Information Overload:  
Teaching Information Literacy in the Technology Age

In today’s digital age, students are presented with numerous sources of information that may or may not be factual. They are often not aware of the various research techniques and resources available to them and do not know how to gauge whether or not the information that they find online or in databases is from a reliable source.

Saya Bobick, Melissa Chesanko, Jayné Chapple, Arnita Sitasari, and Laura Trent, graduate teaching assistants in the Center for Women’s Studies, decided to research this problem in an attempt to better serve their students. The graduate students conducted two hands-on workshops for each of their Introduction to Women’s Studies classes in collaboration with Carroll Wilkinson, West Virginia University librarian.

Chesanko commented that the information literacy sessions for her classes gave her an opportunity to learn along with her students.

“Each time Carroll comes to our class I pick up something new,” she said. “It also serves as a great reminder about searching effectively and checking the validity of the sources I use in my own research.”

Following the workshops, they tested students’ understanding of the research techniques and presented course assignments that required the students to use their new skills. This activity augmented their curriculum because their students explored databases and internet searches specifically geared towards research in the field of women’s and gender studies. Through their research experience, the instructors showed how to effectively integrate information literacy and tailor it to a specific subject.

At the completion of this research, Chesanko, Sitasari, and Trent organized a panel discussion, “Incorporating Information Literacy into Introductory Level Curriculum,” at the 6th Annual Georgia Conference on Information Literacy in Savannah, GA.

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A Message from the Director

Ann Oberhauser, Director, WVU Center for Women’s Studies

Building on the core mission of women’s and gender studies at West Virginia University, I would like to identify some of my priorities for the Center that include preparing students for the 21st Century, developing feminist scholarship and research, and expanding the diversity of our program and community.

Feminist teaching and pedagogy have always been strengths of the Center for Women’s Studies. We are well positioned to expand our course offerings and update the curriculum to meet the needs of today’s students. As mentioned in the cover story of this newsletter, the Introduction to Women’s Studies course offers an information literacy component which is crucial for contemporary learning. Additionally, we recently added a course on women in sports offered through the College of Physical Activity and Sport Science. The faculty member who teaches this course brings an expertise in gender and sports that will help to expand our curriculum in an exciting area of women’s and gender studies.

An important part of our teaching role is to provide relevant and exciting learning opportunities for students at WVU. Interdisciplinary programs, such as women’s and gender studies, give students a breadth of skills and critical thinking to address contemporary issues regarding health care, migration, and education. Women and gender are integral components of each of these issues. Many of our students in women’s studies are double majors or have minors in political science, communications, geography, foreign languages, or other related disciplines that enrich their education and prepare them for graduate school or for today’s workplace.

Another priority is to develop the feminist scholarship and research mission of the Center. West Virginia University continues to hire excellent faculty who are highly talented and bring a fresh perspective to our academic community. At a recent faculty meeting, we welcomed colleagues in foreign languages, journalism, English, geography, education, and several other disciplines who are engaged in feminist scholarship. Our faculty associates are involved in research projects that encompass important initiatives such as expanding opportunities for women in the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields and incorporating gender-sensitive material into secondary education. Other faculty members have conducted international research in countries as diverse as Nicaragua, Italy, and Russia.

The final priority is to expand the diversity and global scope of our program. The field of women’s and gender studies has always examined issues of difference and diversity in its curriculum, research, and community outreach. This approach was highlighted at the National Women’s Studies Association annual meeting I recently attended where feminist activist and scholar Angela Y. Davis was the keynote speaker. Her commitment to social justice exemplifies the need to combat discrimination and engage with the realities of our multi-cultural society. Likewise, I believe that the diversity of people at the university, in Morgantown, and throughout the state of West Virginia must be reflected in our curriculum, research, and activities at the Center.

This is an opportune time for change at West Virginia University with a new administration, growing enrollment, increasing faculty governance, and continuing economic challenges. I am very encouraged to see President James Clements address gender issues in discussions about recruitment and retention of students, curriculum development, hiring practices, and staff needs. Another important announcement at WVU this fall was the selection of the new provost, Dr. Michele Wheatly, who has a strong background in women and science. Many of us will benefit from her leadership and experience as a scholar and as an administrator.

In closing, I look forward to continuing the academic and advocacy role of the Center for Women’s Studies at WVU. Please send me your ideas and questions as we embark on this exciting journey. In addition, I encourage you to engage with and get involved in the Center; teach a class in feminist literature, take a course on women and sports, give to a student scholarship fund, or attend one of our panel discussions on teaching and research. We welcome your talent and support.

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Faculty Work Climate Survey Conducted at WVU

Is your workplace a safe space? Do you feel that you are treated with respect by your co-workers and boss? These and other questions were asked in a survey distributed to all faculty at West Virginia University during spring 2009. Nearly 1,000 faculty from the main campus and branch campuses of WVU responded to the survey, organized by Leslie E. Tower, associate professor of social work, and endorsed by the Council for Women's Concerns (CWC) and the Welfare Committee of the Faculty Senate.

In her analysis of the survey responses, Tower found several important strengths and issues to address concerning the overall work climate for faculty at WVU. The results were broken down by gender, age, race/ethnicity, college, and other categories to yield more detailed information about perceptions of the work climate among faculty. In general, men perceive a more positive climate, reporting less sexual harassment, less gender discrimination, and less gender insensitivity than women. In contrast, women identify workload, support resources, safety, parking, and networking opportunities as significantly more important than men.

According to the survey, both women and younger faculty are more concerned about paid maternity/paternity leave, on-site childcare, workload adjustments for new parents, domestic partner benefits, and lactation support. In contrast, older faculty rated health insurance, retirement, and workplace safety as important aspects of their work.

The survey and its results have been presented to the Provost's Office, President's Office of Social Justice, Department of Human Resources, Faculty Senate Welfare Committee (including Faculty Senate leadership), and other campus groups.

For more information about this survey, contact Leslie E. Tower at letower@mail.wvu.edu or view the CWC website at www.as.wvu.edu/cwc.
During October, I attended the Succeeding As Women in Higher Education Conference in Cortland, NY. The event was organized by the Center for Gender and Interdisciplinary Studies at SUNY-Cortland. The conference addressed four main questions:

1. What are the reasons that women are not in leadership positions in higher education in general?
2. What institutional practices exist to support, enhance, and cultivate gender equity in higher education?
3. What values impede or promote women in leadership positions?
4. What attributes or credentials are required for women in leadership positions?

The research that I presented was part of a larger project examining collaborations between women’s studies programs and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) departments nationally. I am collaborating with faculty at WVU and Minnesota State University-Moorhead (MSUM) on this project. Our specific concern is to evaluate whether or not the discipline of women’s studies has effectively engaged with the STEM fields. Additionally, we wonder if the potential contributions of women’s studies are recognized by STEM disciplines. Though attention to gender in STEM, particularly in terms of diversifying the workforce, is currently the subject of much attention, does this interest in gender indicate an awareness of women’s studies? And, conversely, are women’s studies programs effectively leveraging this interest in diversity in order to enhance and strengthen women’s studies’ future as an academic field?

The paper that I presented at the conference is a project that I am conducting with Linda Fuselier, PhD, associate professor of biosciences at MSUM, on students’ attitudes. Studies show that women are less likely than men to persist in the sciences. To explore impacts of undergraduate experiences on this phenomenon, we looked at college students’ attitudes toward women in science, the effects of values on science, and whether science is competitive or collaborative. Additionally, we asked how students define disciplinary research, specifically which disciplines they would include in a collaborative project on human physiology.

We found significant gender differences in students’ attitudes toward women in science and in their understanding of collaboration. Female students had stronger agreement with statements emphasizing women’s participation in and contribution to science. They also were more likely to recognize the potential impacts of values on science. In addition, female students saw science as more collaborative, identified a broader range of disciplines (including the social sciences and the humanities) with which to collaborate, and described direct examples of collaboration (working with another person face to face) as opposed to indirect (reviewing others’ work). The implications of these findings for developing teaching strategies to maintain women’s continued interest in science are discussed in our rese.

In addition to presenting my own work, I attended presentations on a diverse array of topics including the gendering of leadership styles, particular barriers for women of color in university leadership, whether male and female faculty’s workloads and salaries are equitable, and barriers to feministic collaborations among female faculty, administrators and staff.

Many female leaders, including university presidents, provosts, and chancellors, attended and spoke about their particular paths to leadership positions. Of particular note were keynote addresses by Nancy L. Zimpher, PhD, first female chancellor of the SUNY system, and Erik J. Bitterbaum, PhD, president of SUNY-Cortland and former president of WVU Parkersburg. Dr. Bitterbaum spoke fondly of his experiences in West Virginia.

For more information, visit the conference website at cortland.edu/swhe.
Graduate Students Awarded Scholarship

The Center for Women’s Studies is pleased to announce the recipients of the 2009 Velma Miller/West Virginia Alliance for Women’s Studies Graduate Scholar Award; Virginia Young, a doctoral candidate in the Department of History, and Danielle Davidov, a doctoral candidate studying public health sciences at the School of Medicine. Both students are women’s studies graduate certificate students and demonstrate strong academic leadership and a commitment to social justice.

Danielle Davidov has been an activist and a researcher in the area of women and public health as an undergraduate at Marshall University and in her graduate program at WVU where she served as Ruth Kershner’s teaching assistant for several semesters. Her focus on women’s health and family violence stems from real-world experience obtained during her volunteer work at the Rape Crisis Center and Domestic Violence Shelter. Davidov says that her goal is to translate the knowledge that she has acquired into positive and purposeful community service and activism.

“The notion of ‘giving back to the community’ is intrinsically linked with public health research, just as service and activism are integral parts of women’s studies,” said Davidov.

Virginia “Ginny” Young returned to higher education after working in retail management for several decades where she experienced gender discrimination in the workplace. She obtained her master’s degree in history at Marshall University. Drawing from her previous work and academic interest in women’s labor history, she plans to conduct research on women workers and unions in craft industries as part of her doctoral work at WVU under the guidance of her advisor, Ken Fones-Wolf. She would like to teach at a university after graduating.

According to Young, “One of the ways in which women are still marginalized is their continuing secondary status in the workplace, and I feel there is no better way to demonstrate and begin to change that fact than to teach women’s history.”

The Velma Miller/West Virginia Alliance for Women’s Studies Graduate Scholar Award supports women who have enrolled in graduate programs, taken leadership roles in academia, and are committed to social justice. The award is given in honor of Velma M. Miller, a founding member of the West Virginia Alliance for Women’s Studies and a leader in community service.

For more information about how to contribute to this award, visit the women’s studies website, wmst.wvu.edu.

New Faces, New Spaces

Change is in the air on the second floor of Eiesland Hall. This fall, the Center for Women’s Studies and the Native American Studies Program hosted an open house to showcase our newly refurbished offices and other additions to the programs.

Chris Tarabrella, Nick Zeletski, and Brad Elder from the Eberly College of Arts and Sciences Dean’s Office spent many days over the summer helping the Center organize, clean, paint, and install new carpets, furniture, and equipment. The new furniture in the office has made it a comfortable and efficient place to work. Additionally, the lounge has a new look that showcases our Women’s Studies Residency Program and the extensive collection of women’s studies books.

In addition to new paint and new furniture, there are new faces occupying Eiesland Hall. The Native American Studies Program, under the direction of Bonnie M. Brown, moved their office from Stansbury Hall to Eiesland Hall this summer. At the open house, Cari Carpenter, assistant professor of English and a faculty member in Native American studies, read remarks from Bonnie M. Brown about their move and the possibilities of strengthening both programs through collaborative projects. Rudolph P. Almasy, interim dean of the Eberly College of Arts and Sciences; Judith Stitzel, former director of the Center for Women’s Studies; and numerous faculty, staff, and students attended the event.

If you haven’t visited the Center recently, please stop by to see our new space and meet our faculty and staff.

Ann Oberhauser, Chris Tarabrella, and Judith Stitzel at the open house.
Faculty News

Bonnie M. Brown, coordinator, Native American Studies Program, directed a week-long West Virginia Teacher Institute on campus entitled, “A Crossroads of Native Culture and History: Exploring the Native American Heritage of West Virginia and the Region.” The summer Institute was made possible by a grant from the WV Humanities Council.

Edward Etzel, associate professor in sport sciences in the College of Physical Activity and Sport Sciences, received the American Psychological Association (APA) Division 47 Award for distinguished contributions to education and training in sport and exercise psychology at the APA National Convention held in Toronto in August.

Marilyn Francus, associate professor of English, presented “Austen Therapy: Pride and Prejudice and Popular Culture,” at the New Directions in Austen Studies Conference in July. The conference was held in Chawton, UK (Austen’s home). The event included presenters from the US, UK, Canada, Australia, Japan, Russia, and France.

Francus also presented “‘When will these discoveries end!’: Gothic Motherhood in Radcliffe’s The Italian ” at the East-Central American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies Conference in Bethlehem, PA.

Donald Hall, chair of the Department of English and Jackson Distinguished Chair of British Literature, will assist the American Council on Education (ACE) in developing the Common Core State Standards Initiative for improving English language arts in grades K-12. Hall was appointed by ACE and the Modern Language Association (MLA) to the ACE/MLA English Language Arts Standards Review Panel made up of distinguished members of the English profession who will assess how well newly released standards describe the knowledge and skills they believe are necessary for college readiness.

Ruth Kershner, associate professor of social and behavioral medicine, received the prestigious CASE Professor of the Year Award in recognition of her teaching. Kershner teaches women’s studies courses on women’s health and gender violence.

Additionally, Kershner coordinated the annual Community Medicine Student Poster Presentation in April. One-hundred students displayed posters on women’s health, gender, and violence.

Carol Markstrom and Bonnie M. Brown took three students to the annual National Congress of American Indians in Palm Springs, CA, in October. Topics addressed included the United Nations resolution condemning violence against Native American women and current issues surrounding The Indian Child Welfare Act.

Ann Oberhauser, director of the Center for Women’s Studies, attended the 30th annual conference of the National Women’s Studies Association in Atlanta, GA. The conference theme was “Difficult Dialogues” and featured activist/scholar Angela Y. Davis as the keynote speaker.


J. Bernard Schultz, dean of the College of Creative Arts, was appointed to the West Virginia Commission on the Arts by Governor Joe Manchin, III. The West Virginia Commission on the Arts serves as a citizen advisory board to the West Virginia Division of Culture and History.


Linda Vona-Davis, associate professor of surgery, presented a poster at the 32nd Annual San Antonio Breast Cancer Symposium in December. The title of the presentation is “Predominance of brain and lung metastases in triple-negative breast cancer patients.” Davis co-authored the work with other clinical members of the Cancer Center.

Carroll Wetzel Wilkinson, director of instruction and information literacy at the Wise Library, announced that the library acquired GenderWatch, a database that allows researchers and teachers to access more than 219,000 articles on wide-ranging topics such as sexuality, religion, societal roles, feminism, masculinity, eating disorders, healthcare, and the workplace.
Alumni and Student News

Jamie Baxter (B.A. 2003) is currently working for the Association for Career and Technical Education in DC. The Association is dedicated to the advancement of education that prepares youth and adults for successful careers. In her role as the advocacy manager, she is the Association’s budget/appropriations lobbyist and the grassroots coordinator.

R. Saya Bobick, graduate teaching assistant in women’s studies, presented “Telling the stories of elder, female Natives: Effects of cultural practices through the lifespan,” at the 21st Anniversary of the Native Health Research Conference in Portland, OR. Bobick was honored to meet Dr. Yvette D. Roubideaux (Rosebud Sioux), MPH, the first woman to become director of the Indian Health Service (IHS) in the organization’s 54-year history. The IHS, an agency within the US Department of Health and Human Services, is the principal federal health care advocate and provider for approximately 1.9 million American Indians and Alaska Natives.

Naina Dumera, public relations and women’s studies major, was recently hired as an intern to help plan and coordinate activities for the 30th anniversary of the Center for Women’s Studies. Dumera has a strong background in editing, layout design, and advertising that compliments her women’s studies focus at WVU.

Andrew Furr, women’s studies minor, traveled to Washington D.C. in July for a Men Can Stop Rape seminar. Men Can Stop Rape mobilizes male youth to prevent men’s violence against women. The organization attempts to build young men’s capacity to challenge harmful aspects of traditional masculinity, to value alternative visions of male strength, and to embrace their vital role as allies with women and girls in fostering healthy relationships and gender equity.

Furr attended the training in an effort to educate himself and to start a men’s-based organization on campus. At the training, he learned how to educate other men about rape and how to prevent it.

The training also focused on concepts of healthy masculinity. Furr recently started a new organization on campus, Mountaineers for Gender Equality.

For more information about Mountaineers for Gender Equity, contact Andrew Furr at afurr@mix.wvu.edu.

Furr’s trip was funded, in part, by the Women’s Studies Difference Fund and by The Office of Deb Beazley, WVU’s sexual assault prevention educator.

Jasper Elected to Staff Council

Cathy Jasper, administrative associate in the Center, recently took on a leadership role at the University as an elected member of the WVU Staff Council. This group represents 3,500 public employees around the state and plays a crucial role in working with the administration to improve conditions for classified and non-classified staff at WVU. Jasper serves as parliamentarian on the executive committee of the Council which meets monthly with President James Clements.

In many ways, staff are the backbone of the University, yet they are often overlooked when raises, hiring practices and other issues affecting WVU employees are discussed. This year, the council is focusing on a variety of topics including salary compensation, health insurance premiums, and cost and availability of parking at WVU. Jasper is a strong advocate for staff and is particularly sensitive to gender discrimination and social justice issues.

A native of Beckley, WV, Cathy Jasper has been employed at WVU for 15 years and has worked in the Center for ten years.

“We are very proud of her contributions to the Center, as well as her professional achievements at the University,” said Ann Oberhauser.

Feminist Majority Leadership Alliance (FMLA)

This fall students involved in WVU’s Feminist Majority Leadership Alliance traveled to Charleston, WV, to hear Gloria Steinem, co-founder of Ms. Magazine and a long-time feminist icon. Rita Snyder, president of FMLA, and eight members of the organization went to the event which attracted over 250 people from around West Virginia.

“The experience was awesome,” said Snyder. “Her speech was very insightful regarding the work which has been done in West Virginia to promote feminism and the work that remains to be done.”

Steinem talked about reproductive rights and the intersection of race and gender. Points which she stressed in her speech included the notion that anti-racism and feminism share common beliefs, reproductive freedom and sexual freedom are important, and governments and religion convolute the meanings behind sex and sexuality.

Steinem spoke of gender roles as a means of normalizing violence within society. She said that the masculine archetype is to be aggressive and the feminine archetype is to be passive. According to Steinem, eliminating this masculine aggressive behavior from society will decrease the mortality rate of men to within one year of the life expectancy of women. Additionally, she encouraged everyone to tell their story, saying “the world needs more narratives.”

“It’s amazing that Gloria Steinem is 75 years old. She seemed ageless.” said Snyder. “She is still a vital and inspiring speaker.”
The 30th anniversary of the Center for Women's Studies is a milestone that represents a generation of women’s and gender studies at WVU. In 2010, the Center will celebrate with a series of events commemorating the advancement of women at WVU, as well as looking ahead to the future of the discipline and changing gender roles in society.

In 1980, women's studies was established as a unit in the College of Arts and Sciences. The program became the Center for Women’s Studies in 1984 and quickly built its curriculum, scholarship, and service to the University and state.

Currently, the Center offers an undergraduate major and minor and several options for graduate students in women's studies. Nearly 100 faculty associates teaching in over 15 colleges and schools across the University participate in the core mission of advancing the status of women and promoting feminist scholarship. Numerous programs have developed to broaden the scope of women’s studies at WVU, including the Residency Program and the Stitzel Endowment for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. Students also benefit from scholarships and the impressive quality and breadth of courses and service opportunities available through the Center. These and other programs that focus on new initiatives in curriculum development, scholarship activities, and fundraising events will be highlighted in upcoming newsletters and on the website during 2010.

In order to celebrate our 30 year milestone, we would like you to submit writing, artwork, or videos about your experience with women's and gender studies at WVU and in your everyday life. The work might be about how feminism has impacted your life, changing gender roles, the future of women’s studies, a woman that inspires you, topics that intersect areas of race, gender, or sexuality – anything that celebrates women’s and gender studies, diversity, or social justice.

Writing must be submitted as a pdf or Microsoft Word document. Art work must be photographed or scanned and submitted as a high resolution jpg or tif document (300dpi). Video must be YouTube ready, mp4 is recommended. Large images or video will need to be compressed in a zip file for submission via e-mail.

Submissions must include the title of the piece, your full name, address, and preferred e-mail address. No third-party or anonymous submissions will be accepted. The deadline for submissions is September 1, 2010.

The work will be archived and featured on the Center's website in a gallery to commemorate the 30th anniversary. Submissions may be sent via e-mail to wmst30@mail.wvu.edu.

Look for details about other activities and events planned for the celebration online at wmst.wvu.edu.