

WOMEN'S STUDIES NEWS

SPRING, 2002

VOLUME 5, ISSUE 1

DIRECTOR'S UPDATE

Diana Scully, Director

As I reflect on the past academic year, one that carries vivid memories of the tragedy of 9-11, I am pleased to report that the Women's Studies Program continues to grow and to fill an important niche within the VCU community.

With the rest of VCU and the country, members of the Women's Studies Program were shocked and grieved by the tragic events of September 11 and the war that followed. In addition to classroom teaching about these events, members of the Program participated in the organizing committee for an all day teach-in at VCU that was widely attended by students, faculty, staff and members of the Richmond community. Additionally, the Women's Studies Program sponsored a viewing of "Beneath the Veil." Students packed the Commons Theatre for this documentary on the life of women in Afghanistan under the Taliban as reported by journalist Saira Shah as she journeyed through Afghanistan searching for the birthplace of her father.

Last year I reported that a Women's Studies major in the Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies Program had been approved effective fall, 2001. This year I am delighted to report that in the first semester of the major, 17 students changed or added Women's Studies as their major. And this academic year will witness the graduation of our first majors: Kellee Kent, Katherine Link and Tiffany Puryear. We wish them continued great accomplishments!

One of our goals in the Women's Studies Program has been to globalize our curriculum and to provide Women's Studies focused opportunities for students to study abroad. This summer, our goal will be accomplished in a spectacular way as 23 students, parents, faculty and friends travel with the Women's Studies Program to Uganda and Kenya (see story P. 2). The primary purpose of the trip is to attend the Eighth International Interdisciplinary Congress on Women, "Women's Worlds 2002," at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda. You can expect lots of pictures in *Women's Studies News* next year!

Virginia Commonwealth University

Director's Update, Continued

At VCU, 2001-02 will be remembered as the year of budget cuts when a worsening economy, deficits in state revenue due to the phase out of the state car tax, and expenses related to September 11, resulted in a number of budget reductions. The consequence is that the Women's Studies Program, like all the other departments and programs, now will have less operating funds at our disposal. Particularly at times like this we rely on our friends to help. If you are interested in becoming a "Friend of Women's Studies," please see the back cover for details.

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CONGRATULATIONS!

Dr. Janet Winston

(Women's Studies and English) has been awarded a research fellowship at the Center for the Humanities at Oregon State University for the 2002-2003 academic year. She will spend the year at Oregon State working on her book, *Victoria after Victorianism: Twentieth-Century Revisions of the Great White Queen*. Dr. Winston's project seeks to clarify Victoria's significance in twentieth-century literature and film, when artists and writers in Britain and beyond transformed her again—from beloved sovereign, to Modernist joke, to Nazi drunk to white supremacist idol.

Best wishes Janet, we will miss you!

New Women's
Studies logo in
black, purple
and red



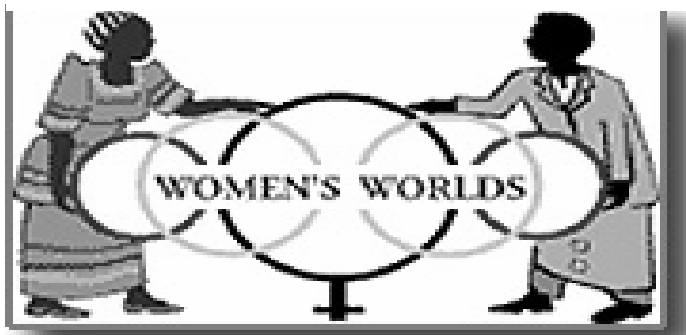
WOMEN'S STUDIES TO TRAVEL TO EAST AFRICA

The anticipation mounts as 13 students, 3 faculty, 2 parents and 5 friends prepare for a July 19, 2002 departure to Uganda and Kenya.

In Uganda, the group will attend the "Women's Worlds 2002" conference and simultaneous meeting of the newly formed World Organization of Women's Studies (WOWS) both hosted by the Department of Women and Gender Studies at Makerere University in Kampala. While at the conference, the group will attend sessions and special events on a range of topics that include women and education, health, water, sanitation and housing, globalization, workplace and economy, family, media, agriculture and environment, peace and conflict, science and technology, politics and government, law and human rights, women's movements, women's studies and men's studies and non-governmental organizations (NGO). Students will work on their Study Abroad research projects and have the opportunity to hear and meet prominent scholars from around the world. From problems related to the lack of potable water to the effect of war on women and children, students will come away with an appreciation of women's lives that are very different from their own.

After the conference, the VCU group will fly to Nairobi, Kenya where they will be met by safari vehicles and begin their trek to the Amboseli National Game Preserve for several days of safari. Nestled at the foot of towering Mt. Kilimanjaro, the Amboseli is home to the Maasai as well as over 400 species of birds and 50 species of larger mammals that include buffalo, lion, gazelle, cheetah, wildebeest, hyena, jackal, warthog, giraffe, zebra, baboon, and black rhino. The Amboseli also is known for its huge herds of elephants and for the elephant preserve established by Cynthia Moss and Joyce Pool who have been studying these animals for over 20 years.

From the Amboseli, the group will fly to Mombassa located on the Indian Ocean. Mombassa is the oldest city in Kenya with a history that dates back 2000 years and a culture that combines African, Arab, Asian and European elements. The group will end their journey in Nairobi spending several days sightseeing, visiting women's organizations and museums such as the former home of Karen von Blixen who wrote under the name Isak Dinesen. It will be a tired but enriched group that touches down at Washington Dulles on August 6!



SUGGESTED READING



Women in Africa
Hollie Mann, Women's Studies

Judith M. Abwunza: *Women's Voices, Women's Power*. Broadview, 1999.

This text is an ethnographic study of the AVALOGOLI of Western Kenya. The author looks at the ways women have been able to empower themselves and resist a society that remains patriarchal in spite of economic development. Abwunza argues that the technological advancement occurring in Logoli society may be encouraging the empowerment of women, while simultaneously oppressing them.

Obioma Nnaemeka (ed.): *Sisterhood, Feminisms & Power: From Africa to the Diaspora*. Africa World Press, 1998

This volume is an indispensable collection of essays written by prominent scholars, feminists, womanists and creative writers from Africa to the Diaspora. Issues and conflicts in feminism and Black Women's Studies are presented in a critical dialog across geographic and ethnic lines.

K. Srujana: *Status of Women in Kenya*: Kalinga, 1996.

This sociological study takes a look at the status of women in Kenya society from pre-colonial to modern times. The author focuses primarily on the socio-economic roles of women in Kenya and the ways in which they are effected by international relations and the global economy.

Sylvia Tamale: *When Hens Begin to Crow*. Westview Press, 1999.

Tamale's study of Ugandan women in politics looks at the various ways the government of Uganda has attempted to empower women through legislative strategies. She takes a closer look at the political lives of five women to examine how they have dealt with the challenges of democracy and development in an historically patriarchal system.

Sandra Wallman: *Kampala Women Getting By: Well-being in the Time of AIDS*. Ohio University Press, 1996.

Wallman's anthropologic study focuses on women in a densely populated section of Kampala called Kamwoka. Women are responsible for the management of illness, including AIDS. The book analyzes how they maintain the well-being of the household in a setting that lacks what would be considered basic health service in the US.

BENEATH THE VEIL

Last fall, a capacity crowd gathered in the Commons Theatre for a Women's Studies sponsored viewing of *Beneath the Veil*, a documentary on the lives of women in Afghanistan prior to September 11. The events following September 11 sparked discussions about global politics and the complexities of international relations on college campuses across the country. The Women's Studies Program contributed to this discourse by providing an open forum for discussion of the ways in which women's lives in Afghanistan have been effected by the rule of the Taliban, terrorism and the gendered nature of global politics.

Beneath the Veil gives a chilling account of the lives of women after the Taliban came to power in 1996. Although Afghanistan has been closed to outside media, British journalist Saira Shah was able to penetrate the inside world of the Taliban as she went undercover with the aid of the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA). While under the veil, Shah discovers unimaginable human suffering among the women and children living in Afghanistan. Amongst the devastation, Shah also finds efforts to empower women and a steadfast will to resist extreme fundamentalism.

Dr. Deirdre Condit opened the viewing with comments on the political and historical context for *Beneath the Veil*. Dr. Diana Scully and Dr. Deirdre Condit fielded questions after the showing. Students and audience members exchanged ideas on a number of topics including the condition of women in Afghanistan, Islam, terrorism and the US war.

RESOURCES ISLAM AND WOMEN AFGHAN WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS

Books

Ahmed, Leila. **Women and Gender in Islam**. Yale University Press, 1992.

Badran, Margot. **Feminist Islam and Nation**. Syracuse University Press, 1995.

Murata, Sachiko. **The Tao of Islam**. SUNY University Press,

Roded, Ruth, ed. **Women in Islam and the Middle East**. I.B. Tauris, 1999.

Resources, Continued

Books

Wadud, Amina: **Qur'an and Women**. Oxford University Press, 1999.

Webb, (ed.): **Windows of Faith**. Syracuse University Press, 2000.

Web Sites

Acting in Solidarity with Afghan People (ASAP)

(www.asap-net.org) an organization committed to the alleviation of oppression and human rights violations in Afghanistan.

Afghan Women's Mission

(www.afghanwomensmission.org) homepage of the Afghan Women's Mission dedicated to funding programs run by Afghan women's organizations to address health care needs of refugees.

Feminist Majority Foundation

(www.feminist.org/afghan/intro.asp) information on the Feminist Majority Foundation's campaign to end gender apartheid.

The Global Fund for Women

(www.globalfundforwomen.org) information on how to become involved in supporting women's rights organizations globally.

Muslim Women's League

(www.mwlusa.org) a United States Muslim organization working to implement the values of Islam and thereby reclaim the status of women as free, equal and vital contributors to society.

Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan

(www.rawa.org) the RAWA homepage where you can search for information as well as purchase RAWA merchandise to support the cause of Afghan women.

Sisters in Islam

(www.sistersinislam.org.my) a group of Muslim professional women committed to promoting the rights of women within the framework of Islam.

Women's Association for Peace and Human Rights in Afghanistan (WAPHA)

(www.wapha.org) an organization committed to restoring human rights for women and children in Afghanistan.

DEIRDRE CONDIT ON MOTHERHOOD AND WORK

Dr. Deirdre M. Condit is an assistant professor in the VCU Women's Studies Program and the Department of Political Science and Public Administration. She has had her hands full since becoming a new mother last May. Recently, she took time out of her very busy schedule to talk with me about her experiences as a new mother while continuing her full-time work at VCU. The following article is a summary of our discussion.

Hollie Mann, Women's Studies

On May 19, 2001, Deirdre Condit could only imagine how drastically her life would change the next day. Indeed, nothing would ever look the same in her world again. Corbette Michelle was born on May 20, 2001 to Dr. Deirdre Condit and her partner Dr. Cliff Fox. This day had been a long time coming and Deirdre was ready for the changes being a new mom would bring. She just wasn't certain what all of those changes would be.

Deirdre approached having a baby as she does most everything in her life, with a clear intent to be well prepared and knowledgeable in every way possible. Prior to the birth of Corbette, she spent a lot of time reading about child development and parenting. Through this process, Deirdre came to the decision that Corbette would spend at least the first year of her life with her mother and father. They would be her full-time primary caretakers. Deirdre has strong opinions about child rearing. "With the exception of the kangaroo, the human baby is the most helpless of all newly born creatures," said Deirdre, "So, why do we insist on just putting a kid out there in the world without first giving her or him all of the support and love needed in order to survive?"

Deirdre and Cliff decided not to take any time off from teaching after the birth of Corbette. Deirdre is an assistant professor at VCU in the Women's Studies Program and the Department of Political Science and Public Administration. She has kept her normal load of three classes a semester and has continued to sit on several committees at the university. This makes for a very interesting and unusually hectic life, as she is also performing the full-time job of motherhood. When asked what this experience is like for her, Deirdre laughs for a moment, and says, "Honestly, it's awful!" Of course, she loves teaching and becoming a mother has fulfilled her in many ways. However, she often feels as though she's leading a double life and the pressures of both motherhood and teaching can be very demanding. Deirdre acknowledges that she generally feels multiple guilts about where her time and energy are going. Known around the VCU campus as one of those rare professors who always goes the extra ten miles, who is readily available for her students day and night, Deirdre must now devote most of that energy to her newly born daughter. When she is with Corbette, she often feels she should be with her students. When she is with her students, she is usually anxious about being away from Corbette. She feels that this shifting of her energy is necessary but is also transient. Deirdre is confident that once her daughter becomes a little older she will be able to return to her general approach to teaching and to her extraordinary dedication to her students.

Daily life has become strikingly different for Deirdre since Corbette came into her life. You can usually catch her eating a quick lunch during her fifteen-minute break between classes or walking across campus with Corbette on her back while meeting with students. Her schedule has been flipped entirely upside down and life revolves around dropping off and picking up Corbette, a routine that Cliff and Deirdre have down to a science. She also decided to breast feed Corbette, which puts another interesting kink in the family schedule. The day usually begins with Deirdre and Corbette spending most of the morning together while Cliff heads off to work. He is the Assistant Director of the Center for Environmental Studies at VCU and manages to teach full-time, perform various duties at the Center and take care of Corbette. Around mid-day, Deirdre usually brings Corbette to work and drops her off with Cliff while she teaches her afternoon classes. When classes are over, Deirdre picks up Corbette up so that Cliff can take his turn teaching late afternoon and evening classes. In the evenings, Deirdre goes to bed with Corbette then wakes up at 11:00 PM and works until 3:00 AM. This is the only way she can get all of her grading, writing and reading done. The daily schedule varies depending on who is teaching and when, but generally Corbette remains with her mother or father most of the time. Deirdre feels that Corbette's constant interaction with her parents, as well as all of her adoring fans at the university, will contribute to a strong sense of self and ease with people.

The division of labor in the Condit-Fox household has always been egalitarian. The only major difference now is a significant increase in work for both Cliff and Deirdre. It is usually the case that they are both doing more than one task at the same time. When asked about some of the daily aspects of life that have changed, Deirdre smiles and says, "Well, you never think about having to take a shower when you're home alone with the baby until the first time it needs to happen." Deirdre and Cliff readily admit they are lucky to be in positions that allow to them to continue working while raising their daughter without putting her in daycare. Deirdre often says that she cannot imagine how single mothers do everything she is doing and more. Deirdre acknowledges that it is a constant learning process and there are always adjustments and fine-tuning involved in being a parent, particularly while continuing to work. But if you ever have the privilege of seeing Deirdre with her daughter and the way her face lights up every time she sees her it's easy to feel the sheer joy she experiences as a mother. It is clear that motherhood was well worth the wait for Deirdre Condit and the benefits far outweigh the costs.



ALL ABOUT FAN

Feminist Action Network (FAN) is a registered VCU student organization dedicated to women's issues and concerns on campus and in the community.

This year, FAN sponsored the *Who's Your Mamma Hootenanny*, an outdoor women's music and art festival featuring five female bands headlined by *The Best Kind* held on March 23rd in Shafer Court. The event featured a visual arts exhibit, street theatre and performance art in between band sets. The purpose of the event was to give women a forum to express themselves artistically and musically in a woman-centered space and to provide an opportunity for other women to experience and become a part of the vital Women's Art Movement happening in Richmond. FAN hopes to make this exciting music festival an annual VCU event.

FAN has already prepared a budget and begun planning for next year's activities including a Sexual Assault and Rape Prevention Campaign, monthly film viewings, and a conference on Multiculturalism and Feminism. FAN membership is growing steadily and the group looks forward to making FAN and the advancement of women's issues a vital and integral part of VCU campus life. FAN meets every Tuesday at 6:00 PM in Scherer Hall, Room 103. Look for announcements about FAN on the Women's Studies bulletin board in the same building. Membership is free and open to all interested students.

CONSIDER A DOUBLE MAJOR

Did you know that if you are pursuing a minor in Women's Studies (18 credits), you can add Women's Studies as a second major (30 credits) for only 12 additional credits? If your first major is in the College of Humanities and Sciences, your General Education requirements will not change. For a major, in addition to WMNS 201-Introduction to Women's Studies, WMNS 301-Feminist Social Theory **or** WMNS 352/ENGL 352-Feminist Literary Theory, and a diversity course (also requirements for the minor), you will need WMNS 401-Senior Seminar, one course in the social sciences, one course in the humanities (both from approved lists) and one additional Women's Studies course of your choice.

There are real benefits to combining majors. Whatever your career goals are adding Women's Studies will be an advantage in work where women and/or girls are the focus. If you would like more information, please contact Dr. Diana Scully, dhscully@vcu.edu.

CONGRATULATIONS!

Aphrodite Hairston
Black History in the Making
Women's Studies Award

and

Melissa Butcher
College of Humanities and Sciences
Outstanding Women's Studies Award



Aphrodite Hairston

Melissa Butcher

WOMEN'S STUDIES PIZZA SOCIAL

In October the Women's Studies Program hosted its annual student appreciation pizza social. The event was held in the Siegel Center and everyone enjoyed free pizza and drinks. Once again, this event proved to be an excellent opportunity for students and faculty to discuss ideas about the Women's Studies Program and hear information on upcoming events. We look forward to seeing everyone there again next fall.

ALUMNA NEWS

We would love to hear from you.
Send us your news about yourself for
Women's Studies News!

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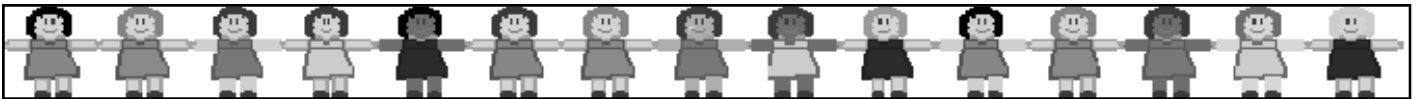
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