Letter from the Director,
Dr. Laura Engel

We’ve had a productive and rewarding semester at the Center for Women’s and Gender Studies! In addition to co-sponsoring a well-attended lecture by renowned literary critic and queer theorist, University of Pennsylvania Professor Heather Love, we had two inspiring student centered events drawing an audience of undergraduate and graduate students from a variety of disciplines. During these conversations, students shared thoughts, questions, and pieces of their research on women’s and gender studies issues. I continue to be inspired by the excellent work being done by students and faculty involved in our program. Graduate certificate holders, Emily Rutter (English), Mary Parish (English) and Leah Boisen (Psychology) were all recipients of this year’s McAnulty College Dissertation Fellowship award. Our number of majors and minors continues to grow as undergraduates seek out new ways to combine the study of women’s and gender studies with Political Science, International Relations, Psychology, English, History and other interdisciplinary subjects. In this issue WGS major Kate Hancock speaks eloquently about why gender studies matters, how it has enriched her studies, and expanded the possibilities for life after Duquesne. Also check out our new resource page on the WGS website!!

I want to thank everyone who made these events possible, with a special debt of gratitude to Ann Vinski, WGS graduate assistant, creator of our new and improved website, and author of this newsletter! As always my hope for the center is that we can continue to provide resources, support, and enthusiasm for projects, curriculum, events, scholarship, and partnerships related to the study of women’s and gender studies. If you would like to become involved in the center or want to learn more about our graduate program or our undergraduate second major or minor, feel free to contact us or stop by our office at 550A College Hall. Best wishes for a wonderful holiday season and a happy 2014!

Dr. Laura Engel

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Please tell me a little about yourself. Where are you from? What year are you at Duquesne? What is your other major?

Well, I “grew up” in Arkansas but moved to Vestal, N.Y. right before high school and currently call Vestal home. I am a junior Sociology and Women’s and Gender Studies double major with a Psychology minor. I just joined the Women’s and Gender Studies and Sociology departments last semester!

What prompted you to want to pursue Women’s and Gender Studies as a second major?

The program first caught my attention by the course titles themselves. The course descriptions fit perfectly into what I am interested in. I wanted to learn about different women in history and the role that women play in society, plays, novels, how women are depicted, and how to make my voice and passion for women’s rights and power be heard. I took the intro to Women’s and Gender Studies class last semester to see how I would like it, and here I am! The department has been so cooperative in working with the Sociology department so that I can absorb the most from both programs.

What connections do you see between sociology/psychology and women's and gender studies that you find particularly compelling?

There is a common thread between all of them! I love it because my classes seem to connect so closely and are frequently in sync. I do not think you can study just one; their “lenses” all overlap. The way women are depicted in society is especially compelling; I also think that gender roles and stereotypes are so interesting to study!

What are your career aspirations, and how do you think WGS will impact your work in that area?

As of now, I plan to apply for the five-year master’s program here at Duquesne, then maybe apply for the Peace Corps with the ultimate goal of working for the United Nations Women. I want to work to empower girls and women through access to educational opportunities.

There are so many possibilities! I love to travel so hope to get the opportunity to travel in the states or abroad.

Have there been any courses or experiences here at Duquesne that have been particularly thought-provoking or formative for you? Can you tell us a little about those?

Intro to Women’s and Gender studies/Drama: Race and Gender sealed the deal for me joining the department. I looked forward to going to class! Dr. Engel taught this last semester—it was one of those classes where you learn more than you realize because it really makes you think and absorb for yourself. Intro set the bar high for the department. One of my current classes, Women and Christianity with Dr. Light, is especially thought-provoking. Again, I enjoy going to this class. This class has really truly opened up doors and allowed me to think and reflect on my spirituality, something which I have been struggling with for years.

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about?

I am so grateful to be in such a comfortable and thought-provoking environment with faculty that deeply cares about what they are teaching; the lessons go far beyond the assigned materials. I cannot wait to take more courses in the upcoming semesters. If you have credits to spare, try and try again to fit a WGS course in your schedule!
IN OTHER WORDS

Graduate Student Spotlight: Sarina Johnston

Sarina Johnston is currently working towards an M.A. in Public History. She was born and raised in Pittsburgh and has returned to the city following a 13-year absence. We are glad to have you back, Sarina!

What is your academic background? What sort of work were you doing before enrolling in the MA program?

I actually finished my bachelor’s degree later in life, although I did start it directly after high school. I spent my 20s managing coffee shops, meeting people, and traveling. I lived in Colorado, North Carolina, and New Hampshire! I completed my B.A. in History with a concentration in Women’s History at the University of New Hampshire in Manchester over the past few years. I also worked on campus as a writing tutor, a research assistant for community outreach, and an office assistant for the internship program.

What about WGS do you find engaging? What prompted you to pursue a graduate concentration in WGS?

I love women’s and gender history and studies. I find it inspiring, exciting, and important! I plan to incorporate it into whichever area of public history I end up working in, so the concentration will help increase both my knowledge and my job prospects!

Are you working on anything currently or do you plan to do a particular project that incorporates WGS?

I am writing a paper for my Archival Studies class on women in archives, and also working on a project/paper for my Feminist Theory class on Marxism and feminism.

What are your career goals? How will women’s and gender issues be part of those?

I hope to work in a museum, but I would love to incorporate more women’s and gender issues in whichever public history venue I end up working. I am especially interested in developing local and community history projects that include awareness of sexism, racism, and classism. I also plan to write a book or two encompassing these issues.

New Page on WGS Website

We are pleased to announce the newly created “Resources” page on the WGS website! In response to requests from various students and faculty, the first part of the page is a compilation of links to information within the Duquesne website, especially to links that provide pertinent information for parents-to-be and new parents. The second section of the page provides links to external scholarly bibliographies and resources on Women's and Gender Studies topics. Please visit the page at:

http://www.duq.edu/academics/schools/liberal-arts/centers/womens-and-gender-studies/resources
What other projects have you done that incorporate Women’s and Gender studies issues?
My first book, *Medieval Monstrosity and the Female Body* (Routledge 2010), was—both in content and methodology—informed by Women’s and Gender studies. I wanted to explore how medieval notions of monstrosity apply not only to *bona fide* monsters (like Beowulf’s Grendel) or marginalized groups (like the so-called “monstrous races”), but also to mothers, daughters, sisters, and wives. This book asks how a portion of the population that was necessary on social, sexual, and reproductive grounds could nevertheless be represented as monstrous, particularly in reference to the female anatomy and physiological processes germane to the very purposes women were expected to serve. In order to uncover the complex and contradictory roles of female monstrosity, I analyzed medieval texts from several genres: Classical mythology, late-antique and medieval gynecological texts and handbooks on wet nursing, and late-medieval hagiographical and mystical literature. It argues that while the act of breastfeeding and the fluid of breast milk were often categorized as natural and nourishing, their meanings, uses, and risks were also used to serve specific cultural, political, theological, and textual purposes. Poets, artists, medical writers, theologians, and mystics turned towards the lactating breast to express polyvalent and often contradictory views about the nature of female corporeality, the process of reproduction, human hardiness and vulnerability, models of holiness, and the intersection of nurture, sex, and food.

How do you approach your discipline, Classics, with a Women’s and Gender studies lens? What connections between the two do you find, and what difficulties do you encounter? How does WGS shape how you see Classics?
Except for Sappho, there are virtually no surviving Greco-Roman texts written by women. Those texts that feature women, female characters, and female bodies do so problematically and often in an ostensibly stereotypical or misogynistic way. These limitations make Women’s and Gender studies a challenge for the field of Classics, but these very challenges have drawn me—and many others, of course—to think critically about locating women, women’s voices, and the functions women serve in ancient texts. In particular, Women’s and Gender studies has informed my theoretical approach to male-authored texts about women’s bodies and encouraged me to ask how female corporeality both soothes and arouses anxieties. Psychoanalytic literary theory has been especially important to me in this regard.

Faculty Spotlight: Sarah Miller
Can you provide us with a description of your new book?
My new book project, *The History and Culture of Breast Milk: From Greco-Roman Myth to Medieval Mysticism* (Routledge), explores representations of breast milk and breastfeeding across a range of genres: Classical mythology, late-antique and medieval gynecological texts and handbooks on wet nursing, and late-medieval hagiographical and mystical literature. It argues that while the act of breastfeeding and the fluid of breast milk were often categorized as natural and nourishing, their meanings, uses, and risks were also used to serve specific cultural, political, theological, and textual purposes. Poets, artists, medical writers, theologians, and mystics turned towards the lactating breast to express polyvalent and often contradictory views about the nature of female corporeality, the process of reproduction, human hardiness and vulnerability, models of holiness, and the intersection of nurture, sex, and food.
Fall 2013 Events

“Miss Representation” Movie Night

On October 17th, more than 20 undergraduate students braved the rainy weather to attend a movie and pizza night. After watching the documentary film “Miss Representation,” the students participated in a lively discussion of the often problematic way that today’s media presents women and men.

This event was sponsored at the initiation of and in cooperation with Alison Lipscomb, a resident assistant in St. Martin.

New WGS Students

Please join us in welcoming our new students!

Graduate Certificate and Concentration:
- Sugandh Dixit
- Sarina Johnston
- Greg Kerestan
- Christopher Maverick
- Emile Mendala-Mathew

Undergraduate Major and Minor:
- Eleanor Boyd
- Shanalyn Cruz
- Kate Hancock
- Jenny Palumbo
- Miranda Witas

Graduate Student Coffee Hour

Because the graduate students in Women’s and Gender Studies represent a number of different disciplines, the Center hosted a coffee hour for graduate students and faculty to meet informally to discuss current projects and future plans. A number of students and faculty members attended, and the conversation was lively and fruitful.

Reading the Social: Erving Goffman and Sexuality Studies

On November 7th, Heather Love delivered an absorbing lecture in which she engaged issues of queer studies, along with readings from Erving Goffman’s work and Laud Humphreys’ *Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Places (Observations).* Love is the R. Jean Brownlee Term Associate Professor and Associate Chair of the University of Pennsylvania English Department.

This event was co-sponsored with the English Department.
In my dissertation, “American Myth and Ideologies of Straight White Masculinity in Men’s Literary Self-Representations, 1945-1980,” I examine self-referential writings of straight white men published during this period in the genres of poetry, memoir, autobiographical fiction, and New Journalism by a cross-section of poets and writers that includes Robert Lowell, John Berryman, Frederick Exley, Norman Mailer, Tim O’Brien and Michael Herr. I argue that the choices these writers make in crafting a “self” for the purpose of public consumption respond to social, economic, and political forces within these writers’ historical moment and, as they do so, reveal the conflicting discourses of masculinity at work within American culture. In constructing their self-reflexive responses, these writers resist the tradition of idealized autobiographical narratives. Instead, they offer portrayals that grapple with the complexities of a postwar nation that despite (or perhaps because of) its affluence and power is vexed by anxieties about its own potency, autonomy, and agency, as well as that of its men. Through their self-representations, writers stage and enact a self or selves, adopting and discarding various models of masculinity as they produce and encounter the voices of “others.” In this imaginative space, these writers demonstrate the means by which ideological systems function discursively to resist challenges to established power structures and the norms of gendered behavior that sustain these structures.

Mary Parish

Emily Rutter

My dissertation, “Constructions of the Muse: Blues Tribute Poems in Twentieth- and Twenty-First Century American Poetry,” examines representations of the blues icons Gertrude “Ma” Rainey, Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, Huddie Ledbetter (Leadbelly), and Robert Johnson produced by a heterogeneous group of American poets over the last eight decades. Situating these representations within evolving discourses of race, gender, and celebrity, I argue that poets invest blues icons with mythic and symbolic qualities that correspond with their own (and often the era’s) aesthetic and ideological concerns. Moreover, I draw attention to the valuable sociocultural work that tribute poets perform by continuously breathing new life into the music and personae of blues men and women. While scholars have studied the blues and these specific icons, few have considered poetic interventions in their legacies. Further, the critics that have explored homages to blues artists have grouped them with jazz poetry and/or have focused on African-American writers exclusively, leaving the multicultural impact of blues icons on American poetry understudied.

My project reads chronologically from the New Negro Renaissance into the contemporary era, exploring a diverse array of poetic portraits. For example, reading Sterling Brown’s depiction of Ma Rainey, I argue that Brown transforms Rainey, the
Upcoming Events

Women’s History Month 2014
Women and the Archives

Keynote Speaker
ANGELITA REYES
Professor, African and African American Studies, School of Social Transformation, Arizona State University

THURSDAY, MARCH 27, 7:00 P.M.
POWER CENTER BALLROOM
Refreshments will be served

WORKING LUNCHEON
An opportunity for Women’s and Gender Studies faculty and students to discuss research and work related to “Women and the Archives”

TUESDAY, MARCH 25
NOON-2:00 P.M.
SILVERMAN CENTER
GUMBERG LIBRARY
Lunch will be provided

You are cordially invited to the

Women’s and Gender Studies Fall Reception

Join us for a gathering of faculty and students

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2013 – 4:30-6:30 P.M.
643 COLLEGE HALL
Refreshments will be served
I also recently published an article, “Monstrous Sexuality: variations on the vagina dentata,” in the Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous (Ashgate 2012). In it, I consider various incarnations of this particular monster: the Greco-Roman Scylla, the medieval hell mouth, serrated chastity belts, Milton’s Sin, the film Teeth (2007), and Rape-a-Xe, a female condom created in 2010 which is armed with hidden barbs meant to maim rapists.

How did you come to be interested in Classics?
I fell in love with Latin as a high school student. This had a lot to do with my wonderful Latin teacher. Although I initially pursued other studies in college, I continued to take Latin and Classics electives, and I enjoyed them so much I eventually caved and declared a Latin major. I really appreciate how the study of an ancient language and culture requires a sort of slow persistence. There is no such thing as speed-reading Latin, and it’s a real luxury to be able to read slowly and ponder the meaning of each word in an ancient poem.

Why do you collect skulls?
I collect skulls and teeth because I am fascinated by the corporeal self: what do our bodies—our bones, teeth, hair, fingernails, and all other manner of bodily effluvia and detritus—indicate about who we are as individuals and what it means to be human. The medieval practice of preserving, trading, and praying to human relics was part of what initially drew me to medieval studies. The idea that bits of bone could be more valuable than gold appeals to me because it interrogates our notions of worth, the meaning of the body, and death.

Critical to my analysis is the impact of national identity on the self-understanding of straight white men. National mythology, which lifts up such iconic figures as, the cowboy, the pioneer, and the self-made man, illuminates these intersections of manhood and nation, and my project recognizes three key myths within its organizational framework. “Economic Man and American Individualism” considers straight white men’s roles within the economic system as breadwinner, worker, and consumer, as well as the ways those roles converge or diverge from markers of national identity such as independence and self-determination; “Hegemonic Man and the American Dream” examines men’s perceptions of their own agency relative to achieving the “Dream,” with particular attention paid to the ways in which representations of a marginalized “other” or “others” reflect anxieties or ambivalence about straight white men’s hegemonic position. Finally, “The Cold Warrior and American Exceptionalism” considers perceptions of the self in relation to America’s privileged position in the geopolitical sphere and its impact on individual action and responsibility to community and nation. My exploration of the tensions and contradictions—the impulses toward resistance and conformity—found in these self-referential texts reveals complexities within straight white masculinity often obscured by the ideologies and mythologies of nation, gender, race, and sexuality.