Notes from the Chair
By Dr. Maria Bevacqua

Happy spring semester from the Department of Women’s Studies! I’m going to keep these comments brief because you’ll be hearing more from me elsewhere in the newsletter.

The highlight of our semester came early. On February 14, we hosted “An Evening with Gloria Steinem,” the second Carol Ortman Perkins Lectureship. What a blast! Steinem was engaging, political, and inspirational as she talked about the past, present, and future of feminism—indeed, all social justice movements. Her optimistic message reached a 1,000-plus audience, not to mention positive newspaper and television news coverage. Carol Perkins was here to introduce our speaker and help raise funds to ensure the future of the lectureship. It was great to get together with community members, faculty, staff, students, and alumnae for this night of hope and empowerment.

We have many more excellent events to look forward to this semester. Women’s History Month promises many learning opportunities to the entire campus and community. April is Sexual Violence Awareness Month, so keep an eye out for important activities. Also in April we will observe Eliminate Hate with a week of events promoting justice and diversity. The Eliminate Hate keynote lecture will be delivered by transgender warrior Leslie Feinberg on Thursday April 6, at 7:00 in the CSU Ballroom. Finally, mark your calendars for the Women’s Studies Spring Banquet to be held April 28 at 6:00 P.M., United Church of Christ, 150 Stadium Circle. We will have an induction ceremony for all new Triota members immediately preceding the banquet.

The Department has just completed our search for a probationary faculty member. We are pleased to welcome Jocelyn Fenton Stitt to Women’s Studies. Jocelyn has served in a fixed-term position this year and will be joining us as a tenure-track assistant professor next year. Welcome, Jocelyn!
Why Women’s Studies?

Two Students Explain Their Choice of Major

Christina Mueller

At age 34, I have returned to Minnesota State University, Mankato after a seventeen year soul searching journey contemplating what I wanted to be when I grew up. The Women’s Studies Program offers me a personal opportunity to reflect on the HIStory that made me who I am today — a person molded by generations of women profoundly impacted by patriarchal constraints and consequences. My family genealogy includes a direct descendant, Elizabeth Howe, who was hanged in the Salem witch trials. Why? Well, because she was single and unwilling to conform to society’s rules.

Yet centuries later, women and marginalized groups continue to struggle with issues of inequality and oppression due to their “differences” from those in “control.” So Women’s Studies courses challenge me to think critically about problems women and oppressed groups face on a local, national, and global realm. Moreover, Women’s Studies advocates change and resolution via participation in activism and continuous education. Every single Women’s Studies class I attend leaves me feeling empowered (and sometime angry about injustices suffered). I have gained tremendous insight and knowledge through the Women’s Studies program, and still I have so much to learn as I work toward my degree!
My path towards Women's Studies started when I was a rebellious teenager growing up near Madison, Wisconsin. At this time, Madison had the reputation as one of the country’s most liberal and progressive cities. The energy that surrounded this hub of social change and progressive wisdom was immensely moving. It was from these small movements that I came to find my own opinions by talking to feminists, local activists, and anyone willing to tell me their passions.

My four years of high school education allowed me a chance to grow and learn through leadership development to become a leader and voice for my peers and those who could not speak. The years passed quickly, and I soon started my college career at Minnesota State University, Mankato with aspirations to become an electrical engineer due to my, at that time, passion for math and problem solving skills. I went from one engineering class to another, always thinking about politics and change. All I was told to focus on was what is important to get me a job that I was told I wanted. I felt a void and soon left this major to find the answers I sought in other fields.

Immediately I hit a passion with a few introductory philosophy courses and maintained psychology as a major for what would be explained to me later as a professional “safety net”. Another year passed and I grew steadily frustrated with unanswered questions and the impersonal solutions that I felt psychology lay forth. Thus, it was time for a change. It was then, that I took a class that would change the course of my life. When I first saw the flyer promoting the philosophy course Feminist Theory, taught by Professor Cathryn Bailey, I was curious. I had heard much about feminist ideas from the protesters on the steps of Wisconsin's state capital building, but knew next to nothing about what it really meant to be a feminist. I felt it was past overdue to find out, thus I enrolled. I discovered that feminism meant more than I could possibly describe. It was social change. It was equality. It was the end of all oppressions. It was hope. It was heartache. It was activism. It was women's rights. It was respect. It was freedom. It was an identity. It was me. My home had already been created for me, and yet it took me two years to realize that the Women's Studies Department, in accompaniment with the Philosophy Department, is where I would find the motivation to pursue the questions and justice I want for the world.
An Evening With

By Lila Kahmann
Women’s Studies Graduate Student

On February 14, the Carol Ortman Perkins Lectureship presented “An Evening with Gloria Steinem.” In the Centennial Student Union Ballroom a rapt audience of over 1,000 listened to Steinem’s message of hope and inspiration.

Steinem discussed the history of feminism from the abolitionist and suffragist movements to the Second Wave. The economic status of women was highlighted; Steinem noted progress has been made towards higher wages for women, yet the barrier is not gone as women still earn only $.76 to a man’s dollar. Women’s work continues to be devalued as care for children, elderly, and the sick are not counted into the economy.

Steinem also spoke of need to change the roles for men. Until more men play a prominent role in child rearing, the myth that boys must dominate will continue. Steinem noted wars will continue to be waged as long as this myth of domination perpetuates.

To the college students in the audience Steinem urged if they want to see change, they must get involved.

Following Steinem’s lecture was a reception which raised funds for the Carol Ortman Perkins Lectureship. Alumnae, community members, faculty, staff, and students had the opportunity to meet Gloria Steinem.
On February 22 Shelly Owen presented a colloquium to the Women’s Studies faculty, staff, and students about disability awareness and feminism. Shelly’s informative and insightful presentation encouraged us to acknowledge the connection between disability awareness and feminism.

Shelly led the group through the history of disability awareness in the United States that covered the social issues of people with disabilities prior to 1950. Included in the presentation was the impact of sterilization within Minnesota. Sterilization totals in Minnesota through 1940 equaled 1,880; 370 were performed on people who were considered “insane” and 1,501 were considered “feebleminded.” Women were affected by these practices at a much higher frequency than men.

Social policy changed from 1950-1999 as legislation such as Social Security Disability Insurance, Medicaid, Medicare, and the Americans with Disabilities Act were passed. A social model which started in the 1970s began to value people first, and realized barriers and oppression are the issue. As Shelly stressed in her presentation, “people with disabilities are those people with impairments who are disabled by society.”

The connection of feminism and disability was made apparent as Shelly described intersections of feminist issues and disability issues. These key issues are employment, violence, motherhood, education, sexuality, and the body. The integration of disability awareness to feminism on a large scale is well overdue.

Some tips and reminders to increase disability awareness:
- Best: 12 point font on documents, e-mails, handout
- Sans serif font (for example, Arial)
- Presentations: background solid color, strong oppositional color for font (28-32 point font)
- Verbally review materials (slide, handout)
- Send materials ahead of time for people who use screen readers
- Remove a few chairs around a table, etc.
- Straws and plastic cups
- Ask to offer assistance—someone may not need or want your help
- Be aware of evacuation procedures
- Never distract a working dog
- It is everyone’s responsibility to make the accommodations accessible
In support of equal rights, I attended the Community Action Training organized by Together Minnesota! (a branch of Outfront Minnesota). This two-hour seminar focused on the proposed marriage amendment that would change our state constitution.

As I walked into the seminar, my only intention was to get information. What I left with was a glimpse of the very real and widespread effects this amendment will have on ALL of Minnesota. With the wording of this amendment, unless you are married to your partner, you may not be able to file domestic violence charges against them. In other states where the currently proposed legislation has been adopted, this has been judicially enforced.

Beyond this, civil unions are included so that the definition of marriage would become, “limited to only the union of one man and one woman.” In short, if you vote in agreement with this definition, you are denying a whole portion of society (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender people) the 1,138 benefits of marriage, as well as forcing two people who love each other to be treated as complete strangers under the law.

If you vote in disagreement with this amendment, absolutely nothing will change in Minnesota law. If you already find yourself in disagreement with this amendment, you can take five minutes of your time to sign a petition (available in the LGBT Center, CSU 173) and/or sign up for Lobby Day (April 27, 2006) at www.togetherminnesota.org. Getting active in support of equal rights to the institution of marriage is just one step students, faculty, alumni, and community members can take to ensure that all humans are treated as such.

Congratulations New Members of the Women’s Studies Honor Society, Iota Iota Iota

Sarah Groh
Brooke Hensel
Julie Kent
Christal Lustig
“Collective Action.” For those who have taken this course you may experience various responses to this phrase—heart palpitations, cold sweats, and other signs of increased tension. Or perhaps a deep sigh of relief that the experience is over for you. Okay, maybe I am exaggerating a bit, but if you have taken the class you will probably be able to relate to the experiences of the Fall 2005 class.

With grand intentions, a larger than average class size, and varied ideas and life experiences we set forth on our quest to create a collective action. Our initial brainstorming included a deluge of project ideas such as petitioning for more emergency call boxes around campus, traveling to Georgia to protest the School of Americas, talking to high school students about Women’s Studies, and protesting any pharmacy in Mankato that refused to distribute emergency contraception.

Eventually we settled on one idea: we would create a film to raise awareness about sexual assault. At this point the semester was more than half over, but we were optimistic we would complete our film by the due date. Once we settled on our project we thought our difficulties were over—they had just begun. While we struggled to write a script and find actors emotions flared as we worked with such a personal topic.

We discovered the topic of sexual assault was a difficult one because many of us had dealt with instances of sexual assault in our own lives. With this discovery we decided to harness this emotional component, rather than continue to fight it.

The film that resulted is a powerful film of our stories, our voices. Our stories were further highlighted by the haunting music of Mary Bue, a musician from Duluth, Minnesota (check her out at marybue.com—she is truly amazing). We decided on abstract visual images that would provide a backdrop for the stories and music.

Due to the kindness of Calvin Moultrie, who oversees the Minnesota State Mankato Greek programs, we were supplied with an audience for our film. At the November All Greek meeting we had our debut. We asked the audience to complete a survey to critique our film and offer suggestions for improvement. The majority of the audience members responded positively to the film. We used these responses to edit the film one more time to create a finished product, Burden of Memories, which is empowering and emotionally charged.

Although some of us in the Collective Action class may have experienced heart palpitations, cold sweats, and other signs of increased tension at various moments, we created a work which we are proud of. The highs and lows of the group process we encountered were only part of our journey toward a meaningful collective action.

Burden of Memories is available for classroom instruction and community programs. Contact Cindy in the Women’s Studies Department to reserve.
I have been teaching at the university level for about 13 years now. But I became a student again when, about six months ago, I took up the practice of yoga. I had been active and, I thought, successful in various forms of physical fitness for over a decade, so I expected yoga to be easy, relaxing, and barely challenging at all. I was wrong.

During my first Ashtanga-style yoga class, I found myself alternately gasping for air, feeling faint from exertion, and struggling to keep up for the full 60 minutes. I thought more than once, I’ll never do this again. But the student in me persisted. I remembered the challenging undergraduate and graduate courses I had taken—those with professors who were less than stellar, with classmates who drove me crazy for one reason or another, or with material that was too hard or too boring. Somehow, as a student, I stuck with these classes. And even if I didn’t love them in the beginning or in the end, I benefited from the journey and the experience.

And so it has gone with yoga. My second class was a little less of a struggle, and my third was almost enjoyable. Now I take classes weekly or more. Yoga helps me explore parts of myself that I never knew existed. I still get dizzy and winded periodically, but I have learned that the journey is one I choose to make, and one I profit from many times over. It helps me become who I am.

All of the graduates in this class have similarly chosen to make a journey. You wanted higher education. You knew that, for a variety of reasons, seeking knowledge was going to make you a better person or help you achieve your goals. You have persisted through challenges. Maybe your classes at Minnesota State Mankato didn’t make you gasp for air or feel faint—at least the dean and I hope they didn’t—but they probably pushed you to work hard. Even if some of them were too hard or too boring, these classes helped you explore parts of yourself you never knew existed. They have helped you become who you are.

There are even more connections to be made between the practice of yoga and the experience of higher education. When I look around the yoga studio, I find people who come with varying levels of ability, varying levels of experience with yoga. My instructor Mona calls the yoga studio a one-room schoolhouse with students from kindergarten to graduate school. Not only do we vary by our level of preparedness for yoga, but we also represent a wide range of ages, races, and levels of ability. Any given class is likely to include people with disabilities—in fact, if you consider the number of bad knees, bad wrists, and bad backs in the room as varying levels of ability, it would be difficult to find an able-bodied one among us. This experience is a daily lesson in humility and gratitude for the diversity of humanity.

I have learned lessons of gender from my yoga practice. This one-room schoolhouse holds people who are fat, skinny, tall, and short, and none of these qualities is necessarily related to one’s practice of yoga. When Mona tells us to hold our hands up and look at our beautiful thumbs, she is telling us to love our bodies and marvel at the wondrous things they can do. She also reminds us to refocus when we get bogged down with the things our bodies can’t do.

I know from my experience with teaching college students, and from observing conventions of our society, that we are obsessed
with bodies—our own and others’. In the classes I teach, we read research and narratives about hating our fat thighs, our dark skin, our Jewish noses, our aging bodies. Students come away from these discussions and assignments with a greater range of options—the option not to hate but to embrace our bodies and our differences. I liken this to the enjoyment of an indulgent moment of marveling at our beautiful thumbs.

During class, between poses, or asanas, Mona will often tell students, “whatever you were feeling about that last pose, put it out of your mind. If you felt like you did it just beautifully, that’s ego, and it has no place here. If you didn’t feel good about the pose, that’s low self-esteem, and it has no place here.” In her one-room schoolhouse, everyone tries their best but is allowed to fail. Everyone knows that this practice is for them, not for anyone else.

And so it goes with higher education. If you did well in your classes and made excellent grades, that is wonderful. But don’t let it go to your head. When you meet new people in the paths you have yet to explore, you will find some who are smarter, some who are not. A humble attitude in the face of success will take you far in life. If you didn’t get the grades you would have liked, if you struggled through university as many people do, I urge you to find ways to learn from the lessons without getting bogged down in self-criticism. Women and all students of color get a heavier dose of this than others—seeing ourselves through a critical social lens. That is low self-esteem, and it has no place here.

I will close with a final yoga reference. Those of you familiar with yoga may know that we end practice sitting on the floor with our palms pressed together facing our instructor. With a bow of the head we all say, “Namaste.” This Hindi word has a number of meanings, and is commonly used as a respectful salutation in south Asia. But my preferred definition is “the teacher in me honors the teacher in you.” So to the class of 2005, and to all those here who helped make your graduation possible through support and instruction, I humbly say to you, [with a deep bow, hands at heart center] “Namaste.”

Special Thank You:

Deirdre Rosenfeld, Women’s Center
Michael Cooper, Minnesota State Mankato Public Relations
Matthew Willemsen, Department of Art
Joe Spear, Mankato Free Press Managing Editor
Kate Goff, Graduate Student, Women’s Studies
Everyone who submitted articles and photos

Feminists have studied the separation of and interaction between the public and private spheres for decades. This issue has frequently been a polemic in feminism, understood in opposing ways that viewed privacy as either an estimable or problematic concept—on one hand, privacy was given as the justification for legal birth control and abortions, but it has also shielded perpetrators of domestic violence and child abuse. Going Public: Feminism and the Shifting Boundaries of the Private Sphere continues the discussion of public/private spheres. This collection of essays displays diverse views on this traditionally dichotomous split. Generally, these essays analyze Western feminist conceptions of the interactions between the public and private spheres from a range of international contexts, including sexual politics in Iran, privacy in revolutionary China, disability in the United States and prostitution in Thailand. Scholars from a variety of countries complicate the feminist dialogue, exploring the wide-ranging areas in which public and private issues commingle, coexist and contend with each other, their boundaries constantly in flux.

Rogaia Mustafa Abusharaf’s piece, “Virtuous Cuts: Female Genital Circumcision in an African Ontology,” uses Sudanese women’s narratives to examine genital cutting. These women problematize Western notions of sexual pleasure, agency and individual rights by applying a communal interpretation to these concepts. Her complex treatment of the subject makes this piece a compelling one for pedagogical purposes, particularly in juxtaposition to articles written by Western feminists on female genital cutting.

Ellen Rooney’s essay, “A Semiprivate Room,” offers a metaphor for understanding the differing narratives of public and private offered throughout the book. She notes that classrooms and hospital rooms can be conceptualized as semiprivate rooms—spaces where entry is restricted to a degree and some privacy is expected, but strangers also enter and interact with each other. Understanding the public and private spheres in this way can make the perspectives offered in this book meaningful, as women’s private lives are frequently pulled into the public sphere, particularly in areas such as sexuality and kinship. The public sphere also travels back into the private through language and ideology. In Rooney’s metaphor, no space is truly public or private, but involves varying degrees of exclusion and intimacy (346).

Overall, Scott and Keates’ collection of essays offers a diverse and fascinating discussion of a debate that has seemingly been rehashed in feminism numerous times, and manages do so in an assortment of innovative ways.
I saw the Vagina Monologues numerous times throughout my undergraduate career. I had always wanted to be a part of the cast, but never had the courage to tryout, that is until this year. I thought I would give it my best try and I’m glad I did. Being a part of the cast was an empowering experience and working with such passionate people inspired me to continue my activism. My self-confidence increased and I plan on trying out again next year.

Go Vagina Warriors!

The following students are working on their theses and plan to graduate this May:

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<tr>
<th>Amy Bremel</th>
<th>Sara Stoltenburg</th>
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<td>Adriane Brown</td>
<td>Jen Macken</td>
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Mark your calendars

Catered Spring Celebration

April 28, 2006

6:00 p.m.

RSVP 389-2077

United Church of Christ, 150 Stadium Circle

Dinner, awards, silent auction, and more.
Hometown: Ringsted, Iowa

Ashley earned her Bachelor’s Degree in English and Sociology with a minor in Social Work from Simpson College in Indianola Iowa. Currently Ashley’s academic interest is, “to survive this semester.” Ashley’s hobbies include creative writing, painting, shopping, and hanging out with her cat Stella.

Quote: “The truth will set you free. But first it will piss you off.”
– Gloria Steinem

Fall 2006 Women’s Studies
Course Offerings

WOST 110: Introduction to Women’s Studies
WOST 220: Global Perspective on Women and Change
WOST 251: Coming of Age
WOST 265: Women and Spirituality
WOST 310: Feminist Thought
WOST 440/540: Feminist Pedagogy
WOST 600: Collective Action
WOST 605: Foundations of Women’s Studies
WOST 610: Graduate Seminar
WOST 620: Feminist Research

Please see Minnesota State University, Mankato web site for further course details at www.3.mnsu.edu/courses
Consuelo M. Concepcion

Consuelo has moved to Glasgow, Scotland where she is attending the University of Glasgow. Consuelo is working on a PhD in English Literature. Her dissertation is on Sixteenth Century English Law and its relation to colonial policy in Ireland, and its concurrent influence on a number of writers and historians.

Consuelo enjoys Scotland, “even given the attendant cultural shocks, such as baked beans for breakfast.”

Lisa Coons

Lisa recently began a new career as Coordinator for the Center of Earth Spirituality and Rural Ministry with the School Sisters of Notre Dame.

Although not Catholic, Lisa feels her spirituality is a positive fit with the School Sisters of Notre Dame. “I see spirituality as being in everything and everyone. If we could see that in each other we’d be better off,” says Lisa. Previously Lisa’s experience with nuns had been a goddess exploration trip to Mexico, which a group of nuns were part of. She states, “in my experience I have found nuns are all about doing the good work in the world.”

The community gardens on Good Counsel Hill provide families and individuals who lack space for gardens a plot to grow their own fruits and vegetables. Organic gardening practices are used in the community gardens. In order to assist people utilizing the gardens, Lisa will be offering workshops on organic gardening and methods of using extra harvest such as canning and freezing. The community gardens are accessible, with some plots built on platforms for wheelchair access. The gardens are open to everyone. In addition to the community gardens there will be a food shelf garden. Volunteers will take care of the gardens, and the harvest will benefit local food shelf programs. Other programming Lisa has planned includes a one week environmental summer camp for children and spiritual exploration activities such as moonlight yoga.

Lisa’s connections to the Minnesota State Mankato and Mankato communities will allow her to work on a number of collaborations such as with campus organizations, YWCA, CADA House, and other groups.

“It’s a dream job I could not have dreamed up.” Congratulations

To volunteer or intern with the Center for Earth Spirituality and Rural Ministry contact Lisa by e-mail at lisacoons@yahoo.com

Women’s Studies Alumnae!!!!!!!

Have some news you would like to share? Have you relocated?

Contact the Department of Women’s Studies at: 507-389-2077
or e-mail Cindy Veldhuisen at cynthia.veldhuisen@mnsu.edu
Women’s Studies needs your support. We have numerous fundraising efforts underway, and with your help we can meet our goals. One effort is to raise funds for Women’s Studies students to attend the National Women’s Studies Association conference in Oakland, CA this June. You can help with this effort by making a monetary gift using the form below, or by purchasing fundraiser-giveaway tickets from Cindy (507-389-2077). Another effort is to endow the Carol Ortman Perkins Lectureship, which invites lecturers to campus based on their contributions to feminist scholarship and their ability to think creatively about the connections between theory and practice. You can be a part of this effort by using the pledge form below, or by calling Susan Taylor (507-389-1006). Finally, you can support the department’s general foundation account, which helps us fund other student travel and purchase educational DVDs and other instructional supports, by using the pledge form below. Any amount is appreciated with any of these efforts. You can help Women’s Studies fulfill our mission of promoting interdisciplinary feminist teaching, learning, and research. Thank you!

Pledge Form

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