Visions & Voices

Women's Studies Newsletter

Photos by: Litzy Noweblewski
Women’s Studies Affiliate Dedicated to Hunger Prevention

By: Mary Canales

With the arrival of spring and thoughts turning towards warmer weather, it is the ideal time to reflect on the past to prepare for the future. As a professor in the Department of Nursing and a Women’s Studies Program affiliate, I often find myself too busy to pause and consider the possible impact of my work on others. This faculty newsletter article provides the impetus and timely opportunity for me to do just that!

When I arrived at UW–Eau Claire in January 2009, I was conducting research with Native American tribes in the Northeast, developing and implementing culturally relevant cancer education programs as part of a multidisciplinary team. Although I wanted to continue with this important and much-needed work, I also wanted to begin to explore research opportunities in my new home community. I am originally from Wisconsin and lived for a very brief (nine months) time in Eau Claire in the mid-1980s but had not lived in the state since 1998. I knew that I wanted to continue to collaborate with community partners and engage in a project that would improve the lives of those who are often underserved, including women. My commitment to women’s health and social justice has been the driving force behind all my scholarship efforts, and I wanted to continue on this path. Fortunately another long-standing commitment—saving the environment—led me to study barriers and facilitators for integrating local food into larger organizations. This work led to my connections with the local Hunger Prevention Coalition, which is also interested in food but from a very different perspective: the real problem of food insecurity in Eau Claire County. Through this coalition I found my niche!

During the past two and a half years I have been part of a collaborative UW–Eau Claire/community partnership to explore the meaning of food insecurity from the perspectives of parents experiencing it in their daily lives and agency staff trying to assist families to meet this very basic need. The majority of parents interviewed for our study are women, the majority of service providers working to improve these women’s lives are women, and our team is all women. I am fortunate to be surrounded by women dedicated to reducing food insecurity in our county.

The partners on the project include the director of the Feed My People Food Bank, Emily Moore; the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) education coordinator for UW-Extension in Eau Claire County, Nancy Coffey; and UWEC alumni Melissa Gullickson, Meghan Lynch, and Brenda Kaczmarski. The students/alumni have been involved over the past year while Emily, Nancy, and I continue to move our efforts forward. We’ve conducted seven focus-group interviews with parents, and a few grandparents, who have children in the home. We hope to learn from their experiences what it means to be unable to meet their family’s basic food needs. Six of the groups were held in Eau Claire and one in Fall Creek so we could understand differences between urban and rural families. One of the Eau Claire groups was held with Hmong parents so their unique experiences could be better understood. The focus group with agency providers was held in Eau Claire, although it included staff who serve families throughout the county. During this process I learned much about my community partners: their passion for improving access to healthy and affordable food for all residents of Eau Claire County; their commitment of time, energy, and resources to ensure the project was completed and results shared; and their fun-loving personalities that often made it possible to read through the very difficult and often heart-wrenching stories we had collected over the year. I also learned a lot about myself (self-reflection is essential in these very busy times, yet is often underrated). I’ve learned that I might be an accomplished researcher but I am not very well connected to the community I live in; that I am a good writer who has published many academic papers but when it comes to child care and babysitting, I am barely average; and that the work I do with others is by far superior to any that I do on my own.

As a team we presented our study’s results on campus, at the state capital in Madison, at two state public-health-related conferences, and to small groups in Eau Claire. As part of our effort to sensitize the community to the plight of people who often live next door or down the street, we hosted a film event on campus. A Place at the Table. This film event also required extensive collaboration including UW–Eau Claire faculty, students, and Events Services, BluGold Dining/Sodexo, the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, Memorial High School students, local media, and many community agencies. Again because of the many partners involved, it was a huge success! These are small steps we are taking to engage others so they too can learn what we did from parents experiencing hunger and together identify ways to solve what often seems an intractable problem.

Our next steps will be funded through a Wisconsin Partnership Program grant awarded to our team to bring together stakeholders in the county who are also committed to eliminating hunger. Collaboration is the key to success, as women, we know that this is the only way to succeed! So as you begin to make summer plans and ponder all the opportunities that await you in the future, remember the women in your lives that have made it possible for you to be where you are today. Consider how you can collaborate with other women, and men, to make a difference in your own community and beyond.
Jessica Valenti’s Visit Spurs Activism at UW–Eau Claire

I was born and grew up in a village in Sichuan Province, China. Before coming to the United States, I taught English at a university in China. I came to the United States in 2004 to pursue women’s studies. I have been in the field since then. I received an M.A. in women’s studies from Georgia State University and a Ph.D. in feminist studies from the University of Minnesota. My research focuses on Chinese ecowomanism, exploring non-western, rural, and indigenous women’s experience and knowledge production in western China. Ecospirituality is a consistent theme in my research and writing. My essay “Nature, Sexuality, and Spirituality: A Womanist Reading of Di Mu (Earth Mother) and Di Mu Jing (Songs of Earth Mother) in China” examines the link between Di Mu Belief, western Chinese rural women’s agency, and sustainability. My forthcoming essay “Turning Weapons into Flowers: Ecospiritual Poetics and Politics of Bön and Ecowomanism” elaborates on the ecospiritual ethos of peacemaking, ecospiritual knowing and knowledge production informed by Tibetan Bön thought. My first novel, “Let My Head Split like a Sunflower, My Tears Fall like Raindrops” is under review by Aunt Lute Books. The novel is based on my field research on women and indigenous spirituality in southwest rural China and Tibet.

I am passionate about teaching. I practice feminist and womanist pedagogy of liberation and care. I have taught both elective and core courses in Gender and Women’s Studies, including Gender and Global Politics, Literature by U.S. Women of Color, and Asian American Women’s Cultural Production, among others. I joined the Women’s Studies Program at the University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire in the fall of 2013. The courses I teach include WMNS 100: U.S. Women’s Experience: Gender, Race, Class, WMNS 301: Examining Women’s Studies, and WMNS434: Women and the Humanities. I enjoy teaching here and I will continue to give my best to the Women’s Studies Program.
Greetings! It is my honor to contribute to the Women's Studies Program newsletter. I am an assistant professor in the Economics Department and a Women's Studies Program affiliate. I have a PhD in economics from the City University of New York (2008). I joined UW–Eau Claire in 2008. I identify as a feminist economist. Hence my research specialization is economics of gender inequality, including the gender gap in infant and child mortality, women's empowerment, and gender issues in South Asia. I strive to promote global feminism and improve women's status worldwide. I have a deep connection with the Women's Studies Program and enjoy contributing to the program through research, teaching, and service.

I am originally from India, born into a middle-class family in urban Kolkata, a large metropolitan city in eastern India. From my early life, I witnessed many forms of poverty and gender inequality around me. My own identity as a woman developed through some interesting contradictions and conflicting pressures. On the one hand, I was encouraged by my parents to get plenty of education, to enter a man's world with a full-time career, and to value financial independence above all else. On the other hand, I was also often coached to maintain my feminine appropriateness, stay indoors after dark in order to be safe, be extra careful around strangers, and to marry and settle down early in life.

I completed my undergraduate education in Kolkata, majoring in economics. Later, I completed an MBA in marketing. In the year 2000, I moved to Mumbai (India’s commercial capital) with an entry-level management position in a consumer products company. I found myself lacking sufficient intellectual challenge and after a year, I realized that I was thirsting for further education and an interesting career that would challenge me. I started applying for doctoral programs at various economics departments in the United States. In July 2003, I moved to New York City and started a fascinating new life journey!

My choice of economics with an emphasis on gender inequality was inspired by the scholarly work of Nobel Laureate Dr. Amartya Sen, whose books inspired me to approach economics as a means to combat inequalities in general and gender inequality in particular. It is Dr. Sen’s work that gave me the confidence that economics can be combined with women’s studies. Dr. Sen and other stellar scholars helped me develop the passion and a lifelong commitment to promote female empowerment and gender equality.


To give some examples of my areas of research, in a recently published paper, I analyzed the determinants of female infant mortality disadvantage in India. In another paper, I estimated the number of excess female infant deaths in India due to gender discrimination and childhood neglect. I have examined correlates of marital violence in Bangladesh. In other recent papers, I studied women’s AIDS awareness in Bangladesh, correlates of fertility in India, and regional variations in excess female infant mortality in India. Since 2007, I have presented my research at twenty-one conferences and invited presentations. I also serve the profession by reviewing books and by providing peer-referee opinions to several journals.

Among several ongoing research projects, I am most excited about a book manuscript that I am writing, Women and Girls of India: A Feminist-Economics Approach to Gender Inequality and Female Empowerment. This book brings together my many years of interdisciplinary scholarly experience, and in particular builds upon the research expertise that I have acquired during my time at UW–Eau Claire. This book will present a comprehensive, multidimensional analysis of the eight most important dimensions of female status, with a focus on twenty-first century India.

At UW–Eau Claire, I have taught freshman-level courses including ECON 103: Principles of Microeconomics as well as upper-division courses such as ECON 337: Women and Labor Markets, ECON 330: Economics of American Minorities, and WMNS 301: Examining Women’s Studies. I have collaborated with several students on research projects. Several of these projects have won the Women’s Studies Program undergraduate research award at UW–Eau Claire and have been presented at undergraduate research conferences, including the National Conference on Undergraduate Research, the Midwest Economics Association annual meetings, and the UW–Eau Claire Celebration of Excellence in Research and Creative Activity.

I enjoy being involved in service activities at the university. I am a member of the Women’s Studies Program Curriculum Committee and have in the past served as a member of UW–Eau Claire’s Chancellor’s Commission on the Status of Women and as a member of the Women’s Studies Undergraduate Student Research Award panel.

I live in Eau Claire with my husband. In my spare time, I enjoy reading mystery and thriller novels. I also like to watch movies and enjoy cooking Indian food. I am also in the habit of pampering our cat, Trixi. She is funny, smart, adorable, and very spoiled!
Greetings! I am Jeni Haddad, a new adjunct professor/lecturer of women's studies here at UW–Eau Claire. I am very excited to be teaching here, especially as this is my undergraduate alma mater. I graduated from UW–Eau Claire with double majors in women's studies and English literature and went on to get my master's degree from the Gender and Women's Studies Program at Minnesota State University in Mankato, Minnesota.

While a graduate student, and later as an adjunct professor at Minnesota State University, I had opportunities to teach a variety of classes, including Feminist Theory, Introduction to Gender, Global Perspectives on Women and Change, Coming of Age, Women and Spirituality, and Violence and Gender. This is my second semester at UW–Eau Claire, and I taught WMNS 310: Women and Violence in the fall, and am currently teaching WMNS 100: United States Women's Experiences: Gender, Race, and Class.

Throughout my education, I have always had a deep passion for social justice; this is (and always will be!) an essential aspect in my life. I remember being simultaneously challenged and inspired in my very first women's studies course and feeling I finally had a language to express many emotions and concepts that I had about the world. This challenge and inspiration is what I hope to bring to my students, and certainly what my students continue to teach me about. In all my classes, as well as in my own feminist and social-justice work, I find it essential to focus on intersectional praxis to integrate theories and actions so we can question and resist systems of oppression. I firmly believe in the concept of “everyday activism,” and I know that what we choose to do and how we choose to live our lives on a daily basis can and does create change.

Along with my passion in teaching and learning about gender and working for equality, I am also strongly passionate about ending gendered violence against women and girls. Since my graduation from my master's program, I have been engaged in antiviolence work: as an advocate in a shelter in Minnesota for women and children who were fleeing domestic violence and now currently as the Domestic Violence Program director for the Family Support Center in Chippewa Falls. I work with women, men, and children who have experienced domestic violence during their journeys to find safety and peace. While this can be a difficult field, I also know that I am lucky to be present in the lives of the individuals with whom I work and to participate in the process of empowering them. They give me hope, every day, that together we can eradicate forms of oppression.

I am very excited to be part of this amazing team in the Women's Studies Program at UW–Eau Claire, and am looking forward to an engaging semester!
Women’s Studies Program Alum Tells Why She Needs Feminism

By: Gretchen Bachmeier

Although almost five years have since passed, I can still remember during the car ride home from freshman orientation proudly telling my parents I was registered to take a women’s studies course. I couldn’t answer their questions about what a women’s studies course consisted of, but that didn’t discourage me. The course sounded interesting, it sounded like me. The first day of my WMNS 100 course my professor asked the class to raise their hands if they considered themselves a feminist. I quickly and probably prematurely raised my hand, not fully understanding what a feminist really was. I figured: whatever a feminist is I must be one. By the end of the semester I was glad I had raised my hand the first day, for I was well on my way to understanding what it meant to be a feminist and to being sure I was one.

It’s hard to grasp how much I grew during my undergraduate studies. The women’s studies courses I took were truly transformative. Being raised in Eau Claire, I came into college with a limited perspective. I quickly learned my white, middle-class, Catholic, heterosexual background left much room to examine and challenge the privileges in my life. For me, as for most people, challenging my privilege hasn’t been the smoothest of roads. It’s been a road filled with much guilt. I’ve learned to redirect that guilt and to learn privilege does not prohibit me from being a good-enough or a true-enough feminist.

I’ve been blessed to have many opportunities as a women’s studies undergraduate. The summer after my freshman year, I attended the National Conference for College Women Student Leaders. I also participated in several student organizations, including V-Day and College Fems. The last three semesters of my academic career, I had the incredible opportunity to intern in the Women’s and LGBTQ Resource Center. My involvement with the center was a vehicle for active participation in educating the university community on issues and concerns facing women. I feel my presence as an intern for the center allowed me the opportunity to develop unique relationships with the student body. In addition to these experiences, I am immensely grateful for the mentors I had. The Women’s Studies Program has incredible leadership filled with faculty, staff, and affiliates without whom my undergrad experience wouldn’t have been the same.

As I approached graduation, I was reminded that the workforce expects graduates to be able to successfully navigate their jobs while mastering the skill of collaboration. I feel significantly more prepared in this skill due to my women’s studies degree. The program taught me how to relate better to others and to understand that we all come from different backgrounds, perspectives, and lived experiences. Women’s studies students learn to love the question: what are you going to with a women’s studies degree? I look at the world through a completely different set of lenses because of this program. These lenses taught me not only what it means to stand your truth but how to actually stand in it. So, my sassy answer to “the question” is: what will you do without one?

In June, I will be starting a job with Target in the Minneapolis area. I would be lying if I didn’t say I was a little nervous to leave the comfort and community I have gained here at UW–Eau Claire. It will be a new challenge to find new outlets of activism and a new community. To overcome the uncertainty, I must remember my all-consuming demand for equality and my love of feminism. I breathe it. I walk it. Some days the walk is lonelier than others and some days it feels as if it would be more comforting to turn around. I refuse to turn around. I will keep pushing forward.

Another Alum Set to Complete Master’s Degree at University of North Carolina Greensboro

By: Hannah Leudtke

Majoring in women’s studies at UW–Eau Claire changed my life more than I ever could have expected. The decision to add the major came after I decided I no longer wanted to continue with the education portion of my English education degree. I suddenly found myself needing to add a minor or another major in order to graduate. My boyfriend—now my husband—recommended considering women’s studies. Having taken one women’s literature class with Dr. Audrey Fessler, I decided to ask her more about what the Women’s Studies Program entailed. My time in the program was rushed, since I made this change halfway through my junior year, but the few semesters I was a part of the program affected me in so many ways. I don’t think my husband would ever have imagined the journey that began because of his suggestion.

After changing majors, I no longer had a clear idea of what I wanted to do after college. With encouragement from Dr. Barbara Kernan, I started looking into graduate programs. Within a year of entering the program, I was applying to women’s studies graduate programs all over the country. After graduating from UW–Eau Claire in December 2011, I went on to start courses at the University of North Carolina—Greensboro in their Women’s and Gender Studies master’s program. The transition to University of North Carolina—Greensboro has been wonderful. The framework of the program is similar enough to UW–Eau Claire that I don’t feel overwhelmed, but the courses are the change and challenge I was looking for. The professors here, especially Drs. Danielle Bouchard and Hephzibah Roskelly, have sparked my renewed interest in women’s studies but have also solidified that I cannot live without English classes as well. This spring will be my last semester of coursework before I hope to complete my thesis in the fall. I plan to apply to PhD programs for the fall of 2015, most likely in English this time. My goal is to become a professor and be able to teach in both English and women’s studies.

While it was difficult to move across the country to start school and a new life, the biggest challenge for me has been becoming a mom as a graduate student. My son, Zane, was born in July 2013 and has been a constant surprise and challenge. Although it was difficult to start fall semester classes only five weeks after he was born, my husband and sister-in-law have shown me great support.

I am always shocked when I look back at the past few years and see how much my life has changed because of joining the Women’s Studies Program at UW–Eau Claire. I am so glad that I made the change when I did and for the new interests that change sparked. Combining my undergraduate majors of English and women’s studies has made all the difference in my studies and in where my life has gone up to this point. I am so thankful for the teachers and classmates I had at UW–Eau Claire and what they inspired me to become.
Women’s Studies Program Awards for 2013

Helen X. Sampson Undergraduate Research Paper Award
Kelly Bertzyk, “The Evolution of the Doll and its Impact on American Girlhood”
Faculty Sponsor: Barbara Kernan

Helen X. Sampson Undergraduate Project Award
Ong Xiong, “Hmongwrite”
Faculty Sponsor: Theresa Kemp

Helen X. Sampson Graduate Research Paper or Project Award
Christopher Jorgenson, “Like a Girl: A Gay Man’s Theoretical Exploration of Identity”
Faculty Sponsor: Audrey Fessler

Donna C. Turell Award
Award Sponsor: Susan C. Turell
Jamie Erickson, “Frankie-Colored Glasses: Using the Disreputable History of Frankie Landau-Banks to Introduce the Feminist Lens”
Faculty Sponsor: Jan Stirm

Mary Catherine & Caroline Kessler Award
Award Sponsor: Patricia Quinn
Faculty Sponsor: Barbara Kernan

Mickey Crothers Award
Adelyn Strei, “The Wire”
Faculty Sponsor: Theresa Kemp

Virgilene & Joseph See Award
Award Sponsor: Patti See
Dessa R. Bell, “Poetry”
Faculty Sponsor: Karen Loeb

Tillie Olsen Award
Award Sponsor: Patti See
Ong Xiong, “Hmongwrite”
Faculty Sponsor: Theresa Kemp

Ailish Frances Barcelo Award
Award Sponsor: Christine Webster
Gretchen Bachmeier, Women’s Studies Major
Barbara Kernan

Feminist Teacher Award
Katherine Bowman, Women’s Studies

Feminist Lifetime Of Distinguished Service Award
Eva Santos-Phillips, Foreign Languages

Feminist Mentor Award
Tanya McNeill, Women's Studies and Sociology

Women's Studies Scholarship Award
Sanjukta Chaudhuri, Economics

Women's Studies Service Award
Stephanie H. Wical, McIntyre Library

Women's Studies Special Service Award
Theresa D. Kemp, English and Women's Studies

Visions & Voices

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