
WOMEN'S STUDIES BULLETIN

January/February 2003

ASSOCIATE OF THE MONTH

Dr. Patricia Vary, Distinguished Research Professor in Microbiology, is this month's featured associate. Vary, who is retiring this spring, has dedicated 30 years to NIU and has been connected to the Women's Studies Program for many years. Along with her prolific research lab and coursework, Vary has taken time to mentor and develop budding women scientists.

After Vary retires in the spring, she will still continue her extensive research on the bacterium *B. megaterium*. Of the many projects in Vary's lab, one of the most time-consuming tasks is sequencing the genetic structure of the plasmids in *B. megaterium*. These plasmids carry toxins, viruses, and genes that transfer diseases. They also act as carriers for genetic engineering and may even one day offer a solution to help clean up the environment. Other exciting outcomes of her lab include patenting a host cell that is currently used in the production of HIV antigens to diagnose AIDS.

During her time away from the lab, Vary has been the faculty sponsor of the Women in Science floor in Douglass Hall for undergraduate women interested in pursuing science as a career. An important outcome of Women in Science is an entertaining website aimed at capturing the attention of young girls and their parents. This website offers advice to parents on how to encourage their daughters' interest, testimonials of female undergraduates, and helpful information.

Vary has also served on the Presidential Commission on the Status of Women, and she was one of the primary instigators of the Campus Salary Equity Study described below. Last April she was awarded the prominent Wilma D. Stricklin Award because "her dedication to women at NIU has improved the quality of life on campus for all."¹

To find out more about Dr. Vary, her research, Women in Science, etc., please visit her website at:
<http://www.bios.niu.edu/vary/vary.html>

ATTENTION ASSOCIATES:

Please contact the Women's Studies Office (753-1038) to let us know if you are planning to offer summer or fall courses that count for the minor/certificate.

GOOD-BYE AND THANK YOU TO VALERIE HALL

Valerie Hall ended her position as Acting Program Coordinator on January 3, after a very helpful two-day introduction to the new Program Coordinator, Jolene Skinner. Valerie deserves a big thank you for filling a much-needed position so quickly and effectively. She organized the Young Women's Conference in the fall and also helped plan most of the events for Women's History Month. As Theresa Laskos so poignantly said, "she caught the ball and ran with it." Valerie continues her work at Illinois Valley Community College in Oglesby in the field of Adult Education.

NEW PROGRAM COORDINATOR

Jolene Skinner is the new part-time Program Coordinator for the Women's Studies Program. She received her bachelor's degree in psychology from Central College in Pella, IA, and her master's degree in psychology from NIU in 1999. She is currently a graduate student at NIU, working on her dissertation in social-organizational psychology. Her research interests include women in the workplace, the social identity of women, and women in leadership. Jolene also teaches part-time at North Central College in Naperville and at the YMCA in DeKalb.

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

This March, Women's History Month will focus on women and volunteerism. Events begin in late February with a student performance of "Vagina Monologues" and end April 2, with a graduate colloquium from a feminist geographer, Dr. Gillian Rose. For the complete calendar of Women's History Month events, visit womenshistorymonth.niu.edu.

Highlights include Dr. Floris Barnett Cash and Dr. Jewell Parker Rhodes. Dr. Cash, Associate Professor of Africana Studies at the State University of New York, Stony Brook, will be giving two presentations. Cash's first address (March 18, 8 p.m., the Heritage Room, HSC) will focus on black women's social activism in Chicago. Her second discussion (March 19, 10 a.m., the Center for Black Studies) will be on Ida B. Wells, an historical figure known for her struggle for women's rights.

Dr. Rhodes is a Professor at Arizona State University in Creative Writing. Rhodes will speak on March 27, at 7:30 in the Heritage Room, HSC. She will read from and discuss one of her novels, *Douglass' Women*.

UPDATE: MOTHERS MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

Thus far, we are half way toward the \$10,000 endowment goal for the Mother's Memorial Scholarship Fund. The \$10,000 goal is set for June of 2003 in order to have scholarships available to upper division undergraduate and graduate students as soon as possible. The scholarship fund was started both to honor those who are or have acted as mothers to members of the NIU community and to encourage students whose career goals include improving the lives of women through education, research, advocacy, support or policy-making.

PROPOSED LGBT STUDIES CERTIFICATE

The Academic Committee of the Presidential Commission on Sexual Orientation is currently working on a proposal for a LGBT studies certificate. The proposal was developed in part because the NIU Presidential Commission on the Status of Women reported that "...the contributions of gays, lesbians, and bisexuals remain unmentioned or undervalued in most areas."² According to the proposal, students who wish to pursue a LGBT studies certificate would take 12 hours of course work "examining issues of gender and sexual orientation in order to function as informed citizens and successful professionals in the twenty-first century."³

Diana Swanson, Amy Levin, and other WS associates have been involved in developing the proposal. The certificate proposals are being sent to the appropriate curriculum committees this semester. For further information contact Diana Swanson (753-6611).

JEANNETTE RANKIN FOUNDATION SCHOLARSHIP (WOMEN 35+)

Every year the Jeannette Rankin Foundation (JRF) awards scholarships to women 35 years of age and older who, through undergraduate or vocational education, are seeking to better themselves, their families and their communities. All applicants for this scholarship must be: (a) women, at least 35 years of age as of April 1, 2003; (b) U.S. citizens; (c) pursuing a technical/vocational degree, an associate degree, or a first bachelor degree; (d) enrolled or accepted in an accredited school for the fall of 2003; and (e) low-income. The deadline to apply is March 1, 2003. To find the exact income guidelines for this program, or to apply, go to: <http://www.rankinfoundation.org/apply.htm>

CAMPUS SALARY EQUITY STUDY

Upon the recommendation of the Presidential Commission on the Status of Women, NIU has formed a committee to study the equity of faculty salaries, with particular attention to any differences due to gender, race, or ethnicity. The committee's major goal is to uncover discrepancies (if any) in faculty salaries and to understand why these discrepancies exist (e.g., rank, seniority, or disciplinary differences vs. more inappropriate reasons). Thus far, the committee has heard reports from two colleges on how they have dealt with equity issues in the past and is working on

developing a fair process for analyzing salaries. For more information on the study, please contact either of the Co-Chairs of the Faculty Salary Equity Task Force, Steve Cunningham (753-6021, cunningham@niu.edu) or Admasu Zike (753-9175, zike@niu.edu).

NATIONAL WOMEN'S STUDIES ASSOCIATION STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE

The National Women's Studies Association is working on a new strategic plan under the guidance of President-elect Colette Morrow. The strategic planning group intends to collect data this spring and prepare a report by November. Amy Levin is Co-Chair of the group and looks forward to receiving comments from Women's Studies faculty, associates, affiliates, and students. Some of the issues being discussed include diversity within NWSA, the association's lack of visibility in comparison to other professional organizations, and the status of regional caucuses.

WOMEN'S ALLIANCE

Women's Alliance is a student organization dedicated to "improving the status of women through action and education." This semester the group is organizing and sponsoring two events for Women's History Month. The first event is a student production of "Vagina Monologues" to be performed in late February. The second event is the Vagina Seminar, a popular event from last year. For the seminar, members of Women's Alliance will research an important topic (e.g., birth control, vaginal health, and sexual dysfunction) and present the information to the audience in safe and comfortable atmosphere.

This year's officers are Co-Presidents, Luz Gonzalez and Sandi Caldron, and Treasurer, Liz Holden. Gonzalez, a sophomore Visual Communications and Photography major, is involved in Women's Alliance because she "loves the idea of learning and raising awareness about women and society, about the misrepresentation of women in the media, and about abuse and successful women." Caldron, a senior Anthropology major, explains that "the issues are really important to me. There is a lot of satisfaction from doing the work, but really it is just a lot of fun!" Holden is a senior Physics major and Women's Studies minor. Holden says that she is involved with Women's Alliance because "I think that we tackle necessary issues, and that feminism is not dead or useless, but more important than ever."

The group meets every Thursday at 9 p.m. in Reavis 103, under the faculty supervision of Diana Swanson. Interested newcomers are welcome. For further information contact Gonzalez (753-2017) or Caldron (753-4930).

¹ (<http://www.niu.edu/women/PCSW/wds02.shtml>)

² (<http://www3.niu.edu/depts/women/pcsw/ace2000.htm>)

³ December 2002. A report and proposal submitted by the Academic Committee of the Presidential Commission on Sexual Orientation.

**Unless otherwise noted, details on the above information are available from Women's Studies, Reavis Hall 103, 753-1038.