

WOMEN'S STUDIES NEWS

SPRING, 2001

VOLUME 4, ISSUE 1

DIRECTOR'S UPDATE

Diana Scully, Director

As you read this newsletter you will see that it has been a busy year, primarily spent planning and preparing for next year!

Women's Studies students and faculty alike are very pleased that a Women's Studies track in the Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies Program has just been approved by the University Undergraduate Academic Committee and will become effective in Fall 2001. The Women's Studies track brings us closer to our eventual goal of an independent major and brings the VCU Women's Studies Program more in line with other major teaching/research universities in Virginia and the rest of the United States where majors have become the norm. For example, of VCU's 25 peer institutions, 68% offer a major, 64% offer a graduate concentration or degree and one, the University of Iowa, offers a Ph.D. in Women's Studies.

It has been great fun this year to dream about Africa and plan for the three weeks we will spend in Kenya and in Uganda attending the 8th International Interdisciplinary Congress on Women and the annual meeting of the World Organization of Women's Studies, both hosted by the Department of Women and Gender Studies at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda.

The Africa trip will be organized like our highly successful 1995 trip to China to attend the United Nations Fourth World Congress on Women in Beijing. Some 60 students, faculty, and friends made the trip making VCU one of the largest NGO delegations at the Conference!

An important objective of the Women's Studies Program is to globalize the curriculum and provide students with opportunities to learn about women around the world. Trips like Africa and China bring us closer to meeting this objective.

Finally some news about faculty. Our congratulations to Dr. Rosalyn Hobson, Assistant Professor of Electrical Engineering and member of the Women's Studies Advisory Committee on being awarded the National Society of Black

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Virginia Commonwealth University

WOMEN'S STUDIES TRACK IN THE BACHELOR OF INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES PROGRAM APPROVED

Since its inception ten years ago, the VCU Women's Studies Program has offered a minor, much to the disappointment of many students who wish to make Women's Studies their major. Similarly, it has been the dream of the Women's Studies faculty to be able to offer students a Women's Studies option. As of Fall 2001, it will be possible to pursue a Women's Studies track through the recently created Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies Program.

Students will be required to take a set of General Education requirements in addition to 30 credits in Women's Studies. Required Women's Studies courses include WMNS 201: Introduction to Women's Studies, WMNS 301 Feminist Social Theory, or WMNS 352 / ENG 352 Feminist Literary Theory, WMNS 401 Senior Seminar, and at least one different course from three approved lists that include diversity, humanities, and social sciences.

The Women's Studies track in Interdisciplinary Studies will offer students the opportunity to pursue a specialized curriculum within the tradition of the liberal arts education. It will prepare students to enter graduate programs in Women's Studies or other fields or professional schools such as law, journalism, social work, and public administration, where women's issues and concerns are increasingly studied. It will also provide the background for students seeking employment in the public and private

sectors where women and girls make up the majority of the customer or client base, or in which gender is a key area of concern. Undoubtedly, many of our graduates will follow the career path noted by Leubke and Reily in their 1995 book, *Women's Studies Graduates: The First Generation* and pursue positions where they can work for social change.

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TRAVEL TO AFRICA WITH VCU WOMEN'S STUDIES

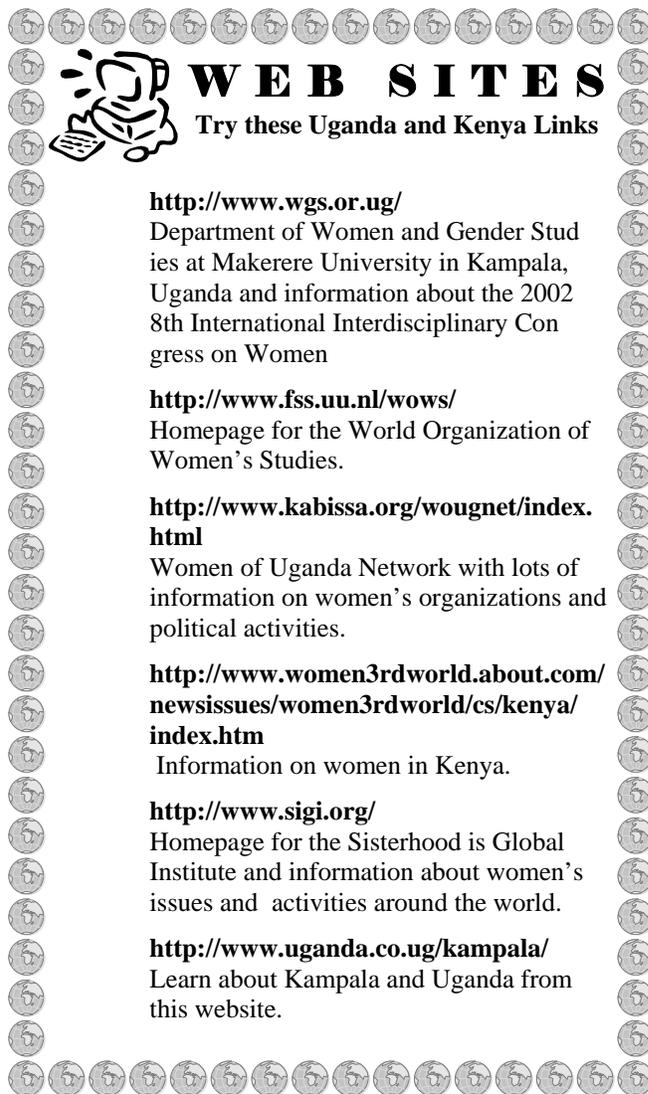
During July, 2002, the Department of Women and Gender Studies at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda will host the 8th International Interdisciplinary Congress on Women and the Annual Meeting of the World Organization of Women's Studies (WOWS)— VCU Women's Studies will be there! We invite current students, alumna, faculty and interested friends to join us for this exciting travel opportunity.

Uganda is a particularly appropriate location for the Congress on Women because of the progress it has made in the area of women's emancipation and gender mainstreaming in the areas of politics, economics, and education and because of its very strong women's movement.

The theme of the Congress, "Gendered Worlds: Gains and Challenges," will provide a forum to discuss a wide range of topics of importance to women, especially women on the African continent. An equally important goal of the Congress is to promote cross-cultural interaction through a variety of cultural and social activities.

Although the trip is a year away, we have begun planning the itinerary which will include some time spent in neighboring Kenya and a safari. In addition to attending the Congress along with women from around the world, side trips to villages and women's organizations are being planned.

If you have ever dreamed of going to Africa, this is your chance! The trip is open to current students, alumna, faculty and friends. Currently enrolled students can receive credit for the trip through our Study Abroad Program. The length of the trip is approximately 3 weeks and it will cost in the range of \$3,500. To receive more details as they are available, please fill out the form on the back page of the newsletter. For more details on the Congress, WOWS and women in Uganda and Kenya, you can visit the websites listed at the side. If you would like to make a contribution to the Africa Trip Student Scholarship Fund, please see details on the back cover.



WEBSITES

Try these Uganda and Kenya Links

<http://www.wgs.or.ug/>
Department of Women and Gender Studies at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda and information about the 2002 8th International Interdisciplinary Congress on Women

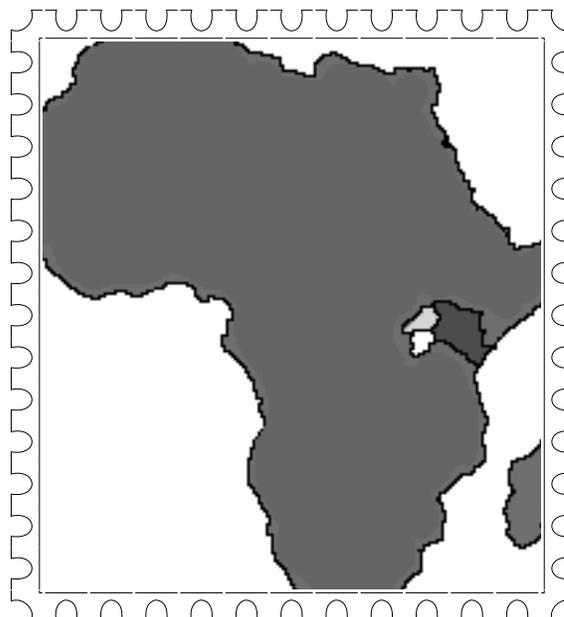
<http://www.fss.uu.nl/wows/>
Homepage for the World Organization of Women's Studies.

<http://www.kabissa.org/wougnet/index.html>
Women of Uganda Network with lots of information on women's organizations and political activities.

<http://www.women3rdworld.about.com/newsissues/women3rdworld/cs/kenya/index.htm>
Information on women in Kenya.

<http://www.sigi.org/>
Homepage for the Sisterhood is Global Institute and information about women's issues and activities around the world.

<http://www.uganda.co.ug/kampala/>
Learn about Kampala and Uganda from this website.



ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBER HONORED WITH NATIONAL AWARD

Dr. Rosalyn Hobson, Assistant Professor of Electrical Engineering, recently received the National Society of Black Engineers Educator of the Year Award. Dr. Hobson cited her parents, good friends, and mentors, as a source of constant inspiration and support and one of the main reasons she was able to receive such a high honor. She said that she was "very excited and honored" to have been recognized and added that her parents were also "very proud." Dr. Hobson has been part of VCU's engineering program almost from the start and she said that she loves the excitement and challenge of being an engineer.

Dr. Hobson also talked about the challenges of being a black woman in the engineering field. She said that



"much of it is conditioning, ... I have become very used to being a part of a male dominated field."

Dr. Hobson added that she "doesn't mind it," mainly because she feels respected by her peers, who seem to place high value on intelligence and value her input, regardless of gender or race. Despite this, Dr. Hobson acknowledges that there are incidents of discrimination, and that though often unintentional, the incidents do not go unnoticed. She makes no pretenses in saying that she "calls it the way she sees it." Dr. Hobson seems unwilling to let discrimination stop her, yet equally unwilling to pretend it does not exist.

Dr. Hobson stated that Women's Studies as a discipline is definitely an area worthy of research since it has such far-reaching societal implications and cited the interdisciplinary nature of the program as one of its strengths. For example, Dr. Hobson added that the exploration of "so many areas allows us to understand our culture and who we are better."

Dr. Hobson's main interest is and always has been education. She clearly believes that education is the key to success in this country. She noted that having grown up "in a family of teachers" was probably the single most important factor that affected her outlook on education. Her final words of wisdom were these, "education is everything; life without it is empty."

DIRECTOR'S UPDATE

(Continued from page 1)

Engineers Educator of the Year Award. Cathy Mooney, Associate Professor of History and long-time Women's Studies Affiliate Faculty member has resigned her VCU position and will be teaching in Boston in the Fall. Cathy has spent the last two years on leave from VCU as the Graduate Director for Gender Studies at the University of Witwatersrand in South Africa. We will greatly miss Cathy's wry sense of humor and wise counsel and we wish her the very best. Finally, special congratulations go to Dr. Deirdre Condit, Assistant Professor of Political Science and Public Administration and Women's Studies, and Dr. Cliff Fox, Assistant Director of Environmental Studies, on the approaching birth of their baby. I know they will have many willing VCU babysitters.

BROWN BAG LUNCH SEMINARS

The Women's Studies noontime brown bag lunch seminars continued this year with a presentation by African American Studies Director and Women's Studies affiliate faculty member, Dr. Njeri Jackson. Dr. Jackson presented photos and a brief talk on her study abroad trip to South Africa this past summer. The presentation was entitled *Five Fierce, Fearless Women in South Africa: Cross-Cultural Encounters with Racism, Sexism, and Class Privilege*. The presentation focused on the trip as an experience that bridged the gap between two very different cultures. Women's Studies Brown Bag Seminars are open to all faculty and students.

The photo above was used with permission from Ms. Deidra McDowell. This photo presents two Zulu children and is entitled "Little Warriors." Ms. McDowell was one of the participants in the study abroad trip that Dr. Jackson talked about. Photos like this one are being sold to raise money for a scholarship fund in South Africa.

**VCU LIBRARIES
ADDS GENDERWATCH TO**

CONGRATULATIONS!

Angelica Bega
College of Humanities and Sciences
Outstanding Women's Studies Student
Award Winner!

VCU Libraries recently announced the addition of GenderWatch, an important full text database, to its collection of online accessible materials. GenderWatch, which is compiled by SoftLine Information, is a full text database of publications that focus on the impact of gender across a broad spectrum of subject areas.

The database provides full text access to over 170 publications on a wide variety of subjects. GenderWatch helps students and faculty locate materials in a number of different fields, including business, education, literature, arts, health sciences, history, political science, public policy, sociology and contemporary culture, gender studies, women's studies and more. Publications include academic and scholarly journals, magazines, newspapers, newsletters, regional publications, books, booklets and pamphlets, conference proceedings, as well as government and non-governmental organization (NGO) publications, and special reports.

GenderWatch also contains archival material, in some cases as far back as the 1970's. Material is continually added to GenderWatch, making this the repository of an important historical perspective on the evolution of the women's movement and the changes in sex and gender roles over the last fifteen to twenty years.

Free text searching and complete indexing makes GenderWatch easy to search and use. For access to GenderWatch simply use the VCU Libraries' A to Z listing of available databases which can be found on the VCU Libraries Web site or by using the following address: http://www.library.vcu.edu/cfapps/webdb/ulsdb_actionatz.cfm?AtoZ=A

GenderWatch is just one of the many ways that VCU Libraries are becoming more involved in Women's Studies. The library's special collections unit is also maintaining archival information on Women's Studies and Women's History



Generous gifts to both the Women's Studies Program and the University itself are the driving factors in keeping women's history and women's experience alive at VCU. The photo above was part of a collection donated to the university by Zelda Nordlinger, a co-founder of Richmond NOW. The photo is provided courtesy of VCU Photograph Collection, Special Collections and Archives, James Branch Cabell Library, VCU.

**JEAN D. HELLMUTH:
HER LIFE'S WORK**



PIZZA SOCIAL

Again this past September, the Women's Studies Program hosted a student appreciation pizza social. During the event, which was held in the Seigel Center, students and faculty exchanged ideas about the program and discussed the desire for a Women's Studies major at VCU. Attendees were treated to pizza and drinks and had the opportunity to talk to professors, sign-up to be a minor in Women's Studies, get information about the student group (FAN), and mingle with friends. Amanda Mauger and Julie Crowder ("The Best Kind") performed for an enthusiastic audience. Their music, a mixture between folk and rock about feminist issues, set the mood of the party perfectly.



FEMINIST ACTION NETWORK ACTIVITIES

The Feminist Action Network (FAN) has had an active and exciting year, and despite the time spent organizing much work has been done! Some of our activities included the following:

1. Staffed a voter registration table, which registered over fifty new voters, provided information about the candidates and the history of women in politics.
2. Staffed a table on sexual harassment with a display made by FAN members, and passed out information on what to do if you are sexually harassed and free safety whistles.
3. Created an art display focusing on breast cancer awareness, including a chalk memorial dedicated to survivors, and passed out informative shower hangers along with other information, including pink awareness ribbons.
4. Attended the World March of Women in Washington DC.
5. Arranged a RAD self-defense class.
6. Organized a conference on the historic, political and sociological aspects of midwifery in Virginia.
7. Arranged a Wellness Fair focusing on health issues specific to women and alternative healing processes.

Fan members have also had stimulating debates on many topics via our listserv, organized small social functions, and distributed information about events affecting women on our campus and in the community. However, this is only the first year — we have much more work to do.

Erica Schweizer, our current scribe, notes that for next year, we plan to host a symposium on reproductive choices, create another breast cancer display, sponsor a legislative task force to keep VCU aware of bills affecting women, organize a table with information about Women in Afghanistan, and organize fundraising for the trip to Uganda and Kenya. For more information contact the Women's Studies Program at (804)-828-6710 or check out our website at www.freespeech.org/fan.

FAN EVENT A SUCCESS

"It was more successful than I ever thought it would be," said Feminist Action Network member Ms. Kimberly Certa of the birth options conference that she helped to organize. The conference, which focused on midwifery and other birth options in Virginia, was entitled "Women, Birth, Politics, and Power" and was presented by FAN on February 1, 2001

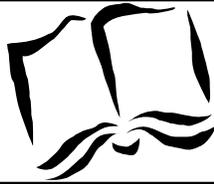
Many people turned out to become informed about women's birth options. The conference was held in the Student Commons and featured Women's Studies own Dr.

Deirdre Condit, Ph.D., an Assistant Professor in both Women's Studies and Political Science and Public Administration. Ms. Certa cited her comments as one of the highlights of the evening.

The conference explored women and birth through a number of different disciplines. Dr. Condit lectured on how women become erased through the "medical model" of birth from a social science perspective; while Ms. Jessica Jordan, C.N.M. presented a lecture entitled, "Midwives, Witches, and Nurses." Ms. Jordan's presentation focused on the history of midwives, and of women in general and her talk was accompanied by a slideshow. The conference also featured speakers from Virginia Birthing Freedom and information for attendees.

**SUGGESTED
READING**

Elisabeth Kuhn, Department of English



Poetry:

Lucille Clifton: *Blessing the Boats: New and Selected Poems, 1988-2000.* BOA Editions, 2000.

Clifton's poignant poems are spare and tough, yet also sensual, ironic, even humorous and joyful, as they tell of painful life experiences with tremendous clarity and power. Her subjects range from breast cancer, dialysis, birth, death, racism, sexuality and menstruation to Lazarus, Superman, God, Leda, and Lot's wife. *Blessing the Boats* includes poems from four previous volumes and has won the National Book Award.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni: *Black Candle.* Calyx Books. 1991. 2000.

Powerful, accessible poems, beautifully crafted with vividly described sensual detail, draw us into the lives of women from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Florence Howe (ed): *No More Masks!* HarperPerennial. 1993.

First published in an earlier edition in 1973, *No More Masks!* brings together many different women, both famous and less so, who write about the full range of female experience, with special emphasis on breaking taboos. Often exuberantly irreverent, like Ellen Bass's "Menstruation" and Carolyn Kizer's classic "Bitch," the poems make many important points. Great reading, with excellent foreword and introduction by the editor.

Denise Duhamel: *Kinky.* Orchises Press. 1977.

Witty, morbid, strange, yet often oddly familiar, these poems are biting satires of Barbie, society, and the "normal" lives women are expected to live. They range from Barbie planning her wedding to Barbie in Therapy and even Afterlife. Not for the faint of heart.

Else Lasker-Schüler: *Star in my Forehead.* Holy Cow Press! 2000. (Translated by poet Janine Canan)

An excellent translation of Lasker-Schüler's poems, one of the most important German Jewish lyrical poets.

Non-fiction:

Ophira Edut (ed.): *Adiòs, Barbie.* Seal Press. 1998.

An excellent collection of essays on body image and race, ethnicity, sexuality and power issues, written by women who have chosen to ignore, subvert, or redefine the dominant standard of beauty.

Fiction:

Gerd Brantenberg: *Egalia's Daughters.* The Seal Press. 1977/1985.

In this satire of gender roles, Brandenberg creates a society where the roles for women and men have been switched - not just the superficial trappings, but the language, too. In *Egalia*, the word for women, "wom," is the generic, and the word for men, "manwom" is the derived form, signifying the "other." *Egalia's Daughters*, a full immersion program into a caricature of a sexist traditional society in reverse, includes reversed versions of just about every facet of gendered experience and makes us face things that have become invisible through familiarity.

Note: Explicit sex and violence.

Multi-genre:

Hilda Raz (ed.): *Living on the Margins: Women Writers on Breast Cancer.* Persea Books. 1999.

An excellent collection on breast cancer. Raz, the editor of *Prairie Schooner*, assembled a powerful volume of autobiographic poetry and essays by Maxine Kumin, Lucille Clifton, Alicia Ostriker, and many other poets and writers.

Amy Bowes, Terry S. Gingras, Beth A. Kaplowitt, Anne Perkins: *Unbearable Uncertainty: The Fear of Breast Cancer Recurrence.* Pioneer Valley Breast Cancer Network. 2000.

Another powerful collection with prose and poetry about breast cancer, focusing on what happens once the acute phase is over. Available from: Pioneer Valley Breast Cancer Network, P.O. Box 236, Haydenville, MA 01039.

Practical:

Karen Kingston: *Clear Your Clutter with Feng Shui.* Broadway Books. 1999.

The first book ever to get me excited about attacking the clutter in my life. Kingston builds on the Chinese tradition of *Feng Shui* as she helps her readers clear clutter from physical surroundings, body, mind, and spirit.

Roger Mellott: *Stress Skills for Turbulent Times.* Career-Track Audio Tape Set.

I love this tape! It goes to the roots of stress and provides simple but very effective tools for change, far beyond the usual Band-Aid approaches. Subversive!

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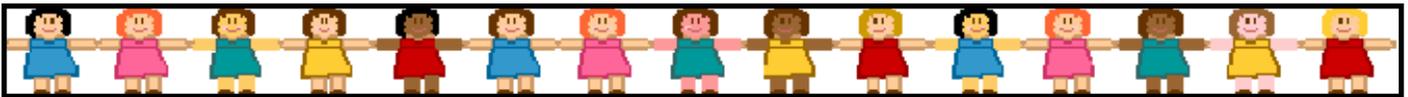
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- ▶ I would like to make a contribution to:
The Africa Trip Student Scholarship Fund _____
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