

## 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 community for scholarly inquiry focusing on women and gender.

WGS subjects are designed to explore the full range of human inquiry, placing gender as the central category of analysis. Because gender is always experienced together with other social markers, WGS subjects investigate gender in relation to other identity categories such as race, nation, sexuality, religion, and class. Exploring gender and related social categories cross-culturally, historically, and artistically enables MIT students to understand competing constructions of knowledge and value and this, in turn, makes possible a broad range of personal as well as intellectual discoveries.

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. Reading groups, intellectual forums, and guest speakers bring the faculty community together for interdisciplinary conversation on topics of shared concern. The core faculty in the program is dedicated to the continual development of undergraduate education that reaches beyond disciplinary boundaries and believes that such teaching makes a vital contribution to our ongoing research.

WGS provides academic and programmatic offerings that engage and challenge faculty, students, administration, and staff. Because our mission is broadly interdisciplinary and spans both theory and practice, we regularly partner with other departments, student groups, and organizations. This year WGS collaborated with Students Advocating Against Violence, the Center for Health Promotion and Wellness at MIT Medical, the Community Response Group, and MIT Medical's LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) Health Service to provide the fourth annual full week of events for Sexual Assault Awareness Week on the MIT campus.

WGS works closely with the Graduate Consortium in Women's Studies (GCWS), a cross-institutional program fostering women's studies scholarship, hosted at MIT. GCWS consists of nine local universities (Boston College, Boston University [BU], Brandeis University, Harvard University, MIT, Northeastern University, Simmons College, Tufts University, and the University of Massachusetts, Boston [UMass Boston]) whose faculty offer interdisciplinary, team-taught graduate courses and a workshop for dissertation writers in women's and gender studies. Now in its sixth year at MIT, GCWS continues to add richness to the already strong women's and gender studies community on campus.

The program's commitment to the study of women and gender extends beyond MIT and neighboring universities to collaborate with other gender-focused programs in the Boston area. WGS and our community partner, Women in Film and Video/New England, continued to cohost the Chicks Make Flicks film screening series and discussion with local female filmmakers. One highlight was the screening of *Play in the*

*Gray*. The film examines the work, art, and emotional lives of the members of acclaimed Boston-based drag and cabaret-style theater troupe, *All the Kings Men*. The film was followed by a discussion with director Kaitlin Meelia.

### **Program Administration**

In AY2011, professor Sally Haslanger (Linguistics and Philosophy) completed her second year as program director. Haslanger is committed WGS's ongoing mission of reaching out to undergraduates through teaching and programming. Her current goals are to strengthen the sense of intellectual community within WGS and to build bridges to new disciplines, especially to scholars outside of the School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (SHASS). There are many existing projects and initiatives around campus—for example, on water, on Haiti, on international development, and on new media—that have specific consequences for women, and these provide excellent opportunities for collaboration.

The WGS program administrator, Heidi M. González, continues working to increase the number of students enrolled in WGS courses, as well 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.

The WGS Committee structure consists of an interdisciplinary Steering Committee, Programming Committee, Outreach Committee, Curriculum Committee, and a Prize Committee. In AY2011, the members of these committees were:

Sally Haslanger (Linguistics and Philosophy), director

Ruth Perry (Literature), senior faculty representative

Haimanti Roy (History) and Beth Coleman (Writing and Humanistic Studies), junior faculty representatives

Andrea Walsh (Writing and Humanistic Studies), Other Academic Teaching Staff (Lecturer) representative and prize committee chair

Julie Reardon '11, student representative

Elizabeth Wood (History), curriculum committee chair

Emma Teng (Foreign Languages and Literatures), programming committee chair

Abha Sur (WGS), outreach committee chair

Rae Langton (Linguistics and Philosophy), GCWS representative

Marlene Mannoff (Library), WGS librarian

Heidi M. González (WGS), WGS coordinator

During AY2011, WGS gained one faculty member, Lerna Ekmekcioglu, through a joint search in History and Anthropology. Professor Ekmekcioglu will fill the Geneviève McMillan and Reba Stewart professorship in history and the study of women in the developing world. Although Professor Ekmekcioglu will be appointed as an assistant professor in the History Section, she is an accomplished scholar with many publications to her name. Her research covers issues concerning Armenian, Greek, and Turkish

women, and war and peace in the Middle East. In keeping with the terms of the McMillan-Stewart chair, she will be teaching at least one course in WGS each year. The preliminary course titles she has proposed for AY2012 are:

- Women and Gender in the Middle East and North Africa (WGS)
- Cultural Pluralism in the Ottoman Empire and in Post-Ottoman States (History)

We lost three WGS faculty at the associate professor without tenure review: Alisa Braithwaite (Literature), Beth Coleman (Writing and Humanistic Studies), and Haimanti Roy (History). In addition, former WGS director Tommy DeFrantz (Music and Theater Arts) accepted a position at Duke University. Losing four faculty members is a serious blow to our small program and we have urged the dean to make every effort to encourage the search committees in these sections to replace those leaving with scholars who can contribute to WGS.

### **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 24 subjects during AY2011. 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 50 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 and 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 discussed current affairs in the presence of their colleagues and invited students from WGS and other disciplines. Erica James hosted "Engendering Violence and Trauma in Haiti." Bruno Perreau presented "Gay Fantasies of French National Identity: The Case of Transracial Marriage."

In fall 2009, a group of WGS faculty (Elizabeth Wood, Beth Coleman, Abha Sur, Sally Haslanger, Kim Surkan, and Stefan Helmreich) applied for and received both d'Arbeloff Fund for Excellence funding and SHASS funding to develop a potential First Year Focus course on gender and technology. The idea is to create an interdisciplinary course that will investigate the relevance of gender, race, class and sexuality to understanding technology and the development of new technologies. During spring 2011, WGS offered the first pilot for the course, taught by Kim Surkan. Although there is considerable enthusiasm for the course among the undergraduates (the enrollment for the class this past spring was seven students and the "overall evaluation" for the course was an impressive 7.0), our biggest challenge at this point is staffing. Beth Coleman was a key faculty member whose research specialty covers gender, race, and technology, and she

will be leaving. Our current faculty are overloaded, and because WGS has no faculty lines, we depend on appointments made in other SHASS departments to staff our courses. For the time being we are keen to have Dr. Surkan continue teaching the class, but this is not a long-term solution, so the future of the project is uncertain.

The Graduate Consortium in Women's Studies continued to offer a host of graduate-level classes. Working with professor Rae Langton in her role as the MIT representative to GCWS, coordinator Andrea Sutton produced several curricular and pedagogical development workshops. In addition, Professor Haslanger cotaught a seminar in the GCWS with professor Peter Taylor at UMass Boston titled, "Gender, Race and the Complexities of Science and Technology." The class was pedagogically innovative and relied heavily on project-based learning. Eighteen students enrolled and collectively represented Harvard, Tufts, UMass Boston, Brandeis, Simmons, and BU. Evaluations from the instructors and students show that it was a great success.

### **Programmatic Highlights**

WGS programming continually reflects the wide spectrum of academic disciplines and gender issues related to the field of 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 throughout 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:

- Chicks Make Flicks film screenings in collaboration with Women in Film and Video/New England. We screened *Play in the Gray*, followed by a discussion with director Kaitlin Meelia, and *We Pedal Uphill*, followed by a discussion with director Roland Tech and producer Kelly Lawman
- Sexual Assault Awareness Week, during which WGS worked closely with MIT Medical Community Wellness, Program for Violence Prevention and Response (VPR), the Student Activities Office, Undergraduate Advising and Academic Programming, Residential Life Programs, and the Technology and Culture Forum. One highlight of the week was the screening of *Speak*, followed by a discussion with VPR representatives.
- A presentation on "Culture and Development, the National Understanding of Diversity: Memoirs of the Former Colombian Ministry of Culture," by Paula Moreno Zapata, cosponsored by the MIT Committee on Race and Diversity.
- A presentation on "Exploring the Myths and Facts of Sexual Exploitation," by Nikki Valila, cosponsored by the Technology and Culture Forum (TAC).
- A series of lectures on "Women in Conflict Zones: A Global Perspective," cosponsored by TAC.

In addition, there were 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, including:

- A fall Registration Day film screening of *Game Over: Gender, Race and Violence in Video Games*, followed by a discussion with professor Beth Coleman.
- "Feminist Sex 101," a presentation led by Kate McCarthy, program manager for sexual health at Community Wellness at MIT Medical.
- "Iraqi Women in the 'New Iraq': Law, Violence and Mobilization," A Geneviève McMillan-Reba Stewart lecture with Nadjé Al-Ali.
- A spring Registration Day film screening of *Red Moon: Menstruation, Culture and the Politics of Gender*, followed by a discussion with professor Jean Jackson.
- "She Stayed with the Sisters: Tap Dance Narratives and Invisibilized Women," a lecture with Margaret Morrison.
- "Trafficking Networks: Selling Sex Through Mobile Technology," a lecture with Mitali Thakor and Nikki Valila.

Given the success of the previous year's Women's History Month film screenings, WGS partnered with GCWS to produce Boston's first Women's History Month Film Festival, titled "Women Take the Reel." Films were screened throughout the month of March at six academic institutions: MIT, UMass Boston, Boston College, Boston University, Harvard University and Simmons College. Each institution hosted film screenings followed by discussions with film directors/producers or faculty-led panels. MIT screened four films: *Never Perfect*, a documentary exploring the dramatic rise in popularity of cosmetic eyelid surgery among Asian American women; *Body and Soul: Diana and Kathy*, a documentary exploring the symbiotic relationship between two women with disabilities; *Women Without Men*, a feature-film centered around the lives of three Iranian women in 1953; and *Budrus*, an award-winning documentary film chronicling the inspiring non-violent protests of that Palestinian village. MIT also hosted two all-day film festivals in collaboration with Queer Women of Color Media Arts Project and "Women and the Media!"

### **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. The student staff continues to be a diverse group of MIT students. Because WGS does not hold any faculty lines, we are limited in our participation in searches. We have been successful in sponsoring Martin Luther King fellows and are always on the lookout for opportunities to bring MLK visiting scholars to campus.

In terms of the curriculum, each WGS class takes into account racial diversity as a key factor in looking at gender. In AY2011, WGS continued to offer a number of classes that directly addressed the issue of American racial politics: 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.427 Women in the

Developing World: Globalization and South Asia, SP.459 Women in South Asia from 1800 to Present, and SP.603J Race and Gender in Asian America. We also offered SP.454J Identity and Difference.

In our programming, we continue to 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**

Professor Haslanger is working to widen faculty participation in the program across the Institute, especially in the sciences and engineering fields, and will work to strengthen the sense of intellectual community within WGS on campus. The program is committed to increasing its community presence at MIT and beyond and will benefit from greater involvement of undergraduate and graduate students in its programming efforts. 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, as these areas are particularly appropriate to WGS at MIT. Towards this end, we are working on several initiatives:

- A seminar series for WGS faculty that would bring important feminist intellectuals to campus, including Jane Mansbridge (Harvard University, Kennedy School of Government), Nancy Folbre (UMass Amherst, Economics), and Cynthia Enloe (Clark University, WGS).
- Two film projects, one documenting the history of WGS at MIT and the other illustrating a broad range of approaches to and understanding of feminism.
- A campus-wide invitation to faculty, students, administration, and staff to continue participating in Sticker Day where WGS allies wear "This is what a feminist looks like" stickers to commemorate International Women's Day.
- Faculty workshops focused on creating safer, nondiscriminatory classroom climates for all MIT students.

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 Women Take the Reel film festival, the Chicks Make Flicks film screenings and discussions with local female filmmakers, and our Sexual Assault Awareness Week collaboration.

**Sally Haslanger**  
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