

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 beyond disciplinary boundaries to engage students in intellectual training that includes ideological analyses and inquiry into a combination of gender studies and disparate fields including the sciences.

The interdisciplinary nature of the women's and gender studies field guides WGS in promoting academic and programmatic offerings 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 & Wellness at MIT Medical, the Community Response Group (CRG), and MIT Medical's LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) Health Service to provide the first full week of events for Sexual Assault Awareness Week on the MIT campus.

WGS continues to host the Graduate Consortium in Women's Studies (GCWS). Now in its third year at MIT, GCWS continues to add richness to the already strong women's and gender studies community on campus. One highlight was the third annual GCWS conference, *Who's Laughing? The Politics of Humor*, which provided a forum for graduate student work as well as a site for cutting-edge feminist discussion among faculty members and conference 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 fourth consecutive year, WGS cohosted the cutting-edge national conference *Women, Action, and the Media (WAM!2008)*, at which progressive 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* series, a monthly screening and discussion with local female filmmakers.

Program Administration

The 2007–2008 academic year marked significant changes in WGS. The Program in Women's and Gender Studies introduced the MIT community to an innovative logo reflective of its new name both on the web and in print. The program also welcomed new leadership with the addition of a new director and program administrator.

In September 2007, Professor Thomas F. DeFrantz began his two-year term as program director. He is working to widen faculty participation in the program across the Institute (especially in the science and engineering fields) and is dedicated to strengthening the sense of intellectual community within WGS on campus. Under his guidance, WGS continues to pay special attention to the international comparative study of gender and to the roles of women and minorities in science and technology. Through his diligent efforts and in accordance with his vision, the Committee on Curricula approved a new WGS course, SP.427 *Women in the Developing World*, dedicated to the interdisciplinary study of women and gender in the Middle East and/or Africa.

In December 2007, Heidi M. González became the new WGS program administrator. She is 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 Steering Committee consisted of Professor DeFrantz, assistant professor Sandy Alexandre (Literature), 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 Bouillette (Literature), assistant professor Alisa Braithwaite (Literature), associate professor Helen Lee (Writing and Humanistic Studies), and professor Jean Jackson (Anthropology). Ex-officio members of the committee were associate head librarian and collections manager for WGS Marlene Manoff (Humanities Library) and WGS program coordinators Emily Meghan Morrow Howe and Heidi M. González. The Curriculum Committee consisted of senior lecturer Wyn Kelley (Literature), Christopher Capozzola, and associate professor Heather Paxson (Anthropology). The Programming Committee members were Martin Luther King Jr. visiting scholar Melissa Blanco-Borelli, lecturer Tuli Banerjee (Foreign Languages and Literatures), Faery, and Professor DeFrantz.

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 27 subjects during the 2007–2008 academic year. 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 WGS.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 WGS.406 *Sexual and Gender Identities* (taught by lecturer Kim Surkan

of WGS) for the third time. 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.409 Women and Global Activism as well as four 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. Thomas DeFrantz and Abha Sur hosted "Talking Across Race: Indian & African American Collaboration." Rebecca Faery and Sally Haslanger presented "Strong Modern Women: Feminist Values in Life, Relationships and Careers."

WGS continued working to bring the interdisciplinary field of women's and gender studies to students through various approaches: a WGS retreat where faculty and students explored the past, present, and future of the program; a student-led discussion event on MIT's registration day titled "Asian-American Youth on Nationality, Family and Gender Issues"; a lecture series with visiting Martin Luther King Jr. scholar Brenda Dixon Gottschild; a discussion group involving Latina faculty members and students titled "Latinas: Living without Limits"; a series of discussions targeted toward MIT graduate students with an interest in feminism (gradfeminists@MIT); and a set of events with the MIT Race-Sexuality Task Force, a student-centered committee focusing on race and sexuality issues.

GCWS continued to offer a host of graduate-level classes. Working with associate professor Ian Condry, in his role as the MIT representative to GCWS, coordinator Andrea Sutton produced a successful curricular and pedagogical development workshop.

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 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

- "From Public Squares to Check-Points: Women of the Occupation in Israel Palestine," Anat Biletzki, professor of philosophy, Tel Aviv University
- "Gender, Globalization & Development in China and India," Uma Chakravarti, author of *Everyday Lives and Everyday Histories: Beyond the Kings and Brahmanas of Ancient India*, and Lin Chun, professor of history at New York University

Women in Science, Technology, and Engineering

- "The Science of Race, Sex and Gender," a discussion with Abha Sur and Thomas DeFrantz, MIT
- "Strong Modern Women: Feminist Values in Life," a discussion with MIT faculty members balancing careers with life, hosted by MIT lecturer Rebecca Faery

MIT-specific faculty development

- "Feminist Faculty Talk Feminist Pedagogy," Rebecca Faery

Global women's issues

- "Women in Conflict Situations in Northeast India & Challenges to the Indian Nation State in the Northeast," discussion/lecture led by Tilottama Misra and Udayon Misra

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

- "Seen and Unseen: Reading the Black Dancing Body," a lecture series with Brenda Dixon Gottschild, professor emerita of dance studies at Temple University
- "Men Speak Out: Views on Gender, Sex and Power," with Donald N.S. Unger, Rob Okun, Ben Atherton-Zeman, and Haji Shearer
- WAMI2008, an annual conference where progressive 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
- "Bachelor Babes, Bridezillas & Husband-Hunting Harems: Unraveling Reality TV's Twisted Fairy Tales," a public talk by Jennifer L. Pozner, director of Women In Media & News, and widely published journalist and media critic
- "Mulata Madness," a performance lecture by Melissa Blanco-Borelli
- Chicks Make Flicks, film screenings and discussions with directors, including the popular event featuring a short film and a full-length feature by Abigail Child; cosponsored by Women in Film and Video New England and Comparative Media Studies
- Sexual Assault Awareness Week, during which WGS sponsored an activist lunch ("What You Can Do to Help") and worked closely with the Center for Health Promotion & 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 the curriculum, each WGS class takes into account racial diversity as a key factor in looking at gender. In the 2007–2008 academic year, WGS continued to offer a number of classes that directly addressed the issue of American racial politics: SP.640J The Science of Race, Sex, and Gender; SP.518 Race and Identity in American Literature; 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.

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 DeFrantz 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 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, areas particularly appropriate to WGS at MIT. The program will also be instrumental in laying the foundation for the establishment of a women's center at MIT.

Martin Luther King Jr. scholar Carl Paris will join the faculty as a visiting scholar in February 2009. A chief priority of WGS is to welcome and involve dynamic women's studies scholars who will enrich the feminist academic community on campus.

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 and WAM! collaborations.

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/>.