 8 overturning of Proposition 8, a court ruling allowing same-sex marriage.

At this time, most states in our country deny gay couples the same civil, legal, and financial rights as heterosexual couples.

There have been states, such as New Jersey and Vermont, which have awarded gay couples basically the same rights as heterosexual couples through civil unions, but they still deny the recognition of being a married couple.

But being able to have the choice to get married for two consenting adults is an inherent human right.

Feminist theorist Jessica Benjamin argues that to be human is to be recognized. One method to recognize a couple's legitimacy and extend legal, social, civil, and financial benefits is through marriage.

Shamefully, there was a time not too long ago when interracial marriages were not allowed. Less known, there was also a time when African-Americans could not marry one another.

I truly feel and hope that within fifty years, gay couples not being able to be married will be just as shocking.

Contrary to what some think, marriage is not a uniform religious institution.

Therefore, to argue to legally ban gay marriage on the basis of infringing on the religious tradition of marriage is misguided.

Reference to this tradition conjures up Christianity. But while the founders of this country and the Presidents have overwhelmingly been Christian, widespread immigration has brought other ethnicities, cultures, and religions to create the United States' melting pot and to dismantle the once tremendously dominant Christian base.

The religious recognition of marriage is present in Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Paganism, and Islam—all of which have ideological differences. To argue marriage between two people of the same sex violates "the tradition of marriage" is to assume one model despite immense variations.

The prerogative of a religious institution refusing to perform same-sex marriage ceremonies is also a very different matter from legally denying the rights of a citizen to marry. Marriage is a matter of choice and a matter of love.

In fact, just as some heterosexual couples choose to have a civil union or a domestic partnership instead of marriage, some gay couples also don't want to get married.

But to deny the ability to choose to marry is to deny a form of recognizing the legitimacy of a person and a couple.

Likewise, to legally refer to a person or an entire group of people as different, and in their differences not human enough to be allowed to marry, is to perpetuate the most base and demeaning of policies and attitudes.

The recent voting on Proposition 8 is a reminder of the denied human rights several million Americans and I face.

Examining popular culture and feminism

By Jenn Brandt



As an instructor of Women's Studies with a focus on culture and the media, I dedicate a large portion of my own research to representations of gender in popular culture.

In addition to textual studies, I am interested in exploring and developing the theoretical platforms on which we discuss women in film, television, and culture. Some of the most current scholarship in this field has focused on the understanding of postfeminism and its relationship to cultural studies.

In *Cinema Journal* (44. 2, winter 2005) and in their book *Interrogating Feminism* (2007), Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra ask, "How do we address and make sense of a postfeminist media culture that repeatedly and loudly insists that feminism is no longer relevant because it has somehow succeeded? Second, how might our scholarship be updated so as to retain the strength and political commitment associated with earlier traditions of feminist

writing and filmmaking?"

Addressing these questions, I will be participating in a roundtable discussion at the Women's Studies and Film panel at the upcoming 2009 NEMLA conference in Boston.

My paper, "'Here's to Not Being Fake': Bravo TV's *The Real Housewives* and the Construction of Reality and the Postfeminist Heroine," offers a critique of Bravo's reality series, "*The Real Housewives of Orange County*," and its spin-offs, "*The Real Housewives of New York City*" and "*The Real Housewives of Atlanta*."

On a basic and realistic level, these shows promote the idea of the postfeminist heroine who is empowered by her status as a consumer, constructing her identity and self-worth in relation to social status and the ability to consume goods.

Through consumption, these "real housewives" construct their physical and emotional selves within a strict ideological framework, all while espousing the "freedoms" of their lives and choices.

At the same time, through its marketing, promotion, and editing, Bravo TV consciously constructs the "reality" viewers see of these women and their lives. As a mediated and fabricated reality, it presents a problematic representation of gender

stereotypes, while at the same time revealing the artificial and constructed nature of these women's lives.

As our modern day "freak show," reality television often leads scholars to scoff at it. I think, however, that these shows are a gold mine for getting at the pulse of our society and understanding its collective desires.

Specifically, I am interested in structures of power and the ways popular culture influences constructions of gender, while continually convincing academics and the general population alike that it's "just entertainment."

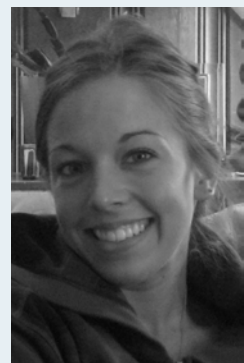
My discussion of "*The Real Housewives*" will explore how reality television can be read as both simultaneously promoting the commodification of feminism and revealing many of the fallacies associated with postfeminism.

By interrogating the relationship between feminist and postfeminist media studies, looking at these texts provides a useful space for feminist discussions of gender, race, and class.

Perhaps even more important, this type of research becomes a necessary step in moving us past the binaries that often stagnate the development of feminist media studies.

Journey through a locker room

By Tiffany Leblond



A familiar image stares back at me. So does this situation that perpetuates the media's attempt to systemically coerce women into deeply caring about improving their

appearance.

I work as a building supervisor at the Mackal Field House complex at the University of Rhode Island. Part of my job is to lock the men and women's locker rooms used in the Tootell building.

Several Monday nights ago, I began this nightly task and approached the first door to be locked in the women's locker room.

Before I even rounded the first hallway,

I noticed in front of me a body mirror. As most young ladies would do, I stopped to look—to view my appearance as others do.

As I took advantage of the opportunity to admire myself, I wondered if I would seem vain or conceited to others, or if others would just pass by me, tacitly assuming what I am partaking in is an absolutely normal, expected, routine behavior.

Either way, I turned the corner. Much to my surprise, I found yet more mirrors. Not just a single mirror, but from the counter-top up to about five feet, a wall of mirrors.

How fun and yet slightly silly,

Now, I have just left the body mirror and am still content with how I looked just two seconds before.

All right, I say. Rounding the last hall I am once more greeted by a 5' 3" brunette staring back at me.

How demeaning that I have been asked to check my appearance yet another time.

But the worst part is that I feel brain-washed by some greater force, to ensure that my appearance is acceptable and desirable, as I have checked my appearance on three separate occasions within ten seconds.

I make my way to the men's locker room. Once in, I only need to walk through one hallway. As I am about to exit, I notice to my left, hanging on the wall, a small 15"x17" mirror.

Baffled at the size and quantity of mirrors in this locker room, I turn around and walk the other way through the hallway to verify: there really is only one, small (at least in comparison to the women's locker room) mirror.

I believe there are many reasons for this scenario, one of which is the crazed concern that women be beautiful, desirable figures constantly reminded that their body image is the most essential aspect of their being.

(Breastfeeding continued from page 4)

URI's first lactation facility is located in 001 Carlotti Hall, according to the ADVANCE Web site.

The site says the room is small and comfortable with a lounge chair, a sink, a hospital-grade electric Medela breast pump, containers to store milk, a refrigerator, and beverages. A lactation consultant is also available as well as support materials. The room is available from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm by appointment only. The room is available to all URI faculty and students. The Memorial Union also has a room available.

Locations that are still in the planning stages are the Womens Center, URI Library, Narragansett Bay Campus Pell Library, and Providence CCE site. The facilities are essential because there is an ever-increasing number of women and nursing mothers in the workforce.

Now female faculty, staff, and students can have the option to return to work/school earlier and remain there during the workday.

More information can be found on the following Web site. http://www.uri.edu/advance/work_life_support/lactation_facilities.html

Women's Studies students feature war survivor

By Kara Lafferty

Women's Studies 310 students, Kinsey Tarbell, Samantha Sherer, and Anna Vaccaro hosted a presentation on the organization Women for Women International. Theresa Tahyor, a Liberian refugee, was the key speaker who shared her experience as a war refugee who went 300 miles across her home country with her child in her bag.

Women for Women International seeks to aid women who have suffered from war. After explaining the function of Women for Women International, students showed a short film from the program. The students followed its presentation by introducing their Liberian guest speaker, who now works in Rhode Island.

The *Good 5 Cent Cigar* writes, Tahyor was able to give the audience a first-person account of what programs like Women for Women and the International Institute of Rhode Island do for people on a global and local level. She talked about how she lived in Liberia with her husband and daughter during the civil wars. They avoided devastation by fleeing to Sierra Leone and then returning to their home in Liberia in 1990, before fleeing again.

Tahyor now works for the Institute by taking care of children. On this page, we have pictures of the hosts, and Tahyor from the presentation.

Media credit: Teresa Kelly

The International Institute of Rhode Island

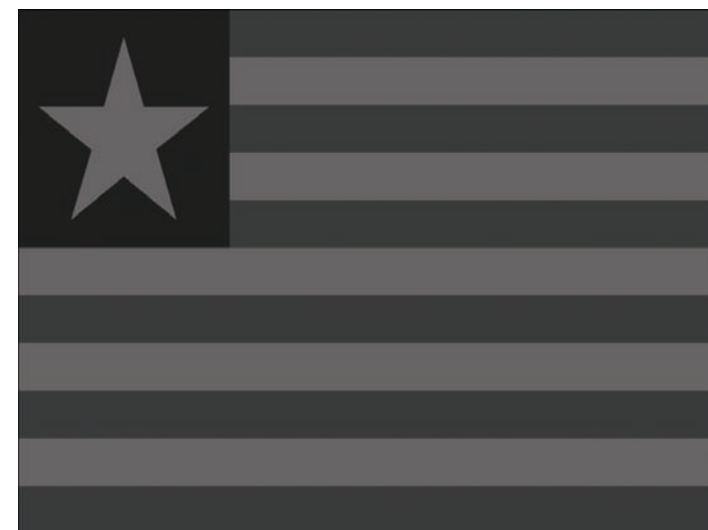
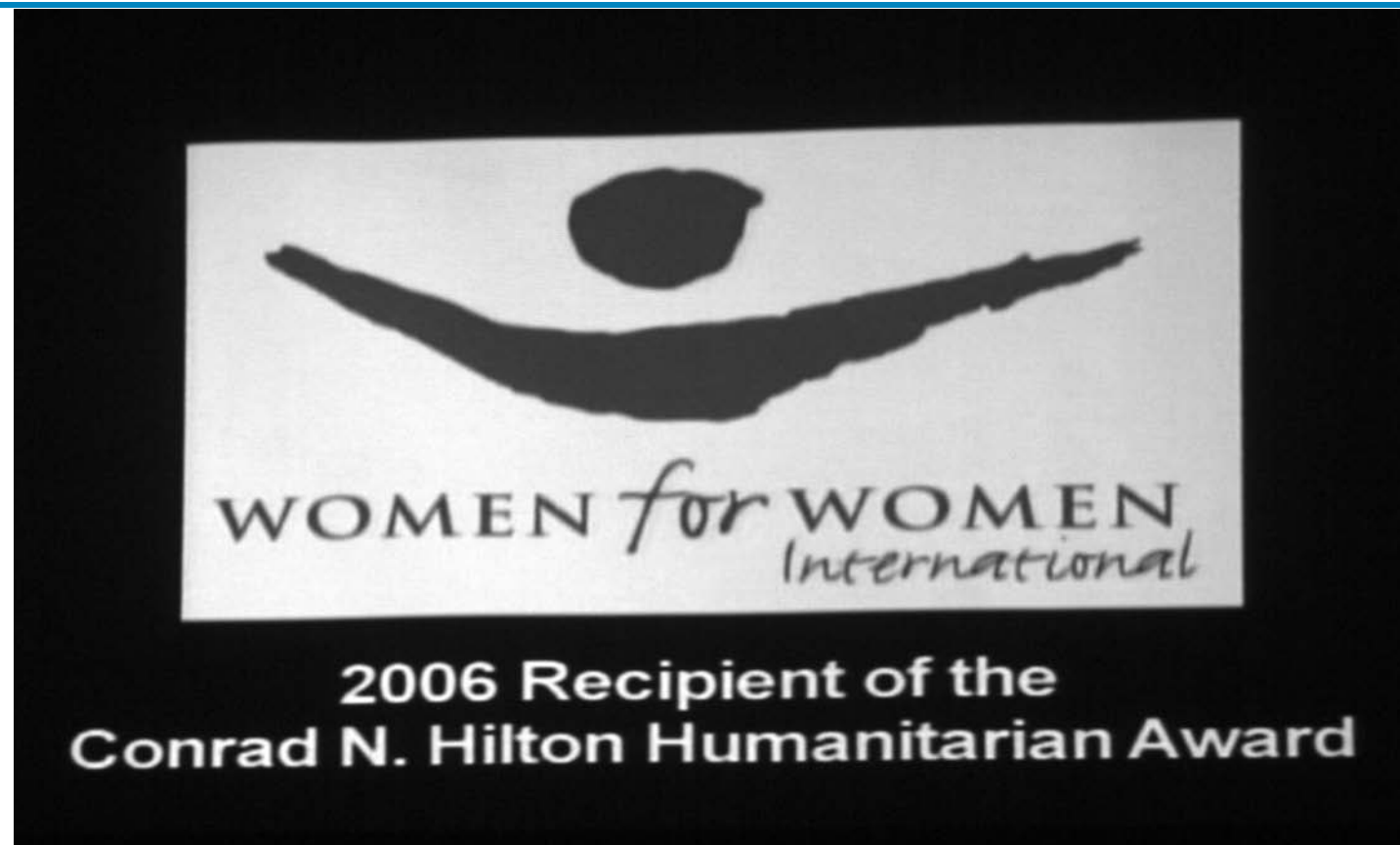
645 Elmwood Ave. Providence, RI 02907
401-461-5940

History: The International Institute of Rhode Island has provided educational, legal and social services to immigrants and refugees throughout Rhode Island and southeastern Massachusetts since 1921.

Housed originally in two rooms on Weybosset Street and dedicated to providing casework and support to a few hundred immigrant women and their families, the Institute now inhabits a three-story building on Elmwood Avenue in South Providence and a new second site at 334 Pleasant Street in Pawtucket.

Mission: To enable all area residents, especially immigrants and refugees, to become self-reliant, invested participants in our communities, while fostering respect and understanding among all people.

Vision for the Future: To dream of a future in which the International Institute of Rhode Island will be the leading comprehensive resource for new immigrants and refugees and a multicultural information center for all Rhode Islanders.



Map image taken from Web site: ourafrianchildren.com



International Institute: Additional Goals

- To be the leading comprehensive resource for new immigrants and refugees and a multicultural information center for all Rhode Islanders.
- To teach others to learn to speak, read, and write English and to experience the values inherent in other languages.
- To help all legal residents achieve U.S. citizenship at a cost within their means.
- To provide all individuals access to affordable health education and services and basic job training and readiness opportunities.
- To offer translation and interpreting services required to ensure everyone's access to essential services.
- To provide for all of our children the value of an education offered in a multicultural, multilingual environment.
- To cherish diversity as one of this nation's outstanding resources.

All International Institute information taken from their Web site www.iiri.org/ourhistory.htm

How Safe Are We?

By Beth Kenyon

Until one faces a “boil water” order like the one we had at the University of Rhode Island in October, people might easily forget the fragile nature of our water supply.

But the closeness of local waste sites, pesticide use, and pharmaceutical products leaked into the soil and water systems through excrement, urine, and disposal all give good reason to be alert to health risks.

Women are especially susceptible to the dangers of water pollution. Many different, unknown materials affect the health of reproductive system. Pesticides have been linked to spontaneous abortions, birth defects, tumors, and fetal death.

Heavy metals and other chemicals have been linked to attention deficit disorder, autism, heart disease, brain, liver, and nerve damage, digestive disorders, asthma, immune response deficiencies, and enzyme deficiencies. Mercury is poisonous and can build up in the body tissues causing organ failure.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) monitors contamination in water. But according to the Sierra Club website, “In the last thirty years, more than 20,000 new chemicals have started into use, but the EPA reports data from only 15% of new compounds.”¹ The good news about the URI boil order is that it was contained to one building (BISC) and involved only fecal coliform.

Jerry Sidio, Director of URI Facilities Services, says, “the only folks who would possibly have been affected would have been those who drank water in the BISC Building prior to [the boil order] notice.”

The occasion does, however, invite one to consider the various ways contaminated water could impair one’s health.

More than a billion people worldwide have scarce safe drink-

ing water.² Millions of deaths per year can be linked to waterborne disease.³ Pollution can be organic, such as sewage, and run-offs from roadways and farms.

These contaminants can enter groundwater supplies. More than 95 percent of all fresh water is ground water and almost 81 percent of community water depends on ground water.⁴

Although the levels of nitrates in ground water has decreased, in part from improved agricultural practices, there is still runoff entering our waterways.⁵

A 2003 South Kingstown Source water assessment by the URI Cooperative Extension in cooperation with RI Health Source Water Assessment Program found that nitrate concentrations, though declining in some of the wells, are still well above the natural background levels, indicating the effects of human activities.⁶ Nitrates are an important indicator of agricultural pollutants and an ongoing concern for area water supplies.⁷

Landfills can also be a source of water contamination.

In fact, the EPA has identified three local Rhode Island landfills as sources of concern: the West Kingstown Town Dump/URI Disposal site, which the EPA listed in 1992 as a “National Priority” Superfund site, Rose Hill Landfill, and Davisville Naval Construction Battalion Center.

According to the Sierra Club report, “One in every four Americans, lives within four miles, of a Superfund Site. More than 1,200 Superfund Sites—the most dangerous toxic waste sites in the nation—poison our land, water, and air with toxic chemicals that can cause cancer, birth defects, liver, brain and nerve damage.”⁸

Due to a lack of funding during the Bush Administration the number of cleanup efforts have been cut in half.

Footnotes for this article can be found on p. 8

History of the West Kingstown Town Dump and URI Disposal Area

Known in the past as “South Kingstown Landfill #2,” the 6 acre West Kingstown Town Dump received solid waste from the Town of South Kingstown beginning in the 1930s.

In the early 1950s, the Town of Narragansett and URI also began disposing of their solid waste in the landfill. This disposal of solid waste went unregulated until 1967, when the Rhode Island Department of Health (RI DOH) noted, during a site inspection, that wastes disposed of at the site were from industrial, residential, commercial, and institutional sources. Numerous operational violations were subsequently cited.

A 1975 study conducted by the URI Department of Civil Engineering and the Rhode Island Water Resources Board resulted in the discovery of a leachate plume beneath the landfill which was contaminating groundwater as far as 1,200 feet west of the dump.

From 1945 to 1987, solid

waste was also accepted at the 12-acre URI Disposal Area, referred to in the past as the “URI Gravel Bank” or the “Sherman Farm.”

After closure of the town dump in 1978, the URI Disposal Area began accepting most of URI’s waste, including small quantities of empty paint cans, oil containers, and pesticide containers.

The RIDEM instructed URI to remove contaminated debris from the site, an action which was completed by URI in 1987. Vehicle access to the site is restricted by a locked chain-link gate across the gravel access road at its intersection with Plains Road.

Several volatile organic compounds (VOCs) were detected in private wells near the site in the late 1980s; these three residences have since been connected to the URI water supply. VOCs have also been detected in the on-site pond.

Information found on the RIDEM Web site

Alumna discusses water in Africa

By Jody Lisberger

Water in Africa. Water in Rhode Island. The two seem far removed, yet behind all water issues lie the same needs for clean and accessible water.

Clarice Odhiambo, who graduated from URI with a master’s in Chemical Engineering in 1988 and was honored October 2008 with a URI Distinguished Alumni Award, knows especially well this problem of water. “That you can do something so simple with so little,” Odhiambo says, “and yet have a life-saving impact on someone, is astonishing, and is a lesson I will always treasure.”

When Odhiambo, from Kenya, arrived at URI in October, she found it ironic that the URI campus was under a boil water order because of fecal coliform in the water. She was quick to remind students in the Intro-

duction to Women’s Studies lecture how we take our water for granted. But in Africa, people face water problems everyday.

“Most people do not currently have water and walk long distances to the river,” Odhiambo said. “There is no irrigation at the moment and all farming is currently rain-fed.”

One of Odhiambo’s major concerns over water relates to women in Africa who spend so much time getting water, they can’t develop their own small businesses to benefit their families and communities. The difficulty of finding clean water and creating good sanitation adds to the stress and time constraints women face.

To help solve the water problems in Africa, Odhiambo has recently started a new organization—ACCESS: the Africa Center for Engineering Social Solutions. Working with URI, Brown, and Hartford College, her goal is to *(continued on page 8)*

**Congratulations to Jody Lisberger
for receiving the 2008 URI College of Arts and Sciences
Lecturer Teaching Excellence Award**

URI's Water System

By Jody Lisberger

URI gets its water from two wells located beyond the Agronomy buildings and the superfund site. The wells draw directly from the Chipuxet River aquifer 250-300 feet deep.

According to the EPA Web site, an estimated 15,800 people obtain their drinking water from three major public wells located within 4 miles of the site. An additional 12,000 people are supplied by private wells, the nearest approximately 1,000 feet northwest of the site. Hundred Acre Pond, part of the river, is about 1,500 feet from the site.

Jerry Sido, Director of URI Facilities Services, says pesticide run-off and contamination, "is not something URI worries about because the aquifer itself is very deep. Plus "run-off is relatively light," he adds, and URI "requires farmers to use as minimum an amount of fertilizer as they can."

URI and five houses are the only ones using the well, Sidio says. The five houses were added to the URI system in 1988 after problems arose with the landfill site.

The recent URI boil order was not because of chemical but fecal coliform (biological) contamination. Fecal coliform contamination, Sido says, "comes from animal or human waste or decomposed animals."

In a closed system like URI's, Sidio says it's hard to determine the source, but usually it comes "from an existing building where a drop in pressure has sucked something back into the system. The system is designed

for that not to happen, but sometimes human behavior will eliminate those safeguards."

As it turns out, the boil order took effect at URI even though the fecal coliform contamination never left the BISC Building. The independent lab that weekly tests URI's water for biological contaminants found nothing outside the building, but the Department of Health requires the whole water system to go under a boil order.

Sidio believes a break in the building's water line the week before from nearby construction, or water sources within BISC being capped by occupants—"like a hose run from a faucet into a tank, eliminating a crucial air guard in the system that keeps waste water separate from source water"—could explain the contamination.

Footnotes from "How Safe Are We?"

1 Reported by Sierra Club, "Communities at Risk: How the Bush Administration is Failing to Protect People's Health at Superfund Sites."

2,3, 4 David Krantz and Brad Kifferstein, *Water Pollution and Society*, www.umich.edu.

5, 6, 7 Reported by South Kingstown Source Water Assessment and the URI Cooperative Extension in cooperation with RI Health Assessment Program.

8 Reported by Sierra Club, "Communities at Risk: How the Bush Administration is Failing to Protect People's Health at Superfund Sites."

9,10 Robert Arnold, "Pharmaceuticals without a Prescription."

11 Environmental Protective Agency, Public Health Assessment of West Kingston Town Dump/URI Disposal Area, West Kingston, RI 2006

(Africa continued from page 7)

"bring college faculty and student interns to Africa, starting with Kenya," to work on solving basic problems" that would make water available year-round.

Before starting ACESS, Odhiambo was the African manager for Coca-Cola's Community Water Partnership program, which has the goal of bringing fresh water to African villages.

Odhiambo found the work with Coke "eye-opening." "There are so many things that we take for granted in life, especially when it is something that you never have to think about, like having clean, safe water to drink because it is always coming out of the faucet."

Her collaboration with programs at URI, Brown, and Hartford College, she hopes, will help villages develop water sources and irrigation for a year-long production of Amaranth, a new crop for Kenya. Four groups—cultivation, planting, harvesting, and irrigation—will work to overcome drought conditions and maximize water and plant production.

Faced with only two growing seasons, the long-rains (March/ April) and the short rains (September/October), and with minimal irrigation among the poor, Odhiambo hopes ACESS will increase crop yield, increase farmers' income, "increase the amount of nutritious food in the household and create a healthy farming community," and give women and girls the time and chance to develop their own potential.

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