Southeastern Women’s Studies Association Conference

After two years of careful planning and preparation, Women and Gender Studies hosted the 2012 Southeastern Women’s Studies Association Conference from Thursday, March 29 through Saturday, March 31. The conference brought in over 200 scholars and activists from around the southeastern region. With four strong keynote speakers and performers- Layli Maparyan, Crystal Leigh Endsley, Jasbir Puar, and Merri Lisa Johnson- scheduled over the course of three days, the conference indeed covered the theme of politics of justice and new visions of culture and society.

The panels this year ranged across the broad landscape of feminist concerns, from aesthetic resistance to queering wellness, from food policy to motherhood, from theory as activism to social justice in practice. The conference highlighted the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and ability in the ways that we think, talk, and teach about the politics of justice.

The conference provided an excellent opportunity for Mason scholars- faculty and students- to present their research to the region. As a result of the location of the conference, we had 28 George Mason University affiliated presenters this year. Congratulations to former Women and Gender Studies Graduate Assistant, Beth Degi, for receiving a SEWSA travel grant. Beth is currently conducting research in Russia and was able to briefly return to campus to present her research.

The conference also allowed for some innovative programming and collaboration. On Saturday, March 31, Women and Gender Studies held a special session entitled, “Immigration and Gender: Stories from the Field.” The session brought together representatives from organizations like the Institute for Women’s Policy Research, the Vietnamese Resettlement Association, Empowered Women International, and the Mason DREAMers. The presentation was followed by a special reception in the Women and Gender Studies Center. A special thank you goes to Shannon Portillo, Jennifer Crewalk, Andrea Robles and Angela Hattery for helping to make this possible.

The conference vision was led by Suzanne Scott, Director of Women and Gender Studies and Lynne Constantine, Assistant Professor in the School of Art. The steering committee consisted of Marisa Allison, Angela Hattery, Christine Hernandez, Toby Jenkins, Sara Mallick, Caroline Pendry, Andrea Robles and Karen Wolf. Approximately 50 outstanding volunteers assisted in the planning and execution of the conference. A final special thank you goes to the following George Mason University co-sponsors for their support of SEWSA 2012: Office of the Provost, University Life, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, African and African American Studies, Center for Social Science Research, School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution.

Judy Richardson and Betty Robinson Deliver 2012 Sojourner Truth Lecture

Judy Richardson and Betty Robinson, former members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), delivered the annual Sojourner Truth Lecture on March 1, 2012. Richardson and Robertson discussed their co-edited book, Hands On The Freedom Plow: Personal Accounts by women in SNCC. The book recounts the experiences of women involved in SNCC in the 1960s and was nominated for an NAACP Image Award and the Benjamin Hooks Award. Following the lecture, attendees were able to purchase a copy of the book and get it signed.

“The Sojourner Truth Lecture series is a very important collaborative effort between AAAS and WGST. This year our two presenters embodied the spirit and tradition of Sojourner Truth and reaffirmed why social justice work remains so important in the 21st century,” Wendi-Manuel-Scott, director of African and African American Studies.

A documentary screening of Scarred Justice: The Orangeburg Massacre of 1968 preceded the lecture on February 29th. “Showing that film and having an opportunity to talk with the producer and a person who was active in SNCC at that time was an amazing experience for the audience. Virtually everyone has heard about the Kent State murders of four white students on a college campus; almost no one had heard of the Orangeburg Massacre of 1968 when black students were shot at and murdered.” says Suzanne Scott, Director of Women and Gender Studies.

The Sojourner Truth Lecture Series was established to preserve the legacy of Sojourner Truth, the African American anti-slavery leader who championed the importance of political and social equality for all women. Past lecturers have included Ntozake Shange in 2009, Toby Jenkins in 2010, and Anita Hill in 2011. The series serves as a bridge between Black History Month and Women’s History Month.

Paula Ruth Gilbert Returns from Fellowship at Oxford

Paula Ruth Gilbert returns to campus this semester after completing a visiting research fellowship with the International Gender Studies Centre at Oxford University. Paula was awarded this prestigious fellowship in order to conduct research on her book, Narrating Female Lives: Human Rights Violations against Women and Girls.
Women and Gender Studies Launches the “I’m a Feminist” Project

Just as Women and Gender Studies closed the Southeastern Women’s Studies Association Conference, the program’s next major project launched. The “I’m a Feminist” project was designed as an educational campaign initiative to demystify the image of feminism. The program invited campus administrators, faculty, and students to answer the prompt, “I’m a feminist because…” Through these responses, videos and posters have been generated to promote awareness and understanding of the feminist identity. A poster display is now set up in the Women and Gender Studies Center. The video highlighting these responses, made with the help of Michael Galvin, Director of Technology Integration, University Life and University Life Services, Loudoun Campus, will be posted later this month. We are still currently accepting responses to the project’s prompt. Keep a look out for more information on this project as it develops.

Upcoming Events

- Social Dynamics of Family Violence Book Launch, Thursday, April 19, 3-5 PM
- Women’s Fraternity/Sorority Leadership Tea, Thursday, April 26, 3-5 PM
- Women and Gender Studies Graduation Reception, May 15, 3-5 PM, Dewberry Hall, Johnson Center

Alumni Spotlight on Lauren Heath: Outside the Classroom and Into the Field

Lauren Heath first heard of Women and Gender Studies while looking for a way to fulfill her global perspectives requirement. She said, “I had always felt very strongly about women’s rights but I didn’t really know much about it. After one class, I was hooked. I registered for more classes and applied to work at the Center, where I was happily employed for two years. Along with working at the Center, I was a Women and Gender Studies minor and spent as much time as possible at the Center and immersing myself in feminism. I dipped my toes into the Feminist Student Organization for a while as well.” Lauren joined the Feminist Student Organization during her senior year in order to help with the annual event, Take Back the Night.

Now, nearly two years after graduating from George Mason University, Lauren works part-time as a Hotline Operator at the National Abortion Federation. In that role she answers a hotline and determines if the caller is eligible for assistance.

Lauren recently accepted a position as a Sexual Assault Outreach Specialist for Fairfax County. She will be reaching out to different places and people in the community to discuss sexual assault and all of the programs offered to assist survivors within the county. “I’m excited to be involved in such an important cause and hope to do my part in making this world a safer and better place. If it weren’t for Women and Gender Studies, I have no idea where I would be working right now,” Lauren explained. “The courses I took and the material I studied changed the way I look at the world. I love Women and Gender Studies!” Her advice to students, especially to those who are graduating is to be mindful of privilege.

Angela Hattery Co-Authors Text on Family Violence

Angela Hattery, Associate Director of Women and Gender Studies, is the co-author of the recently published text The Social Dynamics of Family Violence. Angela was finishing the work on this text when she joined the university and will teach a course by the same title this fall. The book is co-written with her long-time collaborator Earl Smith, Professor of Sociology and Director of American Ethnic Studies at Wakeforest University. This publication includes an instructor’s website with PowerPoint, presentations, exams, discussion questions, projects, and sample syllabi.

“The idea to write the book came out of both our other scholarship on intimate partner violence—some of which is included in the book—and our decades of teaching courses on gender, race, and power. We wrote this book to make scholarship and theories of family violence—violence against women, child abuse, elder abuse, violence in same sex couples—accessible to students, practitioners and researchers,” said Hattery.

Lisa Lindley Conducting Research on Mason’s LGBTQ Community

Lisa Lindley, faculty affiliate in Women and Gender Studies and Associate Professor of Global and Community Health, directed the PhotoVOICE Project with LGBTQ students at George Mason University. The OUTlook on Mason PhotoVoice project brought together nine undergraduate students to share their experiences as members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning (LGBTQ) community at Mason. Through witnessing their visual images and reflecting on their written narratives, visitors of the exhibit were invited to join a critical dialogue about the strengths and concerns of the LGBTQ community and the campus climate at Mason.