

University of Oklahoma

Women's and Gender Studies Program

Third Annual "Take Root" Conference a Success



OU students Helen Kerwin and Valarie Lambert pose with Senator Constance Johnson for a photo while browsing tables. Photo provided by Lupe Davidson.

By Shaista Fenwick

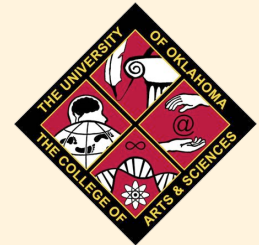
The third annual "Take Root Conference: Red State Perspectives on Reproductive Justice" took place Feb. 16 and 17 at the Oklahoma Center for Continuing Education Thurman J. White Forum on the Norman campus. Activists, students and educators came from throughout the country to share their unique perspective on reproductive justice work in traditionally "red" states, and the relevance of that perspective in the larger reproductive justice context. "Take Root" drew participants from Oklahoma, as well as several surrounding states, including Texas, New York, Wisconsin, Kansas, New Mexico, Arkansas and Mississippi.

Conference headliner Loretta Ross is one of the principal founders of the reproductive justice movement, and helped define the original RJ framework. Ross delivered the keynote speech Friday evening that explored the underlying themes in RJ, including the roles of class, race and reproductive rights as civil rights. "The right to have a child, the right not to have a child, the right to raise that child; that is reproductive justice," Ross said. Ross also critically explored reproductive justice as an element of social justice and human rights, asserting that both have similar potential for being dominated by privileged allies.

Activist lawyer Deborah Small further explored the role of privilege in the closing session Saturday evening "The essence of privilege is believing you have what you have because you deserve it, because you worked for it, and seeing yourself outside the arc of history," Small said. Guest speaker Pam Merritt, an activist and blogger currently living in St. Louis, clarified that there are differences between reproductive rights, reproductive health and reproductive justice. All three are discrete but necessary elements in the social justice framework, but they are frequently conflated to the detriment of all three areas of work.

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“Take Root” (*continued*)

The conference’s work in furthering the conversation of reproductive justice and regional Red State perspectives was apparent in the structured events, but also during the many organic side conversations taking place in the interstitial areas of the conference: in the hallway with tabling organizations, near the chairs by the registration room and during meals and breaks.

“Let me be the strongest link I can be in the chain of justice,” Small said. “Take Root 2013” allowed its

members to discuss, refine and explore differing experiences in the work of reproductive justice, while forging critical alliances and strengthening participants’ commitment to that work. “Take Root” continues to grow, as do the alliances between organizers and community members across state lines, drawing 50 more participants than “Take Root 2012”. The conference is expected to take place again at the OU campus next year.

Get to Know an Alum: Kathy Taylor

By Lyndsey Smith

Kathy Taylor earned her undergraduate degree in journalism and her law degree from OU. This education launched her into a career as a corporate lawyer, business owner and public servant. Taylor credits her OU education, including courses taken in OU’s Women’s Studies Program (now WGS), for the achievements in her life. “The ability to focus on the impact and achievement of women like Jeanne Kilpatrick, who was born in Duncan, Okla., was the first woman appointed as the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, was both instructional and inspirational,” Taylor said.

In addition to her business career, Taylor served as Oklahoma’s Secretary of Commerce, Tourism and Workforce Development, recruiting the largest Dell computer facility outside of their Texas headquarters to Oklahoma. She was elected mayor of Tulsa in 2006, becoming only the

second woman to hold that post. During her term as mayor; she is credited with infusing the city with a new energy.

After completing her term as mayor, she returned to state government to hold the post of chief of education strategy and innovation.

During her time in that role, Taylor spearheaded a bipartisan reform plan that include a vision for a transformed public education system with higher academic standards and new teacher and leader effectiveness standards and support.

Taylor was named a Fellow at the Harvard University Kennedy School of Government and taught Pathways to Public Service at the Kennedy Institute of Politics during the spring 2012 semester. Recently, she and her husband, Bill, endowed a Family Law Legal Clinic to support the varied needs of women returning from prison and seeking to re-establish a stable personal and family life.

Taylor is currently running for mayor of Tulsa in a non-partisan election. Voters took to the poll June 11, and though Taylor took the greatest percentage of voters, without a clear majority, a run-off will decide the race at the Nov. 12 general election.



Kathy Taylor. Photo provided by Taylor For Tulsa Campaign.

Students Attend National Young Feminist Leadership Conference in Washington D.C.



Katelyn Roberson, WGS major from OU, and Anna Przebinda in front of the Washington Memorial in Washington, D.C. Photo provided by Anna Przebinda

By Anna Przebinda

The Young Feminist Leadership Conference provided a unique, invaluable experience to network with other like-minded individuals and professionals, and to learn important skills for lobbying, creating organizations and running for political office. These opportunities and skills are key for women to become successful activists and professionals.

The conference also featured distinguished speakers Sara Alcid, Wida Amir, Barbara Arnwine, Susan L. Burke, Alice

Cohan, Chloe Cooney and Terry O'Neil. I was fortunate enough to meet Katherine Spillar, the editor of *Ms. Magazine*, a feminist magazine created by Gloria Steinem that publicizes feminist issues and information to the public. This was an incredible experience because throughout my education in Women's and Gender Studies; *Ms. Magazine* was repeatedly credited as one of the biggest efforts second wave feminists made to advocate for women's rights. The Chief of Staff to First Lady Michelle Obama also gave a speech, and spoke with us about current barriers women face and

provided insight on what we can do to overcome them.

My time at the Young Feminist Leadership Conference was particularly valuable because Burke agreed to take me as an intern at her law firm this summer. My dream is to be an international women's rights lawyer, and it is vital to have experience at a firm before law school. However, I have had difficulty obtaining an internship at a law firm because they usually take only law students. After hearing Burke on a panel in one of the workshops, I introduced myself, told her what I wanted to do with my life, and asked if she was taking interns. Burke did not turn me away; instead she looked at my resumé and found a place for me on her team. Now I am fortunate enough to be able to work with one of the top attorneys in the United States on women's issues. This is why this conference is so important; it allows young feminists to connect with like-minded professionals and establish relationships that will help women overcome some of the barriers we face in the career world. I cannot express how lucky I am to have attended this conference, and I am extremely grateful for this opportunity granted to me.



2012-2013 Activists-in-Residence: The Selmon Family



The Center for Social Justice 2012-2013 Activists-in-Residence, the Selmon family

By Mallory Gladstein

The Women's and Gender Studies Program Center for Social Justice had an excellent year with its 2012-2013 Activists-in-Residence, the Selmon family. The Selmon family has a long and decorated history with OU and the Norman community. Both parents, Dewey and Kathryn, attended OU and graduated from the Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication. Dewey was part of the '74 and '75 National Championship Sooner football teams, and Kathryn is a founding member of Norman's Food and Shelter for Friends. They have seven children: Shannon, Megan, Lauren, Zac, Adam, Christiana and Gabrielle.

The Selmons worked with us during the course of the past academic year to bring a series of events to OU students, faculty and the community interested in nonprofit organizations, local and global activism that has given us a look at the work the Selmons do here in Norman and in Liberia from several different angles. Our first event, "Stories from Trips to

Liberia," featured members of the Selmon family speaking about their personal experiences going to Liberia, the work of Ma Feeta, the Rainbow Town Orphanage, and the origins of SHINE Foundation.

SHINE Foundation, created by the Selmon Family in 2005, works to support Rainbow Town and the mission of Ma Feeta. During Lauren Selmon Roberts' first trip to Liberia; she learned the heroic story of Feeta Naimen. A single woman charged with the choice of caring for what would become over 150 orphaned children during the 14-year civil war in the Liberian bush or death for herself and the children, she chose the children and became Ma Feeta overnight. Protecting and caring for the children throughout the war, she went on to settle with the children, who were not reunited with their families on the 50-acre plot of land that has been provided for Ma Feeta and the children, Rainbow Town.

In our second event, Megan Selmon described her experience as a decorated member of the State Department in the event, "Engaging with Failed States: Challenges and Debates in U.S. Foreign Policy." Our third event featured a screening of Lauren Selmon Roberts' award-winning documentary *Rainbow Town*. Lauren and Amy Elrod, a photographer involved with Rainbow Town, spoke about their experiences and interacted

with students after the screening. Our fourth event, "Local Effort, Global Impact: How to Start a Nonprofit Organization," was hosted by Shannon Selmon-Carter, director of the SHINE Foundation. She walked students through the process of starting a nonprofit organization and described the Selmon Family's experience building the SHINE Foundation from the ground up.

The various Activists-in-Residence events have given students an extensive and varied insight into the different ways members of the Selmon family are effecting change based on their strengths and areas of interest. The Selmon family is a shining example of individuals from the community in Norman doing work here and abroad to better the lives of those around them.

We would like to thank them for serving as the 2012-2013 Activists-in-Residence and their dedication to their work.

Our final event with the Selmon family as this year's Activists-in-Residence was this June. We hosted Amy Elrod, photographer, for an art exhibit and fundraiser for SHINE Foundation and Rainbow Town.

More information about the Activist-in-Residence program and other events can be found at csj.ou.edu.

Farewell to Martha Skeeters



Martha Skeeters

By Lupe Davidson

After years of service and dedication to OU and the Women's and Gender Studies Program, Martha Skeeters is retiring.

While in WGS she taught Introduction to Women's and Gender Studies; Red Dirt Women and Power; U.S. Women's Movements; and European Witch Hunt. Students found Skeeters to be an engaging, knowledgeable and passionate educator. Not only was Skeeters successful in the classroom; she also is a brilliant scholar.

Skeeter's book *Community and Clergy: Bristol and the Reformation*

was published by Oxford Press (1993). According to one reviewer, the book "represents an important addition to the literature surrounding the English Reformation and the history of early modern urban communities" (*Albion*). To this day it remains one of the most influential studies on the impact of the British Reformation. Skeeters also is one of the driving forces behind "Red Dirt Women and Power: A Video/Oral History of Activism in Oklahoma's Campaign for the Equal Rights Amendment" that can be found at wgs.ou.edu/ohp. Currently, Skeeters is writing a book about the intersections of gender, religion and economics in witchcraft accusations in early modern England.

In addition to being a dedicated educator and scholar, Skeeters also is a committed warrior for

reproductive justice in the state of Oklahoma. In 2010, She founded the Oklahoma Coalition for Reproductive Justice, which works tirelessly to defend the rights, dignity, health and lives of Oklahoma women, according to ocrj.org. In April of this year, Skeeters organized the event Pink Wave, which united activists from around the state of Oklahoma for a day of lobbying, tabling and a rally held at the state Capitol.

Of course, Skeeter's accomplishments are far greater than this space allows. She has given so much to WGS. Let it suffice to say that we respect, love and deeply appreciate Skeeter's years of dedicated service to the students and the program. Martha, thank you for everything that you have done. You will be truly missed.

Message From the Director

The end of the spring semester is always a time for celebrating as we congratulate our majors, minors and graduate certificate students for their achievements. I think I speak for all the WGS faculty when I say that we rejoice in your accomplishments and wish you the very best. We also know that we will miss you as you move away to meet new challenges and opportunities in your lives.

This semester, I would like extend my warmest wishes to two faculty members who will be leaving OU to pursue new opportunities elsewhere. Hester Baer has accepted a position in the Department of Modern Languages at the University of Maryland, College Park. Baer has been a

huge asset to the Women's and Gender Studies Program. She has regularly taught WGS 4003, Method and Theory, and receives rave reviews from her students. She also has served on several committees, including as chair of the Curriculum Committee, for the past two years. She is an exceptional scholar, mentor, feminist and friend, and we will miss her greatly.

WGS affiliate faculty member Zoe Sherinian also is leaving OU to assume a faculty position at the University of California, Merced. As a member of the WGS faculty governance committee and the curriculum committee, Sherinian has had a profound effect on the revitalization of the Women's and

Gender Studies Program. By bringing her expertise, her knowledge and her passion for social justice to the faculty and students of WGS, she has educated many of us about the use of music as a tool of social empowerment. A huge thank you to Zoe Sherinian and Hester Baer for their efforts on behalf of this program and the university community. We couldn't have come this far without you!



Jill Irvine, WGS director



Faculty News and Publications

Hester Baer received a Presidential Professorship for outstanding teaching and research at the University of Oklahoma.

Eric Bosse's short story, "Plantlife," appeared in the feminist science-fiction anthology, *Daughters of Icarus*, from Pink Narcissus Press (March 2013); the December 2012 issue of *Fiddleblack* includes his story "The Master of Submission"; his story "Our Lady of the Rockies," about parents struggling to come to terms with their child's asexual and androgynous identity, can be read online in *Fried Chicken and Coffee*. All three stories also appear in his collection, *Magnificent Mistakes*, from Ravenna Press.

Lisa Funnell published a chapter titled "Fighting for a Hong Kong/Chinese Female Identity: Michelle Yeoh, Body Performance, and Globalized Action Cinema" in the collection *Asian Popular Culture in Transition* (2012). She also published a chapter titled "Hong Kong's It/Ip Man: The Chinese Contexts of Donnie Yen's Transnational Stardom" in the collection *Transnational Stardom* (2013).

Catherine Hobbs had a book chapter published on writing instruction in the 20th century in *Short History of Writing Instruction* (Routledge 2012). She also received two contracts with her co-author for books, the first being *Educating the New Southern Woman: Speech Writing and Race at Public Women's Colleges, 1894-1945*, which examines rhetoric and writing at eight land-grant model colleges for white women across the South. The second contract is for a collected edition titled *Rhetoric, History, and Women's Oratorical Education: American Women Learn to Speak*, which collects articles by new and established scholars on women's experiences in public speaking and their varied educations and preparations to speak.

Jill Irvine published an article, "Electoral Breakthroughs in Croatia and Serbia: Women's Organizing and International Assistance," in *Communist and Postcommunist Studies* 46 (2013). Irvine and Cindy Simon Rosenthal have been selected as the next co-editors of the journal, *Politics & Gender*. The journal office will be moving to the Norman campus this fall.

Janna Martin will have a book chapter published in 2016 in an autoethnography text with Glenda Hufnagel titled "Social Support and a Mother's Journey of Post Partum Depression." She also presented at the instructional workshop for Teaching Excellence at OU in January and traveled to Guatemala, where she held a workshop for 22 teachers at a school, and spoke to about 300 students at a school assembly.

Clemencia Rodriguez received the Norman Campus Vice President for Research Award for Outstanding Research Engagement.

Susan Sharp received the Evelyn Gilbert Unsung Hero Award from the Section on Women and Minorities of the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences for her contributions to the study of gender and crime.

Zoe Sherinian received the Norman Campus Vice President for Research Award for Research.

Meredith Worthen received the 2013 Irene Rothbaum Outstanding Assistant Professor Award from the College of Arts and Sciences.

Students Attend Civil Liberties and Public Policy Conference

By *Katy Shannahan*

This spring semester, two OU Women's and Gender Studies majors were awarded travel scholarships to attend the Civil Liberties and Public Policy conference at Hampshire College in Amherst, Mass. Katy Shannahan and Sami Adhikari were honored to participate in the reproductive justice conference for the first time. Several members of the Oklahomans for Reproductive Justice organization attended the conference as well, contributing to a significant presence of OU students.

For me, it was a truly remarkable experience that really opened my eyes to the wide range of work

being done within the movement for reproductive justice. The conference did a great job of exposing the depth and diversity of the movement for reproductive freedom. It doesn't stop at Roe vs. Wade. Adhikari found a panel on transfeminism, which explored the relationship between the reproductive justice movement and trans activism, to be particularly informative. "The conference was a wonderful experience," said Adhikari, noting that her attendance would not have been possible without the assistance of the scholarship.

This year's conference also featured two panels concerning activism and organizing efforts in conservative Southern states.



Katy Shannahan and Sami Adhikari

Sandra Criswell, a graduate of the OU WGS program, was featured on a panel discussing red state perspectives on reproductive justice. Both Criswell and Jen Cox, an OU graduate student, hosted a strategic action session on social justice organizing in red "flyover" states. Many were encouraged by the alliance and support from coastal activists that developed during these sessions.

Robert D. Lemon Social Justice Award

By *Lyndsey Smith*

The Center for Social Justice established the Robert D. Lemon Social Justice Award to honor one student, one faculty member and one staff member who demonstrate unwavering commitment to solving social justice issues in the world this year. The award is named after honoree Robert D. Lemon, a philanthropist who is very involved in human rights advocacy in Oklahoma and around the country.

Lemon, a native Oklahoman, worked as an oil and gas attorney in Texas and Oklahoma. He and his wife, Mary Lou, became involved in the LGBT community in the early 1990s, when they both learned that one of their sons is gay. In addition to attending pride parades and peace talks, the Lemon family also is very involved in many other social justice issues, such as reproductive justice. The Women's and Gender Studies Program is

grateful to the Lemon family for all they do to support our program, including providing funding for two courses: Men and Masculinity and Queer Theory, as well as staff support for the Center for Social Justice.



Robert D. Lemon giving an acceptance speech after receiving the "Hero of Hope" award from the Cathedral of Hope in Oklahoma City in December 2011.

"The Lemon family is honored to work with the Women's and Gender Studies Program and the Center for Social Justice to serve OU. We hope our efforts will improve the lives of all the women in the world," Lemon said.

Recipients of the 2013 Robert D. Lemon Social Justice Award are Ana Deisy Escalera, an energy management major, who was nominated for her involvement with Dream Act Oklahoma, an organization that promotes civil rights for the undocumented community; Emma Newberry-Davis, a Women's and Gender Studies major who was nominated for her activities on campus in promoting sexual health education; Meredith Worthen, a sociology professor, nominated for developing The Welcoming Project, a nonprofit organization that encourages a welcoming environment for the LGBTQ community; and Erin Simpson, center coordinator for Walker Tower, nominated for using her research on women in student affairs to work toward solving social justice issues on college campuses academically and in her daily work with students.



Congratulations, WGS Majors, Minors, SJ Minors and Graduate Certificate Recipients!

Bachelor of Arts in Women's and Gender Studies:

Mina Benalioulhaj, Emma Newberry-Davis, Carly Palans, and Katy Shannahan

Minor in Women's and Gender Studies:

Elie Bowen, Rachel Henson, Chelsey Kraft, Ben Mather, Kayla Rials, Kaci Toole, Morgan Whinnery, Sarah Wilson, and Erin Yeo

Graduate Certificate in Women's and Gender Studies:

Julie Davis, Katherine Eaves, Catherine Kinyon, Erin Simpson, Amy Smith, and Robin Thornton

Minor in Social Justice:

Kasey Anderson, Alya Avant, Megan Beasley, Bailey Daughterty, Matthew Mead, Megan Scott, and Alexis Talley



Carly Palans and Katy Shannahan, Outstanding Seniors 2013, with Sandie Holguin.



Martha Skeeters with graduating WGS major Emma Newberry-Davis.



Graduate Certificate Awardees: Amy Smith, Erin Simpson, Julie Davis, and Robin Thornton, with Jennifer Davis.

2012-2013 WGS Award Winners!

Travel Scholarships:

Sami Adhikari, Anna Prezbinda, Katie Roberson, and Katy Shannahan

Betty Baum and Norman Hirschfield Award:

Kristin Haddock, Maria Kroeker, and Yixin Wen

Outstanding Senior Award:

Carly Palans and Katy Shannahan

Robert D. Lemon Social Justice Award:

Ana Deisy Escalera (student), Emma Newberry-Davis (student), Meredith Worthen (faculty), and Erin Simpson (staff)

Excellence of Spirit (EOS) Award:

Priscilla Crandell and Sheila Wiard



Erin Simpson, 2013 Robert D. Lemon Social Justice Award Staff Member recipient, with Lupe Davidson.



Priscilla Crandell, one of two 2013 EOS award winners, with Cindy Merrick.



Yixin Wen, Maria Kroeker and Kristin Haddock, 2013 Betty Baum and Norman Hirschfield award winners, with Zermarie Deacon.



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