

# WOMEN'S, GENDER & SEXUALITY STUDIES PROGRAM



*Left.* Students in WGSS Professor Kiaran Honderich's Winter Travel Course . *Above.* Lucie Schmidt, WGSS Chair.

## A LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Dear WGSS friends:

I'm extremely happy to welcome you to our inaugural Williams Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program Newsletter. For those of you who don't know me, I am an Associate Professor in the Economics department, and I took over as Chair of WGSS this fall after returning to Williams from sabbatical.

It is an exciting time to be Chair of WGSS. We currently have 14 senior and 10 junior majors, and enrollments in our Introduction to Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies course have remained high. We have two new faces on campus this year - Margaux Cowden, who has a joint

appointment in WGSS and English, and Greg Mitchell, our first tenure track hire directly into the WGSS program. Their enthusiasm and intellectual vitality has already made a mark on our program, and their courses are a huge addition to our curriculum. Greg has also brought us into the social-networking era with the construction of the WGSS Facebook page - "like" us! There is also a great deal of excitement about our senior seminar this year, "Dangerous Bodies: Black Womanhood, Sexuality & Popular Culture," taught by Rhon Manigault-Bryant.

We have also sponsored (or co-sponsored) a number of

great events on campus this year. One highlight for spring term is a visit by award-winning American playwright Tarell Alvin McCraney, organized by Amy Holzapfel and Bolin Fellow Mecca Sullivan.

In closing, I wanted to take this chance to thank Katie Kent, the new Director of the Williams-Exeter Programme at Oxford. Katie's strong leadership of the WGSS program over the past few years is one of the primary reasons that I inherit a program in such strong shape. We are grateful for her contributions, and miss her presence on campus.

All best wishes,  
Lucie Schmidt

*Inside this issue...*

- Meet the New Faculty
- WGSS Major Lysa Vola's Reality TV Debut
- Student and Faculty Updates... and more!

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Fall 2012

## MEET PROFESSOR COWDEN!

A Visiting Assistant Professor in WGSS and English, Margaux Cowden arrived at Williams by way of Temple University in Philadelphia and, prior to that, the University of California at Irvine, where she received her PhD in Comparative Literature with certificates in Feminist Studies and Critical Theory. Her work investigates American literature and transatlantic modernism with an emphasis on gender and sexuality. Her current book project maps the convergence of modernist literature, sexual science, and human geography, and explores the ways in which modernist appropriations of geography generate queer frameworks for sexuality, pleasure, and reproduction.



## FIVE QUESTIONS WITH PROFESSOR COWDEN

1.) As a new faculty member, how are you liking Williamstown? What's your favorite thing so far?

Williamstown is the most beautiful place I've ever lived. Also the smallest, and it still surprises me that the folks at the grocery store remember which recipe I was trying the last time I came in--like the one I bought the chicken livers and bourbon for--and always ask how it turned out. It's hard to choose a single favorite thing, but for now I'll say visiting the cheese at Cricket Creek farm and wandering through Hopkins Forest.

2.) You're teaching a whole class on "complaints." What are some of your biggest pet peeves?

I thought you'd never ask! Malingering (especially when my beloved is the malingerer); strategically placed and pointy cat paws

first thing in the morning; squishy, crustless, flavorless bread; avocados, and the shock people display if you do not like them; having to wear socks and weather-appropriate shoes; from childhood: the skin that forms on the top of hot creamed spinach, and creamed spinach in general; mansplaining.

3.) Your research talks a lot about travel. Are you much of a traveler yourself? What are your favorite places?

Yes! Currently, my favorite place is Granada, Spain, which is hot and beautiful and full of ancient winding streets. Granada is also home to the Al-Hambra, which contains intricate carved plaster moldings and ceilings that have survived since the 8th century (best seen at night!), and offers some pretty impressive flamenco action. Kauai and Fez are close seconds, and I could never

forget Paris. I lived there once upon a time, and while I'm not sure it's the most beautiful city in the world, I do think it's among the most interesting.

4.) You're also teaching a class this Spring about modern pleasures. What kinds of things will you be talking about?

Sapphic salons, butch jazz singers, cubist euphemisms for sex, dirty birds, dirty thirds, avant-garde fashion, and queer cabarets! Really! More concretely, *Modern Pleasure* investigates if and how early-twentieth-century modernist and avant-garde literature might be aesthetically, formally, or thematically "queer," which might have a variety of meanings in these texts but will often include some revision or deconstruction of prevailing ideas and representations of pleasure. If you want to spend time

reading queer and feminist theory, thinking through different understandings of queerness, considering modernism from fresh sexual and geographic perspectives, or digging into the formal strategies of avant-garde literature, this is the class for you!

5.) Wow! Please tell me there are "experiential learning" assignments in this class!

Hmm...perhaps Williams needs more queer cabaret? (Don't we all??) In addition to great readings and discussions, we will have creative assignments, including a little ethnographic research on contemporary pleasure and some experimentation with avant-garde literary forms. I am also hoping to bring Smith College's Professor Laura Kalba to talk about color, fireworks, and how modernity has shaped sensory experience and its attendant pleasures. And other excitement to be determined....



### MEET PROFESSOR MITCHELL

Gregory holds his PhD in Performance Studies from Northwestern University, from which he also received a PhD Certificate and served as a Mellon Cluster Fellow in Gender & Sexuality Studies. While there, he also received the Presidential Fellowship and membership in the Society of Fellows, that university's highest honor for doctoral researchers, and his students elected him into the prestigious Faculty Honor Roll for excellence in teaching. He also holds a masters in social science (focusing on cultural anthropology) from the University of Chicago and masters and bachelors degrees from Illinois State University. His work takes a humanistic approach within ethnography, blending queer theory with anthropology to explore the everyday lived realities of male sex workers in Brazil as they perform race and masculinity for foreign and domestic gay clientele. His work appears in *American Ethnologist*, *The Journal of Popular Music Studies*, and *The Wagadu Journal of Transnational Feminist Studies*, as well as edited volumes in Brazil and the United States. He has received recognition and awards from the Ford Foundation and twice from American Anthropological Association sections.

### DATES TO WATCH OUT FOR

**February 18** at 4 pm. **Jenn Tyburczy** (Fulbright Fellow at COLMEX) will give a talk entitled, "Sex after NAFTA: Performing the 'Sexual Modern' in Mexico City."

**April 22.** **Tarell McCraney** visits campus (see feature, below).

**May 3 -5.** Williams hosts **WORLDS OF WONDER: THE QUEERNESS OF CHILDHOOD**, a conference featuring keynote speaker, **Judith Jack Halberstam**.

### NEW WGSS PODCAST COMING

We are excited to announce that next semester WGSS students and faculty will be unveiling a new podcast featuring interviews, book reviews, roundtables and more. Confirmed guests include Gayle Rubin, Lauren Berlant, E. Patrick Johnson, and the columnist and author Hanna Rosin (*The End of Men*).



# *WGSS Major Lysa Vola*

## *Gets Schooled!*

"Schooled," a competitive trivia series, features eight different New England colleges. In each episode, three students from two schools compete in a single-elimination tournament. Lyssa Vola '13, Marty Clarke '14, and Alex Kling '16, make up Team Williams.

In each half-hour episode of "Schooled," college teams compete in academic and intelligence-based challenges meant to test contestants in high-pressure, time-sensitive situations. The winning team at the end of each episode moves forward in the bracket, and the losing team is eliminated. The grand prize winners receive \$5,000 per person and tickets to a Boston Red Sox game in the NESN luxury box at Fenway stadium. The second season of the seven-episode series began on Tuesday, Oct. 30th, when Harvard University defeated Boston College. Then our college faced off against its biggest rival, Amherst on November 7th, and won! We face off against Harvard University in the next round (the semifinals), which will air at the end of this month (or the first week of December) on the NESN. Other schools participating in the tournament are the University of New Hampshire, University of Vermont, Norwich University, and Providence College, last season's champion.



### **What was the audition process like?**

I was walking through Paresky for lunch in September in between classes and decided to check out the casting table that was set up...The casting consisted of a questionnaire with some odd questions including how I define myself, picking out "labels" that might speak to who I am (such as "nerdy," "popular," "girly," etc.). I remember writing some sarcastic comments into the margins – just to have fun with it - such as "We go to Williams...aren't we all a little nerdy?" I also remember them asking a few other questions that really stuck out to me: "What are you most proud of?" "What are you most ashamed of?" and "What makes you unique (or different from everyone else)?" They also asked for my favorite quote, to which I gave them: "If you're not living life on the edge, then you're taking up too much space." There was a little "test" given out as well, which seemed to test a certain range of knowledge and my response to some trivia based questions. The questions ranged from U.S. geography to identifying certain periodic elements by chemical symbol and dating the year of production for certain literary works. But, there were also two mind puzzles I had to solve. They also asked us about what our majors were and our GPA. Once I filled out both the questionnaire and the test of random trivia they gave me, I was interviewed by a casting director for the show. He videotaped my interview, which I was then told would be shown to the entire casting crew working on the show. It was a bit nerve wrecking, and I left the audition feeling like maybe I was a bit "too real" or honest, for them to ever place me on the show. They were interested in asking me how I was "unique" or could set myself apart from all the other Williams students who were auditioning. I was open with them in discussing some of the most personal aspects of my life. I discussed how being adopted as one of seven adopted children into a multicultural family has truly changed my outlook on life and my ability to interact with all different kinds of people. I also talked about being a first generation college student.

## **Now that the first episode, in which you "schooled" Amherst, has aired, what's the reaction been like?**

My classmates have all been really supportive. We have a relatively small campus so news of how three students from Williams were cast for a TV show spread fast and people were definitely interested in finding out more about the show and filming. I was also absent from class quite a bit to film for the show, so I kept my classmates wondering about what I was doing during the entire month of October. We filmed our match against both Amherst and Harvard at Williams, so students got a chance to watch some of the filming process, since we did film in Griffin Hall and outside on frosh quad, and Weston Football Field. I was nervous for the screening of the first episode in Paresky, because it was also the first time my team members and I had seen the final cut of the footage we spent 13 hours filming for. We had no idea which things that we'd said or done may have gotten edited into the episode itself. Surprisingly, despite some of my mistakes when answering some of the trivia questions, most of my classmates commented on "how well I did." I was relieved by this, since my biggest fear was that other students would start saying things like, "Oh, I would've gotten that question right," or that "was easy," not realizing how all of the pressure of being filmed and put on the spot to give an answer factored in to our responses and ultimately, some mistakes we made.

## **Were there any interesting gender dynamics on the set or among any of the teams?**

Gender, in my opinion, seemed to be a clear element of each team on the show. There was only one female cast from every college, but two males, which struck me as interesting. I think that's why, much of the time, the females were portrayed as being more competitive, because it was easier to sort of pin the "token" females of each team against one another. I found that in each individual round of the competition, I was facing the female member of the other team. That *may* have been coincidental, but it was interesting how it just sort of "naturally" happened to be that way every time we played another team. I kept wondering what it might have been like if there were two females and one male cast from each school instead and whether or not that might change the dynamics of the show. On set, I felt some pressure as the only female on my team (and the only female representation of women at Williams) because it was sometimes hard to get my point across or to feel included in the morale of the team... In the beginning, I felt like I couldn't quite place what my role on the team was going to be. Then, I became more assertive and by the final episode we filmed for the show, we were at our peak of working together and truly using all of our individual assets to benefit us. I think that because there's only one female cast onto each team, I still wonder what role(s) I was possibly scripted to fulfill by the casting crew of the show. I assumed that the women they chose for the show had to represent a balance of both "femininity" and competitiveness. I also found it interesting that I was not only the one female on my team, but also the only person of color. So I may have been chosen to simultaneously represent two separate identities, which the women on all of the other teams (except UVM) did not have to balance because they were all White women.

## **If you win, what will you do with the \$5,000 in prize money?**

If my team wins, I will use the \$5,000 to help me buy a car after I graduate in June. After all, I'll most likely need to drive myself to my next destination in life!

## WILLIAMS WELCOMES TARELL McCRANEY

The award-winning American dramatist Tarell Alvin McCraney will be visiting Williams on Monday, April 22nd. During the day, he will be visiting classes taught by Professor Sullivan and Professor Holzapfel, and will also be having lunch with students during the day. At 4pm, Mr. McCraney will be presenting some of his newest work to faculty and selected students at the Oakley Center for the Social Sciences and Humanities. Please mark your calendars and be involved in this exciting event! Beginning in 2009, Mr. McCraney, as NBC News writes, "caught the attention of the theater world with his *The Brother/Sister* plays, a trilogy which explores homosexuality, family and Yoruba culture in rural Louisiana. McCraney is a gay man who grew up in the inner city of Miami, with a brother in jail and a mother addicted to drugs, who later died of AIDS. He brings some of his experiences to life on stage through these fictional works." Mr. McCraney himself writes: "I lived in the other America; the America that doesn't always get depicted in the cinema. The America that we are told to pretend isn't there." Through exploring these untold stories, McCraney is "dedicated to trying to bring a new audience to American theater."



## SEXUAL ECONOMIES STUDENTS GET A PERSONAL LOOK AT GENDER & MEDIA ISSUES, SEX WORKER RIGHTS



Students in Sexual Economies (WGSS 306) recently traveled to New York City to better understand the intersections of sex and money in a variety of businesses and contexts. They met Erica Jensen, a casting director at Calleri Casting, who discussed how the entertainment industry looks at issues such as type-casting, the "it-factor," and how she deals with issues of race, gender and age in

her work on various film, TV and theatre projects. Ms. Jensen is an award-winning casting director, who has also – amidst her many other clients – done casting for the Williamstown Theatre Festival. The students also met with sex workers and sex worker rights activists to learn about current legal issues and other matters facing sex workers. After having candid discussions with members of the Sex Worker Outreach Project (SWOP) and Sex Workers Action New York (SWANK), they also met with the founder of the Red Umbrella Project, a storytelling and performance collective for people working in sex industries. One of the participants, Ceyenne, shared her experiences as a trans woman who, while serving time in jail for prostitution and facing stigma on multiple axes, used her unique experiences to begin working on a cookbook and memoir, *Cooking in Heels*, which she shared with the students.



# UPDATES



**DENISE BUELL** had a terrific time last Spring teaching the capstone seminar on theories of agency and identity (WGSS 402 Transformations and Entanglements). Although not offering any WGSS courses this year, she remains on the advisory committee and is co-organizing the visit of an exciting womanist scholar, Tracey Hucks (Haverford College), for next semester. Professor Hucks will be coming to campus to give a public lecture on Wednesday, February 20<sup>th</sup>, at 4:15pm (location and title of talk TBA). Her recently published book is: *Yoruba Traditions and African American Religious Nationalism* (2012). Last summer she completed two articles that draw extensively on feminist theory, especially of the strand called “new feminist materialism,” which students who took WGSS 402 in spring 2011 helped her to think through. These pieces are now in press: “Hauntology meets Post-Humanism: Some Payoffs for Biblical Studies.” In *The Bible and Posthumanism*. Ed. Jennifer Koosed (*Semeia Studies* Atlanta: SBL). “The Microbes and *Pneuma* That Therefore I am.” In *Divinanimality: Creaturely Theology*. Ed. Stephen Moore and Laurel Kearns (New York: Fordham University Press). Also in press is a short piece exploring how feminist scholars of the Bible have understood and approached the notion of “canon” when interpreting biblical texts: “*Canons Unbound*.” In *Feminist Biblical Studies in the 20th Century*. Ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. Volume 20 of *The Bible and Women: An Encyclopaedia of Exegesis and Cultural History*. General editors: Irmtraud Fischer, Mercedes Navarro Puerto, Jorunn Økland, Adriana Valerio. She’s also been commissioned to write an essay for the *Oxford Handbook of Feminist Biblical Interpretation*; so next summer she’ll complete her essay for it, entitled: “Transformations of and in Life: Intersectional and Intra-actionist Feminist Biblical Interpretation.” Lastly, in January, she’ll be presenting a paper “Canonizing Agency and the Agency of Canons” in a symposium entitled “Making Canons: Feminist Perspectives” at the University of Oslo’s Centre for Gender Research: The other participants include Linda Alcoff and Judith Bennett, as well as Norwegian scholars Jorunn Økland (the organizer) and Carin Franzén.

**HALEY EAGON** worked for the New America Foundation this summer in the Asset Building Program. While there, she primarily wrote blog articles for them about events, and her work culminated in a three part blog series about the way that single mothers uniquely experience certain economic issues. You can find her series at <http://newamerica.net/user/464>.



**KIM HOLACHEK** is currently applying to graduate programs that have a strong WGSS orientation. She is also continuing research on interpersonal stressors as a risk for depression in adolescent girls with Professor Catherine Stroud in the Psychology Department. Their research shows that there is a sizable gender difference in this particular area.

**KIARAN HONDERICH** has an update on our WGSS travel class this winter, which is being co-led by Jonathan Morgan-Leamon: “We have a fabulous group of students for our WGSS travel WSP class, which will be going to Uganda to develop a pilot project of income generation and capacity building for grassroots HIV+ youth activists, centered on trainings in different computer skills. This is a ‘train the trainers’ model, so we will give more advanced trainings to a group of activists in the capital, Kampala, then go with them to a remote market town to guide them in training local youth. We hope to have an alum --Toni Kraeva, '09 - coming to join us to work on the income generating aspects, and we have a high school student from Mt. Greylock coming too. Students have already started working on our training curriculum, and last week we bought our tickets! While in Uganda we also hope to meet with queer rights activists to learn about the Anti-Homosexuality Bill which seems likely to pass before the end of this year, and discuss what kind of solidarity work they are calling for.”







**JALLICIA JOLLY** received the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship (MMUF), the QuestBridge Community Service Grant, and the Gilman International Fellowship. After working with the Jamaica AIDS Support for Life (JASL), a community-based organization that uses education to spread awareness of HIV and AIDS, she returned to Williams to complete the MMUF colloquium with nine other Williams fellows and six South African fellows from the University of Cape Town. The students gained exposure to a wide array of research topics, had quality time with professors, and had the opportunity to connect with fellows from other colleges – Wesleyan, Bowdoin, Queens College, and Harvard – at the annual

Mellon Mays conference. After the colloquium, she returned to Kingston, Jamaica to continue working on her research project – understanding the survival strategies of Jamaican women. For a month, she collected oral histories of women living in two neighboring communities – Franklinton and Raytown – in order to examine the familial and communal networks they rely on. She ended the summer studying Spanish in Costa Rica. Next semester, she will be going abroad in Central America in Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador as she continues her research exploring how poor women of color create communal and grassroots efforts for social change.

**KATIE KENT** sends her best from England. She is missing the WGSS community--Oxford is just not the same! Her review of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's posthumous book of essays, *The Weather in Proust*, is forthcoming in *GLQ*, and she is busy reading all the books nominated for the Alan Bray Prize, awarded by the GL/Q Caucus to the best book in literary and cultural studies, broadly defined, in 2011. It's a lot of work, but a great way to catch up on the newest titles in the field. Happy winter to all!



**GREGORY MITCHELL** presented a paper entitled “More Than Kin, But Less Than Kind: Sex Tourism and Queer Families in Neoliberal Brazil” at the American Anthropological Association’s annual meeting and is giving an invited lecture at Amherst College called, “For ESPN to See: Lessons from London and South Africa for Brazil about Moral Panics, Sex Trafficking and Global Sporting Events.” The talk is part of a new project about unreliable media narratives about sex trafficking and sporting events, which governments can use to persecute sex workers and to facilitate neoliberal land seizures in the run-up to events such as the World Cup and the Olympics.

**MECCA SULLIVAN** has recently published several pieces, including “‘Unsayable Secrets’ of Diaspora’s Bodily History,” *Jacket 2* (Special issue on M. Nourbese Phillip), “Second (and Third, and Fourth...) Helpings: Size and Spectacle in The Help.” In *Still Maids, Still Toms: Perspectives on The Help and Other White-Authored Narratives of Black Life in the 'Post-Racial' Era*. Ed. Claire Garcia and Vershawn Young. (Edited collection under review for University of Illinois Press New Black Studies Series), “Writing (on) our Bodies,” Co-written with poet Rachel Eliza Griffiths. *VIDA: Women in the Literary Arts*, Forthcoming November 2012. “On the Morning of the Election (Or, Your Abstention Will Not Protection: Voting and Radical Black Feminist Politics.” Co-written with Dr. C. Riley Snorton, *The Feminist Wire* 6 November 2012. “Blue Talk and Love,” *American Fiction: Best Unpublished Short Stories by Emerging Writers*. MN: New Rivers Press, 2012 (short story named a finalist for the American Fiction Prize). She also gave invited lectures or conference presentations at Fordham University, the American Studies Association Annual Meeting, and at Harvard University’s Queerness of Hip Hop/The Hip-Hop of Queerness conference.





# W G S S   S P R I N G   C O U R S E S

101 Intro to Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies	Alison Case	MWF 11:00 AM-12:15 PM
202 Intro Sexuality Studies (D)	Gregory Mitchell	TR 08:30 AM-09:45 AM
204 The Experience of Sexuality	Margaux Cowden	TF 1:10 PM-2:25 PM
212 Ethics & Reproductive Technology (W)	Julie Pedroni	TF 2:35 PM-3:50 PM
222 Modern Spanish Women	David Colbert-Goicoa	MR 1:10 PM-2:25 PM
237 Gender & Desire 1200-1600 (D) (W)	Sherron Knopp	MR 2:35 PM-3:50 PM
238 Science, Gender and Power	Laura Ephraim	TR 11:20 AM-12:35 PM
254 Manet to Matisse	Carol Ockman	TR 11:20 AM-12:35 PM
259 Adultery in 19th-Cent Novel (W)	Julie Cassiday	TBA
261 Lost Voices of Medieval Women (W)	Jennifer Bloxam	MR 1:10 PM-2:25 PM
304 Gender, Genre, and Sexuality (D)	Mecca Sullivan	MW 11:00 AM-12:15 PM
306 Queer of Color Critique (D)	Gregory Mitchell	TR 09:55 AM-11:10 AM
308 Gender & Society Modern Africa	Kenda Mutongi	TR 11:20 AM-12:35 PM
309 Everyday Life in Lit & Film	Helga Druxes	TR 09:55 AM-11:10 AM
311 Theorizing Shakespeare	Christopher Pye	TR 11:20 AM-12:35 PM
321 Continental Feminist Theory (D)	Jana Sawicki	MR 2:35 PM-3:50 PM
326 Queer Temporalities (W) (Tutorial)	Jacqueline Hidalgo	TBA
327 Foucault (D) (W) (Tutorial)	Jana Sawicki	TBA
333 19th Century British Novel	Alison Case	TF 1:10 PM-2:25 PM
338 Latina/o Musical Cultures (D) (W)	Maria Elena Cepeda	TF 2:35 PM-3:50 PM
388 Psychoanalysis, Gender & Sexuality	Christopher Pye	TF 2:35 PM-3:50 PM
396 Modern Pleasure	Margaux Cowden	MWF 11:00 AM-12:15 PM
402 Dangerous Bodies	Rhon Manigault-Bryant	M 7:00 PM-9:40 PM
452 Women in America 1620-1865	Gretchen Long	W 1:10 PM-3:50 PM
461 Writing About Bodies (W)	Carol Ockman	TBA