The University of Oklahoma
Women’s and Gender Studies Program

VOLUME 3, ISSUE 1

OU Center for Social Justice Opening

The Center for Social Justice is a new initiative of the Women’s and Gender Studies Program to promote gender justice, equality tolerance and human rights through local and global engagement. The Center aims to unite activist, academic and community interests and efforts to increase justice awareness and advocacy. Activism and justice are at the core of the Women’s Studies’ history and tradition. The Center for Social Justice recognizes that while questions of social justice concern all human beings, women and children are harmed disproportionately when it comes to the allocation of political power and economic resources.

“The idea of a Center came from students,” says Jill Irvine, director of the Women’s and Gender Studies Program, “Students came to the program after seeing films about the working conditions in sweatshops, or after having read about the systematic rape of women in the Democratic Republic of Congo. They wanted to take it to another level. The center offers them a way to bring these issues to the campus and community.” The Center aims to channel students’ ideas and energy about these pressing issues, and in that way facilitate engagement. “I am so excited that there is a place for activism and so many different opportunities for me to learn about social justice outside the classroom,” says Bekah Stone, a Women’s and Gender Studies minor and the research assistant for the Center, “One student called the Center ‘the activist arm’ of the Women’s and Gender Studies Program. I think that describes it well.”

“Most people point out that we have seen remarkable steps towards social justice in recent history and it is true,” says Karin Jonsson, the project coordinator for the Center, “But there are still many pressing social justice issues right here in our neighborhoods in Norman, as well as globally. They are pleading for our attention. The Center wants to create a space where these issues can be explored.” The Center addresses issues from human trafficking, violence against Native American women to fair trade and feminism in Islam.

The nine different programs in the Center unite professional and personal perspectives, and incorporate practical and academic approaches. “Each program is unique, which we found important. We want all students to find something that inspires them,” Jonsson says.

The Center’s goal reflects the University of Oklahoma’s vision to prepare students of all academic majors for working in and contributing to the local and global communities in which they live. “We hope the Center will help our students to become successful leaders, workers and human beings in Oklahoma, or anywhere in the world. We want to prepare the students that are ready and eager to address local and global challenges,” Irvine says. “Many of our faculty members have worked hard to make this Center happen.”

“The Center will be open to all OU students, faculty and staff. We want it to be a place where different departments, programs and institutes can find each other and work together for a common cause. We have already linked people and programs together, and the collaborative projects are just amazing,” says Jonsson.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE CENTER,
Visit: peace.ou.edu

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN MINORING IN SOCIAL JUSTICE?
The Women’s and Gender Studies Program anticipates adding a minor in Social Justice beginning in Fall 2010. For more information on Social Justice courses, visit the WGS website: wgs.ou.edu.

Issaka lives in Kantia, Ghana, and is a women’s rights activist. Issaka has served as the deputy minister for local government and rural development in the Ghanian government. Presently she is a human rights and community development activist, founding and serving as the director for the non-governmental organization, The Center for Sustainable Development Initiative (CENSUDI). CENSUDI works on gender issues and women’s rights in northern Ghana, working to improve the status of women and girls in their poverty-stricken area.

Issaka’s focus is making women’s daily lives peaceful and free from fear. Her public lecture on Sept. 23rd was titled “Realizing Women’s Rights in Africa: The Interface between Cultural and Universal Rights.” Issaka said that that many African women face discriminatory, dehumanizing and derogatory traditional cultural practices on a daily basis. Many of the cultural norms in Ghana and many times violate women’s basic human rights even while they conflict with governmental laws. Issaka sees great potential for reforming these norms, while retaining much that is valuable in the local culture.

She told several stories of oppression of women in and around her village, but also related wonderful stories of success. In one of her uplifting anecdotes, she told of when she and her sister, attending a local funeral, overheard a man criticizing their activism work. He thought it was a shame that no man in the village could beat his wife anymore, because if he did the wife would run to the Issaka sisters and have him arrested. He did not know Issaka and her sister were standing right there, but when he found out he left quietly.

In addition to the public lecture, the Issaka presented a workshop and discussion for interested undergraduate and graduate students called “How to Change the World: Lessons Learned from Everyday Activism in Ghana.” More than 100 students and members of the community attended, which delighted Jill Irvine, the professor whose Dream Course brought Issaka to OU. There also was a breakfast discussion with WGS majors and minors in the WGS library. Issaka answered questions and told amazing stories of her life and work.

Irvine’s Presidential Dream Course, Women and World Politics, brought three other remarkable speakers to OU this semester.

- **Oct. 12:** Mona Eltahawy, noted jounalist and blogger on the topic of Women and Islam, gave a talk titled “Generation Facebook: How Young People and Women are Changing Religion and Politics in the Middle East.”
- **Oct. 22:** Gini Reticker, an award-winning documentary film maker, screened her film, Pray the Devil Back to Hell. She answered questions about the film after the screening. In addition, Reticker met with students in the Women’s and Gender Studies lounge.
- **Nov. 19:** Charlotte Bunch will give a public talk titled, “Women’s Global Activism, Women’s Rights as Human Rights.” She will give remarks at the launching of the OU Women’s and Gender Studies Center for Social Justice.
**Get to Know a Major: Garrison Warren**

GARRISON WARREN is a third year Women’s and Gender Studies major at OU. He is involved with many of the program’s activities and with a other activist groups around Norman.

Originally from South Jordan, Utah, Warren is a double major in political science, but he says he really feels that women’s and gender studies is where he wants to concentrate. “I think the Women’s and Gender Studies Program has begun the process of constructing who I am almost from scratch. The way I experience and interact with the world is undeniably and inextricably linked to my experience in the WGS program and the women that define it. The program is very important to my life and, undoubtedly, my career.”

He first became interested in gender studies when a friend on his high school debate team talked to him about Judith Butler’s foundational work, Gender Trouble. “I think a lot of my intellectual/emotional/spiritual growth is currently focused on breaking down everything around/within me. Such as, the ways that certain other problematic notions construct the institutions I engage in and the social interactions I experience. I am trying to deal with this in my studies.”

While he isn’t sure what he wants to do after he graduates in 2011, he enjoys debate, and “talking stuff out,” with people who are actively engaged in changing the world. He says that Jill Irvine, the director of WGS, is “an endless source of inspiration,” adding that Madeline Ambrose, a leader in the Norman Women’s Collective and the Norman Queer Alliance, is a person who is helping him shape his view of the world. Finally, Warren’s close friend and fellow WGS major, Caitlyn Wright, is “integral to my conception of ‘family’ at OU. I think it would be very difficult to be in her presence and not feel unconditional warmth and support. She is a shining embodiment of feminism at the University of Oklahoma. I feel like she is creating family for me here that includes Sandra Criswell and Lindsay Nordstrom.”

Warren’s desire is to continue to grow in these relationships and in the way in which he interacts with the world, and which, he says, women’s and gender studies is integral.

**Get to Know an Alum: Beth Barefoot**

2003 Women’s and Gender Studies Alumna Beth Barefoot started her political career at OU when she was elected to the University of Oklahoma Student Association. Since graduating, she says, she has had an “accidental career in politics.” In 2004, she began working on Rep. Dan Boren’s first Congressional election campaign and has since lived in Washington, D. C. She is currently working with the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, the official campaign arm of the Democrats in the House of Representatives. Although Barefoot claims a new obsession with learning about the British monarchy, she will continue to work for the DCCC.

A career in politics may have been unexpected, but Barefoot says that her time in Women’s Studies provided her with the experience, knowledge and ability to be successful in Washington. More importantly, Barefoot says that the motivation and inspiration instilled in her by her Women’s Studies professors have helped her to keep fighting for women’s equality in such national issues as healthcare reform.

Barefoot urges undergraduates to take their time and enjoy the college experience at OU: “You have your entire life to work — enjoy being a student and take advantage of all the wonderful things” college life has to offer, and, she says, “enjoy what your women’s [and gender] studies professors can teach you.”
Women's and Gender Studies Program

Student News

- **Kelsey McMurray** is going to study at the University of Sheffield, England, for the spring 2010 semester.
- **Britan Mills** chaired the CAC Howdy Week for August 2009, and recently was named Miss Oklahoma City 2010.
- **Lieneke Mous** has been named a Fellow of Xenia Institute's Dialogue Program; she is the vice president of the OU Advocates for Sexual Assault Awareness.
- **Shagah Zakerion, Caitlyn Wright, Sandra Criswell and other members of the Women's and Gender Studies Student Association** experienced successful results organizing events for Reproductive Rights Week.

Faculty News

- **Susan F. Sharp** was awarded the College of Arts and Sciences Kinney-Sugg Outstanding Professor Award for the 2009-2010 academic year.
- **Hester Baer’s** *Dismantling the Dream Factory: Gender, German Cinema, and the Postwar Quest for a New Film Language* was published by Berghahn Books.
- **Marcia Chatelain** recently was chosen to participate in *Ms.* magazine’s Feminist Scholars Writers Workshop. She is going to Los Angeles in December to meet with the group.
- **Jennifer Davis-Cline** had the honor of being profiled in the *Guardian* (U.K.) newspaper’s “Improbable Research” column and wanted to share the link:
  

- **Elyssa Faison’s** coedited book, *Gender and Labour in Korea and Japan: Sexing Class*, with Ruth Barraclough, was published by Routledge and contained Faison’s chapter, “Gender and Korean labour in wartime Japan.”

- **Susan Laird** was invited to Tohoku University in Sendai, Japan in October as part of the Ikuta Project’s Hagi-Seminar, “Single-Sex Education in Japan and the U.S.: From the Philosophical Point of View.” She also gave an invited lecture to students at Soka University in Tokyo titled, “Do We Need a Concept of Coeducation?” which is a study of AAUW’s policy position papers and educational research reports as pragmatist critiques of Mary Wollstonecraft’s theory of coeducation in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.


- **Clemencia Rodriguez** has two co-edited books from Hampton Press next year:
  
Congratulations to our 2009-10 scholarship recipients: Keely Adams, Angela Person and Sonya Conner.

Keely Adams is a senior Women’s and Gender Studies major. She plans to pursue a master’s degree in Women’s Studies after she graduates or to attend law school.

Angela Person earned a master’s degree in museum studies from OU and is beginning a doctoral degree in geography this fall. She plans to focus on regional museum architecture and the impact it has on the community in which it is located.

Sonya Conner earned a master’s degree in sociology from OU and currently is working on a Ph.D. in sociology; her dissertation focuses on motherhood and the family. She also is pursuing a graduate certificate in women’s and gender studies.

The Betty Baum and Norman Hirschfield Award was endowed permanently in Women’s and Gender Studies by EJ Hirschfield and Alan Hirschfield in 1999 in memory of their parents to recognize and assist single mothers returning to the OU Norman campus. Three scholarships of $4,000 each are awarded annually.

2009 Social Justice Award

Congratulations to the 2009 Social Justice Award recipients, Caitlin Campbell, WGS major, and Katie Barwick-Snell, WGS faculty member!

The Center for Social Justice will recognize one student and one faculty member each year for their contributions to social justice. Recipients receive recognition along with $100 to donate to the charity of their choosing. Nominations for the award were accepted and applications were reviewed by a committee. Award recipients were announced at the Women’s and Gender Studies Spring reception in May 2009.

Barwick-Snell, nominated for her devotion to building community in Norman through the Center for Children and Families, chose to give the award to the CCFI, whose mission is “to improve the lives of children through partnerships with families and communities because every boy and girl deserves to grow up safe, nurtured and loved.”

Campbell, nominated for her dedication to the Women’s Resource Center at OU, chose to give to Camp New Hope in Oklahoma, which cares for and nurtures the emotional and spiritual growth of children with one or more incarcerated parent. Their goal is to break the cycle of incarceration and to encourage children whose parents are absent.

For more information about these organizations, see:

Center for Children and Families:
http://www.ccfinorman.org/

Camp New Hope:
http://newhopeoklahoma.org/index.html
The Women’s and Gender Studies Program is pleased to announce a new scholarship. The Empowerment of Spirit Award was established to recognize the academic success of single mothers who are also full-time students and to assist them with expenses. The purpose of the award is to encourage single mothers to stay in college and finish pursuing their educational goals. Each of these award winners applied for the Betty Baum and Norman Hirschfield Scholarship (see p. 5), but the number of worthy applicants outnumbered the number of awards to be given. Faculty of the Women’s and Gender Studies Program wanted to find a way to recognize the additional applicants. Martha Skeeters, WGS professor, asked several members of the community to consider giving $100 toward additional awards. Norman business owner Cindy Merrick had recently received a windfall of $8,000 and, when approached by Skeeters, decided to use the windfall to inaugurate a new scholarship, the EOS or Empowerment of Spirit Scholarship, giving $2,000 to each recipient. According to *The Norman Transcript*, Merrick, a single mother, and her friend, Ally Richardson, wanted to establish the new scholarship to help student mothers to be able to commit fully to their children and their education. Norman residents Bin Ro Lee and Jean Vieux also contributed to the fund after being asked by Skeeters. Merrick and Richardson raised an additional $1,500 this September toward funding the future EOS scholarships.

**Rebecca Karnes** is an anthropology major. Karnes wants to be able to help women in the community. Specifically, she plans to raise awareness about domestic violence in Oklahoma in order to empower abused women. After graduation, in Karnes plans to attend medical school and possibly becoming a medical examiner.

**Peace Ossom** is a psychology and pre-med senior. She is interested in cultural anthropology and human behavior, although her focus right now is on medicine. Ossom will graduate in May of 2010. After graduation, she plans to attend medical school to become a podiatrist specializing in foot and ankle birth defects in children.

**Yok-Fong Paat** is a Ph.D. student in the sociology department. She is interested in women and children’s welfare and welfare reform. She has an article forthcoming in the journal *Children, Youth and Environment*. She also studies incarcerated women and the effects this has on the children. After she completes her Ph.D., she plans to research more about women’s studies and children’s studies. She says that “women and children should have the voice to inform the world that impacts their lives,” as well as to know “how to improve their lives.”

**Eulonda Rushing** is a human relations and WGS senior. She is involved with OU’s Project Threshold and volunteers at the Women’s Outreach Center. She is also the president and regional representative of the Kappa Alpha chapter of Delta Sigma Theta sorority. After graduation, Rushing plans to attend OU law school and become a lawyer. Her main goal is to work with non-profit organizations fighting for women’s rights and basic human rights.