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URI Women's Studies faculty and students have local, national, and global impact



Dear All,

With this new semester, Women's Studies faculty and students continue to lead in important historic and educational ways.

Prof. Donna Hughes and recent WMS grad Melanie Shapiro have been major players in lobbying, creating legislation, and ensuring the new criminalization of prostitution in RI. While there is dissent from some women's groups in RI about this new law, the new ability for police to enter places of prostitution to break up sex-trafficking rings and to arrest johns is a major step toward protecting women who are trafficked. The law also incorporates measures that will erase criminal records of prostitutes.

Within the WMS Program, full and part-time faculty have now benefited from two sizeable grants that

have provided professional development for Sakai teaching and for Assessment at the 100- and 300-levels. These workshops have clarified WMS learning outcomes, generated assessment models for other departments to build on, and provided opportunities for WMS faculty to share their online teaching expertise campus-wide.

WMS also continues to be at the forefront of Diversity. With a grant from the URI Foundation, WMS sponsored "Out of Diversity: We Speak" where four faculty (Stephen Barber, Lynne Derbyshire, Frank Forleo, Yvette Harps-Logan) and four students (Brandon Brown, Marissa Fisher, Eva Jones, Kou Nyan) presented their stories to a packed house.

Hosting Nigerian scholar Dr. Bola Akanji has been another high point. WMS collaborated with Economics, African and African American Studies, and CCE to bring Bola to URI—an important interdisciplinary collaboration. Bola shared her expertise with faculty and hundreds of students about gender, macroeconomics, human development, and sustainability in Africa and world-wide.

The lectures Bola gave and the diversity of classes she visited—WMS, Economics, African and African American Studies, Sociology, Psychology, and Human Development and Family Studies—along with the subjects she spoke on—Gender, Poverty, and Inequality; Media and Race;

International Development; Women and Human Rights; Global Gender Policies; Gender and the Law; Gender and HIV/AIDs; Gender: The Missing Link in Africa's Sustainable Development—all attest to the exciting global gender research going on at URI.

Add to these events Mary Cappello's Oct. 14 reading from her brilliant new book, *Called Back: My Reply to Cancer, My Return to Life*, and Prof. Annemarie Vaccaro's (HDF) and my presentations at the SUNY Cortland "Succeeding as Women in Higher Education" conference Oct. 23-25, and one gets a sense of the pioneering work WMS is doing.

Graduate students involved with

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EVENTS & EDITOR'S NOTE

Director's Note Continued

WMS also continue to represent the program well. Jenn Brandt, graduate TA, has presented several papers on Popular Culture and co-taught the large lecture class WMS 150. Jenn and Laurie Carlson also attended a conference on Gender and Disability Studies.

New courses also keep us moving forward: "The Female Cyborg in Disability Studies and Feminist Science Fiction" (Laurie Carlson) "Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece and Rome" (Vince Petronio), Monsters and Angels in American Film and TV (Valerie Karno), Women and the Environment (Talvi Ansel), Latin American Women's Lives (Rosie Pegueros), Gender, Economics, and Africa's Sustainable Development (Bola Akanji), Postfeminisms, Pop Culture, and Contemporary Gender Studies (Jenn Brandt), and Women and Sci Fi: From Mary Shelley to Sigourney Weaver (Brett Rutherford). Our many other established courses fill quickly.

With a new president at URI, WMS also continues to exhort the administration to designate a second tenure track line for WMS, and to create more gender equity in the top echelons of leadership. Among other things, Bola's lectures have made yet clearer the fact that gender equity and equality are as crucial for developing countries as they are for institutions attempting to build and ensure well-being, productivity, and financial success. - Jody Lisberger



Director of WMS Jody Lisberger gets invited to dance at the annual African Alliance of Rhode Island meeting on Nov. 21st, 2009.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Dana Shugar Colloquium Series

"Out of Duty: The Late Work of Virginia Woolf," Prof. Stephen Barber - February. 18, 5 p.m., Lippitt 402

"Cops, Jocks, and Frat Boys: Working With Stereotypically Difficult Audiences," Keith Labelle and Jenn Longa Moio, Directors of the URI Violence Prevention Program - April 7, 4 p.m., Swan Auditorium

"Commemorating Dana Shugar and the History of the URI Annual Gay and Lesbian Symposium," Profs. Mary Cappello and Jean Walton - April 8, 9, or 10; Place TBA

Spring 2010 Annual Schweers Lecture on Women and Health

"How to Keep From Breaking Your Heart: Heart Disease and What Women of All Ages Need to Know," Dr. Barbara Roberts, Miriam Hospital Women's Cardiac Center - March 18, 7 p.m. Swan Auditorium

International Women's Day, March 8, 2010

Fawzia Afzal-Khan: Pakistani-American performance artist-playwright



EDITOR'S NOTE

I am very pleased to bring to you the Fall 2009 issue of the Women's Studies Newsletter. I am proud of this issue, and I truly believe the Newsletter keeps getting better and better. This publication focuses on women's issues at the local, global, and national level, while uniting faculty and students to write about these topics. Many thanks to all of those who took the time out of their busy schedules to contribute to the newsletter. If you are interested in writing for the Women's Studies Newsletter in the spring, please contact me at WMSNewsletter1@gmail.com.

- Kara Lafferty

UNPRECEDENTED ANTI-TRAFFICKING LEGISLATION PASSED PROF. DONNA HUGHES PROVIDES TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JUDICIARY COMMITTEES



In November, the Rhode Island Assembly passed and the Governor signed an unprecedented three pieces of legislation that will protect victims from sex industry predators and give law enforcement the tools they need to arrest pimps, traffickers, and "johns."

All three bills were sponsored by Representative Joanne Giannini, Democrat from Providence. Donna Hughes, Professor & Carlson Endowed Chair in the Women's Studies Program, and Women's Studies graduate Melanie Shapiro co-founded a new organization—Citizens Against Trafficking—in order to advocate for the passage of these three bills.

The following is an excerpt from Professor Hughes' testimony before the House and Senate Judiciary Committee on why Rhode Island needed a prostitution laws.

"Decriminalized prostitution has created many problems for the state of Rhode Island. We know that women from foreign countries are here in the spa-brothels. We know that U.S teens are trafficked here from other states. We know there is much evidence of sex trafficking in the Asian spa-brothels and strip clubs.

"A number of regional service providers for women and children victims of trafficking and prostitution have written describing the harm to victims. They have documented that Rhode Island is a destination for victims for all over the northeast. We owe our neighbors a law that will prevent women and girls from being abused in our state.

"Our lack of a prostitution law stands in the way of law enforcement intervention to stop pimps and sex traffickers and subsequently assist victims. Law enforcement cannot adequately investigate harmful activities indoors without a law. Rhode Island cannot hold perpetrators accountable and end the exploitation and abuse of women, children, and mostly likely some men, without a law.

"We owe our own citizens protection from pimps and sex traffickers. This past weekend, the FBI-conducted a nationwide crackdown on pimps, another name for a sex trafficker.

"There were arrests in 36 cities that resulted in rescuing 52 children and arresting 60 pimps. No city in Rhode Island was included in this action.

"Since 2003, the Innocence Lost National Initiative has rescued nearly 900 children and resulted in 510 convictions of pimps. Rhode Island has never been included in the Innocence Lost National Initiative because we don't have a law against prostitution that would enable our state and local police agencies to cooperate with federal law enforcement.

"I want Rhode Island to be a participant in the leading national effort to stop sex traffickers of children.

"Finally, after a long process of drafting bills and negotiating, we have a prostitution bill that I think is one of the best in the country. It has a provision that will ensure that victims of trafficking are not punished, one of the legitimate concerns of opponents."

Rhode Island now has laws that will:

- Ban minors from working in any "adult entertainment" business
- Criminalize forced labor as a form of human trafficking
- Enable the prosecution of sex trafficking of minors without proving that coercion was used
- Criminalize the soliciting of commercial sex by prostitutes and "johns"
- Prohibit victims of sex trafficking from being convicted of prostitution offenses

FEMINIST ANALYSIS AND REFLECTION

FEMINIST DISABILITY STUDIES: ADDRESSING DISABILITY & OPPRESSION THROUGH DIALOGUE, AWARENESS, & COLLABORATION BY: JANICE DIONNE

Women's Studies part-time faculty members Jenn Brandt and Laurie Carlson attended the May seminar "Global Bodies: Representing Disability and Gender" presented by West Virginia University, and led by Robert McRuer, an Associate Professor of English at George Washington University, whose work centers on cultural and disability studies, queer theory, and critical theory.

Sessions featured eye-opening discussions on topics that covered a wide range of subjects: Disability/Representation 101; Crip Theory, Crip Culture, Crip Representation; AIDS Cultural Theory; and Transnational Studies. An evening Film Festival topped off the first day's line-up, with one intriguing offering entitled *The Scary Lewis Yell-A-Thon*.

Jenn, whose work here at URI focuses on gender and cultural studies in the media, was surprised at the magnitude of issues covered under the scope of disability studies. She emphasized the "social construct" aspect of disabilities that defines our understanding of them, and felt it is an important concept to relate to Women's Studies and the social construction of gender.

Jenn expressed her appreciation of how people with disabilities navigate through our environment despite physical challenges, noting "just as our concepts of femininity and masculinity are shaped by the influence of political cultural, and economic institutions of power, so, too, are our understandings of 'ability' and 'disability' in society. This is particularly relevant when we consider how these identities are portrayed by, and represented in, the media."

Further complicating this notion, Jenn points out that certain disabilities

are not always easily identifiable or visible, such as AIDS/HIV, ADHD, Multiple Sclerosis (in its early stages), and there is often debate as to how people with these afflictions are categorized under the disability banner.

Laurie Carlson, a PhD student of English and a part-time

Women's Studies instructor currently teaching, "Female Cyborgs in Disability Studies and Feminist Science Fiction," described her delight in being with a roomful of people "invested in talking about just disability and gender; not just discussing disability *Continued on Page 10*

EQUAL TO THE TASK: RETURNING TO URI AS A SINGLE MOTHER BY: ANNA VACCARO

At one point or another, we all face difficult tasks in life. When the hard times come, we have the option of running and hiding or boldly charging forward, refusing to be overcome by what we suffer.

This semester, I have returned to school as a single mother. I have found it to be a learning experience, both challenging and demanding. I have had to learn how to juggle two very different roles: student and mother.

At times, they have been difficult to synchronize. I have had to learn to manage my time very differently, organizing everything—taking showers, doing laundry, seeing friends—to the schedule of my baby and homework demands.

On May 15, 2009, I gave birth to my son. The thirty-nine hours of labor it took to bring him into this world was my first hint that motherhood was not going to be all fun and games; it would require a lot of hard work, sacrifice, and patience.

As I endured what felt like the worst pain imaginable, I was also aware that the hardest thing I had ever had to do would also bring me the greatest joy in my life: my son. After he was born, in those first few hours of exhaustion and utter amazement at the child now in my arms, I



was in awe of what I had just done.

It had been without question the hardest physical task I had ever endured. But with the help of my mother and my sister, and drawing on my inner strength and resilience, I had done it.

When I was pregnant, my sister used to tell me, "You are equal to the task." I realize now that what she was trying to tell me was that yes, the journey would get hard. And yes, being a student and a young mother would not be easy. But I also know that she was telling me I can face whatever comes my way with the same determination I had during childbirth because the end result, whether it be my newborn baby or just the *continued on Page 6*

DR. BOLA AKANJI, NIGERIAN SPECIALIST IN ECONOMICS, GENDER, AND SUSTAINABLE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REFLECTS ON HER 3-WEEK VISIT TO URI



Q: What brought you to URI?

As a URI Mom, I visited the Kingston campus in April 2009, during an extended leave period from my Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research. Being in an academic environment, I wanted to get involved in doing something, not just out of curiosity about my related disciplines, but to give back something to a College where I have observed extraordinary pastoral care of students, especially those who may have adjustment problems.

My son who finished lower schooling in Nigeria has found tremendous accommodation and support in URI, giving him a better grounding for the change. This is a lot more than I have observed in other colleges in the United States. My older son attended two colleges in the United States so I speak with some measure of authority. I therefore wanted to get involved and possibly give something back to this University.

Q: Which departments hosted you at URI?

My first port of call was the Women Studies Program where I met Dr. Jody Lisberger. This historic meeting of minds led us to where we are today. She immediately convened a meeting with Dr. Matt Bodah (Economics) and chatted with Dr. Vanessa Quainoo (African and African American Studies), who was away at the time, and thereon a proposal for my collaborative engagement with three departments was conceived and approved by the Dean of the College of Arts and Science, Dr. Winnie Brownell.

Q: How did you participate during

your three weeks?

My program was to include two public lectures and two class visits. However, because of tremendous interest that was expressed by Faculty members across different departments in the College of Arts and Science, my class visits took me to seven classrooms around the Kingston campus, while I deferred at least another four until my next visit in the Spring.

Q: Which classes did you attend and what did you discuss?

WMS 150—Gender and the environment; ECO 338—Gender, Poverty, and Inequality; COMM 441—Race, Class and Gender in the Media; WMS 430—Women & Human Rights Policy; WMS 150—Gender and the Law; HDF 575 and 576 (Cultural Competence in Human Services and Diversity in Higher Education)—How to do good with gender research; SOC 100—Gender and HIV/AIDs.

In all the classes, my focus was to bring in a gender perspective to the main lines of inquiry from a comparative developing country perspective.

Q: Did anything stand out to you about URI students

The number of class invitations and the level of interest and curiosity shown in these classes, which ranged from freshman classes to a graduate level class, sent me a few strong messages:

One, that the students are wide open to fresh ideas but have had insufficient exposure to global themes, especially on Africa. Although the knowledge of these issues increased with the students' course year, there is still a large room for global aware

ness.

Two, the interconnections of gender in virtually all the classes I visited, in spite of their varied themes, tells me that gender-awareness, which is central to a deeper understanding of international and human development challenges, already runs a thread across many disciplines in the College. This thread needs to be harnessed into a bolder intellectual focus at URI as is already being done in a few Universities across the US.

Three, there is more than sufficient evidence that more opportunities need to be created through curriculum and non-curriculum activities to enable the students take a look "outside their window" to see "how the other half lives," not just in United States but across the globe. Challenges of sustainable livelihood in Africa and developing countries in general are now global challenges. Young minds must be made to grapple with these in their early quest for knowledge.

Q: What were the topics of your public lectures?

My first lecture, on "Gender Inequality and Economic Development: A Comparative Global Perspective," pursued a conceptual and empirical progression in the analysis of *Continued on Page 6*



Reflections on Nigerian Scholar's Visit Continued

economic growth and human development that has gender equality as a necessary and critical factor that shapes both concepts for sustainable development or underdevelopment and for "good" or "bad" growth patterns.

I concluded that a heterodox gender perspective to the analysis of policies and institutions, say, liberalization policies, is a sine qua non for mediating them (institutions and policies) towards sustainable development, especially in the global South.

The second lecture, "Gender: The Missing Link in Africa's Sustainable Development," explored the economic history of Africa through the lens of colonialism and globalization. The resultant gendered pattern of development, especially the feminization of agriculture, has reinforced poverty, hunger and low human development on the continent.

In this lecture, which I gave at the URI Providence campus, I highlighted a gamut of unexploited growth potentials of Africa, empirically proven, which are largely defined by gender inequalities in opportunities and capabilities of her "workers." I also analyzed the threats posed to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by gender inequalities.

I concluded that while colonialism, and now globalization, remain fatal to Africa's sustainable development, patriarchy remains a "malignant" sexist apparatus that is endogenous to Africa, all of which needs to be addressed

Single Mom Continued

satisfaction of persevering and surmounting challenges, will in the end be well worth the trial.

I remember her advice as I navigate student life with motherhood, adjusting my life accordingly. Ultimately, I want my son to know that I worked hard to conquer the trials in my path. I want him to know that, even if he was not born at the most ideal time of my life, I was able to continue to work towards my personal goals while thoroughly enjoying the experience of raising him.

I want him to understand that the ability to deal with the hard times in life builds a strong character and teaches us lessons we will not soon forget. I hope he looks at me with pride some day, ready to face the challenges in his life. If I can do it, so can he.



as the "missing link" in Africa's march toward sustainable development.

Q: What do you plan to teach in your spring course (WMS 490.003)?

I will be teaching a course that essentially allows me to expound greater details of the subjects of my public lectures as well as explore possible new areas of interest for future courses on global gender and economics discourse. The course is called Gender, Economics and Africa's Sustainable Development.

Q: Who would benefit from taking this course?

This course, which is open to both matriculated and non-matriculated undergraduate and graduate students of URI Kingston and Providence, will benefit everyone who is interested in situating the state (or otherwise) of sustainable development (of Africa and Least Developed Countries) within a framework, not just of low/high human development, but that of gender-blind/engendered economics.

Students taking this course will have the opportunity to learn about alternative paths to sustainable development in developing countries and will explore conceptual shifts in human development paradigms, economic production and social reproduction paradigms and gender-aware growth paradigms.

MEET THE INTRODUCTION TO WOMEN'S STUDIES 150 TEACHER ASSISTANTS

Hi, my name is Annathena Grigelevich and I am a Psychology major here at URI. Being a Teaching Assistant for WMS 150 has been an exciting opportunity. I've learned that at times planning, organization, and a gentle kind of leadership are necessary. This has been the case with our grassroots feminist approaches to action projects in class. I have loved sharing articles and other media with students. When I am not consumed by academic work I enjoy music, art, theatre, writing, spending time with my family and keeping in touch with friends I have made all over the country and some in other parts of the world.



Hello, my name is Kara Lafferty and I am the TA for the Women, Gender, and RI group. I am thrilled to be working with great students. This is my second time in the TA position and I am very grateful for what I have learned. My group ran a food drive and also a phone card drive to benefit homeless and domestic violence shelters. They collected over 440 pounds of food to distribute to the RI Food Pantry and raise over \$220 dollars for phone cards.



My name is Courtney Needham. I am a Junior Communicative Disorders major from Canston, RI. Last year, after taking Jenn Brandt's WMS 150 class, I became very passionate about Women's Studies. Fast forwarding to this fall, I became a TA for WMS 150 with Jody Lisberger. My recitation group, Women, Gender and the Workplace, has proven to be of high interest for students who will soon be entering the workforce. Recently the group developed an interesting presentation on sexual harrassment. They presented the information to fraternities and sororities on campus. Outside of class I like to travel and relax on my time off from school.



My name is Cortney Sheehan, and I am in the midst of my final year here at URI. During the past 3 1/2 years I have been studying as a Psychology major, with minors in Leadership and Peace and Nonviolence Studies. I plan to use my undergraduate degree as a stepping stone to a doctoral program in school psychology--but not before I take a year to travel and teach in Seoul, South Korea. A semester abroad in South Africa served as one of the defining moments in my life. As the Women, Gender, and Global Politics TA for WMS 150 this fall, I have been fortunate enough to work with a fantastic group of students. This section has taken an active interest in the human rights issue of human trafficking.



Hello, Everyone! My name is Jessica Williams and I am the TA for the Women, Gender and Health group in Women's Studies 150. As a resident of Rhode Island, I have had URI become my home away from home. It has provided me with opportunities I would have never imagined. This is my third year at URI studying Secondary Education, Biology and Women's Studies. In the spring 2010 semester, I will be studying abroad at James Cook University-Townsville, which is located along the coast of Queensland, Australia. I am very excited to begin my semester abroad and study Biology in the rain forests and at the Great Barrier Reef, as well as expand my global awareness about Women's Studies. The Women, Gender and Health group has chosen to raise awareness about topics such as Eating Disorders, Sexual Health, and Female Genital Mutilation.



YOUNG PEOPLE LEADING THE WAY: CO-DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

BY: DONNA HUGHES

I recently (November 19-21, 2009) had the opportunity to participate in a global conference in Tangier, Morocco, organized by the Amadeus Institute (MEDays, <http://www.medays.org/eng>). The main themes of the conference were responsible co-development in the Mediterranean and Africa with discussions on human and state security, economic recovery, sustainable development, and the challenges of water and energy needs.

The Amadeus Institute is the first think tank in Morocco. The Institute was founded just a few years ago by graduating university students with public policy interests and a commitment to finding solutions to the region's most pressing problems. It was a unique and inspiring sight to see young men and women in their mid- and even early twenties running an international conference.

Although an open conference, security was tight as a result of so many world leaders, including some controversial ones, participating in the conference.

The political highlight of the conference was the dialogue between former Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and Rafik El Hussein, envoy from Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the peace process.

The Amadeus Institute came under criticism from some Arab groups for inviting Ms. Livni to the conference. There were Internet threats of a terrorist attack against the conference and there was a demonstration protesting Ms. Livni's presence.

At the forum, Livni strode confidently onto the stage to shake hands with Hussein. During her speech, she acknowledged that it was "not easy to invite me" to the conference. She reaffirmed Israel's commitment to a two-state solution for Israel and the Palestinians and Israel's willingness to negotiate with the Abbas government. She aimed her criticism at "radicals who spread hate."

She blamed the continuing conflict on "religion being abused to spread hate." She reaffirmed Israel's desire for peace with the Palestinians. She said: "Israel is not the enemy [of the Palestinian people]; radical elements are."

A chorus of voices throughout the conference rejected "religious extremism," the code term for radical Islamic groups, their politics and terrorism. I spoke about human trafficking on a panel on transnational drug and human trafficking as part of the dialogue on global security.

The highlight of the conference for me was getting to meet and talk with Morgan Tsvangirai, the Prime Minis-



ter of Zimbabwe. Mr. Tsvangirai has been an opposition leader and pro-democracy activist against the dictatorship of Robert Mugabe. Mugabe's political and racist policies have destroyed the economy and productive infrastructure of Zimbabwe. Tsvangira is now in a tenuous power-sharing relationship with Mugabe. The vice-president of the Amadeus Institute told me that they are committed to inviting pro-democracy activists who resist oppressive regimes to the conference each year.

One of the most surprising political signs I saw was the warm welcome extended to the former Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing, who participated in the opening ceremony and a panel. For years, China has been expanding its interests in Africa—and getting oil in return—but I was still surprised at the warmth of the embrace. The moderator of the panel even referred to the "perfect marriage between Africa and China." Considering China's own human rights violations, including its massive effort to stop Internet communication, and its support for the Sudanese government, which is known to be behind the genocide in Darfur, this left me uneasy.

It was encouraging to see young people so engaged in organizing policy debates. Many conference participants talked about the new generation for Africa and the Mediterranean and what they might achieve.

BREAST CANCER AWARENESS: PROF. MARY CAPPELLO PUBLISHES A PROVOCATIVE AND DARING NEW BOOK

BY: KARA LAFFERTY

In her newly published, compelling memoir, *Called Back: My Reply to Cancer, My Return to Life* (Alyson Press, 2009), Mary Cappello wonders aloud for us what "breast cancer awareness" really makes us aware of. Provoking her readers to question what it means to be "aware," Cappello makes it very clear that she finds breast cancer "a profoundly public disease," one dealing with a part of our body that is a "center of our sex and sexuality," issues that don't get talked about in the name of breast cancer awareness.

One thing women in particular could benefit from, Cappello claims, is greater awareness of the medical system and the culture of cancer. She emphasizes the need to "think" and to have "access to language," including the language of medicine. Cappello references an epigraph from Audre Lorde that establishes, the "need for every woman to live a considered life," one that calls for reflection and examination.

Cappello exhorts us to question what is "happening in a structure instead of entering it passively and docilely." She believes we shouldn't "give ourselves over to the authorities." If you do not follow protocol, she notes, it is often interpreted that you do not want to live.

Cappello critiques the current way the media and public address breast cancer. For instance, she attended a breast cancer conference in which she needed to pay hundreds of dollars to have her book on display, yet her book is something women should be encouraged to read to help them understand and navigate the cancer culture. She noted that people attending the Susan Komen Walk for the Cure are asked to pay twenty-five

dollars to register, and receive a pink t-shirt with abstract mantras such as I believe and survivor. "Why not a book?" Cappello wants to know. A non-biodegradable ribbon and visor which were also included in the care package. I suppose the prospect of the ribbons and visors ending up in a toxic landfill that causes cancer wasn't given a single thought.

Cappello urges us not to forget that the "history of breast cancer is also a feminist issue." Cappello believes that breast cancer has "turned into an anti-feminist issue" in the way women are expected to stay patient and complacent during the whole process, while also donning a lot of pink.

Cappello references the "brilliant" article "Welcome to Cancerland" by Barbara Ehrenreich in which Ehrenreich argues that breast cancer has taken on "the status of a cult" and breast cancer awareness is "anti-feminist." Women with breast cancer, Cappello and Ehrenreich both note, are not supposed to be angry.

Cappello reminds us that "corporate sponsorships get behind a safe cause" such as breast cancer because it makes it seem that they care about women, but do not have to deal with unpopular politics. In addition to this feigned sponsorship and caring, Cappello says, there is a "policing of the way we feel." When Cappello and Ehrenreich refer to this cult-like status, they are getting at the notion that people are unaware and do not question what is happening to them.

Cappello also reminds us that Audre Lorde and Rachel Carson "made breast cancer visible." She says they and other feminists are responsible for calling into question the ways in which mastectomies used to be performed. Until recently, when

women were put under, they would not know if they would wake up with their breast or not. Early feminists recognized that this lack of information actually led to disablement.

Cappello recognizes Dr. Susan Love as someone outside of what Cappello dubs an "anti-feminist movement." Love started what Cappello calls "the unfortunately titled" Army of Women, a research initiative that insists testing be done on women instead of rats. In most research case studies, rats are the experimental objects. Love is trying to get a million women to participate in research and she wants to make the research sharable.

Cappello also points out the lack of attention given to the environment during breast cancer awareness month. According to her, we turn a blind eye to systemic environmental factors that are causing cancer. She cites a government program that asked consumers to go to Washington D.C., "to have a voice in determining which scientists and research projects are funded." "But," she noted, "only 2% of funding goes to preventive measures and 1% goes to studying complementary alternative treatments such as acupuncture." Cappello asks, "Why are we refining chemo instead of finding out why there is cancer?" This evasion, Cappello believes, is a "profound failure."

Long before Cappello was diagnosed with breast cancer, she had been interested in writing about issues relating to medicine and the body. She wrote her Ph.D. dissertation on representations of illness and health in nineteenth century American Literature from plague discourse to female hysteria. This early work of Cappello
Continued on Page 10

Breast Cancer Continued

lo's was inspired by the philosophy of Michel Foucault. Cappello is interested in the two disciplines of literature and medicine, which are usually not found in the same place. She believes you should "let them talk to one another."

Cappello wants us to explore what happens to medical knowledge if we ask the questions we ask in literature classes and vice versa. Are the epistemological methods the same ones we intelligently use in literature? How is the body represented in a medical text and in a literature text in the same moment in history? How does popular culture become infused in medical discourse without our knowing it?

Cappello says medical schools decided that their doctors in training could learn something by reading lit-

erature texts and being made to write more about feelings. This was one impetus behind the start of Medical Humanities programs. But Cappello reminds us that the problem with this approach is that "it presumes--we presume we go to literature for feeling, and medicine for thought." This approach reinforces a division that already exists.

In *Called Back*, writing about pain in the way that it's perceived in the medical realm and about psychological pain, Cappello speaks from experience and explains that "just because you are numb does not mean you do not feel pain."

Equally remarkable as her insights and honesty in this memoir is the poetic sensibility Cappello brings to her prose. She was trained as a poet and therefore she has a poetic way of seeing language. Cappello explains,

"I don't always write narratively." Instead she moves by "way of association." Cappello is interested in "putting x next to y instead of a leading to b."

Called Back is filled with evocative and daring juxtapositions. Cappello prefers to dwell in the "appositional not oppositional." She believes appositional relationships between thinking and worrying, between being penetrating and rubbed up against, allow us to move past binaries and enable us to appreciate unlikely relationships such as medicine and literature.

In her memoir, Mary Cappello delivers an account that changes the relationship between the personal and political from oppositional to appositional, thus creating an empowering experience and a new kind of awareness.

Please visit our website where you can find the Spring 2010 and Summer 2010 course listings for Women's Studies:

<http://www.uri.edu/artsci/wms/>

Please email the WMS Newsletter with any comments and let us know if you are interested in writing for our Spring Semester issue:

WMSNewsletter1@gmail.com

Feminist Disabilities Continued

as a sub-topic of feminism or diversity studies."

She remarked about the reluctance of many "liberal academics" to accept disabilities as a "legitimate field of study." Laurie summed up with one of her favorite quotes by Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, renowned scholar of feminist theory and disability studies: Disability is "the unorthodox made flesh."

Jenn and Laurie managed to attend all the sessions and came away with many life-impacting lessons that they will certainly incorporate into their curriculum.

Both are very grateful to Women's Studies and Winnie Brownell, the Dean of Arts and Sciences who helps allocate the Hope & Heritage Grants, for some of the financial support that allowed them to attend such an enlightening conference.

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