

Women's Studies Newsletter

March 2009

Welcome to the Centre for Women's Studies

Brock's Women's Studies (WISE) program offers a range of courses spanning across the disciplines that examine women's lived experiences and identities in current and past societies, and that encourages new students to question their own positions within their cultural terrain. WISE employs multiple theoretical frameworks, including feminist, gender and queer theory, cultural, Marxist, and postcolonial studies, and the program engages with historical, philosophical, and literary foundations to question and challenge the ways that culture constructs concepts like gender (femininity and masculinity), sexuality (male and female), and power (majority vs. minority groups, imperialism, colonialism). WISE is an

interdisciplinary, cross-cultural area of scholarship, enlisting the help of professors in English, Sociology, Psychology, History and Classics, so any WISE major is sure to have a broad knowledge base. A background in WISE will prepare a student for work in the education system, for work abroad with non-governmental organizations that promote equity in education for girls and women, for social work, or for political activism in women's issues, among other promising careers.

For more information on the program, visit our website at www.brocku.ca/womensstudies

-Stephanie Leach & Anne Yokwe,
Women's Studies Liaisons

Meet the WISE Faculty



Ana Isla

Ana Isla is a professor and an activist in the Women Studies department who focuses on the fields of women and development and ecofeminism. She is currently conducting research in two areas: an exploration of Subsistence Economies in the Peruvian Rainforest, and Ecotourism and Mining as Sustainable Development in Latin America. Her research lobbies

against Eco-tourism in the rain forests of the world because ecotourism is inextricably linked to the impoverishment of local communities as agricultural lands have been transformed into service oriented activities in favour of international middle-class tourists.

Against the conventional wisdom, she teaches “Women and Development” (2P96) and “Environmental Justice” (3P80) focusing on the interconnectedness of social justice and ecological antagonisms grounded in the workings of capitalism and emphasizing the colonial, class, race, and gender interests of those who benefit and suffer from social and environmental inequities. In doing that, she opens up an ecofeminist conversation with political and ecological economists, as well as with eco-socialists. Those students who advocate social change will benefit from taking these courses that foster an understanding of how bodies and ecosystems are ‘othered’.



Margot Francis

Margot Francis is a professor in the Women Studies department who focuses on queer communities and popular culture. Margot emphasizes the importance of offering a course in queer culture, particularly in an environment like Brock's where there are few opportunities to explore this body of knowledge.

There has been an explosion of scholarly work in this field and it is important for students to remain current in gender studies, which is a constantly changing field, in order to keep up with a broadening theoretical base, which also includes gender and sexuality and the intersection between gender and race. The course is a lot of fun. Students examine rich cultural and material productions by Queer communities over the past 30 years, which have implications for, but are not limited to, lesbian, gay, bisexual & transgender (LGBT) students. All lectures provide an opportunity to discuss the course readings in relation to at least one form of cultural work. These cultural productions range from feature films, to short independent video, to documentaries, to contemporary novels.

Because queer media is built on queer histories that challenge notions about our own sexual orientation, Margot realizes that it can be a challenge teaching a course that speaks to students from diverse backgrounds and sexual orientations who might feel uncomfortable synthesizing discourses on sexuality. However, the nature of the course is to discuss, and embrace, sexual difference, and this is encouraged of all students.

Queer Communities at Brock
We are Queer We are here!!!

The Brock community is receptive to cultural diversity and sexual orientation, choosing to battle against homophobia, which is still an issue in our contemporary, “liberal,” society. The positive space campaign is a welcoming community that recognizes the right to exercise and express sexual identities, and to support lesbian, gay, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) students within the Brock environment and outside.

- Anne Yokwe, Women's Studies Liaison

Women's Studies Across the Disciplines: Broaden Your Knowledge Base

WISE/CLAS 2P61:

"Women in the Ancient World" challenges the myth that history has nothing to teach us about the present. Dr. Allison Glazebrook, who uses an unconventional approach to teaching about ancient women, discusses women's lives in the past in a way that concurrently examines gender and sexuality in the present, and examines how systems of oppression either still exist, or change. Glazebrook insists that earlier civilizations are not always less democratic, which is a common belief: the ancient Egyptians were an older society than the more well known (and supposedly democratic) ancient

ENGL 3V93: Feminist Speculative Fiction

"Feminist Speculative Fiction" caught my attention immediately: I'd get to study dystopias, schools of magic, and feminism for credit. Dr. Ann Howey, an Arthurian and children's literature scholar, explained that the goal of the course is to examine the intersection of science fiction and fantasy with feminist dialogue. While stereotypes label these genres as by males and for males, Dr. Howey notes that "so many women are writing [speculative fiction] and this class provides a way of examining women's contributions to the field." And for those who believe that this genre only caters to masculine interests, Howey remarks that speculative fiction and feminist thought intersect in their goals to critique social constructions. As a popular literary genre, speculative fiction has the ability to reach a larger audience so more readers (and readers who would not generally be exposed to feminism) can become familiar with feminist ideas. Texts for this class include Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, which examines a young woman's response to the dystopian future that she lives in, and the faith that emerges from that darkness, and Patricia McKillip's *Od Magic*, which tells the story of a uniquely talented man who takes a job as a gardener at a school of magic.

Women in the Ancient World

Greeks, but Egyptian women had more autonomy, which suggests that rights are not always progressing linearly for women. Moreover, Glazebrook notes that past students have been surprised by Spartan women's autonomy, and ability to "kick ass!" Whereas silence was the ideal for a woman in Greece, a Spartan woman had a respected voice: if she told her son to "come back with your shield or on it" she was taken seriously. Glazebrook believes that looking at women's roles in past societies will help to understand women's roles in society today: if women had systems controlling their voices then, can we find similar systems operating today?

WISE/SOCI 3P58: Women and Aging

Everyone ages; however, Dr. Ann Duffy, creator of "Women and Aging," notes that "young women are not encouraged to think much beyond 40...other than to be aware of the pressure to battle the physical aging process and the threat of wrinkles and grey hair." "Women and Aging" encourages female students to examine the way that aging has been conceptualized as a failure for women. Dr. Duffy encourages her students to understand "aging as a natural, physical process [that] runs counter to the consumer society model of aging that promises endless youth." Understanding one's own position in an aging process that is culturally constructed, and listening to women's voices that have passed the tabooed age of 40 are ways to reconceptualize the actual experience of aging, and to push against the commercialization of aging. After all, we're all going to get older and we shouldn't be told how to do something that comes naturally.

Understanding Feminism at Brock: Student Responses

I recently patrolled the halls to get a better understanding of how Brock students understand the term “feminism.” Both personal experiences and stereotypes had an impact on the responses, and the goal here is to dispel some of those myths and misconceptions attached to the *dreaded* word **feminist**. -Stephanie Leach

What does the term “feminism” and/or “feminist” mean to you?

A: Feminists are a group of individuals who ensure equal rights are given to women in regards to any field within the world.

Response: The goal of feminism is definitely to end the subordination of women. Unfortunately, feminists have not yet been able to ensure this for the majority of women. Unequal wages in the workplace (women, on average, still only make 75% of what men make on average) and unequal representations of women’s artistic history are two ongoing problems that plague women everywhere, and perpetuate a cyclic system of discrimination.

A: I think of a movement where women believe they aren’t being treated fairly and that think all men are misogynists. I also think of the lesbian riots at Lilith Fair.

Response: The idea that feminists hate all men is a common misconception. Feminism does not target or hate all men, and recognizes that generalizing all men as misogynistic is unproductive and untrue. Instead, feminists examine structural inequality in order to determine how discrimination is culturally and politically constructed by larger systems. We are taught to look at and judge individual cases of sexism or racism, but the real problem lies in structural sexism, where inequities can be naturalized and perpetuated.

Whether female or male, do you consider yourself a feminist? If yes, why? If no, why?

A: Yes and no; Yes, because I believe genders should be regarded equally, but no because I am not a woman.

Response: Anyone can be a feminist. Feminism is a belief system and therefore anyone who agrees with feminism’s values can label her/himself as a feminist. Joss Whedon, the creator of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*, has on numerous occasions labelled himself a feminist.

A: Yes, I was raised with my mother as the main provider in my household, but that didn’t stop her from nurturing and being a caregiver as well. And by following her example I have great ambitions for the future but I know that if I decide to stay home and have kids I would not be turning my back on feminism. I am feminist because I know I have the right to choose my destiny and I exercise that right everyday of my life.

Response: There does seem to be a myth that a woman who is a feminist won’t be a good mother, or wouldn’t want to be a mother because she would be too busy clawing her way to the top of a corporation, or picketing in the streets, but feminism tries to dispel

the notion that women are subject to one gender role, or are “naturally” better suited for one type of lifestyle.

Community Events: Get Involved!

Sex Work Shouldn't Equal Murder

On Thursday January 22, 2009, a rally was held at the Robert S. K. Welch courthouse in downtown St. Catharines to demand justice for the murder of the local Stephine Beck. Stephine, who was strangled to death on March 7, 2007, was a sex trade worker and a drug addict. The accused Wayne Ryczak, who pled guilty to manslaughter, only received a one day jail sentence, leading rally co-organizer and participant Lois Smith to remark, “the punishment didn't fit the crime.” Slogans like “One, two, three, four, we want justice, we want more” and “Justice for Stephine and all other sex trade workers” could be heard in the downtown core, as participants rallied against the unjust sentence and waited for the appeal, which was taking place simultaneously. Many are suspicious that Beck's lifestyle was the reason for the unfair sentence, and Stephine's mother, Alice Dort, asked about the one day jail sentence, “Are you telling me that's all her life was worth?” Fellow Brock students Brittany Stalker and Leslie McCormack, both 4th year Soci/Crim, attended the rally, but both expressed concern about the lack of student participation at the event. Brittany, who's also attended animal rights events, noted that more Brock students ought to get involved in community events and speak out about controversial issues. This event, like many others held in the Niagara region, presents a fulfilling opportunity for university students to get involved and speak out for all of those silent voices, and for all those underrepresented peoples. As Deb Nanson, the founder of a St. Catharines sex trade task force, states, “Sex work is what [Stephine] did, it's not who she was.” Our job today was to let St. Catharines know that.

-Stephanie Leach

March 2 – 8: International Women’s Week: Reclaiming Our Bodies

Hosted by the Feminist Action Collective

March 2: Reclaiming Women’s Health

12pm-3pm: Reclaiming Your Menstruation : Brock University –MAC CHOWN A BLOCK

Join volunteers of the Feminist Action Collective for a workshop on how to make your own reusable cloth pad! - take one home with you! No experience necessary, supplies provided! Find out more about Women's Health History, the politics of menstruation and how to reclaim your period!

5pm-7:30pm. Screening of “The Business of Being Born” at 31 James Street, St. Catharines, followed by a presentation and discussion on midwifery and reclaiming your body in child birth.

March 3: Reclaiming Domesticity

12:30pm-3pm – Chemical Sensibilities ... Radical Domesticity as Anticapitalist Activism!
Brock University THISTLE EYE

4pm-6pm - : Subsistence Displacement and Food Sovereignty - a presentation by Megan Martins
Brock University TH 242

March 4: Budget Cuts Rally

B.rock L.abour A.nd S.tudentsT.ogether will be coming together with members of the Brock Community to rally against the budget cuts proposed by the University Administration.

Rally

When: Wednesday March 4th, 2009 @ Noon / 12h00

Where: In Front of the Schmon Tower

Protest

When: Wednesday March 4th, 2009 @ 2:50pm / 14h50

Where: Outside of Sankey Chamber in MCA (Top of Stairs)

Contact: blastagaincuts@gmail.com for more info!

March 5: Global Feminisms

11am-4pm: Come see displays and hear discussions from various organizations and groups from the international women’s movement – MCA Block

3pm-5pm: Join us in Welch Hall 207 for presentations about the global feminist movement.

March 6: Women's Spirituality

This event will be held at the St.Catharines Area Arts Council, at 27 James Street, downtown St.Catharines.

6pm-7: A screening of "The Burning Times", and NFB film discussing the witch hunts and women's spirituality.

7pm-8: A discussion and lecture about women's spirituality.

8pm-9: A meditation workshop with Kay Proudfoot.

Join us afterwards for an **ALL WOMEN'S POETRY AND MUSIC** show! 9pm, Strega Café (King Street, downtown St. Catharines)

March 7 & 8: The Vagina Monologues

Saturday: 7pm (Doors at 6:30)

Sunday: 5pm (Doors at 4:30)

Robertson Hall, 85 Church street (behind the Folk arts Council)

Ticket are 8\$ in advance, 10\$ at the door and are available from: OPIRG Brock, Strega Café, NAC and Maiden Niagara

March 8: International Women's Day!

10am-11am: Tune in to CFBU 103.7 for a one-hour discussion on current women's issues, with the Feminist Action Collective!

Contact us at: feministactioncollective@gmail.com



Your Women's Studies Liaisons



Stephanie Leach

Stephanie Leach is a 5th year English major who became involved with the WISE department in her third year. "I love studying literature, but I find the experience much more fulfilling when my work can intersect with current women's issues and cultural studies. Unfortunately, coming out of high school, I had no idea that WISE existed, and what I was told about feminism wasn't favourable. I want young women to realize the benefits of this program – not just in the workplace down the road, but in their understanding of the world around them." Stephanie will be using her WISE background next year at the Master's level, studying the popular vampire series *Twilight* from a feminist perspective.



Anne Yokwe

Brock has been my second home since I migrated to Canada four years ago to take Community Health Sciences and Women Studies, which integrates theory and praxis, especially, when learning about women issues that are intertwined with gender, sexuality, class and race. These courses empowered me to become in touch with the notion of the "self". A term that implies how the personal is Political and, that the body is a site for struggle, contest and resistance, which creates awareness concerning social issues that affect us women. These experiences give me a sense of independence and a voice to challenge systems of oppression that exist today. It's been a pleasure putting up this years Newsletter which was so much fun. I hope that this is an opportunity for more students in the University and outside it as well to become engaged in these discourses and find a new appreciation for Women Studies.