

## Chair's Report, October 2008

The past year was a full one for the Department and for myself as Chair. For details of the marvelous international conference organized by last year's Ruth Wynn Woodward Endowed Professor, Susan Stryker, see the special report elsewhere in the Newsletter.

A second highlight of the year was the granting of our first PhD in Women's Studies, to Dr Sonja Boon, at the Spring Convocation, also reported elsewhere in the Newsletter. Our graduate students, especially Mary Shearman, were active on university committees. I am grateful to them for nominating me for a Teacher of Excellence award and shepherding the nomination to a successful conclusion. They were also responsible for the successful nomination of Helen Leung as keynote speaker at the annual meeting of the Canadian Women's Studies Association at the University of British Columbia in June.

The interdisciplinary "Disciplining the Body" Colloquium that the Department sponsored on January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2008, was the third departmental high note in the past year. Modest funds from the Ruth Wynn Woodward Endowments and from the new Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Lesley Cormack, supported a day-long colloquium that drew speakers from seven departments and gave four of our current or former graduate students the opportunity to speak at a university-wide academic colloquium. Attendance varied over the day but peaked at a very respectable fifty. Although the discussions about papers were lively and provocative, and several of the participants from other departments expressed a desire to mount a national conference on the subject, only one member of the faculty in Women's Studies chose to pursue another conference, so the plan to hold a regional or national conference has been put on hold.

The CWSA recognition of Helen Leung and the thoughtful and positive keynote address Helen gave to the CWSA meeting were other affirmative events this year. After Helen's well-received talk, twenty faculty and graduate students (and two former graduate students) met at a party hosted by former department members Meredith Kimball and Honoree Newcombe, to toast Helen's speech and the extraordinary scholarly productivity of the faculty this past year, in particular the publication of three scholarly books.

Another celebration that must be mentioned was the departmental dinner for Roberta and John, where another festive gathering of twenty-six faculty, students, and partners partook of the usual cornucopia of foods associated with Women's Studies' potlucks, toasted and presented our wedding gift to Roberta and John. A good time was had by all.

Not everything that happened this year was positive, though departmental responses to the challenges of the past academic year were very constructive. New university and faculty initiatives to recruit high school students directly into departments caused some concern, since Women's Studies is not taught in high school. To address these challenges, the Department hired one of our undergraduate students, Robin Gilker, to research high school recruiting and contact university recruiters and high school teachers. The most concrete result was a new and more enticing departmental brochure to send to

the high schools and to include in university-wide recruitment visits, but the final report also provided useful information about the high school recruitment process and about the new Social Justice courses in the high schools, which will offer opportunities for exposure to Women's Studies.

Severe and sudden budget cuts for the university and the prospect of vertical or program cuts were sobering realities in the spring and summer. In response, the Department held a Revisioning Meeting that made several recommendations about enhancing enrollment and revitalizing the Department. So far, the main outcome has been an arrangement to update and add to our distance and on-line courses over the next three years. Other proposals, notably those to more clearly "brand" and rename the department Women and Gender Studies or Gender and Women's Studies, were further discussed at the annual Advance held at the beginning of September. As we move into preparation for an external review of the Department next spring, we will continue these discussions.

As I write, the impact of the university's financial situation is still unclear and unsettling. However, we are taking actions that will secure our future as a department.

Mary Lynn Stewart