Edith Kreeger Wolf lecture series in GSS
Sini Anderson, Clare Hemmings and Elizabeth Grosz

Honoring Alex Owen
GSS celebrates the foundational work of retiring faculty member
It’s been a year of many transitions in Gender and Sexuality Studies. I took over a thriving program from departing Director, Mary Weisman. It was an exciting but challenging fall. Shortly thereafter, we learned that Alex Owen, one of our core faculty members, would retire in summer 2015. This news was greeted with real sadness as well as a desire to recognize Alex’s impact on the program and to continue to build on all that she accomplished during her tenure at Northwestern University. This spring, we collaborated with the History Department in designing a grand celebration of Alex’s scholarship, pedagogy, and institution building in a day-long conference featuring her former students and a panel of GSS faculty, led by Tessie Liu and Jeffrey Masten, who reviewed the program’s history and Alex’s central role in it. Soon, you will be able to see their thoughtful remarks on the program website.

In December, the Advisory Board met to review the state of GSS – which has been highly successful in adding more courses to our roster and attracting more students, both graduate and undergraduate, to them– and began discussions about an upcoming faculty search, which will be led by Mary Weisman, who has generously agreed to step in as Acting Director next year while I am on academic leave at the National Humanities Center. In keeping with our focused attention on relations between pasts and the futures they make possible, our Kreider Wolf speaker’s series this year featured filmmaker Sini Anderson, producer and director of Wolf, as well as Kathleen Hanna and Riot Grrrl feminism of the 1990s, as well as Clare Hemmings from the London School of Economics and Elizabeth Grosz from Duke. Each in her own way addressed the question of how to tell feminist, or gender issues; the other will fund research projects that address LGBT or sexuality issues. Substantial or recurring donations may result in a named award.

Please send donations to:

Gender and Sexuality Studies Program
Northwestern University
1800 Sherman, 4th Fl.
Evanston, IL
60208-2211

Janice Radway, Director of Gender & Sexuality Studies
GSS celebrates the work of Alex Owen

Professor Alex Owen came to Northwestern University in 1992 as Associate Professor of History and Women’s Studies and as one of the first two tenure-line joint appointments in the newly established Women’s Studies Program. Alex has taught one of our two core courses, “Roots of Feminism,” since her arrival, designed one of our first upper-division seminars in sexuality studies, “Sexuality and Its Discontents,” and developed a wildly popular graduate seminar in “Women’s and Gender History.” By the late 1990s, Alex and members of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Women’s Studies Program had secured resources for new course development, faculty-graduate seminars, and new rotating faculty positions in the program and she became the founding Director of the vastly expanded and newly renamed Gender Studies Studies Program in 2000. In 2011, Alex and Mary Dietz co-chaired a committee tasked with redesigning the undergraduate curriculum to reflect our ongoing, evolving, and expanding commitments to feminism(s) in conjunction with sexuality studies and in 2012 we established a standalone undergraduate major in the newly renamed Gender and Sexuality Studies Program.

Alex announced her retirement this year and on May 29th the History Department and Gender and Sexuality Studies collaborated on a daylong conference in Alex’s honor. In a two-part panel entitled “Building Feminist Futures,” GSS faculty members offered comments on Alex’s central role in building a thriving GSS program sustained by a dedicated community of scholars at Northwestern. We include some excerpts from the panel below.

“You’ve heard a lot about Alex’s course ‘Roots of Feminism’ in which the changing meaning of feminism is intellectually and politically built into students’ understanding of the imbination of feminist critical engagement with successive Western cultural, social, and political systems and theories. Alex’s own formation is significant as well. Being part of the long moment when British Marxist feminism turned to psychoanalysis — first Freudian and then Lacanian — without abandoning the social (I’m thinking of scholars like Juliet Mitchell, Jacqueline Rose, and historian Sally Alexander), this training has played a foundational role in the kind of institutional leadership that Alex has offered. In many respects, her roster of classes anticipated our eventual direction. I’m reminded that we relied on her other signature undergrad class “Sexuality and Its Discontents” to introduce students to the other P-word — Foucault. So, while the “and” between gender and sexuality studies makes it seem like an additive procedure, it really is not. The appellation should focus us on the tensions instead. We need the “and” because gender and sexuality are not reducible to each other. We need both to set them in dialogue. As we celebrate Alex’s role in building GSS, we need to recognize that Alex’s theoretical pellation should focus us on the tensions instead. We need the—Tessie Liu, Assoc. Prof. in History and GSS

...reminded that we relied on her other signature undergrad class “Sexuality and Its Discontents” to introduce students to the other P-word — Foucault. So, while the “and” between gender and sexuality studies makes it seem like an additive procedure, it really is not. The appellation should focus us on the tensions instead. We need the “and” because gender and sexuality are not reducible to each other. We need both to set them in dialogue. As we celebrate Alex’s role in building GSS, we need to recognize that Alex’s theoretical pellation should focus us on the tensions instead. We need the—Tessie Liu, Assoc. Prof. in History and GSS

I have never heard Alex describe “Roots of Feminism” as the crown of our undergraduate curriculum, though we as her colleagues often have, like “Advanced Feminist Theory” at the graduate level, “Roots” is the magnetic pole around which all our GSS courses at the frame of reference each student holds in common. That differs from saying “Roots of Feminism” or feminism as a whole... —Jeffrey Masten, Prof. in English and GSS
Edith Kreeger Wolf Lectures
This year’s Edith Kreeger Wolf lecturers: Sini Anderson, Clare Hemmings and Elizabeth Grosz

The Edith Kreeger Wolf Endowment brings scholars, professionals, and public figures to Northwestern, with the goal of deepening students’ familiarity with accomplishments women have brought to their fields of scholarship, the arts, public services, and the professions.

SINI ANDERSON’S THE PUNK SINGER

By Leigh Goldstein (PhD Candidate, Screen Cultures Program & GSS)

During her visit this fall, Documentary Filmmaker Sini Anderson screened her feature film, The Punk Singer (2013), which chronicles the feminist commitments and artistic achievements of Kathleen Hanna. Hanna is perhaps most widely known as the lead singer of Bikini Kill, and as a pivotal figure in the 1990s feminist punk rock movement Riot Grrrl. Anderson’s film provides an extensive portrait of that era of Hanna’s life, incorporating archival footage of some of the band’s landmark performances, but also explores Hanna’s post-Bikini Kill musical projects and her more recent struggle with Lyme disease. Toby Vail, Kim Gordon, Allison Wolfe, and Tavi Geverson are among the many talking heads who surface in the film, volunteering their perspectives on Hanna’s story and its feminist motivations. It is Hanna, however, who amounts to the most eloquent and magnetic commentator. In explaining her move away from punk rock and towards electronic, for example, Hanna reads the musical transition as an innovation in her ongoing commitment to feminist politics: “In Bikini Kill I was singing to an elusive asshole male that was fucking the world over and I was allowing other women to watch me do that, and I really wanted to start directly singing to other women.”

After the screening, Anderson fielded questions about the film’s archive, explaining that she drew on institutional resources, such as university zine collections, as well as personal collections, to give a sense of Riot Grrrl’s visual aesthetics. She also offered a brief description of her follow-up film, So Sick, a documentary about Lyme disease. Framing the film as an outgrowth of The Punk Singer, Anderson explained that though she had spent years having their symptoms misdiagnosed and their appeals for treatment ignored, she was singing to an elusive asshole male that was fucking the world over and I was allowing other women to watch me do that, and I really wanted to start directly singing to other women. She also explained her struggles with Lyme disease and her more recent struggle with Lyme disease.

ELIZABETH GROSZ ON IRIGARAY, ETHICS, AND ARTS

By Jeffrey Kosbie (JD/PhD, Sociology)

On May 5, 2015, Elizabeth Grosz, Professor of Women’s Studies at Duke University, delivered a talk at Northwestern entitled “Irigaray, Ethics, and Arts: Ontologies, Topologies, Temporalities.” Speaking to a packed room, Grosz used Irigaray as a starting point to rethink the notion of sexual difference. In a wide-ranging lecture, Grosz sought to demonstrate how masculine features of science, the arts, and philosophy shape how we know sexual difference and proposed to use the “losers” of intellectual history to imagine new futures and new ways of becoming. In particular, Grosz suggested that we turn to pre-Socratic philosophy as a source of imagining an alternative philosophy, one that focuses on the interconnectedness of things and disciplines, as a way of thinking through sexual difference without relying on the assumption of individuality.

In a lively exchange during the Q & A session, Grosz and audience members debated what we mean by the term “culture” and the extent to which cultures shape our understandings and perceptions of sexual difference. Grosz argued that the ontological experience of sexual difference precedes our cultural interpretation of it, pointing out that every culture has at least two sexes, and every culture must address the question of how to live with others.
Faculty Updates


Kai M. Green (SPAN post-doc) received a faculty research grant to conduct research at the Schomburg on Black Trans* archival methods and was named in The Nation as one of six scholars reimagining Black politics.

Jan Radway (Communications) won a year-long fellowship to the National Humanities Center in North Carolina, where she will be in residence next year to work on her book, Girls, Zones, and their Travels: Reimagining Subjectivity and Sociality in the 1990s and Beyond. She delivered the keynote address, “ Riot Grrl History, Underground Itineraries, and Girl Zine Networks,” at the Annual Meeting of the British Association for American Studies and delivered lectures on girl zines at the University of Kansas, Western Illinois University, and the University of Washington. She continues to serve as co-chair of the Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession of the Modern Language Association and was recently elected as Women in the Profession Delegate to the MLA General Assembly. The 2014 meeting of the Popular Culture Association included a double session devoted to discussion of Radway’s Reading the Romance, 30 years after it was first published.

Gregory Ward (Linguistics and Philosophy) received a grant from the Hewlett Curricular Fellowship Program to adapt his newly-launched Language and Gender course (GSS 234) to satisfy the proposed Social Inequalities and Diversity (SID) requirement at Northwestern.

Making bio-sexual subjects

Postdoc Aaron Norton explores male circumcision campaigns for HIV prevention

By Stefan Vogler (PhD Candidate, Sociology & GSS)

On October 30th, incoming SPAN Postdoctoral Fellow Aaron Norton delivered a talk entitled “You mean you’re not circumcised? Male circumcision campaigns for HIV prevention and the making of Bio-sexual Subjects.” Norton examined how efforts to convince African men to get circumcised created new conceptions of risk. What ethical tensions arise when a part of the body, the foreskin, becomes “risky”? Ultimately, he argued that campaigns engender new understandings of “good” and “bad” bio-sexual subjects.

In the early-2000s, three randomized controlled trials conducted in Africa were stopped early when they revealed that the circumcised men in the trials were at substantially lower risk of contracting HIV. Subsequently, in 2007, the World Health Organization officially recommended male circumcision as an HIV prevention strategy. Since that time, Norton argued, initiatives in several African countries have (continued on page 9)
positioned circumcision as the ethical choice to protect not only oneself but also one’s partners and community from unnecessary HIV risk. In this context, to not be circumcised becomes both stigmatizing and the mark of a bad bi-sexual subject. Whereas limiting one’s sexual partners and using condoms may have once been enough to be a good bi-sexual subject, now the good (male) subject should also be circumcised. In this way, sexual risk takes on a new valence by problematizing the body itself. Norton closed with some ethical considerations, including the possibility that circumcision campaigns re-stigmatize (or perpetuate the stigmatization of) black bodies as sexually risky and the difficulties of translating population-level risk statistics to the individual-level.

Out of the darkness
Postdoc Kai M. Green explores the "darkness" to illuminate the histories of Black queer communities

By Theo Greene (PhD Candidate, Sociology & GSS)

On October 16th, SPAN Postdoctoral Fellow Kai M. Green delivered a talk entitled “Into the Darkness: A Quare (Re)Membering of Los Angeles in a Time of Crises.” Based on his dissertation research of Black queer communities in South Los Angeles, Green explores the various ways in which Black queer communities created, appropriated, and reimagined Black queer space since the start of the AIDS crisis in 1981. The AIDS crisis further exacerbated the material and ideological struggles within Black communities like South Los Angeles already plagued by drug abuse, gang violence, and larger economic disinvestment. Despite the complete erasure of Black queer communities in mainstream responses to AIDS during the 1980s and 1990s, Black Angelinos produced “technologies of survival” to support, educate, chronicle, and preserve Black queer experiences in ways that complicate traditional misunderstandings about both the mutual exclusivity of Blackness and queerness and the singularity of the Black experience more broadly.

Drawing on a combination of qualitative methods, Green theorizes “darkness” as a frame for understanding processes associated with the production and maintenance of Black queer geographies in South Los Angeles. First, darkness functions not only as the physical embodiment of Blackness, but also the physical manifestation of HIV/AIDS. Green parallels the stigma and discrimination associated with Black bodies to queer bodies marked by AIDS in the early days of the crisis. Second, darkness represents the intellectual void created by scholarship on both gay and Black Los Angeles, both of which completely overlook the production and maintenance of Black LGBT community spaces in Los Angeles. Finally, the darkness operates as a site of situated knowledge, where the recovery of a Black queer past calls into question the nature of knowledge production itself. Yet to relegate or dismiss darkness as a negative or a void is to miss the point entirely. Black LGBT Angelinos, argues Green, draw productively on darkness as pivotal to creating, remembering, and preserving local histories.

The multidimensionality of darkness as a theoretical framework enables Green to marshal an impressive array of evidence to highlight the political and socio-cultural diversity of Black people, Black (queer) space, and community. “Writing the land” in spaces like South L.A.’s Annual Kingdom Day Parade or in Black Churches do more than make Black LGBT folks visible to the broader Black community; they also reenergize the political possibility of sites that have become largely symbolic in the post-King/Age of Obama. At the same time, the specific sites that Black LGBT communities create for themselves also draw attention to efforts within Black queer communities to understand and articulate difference. Green’s talk produced an engaging discussion about the epistemological possibilities of “darkness” as a viable source of knowledge production in the social sciences.

Kai Green, SPAN post-doc [Photo courtesy of Jeremy Cornelius]
GSS Graduate Program Year in Review

By Nick Davis (Director of Graduate Studies GSS)

The GSS Certificate and the GSS and SPAN Graduate Clusters continue to enroll more students than ever. To our delight, the rigorous interdisciplinary work these students do in these two curricular tracks keeps reaping well-earned rewards, including tenure-track jobs at Bowdoin College (Theo Greene), the University of Southern California (Carla Della Gatta), and Tufts University (we miss you, Kareem Khubchandani!). Equally exciting are the prestigious fellowships our students earned from organizations like the American Council of Learned Societies, the Center for European Studies, the Chabraja Center for Historical Studies, the Newberry Library, and the Sexualities Project at Northwestern. Our grads presented new work at multiple conferences near and far—sometimes quite far!—and sustained vital intellectual and artistic traditions at nearby events like QueerTopia!, Queergasm, the Chicago-wide Engendering Change conference, and the annual SPAN Symposium. This fall, we will welcome four new Cluster Fellowship recipients into GSS and SPAN, in the fields of African American Studies, Anthropology, Art History, and Theatre and Drama, joining the dozens of other students across multiple departments, programs, and colleges that already make GSS such a thriving community for graduate training.

Graduate Student Updates >>>

Clare Forstie (PhD Candidate, Sociology & GSS Certificate) was awarded a University Fellowship at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, where she is currently teaching, conducting research for her dissertation, and facilitating programming for the Doyle Center for Gender and Sexuality. She presented at the American Sociological Association’s 2014 Annual Meeting and at the Eastern Sociological Society Annual Meeting in 2015, where she presented preliminary results from her dissertation on LGBTO friendships. Her book chapter, “Trigger Warnings,” is forthcoming in Queer Studies and Education: Critical Concepts for the Twenty-First Century, edited by Nelson Rodriguez, Edward Brockenbrough, Jennifer Ingrey, and Wayne Martinez.

Carla Della Gatta (PhD, Interdisciplinary Program in Theatre and Drama & GSS Certificate) was a GSS Teaching Assistant this year and designed and taught a new course on “Latina Theatre & Feminisms” in Winter quarter. She will begin a tenure-track position as Assistant Professor of Critical Studies - Theatre at the University of Southern California in the fall.

Jeff Koscie (JD/PhD, Sociology) successfully defended his dissertation, “Contested Identities: A History of LGBT Legal Mobilization and the Ethics of Impact,” in April. This semester, he plans to move to San Francisco, take the California Bar Exam and apply for litigation jobs that will allow him to use his background in the legal and policy issues that impact LGBTQ communities.

Rae Langes (PhD Candidate, Performance Studies & GSS Certificate) staged Bound by Other Ties, which interrogates relationships between state regulation of gender nonconforming people and queer kinship, for the Chicago Home Theater Festival (see www.chicagohfnt.org). Rae received a SPAN Summer Research Grant, a SPAN Graduate Student Conference Travel funding and the Buffet Institute Graduate Student Conference Travel Award this past year. Next year, Rae will be a Teaching Assistant for GSS and will teach a new course on “Gender, Sexuality, and Monstrosity in Contemporary U.S. Culture” in winter 2016.

SPAN Co-Director Steven Epstein and Angela Leone at SPAN mentoring group [Photo courtesy of Jeremy Cornelius]

GSS Undergraduate Program Year in Review

By Amy Partridge (Assoc. Director of Undergraduate Studies GSS)

We congratulate our 33 graduating seniors and look forward to following their future trajectories and contributions to the field! Special kudos to our five senior thesis students who were all awarded honors by WCAS and to Bea Sullivan-Knoff who was awarded the Betty Jo Teeter Dobbs Prize for her thesis entitled “Shaping Bodies, Shaping Society: German trans law, the effects of socialization and sex-amending legislation on body image and health in the trans community.” To find out more about our students’ many accomplishments this year see the thesis abstracts, updates, and the full list of award winners below.

We continue to offer a wide range of courses at the undergraduate level and are pleased to announce a number of exciting new additions to the undergraduate curriculum in 2015-16. Next year’s GSS TA’s will teach new courses on “Hip-Hop Culture and Black Feminisms,” “Femininity and Theatrical Performance” and “Gender, Sexuality and Monstrosity in Contemporary U.S. Culture.” We are also delighted to be co-listing Prof. Marquez’s new course on “Xicana Feminisms” in Winter quarter and Prof. Zampieri’s “East Asian Masculinities” and Prof. Brucek’s “Indo-Pakistani Women Writers” in spring. We look forward to continuing to collaborate with our current undergraduate students in the classroom and on campus events.

Undergraduate Awards

RAE ARLENE MOSES LEADERSHIP AWARD
Elizabeth Anne Bohl
(GSS & Psychology ’15)

BETTY JO TETTER DOBBS PRIZE
Bea Cordelia Sullivan-Knoff
(GSS & Theatre ’15)

OUTSTANDING STUDENTS

Freshman:
Mariana Pimentel Dipolado
(GSS & Spanish ’16)

Sophomore:
Test Madeline Levin
(GSS & American Studies ’17)

Junior:
Cristina Nicole Polenica
(GSS & Social Policy ’16)

Undergraduate Updates

Lucy Bloomberg (2016) was awarded a Summer Undergraduate Research Grant to conduct archival research on Jane, an underground abortion service in Chicago from 1969-1973, and will begin a senior thesis in American Studies in the fall.

Lauren Goldstein (2018) was awarded a Summer Internship Grant from NCA and will be interning in the Social Media department of Birchbox in New York this summer.

Beatrice Hagney (2018) will study abroad in Prague this fall through CIEE’s Central European Studies program.

Emily Anne Karpinski (2015) will begin a Masters in Social Work program at the University of Texas, Austin in the fall.

Alumni Updates

Gabe Bergado (2014) is a staff writer for the news site The Daily Dot where he covers web culture and online communities with a focus on LGBTQ issues and youth culture.

Sarah Daoud (2013) is working as a resource advocate at the Broadway Youth Center in Chicago and will begin a Masters of Social Work program in the fall.

Keith Miller (2010) is working on a research project about Millennial men’s negotiations with the mandates of masculinity entitled “Pillow Talk: The Truth Behind Beauty, Masculinity and Male Desire,” which will culminate in a book, an art exhibit and a large-scale marketing campaign.

Anthony (Tony) Reita (2004) is working for the Seattle Counseling Service, a community mental health agency that specializes in serving LGBTQ communities, and advises other mental health professionals in providing culturally competent care to LGBTQ clients as a Sexual Minority Specialist for King County, Washington.

By Amy Partridge (Assoc. Director of Undergraduate Studies GSS)
Five GSS seniors complete theses

Problematicizing Victimhood: The failure of the state and the commercial sexual exploitation of minors

In the United States, girls who are under the age of consent can be, and are, arrested for prostitution in lieu of being offered legal protection and rehabilitative services. These protections and services are only available to those girls who are identified as "victims" by specific government and non-profit organizations. I argue that this need to claim victimhood to receive attention under the law objectifies those girls who are often most in need of care and protection by promoting a "punishing pimps and rescuing the girls" approach to the problem of the commercial sexual exploitation of minors. I use Wendy Brown's theories of masculine domination to expose the ways this narrative reinforces structural inequalities and use Joan Tronto's Caring Democracy to conceive of a system of care that provides care for girls, in whatever form they need, and does not rely on the racist, classist, and sexist structures currently in place.

The Apatow Bromance as a Rearticulation of Masculinity

My project explores the emergent genre of 'bromance comedies' and looks specifically at bromance films created and influenced by director/producer Judd Apatow. I examine five of these "Apatown" bromance films: Superbad, Pineapple Express, Funny People, This is the End, and The Interview. These films portray a version of masculinity that permits their male characters to be much more emotionally expressive than other representations of masculinity allow. To explore what exactly makes these films' portrayal of masculinity substantively different than prior iterations of masculinity I focused on how these films work through two main conflicts inherent in the definition of masculinity, as defined by sociologist Scott F. Kiesling. The first of these conflicts is between the masculine imperatives to both assert one's heterosexual dominance over others and, again, the dictate to display male solidarity. I utilized the Apatown films and promotional material surrounding the films to analyze how these films' portrayals of 'bromantic' relationships contend with these two conflicts associated with traditional definitions of masculinity.

Hook Up and Rape 'Cultures': Recovering Power Relations in the Discourse of Sexual Assault on College Campuses

My thesis explores the emergence of the terms 'hook up culture' and 'rape culture' within the contemporary discourse of sexual assault on college campuses. The terms 'hook up' and 'rape,' which have been explored as structures of power and domination from a feminist perspective, have now been reconstructed as all-encompassing 'cultures' to describe the behaviors and perceptions of United States college students. Using a radical feminist and a choice feminist lens, I analyze the linguistic move to 'culture' in order to assess the implications of these terms on the practical experiences of students. I argue that the use of these terms represents a turn away from an analysis of structures of power and domination in discussions of sexuality and ultimately serves to normalize sexual assault.

From Wishes to Princes: Disney's Response to Popular Notions of Feminism in the Production of Princess Films

Audiences went wild for Disney's Frozen in 2013, some praising Disney for giving girls an empowering tale of sisterhood and a moral that greatly differed from Snow White's "Someday My Prince Will Come." But exactly how different are Frozen and other recent Disney princess films from their earlier films? In this thesis, I explore the progression of the Disney princess brand. I examine Frozen (2013), Tangled (2010), and The Princess and the Frog (2009) to note the ways that Disney has recently sought to change the princess narrative and to portray femininity. I examine online feminist sources, newspaper film reviews, and academic journals and compare these to my own readings of these films to argue that, though the princesses have become more similar to the personalities and attitudes of young women today, there are still significant differences between academic feminisms and the interpretation of feminism at Disney.