Our Collective Legacy

Spring 2012

I am a feminist-woman, a war-is-not-the answer-woman, a stop-the-gender-violence-woman and thus, I can be one angry Vagina!

RUNNING THE VICTORY LAP
NUCLEUS OF EMPOWERMENT
ASK DR. PHILLIPS
FINDING THE VAGINA IN ME
WHO DO YOU THINK I AM? I BET YOU’RE WRONG.
What a pleasure it has been to attend WGS’s timely and provocative events, teach your students, and have your voice on our campus. The Program has made us intellectually richer, broadened our horizons, and its academic and artistic pursuits have been noble and necessary.

Kevan Yenerall, Ph.D.
Political Science

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For all of us 20 years is a milestone moment. For an academic program which attempts to capture, express, inform and advance a critical piece of the human condition, 20 years is a lifetime. The stories, quotes, and pictures from those who have been touched by this program will move and inspire.

Even in the year 2012, women and girls must continue to consciously create and maintain their own space and place in society. The study of women and gender provides us with a body of knowledge, a vocabulary, a women-centered way of working and living within our currently male-dominated society. Women and men are better for the knowledge and the prodigy that this knowledge has produced.

As the founding-mother of the Women and Gender Studies Program, Dr Deb Burghardt is to be thanked, congratulated and exalted for her commitment to the study of women and gender through her teaching, mentorship, research, and service to Clarion University students, the university and the community. Deb, you are truly a Golden Eagle!

Here’s to the next 20 years for the Clarion University Women and Gender Studies Program, may they be eagletastic!

Karen M. Whitney, Ph.D.
PRESIDENT
Clarion University
For more than twenty years, WGS has served as the respected voice of women and a courageous advocate for inclusion throughout the region. Under the leadership of Dr. Deborah Burghardt, there have been two decades of activity and accomplishments focused on civility, equity and civic engagement. Through numerous collaborations, she has successfully developed community partnerships, designed curricular programs, promoted activist projects for students, and implemented innovative teaching strategies.

Through her interactions with students and colleagues, Dr. Deb has made an amazingly significant impact on each person who embraces the ideology of empowering women and adopts the collective voice of solidarity. Students who have taken advantage of the programs offered through WGS encountered a student-oriented and caring director, committed to creating opportunities for intellectual growth. Dr. Deb has made an enduring impression on her students, colleagues and community partners.

Kudos to the many committed faculty who served both their disciplinary departments and the WGS Program. Their outstanding teaching, service on the WGS Advisory Council and unflinching advocacy for WGS laid the groundwork. They sustain the Program’s mission of interdisciplinary learning and collaboration.

Kudos also to the staff and students who have worked hard alongside faculty to assure that Clarion University is a leader in developing women as leaders and men as allies!

Based on this strong foundation of spirited support of women’s and gender issues, I have no doubt that the next twenty years and beyond will bring a continued focus on the need to promote civility, inclusion and equity throughout our region and the world.

Rachelle Prioleau, Ph.D.
DEAN
College of Arts and Sciences, Clarion University
"In the beginning we needed a program that supported the needs of women on campus. At the time of conception, women were invisible in many facets of the curriculum. It was more than just classes—the program would be a physical focal point on campus where like-minded people could congregate and share ideas."

~ Myrna Kuehn, Ph.D.
Chair, Communication and WS Founder
We would have taken any space, just to have a room of our own. However, thanks to Provost John Kuhn, we didn’t have to settle for less. “Women need windows,” he told me, “I have the perfect place for you.” When he opened the doors to Harvey Hall’s west wing five years before its slated renovation, we understood. There in the midst of the radio station ruins, a magnificent window welcomed us. Through the panes we gazed at two pear tree crones, soon-to-be witnesses to women’s studies life. Their brilliant red, autumn leaves, stark limbs of winter, bevies of white spring flowers and lush green of summer would observe the passage of our seasons.

There was a homecoming element to my being assigned to Harvey Hall. I came to Clarion in 1967 and donned the blue and gold beanie that distinguished me as a first year student. My ZETA blazer came later. James Gemmell was president. I borrow words from his son, James Christopher Gemmell, who described my Student Union at the dedication of Gemmell Student Center.

I listened as he recalled his boyhood discovery of a ‘small rectangular Indian Clay colored building [on his] new academic outpost.’ There, “thatched in the limbs of an overgrown forsythia lay a faded sign: Harvey Hall.” He perceived “the subterranean haunt,” what passed for my Student Union, as a landscape of “fluorescent lighting, Formica topped tables…molded plastic chairs… aging Wurlitzer jukebox set against Commonwealth green walls.” He sized up the place as a “mecca of social opportunity.”

All I would add to Gemmell’s remarks is the woman working at the snack bar. She stood small in stature, a walking apology with thin, dull, red hair pulled up in a net. Her eyes mere slits, her expression, the frozen kind, communicated no joy or hardship either. I’d watch her as she prepared my usual: grilled cheese and a chocolate milkshake. I wondered what her life off-duty might be like, but I never inquired. I was oblivious then to how significantly one woman’s story can shape another woman’s life.

Gemmell continued to wax poetically about ‘the transformation of that tiny rathskellar beneath Harvey’ into the new Student Complex. My mind wandered to another transformation, the one now thrust into my hands by an act of serendipity.
The one glitch in the process of establishing the Women’s Studies program, outside of the condition of the space, occurred when some of the promised funding was delayed. The intended director of the new program withdrew in protest. Some committee members wanted the committee to follow suit. Fearful of losing all we had worked for, I called an eleventh hour meeting of the committee to discuss a course of action. We finally agreed that if a suitable director could be found, we would proceed in spite of the delayed funding. The final result of this crisis was naming Deborah Burghardt as DIRECTOR OF WOMEN’S STUDIES.

Many of us on the committee had seen Deb in action with students and were confident in her leadership capability. But few could have predicted the incredible enthusiasm and energy she brought to the job and her ability to galvanize the campus community. If Dean Scanlon was the single most important person in institutionalizing the Women’s Studies Program, then Deborah Burghardt was the guarantor of the program’s long-term success. It is impossible to overestimate the contribution Deb has made to Women’s Studies at Clarion for 20 years during my personal involvement in them.

“It began with the Status of Women Subcommittee, with a few of us meeting in the basement of Harvey Hall. We were feminists and any project that would advance the cause of women was a good thing. Understanding the milieu of the times matters—the Mary Keetz Study at West Chester showed the predominance of male administrators and faculty across the system, and other areas where the academy failed to recognize the contributions of women. CU was not an exception.

Creating a WS Program was a good thing, something we as founders thought important. You ask, How did it finally happen? How does a flower grow? The process felt like a natural evolution of activist minds collaborating. I don’t think of it in terms of defining events, more like a flow.

While as her partner, I could not vote on Dr. Deb for director, I knew she was the right person for the times.”

~ Richard Nicholls, Ph.D.
Psychology and WS Founder
Prior to WGS I worked as an advisor for Upward Bound and EOP/Act 101. These experiences opened me up to the raw realities of social injustices. I witnessed, firsthand, how abject poverty, racial prejudice, and blatant sexism can narrow children’s choices, press their potential flat. I decided to be an advocate for my students, to speak up to those who leveled biased judgments against them.

My appointment to WGS signified arrival at a place where “passion,” an unbecoming academic quality, would be embraced. Once, a dean applauded my “enthusiastic” performance in an annual review and I took offense. “I have feelings about changing the world that go to the bone,” I cried. “This is not a mere job to me—it is my passion. This work is the culmination of everything I have worked for.” She agreed to change her descriptor. When I started the position, she had suggested I turn my knee socks in. I tried more “professional” garb, but quickly changed back. I can’t think of a single time my socks inhibited my achievement. I’ve tried to teach my students this lesson: to be yourself is the deepest well, the source of your creative powers.

Smitten with my good fortune, I might have been a little hard to take when I first began directing WS. To quote me, “I am pleased to be leading WS at my undergraduate alma mater. CU is now perfect.” There was also one answer on an early faculty assessment that lingers: “To improve, stop acting like WS is the end all and be all of programs at CU.” Add in the dinner at Dick’s Last Resort restaurant, an experience consciously designed to torment the customer by all brand of insult and humiliation (I did not get the joke). I admonished our young waiter: “You know what you need?” I sputtered, “You need to take a WS course!!” My husband still teases me about my thinking that taking a WS course is the answer to everything wrong in the world. I still humor him in his lack of faith.

I was “suitable” for the WS directing position because the PASSHE Women’s Consortium, with the leadership of Mary Keetz, had shown small numbers of women throughout the system that together, we formed a critical mass. Her research on the status of women in the system showed appalling results in terms of representation in administration and on the faculty, inequitable salaries and rank based on sex, lack of racial diversity, sexual harassment polices, women’s centers and WS programs.

It was at the organization’s first conference that I came to know Kathy Graham, as a mentor, a wit, and someone who absolutely had to read before bed. On our return trip home, we and Cass Neely made a promise to ourselves. Unlike Stanton and Mott, who did the same after the London Abolitionist Convention denied their voices, our voices had been lifted up. We felt were destined to be instruments of change at Clarion University.
November 1982. The chill, drear of the interstate world outside the car, the warmth and camaraderie on the inside, where we were far away from the immediate world of winter, from the bleak, grey landscape of central Pennsylvania and on our way to a new horizon, one that lies ever before us.

Cass Neely, Deb Burghardt and I didn’t know where we were going that day; we only knew that we were, as Adrienne Rich said, carrying “a book of myths in which our names do not appear”; and that we wanted to change that. And for the first time, maybe for all of us—certainly for me—we knew we could.

On that homeward trip from the November Women’s Consortium conference in Bloomsburg, we were filled with visions of power, of woman magic. We drove back to Clarion as if it was a new land filled with the promise of a new life. We had taken our first steps in subversion and were anxious to get back to the arena and try out what we had learned about leadership. Never again could we be bested, we thought, because we had been armed with the skills of leadership.

But with our new power came new knowledge; we knew that our power source was other women, meeting together, working together, fighting the good fight together. We knew that in leaving the conference all of those women like us from across the state, we were leaving the fountainhead and we were leaving it for a whole year. How were we to sustain the energy, and the spirit that filled us to the brim that day?

The answer, of course, was to create another power source closer to home, another conference of sisters, so that when the cold snows of winter had just about blasted our souls we could reach out to the warmth of a new fire that would chase away the winter and offer a woman-greeting to spring. And thus, the Clarion Women’s Conference was conceived. Our first conference, “Leadership: Steps and Strides,” was held the following spring March, 1983. We began with steps; today we fly.
The first Clarion Women's Conference was chaired by Anne Day. I saw her rise from the mists inside the Magee Hotel, Bloomsburg, Pa., at the first Women's Consortium Conference held there. "Look at the women here today from your campus," the organizers said. "Find those with the most experience because they'll know the politics at your institution. Ask these women to teach you. All Clarion eyes turned to behold Anne Day. She probably said something like, "Yes, I certainly do know!" followed by a hearty laugh. She quickly became our leader, a woman we trusted and supported. When doubts crept in, she'd say to us, 'Oh, but you're good. You really are.'

"A difference I noticed in the past 20 years is an increased awareness of sensitive issues on campus. The WGS Program provided a forum that allowed people to have not "polite" discussions. For example, there was no outspoken support for LGBTQIA issues 20 years ago. The influence of having a Women Studies Center on campus paved the way for support of other underrepresented groups. And women aren't invisible in their academic disciplines anymore."

"The success of the program is because of Dr. Deb's character. She is the "perfect diplomat." It is because of her the idea of 'gender studies' took off. She can see the bigger picture."

~ Myrna Kuehn, Ph.D.
Communication Chair, WS Founder

"In my academic career, which began in 1988, the years at Clarion were a highlight due to the dynamic and varied group of feminists involved in the creation of the Women's Studies Program. The dialogue and process that we engaged in to develop the program were personally enriching and led to a successful program design."

~ April Katz, MFA
Art, WS Founder

"The WGS Program has done an outstanding job in its programming and curriculum development. Twenty years ago, when I served on the WS Advisory Council, I was a second year graduate student who was preparing to go into higher education as an English professor. The Founding Committee chair, Dr. Kathryn Graham, and the program provided me with a sound foundation for incorporating WGS into my courses as an English professor, especially my literature courses. Long live the WGS Program!"

~ Brian Roberts, Ph.D.
English, WS Advisory Council
Jane Elmes delivered the keynote address to inaugurate the first Clarion University Women’s Conference on April 14, 1984, a regional PASSHE Women’s Consortium gathering. As she concluded her remarks, Jane reminded the audience of a simple truth: “The initial drive to leadership, and that final momentum, must come from within.”

I recalled Jane’s comment as I began to write my recollections of that first conference because her words still resonate with me today. Telling the story of the first Women’s Conference and the eventual founding of the Women and Gender Studies Program, comes after I look within myself to consider my role in those early days of struggling and dreaming.

At the request of Dr. Francene McNairy, then chair of the newly formed Affirmative Action Commission, I chaired the original Status of Women Subcommittee, charged by the university to identify and address the concerns of women on campus. We met for the first time on December 9, 1983, to assess the needs of campus women, design long- and short-term goals to meet those needs, and to identify programs and funding to meet the goals.

The power within and dedication of the fourteen women and one man who met that day was incredible and palpable. After much discussion and debate, we chose four specific goals to work toward: (1) identify and secure a location to establish a returning adult center; (2) identify and secure a location for a women’s center; (3) organize and implement diverse programs designed to raise the consciousness of the university about the concerns of women; and (4) monitor and eliminate the use of discriminatory and/or sexist language in campus communications. It looked so simple and clear on paper!

Both the 1984 and 1985 Clarion Women’s Conferences, our first attempts at providing diverse programming, dealt with the theme of leadership. However, in 1985 we moved away from the regional consortium model to stand on our own. We wanted to build an annual conference focused on women’s issues relevant to our own university and community. The buzz phrase was “participatory workshops,” and the raising consciousness was fast and furious. As the conference chair, I was not alone. My support group cared as deeply as I did and
were willing to work hard. And what made all the work worthwhile was the participants. Rooms filled with people who wanted to learn, share, grow and risk change. Even as I write, I am thrilled again by the memory of those individuals.

And what of our four goals? In 1989, we achieved commission status by state mandate. Our child, the Returning Adult Center (RACS) served students for several years, in addition to birthing an Adult Orientation Program, thanks to the parenting of Donna Poljanec. Our Sexual Harassment Committee became a presidential commission with the leadership of Janice Horn, Kathy Spozio and Margy Vanlandingham, Deb Burghardt chaired our Dating Violence Committee and advised Students Together Against Rape (STAR) whose courage and efforts led to our focus on this issue. The Sexual Assault Network, model for today’s Clarion VDay Project, also evolved from that work. The dream for a Women’s Center was realized at the founding of the Women and Gender Studies Program, an initiative chaired by Kathryn Graham.

The Conference thrived from 1983-1995 and earned a National Continuing Education Creative Programming Award in 1991. Janice Horn made sure books and videos linked to the annual themes became available in Carlson Library. And as to the language, well we still encounter resistance to the use of gender neutral language at times—humankind, not mankind, please.

As I look toward tomorrow after realizing what has taken place during the past 28 years, a few thoughts come to mind. First, I feel a humble satisfaction to know that I was a part of bringing dreams into reality. Second, I am eternally grateful for the women and men who have evolved from colleagues to friends over the course of our journey. And finally, I am encouraged by today’s members of the Presidential Commission on the Status of Women who continue to identify needs, set goals, and remain steadfast in meeting those goals.

Progress spirals. The sand shifts but the foundation is solid. It is gratifying to realize that our struggling and dreaming lives on, and that as “that final momentum comes from within,” our story will be told and told again while we continue to reach for equality.

WOMEN'S stories and mentors’ guidance lay scattered on my path to directing like rose petals from a romantic lover. I arrived on the wings of the PASSHE Women’s Consortium, years of Clarion women’s conferences, and the Status of Women Subcommittee, now Commission. I arrived on the eve of the inauguration of our first woman president, Diane Reinhard.

And actually, I had little to do with the founding of the WS Program. Kathy Graham, with an able subcommittee, took up the cause. It is hard to admit, but I was intimidated by the strength of these women, all holding doctorates and steeped in curricular reform, Faculty Senate leadership and APSCUF business. I watched their deliberations from a distance, not daring to hope that the position they imagined, my dream job, could ever be mine.
In our quest to establish a Women’s Studies Program at Clarion, it became evident early on that what we needed first was to see what other schools had done — what other Women’s Studies Programs in schools like ours looked like. I remember a cold, snowy trip to Edinboro with Sylvia Stalker to meet with other women from PASSHE who shared our interests. I believe that might have been our first contact with Maureen McHugh from IUP, who was establishing Women’s Studies there. She turned out to be a tremendously useful and resourceful friend and later came to the Clarion campus to help us further.

We also traveled to the Tri-State Women’s Studies conferences at Chatham College and Seton Hill to see their programs. Deb Burghardt, Anne Day and I attended the National Women’s Studies conference in Akron, Ohio, a group which Deb eventually became very active in.

Other useful sources of information were the program proposals for Women’s Studies Programs that other schools shared with us. April Katz, for example, was able to get us a hard copy of the program at Arizona State which she had been involved with. I remember long working sessions in Carlson Hall conference room, poring over such documents as we struggled toward a vision. And then there were the open forums we held on our campus. We sent out an open invitation to all interested departments in order to explain our goals, answer questions, head off resistance and garner support campus-wide. Maureen McHugh again provided useful as a featured speaker at one such forum. Lynn Goodstein, director of Women’s Studies at Penn State, was another valued consultant who helped us to shape our program. After one such open forum, Donna Ashcraft opened her home to us for refreshments and some wonderful kibitzing with these accomplished, knowledgeable women.

I remember lunches at my house in Clarion where we met to hammer out our proposal, each of us having drafted copy to be integrated into the whole. I remember Myrna Kuehn’s excellent sense of logic in these meetings where collaboration was not always easy and feathers could be easily ruffled. The Women’s Studies Program — which evolved through many hours of discussions, forums, and revisions — was truly a collaborative effort, reflecting the thought and cares of a broad spectrum of faculty and administrators.

Jim Scanlon, Dean of Arts and Sciences at the time, was in my mind our single most important and influential collaborator and ally. When he agreed to be our advocate and took such a keen interest in the shaping of the program, I felt, as I believe we all did, that we would succeed and that the Women’s Studies Program would become a reality and be institutionalized sooner rather than later. We felt fortunate, indeed, to have such a powerful ally and advocate in the administration. Hence, the program won campus approval and was sent to Harrisburg in the fall of 1991.

It’s difficult to believe that 17 years have passed since then or that the Women’s Studies Program is 20 years old. In that time it has helped hundreds of women at Clarion to recognize their full potential as women and as human beings. And who knows how many others have been shaped by it because of the efforts of the hundreds who have gone beyond the academy to carry the message to the larger community, to the world? The Women’s Studies Program has served as the nucleus of empowerment for women at Clarion, the agent for change to a new paradigm. It has become everything and more than the founding mothers and fathers hoped it would be. Its future is something that we couldn’t have even imagined in 1992!
on as director, I felt the flutters of fragility, recognizing an educational equity initiative bore controversy and challenges. While traveling in WV, I spotted a lonely rocking chair at a flea market. I circled it, studying the crude, yet sturdy construction, and wondering about the choice of paint—the color of mud. I bought it for $10, hauled it home and moved it to the WS Center. "If anyone tries to close these doors," I told the students, "they'll have to carry me out in that rocking chair."

No one ever came, of course; we had little resistance to our "nucleus of empowerment," with the exception of a heated exchange of letters to the editor. "Restrictive studies programs 'a farce,'" read the headline in our local paper. Joe Bodziack answered, "WS courses" contribute... to an individual's sense of the larger world—its complexity, its beauty, its suffering, its joy, and an understanding of his or her place in it." He also used the term "dead white men" in relation to breaking "the silence imposed on the marginalized."

"Watered-down standards are the problem," shouted the next headline. "Does being a dead white male cancel out one's contributions?" asked the writer and then, "Where is the rigor in feel-good courses?"

The debate raged on in The Call: "Don't exclude 'dead white men,'" the headline pleaded. "Don't limit electives to WS when there are so many other non-restrictive courses to choose from."

Volunteers from the WS Center took up their pens. Mary Gravelle explained CU course requirements and the wide array of choices for students. Eight others signed on to express appreciation for the exposure to knowledge relevant to their lives and applicable to their majors, making friends with diverse people, and gaining compassion for others. Moreover, WS courses had created an interest in bettering themselves and their surroundings. This was not the last time student voices would change the conversation on campus. Hillary Gates and Katie Weinheimer headed newsletters, Carla Kostek wrote a zine and Lisa Covington went national as a blogger for Feministing.com.
As Clarion University’s Women and Gender Studies Program celebrates its 20th anniversary, we should be proud of the part we have played in the history of a nationally recognized academic discipline. Today there are over 650 Women’s Studies programs throughout the country including fifteen Ph.D. programs. Women's Studies is now widely recognized as an academic field that prepares students for social justice advocacy and for working with diverse populations. But this was not always the case. Forty years ago, when the first programs were established at SUNY-Buffalo and San Diego State University, Women's Studies was seen as a radical new field that challenged not only what was taught at the college level but also how it was taught. The first Women’s Studies classes were modeled on the consciousness-raising groups of the feminist movement in the 1960s and 1970s, where, by listening to each other's stories, women became more aware of the ways in which a patriarchal society limited their opportunities and distorted the ways they saw themselves. In the Women’s Studies classroom, this model became a powerful tool for challenging the patriarchal nature of higher education, where traditionally women had been excluded or segregated as students, and where the contributions of women as scholars, artists, writers and scientists were usually overlooked.

When our Women's Studies minor program began in 1992, courses like Images of Women in Literature, Psychology of Women, and Philosophy and Women reflected the need to focus on the half of humanity that had been historically neglected in different academic disciplines. In addition to learning about women's experiences and contributions, students were also encouraged to follow the feminist model of community action by becoming involved with PASSAGES, Inc., and S.A.F.E., and twelve years ago, the first performance of The Vagina Monologues added a new level of visibility to the program as well as a new venue for advocating against domestic violence, both locally and internationally. Today, the field of Women’s Studies is exploding with change, and our program is changing along with it. Topics such as eating and food, global feminism, girl culture, women’s health, women and the environment, sexualities, masculinity, transgender experience and the intersections between racial, gender, sexual, and class identities have all been moving Women’s Studies—now called Women and Gender Studies—forward into an interdisciplinary future. At Clarion, we anticipate more interdisciplinary courses covering these topics, especially on global issues, LGBT issues and the intersections of race and gender. While the consciousness-raising origins and community action goals of our courses are still very much alive, our classroom teaching will take on new forms as we move into offering more online courses and degrees. It is an exciting time for Women and Gender Studies across the country. As we begin our next 20 years, I think it will be a time of new possibilities for us here at Clarion as well.
Jeanne M. Slattery, Ph. D.
Psychology and WGS Advisory Council

The Presidential Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW) and the Women and Gender Studies Program (WGS) have a long history of working well together. Although the PCSW and WGS programs each had its own initiatives, it was often difficult to tell which were WGS initiatives and which were primarily the product of the PCSW. One group's ideas, sweat and budget often supported the other's initiatives, leading to the increased success of both groups.

The WGS program had its own steering committee, but throughout much of its history the PCSW has acted like the WGS Action Committee (as opposed to its Curriculum Committee). The PCSW has had a broad mission. We support feminist scholarship and research in fields that are nontraditional for women. We have offered programs to mentor women faculty toward tenure and promotion, as well as a series of workshops to prevent sexual assault. Other groups on campus have picked up these programs. Now there are mentoring programs, promotion workshops offered for all faculty and Public Safety offers Rape Aggression Defense Systems (RADS) workshops regularly. We have developed programs to address sexism and racism in the media, produced a series of posters to raise awareness about — and decrease — sexual violence, and offered programs on women's health. We organized a day-long retreat on globalizing the curriculum and wrote articles for an issue of Hand-in-Hand on social justice. We sponsor students and faculty interested in attending leadership retreats offered at the state level. We bring in poets, scientists and artists to create a community where feminist scholarship is valued, and where women's scholarly pursuits and scholarship of women is supported. We buy books and videos on issues related to our mission, placing them in Clarion University's library.

Clearly, PCSW members have systematically, thoughtfully— and with considerable discussion — worked to foster an environment where women at all levels can safely work, grow and succeed. Although our primary mission was to make change at a university level, the group also encouraged its members to grow and thrive. Our first retreats at the Clarion River Lodge—later offered in other venues—were very helpful. I found a like-minded and supportive community, began to imagine what we could do to make change, and developed the skills to put those ideas into action.

Clarion University has recognized our leadership role in creating a more equitable climate by giving the PCSW its Equity Award on two occasions (1998 and 2001). Further, a number of the PCSW's leaders and members have received Equity Awards (e.g., Deb Burghardt, Jeanne Slattery, and Sylvia Stalker), and we have successfully nominated students, groups and community members who have worked with us on equity issues (e.g., Moniqua Williams, Janice Horn, and Pat McFarland). Receiving these awards, though, was not just an honor, but part of our work to make the university a place where women's ideas, energies and scholarship were recognized and valued.

The PCSW and its members have been passionate supporters of equity issues at Clarion University. We expect that the PCSW will continue to work hand in hand with the WGS for years to come to create a fairer, safer climate at Clarion University.
"Deb puts a positive spin on the wolf/tiger in sheep’s clothing/drag description: There is a lot more steel rooted in this ‘warrior’ than casual interactions might realize or appreciate."

~ Robert Girvan, Ph.D., Retired
Sociology and WGS Advisory Council

"Deb’s energy is so unique. I can’t actually imagine the university without her. What a great role model for me in my career, family and life. I will always be grateful."

~ Marilouise Michel, Theatre
I first heard of the illustrious "Dr. Mary" my freshman year when friends reported she stood on a desk the first day of class. When I became a Clarion Women's Conference chair, she reigned as Director of Theatre. Thus, I sought her out to create and perform a piece about Elizabeth Cady Stanton (played by Elizabeth Threnhauser) and Susan B. Anthony's stirring friendship. Playing Anthony inspired Mary's conversion to feminism. "The spirit of the enormous effort poured into female suffrage changed my weak attitudes… I came to realize the enormity of courage and forthrightness the two friends endured to elevate women to the status of first-class citizen."

In 1994 Edna R. Brown established a University endowment to honor her dear friend, Mary R. Hardwick. Edna earmarked a portion of the funds to support WS co-curricular events, at Mary's request.

The two women met their last year at Oklahoma A&M, sure that fate had designed the encounter. Both women were born in the same year and month, on the same day, in towns of the same name—Cherokee. Both of these sensitive, free spirits carried Ruth as their middle name.

I shared Edna's company on two occasions, once when she came to Clarion for Mary's one-woman show, "Gifts of Age," and once when I visited her home in Ponka City, Oklahoma. Despite having been born with cerebral palsy, Edna grew into a fiercely independent woman, a capable social worker, and a healer, who was respected in the Native American community.

Prior to my visit, Edna sent me a pair of steel gray, leather cowgirl boots so I could explore her ranch and meet her menagerie. We walked in barns that smelled of rotting hay and fresh manure. "When this country opened up," she said, eyes twinkling, "a woman would pick a horse over a man any day."

My parting gift from Edna was two rose rocks about four inches across. "This region is one of the few places in the world where you can find these rocks," she emphasized, obviously proud of the fact. When I told Mary my specimens looked like vaginas, she laughed hysterically. I took it that it was unlikely that Edna would ever see the resemblance.

I’m thankful to Edna, who died in March, for helping us to provide unique learning experiences such as Kathy describes. Additionally, we supported a Hip Hop Symposium, brought Eve Ensler to town, supported student travel to New Orleans, and offered faculty workshops on developing feminist community online.

With her backing, I dove headlong into many worthy projects, undeterred by funding sources. "Edna R. Brown," I would say to myself over and over, like a mantra, "We can do it. Edna R. Brown and I, we can do it."

Saying her name transformed me into a strong, western woman like her. Then, I'd slip my feet into those steel gray cowgirl boots and leaned into the wind.
One of our first endeavors to carry out the mission of WS was to write a grant, Deborah and I, which we entitled “Minority Women Scholars: Toward 2000.” Awarded by the state system, this substantial grant allowed us to bring in four noted women scholars to promote diversity through a series of activities focusing on their specialties. The scholars stayed with us a couple of days, visiting classes, meeting with students and faculty in the WS Center, and delivering an evening talk in the Hart Chapel. One scholar in particular stands out in my memory, the African American literature scholar, Mae Fergerson. That year was the 10th anniversary of Alice Walker’s masterpiece, “The Color Purple” so we followed up Mae’s talk with a showing of Spielberg’s beautiful film version. My students had just read the novel and were a captive audience of the film and Mae’s presentation as were many others. The Chapel was filled.

Afterwards, at a reception in the WS Center, I felt a profound sense of satisfaction and joy as I saw in people’s faces and heard in their conversations the impact of this unique learning experience made possible by the grant. Deb and I were floating for weeks after Mae’s visit and couldn’t stop playing “The Color Purple” soundtrack. Unique bonds of sisterhood were recognized or forged anew throughout the entire WS community that spring. To this day, Deb and I sing a few bars of Shug’s song “Sistah...” to evoke the strong sense of sisterhood we all felt during our wonderful experience with Mae Fergerson, Alice Walker, and “The Color Purple”.

The newly formed WS Program was off to a running start in those first couple of years. Soon, we had to make some serious plans for our first offering of the capstone course. Our first minors were completing their course requirements in 1994.
and we wanted to create a very special experience for this group whom we had grown so close to. Deb and I decided to create a team-taught course on the novel. We would meet Monday evenings from 6 – 9 p.m. in the WS Center where we would sit in a circle and discuss the wonderful books we had read. We chose the novels based on some of the themes we wanted to explore, like friendship, liberation, and sexuality. We also decided that each week one of the ten participants would bring in a snack to see us through until 9 p.m. Perhaps my fondest memory from that class was the night that Deb brought in fried chicken and all the “fixins” to echo some of the dinners served at the “Whistle Stop Cafe” in “Fried Green Tomatoes” by Fannie Flagg. Not only was it the pièce de résistance of all the snacks brought in; it was also one of the liveliest discussions we had that semester as we examined the lives and behaviors of the truly memorable and heroic women of “Fried Green Tomatoes”…like Ruth, Idgie and Evelyn Couch.

The experience of that course for me was unequalled by any other course I have taught. We, one of my dearest friends and I, Deb Burghardt, and those initial minors, were making history, and we knew it. We were also treading on new ground in our discussions, achieving a certain intellectual intimacy made possible by the trust and regard we held for each other and inspired by our unique situation. Two large plaques engraved with the graduates’ names and another presented to Deborah and me are proudly displayed in the WS Center to commemorate that first class and to give credit to all those students in subsequent years to graduate from the Program.

The third and final WS experience I want to highlight occurred in 1995. Deb received a grant from the Pennsylvania Humanities Council to commemorate the struggle for woman’s suffrage, culminating in the winning of the vote for women in 1920. This theme also informed Deb’s Introduction to the Introduction to Women’s Studies course that year. Hence, she planned a trip for the students to Seneca Falls, New York, and she invited me to go along as chair of the Women’s Studies Council.

One cold, blustery day in March, we bundled into three cars and made our way to Seneca Falls where the first Women’s Rights convention took place in 1848. I remember visiting Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s home and the Women’s Hall of Fame, a small interactive museum that we all enjoyed. But most memorable of course was the site of the convention itself, the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel, where the Declaration of Sentiments was presented, discussed, revised and signed by 68 women “relying upon the Right and the True” along with 32 men who were “in favor of the new movement.” The site is now a historic landmark, which echoes and resounds with the voices of Stanton, Lucretia Mott, Frederick Douglass and others who began on that hot July day in 1848, the inexorable march of freedom for women in this country. As we stood in that sacred place and felt the enormity of what had occurred there, one of our minors, Jeanette Peretta, started jumping up and down shouting, “I Am Woman.” What an incredibly moving experience that was! Later that year I was honored to play the role of Elizabeth Cady Stanton on the Suffrage Homecoming float, alongside Brian Roberts’ Frederick Douglass character.
I was quite young when I came to Clarion University as an assistant professor of psychology. Even though it was early in my career, because of my educational background, I was recruited to help work on developing a WS minor and program. Now I’m not quite so young, but the one thing that strikes me most as I reflect on the 20 year anniversary of the program is, as they say, “The more things change, the more they stay the same.”

Certainly things have changed for women over the last 20 years. We have made great strides toward equality. We now earn 81 percent of men’s pay instead of just 67 percent, as was typical back when I first started teaching at Clarion. We have a female Secretary of State and a number of women have run in primaries to be their party’s nominee for President and Vice President of the United States over the last two presidential elections. And the Clarion University Women’s Studies program is now called the Women and Gender Studies Program.

Not only that, but the WGS program has developed a concentration for the Liberal Studies degree in addition to the minor and is in the process of developing a major. I should note that the development of both of these programs certainly did not generate the same amount of resistance and backlash the original minor did. Moreover, both the concentration and the major have (or will have) the potential for being completed online. THAT certainly wasn’t a possibility 20 years ago! In fact, during my first year here at Clarion, faculty members didn’t have individual computers in their offices. I used our department secretary, Diana’s, computer if I needed to type up something in a word processing program. Now we can touch the lives of countless women and men who might have never been exposed to some of the basic ideals of feminism and WGS. In fact, I teach both my Psychology of Women and Human Sexuality courses online, in addition to on campus. I just love it when I hear a student (especially returning adult students) say (or read a comment from a student that stated), “I had never thought of it (whatever it is) that way” about those courses!

And yet I notice each semester that I am still teaching similar topics in my Psychology of Women course to those I taught when I first came to Clarion. Sure the data changes a little and there is a need to update my class periodically, and I do change how I teach it, but it is disappointing to me that social change has not progressed more than it has. In fact, sometimes I think the pendulum is swinging back. Consider, for example, the immense popularity of the “Twilight” series, a young adult novel series (and movie franchise) of a story which revolves around its heroine’s love relationship with a man who is paternalistic, and emotionally (and occasionally physically) abusive. The
love relationship between Bella and Edward is often viewed by fans as being ideal, and much of the sex-typed and/or sexist behavior is excused because it is viewed as evidence of the depth of their love. That Bella’s whole life revolves around her love interest is ignored, but she is willing to give up everything (college, career, her family) to be with him and have his child. Ultimately she gives up her life for him (to become a vampire).

What is disturbing to me is how much these behaviors mirror the very behaviors feminists fought to change at the beginning of the women’s movement, and that any concern over these depictions is dismissed by many as “reading too much into the novels.” Such sentiments are reminiscent of early feminists being told they didn’t have a sense of humor when they objected to sexist or racist jokes. Similarly, the ground-breaking book, “The Second Shift” by Arlie Hochschild with Anne Machung, is out in a brand new edition! As exciting as this is, in the advertising description it notes that the new edition tells us how much—and how little—has changed for women today.

While we have definitely seen an improvement in women’s lives because of work done over the last 20 to 40 years, I also see a return to traditional behaviors and attitudes, beyond just this interest in sex-typed romance novels. For example I see a return, or maybe I should say an exaggeration, of the objectification of women, which typified a great deal of protest that marked an earlier era. I can feel the pendulum swing back as women increasingly feel a need to wear uncomfortable “shapers,” and “push-up” bras to achieve some media-driven “ideal” look. Does no one remember women trashing their girdles, and “burning their bras” at the 1968 Miss America beauty pageant?

Similarly, recent research suggests a renewed interest in traditionally feminine roles. For example, only 24 percent of mothers surveyed by the Pew Research Center (2007) thought that working full-time was an ideal situation for them (compared to 72 percent of fathers) and 44 percent of stay-at-home mothers thought that the increase in the number of mothers working outside the home was bad for society. Do these sentiments sound familiar? Everything old is new again. But this renewed interest in traditional feminine values is troubling to me given the problems our mothers had with such restrictive roles and the effort it has taken to progress even this far toward equality. (See, for example, early feminist writings such as Betty Friedan’s “The Feminine Mystique” and Simon De Beauvoir’s “The Second Sex.”) As we commemorate the 20 years of history of our WGS program, it is vital that we remember our national history. If we want to keep moving forward, if we don’t want to lose ground, as we continue to work toward equality we cannot take for granted the efforts of those who came before us, and the rights and privileges they secured for us. I write and I teach because I remember and can share those memories with others. And I will continue to write and teach until equality is achieved.

Look for Dr. Ashcraft’s book, Deconstructing “Twilight”, which examines the “Twilight” series from a feminist and psychological perspective. It will be available later this year from Peter Lang Publishing amazon.com.

“I had been at the university for exactly one-half day when I met Deb. She approached me at my own faculty orientation to ask me to help with the WS Program. Talk about not wasting time! How could I say “no?” If there is one quote I would give, it is that Deb Burghardt is one of most determined, resolute, and persuasive people I have ever met: a true force of nature.”

~ Jamie Phillips, Ph.D.
Philosophy and WGS Advisory Council

“Working with Deb has taken me to seriously consider teaching a class on WOMEN and ECONOMICS. Deb has made obvious her passion and knowledge for what she understands and believes in.”

~ Sandra Trejos, Ph.D.
Economics and WGS Advisory Council

“pop pop fizz fizz oh what a relief it was...to find Dr. Deb when I arrived at Clarion just a few years ago. Effervescent, a force, smart, committed, nurturing, did I mention smart? She made me feel at home in a community of like-minded individuals, who care about equity, want to change the world and continue what I have been fighting for the last many decades. From one child of the sixties to another: WE SHALL OVERCOME.”

~ Vicky Clark, Ph.D.
Art and WGS Advisory Council

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Dear Dr. Phillips:

A couple days ago, my girl caught me doing the pink flamingo (you know, sexy stuff) with another woman. I admit that it was the third time—and the third woman—I got caught with this month. And I even admit that I feel kinda bad about that (you know, getting caught and all). But then my woman goes and screams at me something that I just didn’t get. She called me a \$%^ male-slut! I was like what the \$%^ is a male-slut, but she just set my couch on fire and ran off and I never got a good response. So, I thought I would ask you since you are so smart and stuff. What the \$%^ is a male-slut?!!

— Buck from Bucks County, PA.

Dear Buck:

First off—great name! Secondly, you wrote to the right person: If there is anything we philosophers understand, it is the meaning of words. And, let me tell you, your girlfriend’s attempt to verbally disparage you is completely non-sensical. The use of the word ‘male-slut’ makes no more sense than other synonymous hyphenated words like ‘whore-dog’ and ‘whore-hound.’ To show you why, let’s philosophically analyze the meaning of ‘male-slut.’

Obviously, the word ‘male’ just modifies the word ‘slut.’ So, your girlfriend is suggesting that you are a slut that also happens to be male (genus and differentia). But given that we know what a man is, what is a slut? Now some academics would flip to the OED [Oxford English Dictionary] for an initial definition, but I prefer to use the ORL [Ole Rush Limbaugh] whenever I can: it is larger, louder, and less work. According to Rush, a ‘slut’ is a woman that likes to have sex a lot. Sad, but pretty straightforward, right? As a side note, Rush suggests that sluts are similar to prostitutes, as prostitutes are women who want to be paid for the enormous amount of sex they have. Therefore, it is quite clear from the ORL that a slut absolutely has to be a woman. I mean, can you even imagine a slut that is not a woman? I didn’t think so! Therefore, by labeling you a ‘male-slut’ your girlfriend is accusing you of being a man who is also a woman, and that just doesn’t make sense does it? She might as well have just called you a square-circle or a female U.S. Senator. These things just don’t exist!

Clearly your girlfriend just didn’t like you having your fun, so she wanted to use a made-up word to make you feel like less of a person. What she didn’t realize was that words are the mechanisms by which we describe, understand and value our mutual reality. By creating a word like ‘male-slut’ she was implying something not just about you, but about all men—namely, that any of us might act like an over-sexed women. Is it fair to smear an entire gender? Of course, not. What you need to do is to take back reality. You could either try to rid the world of the word ‘slut,’ that has some admittedly negative connotations for women, but that would be so hard. Alternatively, you could just replace your girlfriend’s negative word for you with something more positive. I asked around and was told that the word ‘player’ might be appropriate, or ‘playa’ as it is sometimes spelled. So remember, Buck! You are not a male-slut! You are a playa. And everyone loves a ‘player!’ Except your girlfriend, of course: she’s a real playa-hata.

Jamie Phillips, Ph.D.
Philosophy and WGS Advisory Council
Teaching literature courses online for the Women and Gender Studies program has become the joy of my academic career. The issues raised by courses dealing with gender, particularly gender and social role and gender and power are in themselves meaningful to students: inequity, unfairness, lack of power, stigma for being different, successes and milestones—these are issues that many can relate to. The truly wonderful aspects of teaching WGS courses online are not only allowing students to find the stories and novels meaningful and important—no matter how obscure—but also that even the most reticent student finds a “voice” in an online class. We all get to “hear” the opinions, ideas, and insights of every single person in the class through the written word in our online discussions.

While not all students find online learning a match with their learning needs, for others it makes a college degree possible. Andy Lingwall’s story reports on two strong women, who happened to step into my woods.

“The joy of my academic career”

Janet Knepper, Ph.D.
English and WGS Advisory Council

To keep pace with the advantages of technology, we are pushed to stretch our conception of how education is delivered. Although, when Art Acton, Extended Studies Associate Vice President, nudged me repeatedly to go online with my WGS Survey class, I steadfastly resisted. Then at the 2005 National Women’s Studies Conference, I attended a faculty panel discussion about the highly suspicious electronic classroom. Four women confidently explained how they had translated their feminist pedagogies, primarily in the spirit of access. They also provided a course design map, which I followed, stepping gingerly, consciously feeling the ground beneath my feet as on a walk in the woods by moonlight.

I was astounded to realize that though separated by many miles and having no faces to match with names, I did know my students’ distinct voices, recognize their hopes and dreams, developing within a fledgling feminist consciousness. My use of discussion boards meant each student spoke to the readings—no one could hide in plain sight as some students managed to do in my face-to-face classes.

“Deb has been the heart and soul of the WGS Program, and she’s a wonderful colleague to work with. We’ll miss her!”
~ Janet Knepper, Ph.D., English and WGS Advisory Council
Phyllis Griffin and Audrey Smith are adult students, parents and working moms who returned to school after several decades of life in other places to work toward Liberal Studies degrees with concentrations in WGS. Both utilized Clarion’s Virtual Campus to realize their dreams of attaining a college education that will benefit others.

“This degree program has helped me to understand where people are in their lives, and how to better relate to them,” says Phyllis, age 56, resident of San Antonio, Texas. “I am able to use what I learned every day on my job - to relate to different people’s behaviors and cultures.”

Phyllis graduated from Clarion in May 2010. In her career and personal life, Phyllis uses her new knowledge to help anyone she can in the community.

“For example, when I was riding the bus regularly to work each day,” she says, “I got to know a young lady who is a single mother. I helped her and her two sons get to school each morning so that she could graduate from high school.”

Based on that experience, Phyllis observed that the bus authority needed to adopt some new policies to make the riding experience easier for parents with children. As a project in Dr. Deb’s class, she wrote a proposal to the bus authority suggesting changes.

Audrey, age 53, a mother of 10 children and single parent since 2002, resides in Barre, Vt. She stayed on course for a Spring 2011 graduation while home-schooling several of her children, writing three books and running a business raising AKC-registered Pugs.

“My WGS coursework at Clarion has been so empowering,” says Audrey. “It has inspired me to learn new things, and helped me to understand my own life and the world in so many different ways.”

According to Phyllis and Audrey, online courses were a challenge at first, but they quickly learned how to make it work to their advantage. Both Phyllis and Audrey noted that their online learning experience has gone smoothly all in all, and that their professors have been accessible and supportive.

“On the class website, Dr. Deb used discussion boards and group projects to put all of us students in touch with one another,” says Phyllis. “She encouraged us to share all of our life stories. This was phenomenal for me, because as an African-American woman, I have lived through so many stages of race relations and the women’s liberation movement in this country.”

Audrey says that Dr. Deb went beyond the class to encourage her students to excel in other areas of their lives. “She actually called me several times to include me in various WGS activities, and helped get me inducted into Tri-Iota, the WGS Honor Society. She is a highly involved, passionate professor. You feel that she knows about you, and that she cares about you.”

In a literature course she took with Dr. Juanita Smart, Audrey recalls that Dr. Smart provided prompt and supportive feedback on her writing, and ran a well-organized online course.

Phyllis added that Dr. Donna Ashcraft utilized web technologies, including podcasts, to reach her students each week. “The podcasts were phenomenal,” she said. “I would listen to them each day while I got ready for work. The convenience of it was outrageous! Sometimes, I would work on assignments late at night while the kids slept. The flexibility was unbeatable.”

Finally, Audrey appreciated being able to make some friends in the WGS program. “It really helps to have someone to relate to informally, so you can support each other through all the ups and downs.”
Thank you to the founders for breathing life into the WGS program and to Kathryn Graham and Karen Smith for their years of chairing the Advisory Council.

Faculty members are to be commended for the excellent face-to-face and online teaching for the WGS concentration, the first and only one in PASSHE. Additionally, they produce quality scholarship, contribute to the community, serve or have served on the Advisory Council and are tireless advocates for WGS. Julia Aaron, Donna Ashcraft, Jessica Crespo, Carie Forden, Janet Knepper, Myrna Kuehn, Scott Kuehn, Jamie Phillips, Carol Brennan Caplin, Vicky Clark, Cynthia Kennedy, Laurie Occhipinti, Miquel Olivas-Lujan, Richard Nicholls, Catherine Petriussans, Susan Prezzano, Karen Smith, Jeanne Slattery, Kevin Stemmler, Eleanor ter Horst, Gerald Thomas, Sandra Trejos, Gayle Truitt-Bean, Joanne Washington, Kathleen Welsh, and Hwei-Jen Yang. Retired or relocated faculty Jane Fox-Tarr, Robert Girvan, Kathryn Graham, April Katz, Martha Ritter, Jean Rumsey, Sanjay Rubello, Beverly Smaby, Sylvia Stalker and Kristin Marshall (1941-2009), who brought the words of great women speakers into our curriculum and once said, “I may never retire. Teaching is the best way to spend a life.”

These faculty members, along with Kathy Shirey, secretary, students, and administrators, make up the community known as WGS. All are welcome to join in the program’s teaching and learning mission.
1910 Woman Suffrage Pageant with Students from Clarion Normal School, circa 1910 from collections of the Clarion County Historical Society.

1910 U.S. Women win the vote!

1911 “Anyone Can Fly” CU Women’s Conference with Faith Ringgold, wins national Continuing Education award.

1910 Woman Suffrage Pageant with Students from Clarion Normal School, circa 1910 from collections of the Clarion County Historical Society.

1968 Clarion League of Women Voters founded.

1976 Clarion NOW Chapter founded by “organizer, testifier, consultant and rabble-rouser” Susan Brown.

1983 Clarion Women’s Conferences begin and last over a decade.


“Awiakta’s visit touched us in a deep place. She reminded us how things start going very wrong when we begin thinking of the Earth as an ‘It’ instead of Mother. The plight we’re in from ‘believing’ money is the all-important bottom line. That children are the future, and ‘seed corn must not be ground.’” - Mary Bragg

1992 Founding of CU WS Program.

1993 Minority Women Scholars Series.

1993 10 years of CU Women’s Conferences celebrating with Awiakta and talking sticks.

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1994 WS inherits Eileen Murphy Thornton Humanities Award given in memory of an activist killed by a drunk driver. Her concern for reproductive rights education resulted in the development of PSY 220: Human Sexuality, a WGS course.

1994 First students graduate with WS Minor and volunteers are honored.

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“Women were always on the bottom. I don't think women ever got the recognition for anything...Deep down inside—I think a lot of the ideas the men came up with, the women gave to them.” Carol Neiswonger, New Bethlehem, Age 47 at time of Project

“Voting was a new experience. We were reticent and our husbands did not encourage us.” Connie Gruber, Shippenville, 94 at time of Project

“That was a bad time—prohibition. My mother always belonged to the Women’s Christian Temperance Union. She tried real hard to keep those places closed...the men would drink and use up all the money.” Myrtle E. McCullough, Rimersburg, Age 80 at time of Project

1995 Our Foremothers’ Legacy Project celebrates 75th Anniversary of Woman Suffrage.

“At the start of the project, no one had ever tried to document the history of Clarion County women in the County’s 156 year history.

“Town meeting and interviews were conducted throughout the county to gather women’s accounts and artifacts from the period of 1848-1948.

1995 Tell It Like A Woman Exhibit, a combination of local materials, National Suffrage photographs and artist Deborah Lawrence’s contemporary visions.

1997 “Our Foremothers’ Legacy” Project wins State and National Historical Society Awards.

1999 Harvey Hall Renovation - Dr. Deb lives with the Physics Department for the year.

1999 Tri-Iota Women’s Studies Honorary established

1996 “First Take Our Daughters to Work Day” (Sons join in 2000). Local girls and boys took part in hands-on workshops to learn about career fields, the value of education, equality in the workplace, and the possibilities for a balanced work and family life.
2001 First Production of Eve Ensler’s *The Vagina Monologues*.

2002 Faculty attend Wisconsin State System Gender and Science Institute and a Women and Science Scholars Series is presented with PCSW.

2002 CU hosts PASSHE Women’s Consortium Conference (and 2005)

2002 Louisa’s Things: Victorian Fashion Show


2004 “Women and Girls in Sport Day” Pittsburgh Passion players come to tell their stories and demonstrate their moves.

2004 FMLA ‘Rocks the Vote.”

2004 Women in Politics Series
2005 Women’s Health Symposium: Hot Flash: Benefits and Risks of Hormone Therapies
WGS partners with local dentist and physicians, and Duquesne University pharmaceutical faculty to discuss the national debate on hormone replacement therapy.

2011 The Clarion VDay Project in partnership with SAFE and PASSAGES.

2011 Clarian League of Voters celebrate the 90th birthday of National League.

2011 PASSHE WGS Online Community established.

2012 WGS 20th Anniversary celebration
Darlene Hartman made the web pictured for a Mentoring Celebration in our early years. The message has not changed: “Lifting as we climb.”

2012 Clarion VDay becomes recognized student organization.

2012 Dr. Deb’s scholarship campaign begins...
“Thank you for giving me a place to spread my wings. This [WS] Center has become a safe place for me to be who I am. I hope we can continue to be generations changing hands—women holding hands throughout time.”

~ Alison Mercurio, '94

“Dr. Deb and the WGS Program have been able to take an old dog like me and patiently teach me what a true feminist is . . . it’s what I am, and I thank them for that.”

~ James Kronmiller, '11
If I arrive at the WGS Center and find it in complete disarray, my mood lifts. Half empty water bottles, stale cookies, chairs arranged like gossiping neighbors, paints, placards and posters strewn across surfaces, and the pungent aroma of stale coffee in the air blow up my hopes like a balloon. Students at work and feminism in action renew my spirit. Students Together Against Rape (STAR), Women United, FMLA, Allies, the Clarion VDay Project, Vagina Warriors and VMen – all have made their home here.

Special events, too, can leave their mark. I cough at the thought of the thick hairspray fog that filled the air as we readied to launch our 1993 ALF float, part of a year-long celebration of women’s enfranchisement. Then, I breathe in the chaotic energy left behind by girls and boys, excused from school early to participate in “Take a Daughter/Son to Work Day.” I picture WS faculty presenting research, hear their music and poetry performed at brownbag lunches and teatime. I see a handful of students camped out at our roundtables to study and nestled into the wing chairs to chat. The Pikna sisters are our regulars at the moment. There were also the passionate speeches given from the steps outside, in honor of survivors and lost women at “Flame to Fire” and “Take Back the Night.”

Year after year, my students have fed my soul and belly in this space. Once, Moniqua Williams served Thanksgiving dinner! Over dessert, she shared her secret recipe for outstanding mac and cheese. Women United provided chips, dip and soda for meetings; FMLA hosted ice cream socials – and then there was Kathy Shirey’s veggie pizza, a Tri-Iota tradition. Chicken tortilla soup, tacos, red pepper sweet potato soup – we could write a cookbook!

Volunteers and interns built the foundation upon which student assistants established the WGS Center’s reputation for quality outreach initiatives. They were, or rather overnight became, expert event planners. I usually recruited my assistants from one of my classes, thus confirming they were smart, dependable, possessed well-honed organizational skills and were connected on campus. In some cases, I intuited an unfocused desire to make a difference in the lives of others. At gut level, I trusted them to hit the ground running, armed with a thimble full of training. Together, with Kathy Shirey, our super-shero secretary, I believed we’d get the work done, no matter the hour on the clock.

Carly’s story to follow may or may not speak to the other student assistants who graced my life. I know they all drew on their creative talents to design systems to organize me (all failed). I know they all saw the sides of me that glow in the dark. For example, Carly did convince Mariah, her Vagina Monologues, co-director, to cast me as “The Angry Vagina”!

“The sky is the limit in that place. When I worked with Dr. Deb, it was a true collaboration … I had a voice. Because of the chats, programs and just being in the WS Center, I am definitely a feminist and proud of it.”

~ Tangynika Matthews, ’99
Eye-opening, panic-striking, awe-inspiring and life-changing are descriptions that come to mind when I think about college. Those four years, mainly spent in the WGS Program, changed and shaped me into a woman I never imagined I could be. Before college, I was a privileged and sheltered teenager who shuddered at the words “feminist” or “vagina.” I came from a middle-class family where my only concern was my wardrobe. My friends were exactly like me.

Clarion University was not my first choice, so I was in a state of disarray from the beginning. I started having panic and anxiety issues about being away from home. I was also trying to mesh my “worry-free” high school persona with what I thought at the time would be my adult, “worry-free” lifestyle. My parents were not watching over me anymore; I could do what I wanted. Wrong. I fell into the partying crowd in order to make friends, and after a few weeks, my grades suffered. I always earned good grades and had friends. Why couldn’t I do that in college? I started to think maybe Clarion wasn’t for me.

I decided to check in at the advising center before I transferred out. In walked this woman, dressed in a flowing skirt, hands jumbling multiple folders and papers. She put all her stuff down, whipped around and said, “Hi, I’m Dr. Deborah Burghardt, but you can call me Dr. Deb.” I remember how she looked at me that day and asked, “Why are you wasting your life in a major you clearly don’t want?”

In hindsight, she took charge, which was something I needed. She told me I would take her husband’s General Psychology course and her WGS course. “I don’t think there is any gender bias in the world,” I thought at the time. “This woman must be out of her mind.” But at that point, I had to try something, anything. The next day, I switched my major from education to communications.

From then on, I started looking for friends with similar interests. I began taking classes that intrigued and inspired me, made me think differently about the world. By changing the way I was living, both academically and personally, I realized I was taking an important step. I wasn’t in high school anymore; I was an adult, officially on my path. I joined extracurricular activities and found my niche. I loved activism because it enabled me to make positive changes in the world, right from the small town of Clarion. I felt like I belonged, that I had a mission to fulfill.

The following year, Dr. Deb hired me as her student assistant. At the WGS Center, I applied what I was learning in my communications, WGS and leadership classes to a job that made me a positive force on campus. Through that knowledge, I also realized I live in a diverse world and I need a lot more exposure.

Dr. Deb had helped me develop my leadership potential and encouraged me to be a role model instead of a follower. Previously, the only race I saw was white. The more I became involved, the more I began making friends with people who were different from me in age, race, sexuality, gender and ethnicity. I grew as a person because of the differences among us. Valuing diversity made my activism on campus so much more fulfilling. I conducted programs and events on campus, based on those ideals.

As co-director of The Vagina Monologues, I was able to do amazing things. Sophomore year I traveled to New York City with friend and co-director, Liz Strasbaugh. We saw two Broadway shows and got to spend an entire day with activist, creator and author Eve Ensler.

After graduation, I was left with a gnawing hole inside of me that I couldn’t figure out how to fill. So, I called Dr. Deb. We discussed the usual (how to change the world) and then she asked, “What would you think about gathering people to work together to end violence on campus?”


“Carly,” she said, “You have to help! I was on sabbatical your senior year. We have to make up for lost time.”

First I was put in charge of alumni communications, and then assigned as co-chair for the Clarion VDay Project. Next came the co-chair of the PhotoVoice project, and then I volunteered to act as editor-in-chief of “Our Collective Legacy”. It hurts my head to think about it, however, I do feel alive again. I am using what I learned in college to bring people together, form a community and work to end gender violence on campus.

Sometimes I wonder what might have happened if I hadn’t gone to that advising center my freshman year. It’s a scary thought. I feel like my world was black and white before. I didn’t know that something or someone could take a paintbrush to my life and add such a variety of colors.
In 2001, I discovered the script for Eve Ensler’s The Vagina Monologues at the annual PASSHE Women’s Consortium Conference. The show was so radical at the time that Louann Williams, director of PASSAGES, Inc., our first beneficiary, feared the agency would lose their faithful donors. On the other hand, Mel Michel remained unruffled. She had complete confidence in Clarion’s readiness for Ensler’s message.

Many of my students and I couldn’t even say “vagina” without blushing. We’d say “vah” and stop. We’d whisper “vagina” and then cover our faces with our hands. We could not say the V-word with a straight face.

However, we took our role to promote the show seriously. Recognizing we dare not utter, “Come to The Vah… Monologues”, or start giggling in the middle of explaining what the VDay cause stood for, the students and I made a pact. We promised to say “vagina” 50 times a day until we could say it with confidence. We also named our vaginas to feel close to this emerging source of empowerment.

Twelve years later, the sounds I most associate with the WGS Center are the voices of Vagina Warriors practicing their parts. All manner of moans in high and low pitches, ranting at the top of lungs, muted, sensual tones and gut-deep laughter penetrated my office door.

I wonder at the variety of activities the casts enjoyed “to bond,” they said. I purchased a pink carpet for a slumber party in the Center. There were sex toy parties, selling Sheetz coupons, vagina cookies and vagina lollipops to raise funds. Student organizations got involved by draping banners from the Chapel’s balcony railings, decorating tees for the Clothesline Project. Once we simulated a vagina with all manner of pink, red and purple fabric at the auditorium entrance.

The next three writers share their standpoint on the power of Ensler’s work. They show what speaking the word “vagina” without hesitation, fanfare or judgment means. They break through the silence that surrounds gender violence.

“Gifted poet Maya Angelou warns, “words get on the walls and into the wall paper. They get in the rugs and they get into us.” I hope she is right. After 20 years of women-centered community, I like thinking that silly ideas and giggles, the “aha” moments of insight, and turning “pain into power” vagina stories, are still there ready to “get into” others.
I damaged myself, now I’m no good,
I’ve never felt worse,
and I did what I could;
my brain never rests,
replaying that night,
he wounded my soul,
as I put up a fight;
I was helpless, forgotten,
I wanted to hide,
crawl into a shell,
stay there ’til I died;
I struggle each day,
to believe what I’m told,
that it’s not my fault,
that I’m very bold;
most days I just feel,
worthless and scarred,
I’m nothing to anyone,
just something to discard;
that’s no way to think,
if you want to survive,
you must accept that you’re broken,
but still be able to thrive!

your thoughts that you channel,
each morning you wake,
must lift and encourage,
for your own sake;
even though I endured,
the most insufferable act,
I must persevere,
it’s the only way to react;
for when you’re torn down,
there’s no other place to be,
than to stand yourself up,
and set yourself free.

DYING TO SURVIVE

Bridgette Shaw, Biology Major
In 12 years of presenting Eve Ensler's The Vagina Monologues at Clarion University, laughter has erupted, tears have fallen and lives have been changed. That response was as true for the 12th annual reading in February, particularly the closing night performance, as it was for the first time “vagina,” as a metaphor for women’s empowerment, was uttered on campus.

The Vagina Monologues has a tradition of being directed by students, and on that evening, former directors returned to reminisce about their days on stage. Their gathering was significant for a celebratory reason, and for a somber one.

They came to celebrate Dr. Deb’s retirement after 20 years of directing the Women and Gender Studies Program. It was she who led the charge to bring The Vagina Monologues to her campus and community. They came to honor Melissa Lynch, who directed the show in 2004 and 2005 and died in a car accident in 2010. Alicia Shropshire authored a poem, Arsenal of Self, for their “fallen sister,” which the directors read as a chorus. Selected stanzas follow:

May my voice break free
Of the restraint
You would put upon me
For the luscious valley between my legs
Which you would plunder
Pillage
And leave barren
Blaming me all the while
Because I caught your attention
This dissention
From Truth
Will not stand
Like I do
Strong with my arsenal of self…

We object
To the objectification with which
We are saddled
Like the saddle on which
We jumped along side you
Running the same horses
Hard
With one leg bound
Bound by whale bone
To ensure you found us to be ladies
When we are warriors
All warriors…

May my voice break free
Of the restraint
You would put upon me
For the luscious valley between my legs
Which you would plunder
Pillage
And leave barren
Blaming me all the while
Because I caught your attention
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Like the saddle on which
We jumped along side you
Running the same horses
Hard
With one leg bound
Bound by whale bone
To ensure you found us to be ladies
When we are warriors
All warriors…
Mel Michel, theatre faculty, spoke to Melissa’s intelligence and talents. “She was one of those rare students whose light is so bright, whose talent and hunger to learn and grow is so deep, that you just wanted to get out of her way.”

Of Melissa’s tenacious spirit, Dr. Deb said, “Though small in stature, there was steel in Melissa’s skeleton. Her spirit swirled ferociously, like the force of the wind. I grew to adore her ‘I-am-so-not-a-woman-to-be-messed-with’ attitude.”

Each director brings her unique vision to the show, and each director leaves with lasting memories. Carrie Arnold Thompson directed Clarion’s first reading of The Vagina Monologues after Mel Michel, who knew Thompson was looking for a project, invited her to take on the role. The show changed Thompson.

“I grew up in a somewhat conservative home. It was a little bit racy for me to take on something so risqué,” she said. “It was one of first times I pushed myself outside of my comfort box. I learned about women and women’s experiences, and I learned there was a world outside of what I knew.”

Rebecca Weinheimer (’00) had graduated from Clarion University when she was invited to direct The Vagina Monologues in 2002.

“I was excited, but I was intimidated. I hadn’t done a lot of directing,” Weinheimer said. “It gave me another vantage point for a lifetime of perspectives.”

Alicia Shropshire, signed on as director in 2003 so she could put some of herself into The Vagina Monologues.

“It helped me grow up and grow in the right direction,” Shropshire said. “It really inspired me – listening to the many voices women do have and being a part of conveying them.”

The following two years, Melissa Lynch directed the show. It was among many theatrical productions in which she was involved at Clarion University. Her acting career continued in Philadelphia after she graduated, cut short by her death in 2010.

Sarah Ducko took the director’s chair in 2005 and 2006. Ducko said her favorite show was in 2006 when everyone sat on the stage to perform. She found it powerful and loved being surrounded by so many women and men, all there for the same reasons.

In 2007 Ducko was student teaching and couldn’t direct, so she recruited her roommate, Emily Parroccini Jeziorski.

“I had seen the show at Pitt when I was in high school, and I loved it,” Jeziorski said. “It made me a feminist more so than I was before, and it gave me the experience of feeling part of a sisterhood.”

Jeziorski, in turn, recruited her roommate, Elizabeth Strasbaugh, to co-direct in 2008, and Strasbaugh then co-directed with Carly Masiroff in 2009. Strasbaugh was involved with the show each of her four years at Clarion.

“The Monologues opened my eyes and definitely made me more confident as a woman,” Strasbaugh said. Mariah Yancey first saw The Vagina Monologues on HBO around age 13. As a sophomore at Clarion, she tried out.

“I got ‘The Little Coochi Snorcher That Could’ part,” Yancey said. “The reading made me more comfortable with my sexuality and expressing myself. It’s allowed me to explore more of my liberal side, allowing people to be who they are and allowing me to guide other people to embrace their differences.”

Yancey co-directed in 2010 with Carly Masiroff, who also co-directed in 2009 and directed in 2011. Masiroff said, “I had never said the word ‘vagina,’ let alone tell other people to say it. But there was something about the show that captivated me. Its ‘in your face’ honesty and message to change the world caused me stay involved for three years.”

This year’s director, Tessa Gilles, took the challenge of directing as a learning experience.

“I wanted my cast to walk away from this experience and feel like they could handle anything, because that’s what The Vagina Monologues did for me.”
Brittany Concilus
Political Science

The day my roommate Emily suggested I try out for *The Vagina Monologues*, I was sure she’d gone insane. Volunteer myself for something containing the V-word? Blasphemy! Still, curiosity got the best of me and, when I Googled the play that night, I think I immediately realized (on some deeply buried internal level) that my life was about to change.

I remember frantically searching for the WGS Center. Despite Clarion’s rather compact size, I still managed to get lost and nearly returned home when no one I asked knew where it was. Finally I made it, hiding my blushing cheeks behind my hair as I grumbled that I was there for auditions. The 10 minutes I spent in that room are mostly a blur to me at this point, and I nearly fell over when I realized that I’d been cast. Although everyone who auditioned got a part, I remember thinking that they must know on some intrinsic level that I wasn’t right for something like this.

A few weeks later, Em, Liz and I made our way to our first rehearsal – again in that room filled with strange trinkets, all proclaiming women’s empowerment – and that was when I first met Dr. Deb. I remember being fascinated by this woman who made a career out of studying women. Until that day, I hadn’t realized that such a thing as WGS existed.

There is so much more to this story that spans the months leading up to our first performance, but I think the most vital part is how my involvement with WGS and Dr. Deb changed my point of view -- how I saw the world, how I saw myself, how I saw the women around me. It’s like my eyes opened for the first time and I finally saw how lucky I was to be born a woman and how many of my sisters around the world were cursed due to the same fate. I physically traveled to New Orleans for VDay’s 10th anniversary with the WGS Program – no, farther. I have traveled all across the globe through these women’s stories, and Dr. Deb was with us every step of the way.

Six years and five productions of *The Vagina Monologues* later, I still can’t find the words to clearly express my gratitude to this program and the amazing women that I feel so honored to have met. When I look back on my years at Clarion, that is what I’ll see: a group of girls huddled together, growing into women, their voices melding into one.

“I feel WGS should be made mandatory for every woman. On my graduation day, I felt completed; proud and happy to have a WGS minor under my wings. I am working ... to make better opportunities for our younger generation.”
~ Monica Barrows, ’11

“The WGS program ... tries to make women see that we ARE worth it by teaching us to stay strong and pursue our dreams ... learn about our forewomen and all they have done to help us be where we are today.”
~ Alexandra Eberle, ’11

“I think the program is important because it works to change ignorance, hatred and prejudice within society. Personally, the program helped liberate my ignorance toward the feminist society.”
~ Geo Miller, ’11

“Without WGS, I do not think I would have been as emboldened. It helps me to raise stranger, more aware daughters and sons.”
~ Audrey Smith, ’11

“Dr. Deb and the WGS program at Clarion completely changed my life. I began to finally respect myself ... I stand up for myself.”
~ Amy Slicker, ’11

“Throughout my WGS minor, I looked at how social/political/philosophical issues affected not only women, but men and minorities ... I am more empathetic and a better listener. I am less quick to judge a situation.”
~ Jena Leddon, Rehabilitative Sciences
“I always knew I cared about gender equality, but I was never sure if I could consider myself a ‘feminist.’ And then I did *The Vagina Monologues* and learned that feminism is not about women being better than men, but about the fact that we are all in this together, and we need to fight for the cause together. The Monologues truly changed my life and my overall world-view. Doing the show was enlightening, empowering, and gave me a true sense of who I was in my own body and mind. The whole experience of people fighting for a cause by getting together and sharing other women’s stories is such a beautiful, artistic way of getting our message across: STOP GENDER VIOLENCE! SUPPORT GENDER EQUALITY!”

~ Krista Baseli, ‘11

“College women are at a transition point in their lives, and it is beneficial for them to see strong, powerful women who have followed their ambitions. This is what the Lunafest Women’s film festival does for women. They show women that they aren’t alone and show them that they, too, can be activist fundraisers in their towns. The WGS Program always seeks to not only involve students, but the community as well.”

~ Gabriele Scrofano
Business and WGS Minor

“My daughter, Amber, began her feminist career at 8, protesting an unjust judge. When Clarion County was targeted as a receptacle for toxic waste, our family protested with a yard sign, ‘Dump the Dump.’ Someone stole it. Amber, while on a field trip, saw the sign on a roadside miles from home. She convinced the bus driver to pull over so she could retrieve it. Together, we marched for ‘Women’s Lives,’ performed in *The Vagina Monologues*, and traveled to New Orleans for VDay to the 10th. Today she is a volunteer for her local rape crisis center.”

~ Dr. Deb
The following passages are excerpts from my journal as I traveled across Europe from January 2009 until June 2009…one of the best life-altering experiences of my life to date…This is something that I have always wanted to do—travel and see the world, do things I would otherwise never have been able to do, meet new people and create a new definition of freedom for myself in multiple ways.

Eight countries total – Spain, Portugal, Italy, France, Holland, England, Germany and Morocco in six months:

SPAIN:  The men I pass in the streets of Spain are strange but nice, as it is mostly because of how open they are. They’re helpful and generous, but if they find you attractive, they’ll have no problem stating why, from head to toe, adding a whistle on top. They stand right in your face to talk to you, and many times I think that they are just flat out going to knock me down when they come to chat. Elders refer to young women as “hija” or “daughter,” and my host mother, Encarni, would say “mi hija” or “my daughter,” their term of endearment that respects our distance. I love the people here. They all nicely correct my Spanish in stores, making sure I understand why it’s said this way and not that, especially if I use a Latin American phrase, for which they continue to explain why theirs is better. They are laid back, letting their dogs roam freely on the streets and riding bicycles everywhere, so I join them, soaking in the freedom of los kioskos y cervecerias, or kiosks and beer stands, on every corner as the sun beams in everyone’s faces. Along the Quadalquivir River, the “Port to the Americas” in the 13th century, stand lines of Orange trees and wooden lattices strung with lavender flowers. The citrusy-floral heat greets the face and absorbs the body, because the soul had been lost in it long ago. That smell will be with me forever…Sevilla, España, la maravillosa.

MOROCCO:  There are hardly any women to be seen and when they are, they never look up and generally seem rushed. If she does happen to be working in The Medina, their maze-like market place, she is in the back mixing up food or crafting her trade that her husband will sell for his profit. I say aloud, “Whatever I want.” But secretly I yearn to travel light, read lots and write my memoirs — say somethin’ about the women in my life. I start here.

In Barcelona, while staying in a hostel room with eight other strangers doing exactly what my friend and I are doing, I met an older British friend, Sam, with whom I reconnected in his hometown of London, England, later in my globe trot. In London, while spending four days and three nights with Sam, my life is transformed. I find myself sitting in his unkempt garden under a typical cloudy London sky. Surrounding us are pink and blue weeds as we sit at a white, cast iron table, wearing matching white robes and enjoying breakfast of poached eggs, sausage and toast, all prepared by my wonderful host. I truly believe that we met to fulfill a deep need we both have, if only for a brief moment. He shows me that it is OK to be sexual, not to be afraid of it, that it is natural and that all men do not take advantage of others’ weaknesses. Because of this, I have been more comfortable with my wants and unwants, my “yeses” and “nos,” as well as my “whos” and “wheres or whens.”
who follow “the Americans” as we end our day with a key to a five-star hotel.

ITALY: From Pisa to Florence, we enjoy our one and only authentic, sit-down Italian meal, and we taste our first bite of the never-ending gelato. We catch an overnight train from Venice to Rome, my true star city, which presents a whole new level of open men, who spy on us in our sleeper meant for five but squeezed in nine to stay together. In Rome, I wait anxiously to see the Coliseum, for I remember wishing to see it in the 3rd grade. I pray all day that the clouds scatter and the sun shines when we enter the Coliseum so that I can experience its full grandeur. Just as we enter in our tour group, the sun comes out, shining the ancient legend of the dream I’m walking and hides back behind the clouds as we leave for dinner.

PARIS: The French are not what I expected. Aside from the horror stories I heard about how they treat Americans, they are nice and friendly, trying to speak whatever English they know. Catching the first glimpse of the Eiffel Tower, my eyes tear up yet again, because I just can’t believe it. Finally reaching and climbing it, a storm hits and everyone at the very top races at neck-breaking speed to escape the height in the storm. We laugh, watching everyone run past us, as we stand back and soak it all in — literally and figuratively — at the top of the Eiffel Tower. Later, walking through Notre Dame, I appreciate the charm of this gothic cathedral, still in a state of dreamy surrealism, trying to wake up but completely loving that I’m living this dream.

GERMANY: Germany completely surprises me. The people are liberal beyond anything I’ve seen in the world... two women love each other openly, two men holding hands romantically, free beaches where nudity is normal — this is where my spirit floats with freedom, the kind of freedom that I want my American people to embrace. Adventures here are never-ending, and for these three days and three nights, I really step out of a cage and onto a stage in a hot, dark club where I allow myself to be the hot girl with the other hot girls on stage, where I catch the eye of a hot guy, across the room and we dance the night away, not speaking one word of the same language. I visit concentration camp museums and have cookouts on a lake with beer and new friends practicing their English. Even though Germany was not a hot spot for me before I arrived, it certainly became one once I left.

AMSTERDAM: Two hours away by train from Cologne, Germany, is the small, lovely town of Amsterdam. Their culture is more liberal than that of Cologne, specifically on a topic that is unheard of anywhere else that I know of. I’d guess that because of this, these people are by far the friendliest of everywhere I’ve been. Though cloudy and gray like London, the whole city has a quaint feel with big-city charm. Canals under bridges that arch over just about every walkway, small cute buildings and smiling faces everywhere I turn; I know I’ll never find another place like it. Everything is cloudy, misty, foggy. I am blown away when two cops walk past and seeing our lighter ask us, “Is it good?” and “Are you enjoying yourselves?” with huge smiles. There’s just no other place on earth that this would happen. I also visit the smallest, but by far the best, museum I’ve ever been to — the Anne Frank House. Everything is set up just as it was while her family was in hid-
In Chinese culture, drawing attention to oneself is discouraged. Thus, my traveling companions, Sue, Cheryl, Cass (my BFF) and I constantly stood out against the backdrop of a reserved people. We were unable or unwilling to give up our group identity — four loud, laughing women, touring Chinese cities more than 6,000 miles from our western Pennsylvania homes.

While touring Tiananmen Square, we told those who requested a picture with us, “They based Sex and the City on our stories, you know.” It was an exaggeration of course, and most everyone did not fall for it. Once we appeased our audience by admitting we were the foursome’s mothers. In reality, we were four women with distinct personalities and an accumulation of six decades under our bras. We had ventured to China, inspired by Sue and Cheryl’s niece, Madison, who had committed to teaching English for a year there.

Cass procrastinates when it comes to packing for a trip. Finally, after hours had passed with no sign of her readiness for the road, I phoned. “I’m trying to hurry,” Cass answered, “but I can’t figure out what to take.”

“Don’t worry about it,” I replied, trying hard not to sound impatient. “Throw a little of everything in your bag. We’ll sort it out when we get to Sue’s house. Cass,” I reminded, “you’re traveling with three women – someone is bound to have whatever you need.”

I can still see Cass, sitting cross-legged on Sue’s shiny hardwood floor, suitcase open, all manner of clothes spilling out like the endless streamer of scarves the magician pulls from a sleeve. A tangle of blond and auburn hair strands frame a face with delicate features. She prefers the I-just-got-out-of-bed-after-great-sex look.

“How many bras do you think I’ll need?” she asked.

“I’m taking three and wearing one, four for 10 days, that should be enough,” I said confidently.

“What? You don’t want a clean bra for every day?” The sound of Sue’s shock reverberated throughout the room.

“You’re taking 10 bras?” Cass and I spoke in unison.

Then Cass, quick wit that she is, challenged Sue’s reasoning: “Lots of panties, I can understand,” she said. “But what fluids are involved with your breasts sitting in a bra?”

“I’ve always changed my bra every day, even if I don’t shower,” Sue said with authority. “How can you two stand not to?” I recognized her disdain, which I took in stride. From the time we met in college, I have admired this woman’s self-assuredness, her drive for control, her ability to travel the world. (Hence, why I have the pleasure of writing this tale.)

“Well,” I chimed in to defend my upbringing, “My mother taught me there’s no problem in wearing the same clothes another day or two unless they’re filthy dirty, ripped, stained or they stink!”

Silence. While Cass and I pondered how she was going to fit all those bras into a carry-on, the only
suitcase we were permitted to take, I suspect Sue was thinking, "Go ahead and be disgusting then. Cheryl will side with me."

The next morning we met Cheryl at the airport. I immediately noticed her tall, slim body, her close-set, sable brown eyes. I admired the easy smile she flung at us, and noted the comfy color-coordinated clothes she had donned that morning. After a ridiculously brief introduction and practically chasing her husband back to the SUV he drove, the three of us crowded close around our new traveling companion.

“Cheryl,” Sue said nonchalantly, as though she could possibly utter an unbiased syllable on this matter. “Let me ask you something. How many bras did you pack for the trip?”

Cheryl’s eyebrows rose slightly. Although she looked puzzled, she answered promptly and honestly – her trademark, I soon learned. “None,” she said. “I’m only taking the one I’m wearing.”

And at that moment precisely, laughter, the never-ending laughter that accompanied our entire journey, commenced.

“That was the biggest function of the program for me, communication – some place and people to bounce ideas off of about coming out … telling our stories or letting folks ask questions.”

~ Mary Gravelle, ’95

“Being a part of the program allowed me to interact with people from all walks of life. I now live in one of the most diverse cities in the U.S., and the skills I developed in the program help me interact with my students on a daily basis.”

~ Sarah Ducko, ’07

“I was able to see the world through the perspective of other women, and though I was dealing with my own personal struggles, after learning of the depth of challenges and eventual triumphs of others, I was left both humbled and inspired … Dr. Deb served as the perfect guide.”

~ Teamarie Rockette, ’11

“I happened to stumble upon WGS … It made having to be in college for six years worth it … This program has changed my whole outlook on my life, my career, my relationships and my perceptions of activism.”

~ Cori Pikna, Rehabilitative Sciences

“Taking such a wide variety of courses to learn about women’s issues has provided me with a new outlook on my own life, as well as that of my future children. I have taken it upon myself now to become the most educated person I can be, and to never stop learning.”

~ Keeley Frank, Psychology

“When I first went into the center, I had no idea what I was walking into. That first FMLA meeting changed my entire outlook on being a woman. I can’t express how grateful I am to have attended a college with a strong, supportive WGS program.”

~ Kelly Surgalski, ’10

“I came into WGS as a single-minded, conservative woman. I left as a person who learned what daily obstacles women go through. The WGS program opened my eyes to how I could become a better me through female empowerment.”

~ Amber Alsop, ’11

“My time in the WGS program has empowered me as a mom and a woman. I was taken back to my roots, and that was amazing.”

~ Charity Myers, Psychology

“WGS is educating without discriminating to expand the minds of all kinds.”

~ Jerome Smith, ’11

“It was certainly not an understatement that you turned my world around during my years at Clarion. I spent a year and a half being stupid—until the Education Opportunities Program got hold of me. As life progresses, one feels fortunate to thank those that helped them along the way. In doing so, I will certainly pay it forward to the students whose lives I affect in my daily work.”

~ David Cummings, ’90
“A situation I was in was me watching my mother putting her hands on my great grandmom. I was only 11 years old and the only one around to get my mom off her. I succeeded but it was hard watching my mom get locked up again. She had got sent to a crazy hospital. I could deal with it. She used drugs and drank. Someone slipped a pill in her drink a year ago and she was never herself again, and she is only 38 years old. It hurt me bad, really bad.”

~ Milky Way

PhotoVoice Participant
In their best wishes that follow, Marlene and Jamie speak about me as if looking through a magnifying glass. I try to take in their affirmations. Admittedly, I am elated to think that years of our chipping away at the walls of injustice has displaced a brick or two. And certainly, I must honor these women in return and recognize their work, a significant contribution to our collective legacy.

My revered Harvey Hall was the site of the first rape crisis center in Clarion County. Thus, we honored the founders and the progress of the agency in the WGS Center. They started in a former storage closet, now home to an elevator, at the top of the stairs outside our door. The university furnished a desk, file cabinet and phone line.

SAFE resulted from a study of domestic violence by the Clarion County League of Women Voters. By 1984, SAFE had opened a small office on Main Street, supported by a $10,000 grant from the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

Jamie Shropshire
Education/Prevention-Legal Advocate, SAFE

I have watched the evolution of a relationship between the university and SAFE as Deb invited us to “be at the table.” She sought to remind everyone that SAFE exists to provide services to survivors of domestic violence by inviting us to present programs to WGS classes, by encouraging students to participate in our volunteer training, inviting SAFE to participate in the Flame to Fire Vigil.

I remember her bravery when she introduced The Vagina Monologues to Clarion. Through those proceeds and other fundraisers, the WGS Program has donated much needed financial contributions to SAFE as well. Deb’s most current contribution to ending violence against women has been initiating the Clarion VDay Project with us as a partner. This fine group of students, faculty, staff and community members will continue Deb’s mission.
A TRUE WARRIOR

Marlene Austin
Prevention Education Coordinator, PASSAGES, Inc.

Deb served on the board of directors of PASSAGES, Inc., for two-and-a-half years, beginning in 2001. At her very first board meeting, she stepped into the role of vice president without hesitation and later assumed the role of board president with immense dedication and care. She ensured that sound decisions were made in relation to the restructuring of PASSAGES, Inc.

Deb was instrumental in bringing Eve Ensler’s The Vagina Monologues to Clarion University and has been a “warrior” ever since! Countless people may never have to face the trauma of sexual violence because Deb stands up for justice. Many women and children who are survivors may not know her name, but have been assisted in healing because of her dedication, support and generosity. We feel incredibly blessed to have had Deb’s support throughout these many years. She is a true “warrior.”

I am a person of ideas, and people like that about me, although I have difficulty with closure, knowing when enough is enough. I’ve had many an idea start out as simple, doable, exciting what-ifs. Then I invite others to get on board. Some folks volunteer. Each comes offering a unique set of talents that, like fertilizer, enriches the soil. I water as I can. Then, suddenly, as if overnight, the idea sprouts a project. The project grows exponentially, bursting forth with possibilities and benefits from heights taller than Jack’s beanstalk. The people blossom in relationship with each other, no one willing to let down another. PhotoVoice was such an idea. I learned about the tool over lunch with colleague, Carie Forden; Kim Verdone suggested MAYS as a community partner; and Carly Masiroff said, “Go for it!”
PHOTOVOICE:WHO

DO YOU THINK I AM?

BET YOU'RE WRONG.

Tina Horner
PUBLIC RELATIONS, PHOTOVOICE VOLUNTEER

For the young women in Secure Unit A at Mid-Atlantic Youth Services (MAYS), violence has been a part of their past. Some have committed violence, some have been victims of violence, and some have committed violence in response to violence committed toward them. Since January, Clarion University’s VDay Project has been helping the women, ages 15 to 20, learn to express themselves through PhotoVoice, a method for telling their stories in productive, creative ways through photography and journaling. An exhibition, “Through Our Lens: What do you think I am? I bet you’re wrong,” in the University Art Gallery concluded the project.

Clarion University English professor Juanita Smart guided the participants through journaling exercises and self-expression. Greg Knox, who teaches photography and works in Clarion’s Computing Services Center, helped them see their world through a camera’s lens. Both have been impressed with the youths’ eagerness to learn and their creativity. Knox described the project as “incredible.”

John Patrus, clinical supervisor at Mid-Atlantic, has seen the positive impact of PhotoVoice. “Our young women’s self-expression styles can become compromised by the wounding within their life circumstances. PhotoVoice provided empowering self-expression, through the “magic” of photography. The attendant writing assignments are doorways for self-discovery.”

For the exhibition, participants selected four photographs from dozens taken, wrote captions for them and submitted journal entries that track feelings about their hearts, bodies and minds. The Clarion University VDay crew included students, faculty and staff, who facilitated activities on alternate Saturday visits to MAYS. In between visits they communicated by mail. Additionally, students in the Survey of WGS class corresponded with the young women.

In interviews the young women shared their experiences: “I learned to express my feelings in a more positive way,” said Tore, who said at home she was always fighting. “The place I focus on is my heart.”

Smart advised Sierra, on how to overcome writer’s block. The youth described having drawers full of journals at home, and being familiar with photography, but she had never combined them as a way of expressing herself.

“PhotoVoice gave me a greater opportunity to explore what I like,” Sierra explained.

Knox helped the young women look at their surroundings in a different way. For example, a 17-year-old photographed a single carpet thread that was sticking up in the doorway of her room. To her it represented the loneliness she felt.

“I’m used to expressing joy in my everyday ways,” said Jocelyn, “but it’s really good to let out some of that darker side.”

Angelique also explored the darker side, “I take a lot of pictures of myself and things I desire. I took a few pictures of the handcuffs and shackles they put on us – it shows I want to be free.”

Two youths have experience with journaling and photography from their respective high schools. One won an art caption-writing contest at her school, and the other used the skills working on her school’s newspaper and yearbook, but their lessons from PhotoVoice are different.

“I learned,” said Leeza, “what one person sees in a photo, another person relates to it in a whole different way.”

According to Shannon, “PhotoVoice helped me to express myself in a way that I can give back to my community.”
In dark waters there isn’t much you can do.
In dark waters there isn’t much you can see.
In dark waters, with every kick of your feet and every stroke of your arm,
With every burning ache in your chest, you’re longing for another breath.
In dark waters there is a constant fear,
Because you do not know which way is up or down.
In dark waters there isn’t much you can do without hope.

If you want to put an end to the violence,
You can’t just sit around and wait in silence.
It’s time we stand up for what’s right,
But don’t worry—we’ll use our words to fight.
It’ll get hard, but we can’t back down.
It’s not for us; it’s for the sake of our town.
Everyone knows that violence has a history,
That’s why they came for you and me.
They said, “Girls, you have a story to tell,
We’re not worried about how many times you fell.
We’re worried about how many keep falling.
Don’t hesitate, girls, this is your calling.
You have stories the world should hear,
Come, you can help put an end to this fear.
Please don’t run away.
The world needs to hear what you have to say.
If you have no words, show us a picture,
No, we’re not picky it’s whatever you prefer.
It’s about the message, not the method.
We’re not looking for it to be perfected.
We’re looking for improvements.
Bringing back the nonviolence moments.
It starts right now; you have a choice,
How are you gonna use your voice?

In her narrative about life before MAYS, Del’Quajah writes:
I’ve been in the system since I was 10 years old…I got taken from my mom when I was six months…I grew up not knowing mom or dad…I hung out on the street 24/7. The streets were my life…there are many times I had to sleep on the streets for days at a time…I spent most of my day fire starting, breaking and entering, vandalism. I fought my way through life. I raised myself, I raised who I am; I thought violence was all that mattered. And I wept day by day living like this.

Though still a teenager, Del’Quajah is large and generously proportioned with stout hands and a full moon face. Though I am certain she could become terrifying and formidable if possessed by the brute strength of her pain and rage, her features now are not what I would expect from one who has survived the streets—the contours and lines of her face, though masked, are soft, gentle, unaffected.

During our writing conference I notice a recurring image in Del’Quajah’s photos: the outline of a heart, which Del’Quajah shapes between her hands by bringing her fingertips and thumbs together. One headless photo of her is dominated by this hand-inscribed heart, which she holds in front of her torso, thumbs on top, fingertips on the bottom, like a breastplate, like a shield, or perhaps the portal into her own soul.

She speaks to me about a child she calls her nephew.
She wants to protect him. “Where does that come from, inside of you?” I ask her, as I touch the heart image in her photo and lean forward, searching her face. Del’Quajah sits and smiles quietly back at me, the light in her eyes flooding the space between us. From Del’Quajah and this PhotoVoice experience I learn what distinguishes the human spirit and makes it sacred: hope, resilience, love.
We end where we began in 1992 – raising our voices, having our say – connected locally and to the world. We hold to Carrie Chapman Catt’s “mighty political experiment,” the League of Women Voters and we continue to rock the vote!

Donna Poljanec
Retired Faculty, Education and LWV Member

The League of Women Voters (LWV) formed in 1920 to educate the newly franchised women on effective use of the vote. Founder Carrie Chapman Catt and members of the National American Woman Suffrage Association urged the new organization to “finish the fight” and to work to end discrimination against women.

The LWV is non-partisan and thus, never supports or opposes candidates or parties, but it is a political body and takes stands on issues. These stands are the result of intensive study, discussion of the pros and cons, and, eventually, member consensus, all at the grassroots level.

Initially, the LWV was primarily concerned with the status and rights of women and women’s issues, but interests were gradually expanded to include issues affecting men. Many men supported the suffragists in the early days of the fight to pass the 19th Amendment. In 1973, the LWV invited men to join the organization, and their numbers continue to increase.

Today, the LWV works to effect change on a wide variety of issues in the areas of Representative Government, International Relations, Natural Resources and Social Policy on three levels – national, state, and local. The national organization has headquarters in Washington, D.C. Fifty state leagues are mostly headquartered in state capitols. The LWV of Clarion County is one of more than 800 local leagues in cities and towns all over the United States.

The Clarion County chapter of the League was formed in 1968. Since then, they have come to be known for candidate forums, voters guides, and voter registration events. In addition, the chapter presents public forums on issues of interest locally, such as Marcellus shale. Members also study and take action on governmental issues, and work with other local organizations on such issues as clean water and air, civil liberties, and services for county residents.

Many of the founders of the Clarion University Commission on the Status of Women were already activists in the League of Women Voters. They partnered with women on campus to hold annual women’s conferences that were open to the public and encouraged women of all ages and backgrounds to come together to celebrate their strengths and acknowledge their needs. They joined hands with the WGS Program in the celebration of 75 years of women’s suffrage and supported various programming over the program’s 20-year history.

For nine decades, the league has worked to ensure our democracy is transparent, effective, and truly representative. The LWV continues to work toward meaningful citizen participation in governmental processes. These challenges are as real today as they were for our suffragist foremothers who struggled for their right to vote so many years ago.
am a feminist-woman, a war-is-not-the-answer-woman, a stop-the-gender-violence-woman and thus, I can be one angry vagina! Born of loving parents (biological and chosen), our kin and cherished friends, I am anchored by my husband’s and my children’s unconditional love. I am Oma to Finn, who takes the universe seriously, and recommends Captain Underpants and the Perilous Plot of Professor Poopypants for my reading pleasure. Moreover, I am the recipient of rich relationships with the women and men with whom I have shared time at Clarion University. I value every hour of our giving to the great cause of equality, the course for my own liberation.

For those of you who know me well, my title, "Running the Victory Lap," may seem an odd choice. I don’t even walk fast. But when President Whitney described my final year of directing WGS in this way, the words felt right. You see, I am no stranger to mental marathons. I know what it means to strike a pace, persist, grow weary, tired to the bone, fight the voice in my head that taunts, "You’ll never make it. Give it up. Who do you think you are?" And then, I see it - the finish line, and I imagine my crossing. I reach deep within; I find a source of energy unknown to me before. I am sprinting now, no longer looking back, no longer measuring myself against the record of another. The run is personal, and finishing is a private victory.

Thank you all for showing up, for the genuine cheers that will be with me always. Thank you, too, for the water that quenched my thirst and the faith that fed my soul.

Smile upon Our Collective Legacy.
Dear Dr. Deb,

"I know you're very sad with your leaving the Clarion University coming up, but know your legacy has been put in the hands of good noble people. I believe your work will go on even without you there. And I know you made improvements in a lot of people's lives. Because you just being here with us for that short period of time, you have made improvements and made an impact on mine. I believe that your work is not over. God has a plan for you. Hopefully, you will find out soon exactly what that might be. Remember the sky is the limit, and you haven't reached it yet. And I, and all the girls at MAYS, ask that you continue to do what you do because you're so good at it and to take care of yourself."

~ Marajah
PhotoVoice Participant
merely skims years of contributions by many women and men to the feminist movement at Clarion University and in the community. These few stories cannot begin to do justice to the impact of the work, nor name all those who should be named. Please forgive what may be missing, for all our memories mattered. This publication is dedicated to Margaret Buchwalter, Mary Gravelle, Kristin Marshall, Melissa Lynch, Kathy Spozio, Suzanne Brown and all those radiant souls with us in spirit.

WOMEN’S STUDIES PROGRAM FOUNDERS:

Donna Ashcraft, Linda Felicetti, Chair Kathryn Graham, April Katz, Myrna Kuehn, Richard Nicholls, Robert Rath, Jean Rumsey, Dean James Scanlon, Sylvia Stalker, Jane Fox Tarr, Gayle Truitt-Bean, Brian Roberts (graduate student), Michelle Lanier (undergraduate student).

“Our Collective Legacy”
"I thoroughly enjoyed my time in the WGS Program. Dr. Deb...inspired me to learn about women's issues and how I could play an important role in effecting positive changes for women as a man... I think it is wonderful and every bit deserving that her legacy will endure with a scholarship that bears her name.”

~ Trafton Clough, '06

THE “DR. DEB” SCHOLARSHIP FOR FEMINIST LEADERSHIP

“Dr. Deb” Burghardt retires after 30 years of service that includes advising for Upward Bound and the Educational Opportunities Program/Act101, and directing the Women and Gender Studies Program. To help keep the legacy of respect for diversity and social justice action strong at Clarion University, a scholarship in her name has been established. This fund will support student participation in study abroad opportunities, social justice symposiums and feminist conference presentations, experiences she believes the leaders of tomorrow will require.