

# WISE WORDS

the first , but certainly not the last, word in women's studies . . .

Spring 2004

## In the Beginning: A Retrospective Look at Women's Studies

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It is hoped that the **WISE WORDS** Newsletter will provide a forum to: encourage students and friends of Women's Studies in the communities to come together (connect) for the purpose of discussing issues of importance in the region; and, to enhance existing relationships and generate new partnerships.

### . . . A Message from the Director

It is March 8<sup>th</sup> and I am writing these remarks during International Women's Day. On this day in 1857, women working in textile factories in New York City staged a protest against inhumane working conditions and low wages. On this same date in 1908, 15,000 women marched through the streets demanding voting rights and an end to child labour. They adopted the slogan "Bread and Roses", with bread representing economic security and roses a better quality of life. The first International Woman's Day conference was held in Denmark in

1910. As Brock University celebrates its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, it seems like a good time to acknowledge our own history and the first female faculty members who confronted and made visible the concerns and needs of women on campus. Professors such as Rosalind Blauer, Josephine Meeker, and Mary Frances Richardson worked tirelessly and tenaciously to address

issues such as daycare, maternity leaves, salary and benefit equality, bursary and scholarship opportunities, and tenure and promotion advancement. Based on their role modelling and the groundwork they put in place, the vision for a Centre for Women's Studies was brought to fruition by women from all six faculties and approved by Senate in 1990.

The first co-major Women's Studies program in 1991 offered a combination of courses in both Social Sciences and Humanities to reclaim women's history, to further the

understanding of gendered experiences and to challenge power structures that perpetuate inequities, self-doubt, isolation and abuse. As interest in the program grew, faculty members from across the university created and taught cross-disciplinary courses that consider women's issues from such perspectives as history, health, literacy, culture, media, economics, education, and

*'As I talk to students, I become concerned about the misconceptions and lack of understanding about the field of Women's Studies.'*

— Sharon Abbey

Cont. on page 2

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

— Margaret Mead

### What's Inside . . .

- Page 2 ~ Faculty Focus
- Page 3 ~ Student Profiles
- Page 4 ~ Fourth-year Students

Please be sure to check the Faculty of Women's Studies Web site at [www.brocku.ca/womensstudies/](http://www.brocku.ca/womensstudies/) for updated information and ongoing activities.

## Moving Forward: Envisioning An Equitable Future

Cont. from page 1

sociology. This year, the department will offer a full major program for the first time. The centre is vibrant, dynamic and expanding but this momentum requires ongoing energy, passion and spirit in order to be maintained. Although the accomplishments of women deserve to be recognized and celebrated, we cannot afford to become complacent and forget that many girls and women in the world still lack an education, access to proper health care, equitable labour advocacy or a secure environment where they feel safe and protected from violence and abuse.

As I talk to students, I become concerned about the misconceptions and lack of understanding about the field of Women's Studies. Many people feel that women's goals have been accomplished, their voices heard and their issues addressed. Others connect Women's Studies with a misinformed and negative view of feminism, dismissing it as a viable or relevant course of study without further consideration. They readily accept a negative portrayal of

feminists as bitter women who focus solely on their disadvantaged position and who direct their anger at men. Such unfortunate stereotyping is misleading and serves to keep us mired in either/or dualistic thinking. In contrast, I would like to emphasize that feminism is an ever-changing and contested discourse that problematizes gender relations and values diversity and self-determinism for all individuals. It is a philosophy embraced by *both* men and women who are: (1) committed to inter-relatedness, working collaboratively and breaking down abusive power structures; (2) open to possibilities that allow everyone to improve their living conditions, recognize their strengths and realize their goals; and (3) willing to confront inequality in order to respect the voices and experiences of everyone. Research and scholarly inquiry that is considered to be 'feminist' is unique in its purpose rather than its design. It focuses on social change, subjective experiences and projects that promote women's humanity, hope and dignity. I invite you to give voice to your ideas, visions and opinions to help us all move forward in Women's Studies.

### Woman's Day Event Held at Brock in March

As a member of the NRIWD Committee, Beatrix Prinsen (on the right) thanked Sarah Beatty for performing on guitar and vocals at the opening of the event



*I do not wish [women] to have power over men; but over themselves.*

— Mary Wollstonecraft



NRIWD Committee member and OPIRG representative Missa Bolibruck (far left) with honorary judges, Marlene Bergsma and Dr. Maureen Connelly

Brock students presented their poster projects as part of the first-year Women's Studies course requirement



### Faculty Focus:

#### Judith Blackwell – Sociology

Professor Blackwell received her B.A. from Carlton University, her M.A. from the New School of Social Research, and her PhD from the London School of Economics.

She was one of the creators of a proposal that led to the creation of the Women's Studies program. The program brings faculty from all subjects together in a common direction by professors from many departments also teaching in Women's Studies. The program also has a community outreach built in so Brock has a profile in the public realm.

Women's Studies is applicable in any field and would be beneficial in any job because all jobs require looking after women's needs. Blackwell is currently researching women as victims of the war on drugs.

*Does feminist mean large unpleasant person who'll shout at you or someone who believes women are human beings. To me it's the latter, so I sign up.*

— Margaret Atwood

## Through the Years: WISE Students Share Their Stories



### 1st-Year

#### Women's Studies/Classical Studies

I started out as an Archaeology/Classics major and switched to a Women's Studies/Classical Studies major after I took Women's Studies 1F90 to fulfill a credit requirement.

It really opened my eyes and peaked my interest, especially about how much has gone on in the women's movements. I felt that women's history and experiences are left out of public and high school because the schools are male-biased and patriarchal. Possibly a presentation at *Smart Start* to introduce students to Women's Studies would help promote the program.

Women's Studies is a chance for women to see how far women have come, what we had to go through to get those rights, and how we ended up where we are now. But most importantly, what still needs to be done.

I am interested in the women in the ancient classical world of Greece and Rome and how myths and the lives of women interconnect and reflect each other. I am also looking forward to taking classes about women in the ancient world, mothering, and sexuality.

In the future I would like to be a teaching assistant, and then maybe a professor, or perhaps work in a museum offering insight on women in ancient times.

Rachel Oulds



### 2nd-Year

#### Women's Studies/Sociology

I began as a Popular Culture major and took Women's Studies to fill a requirement. I loved the class so I decided to become a Women's Studies co-major. I enjoyed *Women In A Global Perspective* and *Mythical Woman in Legend and Religion*,

but all Women's Studies courses opened my eyes to a new idea or perspective. I recommend taking Women's Studies just to see what it is all about.

I have always thought that women were equal to men and I felt angry about things that others seemed not to care about. I was also interested in women's rights and feminism in high school but I never thought about taking it in university.

I was involved in starting a Women's Studies Society this year. We will continue again in September and I hope we will be involved in things like promoting International Women's Day, setting up talks and debates, and possibly writing articles for the *Brock Press*. I also feel Women's Studies needs to be promoted in high schools.

Although I am uncertain of a career at this point, I am interested in studying women and violence. I think I might be interested in working as a social worker, women's rape crisis worker, or as support worker in a women's shelter.

Robbie Nussey

### 3rd-Year

#### Women's Studies/Sociology

I took Women's Studies as a first-year elective with a major in Sociology. I did not enjoy the course until my TA explained the readings and material to me. My advice for students now is to think positive and to seek help when you need it.

My favourite classes in Women's Studies have been about women in history, women in literature, and feminist research methods. But I feel Women's Studies is not promoted very well. I would suggest sending representatives to high schools and have them discuss what Women's Studies is and how it can be connected with other courses. I've gotten positive reactions from friends and family for taking Women's Studies.

My interest in working with children with special needs has helped me with career choices. In the future I want to be a schoolteacher, either of kindergarten or Grade 1, a vice principal, principal and/or a guidance counsellor.

*Cheshue worked as a teaching assistant for first-year Women's Studies this year.*



Cheshue Soufian

### 4th-Year

#### Women's Studies/Sociology

Inspired by my mother's participation in classes about feminism, I decided to incorporate feminism into my goal of being a teacher and creating change through education. To prevent some of the negative views of feminism, I feel it needs to be taught in the elementary Grades 3 to 6, so that students have a firmer grasp of what feminism means and dispel images created by the media. Equal access in education is a very important part.

I am currently writing my thesis on the everyday lived experiences of feminist secondary school teachers by investigating whether teachers were involved in gender training, and if and how they incorporate feminism into their classroom. I am also looking at teaching strategies and resistance that teachers may have to feminism.

*Natalie will be attending D'Youville College in Buffalo, New York, in January 2005, to pursue a teaching degree and Master of Education. While at Brock she was a teaching assistant for first-year Sociology.*



Natalie Kirkpatrick

## Fourth-Year WISE Co-Major Students Move On

### Krista Catherwood - Women's Studies/Sociology

Coming out of high school I looked for courses that were different from subjects I had been taught, so I decided on Women's Studies. I chose Sociology as my co-major because I found a parallel between the two disciplines, which complimented each other.

In Women's Studies you learn about how society, family, religion, etc. shape different experiences, and it makes you question the dominant ideologies.

Interest in my thesis topic began from a volunteering experience I completed for WISE 3P95: *Experiential Learning*. I was and still am interested in violence against women. My thesis is on the occupational stress encountered by employees in battered women shelters. I am distributing questionnaires and then interviewing workers in battered women's shelters asking them to indicate the amount of stress they experience.

*Krista would like to work within the field of social work or counselling services for a few years and then pursue an M.A. in Social Work. While at Brock she was a teaching assistant for Sociology.*

The eyes of others our prisons;  
their thoughts our cages.  
—Virginia Woolf

### Katie Waugh – Women's Studies/English

A high school guidance counselor recommended the Women's Studies program to me, and after my first Women's Studies class taught by Ann Duffy, I was hooked.

For my thesis topic, I chose to investigate the consequences, or possible consequences, of adolescent sibling care-giving, and if such consequences extend into adult lives. I am also interested in reproductive technology and its effects and consequences on women.

I was glad to see Women's Studies incorporate two half-appointed professors last year, and I feel that along with the newsletter, the program is better promoted. They give a sense of place to the program. Women's Studies was never mentioned in university presentations in high school.

*Katie would eventually like to pursue an M.A. in Social Justice and Equity or a teaching degree. While at Brock she was a teaching assistant for Women's Studies.*

### Penni Lafleur – Women's Studies/Communications

It wasn't until after taking Women's Studies 1F90, as an elective in the spring of 2002, that I became a co-major. The course, taught by Dianne Bergsma, opened my eyes in the most profound ways. Not only was I able to incorporate most of my education in media studies into this new discipline, but I also discovered many facets of my own life. That fall, going into my third year of studies as a Communications major, I switched my focus to co-majoring in Women's Studies.

After completing the mandatory requirements for both second- and third-year Women's Studies courses in one year, I found I was able to explore another area of study I was interested in – Women and Work. I chose women with work-related injuries as my thesis topic and I am examining the social, economic, medical and possibly political responses to women's claims of injury acquired in the workplace.

*Penni will be attending McMaster University this fall to pursue an M.A. in Work & Society, where she will continue to explore the topic of women and work. While at Brock she was a teaching assistant for Women's Studies and Communications Studies.*

### WISE 2003 Josephine Meeker Award Winners



The Centre for Women's Studies 2003 recipients of the Josephine Meeker Research Fund. Pictured from left are, Sandra Pacheco, Penni Lafleur, Krista Catherwood, Josephine Meeker, retired professor of Geography, Sharon Abbey, Director of the Centre for Woman's Studies, Katie Waugh and Natalie Kirkpatrick. Fourth-year students majoring in Women's Studies are eligible for the annual award to help offset the costs of Honours projects.

This edition of *WISE WORDS* was created, designed and edited by Penni Lafleur, a fourth-year Women's Studies/Communications co-major. Contributing writer was Jen Roy, a third-year Women's Studies/Psychology co-major, as part of a volunteer placement for WISE 3P95: *Experiential Learning*. To find out how you can assist with the creation of the Fall 2004 edition, please contact Beatrix Prinsen at [bprinsen@brocku.ca](mailto:bprinsen@brocku.ca)

## Program Options

Major in WISE \*NEW\*  
 Co-Major in WISE  
 Minor in WISE  
 One or More Electives

### Spring 2004

#### 1F90 – *Introduction to Women's Studies*

An overview of theoretical perspectives on the study of women's lives

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#### 3P65 – *Health Issues for Women & Girls*

Feminist analysis of perceptions of health

### Summer 2004

#### 2Q90 – *Images of Mothers & Motherhood*

Comparative constructions of maternal norms in popular culture including film analysis and autobiographical inquiry

### Fall 2004

#### 1F90 – *Introduction to Women's Studies*

An overview of theoretical perspectives on the study of women's lives

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#### 2P90 – *Women's Issues: Sexuality, Class, Ethnicity*

Diverse perspectives on the intersecting locations of women

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#### 2P91 – *Status of Women: Historical Perspectives*

The development of feminist consciousness through analysis of lives and literature

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#### 2P00 – *Classic & Contemporary Discourses in Women's Studies*

Issues-based study of gender from women's viewpoints within various frameworks

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#### 3P60 – *Gender Issues in Teaching and Learning*

Feminist pedagogical theory and practice with respect to both traditional and alternative educational contexts

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#### 3P90 – *Contemporary Feminist Thought*

Controversies and debates about diverse issues from a global feminist perspective

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#### 3P95 – *Experiential Learning in Women's Studies*

Co-ordinated and theoretically grounded work relating to the participation in and reflection on practical experiences, community placements

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#### 4F90 / 4F91 – *Honours Thesis & Seminar*

Development of an individual project under the supervision of a faculty advisor

### Winter 2005

#### 2P92 – *Women in World Literature*

Representations of women in literature and analyses by women from diverse marginalized backgrounds

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#### 2P96 – *Women & Development*

Feminist examination of diverse experiences of women living in the non-industrial world

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#### 3P61 – *Gender and Society in Ancient Greece*

Ancient construction of femininity and masculinity and their relationships to social political and legal systems in Greece

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#### 3P91 – *Contemporary Feminist Research Methods*

The study and practical application of a variety of research methods from a feminist standpoint. A research plan will be designed based on a question of interest to the group

**Note:** 1F90, 3P95, 4F90 and 4F91 will continue in the winter term.