

## Award winners



2008 Dorothy E. Lee Scholarship recipient Muria Herman



Joseph Laurenti with Breanna Mull, 2009 Luellen Laurenti Scholarship recipient

Bill Semlak with Brandy Peak, Anne M. Semlak Scholarship and 2009 WGS Achievement Award winner

## Women's and Gender Studies Program art series



Britten Traugher, "Imagine If"



Susan Mamoun and Brenda Mendoza, "Just Sit Still and Look Pretty"



Connie Richards, "All Gussied Up"



Jan Brandt and Devin Prendergast, "Pretty Is..."

**ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY**  
*Illinois' first public university*

**Women's and Gender Studies Program**  
Campus Box 4260  
Normal, IL 61790-4260



A Bulletin of Illinois State University's Women's and Gender Studies Program

# WGS ALUMNI MATTER

SUMMER 2009

## From the director

Dear Alumni,

It is with pleasure and pride that I offer you our third annual alumni newsletter. I always look forward to this time of year, when I can recount to you what's been happening in the Women's and Gender Studies Program (WGS).

We are pleased to report another wonderful year of rich and varied curricular and extracurricular programming. At our 14th Annual Symposium, nationally acclaimed body studies scholar Susan Bordo gave the keynote address, and students presented excellent papers, performances, and creative readings. One of our alums, Drew Anastasia (you may remember him as Angie), returned to Illinois State to deliver a public lecture about his transition from female to trans-man. Other speakers included Suzanne Obeler, Lynn Worsham, and Nancy Agabian. We also cosponsored a conference on gendered violence, "Where's the Outrage?"

FLAME, our student feminist group, continues to showcase their committed energy. This year their *Vagina Monologues* production netted over \$7,000 for the V-Day campaign to help women in the Democratic Republic of Congo who have endured mass rape as a weapon of war. In addition to the Clothesline Project, It Affects Me campaign, and Take Back the Night, FLAME also sponsored the Guerilla Girls—bad girls of the art world.

On the curricular front, we launched new courses: Gender and Empire, Sociology of the Body, and Ancient Greek and Roman Women. This year we welcomed new faculty and said goodbye to Nathalie op de Beeck, Lucinda Beier, Jeanne Howard, Nancy Tolson, and Lynn Worsham. We also graduated the largest class of WGS minors ever. We wish all of them the best!

The most important ingredient of this newsletter is you. We love hearing from our alums and like it even better when they stop in for a visit. Drop us a line and let us know what you're doing to make the world a better place.

For more details and pictures, read on. . . .

Sincerely,

Alison Bailey

## Alumni news

**Debbie Armstrong '04** was recently hired as information technology manager in Illinois State's Office of the University Registrar.

**Grace Foote Johns '05** received a WINGS Award at McLean County's Annual Women of Distinction Awards ceremony. The \$1,500 prize will help fund Grace's Educational Administration and Foundations dissertation on gender equity and diversity in science career mentoring.

**Rachel Spangler '05** has published her second book, *Trails Merge* (Bold Strokes Books 2008). Writing and raising her son Jackson keep her busy.

**Devona Mallory '06** is an assistant professor on the English, Mass Modern Languages, and Mass Communication Department faculty at Albany State University in Albany, Georgia.



Rachel Spangler and Jackson

**Katelyn Wood '07** completed her M.A. in rhetoric at the University of Texas at Austin this spring. Next fall, she is moving to the School of Theatre to start working toward her Ph.D. in performance studies.

**Annaliisa Ahlman '08** is currently working as the educational outreach director for the Illinois Shakespeare Festival. This spring she directed the Women's Project students in "Intersections: Sticks and stones may break my bones but my words will rise above you," a spoken word performance based on the actors' experiences with issues of gender, race, and substance abuse.

### Consumer capitalism and the body

On April 3, 2009, Susan Bordo, author of *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, delivered the 2009 WGS Symposium keynote address, "Beyond Eating Disorders: Why We Need to Re-think Everything We Thought We Knew." Illustrating her symposium lecture with images from popular culture and advertising, Bordo argued that consumer capitalism is much to blame for the disordered eating and distorted body images that have affected girls, women, and, to a lesser extent, boys and men. To sell products, she claims, media have successfully promoted a culture of indulgence and obsession. Bordo demonstrated how advertisers market adult fashion and sexuality to girls and women, seducing them into "needing" designer fashions and designer bodies. She suggests that it is time to reset our attitudes about the relationship between our bodies and our consumer habits. Bordo also presented her paper "What Did Anne Boleyn Look Like?" on April 1 to the Colloquium on Visual Culture.



Speakers and organizers at the Where's the Outrage conference

### Where's the Outrage. . .

. . . about gender-based violence? This question was posed at the "Where's the Outrage?" conference held on March 19, 2008. Mary Fabri, Psy.D., senior director of the Marjorie Kovler Center for Treatment of Torture Survivors, gave the keynote lecture on rape as a weapon of war and tool of torture. The presenters challenged their audience intellectually, spiritually, and emotionally to bear witness to the toll that such violence takes on individuals and communities. They also spoke about the positive work that groups are doing around the world to help survivors heal and to overturn the social and political forces that perpetuate this violence. WGS core faculty member Rebecca Saunders, who organized the event, discussed South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

### Vocal transitions

By Jenna Goldsmith, WGS certificate student



Drew Anastasia

Women's and Gender Studies alum and University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee doctoral student Drew Anastasia '06 visited campus on March 16-17, 2009, to talk to students about his experience transitioning from a woman to a trans-man. Anastasia gave his main talk, "Confessions of a Karaoke Junkie: How I Came to Narrate My Gender Transition by Losing My Voice," to an enthusiastic audience of Illinois State students and faculty members. As a woman, Angie (Drew's birth name) identified with the lesbian separatist movement, but as he transitioned, his identity gradually shifted to "genderqueer" and then to "trans." He is still a radical feminist, and is dedicated to building coalitions and understanding among local communities of color, feminist communities, and queer communities.

Visit us at:

**[www.WomensAndGenderStudies.ilstu.edu](http://www.WomensAndGenderStudies.ilstu.edu)**



The audience at the WGS 14th annual symposium



### Feminist guerrillas invade Illinois State

By Sheila Majumdar '09

Two Guerrilla Girls, founding members of the New York City-based artist activist group, graced the Brown Ballroom on April 16, 2009, gorilla masks and all. The dynamic duo has been championing women artists since 1985, using art and performance to critique discriminatory practices within the art world. They rattled off quotes and showed slides to illustrate sexism in Western culture, making a strong case for the art world's continuing need for an anonymous conscience. FLAME sponsored the GG's performance, which topped off "It Affects Me," a weeklong annual campaign to counter gendered violence.

### Nancy Agabian visits

By Shushan Avagyan, WGS certificate student

Nancy Agabian is well known in the Armenian-American community for her progressive and controversial texts and performances that explore the polymorphous and elusive nature of identity and sexuality—topics that rarely surface in Armenian-American culture. On February 11, 2009, Agabian spoke at the International Studies Seminar and read from her memoir, *Me as Her Again: True Stories of an Armenian Daughter*, in which she narrates her coming to terms with previous generations' trauma caused by genocide, and personal struggles with sexuality and repression.



Photo courtesy of Britten Traugber, WGS certificate student

### Anne M. Semlak Memorial Scholarship



Anne Semlak

The family of Anne Semlak '01 has established a new scholarship fund for outstanding Illinois State University students who are active in women's and gender studies. Anne graduated from Illinois State with a degree in political science and minors in both women's studies and peace studies, and won the Women's Studies Achievement Award. During her all-too-brief career, she worked with programs that aid victims of domestic violence, provide alternatives to the court system for juvenile offenders, and serve Unitarian middle and high school youth. Semlak's work helping others defined her life. Her spirit lives on in all of those who had the good fortune to know her. The first recipient of the scholarship is Brandy Peak '09.