Warmer weather, longer days, and students sporting shorts and flip-flops well before most faculty think prudent—how delightful the first signs of spring! With Spring Break a vague memory, most of us are hunkering down for the semester’s Last Call: final papers, exams, and projects; extra credit; make-up work; thesis defenses. Now is when the hard work of January, February, and March really begins to pay off.

Looking over the many accomplishments of the Women’s Studies Department this semester is very satisfying. As I mentioned in our last issue, we have successfully implemented a revised undergraduate curriculum, which increased most 3-credit classes to 4-credits, with added “lab” hours outside the classroom. With the added credit hour, for example, students in Cheryl Radeloff’s Feminist Research & Action class have more time to devote to the applied research projects this class is known for, and they will highlight their accomplishments at this year’s Undergraduate Research Conference. We are proud to be the only department on campus that systematically incorporates the URC into the curriculum.

Minnesota State Mankato’s Women’s History Month is full of exciting activities, thanks in large part to our friends in the Women’s Center. Women’s Studies has organized two important events, both on March 26. First, on behalf of Susan Freeman’s graduate Feminist Histories class of Fall 2007, Katie Bowman presents the results of their group oral history project, History of Women’s Studies at Minnesota State University. Second, in conjunction with the Kessel Peace Institute, the Pakistan Student Association, and the Women’s Center, we are hosting an open forum to commemorate the life of Benazir Bhutto, the first woman president of a Muslim nation, assassinated last year. We expect both of these events to inspire critical examinations of women’s leadership and the writing of history.

Women’s Studies students have been as busy as ever with their curricular (such as the research projects mentioned above) and extra-curricular activities. In January, majors Stacy Scofield and Brad Freihoefer participated in the all-expense paid Young People For (YP4) National Summit in Washington, D.C. The summit is the kickoff of a long-term training and development program for young people interested in progressive political affairs. This program is an initiative of People for the American Way, which believes in investing resources in the young people who will become the future progressive leaders in politics, business, and the non-profit world. Congratulations, Brad and Stacy, and thank you for all the good work that is to come! Read Stacy’s reflections on the Washington summit inside.

Recently, I completed a Minnesota State Mankato “Great Place to Work” survey. It got me reflecting on all the things I appreciate about my job and about Minnesota State Mankato (and, frankly, about all the changes I would make in a heartbeat if someone appointed me queen!). When asked “what three things make Minnesota State Mankato a good place to work,” I only hesitated in deciding how to prioritize: I love my job because I get to be a feminist professor. I get to work with committed feminist colleagues who come from different perspectives but who share my commitment to women’s studies education. I love my job because I interact with students who make me laugh and make me think all the time. And I love my job because, through my chairing work, teaching, scholarship, and involvement in the communities I belong to, I get to be a part of social change. You can’t beat that.
From the Front Lines
The Experience of being a Teaching Assistant
By: Katie Bowman

Upon preparing for my experience as a Teaching Assistant in Women’s Studies, my first worry was whether or not I would be taken seriously as a teacher, since I would likely look younger (at least shorter) than many of the students I was about to meet in my class. Would the students listen to me? Would they discount the premises of Women’s Studies because they did not believe me? What if something bad or unexpected happened in the classroom? How would I deal with all of the unpredictable variables of teaching? Approaching the second half of the semester, I have learned that gaining the respect of students has little to do with my size or age and more to do with my confidence and my willingness to improvise in the face of the unexpected.

On more occasions than I can count, I have had to confront problems with technology in the classroom. Inwardly, I’m thinking, “Uh oh! Yikes! Eeeee! What now?!? This is horrible! Mayday!!” But, I know I have to keep my cool so that I appear confident on the outside. So, that’s when I rely on my knowledge of Women’s Studies and feminist pedagogy to help me improvise. In feminist pedagogy, it is often agreed that effective teaching should avoid being rigid and prefabricated. Feminist pedagogues argue that teaching is a flexible craft that requires improvisation and dynamic thinking. This pedagogical approach has often soothed my nerves in times of technological failure and unexpected circumstances. I have learned that sometimes embracing unexpected situations in the classroom leads to the best class discussions and learning moments, for me as well as the students.

So, as a first-time teacher, while sometimes I admittedly feel disoriented, I find that the challenges I have faced have enriched my experience and built my confidence, rather than diminish it. This is thanks, in large part, to my reliance on feminist pedagogy and its reassuring assertion that improvisation is central to good teaching. Further, as it turns out, I have discovered that the students I work with are not ravenous wolves ready to take advantage of my insecurities, but rather just as eager to see me succeed and bring life to the classroom as I am.

Young People For Summit
By: Stacy Scofield and K.M. Aase

Recently, Women’s Studies major Stacy Scofield attended the Young People For conference in Washington DC. Young People For (YP4) is a progressive social justice organization started by Norman Lear that works with and is funded by People For the American Way. Their goal is to train young community leaders in progressive ideas, social advocacy, and organizing.

Stacy received a fellowship to attend the summit in Washington D.C. over Martin Luther King Jr. day weekend. Her schedule was packed for the entire weekend, giving her many opportunities to learn, network, and brainstorm.

One of the things Stacy loves most to discuss is the diversity of the summit and the opportunity to work with different campus and student groups from the Midwest region, including students from McAllister College, University of Minnesota, Carleton College, and Native American students from South Dakota. She also worked with two other students from Minnesota State Mankato, including Women’s Studies major Brad Freihoefer. She spent eight hours a day working and workshopping with different people, learning how to work closely with political organizations and lobbyists, how to network, and bring social justice issues back into policy.

During my conversation with Stacy it was clear that she was very passionate and inspired by her time at the YP4 summit and spoke with great enthusiasm for what she had learned and accomplished.

Stacy stated that the diversity of the students was inspiring, as was the activism that others who attended conference had already engaged and the things that they’d undertaken on their own, even without the help of YP4. Each individual person was given a voice. She states: “It was great that at the end of the day we did something called fish bowl. Each person had the opportunity to stand up in front

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of the crowd and talk about anything they wanted to talk about… From a very feminist perspective, each individual person was allowed to have his or her voice, yet we were able to draw similar experience, interpreting the personal as political.”

The example she gave was of Native American students who discussed the issues of alcoholism and abuse on their Reservation and how they had been inspired throughout the day to talk about these issues, where they are usually silenced. Stacy was really moved by their passion and how they articulated their concerns, “yet accepting of us (or even me) as a white middle class older woman.”

The issue that Stacy focused on was the environment at Minnesota State Mankato, which tends to be generally apathetic when it comes to rallying around a certain cause. The Minnesota State Mankato delegation was able to articulate that and speak with a woman from another campus who had similar problems in the past. Stacy says, “We’re going to try to work with her to build some resources.”

YP4 is more than a one-year fellowship. They give fellows the tools and information required for sustainability. Stacy is going to be a graduate student next semester, and feels that Minnesota State Mankato is going to be her home for many years, so she will be able to pass this [information] on, include it in her studies, and include others in her YP4 agenda. As for final thoughts? Stacy says, “Kudos to Maria Bevacqua for nominating me and having the foresight to see past my age and understand that I’m willing to work with anyone on campus.”

For more information on Young People For, check out their Web site at www.youngpeoplefor.org.

V-Day 2008:

Vajay-jay, Wolly Bolly, Cooter, Lotus, Mongo, Box, Jelly Roll, Pussycat, Pocket Pie, Cunt, Cha Cha, Bobina. Or maybe you simply prefer “Vagina.”

By: Beth Harders

Yep, it’s that time of year again. With the V-Day movement, February 14th has become a day not only to think about love, but also about vaginas (and even your love for vaginas). Each year, college campuses and communities, nationwide and abroad, put on The Vagina Monologues, a play created by Eve Ensler and based on real women’s stories about their vaginas. The Vagina Monologues promotes awareness of violence against women and raises money for anti-violence organizations.

As a repeat Vagina-goer, if you will, I look forward to Minnesota State Mankato’s production every year. This year, as I sat waiting for the production to begin, I watched as Ostrander Auditorium filled with women and men, college students and community members, survivors and friends, and was amazed once again at the large number of people in attendance. I later found out that the Friday night production not only sold out, but drew a crowd large enough to irritate fire marshals. In fact, there were 550 tickets sold for the two-night event and, in combination with the proceeds from ticket sales, local business sponsorship, a “woman-friendly artwork” sale, and private donations, Minnesota State Mankato’s V-Day 2008 generated $6,000 in proceeds. This money was distributed to the women of New Orleans and the Gulf South, who are currently facing violence in their everyday lives, the Sexual Violence Resource Center of Mankato, and Minnesota State Mankato’s Sexual Violence Education Program.

As the lights dimmed and the crowd quieted, I prepared myself for two hours of listening to stories about vaginas, ones that I knew would make me cry, make me laugh, and of course, ones that would piss me off and remind me why I was there. The cast did a wonderful job and I laughed, I cried, and I got pissed, as predicted. The most moving part of the night, however, was not any individual monologue but what came afterwards. At the end of The Monologues each year survivors and secondary survivors are asked to stand. This year, instead of focusing on the number of people who stood, I focused on the faces of those around me. When asked, women slowly stood up, some in groups and some confidently on their own, claiming their identity as survivors. The looks on these women’s faces were revealing of personal struggles, and for many, suggested that this was the first time they felt as though they weren’t alone or weren’t being labeled as the helpless or guilty victim. As friends and family of victims and survivors rose, leaving few people in their seats, it was evident that this was not only an individual monologue but what came afterwards. At the end of The Monologues each year survivors and secondary survivors are asked to stand. This year, instead of focusing on the number of people who stood, I focused on the faces of those around me. When asked, women slowly stood up, some in groups and some confidently on their own, claiming their identity as survivors.

The looks on these women’s faces were revealing of personal struggles, and for many, suggested that this was the first time they felt as though they weren’t alone or weren’t being labeled as the helpless or guilty victim. As friends and family of victims and survivors rose, leaving few people in their seats, it was evident that this was not only a powerful act that brought home the reality of the extent of violence against women, but it was an act that brought together a community of people, one in which no one was ashamed and everyone could see a potential for change. Although the audience’s faces seemingly said different things—some were grimaced with painful memories, some were tearful eyes, and others seemingly confident—I felt an overwhelming sense of connectedness and a feeling that in standing together, survivors and friends, we were saying, “This is who we are, this is how we survive.”
Fall semester in the Women’s Studies Graduate Program is always when the Collective Action class is held. Collective Action is a required course for all graduate students in the Women’s Studies department, and every year the experience is a little different. The idea behind the class is for students to create and execute an action project that achieves some sort of activist goal. The only hard and fast rule is that the students can’t do anything illegal.

The 2007 Collective Action class came to a quick consensus of what our project would be. We wanted to help the local women’s shelter, Committee Against Domestic Abuse (CADA). We were lucky enough to have two students with experience working at women’s shelters, and one with connections to CADA. Because of this insight, we were able to find a very specific need and attempt to meet it. CADA needed art supplies for the children who stay there. Like most shelters, CADA operates on a shoestring budget and art supplies are near the bottom of a rather long list of other things that residents need.

Together, the Collective Action class planned an art drive to coincide with the showing of the Clothesline Project to help generate donations from people on campus. The Clothesline Project is a domestic violence awareness project that consists of T-shirts that are decorated to commemorate women, children, and elders who have died due to domestic violence. The shirts are hung on clotheslines for passersby to read.

Originally the plan was only to put up the project for three consecutive days, but after being very successful for the first three, we continued for the rest of the week. While we staffed the project, we also collected donations of new or gently used art supplies on behalf of CADA. In addition, we solicited local businesses for give-aways for students or student参与。
groups who donated the most to our drive to help motivate the student body.

Between many generous donors on camps as well as Collective Action students’ families, friends, and business connections we were able to gather a huge amount of art supplies, including cardstock, envelopes, rubber stamps and ink, fabric, stickers, scrap booking supplies, fancy paper punches and scissors, and of course, construction paper, crayons, glue and paints. The monetary donations we received were used to purchase large bins to hold the supplies.

The class members of Collective Action were overwhelmed by the response to our and CADA’s need, and were thrilled that it took two cars and a small truck to deliver the carefully organized supplies. A CADA volunteer expressed that not only would this be a boon for the children, but would allow the women there to make their own arts and crafts, such as scrap books and greeting cards.

Of course there were bumps in the road along the way, but the class came away from the project really feeling like we’d done something to make a difference. It’s easy to fall into the trap of thinking that the only way to make a difference is by ending world hunger and negotiating peace in the Middle East, but the truth is, change can be effected far closer to home and be just as important. Participants in the Collective Action class of 2007 were Evangeline Simmons, Tom Nixon, Jessica Martinez, Christal Lustig, Sara Gronstal, Erica Carnes, Dave Buckley, and Katie Aase. Advisor: Dr. Cheryl Radeloff.
Interview with Dr. Jocelyn Stitt

By: Jessica Martinez

Graduate Student Jessica Martinez interviews Women’s Studies Professor Dr. Jocelyn Stitt about her most recent book (with Pallavi Rastogi, eds.) Before Windrush (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008).

Jessica: You discuss that early Black British texts have been “anthologized and incorporated into scholarly work as examples of sociological or historical issues, rather than as literary texts in and of themselves.” What is the impact of framing these texts this way? In what way does that connect to the absence of Asian writers?

Jocelyn: Within the context of British culture, literature was seen as the pinnacle of civilization and gentility. The absence of written literature was seen as evidence of a culture’s barbarity and its need for European colonial control. So one of the big points we are making in Before Windrush, is that writers in the Asian and African Diaspora were present in Britain before World War II. Most British people think about the creation of multicultural Britain as something that began after WW II and after decolonization movements, but the writers discussed in the essays in Before Windrush testify that colonial subjects were present in Britain from the eighteenth century onward. These writers were making contributions to literature and were critiquing traditional notions of what counts as literature. Perhaps most importantly, these writers critiqued British colonial rule and slavery decades before formal anti-colonial struggles began in the twentieth century.

Jessica: The introduction reveals your objective to change “the marginalization of early Asian and black writers,” and your aspiration that this book will prove to be a “significant intervention in postcolonial and British studies.” Can you elaborate on these goals, and speak to what ideally would follow? In other words, what tangible changes does this anthology create in academia?

Jocelyn: In pushing for these writers to be considered along with more “canonical” writers, what Pallavi Rastogi and I were hoping for was, in essence, a reconsideration of what it means to be British. One of the main pieces of propaganda promulgated by racist nationalist groups in Britain, like the National Front, is that the UK was a homogeneous, culturally coherent Christian society before the “intrusion” of Asian and African Diaspora peoples into the supposedly “pure” English national space. Given the fact that the UK since 1707 was made up of a union of Celtic peoples, like in Scotland, with English and other ethnic groups, this idea would the laughable even without evidence that Asian, African, and Caribbean peoples lived, worked, and had children with British people going back hundreds of years.

This is one of my favorite parts of the introduction that Pallavi and I wrote together and I think it really expresses the political ideas behind our collection of literary criticism: “To see Britain as culturally and racially heterogeneous in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early-twentieth centuries is to understand the contemporary multiracial populations within Britain as existing in a continuum, perhaps even in a conversation, with earlier diasporas. The chant of disenfranchised immigrants in the 1970s, ‘We are here because you were there,’ reminding native British subjects of colonialism, might be changed to, ‘We have been here all along.’ This idea of the heterogeneity of colonial Britain drives a stake into the heart of modern exclusionary British nationalism. In short, recovering the history of African, Asian, and Caribbean writers before 1948 changes our ideas of British nationality and literary culture in remarkable ways.”

Flip-Flops for Feminist Funds

By: Jessica Martinez

Each year, Women’s Studies graduate assistants pursue fundraising endeavors to assist students with the cost associated with attending the annual conference of the National Women’s Studies Association. This spring, we have decided to fundraise in a different way than we have before — by selling flip-flops! Tabling in the Centennial Student Union during the week before spring break, we sold sandals in twenty-four bright, fun, eye catching patterns to students headed for warm weather destinations.

Our sunny table stands out from tables of pamphlets and baked goods that are standard fare in the student union, and has drawn a lot of attention, even from students who smile at the juxtaposition of our merchandise and the lingering snow outside. In later weeks of spring, as the days get warmer and longer, we will continue to sell the flip-flops, and we are optimistic that we will be successful in raising the substantial funds needed to help send women to the National Women’s Studies conference.

Spring 2008
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 Cincinnati, Ohio this June. Another effort is to support the Carol Ortman Perkins Lectureship, which invites lecturers to campus based on their contributions to feminist scholarship and their ability to think creatively about connections between theory and practice (past speakers: Kathy Najimy, Gloria Steinem, Wilma Mankiller, and Dorothy Allison!). 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. You can be part of this effort 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!

Women’s Studies at Minnesota State University, Mankato

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