

HIGHLIGHTING WOMEN'S ISSUES

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MANSFIELD UNIVERSITY'S WOMEN'S STUDIES NEWSLETTER

Mansfield University Suffragists March in 1890s Parade By Judith Sornberger



M.U. Suffragists ready to march. For more photos, see page 7.

As a way of joining in the fun of 1890s Weekend, and to remind everyone that women weren't having all that much fun in the 1890s, Women's Studies faculty, students, friends and their children marched in the 1890s parade as suffragists on Saturday, September 30, 2006. This is the fourth year that the Women's Studies Program has participated in the parade wearing pennants (based on the ones worn by suffragists in this period) that read "Votes for Women" and singing the song from *Mary Poppins* that begins: "We're merely soldiers in petticoats,/dauntless crusaders for women's votes."

Women's fight to exercise the right to vote (the Constitution already gave them the right to vote; they were not allowed to exercise that right) began in 1845 when the attendees at the first women's rights conference in Seneca Falls, NY, voted to

include women's right to vote as part of their "Declaration of Sentiments." Women did not win the right to exercise their right to vote until 1920.

Most of the parade onlookers cheered our suffragists, but, as in the real 1890s, there were also detractors. A few men (all in fun) yelled "get back in the kitchen" and "go home," which added to the historical accuracy of the march.

Guest artist presentation in January By Nancy Boston



We have something to look forward to at the beginning of the spring 2007 semester. On Friday, January 26, Lauren Pelon will present a program of women's music, with narration of social settings, and performances on many instruments. In her production: Lauren Pelon "Women in Music: Someone Will Remember Us", she traces the story of women in music and perform music from around the world. The concert celebrates music written by, or for, women. It is designed to cross the boundaries of time, distance and culture. The concert features voice along with ancient and modern instruments - some of which were traditionally played by women, some forbidden to women.

Lauren Pelon, recipient of the 2001 "Artist of the Year" Award from Southeastern Minnesota Arts Council (SEMAC), studied the history of music and instrumentation both in America and overseas. She is noted for her soprano voice and her accomplished performances using a variety of wind, string, percussion and electronic instruments, both ancient and

modern. Pelon has performed on television specials, at the Russian Institute for the History of the Arts (St. Petersburg, Russia), and in concerts throughout the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Kazakhstan and China. In 2003, she was invited to present the 18th annual Gordon Athol Anderson Memorial Lecture at the University of New England, Armidale, New South Wales, Australia. Performing on over 25 ancient and modern instruments, and vocals, Pelon's compositions and arrangements have been featured in her solo concerts, with the Philadelphia String Quartet, with symphony orchestras, and on NPR's "All Things Considered."

Bernice Johnson Reagon Performs at M.U.

By Lynn Pifer

Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon, noted Civil Rights activist, historian, singer, and composer, performed a spoken word "Song Talk" entitled "Freedom Struggle for a Battered Earth," on Monday, September 18, 2006. Her performance was sponsored by Mansfield University's Frederick Douglass Institute, and was a part of the university Faculty Lecture Series, "Environmental Advocacy: Preserving the World for the Future." Dr. Reagon's performance focused on the ongoing struggles in her life, from the Civil Rights Movement to current environmental challenges. At one point she joked with the crowd, "I come to you at a time when we wonder when we can eat spinach again."

Dr. Reagon's points were interspersed with song. She sang snippets of gospel songs, Civil Rights protest songs, and songs she has written herself. Her performance inspired the audience to do something positive with the gift of life: "If you wake up in the morning, and you're not dead, you were meant to be here." She encouraged us to improve our world and live more harmoniously in it.

Reagon is the recipient of the 2003 Heinz Award for the Arts and Humanities for her work as a scholar and artist in African American cultural history and music. She also serves as Curator Emeritus at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History in Washington DC. She recently retired after 30 years from performing with Sweet Honey in The Rock, the internationally renowned a cappella ensemble she founded in 1973. Her work as a scholar and composer is reflected in publications and productions on African American culture and history, including: a collection of essays entitled *If You Don't Go, Don't Hinder Me: The African American Sacred Song*.

Before her performance, Dr. Reagon agreed to have lunch with Frederick Douglass Institute Scholarship recipients. One of these students, Xernalia Kayode, notes, "Having the opportunity to speak with Dr. Reagon was such a wonderful experience. I was fortunate enough to hear about her singing group and the many other performers that she has worked with." She added, "Her performance was like none other than I have ever witnessed. She fused mixed speech with her melodious voice and I was extremely amazed and inspired by such talent."

Dr. Reagon's ended her performance with an old gospel tune, " , " and she asked the audience to join in. And we did -- in harmony.

FROM THE DIRECTOR . . .

Women's Studies:

What's Leadership Got to Do with It? —a two-part article

When we think of leadership, many of us envision elected officials, bishops and popes, creators of breakthrough scientific theories, generals, and leaders of social and



political movements. Certainly, it is easy to recognize the ways that individuals who hold such positions have influenced the lives of many. Perhaps, however, this way of identifying leadership roles is too narrow. What about someone who volunteers in a literacy program? How about a parent who eloquently addresses the local school board? What about teachers? What about those who supervise other workers? How about those who write books or article that influences others—or who write probing and convincing letters to the editor?

President Loeschke's interest in creating a "brand" focused on leadership has produced a fair amount of discussion on campus. I recently heard one faculty member remark, "If everyone is a leader, who will be the followers?" I cannot imagine a better scenario than living in a community or nation in which everyone considered herself or himself a leader. Imagine the level of involvement in our schools, local governments, places of worship, and our communities in general if everyone believed that he or she had a leadership mission.

From its creation fifteen years ago the Women's Studies Program at Mansfield University has been a leader in interdisciplinary learning and student-empowered pedagogy, not to mention in teaching about gender and multicultural issues. However, we also are proud of the many ways that we help students gain the content, perspective, and skills they need to become leaders in a number of contexts.

Women's Studies courses expose students to ways of knowing and bodies of knowledge most of them have never encountered in a formal way. For instance, in Introduction to Women's Studies (subsequently referred to as Intro), they learn how two women—Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony—impassioned by a dream—changed the political landscape of a nation. Moreover, they learn of the cooperation needed, not only between those women (Stanton writing the speeches from her house filled with children so Anthony could go on the road

and deliver them), but among the various political groups of that time who supported women's suffrage. And they learn that leaders—if they are to succeed—must use every means of power and persuasion available, and even then may never see their efforts come to fruition, as Stanton and Anthony did not. Nevertheless, Stanton and Anthony had faith in the generations of women they had influenced to finish the job. One could say that Women's Studies offers an alternative approach to leadership—one based more on cooperation than competition.

Leaders of all kinds need to be culture-savvy. Women's Studies courses help students to make sense of and critique their culture from the perspective of gender issues. Courses such as Dr. Shawn Holderby's "The History of Women through Television" give students the tools to analyze women's roles in the popular media. In order to enter into a conversation with one's culture, to become a leader in one's culture, one must be able to hear the cultural messages, both spoken and unspoken, and read the subtexts. I don't know how many times students in Intro have told me that they cannot see a movie, watch a tv program, or listen to the radio anymore without recognizing messages about women and their roles, whether positive or negative. They can't open a newspaper or magazine without cringing at messages they would never have noticed before. They tell of their conversation with their parents, friends, and children about what they view, hear, or read. I would posit that, when a student points out a misogynist song lyric or negative message about women in a film to others, he or she is displaying an act of leadership.

As a discipline, Women's Studies offers a critique, also, of the ways that knowledge has traditionally been acquired and taught. Freud, for instance, considered women's moral and ethical development inferior to men's because he observed that his women patients did not possess the qualities that his research had ascertained

as crucial to adult development.

Contemporary feminist psychologists, such as Carol Gilligan and Nancy Chodorow, however, have noted that Freud compiled his criteria on the basis of his research conducted solely with *male subjects*. Studying women's development, Gilligan and Chodorow discovered that women tend to approach moral and ethical dilemmas less from the perspective of individual rights and responsibilities than from that of shared responsibility. Women also tend to see such dilemmas more contextually than men. Neither set of approaches is *right* (unless, of course, you agree with Freud that women are failed men); they are simply different approaches. However, it took individuals willing to buck the revered "truths" of their discipline—leaders, that is—to point out that there are other, equally valuable, ways to address an ethical issue. Women's Studies students learn to recognize and question the limitations of knowledge that is acquired via an inappropriately limited—and limiting—perspective.

Of all of the courses I teach (most of which are in my home discipline—English), my Women's Studies courses are most likely to yield students who challenge me to provide my sources. They want to know where exactly I got all this information that is rocking their world. I can only be delighted to be so challenged (well, most of the time). These students are learning to analyze sources of information, and they are learning to challenge authority figures, like me, which seems to be crucial knowledge for leaders.

Very possibly this freedom to question and challenge that Women's Studies students exhibit is a result of the nonhierarchical pedagogical approach evident in most Women's Studies courses. Our courses don't hold a patent on such pedagogy, yet in the last 35 years, our discipline has been a leader in challenging the top-down, teacher-as-full-pitcher-students-as-empty-vessels approach to teaching. Although we professors recognize that we hold specialized

knowledge to be communicated to and absorbed by students, Women's Studies stresses that all members of a classroom community have valuable information and perspectives to share. Since many of our courses are interdisciplinary, students majoring in different disciplines have the opportunity—and the responsibility—to bring in knowledge and perspectives from their disciplines. For instance, in the Intro course, when I am teaching about, say, how a patriarchal form of culture evolved as human life became more agrarian, I might ask an Anthropology student to help me explain this development or to add to my explanation. Or when we are looking at women's current political representation, I might ask a Political Science student for insights. In essence, the class becomes a group of "experts" from different disciplines.

Equally valuable are the ways that we invite students to supplement the facts, studies and perspectives we offer with examples from their own lives—whether from a nontraditional student relating her dilemmas over socializing a son and a daughter or a male student telling of his mother's struggle to raise three kids after his father left them. I frequently assign students to conduct a multi-generational oral history with female members of their family about issues such as gender-defined roles in childcare and housework. Not only do students feel that they are bringing important documents in to share, but also they come to understand more about their families and their culture historically. Collaborative peer work groups are used frequently in our courses, both because they broaden the responsibility for course content to include the students and because they teach students to cooperate in reaching a goal—again, a vital leadership skill.

Why do I believe that pedagogical approaches that acknowledge that students are valuable partners in creating a learning environment are important for developing leaders? The main reason is that I think that, in order to be a leader, one must

believe that she or he has something valuable to offer. We hope that receiving a degree from Mansfield University in itself will give students that sense, of course. Certainly, taking on leadership roles in the classroom in the ways I have described instills confidence that one's carefully-considered ideas and their thoughtful expression—whether in speaking or in writing—are likely to be taken seriously and valued by others.

Students often write on evaluations of Women's Studies courses that they enjoy the discussions. Some of us professors find ourselves sharing stories from our own struggles as women that are related to the subject at hand, which seems to help students feel comfortable about talking about their own experiences. Many of the issues we discuss are ones they recognize as having a direct impact on their present or future lives: employment issues; equal pay; family and relationship issues; the popular media; the political realm; body image. Students have strong opinions on many of these subjects. Occasionally, they argue, especially as we move deeper into the semester and a climate of trust and safety has been established. Women, especially, are socialized to avoid confrontation. It is crucial that they learn to override such cultural conditioning if they are to become effective members of their families, workplaces, communities and nation, and Women's Studies courses are a venue in which many women students find their true voices. Leaders of any gender rarely have the luxury of being non-confrontational. Think of Susan B. Anthony, of Fannie Lou Hamer, of Frederick Douglass. Think of Joan of Arc!

Perhaps it might be useful to think in terms of acts of leadership that can eventually accrue and become a habit, a way of being that we call leadership. If so, acts such as speaking up and offering help when one sees that a friend is in an abusive relationship, or having the courage to face up to a harasser, or positing a radically new way of approaching an old problem are all

acts that could lead to one becoming a leader. We teach students to take these small steps and to imagine themselves—and work themselves—into the larger acts of leaders.

(In the next issue I will address how the Women's Studies Program helps create leaders via extracurricular experiences.)

--Judith Sornberger

Celebrations...

Congratulations to Linda Rashidi, who is spending her sabbatical leave as a Fulbright scholar in Bulgaria. Dr. Rashidi writes, "I am teaching an MA course in Writing Up the Master's Thesis for students in the linguistics program. My students are all women, many "nontrads" with jobs and/or families. As this is a course covering material they will definitely need next semester when they write their theses, they are highly motivated. And because students in the MA program are highly selected, their English is excellent. They also have an amazing background in functional linguistics, something I find an absolute delight."

"I have just finished a three-week intensive course in practical Bulgarian. I can now: read a menu in Cyrillic and order food, shop with impunity, elbow my way onto crowded trams, buy goodies at my favorite pastry shop, and select seats and buy tickets for the opera. What more can one ask of life?"

Dr Rashidi will present a paper entitled "Beyond Mere Words: Duality, Reality, and Linguistic Structure in Durrell's *Balthazar*" at the annual conference of the Bulgarian Society for British Studies held in Plovdiv, Nov.3-5.

Teri Doerksen's essay, "Students in the Cedar Parlor: How and Why to Teach Sir Charles Grandison in the Undergraduate Classroom," has been published in the MLA Press's *Approaches to Teaching Richardson's Novels* edited by Jocelyn Harris and Lisa Zunshine.

Andrea Harris, Department of English and Modern Languages, was interviewed on WMUK, the radio station of Western Michigan University, in May 2006. She was invited to discuss her work on Virginia Woolf and her teaching but also weighed in spontaneously on the war in Iraq and the Bush presidency.

Dr. Margaret Launius was appointed by the Provost to the Faculty Associate position in Spring 2006. She was reassigned to work half time in the Provost's office and her duties include coordinating University Days and Faculty Lecture Series programs, co-chairing the Student Success Task Force, developing a Faculty Early Career Development program, compiling the Faculty Accomplishments booklet, and attending a variety of committee meetings. She is especially involved in the First Year Experience program for students and developing student leaders.

Lynn Pifer has been awarded an alternative work assignment to do a student/faculty research project, on civil rights novels and films, "Birmingham in fiction and on film," with senior Amanda Shumway. Dr. Pifer was also interviewed for a Women's Magazine program on KPFA, a public radio station in Berkeley, CA. She discussed Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon's performance at M.U., M.U.'s Frederick Douglass Institute, and her research interest in novels of the Civil Rights Movement.

Kristin Sanner has an article, "Henry James's Portrait of a Lady" forthcoming in *A Critical Companion to Henry James* (2007).

Judith Sornberger has poems in the current issues of *Earth's Daughters* and *The Comstock Review*. Her poem "Our Lady of the Rest Stop" was reprinted in *On the*

Road, an anthology published by *White Pelican Review*. Her poem "Prayer Flags" appears in the anthology *Encore: More of Parallel Press Poets*.

Louise Sullivan-Blum's poem, "On the Morning After War Begins," has been published in the collection, *Out of Line: Fiction, Poetry, Essays Themes of Peace and Justice*, by Garden House Press. Her essay, "Killing My Father's Cat," appears in *The Cream City Review*.

WOMEN'S STUDIES COURSES SPRING 2007



ENG 1100W-01: Intro to Women's Studies

M W F 9:00-9:50

Although most American women believe in their right to equality, a basic definition of feminism, few define themselves as feminist. In this course, we'll consider the relevance of feminism for women today by examining connections and differences between women as well as feminist approaches to work, families, race, class, and sexuality. We'll also focus on how these issues play out in the university.

Prof. Andrea Harris

MU 2205 Women in Music Thursday 6:30-9:20 p.m.

This course is designed for both undergraduate music majors and non-majors. We will explore many outstanding women composers and performers in the western and non-western traditions, within their social, political, economic and cultural contexts. Many genres of music will be discussed, including classical, pop, jazz, blues and folk music. The ability to read and write music is not necessary.

Dr. Nancy Boston

**HST 2210: American Women's History
M W F 9:00-9:50**

This course traces the history of women in America from Native Americans through the modern period. The class specifically focuses on issues and problems facing women as they fought to gain the vote and equality before the law. Particular attention is also paid to the changing cultural and social understandings of gender in the United States.

Dr. Shawndra Holderby

**ANH 2250: Anthropology of Gender
MWF 10:00-10:50**

This course provides an introduction to the cultural diversity of gender roles with emphasis on the roles of women, gender bias, and cultural definitions of men and women. Contemporary gender issues are studied within a variety of cultural contexts.

Dr. Azizur R. Molla

**COM 3334 Gender Communication
Tu Th 10-11:15**

Designed to introduce students to the concepts of gender and how those concepts relate to communication. The course introduces students to important gender communication concepts such as gendered verbal and non-verbal communication, the social shaping of gender, gendered power and violence, sexual harassment, and gendered communication in educational, organizational, media, and relationship settings.

Dr. K. Sue Young



M.U. Suffragists march in the 1890s Parade.

**WS 4410: Women and Spirituality:
Wednesday 6:30-9:20 p.m.**

Is there a difference between women's and men's experiences of the sacred? How do women's practices of spirituality differ? What is the linkage between spirituality and religious traditions, and what spiritualities exist outside these traditions? Is there a spirituality of the body? of the earth? of female anger? We will explore these questions and others through readings, journaling and projects. Our sources will include written works, art, and music from ancient goddess traditions to Medieval Christian mystics to Native American traditions to a broad range of contemporary explorations of the sacred.

Dr. Judith Sornberger



WOMEN'S STUDIES MINOR: 18 S.H. PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

WS 1100 Introduction to Women's Studies **3**

Choose one Humanities course:

ENG 3326	Women's Literature
ENG 3328	Lesbian and Gay Literature
HST 2210	American Women's History
HST 3313	European Women's History
HST 3325	History of Witches
MU 2205	Women in Music

Choose one Social Sciences course: _____ 3

COM 3334	Gender and Communication
NUR 4402	Women's Health Issues
PSY 4422	Psychology of Women
ANH 2250	Anthropology of Gender

Choose two electives (6 s.h.) from the courses listed below, any of the courses listed above, and/or courses cross-listed with Women's Studies.

ENG 2220*	Special Topics in Literature (*when offered with Women's Studies content)
ENG 3305*	Comparative Literature (*when offered with Women's Studies content)
ENG 3307*	Literature in English from around the World (*when offered with Women's Studies content)
ENG 3320*	Special Topics in Literature (*when offered with Women's Studies content)
ENG 4401*	Seminar in Literary Studies (*when offered with Women's Studies content)
HST 3294*	Topics in American History (*when offered with Women's Studies content)
HST 3295*	Topics in Global History (*when offered with Women's Studies content)
HST 3296*	Topics in European History (*when offered with Women's Studies content)
HST 3326	The History of Women through Television

WS 4410 Seminar in Women's Studies 3

Total 18