Shalom—Debra Bergoffen, Director

It is time to say Shalom. A good-bye that says hello. A hello that offers the pleasures of peace, peacefulness and contentment. This is my Shalom column: my goodbye to being Director; my hello to returning to the faculty; my welcome to our new director Nancy Hanahan.

These are difficult times for the university. We are facing dramatic cutbacks just as our undergraduate programs are showing the effect of having two full time Women's Studies faculty; of having our two lower level courses meet General Education requirements; of having a talented group of Cultural Studies students committed to working in the Women's Studies program. We were 155% of enrollment target this spring semester, the largest growth of any unit in the College. Time for a radical cheer! Our graduate certificate is approved and will be launched in the fall with the Women's Global Issues course. Our very successful campus programs bear the stamp of Rebecca's full-time energizing presence in the Center, of Erica's skills, and of the talents of our student assistants, Tara and Cindy. We have been blessed with students organizing and working in the Women's Coalition and the Men's Ally Group. Forced, like everyone else in the University, to establish priorities and become leaner, we have decided that we cannot skimp on the materials that let people know who we are and why we are here. We now have two Center brochures. One is focused on the Center's University Life programs. One details the Center's academic programs. We are also committed to Matrix, for we believe that we need a venue for keeping our widespread faculty in touch with each other.

You, the faculty, staff, and students who support the Center are our most valuable asset. Your commitment is a mark of the vital role feminists play in the university’s academic and communal life. You will get us through the cuts. I am looking over the rainbow. I see a program and a Center that is at the top of the game: special topics courses in Domestic Violence, Sex Trafficking, Third Wave Feminism; a dorm floor designated for Women's Studies students; campus events featuring Jean Kilbourne, Patricia Hill Collins, The Guerilla Girls. I see an incoming Director who will show us new ways to develop our program, teaching, research and community building accomplishments.

The budget cuts are temporary; our feminist commitments are permanent. Shalom!

Announcing the New Graduate Certificate in Women's Studies:

Women's Studies will launch its new graduate certificate in the Fall '02 semester. The program will give students the opportunity to develop and enhance their understanding of the social, political and economic situations of women in their local, national and global contexts. The Certificate may be taken in conjunction with a Masters or Ph.D. degree or as a stand alone course of study. It will allow students enrolled in other graduate programs to develop an expertise in women's issues as related to their master's or doctoral degrees and give professionals working in areas that concern women (e.g. the arts, health, education, public policy), the opportunity to enhance their expertise. The certificate is comprised of 15 credits and a capstone portfolio. As part of these 15 credits students must take two core courses: Feminist Theories Across the Disciplines, WMST 630, and Women and Global Issues WMST 640. The remaining 9 credits will be electives, selected jointly by the student and the student's Women's Studies advisor.
The “Naked Truth” About Advertising
Ruth Fischer Reports on Jean Kilbourne’s lecture

Jean Kilbourne, noted authority on the images of women in advertising, spoke to a packed house in the Johnson Center Cinema recently in her presentation “The Naked Truth: Advertising’s Image of Women.” Advertising’s ubiquity in the media, she asserts, profoundly influences our values about what women should be, how they feel about themselves, and how they could be treated.

The ideal feminine beauty with a flawlessness impossible to achieve—except by airbrushing or digital enhancement—becomes the standard. The ideal woman also tends to be frail, vulnerable, and thin to the point of emaciation. Women are supposed to “take up less space.”

Given our core American belief that transformation is possible, when women, through excessive dieting, exercise, beauty aids, and cosmetic surgery, fail to achieve the ideal, they somehow at fault. Consequently, eating has become a moral issue. Rather than consuming a healthy diet that lets our bodies reach their natural “set points”, women contribute to the $60 billion diet industry, which, for the most part, fails to deliver the sustained weight loss it promises.

Women’s bodies are objectified, sexualized, and eroticized. A gin ad shows the image of the label projected on the minimally clad torso of a woman’s outstretched body. A woman’s color is depicted as a leopard, as if she were not fully human. Such images contribute to a cultural attitude that justifies violence against women; if they are objects or not human, the logic goes, then treating them violently is acceptable.

When ads seem to be objectifying men, men become more powerful while women remain passive, submissive, powerless, dependent. This power and subsequent link of the masculine with violence put men at risk by pushing them to repress their feelings. How men feel about women also reflects how they feel—and in many cases, contempt—about (what are considered) feminine qualities in themselves, qualities such as compassion, cooperation, nurturance, and intuition. Such contempt prevents these men from being fully human.

Sometimes the image in the ad is less important than the corporate structure behind it. For example, the Nike ad promoting an image of a female athlete hides the corporate exploitation of the Indonesian women who make Nike shoes.

Because of its pervasive, insidious nature, advertising keeps us “trapped in rigid roles.” To counter these influences, we need to promote media literacy that educates critical viewers. Since the primary purpose of the media is to deliver audiences to advertisers in a process called “renting [the] eyeballs” of the target audience, such education is essential. For Kilbourne, an active educated public would see themselves as citizens, not consumers, capable of living, as William Faulkner notes, “authentic freely chosen lives.”

“Assume the Position”—Patricia Hill Collins Speaks on Black Sexual Polities
by Terry Zawacki

In her introduction of Patricia Hill Collins, this year’s speaker for the March 20 Sojourner Truth Lecture, Marilyn McKenzie noted that black feminist thought is a “staple” in discussions about the intersections of race, gender, and class, and that Collins, a sociologist, has been doing significant work in these areas for a long time. Collins began her talk by asking the mostly student audience filling the Johnson Center Cinema not to put her and her ideas in a box, and, if they did, to realize that “that box is the one you came in with.” Collins’ talk focused on a chapter she’s working on for her current book, a chapter called “Assume the Position: Gender, Sexuality, and Violence.” She punctuated her talk with frequent conversational asides to engage the listeners.

Like Sojourner Truth, Collins said she is committed to black empowerment in the context of social justice because “when African Americans are empowered, everyone else is too.” As Collins sees it, the issues limiting the ability of African Americans to move forward now are related to gender and sexuality. We need a new liberatory black sexual politics, she said, which will address black agency in terms of the question, “What kinds of black men and black women do African Americans want to be at this (Continued on page 3)
From Print to Film: Beverly Lowry’s Crossed Over

"Death was my subject at the time," Beverly Lowry mused as she described her book Crossed Over: A Murder, A Memoir, in a presentation on February 20, delivered to a class of George Mason University English majors. First published in 1992 and recently republished in paperback, the book recounts Lowry’s relationship with Karla Faye Tucker, a young woman convicted and, later, executed for murder. Lowry found herself strangely drawn to newspaper photographs of Tucker, at “a time of shadows” following the death of her eighteen-year-old son Peter, killed in an unsolved hit-and-run incident.

Lowry’s unfolding relationship with Tucker is interspersed with flashbacks that deepen our knowledge of both women’s lives. The book traces the trajectories that brought them both to Texas Department of Corrections (now Criminal Justice), Tucker as a prisoner on death row and Lowry as her curious visitor and, soon, her friend. Lowry’s taut memoir is a search for meaning amidst the violence of Tucker’s life and the sudden loss of her troubled son. Crossed Over is also the subject of a made-for-television movie aired on CBS on March 3. In her lecture, Lowry recalled the jolting experience of seeing herself represented in the film, as actor Diane Keaton walks into the prison and announces, “I’m Beverly Lowry.” Jennifer Jason Leigh plays Karla Faye Tucker. The autobiographical persona of Lowry’s memoir is at once more street-smart and more vulnerable than Keaton’s anxious, vaguely tweedy character. The screen version capitulates to the pressure for closure that is common in popular genres, and, again, like much popular film, it keeps the story focused on middle-class characters. Crossed Over, then, becomes a story of the (Continued on page 7)

"Assume the Position"

(Continued from page 2) the historical moment?" Following from this, the social problems that need to be addressed are: 1) love relationships (we need to learn how to love “fully human black people,” not just television representations or the folks who live next door, but the black kid in the bad neighborhood in D.C.); 2) the HIV problem (we need a black sexual politics to deal with the issues around drug use and gender identity); 3) violence as it “permeates this culture” (violence is “an important piece of our culture—slavery was a violent institution.”)

In her book, Collins is working out two core ideas that are useful in formulating a new politics. One involves the use of the metaphors of “prison” (keeping people out of “our” spaces) and “the closet” (keeping people in their own spaces). These metaphors lead to certain political strategies related to “breaking out” (of prison) and “coming out” (of the closet). The second is an examination of the “illusion of racial integration”—those practices that contain and control black people, like television shows and commercials including black people “just like me,” and the symbolic inclusion of black authors in a syllabus while there are no black teachers in front of the class. Both of these illusions “substitute for the messy work of getting to know real black people.”

The remainder of Collins’ talk focused on the Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill trial as a “watershed” event because we learned that the former discourses we’d used to talk about race and gender didn’t work. “Why didn’t African Americans believe Hill?” and “Why did those who believed her refuse to support her?” To address these questions, Collins discussed the segregated discourses of race and gender and racism and rape, with lynching being a trope for black sexuality and for institutionalized castration, both public and powerful. Collins is interested in contemporary measures of social control and the current discourse around black women and sexualized violence. Black feminist scholarship challenges the history of black women as victims of black violence and is “coming forth to grapple with how a rape culture can be shifted.” We must break the “silence” about family violence, she asserted. Collins ended her presentation by discussing new versions of the prison and the closet. Rather than coming to conclusions, Collins’ talk was very much a working out of some of the “core issues” that concern her in her book in progress.
Spotlight on WMST Minor Troy Mickins, by Rebecca Walter

Every time Troy Mickins leaves my office, I feel a sense of rejuvenation; a wonderful trans- action of positive energy is exchanged. The 32-year old junior is a Philosophy major and Women's Studies minor. Mickins returned to Mason last year as a full-time student after having worked in the U.S. Patent Office for over eleven years. He is President of the Phi Alpha Delta Co-Ed Pre-Law Fraternity which is com- mitted to assisting those interested in pursuing law as a career, by organizing free LSAT prep tests and programs featuring speakers already in the field of law. Mickins works at the Office of Diversity Programs and Services where he helps promote events and assists with program coordination. He was asked to introduce the keynote speaker at the black student recognition gala this past February. He is taking an active role in Take Our Daughters to Work Day, sponsored by the Women's Studies Research and Resource Center, a national event that occurs on April 25. He was asked to introduce Patricia Hill Collins at this year's Third Annual Sojourner Truth Lecture, jointly sponsored by African American and Women's Studies.

Mickins is also the most active member and visible leader of the Men's Ally Group started by the Women's Center this summer. I ask him about his role in the group and he explains that he considers himself to be the psychological operations person. I ask him what this means. He tells me that he produces, posts and maintains all of the recruitment and advertising for the Men's Ally Group. When Troy mentions psychological operations, I think of something different. Mickins is always trying to creatively reach out to men, and trying to help them realize the signifi- cance of this group. The Men's Ally group has publicly announced their alliance to both the Women's Coalition and the Pride Alliance. This is unprecedented. This challenges stereotypes about gender and sexuality. This is bold. This, to me, is psychological operations.

Troy is also "Dad" to his six-year-old daughter, Troi. He often brings in the trinkets she makes him and the pictures she has drawn of the two of them, wearing matching t-shirts that say "I love you." He regularly complements Troi on her intellect, taking the focus away from her body, her image and her appearance.

I ask him why he chose to be a Women's Studies minor. After taking Debra Bergoffen's Feminist Theories Across the Disciplines, she "advised" him to switch from an IT to a WMST minor. When answering this question on a large scale, Troy tells me he wants his daughter to become and feel like a full member of soci- ety. He doesn't know what her sexuality is going to be, but he does realize she's black and female, possessing what he calls "two out of three strikes" against her. He wants Troi to grow up and feel part of society without having to compromise--unnecessarily--to participate. He also wants to heal himself and other men that struggle with having been so- cialized to be a certain way and realize that no one can actually live up to unreasonable standards as to what a man is supposed to be. He says that men are socialized to hold things in without communicating at all. The Men's Ally Group talks about male experiences, what it is like to grow up male and some of the myths and misconceptions they buy into about being male. He looks to So- journer Truth as a role model as someone who didn't sit on the sidelines, but who was active in pursuing her rights.

Troy tells me that he thinks outside his body, that his mind is not gendered. He be- lieves that even if he were born into a female body he would essentially be the same type of person he is today. After graduating he plans to attend law school and form a media company with his sister, with the hopes of publishing books and other media that may not otherwise get published in mainstream media. He wants to help marginalized folks out and help the next generation.

See why I am always rejuvenated?

Congratulations Graduating WMST Minors!

Elizabeth Kravetz is graduating with a BS in Psychology with a minor in WMST. An active member of the GMU Pride Alliance, and a proud co-president of Women's Coa- lition, Liz will be moving to NY in May to pursue a career in sex therapy.

Bethany Rohrer is graduating with a BA in Communication and a minor in WMST. She plans to return to New York City to work at a woman-owned firm for a few years before attending law school.

Julie Ryan is graduating with a BA in Communication and a minor in WMST.

Ashley Smith is graduating with a BA in English with a minor in Women's Studies and will begin working on her MA in Women's Studies next fall at The George Washing- ton University.
What’s Next—Nancy Weiss Hanrahan

The following article is excerpted from our incoming director’s statement of her vision for the future of Women’s Studies. Nancy will begin her term as Director in Fall 2002.

As I see them, the specific challenges facing the Women’s Studies program are how to attract students, how to build and sustain community, and how to support research. In addressing these issues, the link that feminism has forged between theory and practice serves us well. For example, I do not believe that we can attract students only through our outreach efforts. The issue of student enrollment in our minor is fundamentally an issue about what feminism means to a generation of students whose life experience is both radically different and yet subtly unchanged from that of most of the instructors in the program and the texts from which they teach. In other words, it is an intellectual and a political problem as well as a pragmatic one. Similarly, while no one has to convince me of the importance of ritual and of presence to community, we cannot sustain community on the basis of planning events and encouraging people to come. Community, especially among members of an academic group, is based on their having common projects and we need to think seriously about what these projects might be and how we articulate our goals to others. Finally, I believe that supporting research means much more than celebrating our scholarly achievements. We need to match research projects with available resources both within the university and without, and to consider collective research initiatives that can be undertaken in the name of the Center itself.

I think we all feel the distance that separates second wave feminism from the life experience of our students...I’d like to suggest that we put this at the top of the agenda. . . . I envision a series of meetings with small groups of faculty from different departments to hear more about how the problem looks and feels in the classroom. Small group meetings would be a step toward community building, bringing in faculty who may not regularly attend WMST meetings or events but who might see the potential in participating in a project oriented toward specific workplace concerns. Once we can articulate some of the issues, I would ask University Life to support a mini-conference on this topic during Women’s History Month as part of its faculty development initiatives.

We need to exploit the research potential of the Women’s Center. . . . One collective project of particular interest to me would be a research initiative in global feminisms. As an “international project, it might be in line for University resources as part of the 2007 plan, and would build on the collective work that WMST faculty did in generating the MA course on Women and Global Issues as well as on the work done by Women’s Studies faculty on the MacArthur grant for a project in East Central Europe last year. And there are certainly pressing issues now with respect to feminism in Islamic countries, the role of women in the transition to democracy (and capitalism) in East Central Europe, and women’s rights as generalized political rights in many parts of the world.

Diversity is an issue we need to consider in all Women’s Studies programs and it is vital to the public profile of the Center. Yet I think that Women’s Studies has another important role to play, and that is to make the case for what women students on campus need. No significant reevaluation of the needs of women on campus has been conducted in recent years. A new assessment of those needs would not only help us better serve our students but also would create a wonderful research opportunity for interested groups of faculty and students.

We cannot solve the practical problems of how to attract students, how to build community and how to generate resources without confronting the issues of who we are, how we understand feminism, and how we hope to articulate it to a new generation of students. From my perspective, the most important functions of the Director beyond the day-to-day administrative tasks are to create the possibility for a sustained discussion of these matters on the part of the Women’s Studies faculty and to generate the resources necessary to support its initiatives in teaching, research and service.

Hanrahan is associate professor of sociology, where she teaches feminist theory, sociological theory, and sociology of culture. She received her PhD from the New School University in 1994. Hanrahan joined the faculty of Women’s Studies in 1997.

Women “Techies” at the Center—Erica Adegbite

The new student group Advancing Women in Technology (AWIT) joins the Women’s Coalition and the Men’s Ally group as an affiliate of the Women’s Center. Loren Nadres and Nudrat Sultana formed AWIT to provide a place for women majoring in information technology, computer science and engineering to discuss their experiences and develop programs that address the unique issues facing women who decide to enter these male dominated fields. The Women’s Center will serve as a resource and a source of support for AWIT. We see exciting possibilities in this affiliation. AWIT students and women and studies students (traditionally humanities students) bring different perspectives to the table. Until now they have not brought their perspectives to each other. With the planned joint meeting of AWIT and the Women’s Coalition later this semester this will change. The Center looks forward to seeing AWIT students in our classes and at our programs. We anticipate developing courses that addresses the interests of AWIT students, e.g. in women science and technology. In welcoming AWIT to the Center we also welcome the opportunity to enrich our programs as we reach out to other communities of women students and faculty.

"I wanted you to know that [this class unit] on violence and violent stories is a very fragile terrain for me. It took most of a day for me to open the Lawless book. If I am particularly quiet during class, it's not because I'm not interested or have not read the assignment, it's because I work hard at keeping certain beasts locked away, and this subject has the power to unlock those doors." --E-mail from one of my students as we prepared to discuss *Women Escaping Violence* (used with permission).

Elaine Lawless' newest ethnographic study of women's narratives asks readers to listen to women who escape to shelters and begin--the "begin," here, is crucial--to tell their stories of abuse. Lawless challenges the standard reception of women's abuse narratives, asking readers to see what social workers have called the "cycle of violence" as a misleading "master narrative" and to re-envision these fragile, newly-emerging stories.

Having volunteered in and conducted fieldwork in Missouri women's shelters, Lawless (who briefly refers to her own experiences as a survivor of abuse) describes her interaction with the women, discusses stories whose tellers must remain unnamed, and presents extended life stories of four women who agreed to be tape-recorded. In chapters entitled "Describing the Un-speakable" and "Hearing Silence," Lawless calls readers to carefully attend to these often halting, seemingly incomplete narratives. Using the insights of such cultural critics as Walter Benjamin, Maurice Blanchot, and Elaine Scarry, she urges readers to re-think, to re-name what may seem like a "narrative failure," a piece of the story left untold by an "incompetent" narrator. By gazing directly "toward the disruption, toward the 'tear' in the 'fabric' of the narrative" and reading the silence of that moment, listeners can hear instead a woman telling moving toward agency and embodiment, a woman escaping abuse and beginning to heal (59).

Employing Janice Haaken's "transformative remembering," Lawless suggests that the telling of such stories is significant in itself, for in these narrative performances, women claim "physical and auditory space" and re-create their own selves (156).

GMU Professor of English and Women's Studies Devon Hodges is co-author of this brave and nuanced new work. The book opens by acknowledging the ironies of the subject: incest, very recently "unspeakable", is now perceived by some as "talked about too much" (1), maybe even fabricated by vulnerable women duped by their therapists into "remembering" abuse that never happened. In a thoughtful, self-reflective introduction, Doane and Hodges recount how they themselves were influenced by contemporary controversies about trauma and recovered memory. "We . . . assumed that our response to [incest stories] should be to decide on their truth or falsehood. After all, because incest is defined as a horrifying crime and evil

"For us, incest is not simply an intrapsychic event, and it is not simply a narrative invention."  
Doane and Hodges, *Telling Incest*

act, the credibility of an accuser and the factual basis of the accusation are matters of serious concern. But focusing on truth and falsehood kept us measuring the credibility of narrators and the credibility of audiences rather than asking why our response was so constrained" (3). Their own approach carves out a new interpretive space: "For us, incest is not simply an intrapsychic event, and it is not simply a narrative invention" (5). Their chapters outline shifting frames for talking about incest, as revealed in fiction and nonfiction. The authors begin by examining early treatments of incest in fiction—Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970)—and then follow incest stories through the second wave of feminism in the 1970s. A therapeutic telling of incest dominated the 1980s, they argue, followed by a backlash in the 1990s characterized, once again, by suspicion of the veracity of the teller. Doane and Hodges are themselves skeptical of the claims of those who would make incest a paradigm for all experiences of power and inequality. At the same time, they are skeptical of the sweeping critique advanced by those who would—once again—cast doubt on the accounts of those who dare to "tell incest."

Writing about incest, Hodges notes, inevitably drew her into the vehement public debate that pits "false memory" against the felt experience of incest survivors. She reflected, "After talking to friends, students, and colleagues about the evolving history of incest narratives, I regularly found myself listening to quiet, personal, and very painful stories about incest experiences. These face-to-face encounters gave me a deeper understanding of my responsibilities as a writer and researcher."

—Barbara Melosh

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**Crossed Over**

(Continued from page 3)

writer's anguished response to her son's death, portraying her relationship with Karla Faye as the vehicle for catharsis and redemption.

The book is more complicated. Lowry proceeds by indirect and provocative juxtaposition, and the book's underlying questions are never fully resolved. Lowry does not offer a settled account of what motivated and sustained this powerful connection; or how Tucker's story is related to Lowry's painful mothering and loss of her son. With tough-minded integrity, she refuses to explain what is, perhaps, in the end, inexplicable. In the new preface to *Crossed Over*, published in 2002 by Vintage, she writes simply, "Karla Faye Tucker was my friend and I loved her."

Beverly Lowry is associate professor of English. She leads the new nonfiction concentration in the Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing program, nationally ranked for its excellence in poetry and fiction. She is the author of six novels and numerous short stories.

—Barbara Melosh
**Vagina Monologues Draws Enthusiastic Crowds**

The *Vagina Monologues*, directed by Mason student Michael Bryant and featuring Mason students Jennifer Douglas-Craig, Millie Langford, Lorraine Ressegger, and Monica Simons, was presented in three sold-out performances on February 8, 9, and 10. The show included Lynda Carter of Wonder Woman fame, who took the stage declaring, "We’ve got a great bunch of vaginas in the house." The show was sponsored by Health Education Services, Sexual Assault Services, and the Women’s Studies Research and Resource Center. Proceeds of the show will benefit the newly created GMU Victims of Violence Fund and Women for Women International. The show generated over $14,000.

— Rebecca Walter