

Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies

A Program of the College of Humanities and Fine Arts

University of Massachusetts Amherst



Spring 2011

Newsletter

413-545-1922

www.umass.edu/wost



From the Director's Chair: Farewell from Arlene Avakian Reflections, History, Our Logo and the Future. . .

As many of you know, I will be retiring this year and this director's message will be my last. While I will miss sitting in this chair, I am very gratified that Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies' future looks so bright. With the crucial advocacy of our Dean, Julie Hayes, and the support of the Dean of the Faculty, Joel Martin, Provost Staros approved a national search for an external chair. We have a stellar search committee, chaired by Miliann Kang, and at this writing we have a number of applicants. We will let you know when we bring the finalists to campus, so stay tuned. Those of you who are attuned to bureaucratic language will notice that I used the word chair not director and that is because Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies is now a department. We have been acting like a department since the 1970s when we had our first tenure track line in the program, and now the historical anomaly of our designation as a program is rectified. In addition to this very exciting search, we are also nearing the conclusion of the search for the Five College Feminist Science Studies position. Banu Subramaniam, the chair of that search committee, reports that candidates have been truly wonderful and the pool is very deep.

LOOKING BACK

I have been chair for the past nine years, but my connection to the program goes back to the Fall of 1973, even before the program existed. I would say that we grew up together. I had come to Amherst from Ithaca, New York where I had been the Executive Director of the new Female Studies Program at Cornell University, and when I got to UMass I was appointed as the graduate student representative to the Women's Studies subcommittee of the Faculty Senate Committee on the Status of Women, the group that wrote the proposal for the pilot program under the umbrella of BDIC. I moved to Amherst because the women's movement in the

Valley was very strong and I felt I could get the support I needed as a single mother who was planning to go back to school. I was planning to work on American Women's Social History with a focus on Black and white women. The problem was that the history department did not offer any courses at all on Black people -- men or women -- and the only class on women was a brand new undergraduate course taught by Joyce Berkman. In those heady days of the early women's liberation movement, we were full of bravado and thought we could do anything -- including changing the world -- so the obvious impediments to getting the education I wanted did not seem so great to me then.

UMass, the history department and the world were not immediately transformed as we had expected, but in the fall of 1974 a pilot program in women's studies was established and the next year I got my MA. While I was a graduate student, I was a TA for the program and part of the large women's studies steering committee, and as was the custom of the women's movement of that time, membership was open to anyone who wanted to attend. After the program was approved but not funded, we managed to extract four TAs from the administration and divided them up for a half time academic coordinator, Cathy Portuges, and two quarter time staff assistants, Dale Melcher and me. We had high hopes for the future of women's studies, but I am not sure we would have envisioned then that we would now be a department with six faculty lines, classes of 300 students -- far too big to sit in a circle -- or be searching for a new chair. I leave the department in excellent hands and I am confident that it will continue to be at the forefront of the most important work in the field.

One of the things I hope to complete before I leave is a brief history of the program/department. Erika Arthur, one of our wonderful certificate students, has been working through the material that has already been collected by the Valley Women's Oral History Project as well as other oral histories and what is in our files and in the heads of those of us who were there at the beginning. Our goal is to put together an accurate

Directors Message, etc.

Thanks to Donors!

chronology. We are also working on a narrative which we will put up on our web site -- stay tuned.

A NEW LOGO

I also hope we will have a new logo by the end of the semester. Since the beginning of the program, we have used the logo of the women's liberation movement, a raised fist inside the women's symbol. It appears on our literature, the window of our offices in Bartlett, and most importantly on the tee shirts we give to our students when they graduate. We have decided that we need a logo that is more appropriate for our new name and to take us into the future. At the same time we want to continue to make reference to the history and symbolism of the raised fist which has a long association with people's movements that predated the women's movement, including labor unions and the Black power movement. If there are any graphic designers out there who would like to take a stab at a new logo for us, we would welcome your suggestions.

RETIREMENT PARTY

If you are in the area, please come to the retirement reception the department is planning for me on **Wednesday, May 4th, 4:00-5:30 in the Massachusetts Room in the Mullins Center**. I am not planning this party, but I will definitely have a hand in choosing the menu and thanks to UMass' great executive chef, Ken Toong, you can be sure that the food will be delicious. I welcome the opportunity to see you once more.

We've gotten spoiled by our large lists of donors in the past couple of newsletters. Last semester the list was exceptionally long because it had been a year since our last newsletter and many of you gave in honor of our 35th anniversary. (Don't hesitate to give to us again, after all, we have an anniversary every year!) We appreciate every single one of our donors, and we honor them in every list, large or larger.

Many thanks to:

Louise Antony
Elizabeth Bennett
Kathleen Cote
Melanie DeSilva
Christine DiStefano
Hildy Fentin
Erin Jackson
Elise Jakabhazy
Dale LaBonte
Linda Leslie
Lauren Mahoney
Eileen O'Neill
Andrea B. Price
Lynley Rappaport
Diana Riddle
Karen Shack
Inez Sieben
Jill Tregor
Timothy Valentine
Cynthia Warren
Emily Weiss
Anne Wiley
Alita Woodcock-Parody



ENEWS

Our website is, as usual, a work-in-progress. The history of the program (department) is being pulled together (see Director's message) as are fliers and information about events going back as far as we can. It's been interesting to see the fliers done back in the 1980s that were cut, pasted and glued together. So, please stay tuned to the "Looking Back" page (link on lower portion of the site) to see our progress both as a mature program and documentation of our history.

Some day we would love to email this newsletter, but we need your email addresses in order to do this – and we don't want to leave anyone out. We've collected only a few at this point, so please send a quick email to lindah@wost.umass.edu with your email address and we'll keep you posted.

We have lots of great things in the works for our Department. We are involved in searches that will bring new energy and vision into the program. As we turn the corner towards this bright and new future, we want to take some time to appreciate Arlene Avakian. Arlene has spent nearly her entire career at the University of Massachusetts in the field of Women's Studies.



ARLENE AVAKIAN RETIREMENT CELEBRATION

This is Arlene Avakian's last semester at Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies. We plan to celebrate Arlene's many contributions this spring. If you have ever been touched by Arlene's work directly or indirectly--read her books, taken her classes, sought her advice, worked with her, been shoulder to shoulder on an activist project together, debated with her, or been impacted by the institutions she shaped, we hope you will show your appreciation. **Come to the reception in her honor on Wednesday, May 4th, 4:00-5:30 in the Massachusetts room of the Mullins Center.**

Arlene recaps the start of her career at UMass (which coincides with the start of women's studies) in her director's message, but she leaves out that after being a part time TA she was an advisor for the program, a lecturer, a professor and the chair, and has at one point or another done almost every task associated with the program. She has taught classes small and large, and written well received books and articles. In addition Arlene has been involved in almost all the social justice efforts on campus since she started here. We appreciate her tenacity, her leadership, her vision and commitment. Arlene Avakian has insisted that students and scholars in women's studies not only focus on gender, but must look at race as well. Without her leadership and persistence, our program would not be in the forefront of intersectionality as we are today. Thank you Arlene.



Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies mourns the loss of Felice Yeskel. Felice was a strong advocate and organizer in many different communities including this campus. She helped found the Stonewall Center at UMass, and staffed it for 20 years. She went on to work on issues of class equality. She was a writer, teacher, activist, mother, and much more. There are many well

deserved tributes to her, to read more about her life and work: www.classism.org



FACULTY CANDIDATES COMING IN THE SPRING!

Chair Search

We will be having a number of exciting talks by candidates for the new Chair of WGSS, (times and dates for those events TBA) and encourage you to attend. We hope to bring candidates in prior to spring break in March. The job description is posted on our website. There will be opportunities for students, faculty and staff to meet the candidates. The search committee is composed of faculty, staff and students. We value input from all members of our community.

Feminist Science Studies Search

We are delighted to announce that several great candidates visited for the Five College Feminist Science Studies Search. See our website for breaking news about the search.



NOTABLE EVENTS FOR SPRING

Du Bois Lecture 2011

W.E.B. Du Bois: Personal Stories/Political Reflections

Bettina Aptheker

Distinguished Professor of Feminist Studies and History, University of California, Santa Cruz

February 28, 2011, 4:30 p.m.

Cape Cod Lounge, Student Union, UMass Amherst

Bettina Aptheker is Distinguished Professor of Feminist Studies and History at the University of California, Santa Cruz, where she has taught for more than 30 years. Her most recent book is a memoir, *Intimate Politics: How I Grew Up Red, Fought for Free Speech and Became a Feminist Rebel* (2006). It contains many stories of her early friendship with W.E.B. and Shirley Graham Du Bois. Other major books include, *The Morning Breaks: The Trial of Angela Davis* (1976; 2nd edition, 1999); *Woman's Legacy: Essays on Race, Sex, and Class in American History* (1982) and *Tapestries of Life: Women's*

Work, Women's Consciousness, and the Meaning of Daily Experience (1989). She is the biographer of Shirley Graham Du Bois for Notable American Women, and is currently writing a critical essay on Graham Du Bois' creative career as an opera composer, playwright, biographer, and novelist. She is also at work on a major research project: "Queering the History of the American Left: 1940s-1980s." http://www.library.umass.edu/spcoll/umarmot/?page_id=804

Anticipatory Governance, Queer Difference and the Emirati Post-Oil Generation

Noor Al-Qasimi

March 8, 2011 4:00-6:00 p.m., Campus Center 905

Noor Al-Qasimi received her Ph.D. in Film and Television from the University of Warwick in 2007 and recently held a fellowship at New York University. Her research interests converge at the intersections between sexuality, cybertechnology, and the region of the Middle East, and those between critical theory, postcolonial feminism, transnational feminism, queer theory, feminist theories of agency, biopolitics, governmentality, and affect theory. She is currently a Postdoctoral Fellow at King's College, University of London. At present, she is working on a manuscript with the working title, *Anticipatory Governance, Queer Difference and the Emirati Post-Oil Generation*.

Brain Storm:

The Flaws in the Science of Sex Differences

Rebecca Jordan-Young, Assistant Professor of Women's Studies, Barnard College

Author of *Brain Storm: The Flaws in the Science of Sex Differences* (Harvard University Press, 2010)

Thursday, March 31, 2011 4:00 p.m.

Campus Center 917, UMass Amherst

It is often taught as fact that female and male brains are different, and that these hardwired differences explain everything from sexual orientation to gender identity, to why there aren't more women physicists or more stay-at-home dads. Rebecca Jordan-Young takes on the evidence that sex differences are hardwired into the brain. Complete abstract available on our website.

Chartered Bus to New York City

for Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies students Saturday March 26, 2011

Careers in the Arts! Meet UMass alums! See innovative art! Spend a day in the City! Thanks to the office of the Dean of Humanities and Fine Arts, we are collaborating to put together this day trip by bus to New York City. The Brooklyn Museum of Art includes The Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art which exhibits the celebrated "Dinner Party" created by Judy Chicago. (If you don't know what this is, look it up! http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/dinner_party/) Two UMass alums work there, Lian Sifuentes, Academic Programs Coordinator, and our own Cheri Ehrlich, Senior Museum Educator and Teen Programs Coordinator. There will be an opportunity to view the exhibits "American Identities: A New Look for the Other Half" and/or "The Dinner Party." There will also be some free time built into the schedule. The bus will leave at 7 a.m. Stay tuned for more details, this trip will be at a nominal fee for students and is sure to fill up fast! All College of Humanities and Fine Arts students are welcome.

CAREER EVENT FOR SPRING

Making Connections Life After UMass, A Student/Alumni/ae Networking Reception

Our own popular Student/Alum Networking Reception in conjunction with Afro-American Studies, Labor Studies, and Social Thought and Political Economy will take place Thursday, April 7, 5:30-7:00 p.m. in the Cape Cod Lounge. This is an informal event where students can come for as long or brief a time as they want to talk to our grads about careers. Co-sponsored with Career Services. If you are a graduate of the program who is interested in participating please get in touch. Complete details will be available closer later this semester.

Check out these websites for interesting events:

www.umass.edu/ewc/eventscal/

www.umass.edu/stonewall/

www.fivecolleges.edu/sites/fcwsrc/news/

...News for Students...

UNDERGRADUATES

REQUIREMENTS

Students are encouraged to regularly check in about their requirements. Look at your ARR--Academic Requirements Report (a drop down option in your student services center in SPIRE.) Be aware of which set of requirements you are under. Also check all your SPIRE messages, and note that most online classes are under Continuing and Professional Education and require additional fees.

If you have questions consult the appropriate office--Registrar, the Dean's office, etc. Make an appointment with Karen Lederer if you want to go over our requirements, or learn more about how to read your ARR. If you have changed your graduation date or academic plans, please let us know. Graduating seniors be certain to make an appointment to check requirements.

GRADUATE STUDENTS

GRADUATE APPLICATIONS GOING DIGITAL!

In a move to expedite our admissions process, applications for admission into the graduate Certificate program are going digital. Starting this year, hard copy applications are to be submitted directly to the UMass Graduate School Admissions office in 530 Goodell and online applications can be submitted to gradadm@grad.umass.edu. Applications are due by March 10, 2011.

Students interested in admission to the Certificate Program should meet with Nancy Patteson, Graduate Program Coordinator, in the main office, 208 Bartlett Hall or call (413) 545-1922. Applications can be found on the Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies website www.umass.edu/wost or they can be picked up in the main office. Non-degree students must first contact the Graduate School before submitting an application for the Certificate in Advanced Feminist Studies.

Celebrating our students!



....Arlene Avakian - from TA to organizer to professor to the boss....





Reflections on my UMass Feminist Theory training ***By Daphne Perkins Berry***

I completed the certificate program in the spring of 2010 and am now a fifth year PhD candidate in Management in the business school. When I came to UMass in the fall of 2006, I had hoped to be able to integrate my interest in how business might help alleviate poverty and delegitimize exclusion through work-related processes in our society. I saw the advanced feminist theory certificate as a way to help me to develop the type of research questions that would be meaningful both to the scholarly community that I was entering and to those in the business community who could help effect change. The certificate program has exceeded my hopes and expectations. It has helped my understanding of the systematic ways in which some people are and have been disadvantaged at work and helped me to focus on the ways that I might make a difference through my scholarship. The program was materially helpful in the design of my dissertation project.



I am completing my dissertation with home health aides in New York City at three organizations of different organizational, management, and financial structure and processes – a worker cooperative, a “conventional” for-profit business, and a non-profit. Home health aide workers are disproportionately women, disproportionately very poor, and depending upon their location, can be disproportionately minority race and ethnicity. But studying the organizational lives of workers who work for low wages (and very few benefits) is a relatively sparsely-researched topic in the discipline of Management. So the community of scholars in the WGSS department has been particularly helpful as a support network for engaging in this type of scholarly work. In addition, the reading and writing in the program have opened doors to new literatures, different ways of viewing research – including feminist research – and different ways of understanding organizations and the possibilities for change.

During my data collection in New York City, I used the subway system regularly through multiple boroughs to get to my research sites. I watched how the demographics and dress of the subway passengers changed by the part of town I was in, often seeing those who, by their dress, were hospital or home health aides en route to work or training. When I arrived to perform my interviews or administer surveys, I was frequently mistaken for a home health aide and directed, with no questions asked, to wherever in the building home health aides went for training. Since this was often just where I wanted to go, sometimes I merely signed the home health aide sign-in sheet if there was one and headed off. Other times, I would try to explain that I was a researcher and begin an exchange of convincing the gatekeeper. My feminist training has helped to think of these interchanges in ways that I might not have before.

At the beginning of my fourth year in my dissertation program, I won a dissertation proposal award from the Aspen Institute - a U.S. business-and-society think tank and research organization, the Foundation for Enterprise Development, and the Employee Ownership Foundation. While the latter two organizations focus on employee ownership, my work on low wage, mostly-female workers in an employee-owned organization has provided more visibility into the problems, including poverty-level wages, of the caregivers and their ability to provide quality care for the elderly and those with physical disabilities. These organizations have continued to support my research related to home health aide work and the worker cooperative form of employee ownership.

For me, having the opportunity to study the theory and practice of ways of performing feminist research with other aspiring feminist researchers from various disciplines has been invaluable. It has expanded my thinking around possibilities for my own work and I am honored and fortunate to have been part of the UMass Advanced Feminist Certificate program.

Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies Program
208 Bartlett Hall
130 Hicks Way
University of Massachusetts/Amherst
Amherst, MA 01003-9269
#A105185

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 2
Amherst, MA 01002

Address Service Requested

Program grads--we traditionally put alumni news in our fall newsletter. So email or write us with your updates, projects, further schooling and other accomplishments. On our website we plan to link to student and alum blogs and other projects, so send us links to your writing, performances, projects and more, etc.

Thirty Years Ago in this Newsletter. . . (in the 7th year of the program)

The newsletter begins discussing the general climate, both political and temperature but goes on to say: *"The good news is that we in the Women's Studies Program and Community are still working hard learning, researching, and discovering all there is to know about women's lives and experiences and the analyses of both. We in women's studies quilt together the bits and pieces of information on women (and our own lives) from all fields and disciplines with all types of research methods. And the good news is that our quilt grows larger with each new student, each new semester, and each new book, paper, and story. . ."*



(Editor's note: I graduated from UMass 30 years ago this spring, with a minor in Women's Studies--then called a certificate. There was an economic recession going on, but I sat with my friends in the sun at commencement, and looked forward to a future where we could work to make the world a better place.)

This newsletter was written and edited by Karen Lederer. Design, production by Linda Hillenbrand. Thanks to Arlene Avakian, Linda Hillenbrand, Nancy Patteson, Svati Shah and Banu Subramaniam for their contributions. Special thanks to Daphne Berry and for her contribution. This newsletter is online: www.umass.edu/wost

