

# Women's Studies News

COLLEGE OF  
HUMANITIES  
& SCIENCES

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## Virginia Commonwealth University

### HOPES ARE HIGH FOR A BA IN WOMEN'S STUDIES

Diana Scully

The VCU Women's Studies Program was established in 1990 and, since fall 2001, has offered a Women's Studies major track in the Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies (BIS) Program. Since the track began, 38 students have graduated, and as of fall 2005, had 46 students with declared majors in Women's Studies. With this experience, the Women's Studies Program sought approval for a Bachelor of Arts in Women's Studies within the College of Humanities and Sciences and, as of April 1, the new degree had passed curriculum committees in the both College and University but has several more approvals to go. The proposed degree is consistent with VCU's recently approved BA degrees in African American Studies and International Studies, and with degrees offered at approximately 75% of VCU's peer institutions.

However, VCU's proposed Bachelor of Arts in Women's Studies also will be unique among institutions in Virginia and elsewhere because in addition to its General Interdisciplinary Concentration, VCU's proposed program will have a concentration in Women, Health and Science.

Students who take the **General Interdisciplinary Concentration** will take a set of courses very similar to those in the Women's Studies major track in the Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies Program which will be discontinued

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## DIRECTOR'S UPDATE

Diana Scully, Director

The spring 2006 semester is almost over and Melinda Johnson, the Women's Studies Program Assistant, and I are rushing to finish this newsletter. It has been an extremely busy and productive year as you will read in my report and throughout *Women's Studies News*.

After a number of years of work and anticipation, it appears that the Women's Studies Program is poised to receive approval for a BA in Women's Studies, hopefully effective fall 2006. As part of the BA program, Women's Studies joined forces with the Department of Philosophy to recruit a new faculty member who would teach courses in the general area of women and science. Unfortunately, we were not successful this year--maybe next year.

The BA will replace the current women's studies concentration in the Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies Program. At this writing, the new Women's Studies BA has been approved by the various curriculum committees of the College and University and is enthusiastically supported by the Dean of Humanities and Sciences. Approvals are still needed from University Council, the VCU Board of Visitors and the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia. When approved, the new degree will be unique among Virginia Women's Studies programs because of its dual concentrations: a General Interdisciplinary Concentration and a Women, Health and Science Concentration developed in a partnership with the VCU Institute for Women's Health, National Center for Excellence. To read more about the new degree and how it will affect you, see p.

I've had wonderful (and exhausting) experiences this year traveling with VCU students. The Women's Studies travel abroad programs are part of our continuing effort to provide student with world class international experiences. During summer 2006, Dr. Angelina Overvold and I led a Study Abroad trip organized around Women's World 2005, the Ninth International Interdisciplinary Congress on Women, hosted by Ewha

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In Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, March 2006. Pictured from left to right: Kara Hershberger, Jaime Bennett, Nina Morris, Benita Panigrahi, Elaine Kelley, Kathleen (Kiffy) Johnson, Rachel Harris, Mia Dodson and Diana Scully

## IRAQI HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST DESCRIBES LIFE UNDER THE US AND IRAQI MILITARY

Melinda Johnson

In March, Eman Ahmad Khamas, an Iraqi journalist and human rights activist, spoke to a capacity crowd of over one hundred students, faculty, and concerned community members who listened in near silence to her stories of life in Iraq under US military occupation and Iraqi military rule. Sponsored by the Women's Studies Program, the Honors Program and the School of World Studies, Ms. Khamas described day to day existence in her country, where bombing has killed many and destroyed much of the infrastructure since the end of major combat operations were declared in March 2003.

Her speech, accompanied by slides, documented the rubble of homes and buildings on which Iraqi citizens have set up tents as living space. According to Ms. Khamas, electricity is available only a few hours a day if at all. Basic shelter is limited to damaged buildings and make-shift tents. Curfews and checkpoints

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## TRAVELS WITH WOMEN'S STUDIES

Diana Scully

If you traveled with Women's Studies this year, here are just some of the experiences you had: rallied for reparations with surviving **Korean women drafted into sexual slavery by the Japanese military during World War II**; dined with **Mary Robinson** (former president of Ireland and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights), **Queen Rania Al-Abdullah of Jordan**, and **Cherie Booth** (noted human rights activist and wife of Tony Blair); stayed in a Ryokan (traditional Japanese Inn) on beautiful **Miyajima Island** on the Inland sea of Japan; danced the "circle dance" with women from around the world at **Women's Worlds 2005 (Ninth International Interdisciplinary Congress on Women)** hosted by **Ewha Women's University in Seoul**; were awed by **Todaiji Temple and Great Buddha (Diahutsu)**; learned how to wear a kimono from teachers at the

**Kyoto Women's Association**; were moved by speeches given by **Gertrude Mongella** (Secretary-General of the United Nations 4<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Women and current president (first woman) of the Pan-African Parliament) and **Shirin Ebadi** (the Nobel Laureate for Peace in 2003); listened to the "nightingale" floors at **Nijo Castle**; ate the food of many cultures but learned that McDonald's and Starbucks are everywhere; watched female shamans perform a ritual cleansing at **Korean Folk Village**; feed tame deer at **Nara National Park**, presented papers at the **Women as Global Leaders Conference** hosted by **Zayed University, United Arab Emirates**; visited **Itsukushima Shinto Shrine** and observed the monthly ritual to female deities performed by monks; attended a banquet for 3,000 on the grounds of **Gyeonghuigung Palace** in Seoul; experienced solemn moments among the memorials in **Hiroshima's Peace Memorial Park and A-Bomb Dome**; attended a desert Arabian Nights extravaganza complete with a laser and firework show; rode by tramway to the top of **Mt. Komagatake in the Hakone National Park** but didn't get to see Mt. Fuji; took pictures of the real snow producing indoor ski resort in **Dubai's Mall of the Emirates**; strolled among the geisha at twilight in the **Kyoto's Gion Geisha District**; met and made friends with women from around the world; traveled by plane, bullet train, boat, subway, bus, car, bicycle, taxi, tramway and foot; and, at bazaars, Buddhist temples, museums, open air markets, airports, street vendors, Shinto shrines, malls, shogun castles, folk villages and souks, shopped and shopped and shopped!! It was a very good year!



Some of the surviving Korean women who were drafted into sexual slavery by the Japanese military during World War II at a rally in their support, Seoul, Korea, summer, 2005.



Study Abroad group at a kimono class in Kyoto, Japan, summer 2005. Pictured from left to right in the top row: Alison Burgujian, Katherine Hemminger, Megan Wood, Christin Munsch, Molly Hayes, Andrea Odiorne, Jacquelyn MacDonald, Christina Kincaid, Diana Scully and Mary Davidson. Bottom row: Angelina Overvold, Andrea Sledd, Shayne Thomas, Rachel Helgerson, Carolyn Lalonde and Benita Panigrahi.

## REFLECTIONS ON TRAVEL/STUDY ABROAD

Benita Panigrahi

The hustle and bustle of airports have always served as a source of unbounded joy to me...that and trying out hundreds of perfumes at the duty-free shops. Encompassed within the space of terminals A-E, one is able to see the world. Hans Christian Anderson wrote, "To move, to breath, to fly, to float, To gain all while you give, To roam the roads of lands remote: To travel is to live." For me, only through travel can I take my rightful place as a global citizen, able to adapt in a variety of cultures and ready to tackle a variety of problems.

Because we do not live in a world where there is one answer to everything or one way of doing things, I jumped at the opportunity to join the VCU Women's Studies Program in their travels to Korea and Japan in the summer of 2005 and the United Arab Emirates in the Spring of 2006. For me person-

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## WOMEN AS GLOBAL LEADERS STUDENT CONFERENCE

Rachel Harris

In the past, when asked how I have spent my spring breaks, my answer tends to be the same each year: not much of anything. Generally, the vacation passes while I sleep, sit at home, or finish whatever assignments are due once I return. But this year was much different. It began with an announcement in one of my classes about an international student conference to promote women's leadership. This was, needless to say, an opportunity entirely unlike any other that has ever presented itself to me, and one that I could hardly allow to slip by in favor of another spring break spent on the couch.

Whenever I explain that I was in the United Arab Emirates during the break, nearly everyone reacts with a certain degree of disbelief, just as I did upon first hearing of the Women as Global Leaders conference. For, it seems that the prescribed roles of women in the Islamic world, according to my own assumptions and typical media portrayals on the subject, stand in contrast to the conference's stated goal of advancing the local and global leadership of women. With this in mind, as I prepared for this conference, aside from the paper I was to present, I was most concerned with dressing conservatively; something which is surprisingly difficult considering American fashion trends toward everything low-cut, tight, or short.

On the first morning of the conference, the bus took us through several streets with flags featuring the Women as Global Leaders emblem lining the medians and along the sidewalks around the Emirati Palace Hotel where the conference would be held. We were dropped off in front of the hotel entrance at the bottom of an enormous set of stairs flanked fountains on either side with a waterfall in the middle. The architecture was simply flawless and the hotel itself seemed to go on forever. Once inside, while attempting to find the breakfast buffet, we were directed

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## MEMORIES OF WOMEN'S WORLDS 2005

Christin Munch

This past June, I had the incredible opportunity to attend Women's Worlds 2005 (WW05): the Ninth International Interdisciplinary Congress on Women at Ewha Women's University in Seoul Korea as part of a trip sponsored by the VCU Women's Studies Program.

The conference kicked off on Sunday evening when participants were bussed from Ewha to an elaborate welcoming festival at the beautiful nearby Gyeonghuigung Palace. I was immediately struck by the extravagance of the affair. As we walked through the palace gates, we set eyes on a sea of people preparing to dine under the stars at large round tables covered with white linen and glasses of red wine. The crowd was welcomed by Lee Myung-Bak, the mayor of

## WOMEN'S WORLDS 2005 AND THE GLOBAL WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

Benita Panigrahi

Upon arriving at the campus of Ewha Women's University in the heart of Seoul last June for the opening of Women's Worlds 2005 (WW05), I was struck by the diversity of voices in the air. Speaking dozens of languages in a variety of dialects, the unspoken statement that filled the humid air was, "we are drawn here for a cause." The passion and enthusiasm of conference participants and the exceedingly helpful conference volunteers was surpassed only by the Korean people themselves. I came to the country with only the basic knowledge of "an jung hayeso" and "camsahamida," Korean terms for "hello" and "thank you" respectively, but the sense of camaraderie fostered by everyone at the Congress, at the University, on the city streets made me no longer a US citizen touring a foreign Asian nation, but rather a citizen of the world, coming back to her global roots.

Beginning with the keynote speaker, President Gertrude Mongela, the voice of women became the authority on issues

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Seoul, and Pil-wha Chang, the WW05 Congress Convener, and entertained by beautiful singing and dancing.

The dancing is what I remember most vividly about that first night. The piece entitled "She is Coming" included women with and without disabilities moving beautifully (although sometimes crudely) to the music. The program stated that the piece symbolized "the women's rising above disabilities, prejudice, and boundaries." When I think about this moment I still get goose-bumps. The night ended by everyone being invited to join the dancers on stage. It was a magical way to start the festivities.

Opening Ceremony speakers included Yang-suk Kwon (the First Lady of the Re-

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DIRECTOR'S UPDATE

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Women's University in Seoul, Korea. Afterwards, our group traveled extensively in Japan. During Spring Break, I accompanied a group of students to the United Arab Emirates where we visited Abu Dhabi and Dubai. The purpose of the trip, which was sponsored by the College of Humanities and Sciences and the Honors Program, was to attend the Women as Global Leaders Conference held at Zayed University in Abu Dhabi where our VCU students gave excellent papers related to the conference theme, "Communities in Transition." To learn more about Women's Studies travels, see the articles and pictures throughout this newsletter.

For students who couldn't travel to distant lands, the Women's Studies Program sponsored several programs focused on the diversity of women's experiences in other parts of the world. During the fall, in co-sponsorship with the School of World Studies, we welcomed Guadalupe Ramirez, founder of AlterNatives, an organization that is dedicated to empowering women marginalized by globalization and Hilde Chanchavac, a Quiche Maya woman and women's health activist and registered nurse. The two enlightened us with their talks on "Effects of Globalization on Maya Women." In the spring, Women's Studies, the Honors Program and the School of World Studies combined resources to bring Eman Ahmed Khamas to campus. Ms. Khamas,

an Iraqi woman who lives in Baghdad and is a women's human rights activist, moved the capacity audience as she described life and death under US military occupation and her hope and work for peace.

Students and campus organizations continue to be a vital resource in the Women's Studies Program. VOX, Voices of Planned Parenthood, held several programs this year focused on women's health and issues related to abortion rights. I am very pleased that FAN (Feminist Action Network) is re-organizing and over 30 students attended the first meeting this spring where they were treated to pizza provided by the Women's Studies Program.

Women's Studies also enjoyed a number of social events this year. During the summer, I hosted a Korea/Japan Bon Voyage Potluck for the students and their parents and significant. During the fall, Women's Studies greeted new and returning women faculty at a Tea Party featuring food from East Asia and England. In March, a number of students participated in Women's Studies at the Opera and filled group seats for the Richmond opening night of Bellini's opera, *Norma*. As our final event this year, I will again host the Fifth Annual Women's Studies Potluck which honors 2005-06 graduates.



*Did you know that you can add Women's Studies as a second major by taking four additional courses (total of 30 credits) beyond the six courses (18 credits) required for a minor?*

THE VCU RESOURCE CENTER ON THE PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Melinda Johnson

There are a number of resources available to victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking on the VCU campus and in the community. The problem is that most students don't know about them says Gay Cutchin, former coordinator of Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Services in the Office of Health Promotion in Student Health Services. While teaching a service learning course on Violence against Women, offered each fall and spring, her students inspired her by asking, "Why isn't there more on campus about this?" That question prompted her to do more.

In October, 2005, Gay Cutchin and Sarah Jane Brubaker, both of the Sociology Department, opened The Resource Center funded through a grant from the Department of Criminal Justice Services. In many cases, victims of violence do not recognize the warning signs. For this reason, the mission of the Resource

Center is two-fold. One is to provide information and referral to victims; the other is education and awareness. Increased awareness and understanding about violence against women aids in preventing further violence. Some problems can be avoided by recognizing the signs and taking action. Action can be as simple as reporting suspected abuse.

Staffed by trained volunteers, the Resource Center provides information and support for victims as well as concerned friends and loved ones who are frequent visitors. "In fact," says Ms. Cutchin, "the majority of those seeking help are doing so for others. It's much easier to hand over a brochure and contact numbers to a friend in need than to tell that friend she is in an abusive relationship."

Sarah Jane Brubaker, director of the Resource Center, hopes to guide the program to create a more informed institutional environment through education and training of those who are most likely to experience or hear of abuse, not only faculty, staff and police, but students as well, perhaps most importantly. The best way for this to happen, according to Dr. Brubaker, is "to educate ourselves about what is unacceptable sexual conduct."

Not all violence can be stopped through education alone. "Action," Gay Cutchin says, "is necessary." The Violence against Women course she teaches is service learning; students in her classes work in the community where they learn about the various ways violence touches women's lives and at the same time what can be done to combat it.

Gay Cutchin and Sarah Jane Brubaker hope the VCU Resource Center will become a model for other college campuses across the state. Those interested in visiting in the Resource Center for referral or education can do so between 10-4 pm, Monday through Friday. It is currently located at 820 West Franklin Street, Room 109. Additional information can be found on their website, <http://www.resourcecenter.vcu.edu/>, or by phone at 804-828-1029. (Editor's note: the Resource Center will probably be moving to another location on campus this summer. Please check their web site for the new address.)

## HOPES ARE HIGH FOR A BA IN WOMEN'S STUDIES

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ued upon approval of the BA degree. This curriculum has an emphasis on the humanities, social sciences, and multicultural diversity. It is intended for students who wish to follow the traditional careers of women's studies majors, primarily in positions where they can work for social change.

Students who select the **Women, Health, and Science Concentration** are likely to be those who plan careers in basic or health sciences. Students who plan to specialize in a field of science or health related to women also will benefit from a specialized curriculum that addresses this interest. This concentration would fill a void in VCU's science and health curricula. VCU will be one of only a few universities to offer a Women, Health and Science curriculum. In Virginia, only Virginia Tech offers a somewhat similar minor called Women, Science and Technology. For this concentration, the Women's Studies Program has partnered with the VCU Institute for Women's Health, National Center for Excellence. The Institute developed and will teach a course on Women's Health Issues over the Life Span. Students will have the option of taking either concentration as an exclusive or double major or a minor.

But what can you do with a degree in Women's Studies? The BA in Women's Studies is a liberal arts degree and, like all liberal arts degrees, is designed to produce graduates who have a strong general education, who can think critically, write well, and who have significant knowledge in one of the arts or sciences disciplines. Studies of women's studies graduates in other institutions have shown that they are prepared to enter graduate programs in women's studies or other fields, or professional schools such as law, journalism, social work, public administration and the health sciences where women's issues and concerns are increasingly studied. In addition, women's studies also provides the background for graduates seeking employment in the public and private sectors, including nonprofit organizations, where women and girls make up the majority of the customer or client base or in which gender and sensitivity to diversity are key areas of concern. We expect that students who focus on the Women, Health, and Science Concentration will be more likely to seek graduate or professional school or employment in a health or science discipline. In general, many women's studies graduates will follow the career path noted by Luebke and Reilly in their 1995 book, *Women's Studies Graduates: The First Generation*, and pursue positions where they can work for social change – as advocates for battered women or rape victims, HIV educators, teachers, professors, lawyers and health care practitioners.

## REFLECTIONS ON TRAVEL/STUDY ABROAD

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ally, the pursuit of my goal to become a physician, working with indigent populations both within the US and internationally, would be a mockery without adequate understanding of the socio-cultural issues of medicine from all spectrums, thus internationally. The global status of women's health specifically provides an excellent stage on which to study the socio-cultural issues of equity, which is intertwined with so many other issues extending beyond the realm of science or medicine.

Learning is best done in a comparative system when one has to critically analyze and defend a viewpoint, and if necessary, integrate elements of different aspects together to come to a conclusion. Travel experiences, particularly in the integrative field of women's studies, have provided a 3-D, real-life demo of theoretical principles ensuring that the lessons learned in the classroom actually stick. Particularly with the Women's Studies trips to international conferences, such as the Women's Worlds 2005 and the Women as Global Leaders International conference, the opportunity to interact personally with a diverse community of scholars allowed me to discuss and develop my own ideas and gain valuable connections for future research and study.

As a woman committed to the cause of empowerment for women, travel in itself is an empowering phenomenon. I am no longer constrained to a specific location, a specific mode of thinking, or a specific valued set of ideals, but I am free to experience a wide array of values, cultures, and ideals so necessary to functioning in a global society. Empowered with knowledge, I am provided with the tools necessary to appropriately construct or deconstruct opinions and stereotypes. Only through such a cultural education have I become aware of the shared struggles manifested differently based on the cultural context. The ability to put a human face on the struggles we all share, have made these lessons all the more poignant, and have provided me with invaluable friendships that have facilitated my personal growth and understanding of the world..

In crossing the globe and abandoning all expectations, I leave behind the comfortable security of home, family, friends, and things like peanut butter, pop tarts, and other favorite meals. Yet it is a necessary sacrifice in order to "live." The excitement of new smells, tastes, and experiences, whether good like the amazing rush of catching a bullet train with thirty seconds to spare or bad like the after effects of camel's milk food poisoning, certainly ensure that the experience is memorable. But it is experiencing those intangible benefits which make Study Abroad opportunities so essential not only to achieve my lofty goals of "saving the world," but also in order to take my rightful place as a citizen of the world. Understanding our common bond, our shared struggles, our common goals--indeed, "to travel is to live." (**Editor's note:** *Benita Panigrahi is a graduating senior and an Honors student with double majors in Biology and Psychology and double minors in Women's Studies and Chemistry. She will attend medical school in the fall, perhaps to specialize in women's health. She is the only student who took both Women's Studies trips this year.*)

## ALUMNA NEWS

We would love to hear from you.  
Send us your news about yourself for  
*Women's Studies News!*

## MAYA WOMEN AND THE CHALLENGES OF GLOBALIZATION

Melinda Johnson

Last October, the Women's Studies Program and the School of World Studies invited women from the Highland Support project to address the topic of "Globalization and its Effects on Maya Women." The Highland Support Project is a non-profit organization based in Richmond, whose mission is to empower women of indigenous backgrounds. One local presence of the Project is the AlterNatives shop at 3320 W. Cary St. in Richmond where indigenous craftspeople can sell their goods at fair market value. Founder of AlterNatives, Guadalupe Ramirez, and Hilde Chanchavac, a Quiche Maya woman from Guatemala, spoke about globalization initiatives, arrested development of indigenous people, and women's empowerment in developing nations.

Today, 80 percent of Guatemalan citizens, Maya and otherwise, live in poverty, 7.6 million citizens live in extreme poverty, with very little hope of escaping it. Some believe globalization can change all this. Globalization involves the push toward an international market in which the spread of capitalism moves from developed to developing nation. However, many argue that globalization is the promotion of a capitalist agenda which prioritizes profit and the interests of multi-national corporations over those of poorer nations.

Guadalupe Ramirez agrees that some doors are opened with globalization and opportunities for women are increased. But there are barriers and unintended consequences. "Like any tool, globalization can be used for good or bad," she told the audience. "A hammer can be used to help a neighbor or used to hit him in the head." Guadalupe has experienced the damaging consequences of globalization as well as its beneficial aspects. She grew up in a family of bakers and wheat farmers in the mountains of Guatemala. For generations, they had made bread which they exchanged for other goods in

a barter system. But when a Mexican bread company moved into town, demand for the family's bread quickly decreased. They could not compete in production or price because they lacked the marketing, equipment, and capital of the larger business, and they were forced to find other means of sustaining themselves.

Guadalupe told the audience that her family's story was not unique. The increased competition for jobs is one factor Guadalupe cites in the rise of machismo, a Latin patriarchal system. Women and girls are systematically excluded from educational opportunities and consequently, the workplace because their role is seen solely as caregiver.

Hilde Chanchavac, a Quiche Maya nurse, spoke about the gender divide in Guatemala. During childbirth, according to Hilde, a father waits impatiently, asking repeatedly if it is a boy or a girl. "Excitement for boys," she said. "A grunt for a girl." Girls are destined to be married at fifteen and it is believed that they should learn the skills necessary to care for a family and a home. For this reason, girls are not sent to school, which is expensive, and the lack of educational opportunity perpetuates illiteracy and unemployment among women.

Maya women, she said, suffer triple discrimination: they are women, they are illiterate, and they are indigenous. Although they have occupied the highlands of Guatemala for centuries, it is the Maya who are treated as outsiders by the descendents of Western conquerors dating back to the 16<sup>th</sup> Century.

Despite these problems, both women claim, globalization can provide opportunity. For example, because of cruise lines opening new ports in Guatemala, local women are able to raise capital by selling vegetables to docked ships. With capital comes opportunity, education. According to Guadalupe, the increased exposure to Western ideals and stories of the women's movement abroad have inspired women of Guatemala to find their own voices.

## WOMEN AS GLOBAL LEADERS STUDENT CONFERENCE

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by women covered almost entirely in flowing black fabric, most with their faces visible, but some showing only their eyes. The red sashes they wore indicated that they were students of Zayed University (ZU), a university for women that was hosting this entire event.

After an introduction from the President of the University, His Excellency Sheikh Nahayan Mubarak Al Nahayan, Her Excellency Queen Rania of Jordan and The Honorable Mary Robinson, the former president of Ireland, gave two incredible speeches, focusing on current efforts to improve the situations of women and the injustices that continue to plague girls and women throughout the world. Aside from these stirring, and in some cases disturbing, speeches, one other discussion in particular sticks out in my mind; that of Dr. Rola Dashti, chairperson of the Kuwait Economic Society. She was one participant in a four-person panel and the only one wearing a white suit, as the other three women wore black hijabs (head covering) and abayas (gowns). Beyond this obvious defiance of traditional dress, she was extraordinarily bold in her statements challenging the treatment of women within Islam, her own faith. This was the only point in the three days of this conference at which there was any significant discussion of or challenge to the accepted roles of

women within many Arab societies.

While the major speakers overall were interesting, and some absolutely riveting, the most memorable aspect of this conference was the opportunity to meet, speak with, and learn from students from nearly ninety different countries. In particular, the ZU students surprised me with their outgoing demeanors and sincere eagerness to answer questions that any of the rest of us happened to ask. Although it was enlightening to hear these women explain their culture, it was also valuable for me, as a U.S. citizen, to explain the culture in which I live to students from many different countries. For, the western perspective, through which I and the majority of the U.S. tend to view the world, generally involves the assumption that anything outside of the United States is foreign and needs explanation to be valid. This conference, however, directly challenged this narrow view as it placed me on both sides of this situation, thereby allowing me to both ask questions and answer them. In this way, I was able to gain and contribute to a better understanding of cultural differences, while also recognizing that my own ideas, although relevant to my own lifestyle, cannot fully explain the lives led by those outside of my own frame of reference. *(Editor's note: Rachel Harris is an Honors Student with double majors in Women's Studies and Psychology. She is finishing her junior year at VCU.)*

## IRAQI HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST DESCRIBES LIFE UNDER THE US AND IRAQI MILITARY

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limit the movement of all citizens, rendering travel and daily routine nearly impossible. Other slides showed pictures of the dead, killed by ‘accidental’ bombings. The violence, said Ms. Khamas, has touched every Iraqi. Anger over the violence, she said, has fueled the insurgency. Ordinary Iraqis are caught in the crossfire.

“The Iraqi people do not want war,” she said. “Our problems before the occupation, they were social problems. They cannot be solved by this.” But now there are new problems. In the United States, Ms. Khamas said, the news focuses on the deaths of American soldiers, but seldom mentions the loss of Iraqi citizens. The death toll is difficult to assess, no official count has been released, but she cited estimates that tens of thousands have been killed. She hoped to speak with U.S. lawmakers and urge them to adopt a plan for peace.

“You cannot impose democracy by force,” she said. “It has to come from the people.” According to Ms. Khamas, the people of Iraq want democracy, but do not believe that they can achieve a democratic government on the current path. She said that many Iraqis believe the United States has long term plans to stay in their country. This belief both fuels violence against coalition forces and furthers mistrust. “Democracy cannot come without trust.” “Ending the occupation will end violence directed at troops,” she added.

Ms. Khamas was in the United States with a small delegation of Iraqi women who planned to travel around the United States telling their accounts of war to the public and urging lawmakers to create a peace plan. Ms. Khamas, who lives in Baghdad, regularly publishes articles on women’s conditions in Iraq. She is a member of the Women’s Will organization, which focuses on defending women’s rights and opposing incarceration of women as hostages, and is involved in mobilizing emergency relief for victims of the war. In her former role as director of International Occupation Watch Center Baghdad, she documented human rights violations committed by US and Iraqi forces. At the close of the program, VCU student, B. ‘Aquila Mujahid, presented Ms. Khamas with a plaque from the Association of Muslim Women in America, VCU Chapter, in appreciation for her work on human rights and peace.



Eman Ahmad Khamas, Iraqi  
citizen and former director of  
International Occupation  
Watchcenter Baghdad

## WE ARE FEMINISTS UNITED!

We are a new student organization open to all members of the university and community.

F.U. hopes to have events and workshops that will promote awareness and activism primarily focused on gender issues.

For upcoming events or to be added to the listserv please email Shayne Thomas at [Thomassa2@vcu.edu](mailto:Thomassa2@vcu.edu)

### MEMORIES OF WOMEN'S WORLDS 2005

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public of Korea), Pil-wha Chang (the WW05 Congress Convener), and Gertrude Mongella (the first woman President of the Pan-African Parliament and advocate for women's human rights). The Ceremony closed with the conference participants singing the theme song "Embracing the World."

For me, one of the best things about the Congress was being in the same room with so many feminist-greats whose work I had been reading for close to a decade. I was star-stuck. Cynthia Enloe, Charlotte Bunch, Nancy Folbre, Sandra Harding, Mary Hartman! Each of these distinguished academics participated in morning plenary sessions, and many participated in smaller, invited speaker sessions as well. These smaller panels allowed for more interaction with conference participants. For example, a colleague, Andrea Odiorne, and I were able to speak with Charlotte Bunch for a good fifteen minutes after one session and interview her for a student documentary that Andrea was producing.

Unfortunately, I only recognized the U.S. academics by name; however I found talks by non-U.S. and non-academics equally exciting. For example, Josefa "Gigi" Francisco (Executive Director, Women and Gender Institute, Miriam College, Philippines) called for the women's movement to link up with other social movements and progressive political parties. And, Ayse Feride Acar (Professor at Middle East Technical University in Turkey) spoke eloquently about how CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, adopted by the United Nations in 1979, not yet ratified by the United States) reflected the goals of the women's movement and, at the same time, shows us the way forward. Throughout the week, I was able to attend sessions on Family Violence, Prostitution, Sex Trafficking, Lesbian, Queer, and Transgender Identities, Ageing, and Teaching Black Women's Studies.

The conference also allowed for students, academics, activists and the like to meet one another. One of my most memorable experiences was being seated next to a Ph.D. candidate in women's studies from Ewha Women's University (while experimenting with free acupuncture). The woman, Jung-Ah Cho, is also the director of the Gyeonggi Women's Development

Center (GWDC). She invited me back to the GWDC tent and we engaged in conversation for close to an hour. It was interesting to compare the field of women's studies and the most critical issues facing women in the U.S. and Korea. My classes have called attention to gender inequality *within the U.S.* with an emphasis on inequality in the workplace, inequality in the home (house work and childcare), and violence against women (rape and domestic violence). However, the most critical issues effecting Korean women are prostitution, sex trafficking, and Korean women's inability to find any sort of employment.

By far, the most extraordinary experience I had at WW05 was participating in a protest at the Japanese Embassy in Seoul. Each Wednesday, for the last three years, the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan has held a lunchtime rally outside of the Japanese Embassy to protest the enslavement and systematic raping of Korean women by Japanese soldiers during World War II. The Council is demanding a public apology, legal reparations, and that Japanese history textbooks accurately reflect what the Japanese soldiers did to these Korean women. Approximately 10 surviving women (of the remaining 118) also attended the rally.

The conference's spectacular farewell festival was held on Thursday night at Ewha's outside arena. The attendees packed into their seats and were entertained by Rebecca Campbell who sang the conference theme song, Susan Hawthorne who recited a moving poem, and two fashion shows by Korean designers. Many participants, including myself, found the fashion shows objectionable because of the commercialization of women's bodies and the exclusion of differently sized models. Immediately afterwards, the emcee apologized for the shows. The remainder of the evening was magnificent. A Korean feminist singer Young-ae Han (also known as "The Korean Witch") sang several songs and encouraged the audience to come up to the front and dance. This was followed by a Latin jazz band, La Amazon, who got the remaining people out of their seats and dancing. It was so much fun! Finally, all participants held hands and danced Gangkang Suwollae, the traditional Korean dance in a circle. Everyone was dancing and singing and hugging. In a world where I tend to feel like a minority for my feminist views, I found myself surrounded by so many like-minded women and men. It felt so energizing and rejuvenating! The next Women's Worlds is to be held in 2008 in Madrid and I am already making plans to attend! (**Editors note:** *Christin Munch received a Master Degree in Sociology from VCU and is currently continuing her graduate studies at Cornell University.*)

**Amendment is currently looking for folks to help with editing, planning, publicity, and activism.**

Email [amendmentvcu@gmail.com](mailto:amendmentvcu@gmail.com) if you want to get involved with VCU's undergraduate feminist journal

Amendment is also now taking submissions year-round, so check out their website at: <http://www.studentorg.vcu.edu/amendment/> and send them your creative and critical work!

**The next issue of Amendment is coming Fall 2006!**

Melinda Johnson



Sara Fariss Krivanec featured in the December 31<sup>st</sup> issue of the Richmond Times-Dispatch

Sara Fariss Krivanec decided to become a doula after the experience of hiring an obstetrician for birth of her son left her feeling alone and depressed. "I waited an hour to spend five minutes with him," she said. Sara knew there had to be another way. She started doing research on birth and discovered doulas and midwives, a discovery that changed her life. Now Sara is a trained labor and postpartum doula. As a labor doula, she educates a woman about her birth options and "provides one on one support for her once she is in labor." Following the baby's birth, a postpartum doula comes to a mother's home and provides further support, including helping with errands and light housekeeping as well as helping to care for the newborn. "I give her the space to be with her baby and feel empowered in her new role."

In addition to being a doula and a student in the Women's Studies Program, Sara Krivanec is past president of Virginia Friends of Midwives, a leader in a local chapter of ICAN, the International Cesarean Awareness Network, and is involved in organizing a new group, Birth Matters. This past fall, the Certified Professional Midwives Bill passed in the Virginia General Assembly, after years of lobbying to allow

non-nurse midwives to practice in the state. For her efforts, Sara was recognized by the *Richmond Times Dispatch* feature, "In the Box--A weekly feature about people whose work touches our lives."

According to Sara, the personalized care provided by midwives has been shown to improve outcomes for both mothers and infants in numerous studies, yet many women dismiss or never even consider contacting a midwife, opting instead for gynecologists and obstetricians, specialists in surgery and illness. "I think it's about the cultural norms, what it seems like everyone else is doing. I think there is a stigma against midwives too (fueled by the medical community) that they are less than doctors or that the care is too old fashioned. It's all so silly. If you just do the research it shows that midwives have better outcomes and more maternal satisfaction because they keep women low-risk and healthy."

According to Sara, women need to be educated about their birth options. Nearly one in three pregnancies in the United States result in cesarean section, a rate double what the World Health Organization considers safe. "Obstetricians," she said, "are surgeons trained in high-risk maternity care." In other countries, where the cesarean rate is lower, low-risk mothers seek the care of midwives, only seeing the doctor when necessitated by a medical condition. In this country, however, birth itself has become a medical condition. "The medical model of birth sees it as a crisis," Sara explained

Sara plans to become a midwife when her children are older, which will be a few years as she and her husband are expecting a third child in September. She says that her training as a doula "has been a wonderful learning experience" on the path toward her goal. Her involvement with reproductive rights has been an education as well, one that led her to a major in Women's Studies. "I see them both as who I am now, my passion. With the women's studies focus, I find it important and it complements the work that I do with women because I have a more well-rounded perspective on where women have been and what they are going through in their lives." (Editors note: Doulas are labor assistants and advocates for laboring mothers; midwives are nurses with advanced training in pregnancy, labor and childbirth)

CONGRATULATIONS!

Black History in the Making Women's Studies Award Winner

Mia Dodson



"I plan to begin work on my masters in clinical psychology and pursue a PhD in the same field. I want to work with African women of the Diaspora in terms of self-esteem/body image as well as issues in clinical psychology. I would like to address the treatment of Black women within the mental health system. After I am grounded in clinical psychology, I would like to pursue additional education and open a battered women's shelter and hospital for women (and men) that do not have health insurance. Another desire is to work with the Deaf community since I am part of it. I know it's a lot but I will eventually get everything done."



College of Humanites and Sciences Outstanding Women's Studies Student Award Recipient

Marsha Alterscu

"I plan to obtain an MFA in Creative Writing along with a Certificate in Teaching Writing. My goals are to teach college freshmen and sophomores the writing skills needed for success at the university level, actively participate in literacy programs aimed at disenfranchised women, and author a textbook on multicultural writing as a learning tool."

College of Humanites and Sciences Outstanding Women's Studies Student Award Recipient

Ashlie Willis



"After graduation in December, I plan to take a semester off so that I can research schools and choose a few graduate programs to apply to. I will continue with Women's Studies wherever I go, and I hope to focus on pregnancy/childbirth."

WOMEN'S WORLDS 2005 AND  
THE GLOBAL WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

*(Continued from page 3)*

ranging from rural agriculture to health to sports to globalism. For almost a week, every spare moment was spent discussing women's issues in morning plenary sessions, in paper sessions and during breaks for lunch. Discussion was not conducted out of obligation, but out of a passion to share, to listen, to learn. Unique for many academic conferences, age was not a factor as young feminists commiserated with and learned from their foremothers. Surrounded by such an impressive range of intellect and passion, the ultimate goal of understanding the changing nature of women's lives was achieved via lively debate and discussion, with friends made along the way.

The cultural backdrop of Asia provided not only the location of the event, but also a means through which to initiate discussion about social movements specific to the Asian context. One such arena was the fight in attaining an official apology and legal reparations for the Korean women drafted for military sexual slavery by Japan during WWII. Initially lured by promises of better jobs, Korean women were taken captive by the Japanese military and repeatedly raped. For the past thirteen years, weekly protests at the Japanese Embassy proved to be unsuccessful. Nevertheless, united in such a front, conference participants were privileged to join the Korean women themselves, in their weekly struggle. Mistakenly referred to as "comfort" women, these vivacious 80-somethings were living proof (though dwindling in number) of the power of the women's spirit. Suddenly "regional" Asian issues became an issue of global proportions. The story of these women was evidence of the necessity of the continued efforts of feminists worldwide and the need for women's rights as human rights to be declared over and over again.

The idea of living in a world with seven billion people is a bit overwhelming; seven billion people with their own agendas, thoughts and lives. Nevertheless, every laugh, every tear, every thumbs up was a sign understood by participants experiencing the same range of emotions during this monumental global forum. International symposia such as the WW05 help to elucidate the simple truth that in today's world, women's struggle is a global one. Women worldwide are facing different aspects of being second class citizens. By opening discourse and recruiting other women facing similar problems, all women from grassroots movements to highly organized governmental groups, can create a powerful team of activists working for common goals. By taking

control of their fates, it is women themselves who can change the status quo for the better. As ambassadors for their respective countries, women and men who attended WW05 were privy to the power of women worldwide working toward their common goals.

Donning traditional clothes from over 75 nations worldwide, hundreds of women took to the Samsung-enhanced stage in preparation for a fashion show of literally global proportions at the bittersweet farewell festival of Women's Worlds 2005. Mirrored by the joyous music and dancing of the opening festival, people from the Global North and Global South sang and danced. Yet as quickly as the songs came to an end, the brief rendezvous was over. After five fulfilling days of plenary sessions, paper sessions, appearances by traditional South Korean dancers, and plenty of authentic Korean cuisine, the international symposium was over for another three years. It is my sincere hope that conference ideals will result in action and will not simply be lost in translation. No words were required for the ultimate message that the world of change was left for us to unfold. Would we live up to the conference theme and "Embrace the Earth"?



*(Editor's note: Benita Panigrahi is a graduating senior and an Honors student with double majors in Biology and Psychology and double minors in Women's Studies and Chemistry. She will attend medical school in the fall, perhaps to specialize in women's health. She is the only student who took both Women's Studies trips this year.)*





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