Greetings from Southside! It’s been a very exciting year for me in my new role as Coordinator of the Women’s Studies Program, full of challenges and rewards.

For the good news, we are happy to be celebrating the tenure and promotion of our former coordinator, Heather Hewett (joint position in English and Women’s Studies) and the successful hire of another new colleague, Meagan Devlin O’Sullivan, who starts her joint position in Women’s Studies and History in the fall of 2012.

Meg holds a Ph.D. in History from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and earned her B.A. in Women’s Studies and History at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her training and expertise focuses on American Indian History, and her current research examines Native women’s activism during the last quarter of the twentieth century.

On a more subdued note, we celebrated the life and career of Professor Amy Kesselman, who retired this year after 31 years of service to the Women’s Studies Program and New Paltz college community. See below for more information about those celebrations and Amy’s parting reflections. She will be sorely missed.

We have established a Feminist Activism Speaker’s Fund in Amy’s name to which donations can be made, via the SUNY New Paltz Foundation-Women’s Studies Program Fund, 1 Hawk Drive, New Paltz, NY 12561.

Kathleen M. Dowley, Associate Professor and Coordinator of the Women’s Studies Program

Reflections on 31 Years at SUNY New Paltz

by Amy Kesselman

I have had a wonderful time in Women’s Studies; faculty, staff and students have sustained a vibrant program, which sometimes ruffled the feathers of disgruntled conservatives but has remained unswervingly committed to bringing a feminist perspective to campus and community. I will miss Women’s Studies. The program has been the center of my work life for 31 years, but as I contemplate focusing on my research on the women’s liberation movement, I remind myself that this also is “what a feminist looks like.”

I am troubled, however, that there will no longer be a faculty member based full time, as I was, in Women’s Studies and hope that in the near future the program will be able to hire someone who can devote her/his full attention to its multifaceted activities.

I’ve seen many changes in the program since I arrived in 1981. During the first 14 years we were located in Hohman House, an old frame building on the corner of Manheim and Mohonk. Reminding us of the Joni Mitchell song about paving paradise, the house was torn down to make way for, yes, a parking lot. In 1998 we moved to Southside House. While it’s a bit out of the way, Southside has been a very comfortable space for Women’s Studies.

It has been exciting to be part of Women’s Studies’ growth. “Women: Images and Realities” had only two or three sections when I first came, and we now offer five or six. Faculty throughout the college have developed new courses in their disciplines, and we have introduced many interdisciplinary courses based in Women’s Studies. In the past seven years we have welcomed three faculty members based in other departments with half-time commitments in Women’s Studies who have immeasurably enriched the program. I hope Women’s Studies continues to grow and flourish, and I intend to stay involved in its courses and activities.
Women’s Studies Celebrates!

The multifaceted celebration of women’s studies that took place on March 29th reflected the many dimensions of women’s studies’ influence. The evening began with “Life after Women’s Studies,” a panel of five graduates of SUNY New Paltz from 1986 to 2006. As they traced their various career paths, the panelists affirmed the contributions of their women’s studies education to the work they have been doing since graduation. Featured were Helen Crisman-Janssen (’88), a nurse midwife at Rhinebeck Women’s Health Services; Martha Cedarholm (’86), Director of the of Health and Counseling Services at Pratt University; Rachel Leon (’90), Executive Director of Environmental Grantmakers Association; Lauren Jamieson (’05), Counselor at Buffalo Women’s Services; and Crystal Montalvo (’06), Supervisor of Data Management at Sanctuary for Families, a Domestic Violence Shelter in New York City.

The assembled students, faculty and alums then moved to the library which featured an exhibit entitled “Women’s Studies as Women’s History.” Faculty from ten different departments created cases that showcased the ways women’s studies has transformed their disciplines. The exhibit also included photos of women’s studies graduates, a history of the women’s studies program at SUNY New Paltz and displays about the discipline of women’s studies itself.

After viewing the exhibit, students, faculty and graduates gathered for a reception honoring Amy Kesselman in the library lobby. Many faculty and graduates spoke about Amy and the influence she had on their lives. To conclude the evening we celebrated the publication of the 5th edition of Women: Images and Realities, A multicultural Anthology, edited by Suzanne Kelley, Gowri Parameswaran and Nancy Schniedewind. Former editors Lily McNair and Amy Kesselman and many contributors joined the celebration.

Biennial Queer Studies Lecture Draws a Crowd

On April 20, the Women’s Studies Program hosted trans-activist and legal scholar Dean Spade (Professor of Law, Seattle University) for our second Queer Studies Lecture, a biennial Women’s Studies-sponsored event organized by Professor Karl Bryant (Women’s Studies/Sociology). Addressing about 150 students, faculty, staff and community members, Spade’s talk – “Critical Trans Politics” – drew on themes from his recently published first book, Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law (South End Press).

Spade discussed the ways that much legal advocacy for trans and gender nonconforming people in the U.S. has reflected the civil rights and “equality” strategies of mainstream gay and lesbian organizations. He raised important critiques of these current strategies, and he pointed instead to examples of an organized grassroots trans movement that is demanding the most essential of legal reforms, in addition to making more comprehensive interventions into dangerous systems of repression and the administrative violence that ultimately determines our life chances.

Calling for an end to both prisons and borders, the points in Spade’s provocative talk continued to be discussed by attendees in the days that followed his visit. We would like to thank the Provost’s office, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and CAS for their support, and we look forward to an equally thought-provoking Queer Studies Lecture in 2014!
Feminist Perspectives on the Occupy Movement

by Edith Kuiper

An attentive audience of over 100 came to LC 108 on Thursday, April 12 to hear a panel discuss the recent Occupy Movement through a feminist lens. Amy Kesselman, Professor of Women’s Studies at SUNY New Paltz, discussed women’s experiences in the male-dominated movements of the 1960’s, at a time when the word “sexism” had yet to be invented. Many men were resistant to women’s leadership and after the women’s movement emerged often refused to incorporate feminist issues into their agendas. She stressed the importance of women’s mutual support within the male dominated movement.

Noël Sturgeon, Professor of Women’s Studies, Washington State University, argued that women played a crucial role in what she called ‘the hidden history of Occupy,’ including anti-militarist, anti-nuclear and environmental occupations. In occupations such as the Mother’s Day action at a nuclear test site in Nevada in 1987 and the Seneca Women’s Peace Encampment that ran from 1983 until 2000, activists developed working methods that were very similar to those Occupy Wall Street employs today.

Affirming her commitment to the Occupy Movement, Ashley Drzymala, a SUNY New Paltz student majoring in Women’s Studies and International Relations, discussed her concerns about the experience of women in Occupy. In addition to sexist responses from the police and the media, she recounted examples of sexual assaults in the Occupy encampment on Wall Street which were not properly addressed. In addition, while class and race issues tend to be seen as relevant topics for analysis and strategy development, women still need to struggle to be taken seriously. Drzymala concluded by saying that women are organizing themselves and that discussions such as these are helpful in that process; she invited people to join the movement.

Women’s Studies Colloquium Series Continues

The Women’s Studies Program hosted three colloquia this year, with support from Campus Auxiliary Services. In October, Professors Anne R. Roschelle, Sunita Bose (Sociology) and Omar Nagi (College of Mount St. Vincent) presented “Changing Images, Distorted Realities: The Social Construction of Beauty in India,” which included a slide show of images from their Fulbright-sponsored travel and research in India.

Assistant Professor of History, Serpil Atamaz, presented her work, “The Origins of the Turkish Women’s Movement,” in November. Professor Kate McCoy (Educational Studies), presented a selection of her ongoing research “Heroin’s Monstrous Beauties: Mark(et)ing Affect and Abject,” to faculty and students in the Honors Center in February 2012. All three talks were free and open to the public.

We look forward to upcoming colloquia in 2012-2013 from Professor Mary Alice Citera (Psychology) and Susan Lewis and her co-author, Emily Hamilton-Honey (History). For information about upcoming events, please visit our SUNY New Paltz Women’s Studies Facebook page, at facebook.com/SunyNewPaltzWomensStudiesProgram.
Suzanne Kelly (Women’s Studies), Gowri Parameswaran, and Nancy Schniedewind (Educational Studies) celebrated the publication of the 5th edition of Women: Images and Realities, A Multicultural Anthology (McGraw Hill, 2011), one of the most read and adopted introductory women’s studies texts in the country.

Suzanne Kelly also served as guest co-editor, with Jane Caputi, of a special issue of The Journal of American Culture, published in March 2012, as well as publishing her solo work “Dead Bodies that Matter: Toward a New Ecology of Human Death in American Culture” in that same special edition of the journal. The article was previously presented as a paper at the 42nd Annual PCA/ACCA Conference in Boston.

Based on her research with Professor Edith Kuiper (Women's Studies/Economics), Claudia Robles-Garcia, an exchange student from the Universidad Carlos III de Madrid majoring in economics, presented a poster on the 18th-century entrepreneur, landowner and social reformer Elizabeth Montagu (1718–1800) at the New Paltz Foundation Board meeting on March 15, and at the Student Research Symposium on May 4. Professor Kuiper and Claudia will be presenting their research at the International Association for Feminist Economics conference in Barcelona, Spain in July.

Anne Roschelle (Sociology) was promoted to full professor, the first woman in the Sociology Department to achieve this rank.

Heather Hewett (Women's Studies/English) taught a new Women’s Studies class, Motherhood and Mothering, in Fall 2011. She plans to teach this class again in Fall 2012 before proposing its inclusion in our regular curriculum. She published two opinion essays on CNN.com and an essay about natural mothering in Brain, Child magazine. She contributed a chapter on transnational feminism to the new edition of Women: Images and Realities and was one of the speakers at a May 2012 conference in Toronto, “What Do Mothers Need?: Motherhood Scholars and Activists Speak Out on Maternal Empowerment for the 21st Century,” sponsored by the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement.

Anita González (Theater) directed the play Eugenia, by Lorae Parry in the Parker Theatre in March. The play tells the story of a transgender Italian woman who traveled to New Zealand in 1916 passing as a man named Jack. In a parallel contemporary story, a school drama teacher attempts to put on a play about Eugenia against the wishes of the Board of Trustees. The Women's Studies Program co-sponsored a post-performance discussion of the play with panelists, Karl Bryant, Morgan Gwenwald, Susan Lewis, and Anita González moderated by Stephen Kitsakos.

Attendees and panelists discussed transgender identities, passing women and sexual identities within the context of the play. Professor González also traveled to Princeton University to attend a celebration in honor of Jill Dolan, who received the Jean Nathan Award for her blog, “The Feminist Spectator.” Women’s Studies faculty and students may find her website (thefeministspectator.com) a useful resource.

Susan Lewis (History) gave a talk at the Honors Center on April 17, 2012 entitled, “The Good War? The World War II Letters of Myra Strachner and Bernie Staller.”

Sarah Wyman (English) presented a paper on women’s aesthetic responses to the environmental crisis, investigating the garden poetry of Jeanne Larsen and Louise Glück and the still life ceramics of SUNY New Paltz professor Anat Shiftan, at the American Comparative Literature Association conference in Providence, Rhode Island in March.
Women’s Studies Graduate Assists in Tunisia’s First Free Election

Kathleen O’Keefe, a Women’s Studies major and Law and Politics minor who graduated from SUNY New Paltz in 1990, spent four months in Tunisia last year helping the Tunisian Bar Association prepare for the country’s first free election in several decades.

Kathleen is a civil litigator, specializing in election law, and has been election law counsel to the Speaker of the New York State Assembly for the last several years. The American Bar Association invited her to serve as an election law specialist in their “Rule of Law Initiative” work to prepare for the Tunisian elections. The project included leading workshops in three cities on best election practices and the role of the lawyer in the election process. Kathleen also supervised the drafting and printing of a comprehensive Lawyer’s Election Law Handbook and developed a web-based/mobile text, Election Law Helpline which operated for several weeks leading up to and including Election Day. On October 23, 2011 87% of eligible voters cast their votes for members of the Tunisian Constituent Assembly in a peaceful election.

Kathleen graduated from Rutgers Law School in 1994 and has clerked in New York’s highest court, the Court of Appeals, and in the New York trial court, the Supreme Court. After 10 years at the Assembly, Kathleen has decided to work full time as a solo practitioner specializing in Election Law and Matrimonial Law. She regularly returns to the SUNY New Paltz campus to lecture on women and the law and has written an essay entitled “Women and the Law: Successes, Setbacks and Unfinished Business” for the fifth edition of Women: Images and Realities, A Multicultural Anthology.

Congratulations to the Class of 2012!

The Women’s Studies program would like to congratulate all of its graduating seniors and acknowledge some of this year’s award recipients.

The Erna Lynne Heyer scholarship, for a women’s studies graduate continuing her education in a graduate program, was awarded to Gabrielle Lamake, who has been accepted into an MA program at the National University of Ireland, Galway. The Alice Fix Award, to recognize activism in the service of women, was jointly awarded to Liz Rubel and Ashley Drzymala.

The 2012 Women’s Studies “Outstanding Graduate” awards were presented to Marissa Ward and Rachel Drew by SUNY New Paltz President Donald Christian and the Pat Clarke Scholarship for a returning, non-traditional Women’s Studies student was awarded to Jasmine Ingersoll.

Women’s Studies for High School Students

The Women’s Studies Program is pleased to announce the re-establishment of the BRIDGE program with Ulster County BOCES Alternative High School and Women’s Studies affiliate, and BOCES teacher Amy Kate Silvestro.

Beginning in Fall 2012, nearly a dozen at-risk high school women will attend a selection of Women: Images and Realities lectures. At the BOCES campus they will work with a modified curriculum and a Women’s Studies Practicum student; the high school students will earn English credit for their participation in the college level course. Silvestro notes that the program was enormously beneficial to her students in the past, and we look forward to renewing this community-based partnership.

If you have news you would like to share with the Women’s Studies Program to be included on our Facebook page, webpage or yearly newsletter, please contact the Coordinator, Kathleen Dowley, at dowleyk@newpaltz.edu, or Cookie Chandler at (845) 257-2975.