

## **History of the Women's Studies Program**

[The Following history was recounted in a luncheon speech by Women's Studies Program Director Frédérique Chevillot in celebration of the Twentieth Anniversary of the Program.]

***Women's Studies 20th Anniversary Conference:  
"What's Right and What's Left to Do?"  
University of Denver  
Friday, November 7, 2003***

“A Short Herstory of the Women’s Studies Program at DU”

Today, I want to tell you the story... about the history... or rather herstory of the Women’s Studies Program at DU. It started twenty years ago... Where were the women at DU in the 1970s?

### **The Founding Mother: Jodi Wetzel**

In the early 1970s, women faculty at DU united to protest salary inequities, to help students with sexual harassment cases, and to provide support in correcting difficult working conditions for the largely female staff. The group became the Committee for Women on Campus (CFCW). DU women managed to make small gains, but the administration of that era was not very receptive to many of the issues raised by the Committee for Women on Campus. After quite a bit of tense negotiation, a Women’s Resource Center was created, and Jodi Wetzel became its full-time director.

When DU acquired the Colorado Women’s College campus in the early 80s, Chancellor Pritchard asked Jodi Wetzel to review the curriculum and decide what was to remain and what was to go. Her report indicated that the Weekend College was the important thing to keep—it was later to become The Women's College. The agreement with Colorado Women’s College trustees included a commitment to women’s education, as well as the establishment of a second Women’s Resource Center, both of which were now run by Jodi Wetzel. Jodi initiated two independent women's programs on the Colorado Women’s College campus: Passages, a now-defunct program for displaced homemakers, and HERS Mid-Atlantic, later re-named HERS Mid-America, a self-funded program which sponsors professional development activities designed to improve the status of women in higher education. HERS Mid-America is still thriving today.

However, due to the financial difficulties confronting DU soon thereafter, a number of drastic measures were taken, and both Women’s Resource Centers were closed. Women faculty were particularly affected by budget cuts, as departments largely staffed by and serving women were closed, including the Departments of Nursing and Speech Pathology, and the Graduate School of Librarianship. Another Program was also to end at that time, the American Studies Program; but in disappearing, the American Studies Program actually gave rise to Women’s Studies. On October 7, 1983, Jodi Wetzel sent a memo to Dean Purcell, and to the Arts and Sciences Faculty Committee on the subject of the "Conversion of the American Studies Program to the

Women's Studies Program." And I will directly quote from the first two paragraphs of this founding document:

*"Proposal: It is proposed by the American Studies faculty that the American Studies Program be converted to a Women's Studies program effective July 1, 1984. With such a program, students would be able to declare Women's Studies as a second major, replacing the American Studies second major that now exists.*

*Rationale: Traditionally, though half of human history has been lived by women, scholars have paid little systematic attention to women's lives, either omitting women's experience, assuming it to be the same as men's, or confining it to narrow interpretations informed by stereotypic views of gender roles. Though both biologically and culturally women's experience has been different from men's, it has not had critical examination."*

Thus was born the Women's Studies Program at DU on July 1, 1984. A number of directors have preceded me in the leadership role I occupy today. I would like to take a moment to acknowledge their accomplishments.

#### **Rita Braitto: 1984 – 1985**

Rita Braitto taught in the Department of Sociology at the University of Denver from 1973 to 1985, serving as the first Director of the Women's Studies Program on July 1, 1984. However, Dr. Braitto left the University of Denver in 1985, to accept a position at the University of Missouri—St. Louis. She all too soon died in 1990, after an early retirement. Dr. Braitto was a very special human being—a feminist, activist, and scholar with wide-ranging interests. She worked relentlessly to improve the status of women at DU and throughout the world. In May 1995, Anne Mahoney established in honor of our distinguished colleague, the "Rita Braitto Award" which is given each year to an outstanding Women's Studies student.

#### **Sarah Nelson: 1985 – 1987**

In 1985, Sarah Nelson, from the department of Anthropology, took on the responsibilities of the Women's Studies program at a time when many academic budgets were being cut. Sarah actively recruited faculty from various departments such as Anthropology, Economics, English, Languages and Literatures, History, Judaic Studies, Mass Communications, Political Science, Psychology, Religious Studies, Sociology, and the Graduate School of Social Work. Sarah asked Susan Sadler to develop the first course on the "Biology of Women." Susan taught the course as an adjunct instructor for three years before joining the Department of Biological Sciences on a full-time basis. Through cross-listed courses, Sarah strove for and fulfilled her vision that all departments – not just WSTU – would implement and promote the awareness and education of women. Sarah directed the Women's Studies Program while at the same assuming the roles of Chair of a struggling Anthropology Department, and President of the Committee for Women on Campus.

#### **M.E. Warlick: 1987 – 1990**

M.E. Warlick, from the School of Arts and Art History, first proposed a Women's Studies minor in March of 1988, which was approved and instituted in February of 1989. She continued Sarah Nelson's vision of furthering WSTU faculty's education and awareness of women's issues at DU. For instance, in her article, "Women's Studies: A DU Case History," from the May 1989 Faculty Forum, M.E. Warlick pointed out the need for universities to reassess how women and minorities are educated. She advocated "a cross-divisional integration of gender issues into the main curriculum" (4). She also proposed the integration of WSTU classes into the core curriculum and upper division courses. Under M.E.'s auspices, the Women's Studies Program received a \$3,000 grant from The College to sponsor "Integrating Women's Studies into the Curriculum," including a day-long symposium to talk about those issues. In December 1991, M.E. presented an "Introductory Proposal" for a Paid Full-Time Director of Women's Studies.

### **Terry Reynolds: 1990 – 1992**

In taking over the directorship of WSTU in Fall 1990, Terry Reynolds, from the department of Anthropology, had two goals: 1) "to achieve institutional presence and stability for the Program," and 2) "To make DU aware of the fact that the 'women's battle' was not yet won" (October 11, 1999 – letter to Frédérique Chevillot). Terry fought for and achieved a 'physical' presence for WSTU, and received office space in the Mary Reed building, as well as a small operating budget. She additionally acquired two undergraduate work-study positions for the Program. Terry created the WSTU Library using donated books from other departments. In 1992, Terri formally resigned from her position after two years to highlight the need for a paid director of women's studies, who up to that point had received a small stipend, but no reduction in teaching load, to direct the program. She brought together a committee of former directors and faculty members who developed a proposal for a director and an administrative assistant which they presented to the Provost and the Dean of Arts, Humanities and Social Studies. The administration agreed to a half-time director and a few hours of administrative assistance.

### **Anne Mahoney: 1992 – 1995**

Anne Mahoney was the first "paid" director who received a half-time reduction of her teaching load to direct Women's Studies. The Mary Reed office space had been re-allocated for another purpose, so Women's Studies was homeless again. The Sociology Department agreed to house Women's Studies in the back half of a large computer lab. The administration provided money for two Graduate Teaching Assistants for special projects. The possibility of setting up a graduate certificate in Women's Studies was explored, but proved to be infeasible at that time. Anne worked to expand women's studies to include interested faculty and graduate students in all parts of the university. She worked with The Women's College to establish a minor and, as part of this process, negotiated higher adjunct pay for instructors teaching women's studies in the traditional undergraduate program. During 1994-95 WSTU was awarded the Leo Block professorship and brought Alison Wylie, a feminist philosopher of science, to the DU campus for the year.

### **Sieglinde Lug: 1995 – 1999**

Thanks to Anne Mahoney's efforts to increase and stabilize the Women's Studies budget, Sieglinde Lug's first priority became to negotiate and set up an office space and lounge for the program. Under Sieglinde's watch, the Women's Studies Program found a space of its own on the third floor of the formerly named General Classroom Building (our present Sturm Hall). In 1996, Sieglinde Lug instituted quarterly half-day workshops at the Phipps Mansion. These workshops focused on themes such as women and ethnic diversity in the academy, feminist methodology, international feminist perspectives and feminist ethics. During the 1996 – 1997 school year, the Leo Block Professorship was given to Robin Morgan, well-known feminist theorist and activist. Throughout the year, WSTU organized a number of activities involving Robin. In January of 1997, Sieglinde instituted the monthly "research-sharing" pizza and soda luncheons for faculty and students. In 1999, Sieglinde conducted and compiled a comprehensive WSTU Self-Study and Assessment for the North Central Accreditation Endeavor, an invaluable document for the history of our program.

### **Frédérique Chevillot: 1999 – 2005**

When I got on-board, the Women's Studies Program had been well established by my predecessors. Learning the history of the program, I realized that I was actually standing on the shoulders of a number of other Women's Studies Directors who had worked very hard to make it much easier for me to serve. In the summer of 2000 the WSTU Program moved from the General Classroom Building to its present more spacious location. I continued the well-established tradition of the quarterly Faculty Research Series and the Faculty Workshops. In Spring 2000, the first volume of *Ruminations: Stories of Women Told by Those They have Inspired* was published in celebration of Women's History Month, with the financial support of the DU Women's Coalition. In Fall 2001 the WSTU Newsletter became available on-line, as well as on paper upon request! In an effort to create a Virtual Women's Resource Center, the Women's Studies Website was up-graded to offer a number of links of interest to WSTU students, staff, and faculty. A catalogue of all the books and videos available in the WSTU office was put on-line along with an annotated catalogue of all the videos of interest to Women's and Gender Studies available at the Penrose Library. Thanks to a number of co-sponsored events in the past few years, the WSTU Program enjoys close connections with the Women's College, the Center for Multicultural Excellence, the Center for Judaic Studies, the Leadership Program, the Honors Program, the DU Women's Coalition—and more particularly with the very dynamic Undergraduate and Graduate Women's Councils, the DU Women's Conference, the Office of Internationalization, and now, ever more closely, with the College of Law.

After a series of reflective Faculty workshops in AY 02-03, momentum was reached and ballots were cast in favor of changing the name of the Women's Studies Program to the Gender and Women's Studies Program. This is a bold, inclusive, and positive move for our Program and I am very proud of, and grateful to the Women's Studies Faculty at DU for having taken this step forward.

Now on to the good news—and there is no bad news. At the end of this academic year, I will step down from my position as Director of the Women's Studies Program. It is good news; it is good news for me, for 5 years of service to the program is a good long time, but I feel the urge to return to my first passion: Women Writing in French. It is also good news for all of us: a position

of leadership is available, take it!. The next director of the women's studies program at DU could well be among us today; she or he may not have heard the call, yet. I am confident that he or she will. By the end of the day, we, you will have formulated a road-map, a blue print for the next director of Women's Studies to find inspiration from.

Please, join me in expressing our appreciation to all the former directors of the Women's Studies Program who are among us today. Unfortunately, Jody Wetzel who was here this morning could not join us for lunch; Sarah Nelson is, once again, traveling the world, and Terry Reynolds could unfortunately not join us [And if I had read my email messages that morning, I would have said: "Unfortunately, Terry could not join us today, but I just received an email message from her this morning, and she is with fully with us in spirit! And I would have quoted a passage from her note!]

However, we are very happy to have M.E. Warlick, Anne Mahoney, and Sieglinde Lug, with us today, standing for all of us. Thank you for your generous and committed hard work! [Then, my (part-time!) assistant got up and gave each of the former director of Women's Studies at DU a copy of Toni Morrison' latest novel, *Love...* as a token of our feminist gratitude.] Your very own copy is on its way!