Dear faculty and staff members,

Dear students,

As usual, this semester has gone by in a whirlwind. What has particularly stood out for me is the close ties that various student groups have formed with each other. Feminist Action at Middlebury, Women of Color, Men Against Violence, MOQA, the African American Alliance, and Allianza Latinoamericana y Caribeña have been meeting since the beginning of the semester to coordinate their activities. We submitted a proposal for an MCAB spring symposium entitled “Let’s Talk about Sex.” Even though we did not come in first place, the committee was enthusiastic about providing funds to invite one speaker to talk about relations between men and women on campus.

This November, under the direction of WAGS Professor Cheryl Faraone, the theatre department staged Wendy Wasserstein’s Pulitzer Prize-winning drama The Heidi Chronicles, one woman’s journey through the American feminist movement. In order to gain an in-depth knowledge of the late playwright’s work, the audience was treated to an entire “Wasserstein Fortnight.” “The time and changes women went through from the 1960s to 1980s are fading from the consciousness of this generation,” says Professor Faraone. “Yet, the play is an essential document in cultural and women’s history.”

Professor Jan Balakian from Kean University gave a talk entitled, “Uncommon Women and The Heidi Chronicles in Historical Context.” In the student-led discussion with cast members and members of FAM, students revealed that they had learned a great deal about the feminist movement from the play. They all agreed that in today’s world they would rather talk about feminisms than one feminist movement. As Heidi performer Lucy Faust noted, “This play makes me ponder on what expectations society has of me and where women are going as a gender.” The “Wasserstein Fortnight” culminated in a Q&A session with Wasserstein’s sister Georgette Wasserstein Levin during the Saturday matinée performance.

At the end of November, we hosted the “16 Days of Activism to End Gendered Violence.” This international campaign spans from November 25, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, to December 10, World Human Rights Day, and symbolically links women’s rights with human rights. It also highlights December 1, World AIDS Day, and December 6, the anniversary of the Montreal Massacre of female students in an engineering college.

In our series of events we highlighted the mainstreaming of today’s porn industry and how its sexist and racist imagery adversely affects society.

In this season’s spirit of giving, the student group, Women and Global Peace, organized a silent auction of photos from Afghanistan. All proceeds will support the livelihood of Iraqi women.

Have a restful break!

Karin Hanta
LADIES FIRST?
Winter term is often a time to study an unusual subject, and, for many, a month dedicated to improving skiing and snowboarding skills. Not so for Marcus Bellows, Hiba Fakhoury, Douglas Hale, Alex Hall, and Kaitlin Ofman. Together with Professor Caitlin Knowles Myers (Economics), they took a field trip to Boston to study gender discrimination in coffee shops for their class “Econ 1008: Deconstructing Discrimination.” Their research has earned them national attention in media outlets such as Slate, The Chicago Sun-Times, MSNBC, and NPR. A paper entitled “A Field Study of Discrimination in Coffee Shops” is forthcoming in Applied Economics.

After noting that there is little evidence of discrimination in consumer markets outside of those for housing and cars, the students designed a study that measured various customer characteristics as well as wait times. They found that women waited 24 percent longer for their coffee than men even with controls for differences in order complexity. They also found some evidence that this wait differential increases when there are more male employees at the shops and when the shops are busy. Their findings suggest that discrimination may result from prejudice; a desire to chat-up female customers; expectations about tipping behavior; or the likelihood to expect complaints.

WE NEED YOUR ART!
We invite you to submit your artwork and text for a calendar project for 2009!
All funds raised through the sales of our calendar will support local women’s organizations that advocate against domestic and sexual violence. The calendar is designed to inform and remind the public of the severity of crimes committed against women and children. We will feature local artists and writers such as Julia Alvarez and Phoebe Stone as well as Middlebury College students. All selections will be made by a jury.

Writers: We will do our best to incorporate your prose, poetry, or creative non-fiction with the art. Your text submissions should not exceed 3000 characters.

Artists: Your work will be reproduced in full color, but we also welcome strong black and white images. The final size of the calendar is 11 x 8.5 inches (landscape format). Due to print margins, the maximum size of each piece of artwork is 10 x 7.5 inches. Please submit the final artwork camera-ready, sized at 10 x 7.5.

Deadline: February 12, 2008
Please submit your work to Karin Hanta at Chellis House (khanta@middlebury.edu)

WAGS Spring Courses

WAGS 0200A
Foundations in Women’s and Gender Studies
MW, 3:00 – 4:15 p.m., HLD 103

WAGS 0200B
TR, 1:30 – 2:45 p.m., RCD B11
Sujata Moorti

WAGS/WRPR 201A CW
Writing For Social Change
M, TR, 7:30 – 9:30 p.m., 11:00 – 12:15 p.m, ATD 102, MNR 407
Catharine Wright

WRPR 0203 CW
Media, Sports & Identity
TR, 11:00 – 12:15 p.m., RAJ CON
Hector Vila

WAGS/MUSC 0224
The Legacy of Black Art
TR, 9:30 – 10:45 a.m., CFA 209
Almeta Speaks

WAGS/AMST 0230A
Gender Images in American Popular Culture
MW, 12:15 – 1:30 p.m., MBH 338
Holly Allen

WAGS/JAPN 0245A
Josei undo: Women’s Activism in Contemporary Japan
TR, 3:00 – 4:15 p.m., RCD B11
Linda White

INTD 0250
Greek Drama in Performance
TR, F, 1:30 – 2:45 p.m.
1:30 – 2:20 p.m., AXT 201, CFA 232
Claudio Medeiros, Pavlos Sfyroeras

WAGS/ENAM 0270
Reading Postcolonial Literature
T, 1:30 – 4:15 p.m., WNS 207
Yumna Siddiqi

WAGS/ENAM 0280
Women and 17th Century Theatre
T, 1:30 – 4:15 p.m., PRS KAD
Timothy Billings

WAGS/SPAN 0458A
Narratives of Love in Modern Spain
W, 7:30 – 10:25 p.m., LIB 140
Juana Gamero de Coca
Spotlight on Assistant Professor Febe Armanios

Professor Febe Armanios (History Dept.) has consistently taught classes on women and Islam and on issues pertaining to gender in the Middle East. This semester she invited feminist anthropologist Elizabeth Fernea.

Professor Armanios, how long have you been at Middlebury?
This is my fourth year at Middlebury College. I was working for the U.S. government before coming here, at the Congressional Research Service in Washington, D.C. I used to inform congressional members on issues related to religion and culture in the Middle East. Women were considered a part of these “cultural” issues. When questions came up about the role of women in the new Iraqi government in 2004, I helped them deal with those concerns and provided non-partisan advice.

What is your academic background?
I received my Ph.D. in Islamic History in 2003 from Ohio State University.

What are your current research interests?
I’m writing a manuscript on Coptic Christianity in Ottoman Egypt (1517-1798). The Coptic Christians are the largest non-Muslim minority in the Middle East, but they’ve received little attention compared to other ethnic and religious minorities in the region.

How is your research informed by Women’s and Gender Studies?
I’m interested in how Copts have used religious discourses to construct their minority identity in relation to the dominant Islamic society. Within this discussion of identity, I investigate how women are depicted in popular religious sources. My most recent research project examines, in part, the representation of sexual and gender differences within “video-hagiographies;” these are modern films that are internally produced and circulated among Copts and depict the life stories of important Coptic saints. I really find them revolutionary. Within this strongly patriarchal culture (both Egyptian and Coptic), I’m interested in discovering how the films have become a vehicle for transforming the traditional, textually-based, static imagery of Coptic women to multi-dimensional and even heroic characters on screen.

What do you cover in your course “Readings in Middle Eastern History: Women and Islam”?
Let me start by saying that I absolutely love the energy of students who’ve taken my “Women and Islam” class! I’ve learned so much from these students over the years. This course looks at how scholars have examined the lives of women primarily in the Middle East, from the rise of Islam to the present. In our class, we ask what it means to write women’s history when we have few existing documents written by women themselves. We look at how Islamic texts such as the Qur’an have affected women’s rights, as well as the ways that the West has (mis)represented the place of women in the Muslim world.

What made you become interested in the field of history?
Studying history opened up the opportunity of traveling and learning languages. Ultimately, however, I am fascinated by people’s stories. Many people study history to learn lessons for today and tomorrow, and I fully appreciate this sentiment. I think that history allows us to better understand human potential: how people have been creative in dealing with challenges. Telling these stories, especially in the context of a troubled and often misunderstood region such as the Middle East, is a core part of my research, writing, and teaching. Since I grew up in Egypt, teaching history allows me to share a part of my culture—my family’s stories—with my students.

www.middlebury.edu/academics/ump/majors/ws
Student Group Activities

FEMINIST ACTION AT MIDDLEBURY (FAM)

FAM is off to a great start this year! We began the semester with a welcome event for new members and new first-year students where we made t-shirts that said “This is What a Feminist Looks Like.” In order to make FAM more issue and discussion based this year we have been meeting every Sunday at 9:30 pm in Chellis House. Based on issues covered at these meetings we submitted a write-up about our thoughts about women at Middlebury to the Task Force on the Status of Women. In addition, in early October we protested the Cook Commons-sponsored Surrender Your Booty party and publicly voiced our concerns regarding the school-sponsored screening of R-rated pornography and the message that this party was sending the student body regarding gender roles and the treatment of women. Finally, in early November we hosted our third annual “I Love My Body” Fashion Show which was an overwhelming success! After the screening of a documentary made by Ryan Tauriainen ’08 regarding the many facets of body image, 25 students, faculty, and staff members strutted their stuff on the runway wearing t-shirts that explained why they loved their bodies. This wonderful event was followed by a Brainerd-sponsored discussion regarding pornography, eating disorders, sexual violence, and homophobia. We have several ideas for events in the upcoming months including a “Get Out Her Vote” campaign to get women registered to vote, a collaborative lecture on sex education, a self defense workshop, and a project to educate women on campus about birth control options.

If you would like to join us, please contact Kolbe Franklin (kbfrankl@middlebury.edu).

MIDDLEBURY OPEN QUEER ALLIANCE (MOQA)

MOQA is in the midst of two major initiatives: bringing awareness to the campus around incidents of homophobia while promoting a positive image of the queer community, and planting the seeds to establish a queer studies academic interest house on campus.

Most recently, MOQA members launched a campaign in response to the presence of a military recruiter on campus. The protest was meant as a visible reminder of the oppressive and discriminatory “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy currently in effect, as well as Middlebury’s problematic stance allowing the marines to recruit on campus. In addition to posters and a strong student showing in Ross Dining Hall, we collected signatures to demand of the Administration a public forum to further debate how our college’s non-discrimination policy can be reconciled with this military presence.

We are very troubled by the continuation of homophobic graffiti and hate speech on campus, and are actively seeking the best avenues to respond and educate our college community. We would like to thank MOQA members and our allies for all of the energy and excitement they have contributed, as well as faculty and staff who have been so supportive throughout fall semester.

If you would like to join us, please contact Christine Bachman (cbachman@middlebury.edu), Ryan Tauriainen (rtauri@middlebury.edu), or Molli Freeman-Lynde (mfreeman@middlebury.edu).
WOMEN OF COLOR (WOC)

This fall has provided an abundance of good fortune for Women of Color. With an impressive class of first-year students, WOC has seen a diverse influx in its membership, bringing with it a multitude of colorful backgrounds, perspectives and ideas. Bi-weekly meetings have stirred up in-depth conversations that range from gendered violence and campus discrimination to different issues of privilege within various communities of color. WOC’s annual event, The Black Pearl Ball, was a tremendous success, with notable contributions from Professor Kareem Khalifa, Alfredo Ramirez, Ross Commons, OID, and Chellis House. WOC has also worked closely with Men Against Violence, Feminist Action at Middlebury, Middlebury Open Queer Alliance, and ALC in an effort to obtain a greater understanding and appreciation of the many women that make up its organization. Tremendous gratitude is expressed to all who helped out and attended the events thus far, and the organization looks forward to continued participation in upcoming events throughout the rest of the year.

If you would like to join us, please email Morgane Richardson (mvrichar@middlebury.edu) or Ethiopia Al-Mahdi (ealmahdi@middlebury.edu).

WOMEN AND GLOBAL PEACE (WGP)

Women and Global Peace (WGP) meets every Wednesday in Ross dining hall for dinner. We discuss issues affecting women from various regions of the world. Last year, WGP supported a woman in Afghanistan through the NGO “Women for Women International.” This year, our main goal is to expand WGP support from Afghanistan to Iraq. WGP believes that what is happening to women in Iraq should be part of everyone’s awareness at Middlebury College. On November 29, WGP organized a silent auction of photos taken by renowned photographer Luke Powell in Afghanistan since the 1970s. The aim of this silent auction is to remember the silent voices of women who suffer in the midst of war and who are victims of violence. All proceeds will be donated to women in Iraq. If you would like to join us, please email Zohra Safi (zsafi@middlebury.edu).

SISTER-TO-SISTER

The fourth annual Sister-to-Sister Summit for seventh and eighth graders from local middle schools took place on November 17. Forty girls from Addison County attended the seven-hour event, which included workshops such as hip hop dancing and creative writing and discussion groups on body image and peer relations. Seventeen “college student sisters” interacted with the girls. For the rest of the school year, they will serve as role models in monthly meetings. In total, the event was supported by over 100 volunteers. Organized by Chellis House, the year-long series of events is funded by the Alliance for Civic Engagement, the Office of Institutional Diversity, the National Bank of Middlebury, Neat Repeats, the Lyons Club, American Flatbread, and the American Association of University Women. If you would like to join the program, please contact Karin Hanta at khanta@middlebury.edu.
Lectures in Review

Family in the U.S. and Japan and the state of women’s affairs in Jordan and Iraq were some of the subjects addressed in lectures co-sponsored by the Women’s and Gender Studies Program and Chellis House during the course of this semester. On October 26, Anne Allison, chair of the department of cultural anthropology at Duke University, gave a lecture entitled “Sociality of Neoliberalism: Affect, Family, and Japanese Youth.” In her talk, Professor Allison highlighted recent trends in Japanese family and society. Due to the economic recession in the last fifteen years, she said, career advancement is much less certain for middle-class students graduating from college than in the previous generation. Three million young people have become **freetas**, a term used for those who float from part-time or contract job to job and continue to live with their parents after graduating from college. Another trend is the increasing number of **hikikomori**, (approximately one million), reclusive teenagers and young adults, who hardly venture outside of their bedrooms where computer game characters become their main social contacts. Virtual beings step in as easy social companions, partly replacing affective relationships in families. As Pokemon goes global, he is the cultural diplomat of a country that selectively forgets about its past and leads the way to new kinds of postindustrial relations within family and society.

On November 6, Michael Kimmel, professor of sociology at the State University of New York, Stony Brook, gave a dynamic talk entitled “Mars and Venus -- or Planet Earth: Men and Women in the New Millennium.” Professor Kimmel urged men to be more actively involved in the day-to-day running of the household. When they do that, the mental health of the entire family improves and children do better in school.

In addition, he noted that female college students will not gain complete sexual agency until every single one of them feels safe on campus. He urged men to actively engage in the movement to end sexual violence and not consider the issue solely as a women’s problem.

On November 5, Jordanian journalist Rana Husseini gave a talk entitled “From Honor Crimes to Empowerment: Women in Islam.” Her coverage of, and dedication to, ending crimes committed against women in the name of family honor helped raise awareness on a topic that is traditionally considered taboo. Until The Jordan Times began reporting on these femicides, the local press shied away from addressing the issue. The government responded to her coverage by introducing legal changes that suggest tougher punishments for men and women who kill female family members for their alleged engagement in illicit sexual affairs. Previously, perpetrators had only received lenient sentences, from three months to two years. Ms. Husseini stressed that honor crimes were not tied to Islam, but were rooted in century-old family traditions. According to her, honor crimes occur both in Muslim and Christian families.

On November 16, Elizabeth Fernea, professor emerita at University of Texas Austin, gave a talk entitled “Iraqi Women Then and Now.” Professor Fernea founded the women’s studies program at UT Austin. Her book *Guests of the Sheik: an Ethnography of an Iraqi Village* has been listed as one of the 500 great books written by women in a recent *Penguin Readers Guide*.

She noted that the current Iraqi penal code has all but obliterated women’s rights. Under the Baathist regime, the General Federation of Women was established and equitable inheritance, divorce, and child care laws were instituted (also as part of Saddam Hussein’s “divide & conquer” strategy to break up tribal structures). In today’s uncertain times, it is logical that some people seek comfort in religion and go back to their tribal structures. At the end of her talk, Professor Fernea said that we should leave it up to Iraqi women, however, to determine “if and how they want to be saved.”