Interview with Teri Doerksen,
Dept. of Languages and Literature

By Dr. Andrea Harris

Dr. Teri Doerksen received the Ph.D. in Cultural and Critical Studies from the University of Pittsburgh. Before coming to Mansfield, she was Assistant Professor of English at Hartwick College. She joined Mansfield’s Department of Languages and Literature in 2000.

How have you been involved in women’s studies programs during your academic career?

I’ve always taught Women’s Studies courses, and almost all of my courses incorporate an awareness of gender politics. At the University of Pittsburgh I designed courses in Sex and Gender Representation in the British Novel, and in Race, Class, and Gender. When I moved to Hartwick, I started teaching Introduction to Women’s Studies, a beginning theory course for undergraduates. I also developed courses like Women and Science Fiction and Gender in the Gothic, then moved on to develop a senior interdisciplinary capstone course called Disney Film: Gender, Race, Class, and Corporate Culture.

In my third year at Hartwick I was elected Director of Women’s Studies, and started to learn about the administrative end of things. I held the position for two years, until I came to Mansfield. During that time I coordinated a program with about thirty-five faculty members (roughly a third of the faculty), planned programming, advised minors, oversaw senior thesis projects, and spearheaded the movement to hire a half-time tenure-track Women’s Studies Director, to give the program additional permanence and security.

How do you plan to be involved in MU’s women’s studies program?

I’m just learning about the Women’s Studies Program at Mansfield, but I’m looking forward to taking an active part in it. I am a member of the Steering Committee, but I’m really just getting my bearings right now. Eventually I would like to have a more active voice in some of the programming, and maybe in a couple of years I’d be interested in more administrative work. I definitely want to teach Women’s Studies courses, possibly including a course about the sensation novel, or a course in some of the exciting, newly discovered women’s poetry from the eighteenth century and the Romantic period. Now that there will be a full-time film professor at Mansfield, it would be interesting to re-imagine the Disney Film course as a 200-level Women’s Studies course that would complement other film offerings.

Did you have a formative feminist experience that you’d like to describe?
When I first went to Boulder, I didn’t expect to find myself in a Women’s-Studies-based program in which every course was rooted in gender concerns. My first semester, I signed up for courses in the Victorian Novel, Emily Dickinson, and Medieval Literature. When I got there, I discovered that the courses were actually titled Dickinson and Gender Poetics, Representation of Gender in the Victorian Novel, and Medieval Women’s Literature. My first response was rejection. If I had never heard these ideas as an undergraduate, and if they hadn’t occurred to me in my 21 years of avid reading, then surely there must be some mistake. I argued vocally that there was no need to use a Women’s Studies perspective – after all, I was smart and my education was a good one, right? If I were to admit that there was a whole different way to think about things, and a whole new world of literature to read, then I would have to admit weakness in my education and my own way of thinking. After a while, though, the evidence started to mount up: there was something to this. After much soul searching, I had to admit that there were big gaps in my undergraduate education – not just in the books that were assigned in classes, but in the kinds of classes that were required and sometimes in the assumptions made by the professors in those classes. When the initial shock wore off, I began to be intrigued, and then fascinated, with this approach to literature that was so different from what I had been exposed to before. It made me reconsider all my assumptions about the world and rethink them from the ground up, with a more complete and therefore firmer foundation.

**What sorts of courses will you be teaching in the Languages and Literature Department?**

I’ll definitely be teaching eighteenth-century literature, which is my primary field – I’m teaching a course in that right now, though you might not know it because it’s cunningly disguised in the catalog under the name Restoration and Neoclassic Literature. I hope to change that soon. The period called “the long eighteenth century” actually is about 170 years long, from 1660 to 1830 and sometimes beyond, so I’ll also be teaching other courses that involve literature from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. Last fall, for example, I taught Romantic Literature and next fall I’ll be teaching a course in the history of the British Novel. I’ll also teach the British Lit Survey I, which is one of my favorite courses to teach because it covers such an amazing breadth – 1200 years in 14 weeks.

I’m also wearing a lot of other hats, just like everyone else in the department. This year I’ve taught Introduction to Literature and piloted a new “gateway” course for majors called Introduction to Literary Studies. I also have been teaching English 112 (Composition) this year, and next year I’ll teach some English 313 as well.

**Would you describe your scholarship, particularly as it pertains to women’s studies and feminism (or feminist theory).**

My work combines gender studies, political history, religious history, and literary history with a smattering of Marxist-structuralist analysis – it’s about as interdisciplinary as it gets, and gender criticism/gender studies is one of the key elements that holds it all together. The book I’m working on right now argues that representations of women, religion and the state in eighteenth-century British literature and culture are intertwined and rise from connected origins. I’m particularly interested in a tendency for female figures to serve as centers for literary negotiation of religious and state issues in
eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century novels. In Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa*, for example, the heroine is an ideal Anglican woman who nevertheless has traits associated with Catholicism; I argue that incorporating Catholic iconography into an Anglican female figure neutralizes the potential danger that the English associated with the Catholic, while appropriating Catholicism’s power. As you can see, cultural representation of women is at the core of my work.

**What is the appeal of eighteenth-century literature for you?**

I’ve always thought of the eighteenth century as an extended conversation – the kind you have in college, where you stay up all night because you’re more interested in hearing what people have to say than in sleeping. Literature in the eighteenth century blurred a lot of the lines we take for granted, which means that there were different “voices” in the conversation than we might expect. A political treatise writer in 1701 might make a point that is criticized in a poem written in 1709 – but that is supported by a novelist writing in 1712. A popular newspaper in 1719 might take the poet to task for his position through a mocking short story in 1722, which might in turn prompt a pamphleteer to publish a counterattack parodying the short story and supporting the novel in 1725. I love being a part of that conversation, even if I can only be an observer (of course, when I do my own research, I get to be part of the conversation, which is almost as good . . .). The novels I love the most are Richardson’s, probably because he creates an extended conversation – I never get tired of sitting down with one of his novels and “listening in” as the characters converse.

I also love the eighteenth century because it’s a time of beginnings. The novel is taking shape in England, the industrial revolution is starting, budding capitalists are starting to challenge aristocratic sensibilities, Hume is answering back to Hobbes and re-imagining human nature in the process, women are becoming published writers and being paid for it, women are allowed on stage for the first time, science and religion are coming into conflict, the middle classes are being “invented.” A lot of our ideas and assumptions took shape in the eighteenth century.

"I AM A WOMAN! AND I CAN DO IT ALL!"

**By Pastor Joy Hulslander, ’99, Liberty United Methodist Parish**

I began my life as a United Methodist pastor serving three churches on July 1, 1995. I began my life as an ACT 101 student at Mansfield University on July 4, 1995, Independence Day. I had succeeded in gaining my freedom to grow and become a professional woman. Four years later, on May 8, 1999, I graduated with honors while pastoring three churches.

During my four years at Mansfield, there were the usual papers, tests, readings, and seminars required of students, but for me there was always a Sunday sermon to write, a worship service to plan, and always the untimely funerals and emergencies. There are some of my friends who think my mantra is, "I am woman! And I can do it all!" However, nothing could be further from the truth. It is because of the wonderful mentoring of my sisters in the journey with me that I have been able to succeed.
My first semester was an awesome summer semester, and there were many people who helped to launch my academic career. However, the first person who mentored me in this remarkable journey was a dedicated woman named Dr. Jan Fuller. Dr. Fuller's professionalism and dedication to enabling students was evident in her willingness to take the time out of her busy summer to teach me and the other incoming ACT 101 students the art of College Study Skills. It was through Dr. Fuller’s instruction on the correct strategies for studying and her encouragement that I acquired not only the skills for studying, but also a positive attitude. The study skills were beneficial, but I found the positive attitude was important for non-traditional students, like myself, who were returning to school after a long hiatus in learning. Dr. Fuller’s support was valuable in fostering within me a genuine love for learning and helped me to understand for myself the importance of striving to attain the goal of academic excellence. I will always be grateful to her for being a role model of a professional woman and for giving of herself.

It was through the mentoring of the Women's Studies program at Mansfield that I learned that the role modeling demonstrated by Dr. Fuller is important for all women, mature and young alike. Following the Introduction to Women's Studies Course taught by Dr. Andrea Harris, I was able to choose courses from the Women's Studies curriculum that helped me to explore women and their spirituality, women and their relationships as mothers and daughters, women and their relationship in history, and women and their relationships with other women. Without these learning experiences, cultivated by models of mentoring and a network of support, my academic career at Mansfield would have been just an exercise in the academics of learning.

During my course work and the Women’s Studies program, I received instruction from strong professional women like Dr. Andrea Harris, Dr. Lynn Pifer, Dr. Judith Sornberger, Professor Louise Sullivan-Blum, Dr. Sharon Carrish-Bulkley, Dr. Margaret Launius, and Dr. Catherine D'Ortona. I have been given the gift of their wisdom, and am grateful for the wealth of knowledge and the mentoring I received from these women who are a part of the faculty at Mansfield University.

As I was writing this paper and remembering the mentoring influences from the University, I suddenly realized that the mentoring was not limited to professional, academic women. During this time at Mansfield I have been supported by women from my parish who are farm wives, teachers, accountants, homemakers, and high school and college students. They have taught me a great deal about life, given me a different perspective, and probably more than any other, helped me to understand the endurance required for bi-vocational women. Following my graduation from Mansfield University, I am still serving in the same parish and am thankful for the continued role models and mentoring of these women.

At Colgate Rochester Divinity School where I am enrolled as a graduate student in the Masters of Divinity program, I am once again encountering professional women who are a part of the Women and Gender Studies program. I find that their mentoring and role modeling continues to be necessary for my professional and spiritual growth. Women like Dr. Melanie May, Dr. Gay Byron, Dr. Gail Ricciuti, and Dr. Pamela Couture are the present professional, academic women who inspire me to reach deep within myself and to give more than I thought possible as I continue to grow in self-esteem, in professional relationships, and in becoming the woman I was created to be.
I am writing this as a thank you to the women at Mansfield University who have been there for me and mentored me, but more importantly to the women who are enrolled and struggling with the question, "Can I do it all?" My answer would be, "No, we can never do it all alone." But by networking and receiving mentoring and giving mentoring to one another, we can indeed grow into the professional women who will be the leaders in our society today and tomorrow.

**SENIOR WOMEN’S STUDIES MINOR LEAH PHILLIPS PREPARES TO GRADUATE**

By Leah Phillips

The spring semester of my sophomore year, I decided to add a Women’s Studies Minor to my college curriculum. I now realize what this education has done for me and am thankful for the knowledge I gained from all of the professors at Mansfield. I am especially grateful to those I was able to have as professors where we created a unique classroom experience. As the days quickly pass by and graduation presents itself on the horizon, I find myself cherishing the time I’ve spent at Mansfield University. Currently, I am looking towards the future and doing a lot of planning.

So far I plan on taking a three-week vacation to see some of the world I live in. I then plan on working for a couple years until I enroll in Graduate School. Currently, I am investigating a Master’s Degree in Social Marketing. Upon completing that degree I will have to make another choice: work or Law School. If I decide to enroll in Law School, I plan on studying Communication/First Amendment Law.

I have to credit each of my Women’s Studies professors for broadening my passion and comprehension for the people who have suffered greatly fighting for their freedom of self-expression. If I become a lawyer, I would like to practice First Amendment Law and represent dynamic groups/individuals that struggle for full-range practice of their First Amendment rights.

Thanks Mansfield University for a great four years of excellent education and experience. You will be remembered fondly by this Fourth-generation graduate.

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Meet the New Advocacy Program Coordinator / Women's Center Director

_Elizabeth Shaffer is the new Coordinator of the Advocacy Program and Director of the Women’s Center. I asked her to introduce herself in this issue. Welcome, Elizabeth!_

My name is Elizabeth Shaffer and I was a student at Mansfield when the Women’s Center was just a dream we worked toward. Now I am the new Director. Because of that I have a lot of energy and enthusiasm for my position. There is a lot being planned for next year, and, surprisingly, since I have only been here about a month, quite a bit going on already. After a little bit of redoing the Center had a
“grand reopening” on March 15, complete with refreshments and a student art exhibit. All the artwork was done by women and will stay on display until March 31. Next year I hope to have a series of art exhibits by students and women artists. In addition, we will be bringing in programs about dating violence, women’s health, sexual assault and relationships. I plan to start focus and/or support groups concentrating on women’s issues.

The Advocacy Program is also busy with plans for a candlelight remembrance of sexual assault victims on April 11, 2001, the middle of Sexual Assault Awareness Week. A group from Rhonda Keller’s class, in conjunction with the Advocacy Program, the Advocacy Association student organization and the Tioga County Women’s Coalition, will sponsor the event. There will be several speakers, and it will start at 6:00 pm. Since my joining the program we have trained new advocates, made plans for fall trainings and I am working with residence life to bring programs about assault and dating violence to campus. I also offer direct services to victims/survivors of sexual assault, harassment and dating violence.

My training as a student here was in psychology with a focus toward counseling. I graduated in 1995, Summa Cum Laude, with a double major, Psychology and Philosophy. Since then I have worked for three years with the Wraparound Program as a Therapeutic Staff Support. I worked primarily with aggressive and suicidal teens aged 11 to 19. I also worked with the HIV/AIDS Support Network in Sayre, PA as a case manager and community educator. Additional training has been in domestic violence, sexual assault and non-violent crisis intervention. I have also worked with a crisis line taking crisis calls. My biggest desire is to help women empower themselves, and, so doing, change their world for the better. I am looking forward to what promises to be an exciting and rewarding career.

**Premenstrual Symptoms and Sarafem: A Feminist Analysis**

**By Denise Seigart**

Recently a new drug has been advertised for the treatment of PMDD, also known as Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder. This disorder is considered to be a severe form of PMS (Premenstrual syndrome). Known as Sarafem, the drug promises to help with many of the symptoms women experience just prior to their periods. Irritability, mood changes, depression, bloating, breast tenderness, tension, and food cravings are all attributed to PMS and PMDD. Although only 3-7% of menstruating women are thought to suffer from PMDD, the drug is being mass marketed to women throughout the country. Yet, we still have little understanding of PMS, PMDD, and appropriate treatments.

Premenstrual syndrome has become a bit of a joke among women and men. If a woman is having a bad day, and expresses anger, she is said to be PMSing. If a woman experiences any symptoms associated with her hormonal cycles (breast tenderness, headaches) she is said to be “suffering” from Premenstrual syndrome. The medicalization of the menstrual cycle, as occurred with the birth process, has become quite a lucrative business. Yet this has not always been so. At one time, women delivered their babies at home assisted by midwives, and the menstrual cycle was regarded as a natural and even beneficial part of life. Pregnancy was not regarded as a disease, nor were the normal cyclic changes women experience
with menstruation. Women used home remedies to treat their symptoms, and often did quite well without medical intervention. Lydia Pinkham, for example, was well known for her herbal concoction to treat women’s symptoms (although we know today that the alcohol content of her “medicine” probably contributed to its relaxing qualities).

Today the potential for money making drives many of the drugs and treatments we see advertised. Sarafem, only the latest drug to be introduced for the treatment of women’s menstrual symptoms, has another name. It is one of the most popular anti-depressant drugs on the market, Prozac. Do anti-depressants help women who experience the symptoms associated with PMDD? If the drug is being mass marketed, you would expect that this theory has been well tested. This however, is not always true. Many clinical trials of anti-depressant use for PMDD are now underway, but results are still pending. What is known is that it is a profitable drug for the pharmaceutical company; therefore, it must be good for women, right? Much the same rationale is being applied to women in their menopausal years. Since the baby boom generation is now approaching menopause, there has been a dramatic increase in the marketing of drugs to prevent menopausal symptoms, osteoporosis, and heart disease in menopausal women. Yet what we understand about these drugs is still limited and controversial. Drugs have side effects, and sometimes the treatment is worse than the “disease”.

When addressing the symptoms of PMS, PMDD, or menopause, I think women should be skeptical of the medical establishment. Think carefully about the motives pharmaceutical companies have for marketing their drugs. Look before you leap! I have no doubt that a small percentage of women suffer severe symptoms associated with the menstrual cycle, but I believe many more women can manage their symptoms with just a few lifestyle changes. Exercise, good nutrition, avoiding caffeine, refined sugars and salt, and stress reduction techniques have all been shown to have a positive effect on the physical symptoms associated with menstruation. Calcium and magnesium supplements have also shown positive effect. Readers who are, I believe a massage, a nice hot tub and a glass of good wine are effective treatments too. Anyway they’re much more fun than any little pill.

Check out these web sites:
http://www.4woman.gov/faq/pms.htm
http://www.mayoclinic.com
http://www.fwhc.org

Denise writes a regular column on Women’s Health Issues for HWI. If you have a question on women’s health you would like her to answer in the newsletter, you can send it to her at dseigart@inet.guthrie.org.