Once a year, the Commission on the Status of Women meets to review the status of women worldwide. This year, the meeting coincided with the 15th anniversary of the United Nations 4th World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995. From this meeting in Beijing came what is known as the Beijing Platform for Action, a platform that is the basis for policy regarding women, women’s rights, and thus human rights worldwide. The focus of this year’s meeting was to evaluate the progress made since the adoption of the platform 15 years ago. WGS Program Director Jill Irvine went to the CSW this year, also known as Beijing + 15. Irvine said it was “really kind of a mixed review, although overall I would have to say the consensus is that Beijing process has stalled due to many factors,” including resistance from conservative women’s groups and the “lack of will” at both the local and global levels.

Irvine teaches about the Beijing conference and the CSW in her Women and World Politics course, so, she said, “it was exciting to see how the conference actually works.” There are two parallel portions that run the entire two weeks: one is an “official” portion where delegates from many countries come to discuss and write policy regarding women; the other is the “unofficial” portion where women working in NGOs and in civil society come from all over the world to share their experiences on the ground in their home countries, their trials and solutions, successes and setbacks.

Irvine said that both portions were interesting, but in different ways. The official portion, for which you must have accreditation through an institution to attend (Irvine was accredited through the Rutgers University Center for Women’s Global Leadership), had an air of “real excitement about the US delegation” which has changed a lot in the Obama administration, Irvine said. Since its introduction in 1979, the US Congress has not ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), but the new administration has pledged its support in ratifying this convention.

The unofficial portion was personally exciting for Irvine because she met so many women in internationally influential movements. Irvine’s association with the Rutgers Center grew out of the Dream Course she taught last semester, Women and World Politics. The center’s founder, and now retired director, Charlotte Bunch, was one of the visiting scholars because she is a pioneer in the movement for women’s involvement in world leadership. Irvine also spent time with journalist Mona Eltahawy and the WGS Fall 2009 Activist-in-Residence Francisca Issaka. Both were part of the Dream Course last semester.

“One personal highlight for me,” Irvine said, “was meeting [former Irish President] Mary Robinson.” Robinson is the former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and is promoting UN Security Council Resolution 1325, trying to “give it more teeth.” UNSCR 1325 is the first resolution passed by the Security Council that specifically addresses the impact of war on women and women’s safety, as well as women’s role in conflict and peace. Overall, Irvine had a great time and hopes to take a small group of students next year. She thinks “students could learn so much from meeting these amazing women who are on the sometimes dangerous front lines in the struggle for women’s human rights.”
The Vagina Monologues
by Caitlyn L. Wright

The Women’s and Gender Studies Program, together with the Women’s Outreach Center produced the annual performance of Eve Ensler’s *The Vagina Monologues* on February 22 and 23 in Meacham Auditorium. The auditorium was packed both nights with the eclectic mix of students, community activists, families, professors, as well as the occasional straggler whose curiosity killed him/her after seeing the word “VAGINA” plastered in bold pink letters all over campus.

This was my third year to be involved in the Vagina Monologues. I first saw the production my freshman year. I sat in complete awe of these bold women who had the audacity to talk about their lives; to talk about their bodies; to talk about their vaginas, in front of a full auditorium of strangers. Each monologue was so different, but so very real, and I found myself relating to each of them in some way. I realized that I never thought about or talked about my vagina ever. The show unleashed in me a passion for the issues that women face daily, and I have been wholly changed since then.

I discovered that there is great power in talking about vaginas. Vaginas get forgotten. We’re busy. Between classes and work and extra-curricular activities, we don’t really have the time to have heart-to-hearts with our vaginas. They’re just there. A friend of mine told me after seeing the Monologues last year, “I never realized how much I take my vagina for granted. It helps me every single day and yet, I’ve spent most of my life being told that you just can’t talk about it.” The Monologues challenge the audience to listen to and respect the vagina; to listen to and respect women and the complexities of their lives.

There’s something profoundly transformative about working with women who care deeply about other women. The cast, this group of 20 or so women, came together every Sunday night for a month to talk about issues that no one talks about: first sexual encounters, rape and incest, childbirth, masturbation, femicide and war crimes. It’s difficult and emotionally draining, but we are all on this journey together. This year 47 women showed up to the auditions. For a show that can accommodate a cast of 20 at the most, this was an exciting challenge. The show was double-cast which made for double work and stress, but was doubly rewarding.

This year, the monologues raised $4,476.67 with 90 percent of that going to the Norman Women’s Resource Center.

“I come from the ‘down there’ generation. That is, those were the words—spoken rarely and in a hushed voice—that the women in my family used to refer to all female genitalia, internal or external. It wasn’t that they were ignorant of terms like vagina, labia, vulva, or clitoris. On the contrary, they were trained to be teachers and probably had more access to information than most.”

— Eve Ensler, *The Vagina Monologues*
Susan F. Sharp has one main goal in her scholarship: to educate the public about the real facts of incarcerated women in Oklahoma. Her scholarship, she says, is meant not only to report to the legislature about the data and statistics of women in prisons in Oklahoma, but also to “get people to change their hearts and minds” about the women.

Starting in 1997 and working with Susan Marcus-Mendoza, now the chair of the Human Relations Department, Sharp began to study the gender differences in the incarcerated population and how these differences affected their rehabilitation and re-entry into society in Oklahoma. She also started working with the Division on Women and Crime in the American Society of Criminology. By 2005, these studies, as well as her studies on the death penalty and the traumatic effects it has on the families of the accused, led to Sharp’s producing an annual report for the state legislature on women and crime in Oklahoma; she has gathered the data and analyzed the statistics each year since 2005. Sharp also is the editor of The Incarcerated Woman (Prentice-Hall, 2003), which examines different aspects of women, crime and prisons, and has authored Hidden Victims: Effects of the Death Penalty on Families of the Accused (Rutgers University Press, 2005). Not only this, but Sharp founded the scholarly journal Feminist Criminology.

In her work, she has found that Oklahoma’s claim to the highest female incarceration rate in the US is not because Oklahoma is ranked highest in crime rate—we actually rank at 17 or 19 out of 50 states—but is because our penalties are harsher for low-level drug offenses, which is where most women’s offenses lie. Sharp argues that the war on drugs targets the weakest link of the drug trafficking chain: women. Many of these women—about 75-85 percent of them—come from neglectful or abusive backgrounds, have a family history of imprisonment, or both. In their offenses, they are charged more harshly in Oklahoma than in other states, and thus serve more jail time.

Sharp has dedicated her career to educating the public better about the lives of these women and the choices that they make. “We need to understand [that] these aren’t bad people; they made bad choices. Their background shapes their choices, and shapes their options” from which they have to choose—and these options are rarely conducive to making good choices. In her work as an activist scholar and in using scholarship to affect social change, Sharp has been working closely with the Department of Corrections. WGS student Amina Benalioulhaj spent her spring break this year with Sharp and the women in prisons in Oklahoma.

“The Department of Corrections’] efforts need to change,” Sharp says, from being tough on crime, to “being smart on crime.” There needs to be more compassion for these women across the system; the “barriers to reintegration” must be removed. Sharp believes this is possible only by educating employers, landlords, the police, and the average citizen about the state of women in Oklahoma. The students in Sharp’s criminology capstone class this semester are doing a service learning project in which they interview people from each of these groups in the community. Selected members of each of these groups will be asked questions about their formal or informal policies regarding felons, their opinions about felons and their rehabilitation into society, or about some of the barriers to this rehabilitation.

There are many women who have left prison behind and make new lives for themselves, Sharp says, but once people find out they are convicted felons, the women tend to get treated differently and are discriminated against in all areas of their new lives. Sharp believes strongly that rehabilitation from incarceration is a social justice issue, one for which she has centered her career on addressing and trying to solve in Oklahoma. The capstone project is geared towards this issue: “The point of the project is to help the students to develop a greater understanding of the issues faced by women prisoners when they leave, thus what kinds of policies might be needed to prevent recidivism and maximize reintegration.” Each of the groups will be presenting what they learned to the rest of the class. Hopefully, too, they will take away lessons from the project. Sharp says, “All areas of my life are about service, in my teaching and my research I’m trying to give back.”
GET TO KNOW A MAJOR: CAITLIN CAMPBELL

Caitlin Campbell is a junior Women’s and Gender Studies major, also earning a minor in nonprofit organizational management, who has been active in a variety of organizations and issues during her time at OU. “The more I find out about the diversity in possible women’s and gender issues, the more issues I become interested in” she says.

In the summer of 2009, Caitlin interned at the Department on the Status of Women for the City and County of San Francisco. She was awarded a Cortez A. M. Ewing Fellowship, so for this coming summer she will be an intern in Oklahoma Representative Dan Boren’s office: “Yay, I will be living the political life in Washington, D.C.!” she said.

Caitlin came to OU wanting to be a doctor focusing on women's health, but she says that when she saw the annual OU production of Eve Ensler’s The Vagina Monologues, she had a “feminist ‘a ha!’ moment.” She says, “I realized that whatever I had to do, I wanted to be working on these important women's issues. Then I took Yaisa’s body image class freshman year, and after that I was sure that I wanted to major in Women's and Gender Studies!”

Focusing much of her studies on gender-based violence, Caitlin has multiple options ahead of her after graduation. “Right now I am thinking about [going to] law school to study international human rights law, or getting a master’s in social work, or becoming a midwife, or joining the Peace Corps.” Caitlin currently is a volunteer with the Women’s Outreach Center as a sexual assault peer educator, she says, “[Whatever I do,] I definitely want to work directly with women or women’s organizations.”

On top of her busy schedule, Caitlin loves to travel and studied abroad in Scotland in the fall 2009 semester. At the end of her study abroad term, she traveled to Italy and Germany before returning to Norman. In addition, she is studying Italian and loves to try new foods.

She expects to graduate in May 2011 and looks forward to what the future brings.

GET TO KNOW AN ALUM: MALAKA ELYAZGI

Malaka Elyazgi lived a unique mother-daughter experience--she and her daughter graduated with bachelor’s degrees on the same day in May 2007. “It was a day full of rich experiences. ...My whole family came to watch us walk.”

Since then, she has been passionate about volunteering in the community. “I decided that I wanted to work in something that is enriching and fulfilling, so I am volunteering. I am serving as the chair for the Governor’s Ethnic American Advisory Council, I serve on the Public Safety Oversight Committee for Norman and the Community Advisory Committee for the Oklahoma City Police Department.” She adds that her favorite service activities are “when I am asked by other faith communities to come and share about my [Muslim] faith.”

It was Women’s and Gender Studies that gave Malaka a voice to represent her faith and her gender in these activities. “Before majoring in Women’s [and Gender] Studies, I was a very private person and I didn't give my opinion much.” During her time at OU, Malaka realized she wanted to share her views and her faith with others in the Oklahoma community. “I knew that I must find a way to show that as an American Muslim, I believe in peace.”

If she had one piece of advice for Women's and Gender Studies majors, it would be to “take advantage of every lecture you attend. You never know what you will learn!”
THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

SPRING 2010

FIRST-TIME FEMINISM
by Yaisa Mann and the Spring 2010 Introduction to Women's and Gender Studies Students

During the beginning of the Spring 2010 semester, I assigned students in my Introduction to Women’s and Gender Studies course to blog about when they first heard about “feminism,” explaining how it was presented and what lasting effect it had on their lives. Here is how some of them responded:

“Before I had taken a women’s studies class I had viewed feminists as extreme activists. Now I view feminism as something different. Feminism isn’t [necessarily] being an extreme activist. For some people it might be sharing ideas of feminism with friends, or pointing out a scene in movie that is negative towards women.” --Jodi Pullen

“My mom presented feminism to me in a very positive way. She is a driven woman who worked her way through college all the way to a PhD and she always told my sisters and I that she is thankful she had daughters and that we can do whatever we set our minds to. She told me there are no dreams or goals in life I cannot pursue [simply] because I am a woman.”

--Mollie Kimpel

“Feminism “was [first] presented to me in a positive uplifting way. It was presented as a unified movement for women’s rights that led the way for women's voting rights and their eventual acceptance as equals in society.”

--William White

“A major exposure to feminism recently occurred [for me] while watching ‘Iron Jawed Angels’ in class. ... Learning how hard females have fought for the rights [women] have today really brings a new-found realization to my eyes. Even though women were spit on, cussed at, imprisoned while being innocent, and denied equal rights, they continued to keep their heads up and fight for what they deserved, what we deserve.”

--Julie Sartin

“My mom taught me that being a woman, in an area full of men that think they are superior, could be a blessing as long as you fight for where you belong.”

--Lauren Bartlett

THE CENTER FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE
by Karin Jonsson, Project Coordinator

The Center for Social Justice, launched in November 2009, continues to work with many university departments, student organizations, and community agencies to foster social justice advocacy and activism. “I am so happy that OU is making social justice a priority. I feel more ready to graduate and make a difference because I have had the opportunity to work with a service agency here in Norman,” says Bekah Stone, a Women’s and Gender Studies minor and one of the research assistants for the center.

The center works both with global and local social justice issues. “They are interrelated,” says Jill Irvine, the director of the Women’s and Gender Studies Program. “We tend to think about social justice issues like poverty, homelessness, racism, and violence as ‘happening over there somewhere,’ but the fact of the matter is that they also are present in our neighborhoods right here in Norman, Oklahoma.”

This semester, the center has highlighted domestic violence in Oklahoma through the screening and discussion of the locally produced film 1 in 3. In addition, guest speaker Stephanie Saldana tackled gender in Islam and Christianity. We are now preparing for various peace events with this semester’s Activist-in-Residence Nathanial Batchelder, executive director of the Peace House in Oklahoma City. We are excited and honored to have an activist with Batchelder’s experiences participate in our program.

As of January 2010, the Center is located in Robertson Hall Room 103. Please drop by and let us know about your ideas and get information about upcoming events. Also, visit our blog your Voice and our Web page at peace.ou.edu.
News and Notes

STUDENT NEWS

- **Keely Adams** and **Bekah Stone** were awarded travel scholarships to attend the Young Feminist’s Leadership Conference in March.

- **Madeline Ambrose, Sandra Criswell,** and **Shagah Zakerion** have been chosen to attend Hampshire College’s Reproductive Justice Conference with the Oklahoma State University’s Gender and Women’s Studies Program in April. They also received scholarship support in order to attend the conference, which promotes feminist activism and solidarity among women and students. For more information, visit: http://clpp.hampshire.edu/projects/conference/2010/overview

FACULTY NEWS

- **Loretta Bass** was awarded a Good Teaching Award from the university.

- **Marcia Chatelain** is now on the board of Girl Scouts of Western Oklahoma. Her chapter “Linda Warfel Slaughter: Cultural Education in North Dakota,” appears in the edited volume, *Feminist Frontiers: Women who Shaped the Midwest* from Truman State University Press this year. She had a paper about African-American girls and incarceration in the early-20th century accepted for the American Studies Association Meeting in November.

- **Sandie Holguin** won a National Endowment for the Humanities research fellowship for next year in order for her to continue her studies on dance and nationalism in Spain

- **Jill Irvine** was awarded the President’s Associates Presidential Professorship.


- **Janna Martin** was awarded the “Most-Inspiring Faculty Member” by the Student-Athletes.

- **Susan Shaughnessy** and **Allison Palmer** taught a course called “Italian Folktales: Performance and Popular Art in Early Renaissance Italy” in Arezzo, Italy over spring break.

We’ve Moved!

This spring, Women’s and Gender Studies moved to new offices in Robertson Hall 100. We occupied the offices in Physical Sciences for over a decade, but took advantage of the more spacious area in Robertson Hall, the former location of the Graduate College.

Robertson Hall has allowed us to spread out from five shared offices and a small library-lounge to seven offices, a common area and a library. We already have had student and faculty lunches.

Our official open house will be celebrated on Friday, April 16th.