

# Department of Women's and Gender Studies



Amherst College

Volume 2, Issue 1

Fall 2010

## WomenSPEAK: a choreopoemplay

WomenSPEAK cast spring 2010



*of color, a group of 7 women ranging from seniors to sophomores set out to give voice to their experiences. The two main objectives of the course were to investigate and*

This past spring semester, a group of young women signed up for a WAGS independent study because they wanted, in their words "to actively explore the variety of human experience amongst women of color at Amherst. Recognizing that it is all too easy to truncate many stories into one, creating overly simplistic and singular portrayals of women

*explore major themes in their lives while finding a way creatively to share these with the greater Amherst community as a performance. The course was composed of 3 units: The first was reading-intensive, the second was writing-intensive, and the third was focused on preparing for the performance."*

Kelly Tellis-Warren 10, Gabriela Acero 11E, Ashley McCall 12 and Ashley Miranda 12, and made rich use of WAGS' receptivity to creative interdisciplinary projects to produce a memorable piece of theater.

The class hopes that this will

not be the only performance of its kind and that future students will find new and creative ways to not only explore important issues in the classroom but also find ways to share it with their peers.

Working with Professor Saxton and Professor Lobdell (of Theater and Dance) they developed and wrote original sketches, songs, and poetry. As the end of the semester neared, the schedule got very frenzied as participants included not only several meetings a week, but also meetings of subgroups, rehearsals in Stirn Auditorium, and late night script conferences.

The result, however, was a smashing performance done before exam week that delighted, moved, and entertained, a full Friedmann Room of classmates.

The group included Angela Coombs 10, Dee Mandiyan 10, Ameerah Phillips 10,



Cast of WomenSPEAK

### WomenSPEAK Program:

*Home: A Poem; A Series of Unfortunate Events; I Heard; Thinkin' of You; Soccer Moms; I Hate It When; I Am Not My Cunt; they Tell Me; Be Humble; Ego Trippin'; Don't Leave Your House 'Til Your Hair Is Right; Please Don't Touch My Hair; Lady Freak; Friendship Lasts Forever; Cross Your Legs; Womanhood*

*Terras irradiant*

"Let them give light to the world"

1821

Amherst College educates men and women of exceptional potential from all backgrounds so that they may seek, value, and advance knowledge, engage the world around them, and lead principled lives of consequence.

## Department of Women's and Gender Studies

---



**WomenSpeak explored themes of identity, race, femininity, sexuality, relationships and everything in between**

### WAGS Welcomes Professor Krupa Shandilya

Amherst's Department of Women's and Gender Studies is delighted to introduce **Krupa Shandilya**, our first full-time member of the department. Krupa, a recent Ph.D. in English from Cornell, works in film and gender. Her research and teaching interests include postcolonial theory; feminist theory; South Asian literature and film; World literature; African and Caribbean literature; and film criticism and theory.

Her dissertation: *Sacred Subjects: Gender and Nation in South Asian fiction* "argues that fiction in Bengali, Urdu, and English troubles nationalist and imperialist constructions of the South Asian nation as an exclusively secular or sacred space. She argues that the late-nineteenth century Bengali domestic novel recreates the Hindu widow as a figure who realizes herself through *satita* or devotion, borne from the Hindu *bhakti* [devotion] tradition. Likewise

the prostitute of Urdu fiction finds agency by embodying modes of respectability which arise from Hindu and Islamic codes of conduct for veiled women. These articulations of agency, which are formulated through the sacred, disturb the nation's construction of itself as a secular entity. Similarly, contemporary South Asian fiction in English interrogates imperialist and nationalist articulations of the "wholly" spiritual nation suggesting that it is implicated in the Hindu-right wing politics of present-day nationalism. The texts thus challenge the secular, liberal discourse that shapes narratives of the nation."

This semester she will pair with Margaret Hunt to team teach WAGS 11, "The Cross-Cultural Construction of Gender" (TTH 2:00-3:30, Converse 209). Her second course, WAGS 66, "Mother India: Reading Gender and Nation in South Asia", will use both films and literary texts (TTH 10:00-11:20).

### Class of 2010 Student News



**WAGS and English Major Robyn Bahr Class of 2010**

Congratulations to the Class of 2010. Our majors included: Robyn H. Bahr (pictured), Katherine D. Black, Siobahn E. Kinney, Brooke A. McVety, and Rachel M. Williams.

The WAGS major requires all senior majors not writing a thesis to satisfy the comprehensive exam by

reading a common text and writing an essay to be read by the department and discussed in a colloquium of WAGS seniors and faculty. For the Class of 2010 the common text was Professor Kristin Bumiller's *In An Abusive State: How Neoliberalism Appropriated the Feminist Movement*

*Against Sexual Violence* (Duke University Press, 2008).

Siobahn Kinney, our lone honors thesis writer, received a Magna for her thesis entitled *Sexual Pleasure as Development: Shaping a Human Right of Play, Pleasure, and Capabilities*.

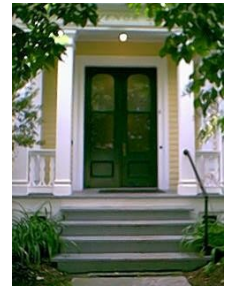
## Faculty News

**Rick Griffiths** is working on Greek-language poetry from Hellenistic Egypt (3rd century BCE). He is interested in how that international culture redefined gender roles in relation to monstrous knowledge (witches, centaurs, sirens, snake-men, Egyptians, patriarchs). He is still processing the experience of teaching "Queer Canons" (WAGS 31) to an amazing group of

students last spring and promises to teach it again in AY 2011-12, if at all possible. This year he is teaching "Greek Civilization" (WAGS 23).

**Margaret Hunt** has received a residential fellowship from the John Carter Brown Institute in Providence, Rhode Island. She will be there in the spring semester 2011, on sabbatical from

Amherst College, pursuing a new book project about a late seventeenth-century East India Company ship. She hopes that the ocean air will help her think fruitfully about long distance voyages in former times. In addition, Margaret was recently elected Vice President of the Northeast Conference on British Studies, and is currently organizing their fall conference, which will be held



Grosvenor House  
55 College Street



in Burlington, Vermont, in the third week of September, 2010.

In the spring, **Martha Saxton** will be teaching US Women's History from the Civil War to the present. She will also be offering the Bruss Seminar with Professor Amrita Basu,

on "Gender and the Environment." This seminar will compare the interrelationships between gender and the environment in the U.S. and India, by exploring the impact of agricultural and conservation policies on women and gender relations. We will examine the gendered

character of the impact of climate change and environmental disasters and women's activism in both countries. Students will complete a research paper.

Because **Michele Barale** was tired of hearing that today's Amherst students are poorer writers than they used to be,

"Throughout my life, I have been highly concerned with human sexuality. After discovering at nine years old what, exactly, sex was, I became fascinated by each and every facet of this important part of human life"

Siobahn Kinney

she spent much of June in Frost Library's Archives and Special Collections, reading a broad swath of honors theses written in 1951. She hopes to do the same for each decade until the present. She has no idea, as of yet, what she will discover. But she hopes that a careful study of sentence length and syntax, paragraph

coherence, and rhetorical development will shed light on something. These theses, she would like to inform her readers, were typed, with footnotes, before correction fluid was invented; errors are hand-corrected in black ink. In the spring, she will teach WAGS 24, "Gender Labor", with Professor Rose Olver.

**Susan Niditch** is teaching two courses this year of interest to WAGS majors, Religion 39/WAGS 39, "Women in Judaism" (M 4:00-6:30, Chapin 203) in the fall, and Religion 37, "The Body in Ancient Judaism" in the spring. Her recent book "My Brother Esau Is a Hairy Man": Hair and Identity in Ancient





## Department of Women's and Gender Studies

### Faculty News

Israel" (Oxford U. Press) deals with a number of the themes explored in these courses. She has been preparing a long piece on the reception history of the biblical Esther to be published as part of an international project on women and the Bible, part of which involves a 2011 summer conference in Marburg, Germany. Her research on "Personal Religion in the Persian Period" relates to her new fall course Religion 36, "Personal Religion in the Bible," many threads of which explore women's religion in antiquity, often preserved obliquely in the official literature of the Bible and in sources of material culture.

**Amrita Basu** has recently published an edited anthology on global women's movements entitled *Women's Movements in the Global Era: The Power of Local Feminisms* (Westview Press). She will be teaching a seminar on Globalization, Social Movements, and

Human Rights in the fall (WAGS 68/ POSC 86 W 2:00 -4:00, Chapin 101).

This year **Manuela Picq** is a Loewenstein Fellow in the Department of Political Science. She is teaching Global Politics of Gender this fall (W 2:00-4:30, Converse 304) and the Political Economy of Gender in Latin America in the spring. Her current research focuses on indigenous justice and feminism in Latin America. In a recent publication - "Trapped Between Gender and Ethnicity: Identity politics in Ecuador," in Roger Coate and Markus Thiel, eds. *Identity Politics in the Age of Globalization* First Forum Press (2010) - she tackles ethno-politics in the Andes. Manuela remains active in Latin American studies, as co-facilitator of the Five College Faculty Seminar in Afro-Luso-Brazilian Studies and Vice-president of the Ecuadorian Studies Section at the Latin American Studies Association. You can also

see her climbing with AC's outdoors club and hitting the trails as she prepares to run the Wonderland Trail around Mt Rainier (93 miles) this fall.

**Rose Olver's** summer work included library research to lay the foundation for a new project in gender and sport focused on women athletes' response to injury. The research literature suggests that women entering the realm of competitive sports may be pressured to adopt a "sports ethic" consistent with the construction of masculinity in which the acceptance of risk, pain, and injury marks the true athlete. She expects to explore the existence of this pressure and its consequences in an empirical study with an honors student this coming academic year. She will be teaching Sex Role Socialization in the

WomenSpeak explored themes of identity, race, femininity, sexuality, relationships and everything in between

fall and Gender Labor in the spring. Both courses consider how issues of gender and sports inform the constructions of masculinity and femininity.

**Amy A Ford** finally broke down and read Elizabeth Gilbert's "Eat, Pray, Love" and wonders what all the fuss

was about as it didn't lead to any earth-shattering discoveries on her part. That said, other summer reading included Irene Nemirovsky's "Suite Francaise", Ian McEwan's "On Chesil Beach", and a huge stack of nonfiction titles waiting to be read. She is happy to report that she will not be teaching at HCC this

fall, but will instead be focusing on creative endeavors, such as writing and performing. She has also been recruited to provide administrative support for the college's new Film and Media Studies Program. She has been getting to know Amelie Hastie, program chair, who is a blast!



**Paola Zamperini** spent the first part of her summer on the island of Elba, in Italy, where she spent time visiting her family, continuing her training as a scuba-diving instructor, and overall recovering from the grueling process of getting tenured, yay! Her newest book, *Lost Bodies. Prostitution and Masculinity in Chinese Fiction*, was published by Brill at the beginning of June. In July she polished her new manuscript on gambling, gender, and space in Ming and Qing fiction, which she then submitted to a couple of publishers for review, and is now waiting to hear back from them, hopefully with encouraging news. In August she took part in a very exciting week-long workshop at McGill University, in Montreal, on the shifts of literary language in Chinese literature between the 1890s and the 1940s. Then, at the end of August, to officially mark the beginning of her year long sabbatical, she will be off to teach a two-week

course on happiness in ancient Greece and China in northern Italy to German students, together with two German scholars. Paola will spend the rest of the fall writing, mostly about gambling but also a bit on pornography in sixteenth century Chinese fiction, and then she will be off to Kyoto, Japan, in mid-December for a semester long sojourn of teaching (a course on fashion history and practice in Japan at Doshisha), research (digging out rare Chinese novels in Japanese libraries), and conference travel in East Asia and Europe. She will return in time for the fall semester 2011, to teach more courses on women, gender, and sexuality at Amherst College.



***“In An Abusive State examines the ways in which society has defined sexual violence as a social problem and how this creates policies that reinforce stereotypical assumptions about women’s dependency and the character of intimate violence.”***

**Kristin Bumiller**



Professor Michele Aina Barale, Chair

Amherst College

Women's and Gender Studies  
55 College Street  
14 Grosvenor House  
PO Box 5000/ AC# 2257  
Amherst, MA 01002-5000

Phone: 413-542-5781  
FAX: 413-542-8192  
Email: [WAGS@amherst.edu](mailto:WAGS@amherst.edu)

**Women's and Gender Studies** is an interdisciplinary and cross-cultural exploration of the creation, meaning, function, and perpetuation of gender in human societies, both past and present. It is also an inquiry specifically into women's material, cultural, and economic productions, their self-descriptions and collective undertakings. We invite you to join us.

For more information contact Amy A Ford, Academic Coordinator, at 413-542-5781 or [aford@amherst.edu](mailto:aford@amherst.edu)

Visit us at  
[www.amherst.edu/  
academiclife/  
departments/  
womens\\_gender\\_studies](http://www.amherst.edu/academiclife/departments/womens_gender_studies)

## WAGS News Then and Now

The WAGS common room located in 14 Grosvenor House has been getting an upgrade this summer. After more than a decade, WAGS has new furniture and paint, new shades and a rug. In addition, as we prepared for renovation we discovered old records of the department's beginnings. We had thought those materials had been lost, so when we found them, Historian Margaret Hunt lost no time in taking them away from yet another possible misfiling mishap. Is this the stuff of someone's future thesis?



On October 15, 1974, the Faculty voted 95 to 29 to "reaffirm ...its sense that Amherst College should become a College for men and women." When the motion on coeducation was introduced in that meeting the women faculty members, who

were sitting as a group, rose and revealed T-shirts emblazoned with **Keep Abreast of the Times — Vote Yes**. This image has come to represent that historic moment in the faculty meeting.

