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Director's Chair

Our big event for 2012-13 featured Sandra Fluke as our main speaker for the year, and she packed the house! In case your memory needs refreshing, **Sandra Fluke**, a law student at Georgetown University, won both admiration and opprobrium on a national scale after she testified at a House Democratic steering committee meeting about aspects of the Affordable Health Care Act then being proposed. If that doesn't refresh your memory, you may recall Rush Limbaugh's irrational, misogynist attack on her. Or perhaps you caught her appearance during the Democratic Convention last fall. She came to campus on September 24, giving a short talk titled "Economics and Equality: How Obstacles to Women's Health Care Access Affects Us All." Her presentation to a polarized (but mostly sympathetic) crowd of 500 was followed by a panel discussion about reproductive rights as an aspect of women's health care. SMU's **Karen Thomas**, a professor in the journalism division, served as moderator; the panelists were Associate Provost and Dedman Law Professor **Linda Eads**; Professor **Charlie Curran**, holder of SMU's Elizabeth Scurlock University Chair of Human Values; and Mr. **Kenneth Lambrecht**, the CEO of Planned Parenthood of Greater Texas.



Sandra Fluke

Fluke, a wonderfully poised presenter who expresses herself with admirable clarity, forthrightness, and humor, gave generously of her time. A whirlwind day brought her downtown to be interviewed by **Krys Boyd** of KERA's respected talk show THINK; she was whisked back to give an on-camera interview to journalism students; and following her talk, after signing autographs and posing for pictures with a long line of admiring students for at least a half hour, she met with student activists from across the metroplex until after 9:30 at night. It was a great day for our program.

WGS followed up with a related program in January. Titled "Collateral Damage – A Panel Discussion on the Forgotten Needs of Under- and Uninsured Women," it formed part of a series that the *Texas Observer* has been running in response to the state legislature's decimation of reproductive health care. **Ken Lambrecht** of Planned Parenthood returned, joined by **state senator Wendy Davis** and **Dr. Deborah Fuller**, an SMU alumna who now practices locally as an obstetrician and gynecologist. All spoke movingly and knowledgeably about the negative effects of the legislature's recent actions on the health of women and families in Texas.

Other speakers and events our program co-sponsored this year include the following:

- **Professor Michael Kimmel**, Distinguished Professor of Sociology at SUNY Stony Brook, who is best known for his many books about masculinity
- **Carol Adams**, author of *The Sexual Politics of Meat*
- **Rebecca Walker**, author of *Baby Love: Choosing Motherhood After a Lifetime of Ambivalence* (2007), *Black, White, and Jewish* (2000), and several other books
- **Reyna Grande**, award-winning novelist, author of *The Distance Between Us*

I would like to give special thanks to Rebekah Boyer, outgoing President of the Women's Interest Network and one of our two WGS majors, for arranging to bring the first three speakers on the list.

I am pleased to announce that **our speaker next year will be Shelby Knox**, whose work on sex education in Texas when she was still a high school student became the subject of the award-winning 2005 film *The Education of Shelby Knox*. Please mark your calendar for the evening of **Monday, October 7**.

Finally, I would like to thank Jessica Lott, my graduate assistant, and Sammy Partida, my undergraduate work-study student, for all the hard work they do for our program.



Beth Newman, Director, WGS

Note: A computer malfunction delayed our Spring 2013 newsletter until the beginning of the Fall semester.

News from the National Women's Studies Association Conference

Director's Note: For the second year in a row, the Women's and Gender Studies Program has sent three students to attend the **National Women's Studies Association** conference. They have captured some of their experience in the three articles that follow. The WGS Program is grateful to an anonymous donor whose generosity has made this travel possible for some of our most committed students.

Lost and Found at the NWSA: Feminist Superheroes and Feminist Commitment

by Bekah Boyer

I had no idea what would await me in Oakland, CA. I have taken too many Women's and Gender studies courses to count (and I have even more feminist themed papers under my belt); I am an active participant in local rallies and fundraisers against the war on women – but nothing in my experience prepared me for my first visit to the annual conference of the National Women's Studies Association.

The decision to go was easy. Only so many students can attend the conference on the WGS program's dime. Quick as I could, I e-mailed my RSVP, not caring who else would go.

Gender theory has been my safe haven. As a survivor of sexual harassment and assault both in high school and in my freshman year of college, I have taken feminist activists and writers as my heroines. When I would get too scared to leave the house or interact with people, I would envision Gloria Steinem in a cape, bell hooks decked out as wonder woman (hooks of course, would insist on lower case letters even as a superhero), Andrea Dworkin fighting crime, and Rebecca Walker smashing patriarchy. I am not the only one who thinks this way: "@feministhulk" writes feminist tweets using the speech pattern of the grammatically challenged Marvel character, and has thousands of followers.

In my comic-book fantasies, I always saw my superfeminists united into a Justice League to destroy oppression. It took my visit to NWSA to learn that in reality they were fighting each other.



Bekah Boyer, at the NWSA Conference

They themselves grew taller by standing on the shoulders of giants and I have the same opportunity waiting for me, if I want to seize it.

But it's okay if I don't. NWSA taught me that merely being me (however much a work in progress) is good enough.

Bekah Boyer is majoring in Art History and Women's and Gender Studies, the latter through Dedman's Individualized Major in the Liberal Arts degree.

Race, Gender, and an Epiphany at the NWSA

by Ruby Kim

In my literature classes, I often find myself passionately highlighting passages in feminist scholarship. Because I was already interested in academic versions of feminism, I looked to the National Women's Studies Association conference with intense curiosity and excitement.

The first day of the conference involved quenching my thirst for feminist discourse and issues related to gender and sexuality. I attended very engaging panels addressing issues of the dislocation of ethnic minorities, a queered reading of the genre of paranormal romance, and the ethics of feminist research. I was fascinated but overwhelmed by intellectual stimulation and ideas swirling in my head.

It was not until the second day at the NSWA, however, that I experienced an epiphany. A workshop called "Asian North American Feminism: Theory Out of Traveling, Traveling Out of Theory" caught my eye in the program. At this intimate roundtable of nine people, an examination of Asian North American feminism allowed me to understand how race and gender intersect. Understanding this 'intersectionality,' to use a term from feminist theory, has empowered me to understand my own marginalization as a woman and a member of an ethnic minority.

Later that afternoon, after attending a follow-up discussion of strategies to overcome oppression, I proposed the idea that we should push for an expanding canon of Asian-American and multicultural literature. Literature allows marginalized groups to represent their experiences, to challenge racist stereotypes, and to construct and maintain a deserved cultural and aesthetic space.

I realized how possible it was to make a change as an individual. I felt I had entered a hidden space and now saw

In-fighting was everywhere. Disagreements escalated quickly. "Feminism should reject the notion of waves," a presenter would suggest, only to be met with **CRASH! BANG! POW!** How could my movement fail me in this way when it had already seen me through what I thought was rock bottom?

On a whim, I went to hear several scholars talk about "life writing" as a vehicle for uniting academia and activism. After the first presenter spoke, I was in tears; by the end, I was resolute. The presenters spoke of failure as a journey. I had just returned to my first semester back to a full class schedule after an emotionally painful medical leave. In a private discussion after the presentation, several of the attendees and presenters went to get coffee. We talked about self-care, about dealing with anxiety in academia, and about balancing the desire to empower others with the need to care for oneself.

The experience was transformative. For the first time I felt the ethic of care. The disagreements were no longer a source of frustration, but rather evidence of the participants' unwavering passion; my desperation was not grief over the shattering of my ideals, but restlessness in the face of my own resolve. These theorists, writers, and mountain-movers were people – flesh and blood just like me.

myself materialized—as an Asian-American feminist. This year’s theme “Feminism Unbound: Imagining a Feminist Future” had a profound effect on my personal, intellectual, and feminist journey. After attending NSWA, I saw a realm beyond lectures and ideas in academia but a world in which I could envision and imagine my own feminist future . . . literally.

Ruby Kim is an English major and double minor in WGS and Psychology

Privilege and Power at the NWSA

by Sammy Partida

I was privileged to attend the National Women’s Studies Association annual Conference for a second time this past November. From hundreds of sessions, booksellers, luncheons, books signings, and more, the NWSA provided an experience of academic rigor and excitement. With over 1,500 scholars, students, and activists, I experienced the camaraderie of shared interests and solidarity on multiple fronts. Its theme was “Imagining a Feminist Future.”



Audience at the NWSA. Picture by Meghan McInnis, NWSA

revealed those same systems that structured my experience as a student, those dynamics that give me certain advantages, and the compulsion of privilege that informed my own ideologies.

After this session, I changed my entire plan for the weekend: I chose sessions and seminars that seemed the most informed by a kind of organic intellectuality (to borrow from Antonio Gramsci). I attended a session that examined the work of Chicana poets and playwrights such as Sandra Cisneros, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Cherrie Moraga, whose progressive feminist vision incorporates race and decenters male experience. I spent my day meditating upon the use of literature and performance to empower activist agendas. Later that weekend I was able to speak with scholars who examined online fan-fiction based on popular television shows and other media, and I attended a panel where the audience and panel discussed queer performances with a focus on Latino/Latina and Black drag performances that explore the intersection of race and sexuality.

The NWSA was a worthwhile experience that I will not forget. I left with more questions than answers, more books to add to my ever-increasing reading list, and new friends to with whom to share it all. I cannot express how transformative this experience has been!

Sammy Partida is majoring in Anthropology and Women’s and Gender Studies, the latter through Dedman College’s Individualized Major in the Liberal Arts degree.

Letter from Anna Skrivanek

[Director's note: Women's and Gender Studies is partnering with the Embrey Human Rights Program to fund a paid internship for a student who participates in both academic programs. Our first intern was Anna Skrivanek, a graduating senior with majors in Anthropology and History, and minors in Political Science, Human Rights, and Women's and Gender Studies. She wrote this letter to keep us posted about the usefulness of the internship.]

February 1, 2013

Dear Women's and Gender Studies Program:

Thank you for giving me an opportunity to briefly recount my experiences as an intern at the **Resource Center Dallas**, a prominent non-profit LGBT [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender] and HIV/AIDS services organization serving the North Texas region. While my internship position only started last August, I've learned so much, already, from the Center's dedicated staff and team of volunteers. Over the past few months, my understanding and awareness of LGBT issues has increased immensely, and I've developed a deeper knowledge base about the day-to-day workings of non-profit organizations.

In the early weeks of my internship, I was assigned to a project involving appropriate conduct for volunteers. After now spending a few months at the Resource Center, I've come to realize that proper conduct—how we engage and interact with those around us—is crucial to ensuring that the organization functions smoothly, particularly in its non-profit capacity.

Shortly after, I was asked to begin research and data collection with respect to domestic partnership benefits at the city and county levels. I wasn't aware until starting this project just how much variation exists between cities and counties offering domestic partner benefits, and in terms of overall cost, the types of benefits available, applicability to children, etc. After weeks of researching the various expenses associated with domestic partner benefits in cities and counties throughout the U.S., the information I collected was sent to DART personnel, where DART's governing board was considering making domestic partner benefits available to its employees. Once DART had made the tentative decision to go forward with offering domestic partner benefits to its employees, I expanded my research findings to include examples of how city and county organizations implemented similar benefits.

Still another project requiring my ongoing time and attention has been my investigation into potential LGBT youth-oriented, evidence-based mental health counseling programs, and their possible implementation at the Resource Center. At their crux, these LGBT youth programs would be designed not only to encourage better relationships between LGBT youth and their families/support systems, but also promote positive behaviors and foster feelings of self-worth among these at risk youth.

In the coming semester, I know that there is still much to be gained from my time and experiences working with Resource Center Dallas staff and volunteers. Without question, the circumstances of this internship have helped me to grow, both as a scholar of Women's and Gender Studies and as an individual committed to the future education and betterment of our nation's young people. And so, in closing, please know how grateful I am for the many opportunities this placement has provided me.

With thanks and appreciation,

Anna

WGS Scholarship and Award Winners 2012-13

WGS/Embrey Human Rights Internship at Resource Center Dallas:

2012-13: Anna Skrivanek

WGS is proud to present the 2012-2013 class of Betty Jeanette Maynard Scholars, who received scholarships totaling nearly \$25,000 recognition of their academic achievement:



Tabitha Gorena, '13 Psychology major; Philosophy and WGS minors



Nancy Fuentes '13 Anthropology major; WGS minor



Ruby Kim '14 English major; Psychology and WGS minor



Samuel Partida '14; majors in Anthropology and Individualized Studies in the Liberal Arts with a Focus in WGS

Ann Early Award for excellence in WGS scholarship and service to the program:



Anna Skrivanek, '13; majors in Anthropology and History, minors in Political Science, Human Rights, and Women's and Gender Studies

The Margareta Deschner Teaching Award:



Associate Professor **Sheri Kunovich**, Department of Sociology.

This award recognizes excellent teaching about women, gender, and/or sexuality, whether or not the professor's courses focus on these topics.

One student wrote, "I firmly believe it is strong, impassioned women like Dr. Kunovich who will act as catalysts in furthering women's progression towards equality. As a gender scholar and a feminist, I would be immensely proud to see her accomplishments honored by this award."

Announcing the WGS Lecture 2013: Shelby Knox

When: *Monday, October 7, at 6:30 PM.* Where: *Hughes-Trigg Theater*

Shelby Knox is the subject of the award-winning 2005 film *The Education of Shelby Knox*, which documents the political and intellectual evolution of a 15-year-old high-school student from Lubbock, Texas, after she joined a campaign in her hometown for comprehensive sex education.

News and Announcements

Professor **Nia Parson**, Anthropology, has published *Traumatic States: Gendered Violence, Suffering, and Care in Chile* with Vanderbilt University Press.

Laura Buck '13 will work as a Patient Advocate for Compass Professional Health Services beginning in June.

Rebekah Boyer Dec. '13, a WGS student pursuing the individualized major with a focus in WGS, was given the Emmie V. Baine Legacy Award by the Women's Center.

Alex Day '15 will take a Campus Outreach Intern position with Planned Parenthood of Greater Texas in the fall.

Anna Skrivanek '13 will teach with Teach for America in San Antonio.

Jaime Toussaint '13 is Development Director at Legacy Counseling Center in Dallas, a nonprofit mental health and substance abuse counseling center for individuals affected by HIV/AIDS.

Whitney Harp '14 will intern with Merriott Terry, the CEO of IGNITE Texas. IGNITE is a national nonprofit dedicated to developing the political ambitions of young women. As part of her work, she will teach a course to students at the DISD Law Magnet school about how government and democracy work.

Nancy Fuentes '13 is working for Cigna in Dallas as a claims manager for those with long-term disabilities.

Please send us your news! Alums, we especially want to hear what you're up to! Drop us a line at womnstud@smu.edu.

We also welcome you to "like" us on [Facebook](#).

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