

## Program in Women's and Gender Studies

The MIT Program in Women's and Gender Studies (WGS) continues to build on its success as an interdisciplinary undergraduate program and to provide a framework and community for scholarly inquiry focusing on women and gender. Exploring gender cross-culturally, historically, and artistically with respect to other identity categories such as race, nation, sexuality, religion, and class, WGS subjects are designed to help MIT students better understand various constructions of knowledge and value and realize the range of personal and intellectual discoveries made possible by using gender as a category of analysis. In addition, the program is an important resource and support for faculty who have an advanced knowledge of women's and gender studies within particular disciplines and who want to enrich their work by collaborating and studying across disciplinary lines. The core faculty in the program is dedicated to the continual development of undergraduate education that reaches across the humanities, social sciences, and sciences to provide students with the tools of cultural analysis and ideological critique.

The interdisciplinary nature of women's and gender studies guides WGS in sponsoring events that both engage and challenge faculty, students, administration, and staff. WGS is dedicated to increasing its visibility within the MIT community and persistently partners with other departments, student groups, and organizations. This year WGS collaborated with Students Advocating Against Violence (SAAV), the Center for Health Promotion and Wellness at MIT Medical, the Community Response Group (CRG), and LGBT@MIT to provide events for the second annual Sexual Assault Awareness Week on the MIT campus.

WGS continues to host the Graduate Consortium in Women's Studies (GCWS). Now in its fourth year at MIT, GCWS continues to add richness to the already strong women's and gender studies community on campus. One highlight was "Conversation on Publishing Options: Meet the Editors," which provided a forum for cutting-edge feminist discussions among faculty members and participants.

The program's commitment to the study of women and gender far exceeds that of other women's and gender studies programs in the Boston area. Working with the Center for New Words for the fifth consecutive and final year, WGS cohosted the cutting-edge national conference Women, Action, and the Media (WAM!2009), at which progressive feminists, journalists, academics, authors, activists, bloggers, and students networked, shared skills, and exchanged innovative ideas to increase women's influence in the media. WGS and another community partner, Women in Film and Video New England, continued to cohost the Chicks Make Flicks film screenings and discussions with local female filmmakers. One highlight was the screening of Pamela Tanner Boll's *Who Does She Think She Is?* This film examines the mothering-versus-working choice faced by American women and women artists pulled in different directions as they try to manage the competing demands of artistic fulfillment, marriage, motherhood, and economic survival. The film was followed by a discussion with Boll, an acclaimed director and Academy Award-winning producer.

## **Program Administration**

In July 2009, professor Thomas F. DeFrantz ended his two-year term as program director. Professor Sally Haslanger will continue DeFrantz's dedication to strengthening the sense of intellectual community within WGS on campus. Under her guidance, WGS will present our 25th-anniversary celebratory conference, Futures of Science, Race and Gender, on September 26, 2009.

The WGS program administrator, Heidi M. González, continues working to increase the number of students enrolled in WGS courses as well as the number of students pursuing WGS concentrations, minors, and majors. She is focused on creating and maintaining collaborative efforts within and outside of the MIT population that will increase the visibility of WGS on the MIT campus, in the neighboring Boston area, and in the national women's studies community. She received a 2009 Division of Student Life Infinite Mile Award for her work on the Sexual Assault Awareness Week Planning Committee.

The WGS Steering Committee consisted of Professor DeFrantz, lecturer Rebecca Faery (Writing and Humanistic Studies), lecturer Abha Sur (WGS), associate professor Ian Condry (Foreign Languages and Literatures), associate professor Christopher Capozzola (History), assistant professor Sarah Brouillette (Literature), associate professor Helen Lee (Writing and Humanistic Studies), and assistant professor Arthur W. Bahr (Literature). Ex-officio members of the committee were Marlene Manoff (Humanities Library), associate head librarian and collections manager for WGS, and WGS program coordinator Heidi M. González. Student members of the committee were Amy Marshall '09 and Ernest Alba '09. The Curriculum Committee consisted of senior lecturer Wyn Kelley (Literature), Christopher Capozzola, and associate professor Heather Paxson (Anthropology). The Programming Committee members were Lee, Sur, Faery, DeFrantz, González, and Marshall.

## **Curriculum and Faculty Development**

WGS offers an undergraduate curriculum consisting of core classes and cross-listed subjects from approximately 10 departments and sections. Students may concentrate, minor, and petition for a major (called a "major departure") in women's and gender studies. WGS offered 26 subjects during AY2009. Approximately 300 students enrolled in women's and gender studies classes, the bulk of whom registered for core classes. In response to student demand, WGS again offered two sections of SP.401 Introduction to Women's and Gender Studies, which allowed approximately 45 students to explore the field at the introductory level. In addition, we were able to offer SP.406 Sexual and Gender Identities and SP.414 Gender/Media Studies (taught by WGS lecturer Kim Surkan). In keeping with our commitment to a globally oriented curriculum, we taught SP.650J The Psychology of Gender and Race with an international focus during the fall and spring and continued to offer SP.427 Women in the Developing World as well as five other classes with international themes.

The WGS Intellectual Forum continued this year in an experimental format in which faculty members presented their current research to their colleagues and invited students from WGS and other disciplines. Sarah Brouillette hosted "Making Human

Rights: The Case of *Born into Brothels*." Arthur Bahr presented "Playing with Mirrors: Revising the Past, Envisioning the Future in John Gower's *Cinkante Balades*."

WGS works closely with GCWS, a cross-institutional program hosted at MIT that fosters women's studies scholarship. GCWS consists of nine local universities (Boston College, Boston University, Brandeis University, Harvard University, MIT, Northeastern University, Simmons College, Tufts University, and the University of Massachusetts, Boston) whose faculty offer interdisciplinary team-taught graduate courses and a workshop for dissertation writers in women's and gender studies. Working with associate professor Ian Condry, in his role as the MIT representative to GCWS, coordinator Andrea Sutton produced several curricular and pedagogical development workshops on topics such as work, food, and law and order.

### **Programmatic Highlights**

WGS programming continually reflects the wide spectrum of academic disciplines and issues related to women's and gender studies. Given the interdisciplinary nature of the field and our commitment to cross-cultural collaboration, Women's and Gender Studies naturally continues to initiate work with groups around the MIT campus and the Cambridge community. Many groups and programs also approach WGS, seeking our administrative and financial cosponsorship. A sample of the interdisciplinary programming that WGS brought to the MIT community in the past year includes:

The Geneviève McMillan–Reba Stewart Lectures on Women in the Developing World

- "Immaculate Conception: Outsourcing Reproductive Labor and Questions for Feminist Analysis," Modhumita Roy, associate professor of English and director of women's studies, Tufts University
- "In Search of Health: Palestinian Women Under Israeli Military Occupation," Rita Giacaman, professor of public health, Institute of Community and Public Health, Birzeit University, West Bank, Palestine

Women in Science, Technology, and Engineering

- "The Truth About Boys and Girls," a presentation by authors Dr. Rosalind C. Barnett, senior scientist at the Women's Studies Research Center, Brandeis University, and professor Caryl Rivers, professor of journalism, Boston University
- "Gendering Robots: Posthuman Sexism in Japan," presented by professor Jennifer Robertson and hosted by Professor Condry

MIT-specific faculty development

- "Current Research Forum for MIT Women Faculty in Science and Engineering," Nancy Kanwisher, MIT professor of cognitive neuroscience, and Nergis Mavalvala, MIT professor, Department of Physics

Assorted lectures and programming in women's and gender studies as related to political science, African American studies, media studies, literature, environmental studies, philosophy, sociology, art, and history

- “When Anchormen Attack! Gender, Race and the Media in Election 2008,” a multimedia lecture by acclaimed journalist, author, and media critic Jennifer L. Pozner of Women in Media & News, cosponsored by the Comparative Media Studies program (CMS) and the Department of Political Science
- “Women on the Edge: The Moral Economy of Balancing Low-Paid Work and Family,” a lecture by professor Lisa Dodson cosponsored by the Department of Political Science
- *Still Black: A Portrait of Black Trans Men*, a film screening in collaboration with LBGT@MIT
- WAMI2009, an annual national conference where progressive feminists, journalists, authors, teachers, activists, bloggers, and students network, share skills, and strategize to increase women's influence in the media; cosponsored by the Center for New Words, Cambridge
- “African American Improvisational Quilts: An Introduction,” a quilt exhibit and public talk by collector Heather Korostoff Murray cosponsored by the Program in Writing and Humanistic Studies and the Humanities Library
- “Achy Obejas Reads From Her New Novel *Ruins*,” cosponsored by the Center For New Words, the MIT Rainbow Lounge, Foreign Languages and Literatures, the Program in Writing and Humanistic Studies, and the Graduate Student Council
- Chicks Make Flicks, film screenings and discussions with directors, including a screening of *The Axe in the Attic* featuring director Lucia Small; cosponsored by Women in Film and Video New England
- QWOC WEEK 2008: Lights, Camera, Activism, film screening of *U People* in collaboration with Queer Women of Color and Friends, Boston
- Sexual Assault Awareness Week, during which WGS worked closely with MIT Medical, the Center for Health Promotion and Wellness, SAAV, CRG, and LBGT@MIT to promote sexual assault awareness and prevention on the MIT campus

### **Research, Publications, and Service**

WGS faculty members continued to make active contributions to their individual fields as well as to the interdisciplinary field of women's and gender studies. Their accomplishments are listed in the reports of their home departments.

### **Affirmative Action Goals and Successes**

The Program in Women's and Gender Studies remains committed to affirmative action in all that we do. We had no long-term staff or faculty appointments and no tenure-track faculty hires this year. The student staff continues to be a diverse group of MIT students.

In terms of curriculum, each WGS class takes into account racial diversity as a key factor in looking at gender. In AY2009, WGS continued to offer a number of classes directly addressing American racial politics: SP.640J The Science of Race, Sex, and Gender; SP.417 Black Matters: Introduction to Black Studies; SP.575J Writing about Race; and

SP.650J The Psychology of Gender and Race. In an effort to promote and sustain an international, comparative study of gender, we again offered SP.409 Women and Global Activism and SP.461J International Women's Voices. We also offered SP.448J Gender and Representation of Asian Women and SP.621J Violence, Human Rights, and Justice.

In our programming, we pay close attention to a variety of forms of diversity, prioritizing a rich schedule of multiracial speakers and events that address women's and gender studies issues at the intersections of race, class, nation, sexuality, and gender expression.

### **Future Plans**

WGS will celebrate our 25th anniversary with the Futures of Science, Race and Gender conference. The conference, scheduled for September 26, 2009, will bring to campus two prominent scholars as keynote speakers: Pilar Ossorio (University of Wisconsin Law School), who will speak on genetic testing, and Elizabeth Roberts (Department of Anthropology, University of Michigan), who will speak on race and gender in technology. The respondents to the keynoters have been selected from MIT faculty and WGS alumni. In addition, the conference will include a panel highlighting four generations of women scholars in Brain and Cognitive Sciences at MIT: Molly Potter, Nancy Kanwisher, Rebecca Saxe, and Liane Young.

Professor DeFrantz worked to widen faculty participation in the program across the Institute, especially in the sciences and engineering fields. Professor Haslanger will continue this work and, more generally, seek to increase the visibility of WGS in the MIT community and beyond. She is especially interested in building interdisciplinary connections in two areas: gender and development and gender and media. Topics in development are of interest to humanists, social scientists, and engineers, and MIT has exceptional people working on solutions to development challenges. We believe that WGS has much to learn and to offer in this area (e.g., relating to cross-cultural work on gender and activism). CMS has taken a hit with the departure of Henry Jenkins. This, however, offers an opportunity to build new alliances and initiate new projects. Many WGS faculty are affiliated with CMS and will be active in rebuilding the program. Professor Haslanger also aims to strengthen the sense of intellectual community within WGS. The program will continue to pay special attention to the international, comparative study of gender and to the roles of women and minorities in science and technology, in both curriculum and programming.

For many years, WGS has networked with other offices on campus to provide support to women students. Given the recent layoffs of Jackie Simonis in S<sup>3</sup> and Lynn Roberson in the Office of the Dean of Student Life, there will be a shortage of resources for women on campus, and more of this support work will fall to WGS. Although we are happy to provide support to students, there is a limit to what we can offer, given that WGS is an academic program. Professor Haslanger will continue to collaborate with other offices on campus to see how the safety net for women can be secured in light of these recent departures and will explore the possibility of establishing a women's center on campus.

A chief priority of WGS is to welcome and involve dynamic women's studies scholars who will enrich the feminist academic community on campus. Martin Luther King Jr.

scholar Carl Paris will continue his WGS postdoctoral fellowship. We will also reach out to Quayshawn Spencer, a Martin Luther King Jr. postdoc in philosophy, whose work on race will be of interest to many in WGS.

Drawing on past successes, we will continue the Women's and Gender Studies Intellectual Forum faculty development series, the Geneviève McMillan–Reba Stewart Lectures on Women in the Developing World, the Chicks Make Flicks film screenings and discussions with local female filmmakers, and our Sexual Assault Awareness Week collaboration.

**Heidy M. González**  
**Program Coordinator**

*More information about the Program in Women's and Gender Studies can be found at <http://web.mit.edu/wgs/>.*