

From the Director

We started our third year at the WSP, welcoming our first visiting scholar, Dr. Brenda McSweeney, and grateful for a grant from the Humanities Foundation at BU. I am delighted to report that the Humanities Foundation has extended our grant for a second year (2004-2005).

We had a year full of interesting and exciting events, including a student led "An evening of Asian dance," invited speakers, and the luncheon series, where we invited professors from the BU academic community to much student enthusiasm and faculty participation.

Personally, I was excited to prepare for my course on "Women in the Muslim World," which was offered at BU for the first time. The student response was overwhelming.

I gave several talks and screened my video documentary, "Mrs. President," at different BU student organizations, and represented the WSP at academic forums.

The International Development Resource Center in Ottawa, Canada commissioned me to contribute a paper on "Gender Justice, Entitlement, and Citizenship in South Asia," a shorter version of which I presented at an international conference held in Ottawa November 12-13, 2003.

On May 4th, at the conference on "Priority Goals for Women in the 21st Century," held at Harvard Kennedy School, I presented a paper on "Legacy of Injustice: Gender Justice, Governance, and Citizenship."

We are looking forward to having another exciting year ahead.

Dr. Shahla Haeri
Director

Azar Nafisi

Azar Nafisi, author of the internationally best-selling book *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*, and a professor at John Hopkins University's School for Advanced International Studies, spoke at BU on April 2nd in an event

sponsored by the WSP and supported by a grant from the Humanities Foundation at BU. Dr. Nafisi gave readings from her book and shared her experiences living and teaching under the Islamic regime in Iran. After her talk, a long line of students and others formed for a book signing by Dr. Nafisi. The event was a great success, and was attended by over 200 people.



Wendy Doniger

On November 3, the WSP sponsored a talk by Wendy Doniger, a professor of religion at the University of Chicago and a leading authority on myth and religion in South Asia. Her talk was made possible by a grant from the Humanities Foundation at BU. Dr. Doniger's presentation was entitled "The Third Nature: Gender Inversions in the Kamasutra." Following a close reading of the text, Dr. Doniger discussed the text's surprisingly non-stereotypical notions of feminine and masculine natures, and then engaged in a question and answer session with the audience.

An Evening of Asian Dance

Broadening our repertoire of events to include art and performance, on February 26th the WSP organized "An Evening of Asian Dance," which featured both Indian and Balinese dances. The evening opened with Claire-Marie Hefner, a senior at Newton North High School, performing a traditional Balinese dance called "Teruna Jaya" (Victorious Youth). Aparna Sindhoor, a PhD student at BU in the University Program, then performed a dance titled "Draupadi," choreographed by Ms. Sindhoor herself. Based on a short story by Mahasweta Devi, "Draupadi" is the story of a tribal Indian woman, and her way of resisting oppression. The dances were preceded by commentary and followed by a reception.



Aparna Sindhoor



Claire-Marie Hefner

Poor Women in a Wealthy Nation

On Monday, March 1st, the WSP hosted a brown-bag luncheon talk, titled "Poor Women in a Wealthy Nation," given by Professor Deborah Belle of the BU Psychology department. Dr. Belle summarizes her talk: "U.S. women live in an extremely wealthy nation, yet the economic circumstances many face are increasingly precarious. Former welfare recipients who find jobs typically earn only \$6-7 an hour, and many are not employed or are employed only sporadically. Over 34 million Americans live below the poverty line, and a majority of these are women and children. Today, poor women and their

children make up a large portion of the U.S. homeless population, and hunger is increasingly a problem for poor women with children, especially poor women of color." Professor Belle also noted that such poverty constitutes a substantial danger not only to these women's physical but also to their mental health.



Prof. Deborah Belle

From Talk to Walk

On Wednesday, April 14, the WSP, in collaboration with the Hubert Humphrey Fellowship program, sponsored a talk by the WSP's visiting scholar Dr. Brenda McSweeney on gender and development in non-Western areas of the world. Her presentation, "From Talk to Walk: Gender Equality in Development," drew on her extensive experience in UN programs around the world, from the Caribbean to India.



Dr. McSweeney takes a question from the audience.

Faculty Activities

Diane Balser

I continue to lead gender related workshops for women internationally. In March, I led a workshop near Paris, mostly with women from France, a few of whom were

Muslim. The issue of the recent French legislation limiting the wearing of religious decoration in public schools was discussed, particularly the ban on wearing the veil or headscarf, a practice of some Muslim women.

Two different points of view were presented in regard to this legislation. One belief is that while requiring the veil or head scarf is sexist, and that women should have the right to choose, French society should encourage cultural diversity and not punish a cultural practice of a discriminated population. The opposing point of view is that the French government has the right to make illegal practices of particular religions and to promote an overall secular society. I found this debate among women very important since it effects so many women throughout the world, involving as it does issues of universal human rights, the secularization of nations, and cultural diversity.

In April, I led a workshop in the Republic of Ireland in which there were both Catholic and Protestant women, from the North of Ireland and from the Republic (or south). The history of conflict in Ireland, particularly and more recently in the North, has had a great effect on women's lives, many of whom have been active in fighting for female participation in the Peace Process.

Lastly, in December 2003, I went to Geneva, Switzerland for the signing of the Geneva Accords regulation regarding the Israeli-Palstinian situation. It was exciting to be at the signing. While the delegations were primarily male, I met many Israeli and some Palestinian women who have been active in their respective feminist and peace movements.

Brenda McSweeney

I've had a thrilling and active year as BU's Women's Studies Program 1st Visiting Scholar! During the Fall of 2003, I designed a new course on "Gender and International Development," which I taught during Spring Semester, 2004. This highly-interactive seminar included consideration of such topics as: a) the education of the girl-child and women's literacy; b) livelihoods and women in crisis; c) engendering human development; and d) gender justice and the way forward. In teaching this course, I drew heavily on my 30 years of United Nations development experience in



Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. This course will be offered again for Spring Semester 2005.

I've led interactive workshops on campus for the groups W.A.K.E (Women Advocating for Knowledge and Empowerment), on Violence against Women (trafficking, girl-child labor, rape as a weapon of war), and for a new organization called *Nari Pragati* on Women and Development in South Asia

and international career opportunities. I'll be a faculty advisor to the latter organisation next year. I also conducted a session on Economic Development for a WSP colleague, Professor Diane Balser, in her Seminar on Global Feminism.

I initiated a first International Summer Internships Program of WSP with opportunities for BU students at the Organisation for Economic Cooperation for Development, Paris, and the U.N. Industrial Development Organisation, Vienna, also in India. The first interns head off to Paris and Rajasthan shortly!

I've acted as a student advisor and have served on thesis defense committees for the International Relations and Communications Departments, and I gave a talk on international gender development at a collaborative event between the WSP and the Hubert Humphrey Fellowship Program. Providing inputs to colleagues' professional work, moderating at conferences, and representing the WSP at various Boston basin fora have rounded out my exciting menu of activities.

Barbara Gottfried

This has been an exciting year for me, especially pedagogically. In the Fall I taught WS 305: Critical Issues in Women's Studies. This is a catch-all course title which allows whoever is teaching to pursue current interests. I offered a course on "Asian Women's Literature and Film." Neither I nor the students were familiar with the material, but we found it both fascinating and provocative, a real glimpse into the lives of women from cultures very different from our own. The novels and films so piqued our interest that we were all ready to pack our bags for a winter break tour of the region, but we

had to satisfy ourselves with lunch at a local Vietnamese restaurant. I plan to teach a variation of this course the next time I teach WS 305 in the Fall of 2005.

Travelling to other parts of the world, both figuratively and literally, is my passion. Since my own college days I have been particularly caught up in Balkan music, dance, and culture. I have found a way to combine both interests in my newest project: I have just been awarded a grant of \$2000 to design a course on "Limits of Citizenship: Balkan Women Between Tradition and Modernity" for Summer Session II in 2005. The course will explore the recent history of the Balkans, but rather than focusing on the fighting, the course will explore the impact of political and cultural struggles on the region's women. We will look at women's rights, the legacy of ethnic cleansing, rural vs. urban women's lives, women as transmitters of culture, the influence of Western feminism, the collapse of communism and challenges of Western capitalism, and the possibilities for women's activism.

The course will conclude with a 10-day trip to Bulgaria, including the capital city Sofia, the beautiful national revival city of Plovdiv, the medieval city Veliko Tarnovo, famous mountain monasteries, and ancient towns on the Black Sea. The highlight of the trip will be 2 days at Koprivchitsa, a festival held every five years where people from all over Bulgaria gather in traditional costume to sing and dance. I think I can promise all participants an unforgettable experience. [nb., the cost of the course will be regular summer school tuition, plus a travel stipend].



Teaching Fellow

Desiree Garcia will continue as the WSP teaching fellow for the Fall 2004 semester. A graduate of Wellesley College, Ms. Garcia is currently pursuing her Ph.D. in American Studies at Boston

University. Her interests are in immigration history and the classical Hollywood studio system. Ms. Garcia also

works as an associate producer at WGBH Boston. In this capacity, she has produced the films "Zoot Suit Riots" (2002) and "Remember the Alamo" (2003) for American Experience, the history series on PBS.

Students

SJD Prize

In the spring of 2004, the Women's Studies program awarded the second annual Sarah Joanne Davis Scholarship prizes. There are two prizes, \$250 each, one for a paper in the Humanities and one for a paper in the Social Sciences. The Social Sciences award went to Shiwali Patel, an International Relations Major, class of '05, for her essay entitled: "War and



Shiwali Patel

Rape: The Situations in the Former Yugoslavia and Kashmir." Shiwali's paper looked at rape as a tactic of war in the former Yugoslavia and Kashmir. This tactic was gained a great deal of international attention for its role in ethnic cleansing in Bosnia-Herzegovina, but it is also used heavily, with far less exposure, in Kashmir. Next Fall semester, Shiwali Patel will be the president of Nari Pragati, BU's South Asian Women's Association.

The award for a paper in the humanities went to Larua Cote, a psychology major, class of '04, for her essay "Finding a Voice: Empowerment through Feminist Literature." Congratulations to both of them!



Larua Cote

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