Supporting New Generations of Feminist Scholars:
The GWS Graduate Program

Our new and still growing PhD program in Gender and Women’s Studies currently supports 16 PhD students as well as an MA/JD student and many more graduate minor and certificate students from across the university. Our students have a wide variety of research interests in women’s, gender, and sexuality studies that use feminist approaches to topics such as social movements, oral histories, theory and philosophy, social networking, and performance, literature, media, and other forms of cultural production. In the fall, three of our students were funded by WOSAC to present their work at conferences. Angela Stoutenburgh gave her paper, “University as Intellectual Commons - Reprioritizing and Respatializing Public Education” at the 8th Annual Historical Materialism Conference in London. Jenna Vinson presented “Teenage Mom Counter-Narratives Within and Without the Web: Theorizing Web-Based Feminist Narrative Analysis” at Feminisms and Rhetorics in Mankato, MN. Finally, Erin Durban-Albrecht gave “Bristling with the Desire to Confront Injustice: Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy’s Queer Contributions to Transnational Feminism” at the American Studies Association conference in Baltimore.

Alumna Profile:
Agatha Beins, PhD

Agatha Beins, who received her MA from our department in 2003, recently returned to the southwest as an assistant professor of women’s studies at Texas Woman’s University after earning her PhD in Women’s and Gender Studies at Rutgers in 2011. We interviewed her about her career and current projects, which include turning her dissertation on 1970s U.S. feminist periodicals into a book, working as an editorial collective member for Films for the Feminist Classroom, and volunteering weekly for a local farm. Here are some of the things she had to say:

“[T]he MA gave me the language to articulate why I wanted to keep learning in a feminist way and why I wanted to do so in an interdisciplinary women’s studies program. Working on [the book] Women’s Studies for the Future with Liz [Lapovsky Kennedy] really clarified that applying to PhD programs in Women’s Studies was not just about my intellectual interests; it was also a political commitment I wanted to make . . . . Though I did not start the program with a particular trajectory in mind—that is, I did not narrate a Master’s degree as an initial step on my way to a PhD/academic career—looking back I can see that a significant part of my MA in Women’s Studies was being treated from the very first day as a scholar. The classes I took challenged me through the range of readings, the density of the theories, and the expectation that I could (and would) contribute to the conversation.”

“I found my dissertation topic in the basement of the UA library while doing research inspired by my thesis topic . . . . I wanted to locate feminist publications that circulated under the radar of popular media and that might fit into the DIY ethic. Sitting in the University of Arizona library, running through rolls of microfilm I came across four different feminist periodicals published in the 1970s: Ain’t I a...
Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy: Working with the Wounaan

The indomitable Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy retired from UA Gender & Women’s Studies in spring 2011 but she remains as active as ever. While Kennedy will continue to be involved in the department, she decided that official retirement would give her the opportunity to spend more time with family, friends, and her partner Bobbi Prebis. She is also working on two major projects that demand her attention: a book about Julia Boyer Reinstein (stay tuned to future issues of the GWS newsletter for more information) and a return to her 1964-1966 fieldwork with the Wounaan, an indigenous nation in northwest South America.

Kennedy explains that there are three things driving her current work with the Wounaan, which is funded by the National Science Foundation through summer 2013. She wants to give her original research—films, noted and recorded stories, and her dissertation—back to the Wounaan now that this return does not exacerbate the colonization of their land and livelihood. Kennedy is committed to collaborative research, a remarkable quality that has set apart her career, and in that spirit wants to undertake cultural recovery research with the Wounaan and another US collaborator, Dr. Julia Valezquz-Runk. She notes that there have been many challenges working together, but that all of the collaborators have persisted and have decided to apply for supplemental funding to bring five Wounaan to Arizona to attend the American Indian Language Development Institute. Last but not least, Kennedy explains that major impetus for her work is the desire to understand the international situation for indigenous peoples and to be able to participate in decolonial efforts by educating people in the U.S. about, for instance, ongoing struggles over land rights.

Kennedy screened her film, “Wounaan: A People of the Rainforest” on March 27th to a large audience in the Gender & Women’s Studies conference room at the University of Arizona. Kennedy discussed her 1960s research with the Wounaan in more detail along with how her experiences in women’s studies and American Indian studies changed some of the interpretations she had of her time in Colombia with the Wounaan.

She additionally mentioned the Wounaan’s largely positive reactions to the screening of the film in Panama this past January. Kennedy is currently fundraising to get the remaining two ethnographic films from this research digitized and translated into Spanish.