

## **Advice to Graduate Applicants from Women's Studies Graduate Directors and Department Chairs**

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One of the most daunting aspects of graduate school is actually “getting in.” Preparing an application package can be a lonely and overwhelming process. What makes a good personal statement? How will I ever get three letters of reference? What should I submit as a writing sample? How long should my cover letter be and what should it say? Oh, and then, of course, there’s those pesky GRE scores—do they really count? All of the confidence that got us through our undergraduate degrees quickly fades as we face the seemingly unending tasks of putting together the perfect application.

In this section of the *Guide*, we hope to restore your confidence by taking out some of the mystery of the application process. Here we focus on the graduate application process through the eyes of directors of graduate studies or department chairs who oversee all aspects of graduate work within a program, including graduate program admissions.

### **What are some general characteristics of a strong application?**

- A good application should answer all of the questions in clear, concise language. Read what is required and address it at appropriate places in the application.
- Strong applications reflect a good fit between an applicant’s scholarly interests and the interests or skills of our faculty: can we train the student in the way that she or he desires?
- Previous coursework or the personal statement should reflect an understanding of academic women’s studies.
- Strong applications include strong letters of reference that speak to a prospective student’s intellectual capabilities and suitability for graduate study.

### **What role does fit play in determining graduate program admission?**

- To find the right fit, really do some homework; use the web and this *Guide* to understand the mission, faculty, and application process for different programs and departments.
- Develop lists of attractions/drawbacks for comparative purposes in evaluating different programs.
- Fit is critical. We cannot offer all aspects of women’s studies within our department, and we need to be sure we can train prospective students appropriately.
- The personal statement may be a way to illustrate how you could fit within a department or program: make reference to the mission statement, faculty expertise, and your own experiences.

**What role does a student's activist work play in evaluating the overall application, if any?**

- Evidence of involvement in activism is desirable. This is not a requirement or a top priority in assessing applications, but it is part of the whole picture. If you spent more time on organizing than on class work and it is reflected in your grades, then *really* say what you were doing and what you *learned* from those experiences.

**What role do campus visits play in the graduate application process?**

- Typically applicants do not visit campus prior to admission; most pre-admission review is through email and/or phone contact. Admitted students are invited to campus prior to making their final decisions about enrollment.
- We ask prospective students to study the FAQ portion of our website, and we answer many questions via email. Applicants are welcome to visit our campus at any time, but we do not encourage them to visit as part of the meet and greet process. Admitted students are invited to campus.

**What general words of advice would you offer to graduate applicants in women's studies?**

- Do not accept a letter of reference that is offered reluctantly.
- Be prepared to show why getting a graduate degree in women's studies fits into your career goals. Rather than "why women's studies," frame your application to show that *because of* women's studies you will accomplish your professional goals.

*Responses were contributed by Lynn Bolles, Graduate Studies Director in the Department of Women's Studies at the University of Maryland College Park, Maria Bevacqua, Women's Studies Department Chair at Minnesota State University, Mankato, and Nancy J. Kenney, Graduate Program Coordinator in the Department of Women's Studies at the University of Washington.*

## An Introduction to the Graduate Essays

Olivia C. Smith, Editor

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Half of the graduate school battle is actually getting accepted. The other half—actually surviving. And it is possible to survive graduate school, a point that many tenured faculty members can confirm. But graduate school would be so much easier to navigate if we just had some insider information. A couple of facts that I learned very early on in my graduate school years: 1.) Always, always treat the office administrative staff with the utmost respect as they work very hard for very little; know everything there is to know about university and department politics; and usually control your paycheck; 2.) Posturing—a.k.a. talking without a clear or relevant point just so that you can show everyone how much you know, which usually shows how much you don't know. Posturing is the one thing that many graduate students are usually pretty good at, and the one thing that drove me nuts throughout my years of graduate school. Posturing is just bad form—Avoid it!. 3.) Life does not stop just because you are in graduate school. Getting your work done is important, but having fun is also important. Learn how to balance both, and you will learn the art of surviving graduate school.

All of the above points, along with a thousand others, were somewhat of a mystery to me before graduate school. When I began the arduous process of applying to graduate schools, I had the strong support of my women's studies professors, who offered advice and openly shared their graduate school experiences. Although their advice proved invaluable, all of them had degrees outside of women's studies, and I longed to hear what graduate students in women's studies had to say about their experiences. Besides a few discussion threads on the WMST-L File Collection, to my knowledge, publications specifically focusing on women's studies graduate students' experiences did not exist. Today, five years after I began my search, there continues to be limited resources on this topic. I expect that the essays provided in this *Guide* will help enlighten students to some of the intricacies of women's and gender studies graduate programs. I also anticipate that these essays are just the beginning, and that as more and more students graduate from women's and gender studies programs, more and more of their experiences will be readily available through publications.

I was quite delighted to receive so many of the wonderful abstract submissions for this publication, but because of limited space and funds, I could only select a few essays to include. In the process of choosing essays, I attempted to balance different experiences and perspectives, which included consideration of degree types and essayists' diverse experiences and backgrounds. I also tried to find balance between personal reflections on actual experiences and theoretical analyses of women's and gender studies as a field, both important aspects when considering graduate school. Despite efforts to offer a comprehensive diversity of experiences, the essays represented here are not exhaustive. However, I do believe that these essays offer an important and unique peak into the mysterious world of graduate school.

This section begins with broader reflections on women's studies as a discipline. In "Encountering Women's Studies," Elora Halim Chowdhury draws on her years as a graduate student and then as a professional in women's studies to examine the field from the inside out. She explores important trends in women's studies and implications for students seeking a graduate degree. Katherine Side, in her essay "Standing Alone: Disciplining Women's Studies through Freestanding Graduate Programs," explores the difference between freestanding and collaborative women's studies programs.

The next three essays offer practical advice to those considering graduate school. We begin with an old favorite from previous *Guide* editions. The essay “Finding the Program that’s Right for You” originally appeared in the 1994 edition of the *Guide*. Despite its age, this essay continues to offer relevant and comprehensive advice and observations about conducting research and applying to women’s studies graduate programs. In “Incorporating Women’s Studies into a Traditional Social Science Doctoral Program,” Kimala Price shares her experiences pursuing a minor concentration in women’s studies and offers strategies for pursuing two discipline areas. Similarly, Brandy Simula offers useful advice for those who want to find the graduate program with the right fit in “Focusing on Fit: Finding the Right Graduate Program for You.”

The final three essays offer more personal reflections as the authors share unique and specific experiences while providing hands-on strategies for surviving graduate school. In “Seeking a Vocation: A Journey Beyond the Ivory Tower,” Katerine Rodriguez writes about her sometimes painful and yet very rewarding graduate school experiences. In the end, she finds that graduate school offers practical skills that can be applied outside of academia. Jennifer J. Gusman and Jeffrey S. Bucholtz, authors of “You *Can* Handle the Truth: Monitoring Power, Privilege, & Oppression in Feminist Relationships,” examine the complicated relationships, the communities built within graduate programs, and power differences within those communities that are inadvertently created even within the “safe spaces” of women’s studies. And finally, the essays end with Pamela M. Rossi-Keen’s often humorous and sometimes painful reflections on the myth and realities of motherhood in academia in her essay “Surprises: Maternity, Scholarship, and Politics in the Academy.”

I hope that you enjoy this new addition to the *Guide*. And remember to record your own experiences as you journey through graduate school—the literary world doesn’t have enough dark comedies!

## Encountering Women's Studies

Elora Halim Chowdhury

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I came to Women's Studies as an undergraduate international student in a small liberal arts college in the U.S. in the early 1990s, a time when the interdisciplinary discipline of women's studies was attaining institutional recognition and debate and dialogue over what constitutes women's studies research, scholarship, and praxis. Granted bachelor's, master's and finally the Ph.D. in women's studies over fifteen years offered me an unique position to occupy the roles of the student (carving out a track suitable to my particular interests), the teacher (constructing multi- and inter-disciplinary courses that often challenged disciplinary boundaries, and genealogical approaches to Women's Studies), the practitioner (using women's studies lens and tools to interrogate and operationalize a scholar/activist agenda); the researcher (using inter-disciplinary methods to conduct field-work and produce new knowledge) and the subject of inquiry (what does one do with a women's studies degree, and what are its potential and limits). Today, questioning the mettle of women's studies is far from over.

This is a field that emerged and evolved within contestations, and coming of age in women's studies for me has meant the same. At the outset I must note this conversation is located in a North American context and the contentions I refer to takes that location as a frame of reference. Writing from this vantage point for me means an acute awareness of the production process of the Third World feminist doing work on Bangladesh in the United States. Furthermore it brings to the fore encountering and confronting what Mary John (1997) has called the pre-determined trajectory of post-colonial subjects' West-ward turn for higher education, garnering knowledge within the US academy, recognizing historical processes that attributes privileged status to that knowledge particularly in relation to the peripheral status of higher education in Third World countries, and interrogating the "native informant" category bestowed upon or self-promoted or actively negotiated by elite Third World migrant intellectuals.

Women's studies is perhaps best defined as the academic site where explicit intersectional analysis, which means the privileging of gender as a unit of analysis in relation to other multiple axes of oppression including race, class and sexuality, occurs. Questions less frequently asked include how these dominant analytic categories of a U.S. – specific intersectionality translate in other national contexts, or configure women's relationships to other women within the national context of U.S. What have been the terms of engagement of US Women's Studies with Area Studies. How to mediate classroom discussions and course curriculum which relegate "theory" to the realm of the First World/Northern women who make forays into the realm of "activism/praxis/field experience" constituting the space of Women of Color/Third World women. What are the points of connection as well as disjunctures constituting relations between US born women of color and those from the global South. And, for that matter between elite women from the global South and those women they claim to represent. To what extent women's studies pedagogy allows the self-reflexive interrogation of the largely pre-determined historically constituted differences that shape the relationship between who you are and what you can say or "choose" to study. All of these questions have led me to problematize and position my work and its accountability with consideration to multiple and discrepant audiences and communities in Bangladesh and the U.S. These questions inevitably have shaped my feminist consciousness and Women's Studies research agenda.

The past decade has been an era of tremendous growth in the field. In the mid-1990s when I was applying to women's studies graduate programs I could only choose between one of two free-standing Ph.D. programs. An interest in global feminisms, gender and development, and a career as scholar/activist narrowed the option to only one. Acceptance then to that sole suitable program meant strategic fashioning of one's dossier. It certainly helped to have had a bachelor's and a master's in women's studies, and some work experience in the "field" relevant to my research agenda. Moreover, identifying faculty mentors in the program I was applying to and demonstrating the ability to be independent and resourceful in shaping one's graduate career was key given the program I entered had no full-time women's studies faculty, nor funds to support graduate students beyond three years, nor opportunities to teach undergraduate courses, nor organized initiatives around professional development. Lack of resources for inter-disciplinary programs including Ethnic Studies, Area Studies and Women's Studies speaks generally of University Administrations' lack of investment in interdisciplinary programs despite paying lip-service to their importance. This is a reflection of the corporatization of Higher Education in the service of global capitalism (Mohanty, 2003). In this climate of shrinking support, women's studies faculty and graduate students, reaping few rewards, are left with the Herculean task of running programs with meagre resources or access; racialized and sexualized exploitation continue to grease the wheels of the academic machinery. Despite high achievement records of women's studies graduates, increasing visibility of women's studies research and praxis, and the importance of foregrounding gendered analyses for building just societies, such a move to deny programmatic support can only be described as a poverty of imagination, and disregard of democratic principles. Being a student in one such impoverished yet pioneering and high-achieving women's studies program has taught me to be much more than *just* a graduate student in the conventional sense; indeed it has driven home the very politicized space and nature of a women's studies education in an era where misogyny of the white male power structure of the academy still thrives.

Along the lines of training women's studies scholars, I cannot emphasize enough the importance of a solid attention to inter-disciplinary methods. Because women's studies positions itself as oppositional to what is considered "legitimate" knowledge and is indeed a valid critique of much that is considered "knowledge," unwittingly there is a tendency in the field to be scornful of "master narratives." If interdisciplinary feminist methods, among other things, mean borrowing research tools from a variety of disciplines to ask new questions, to foreground questions of hierarchical relations of power between researcher and subjects of research, to be critically conscious of one's own social location and how that influences the research agenda, process and product, the accountability of the researcher to the communities they write about - all of these questions need to be thoroughly engaged in the classroom to prepare students for responsible research and to anchor one's work. Absent a grounding in "master narratives," and relying entirely on interdisciplinary methods may offer breadth but not depth. I truly believe this is an area that scholars and teachers of women's studies must now turn their attention, and it would behoove students to demand attention to these questions as part of their graduate education. These questions have implications for those seeking tenure-track positions in disciplines or interdisciplinary programs.

In the mid 1990s, the job market tilted favorably toward the disciplinary trained gender scholar rather than the interdisciplinary women's studies scholar because the former could be hired as joint appointments. Recent years have witnessed the opening up and creation of tenure-track positions seeking full time appointment in women's studies of scholars trained in the field and even in tracks of "intersectionality" and global/transnational feminisms. I find particularly interesting the resolute grounding of intersectionality tracks in scholarship on Euro-America, and the transnational tracks beyond the geographic Euro-America. Hence, the continued divisions in conceptualizing the categories "women of color" and Third world feminism as well as the U.S. and the global. We must dislodge this division which hinges on the idea that the borders of the American nation are intact,

and obfuscates the confluence of the local and the global in the transnational (Eisenstein, 2004). These false divisions then limit in vision the urgent alliances that are possible across oppositional spaces literally Women's Studies, Ethnic Studies *and* Area/International studies. Having just come off the U.S. job market, I can vouch for my own marketability in transnational feminism-track as opposed to the woman of color-track albeit arguably the boundaries between these tracks are essentially fluid.

These divisions also influence the (re)production of women's studies constituencies who will be divided along lines of color, nationality and citizenship. They lead to the reductionism of U.S. feminism as liberal and Western, and its imperialist erasure of the multiple forms of feminisms 'elsewhere,' and the interconnected struggles of women confronting multiple systems of power (Alexander, 2002). For example, in my "Women in Global Perspectives" course, the students who are the most enthusiastic endorsers are from new immigrant communities and international students. Even the most theoretically savvy North American women's studies student has difficulty in deconstructing categories such as "Third World women" although they are quite adept in applying an intersectional lens to categories such as "Western/Hegemonic Feminisms" or US women of color. At the same time, when the subject of women 'elsewhere' is broached, there appears to be a peculiar collapsing of divisions among women in the U.S. so as to create a singular privileged First World woman in relation to her oppressed Third World counterpart.

Women's studies pedagogy has championed the validation of personal experiences, mostly through a promotion of confessional statements, and journaling of personal reactions. I myself am a product of that pedagogy, about which I must add a cautionary note. Considered libratory and validating of women's experiences, this confessional model can also be stifling and counter-productive because it stands the risk of reinforcing ascribed categories and assumptions of the 'other.' While I do not doubt the importance of creating safe spaces to share experience and build alliance, I am extremely conscious of which students, voices, and experiences are privileged and which enunciations intelligible through these modes of learning given the U.S. specific frame of reference implicitly rooted in a liberal individualism. Hence, unless we are careful to simultaneously address systematic and global inequities, do we run the risk of de-intellectualizing and depoliticizing a field which is arguably still marginal within academe particularly when we – women's studies scholars in the academy - are still evaluated (promotion and tenure) by institutional standards and criteria which devalue work (research, teaching, scholarship) that is not adequately intellectual.

As women's studies graduate students and newly minted women's studies Ph.D.s enter and position themselves within the academy, these are scattered issues they may confront. I do consider this a privileged position to enact social change, to further oppositional consciousness, to take apart false dichotomies, to forge unsuspecting alliances, conversations and dialogues. Through contestation, the field has emerged, and it is time to take ownership of that history as we continue our struggles toward more rigorous feminist solidarity.

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# Standing Alone: Disciplining Women's Studies through Freestanding Graduate Programs

Katherine Side

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The development of undergraduate Women's Studies programs throughout the 1970s and 1980s in the United States and Canada often reflected three realities: faculty members received their education in and/or were appointed to programs and departments other than Women's Studies; Women's Studies had limited visibility and received relatively little institutional support; and interdisciplinary scholarship was generally not well recognized or well respected. With the recent proliferation of Masters level programs in Women's Studies, most of which were developed during the 1980s, and doctorate level programs, all of which were developed during the 1990s or later, Women's Studies now occupies a more visible place in universities and has gained significant scholarly and institutional legitimacy.

Women's Studies, sometimes positioned as a discipline and sometimes positioned as an interdisciplinary domain (Boxer 1998; Wiegman 2002), is actively becoming disciplined.<sup>1</sup> Disciplines serve intellectual and practical functions. Intellectually, they are based in a common vocabulary, in shared sets of assumptions and collective understandings about how to investigate and interrogate knowledge projects in ways that distinguish them from one another (Buker 2003, 73). Practically, disciplines divide up intellectual labour and serve as bases for the distribution of institutional resources. For example, disciplines often have designated hiring and tenure lines and are often included in national assessment schemes and funding frameworks (Griffin 2005, 108).

Interdisciplinary domains or "fields of inquiry" (Buker 2003, 73) draw on the common vocabulary, shared assumptions and collective understandings of a number of disciplines to investigate and interrogate knowledge projects, without attempting to distinguish them from one another. Interdisciplinary domains or fields of inquiry challenge the practical division of intellectual labour and the allocation of resources by discipline and as a result, often lack the same institutional support as disciplines. For example, faculty members in interdisciplinary domains or fields of inquiry are often hired in disciplines, but have responsibilities in the discipline and in the interdisciplinary domain, the latter of which is often excluded from national assessment schemes and funding frameworks.

As opportunities to obtain graduate degrees in Women's Studies increase, and as Women's Studies becomes disciplined, the freestanding PhD in Women's Studies is likely to be the preferred academic requirement and those expecting to hold academic appointments in Women's Studies in the future should be looking toward freestanding graduate programs.<sup>2</sup>

## *Freestanding and Collaborative Programs*

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<sup>1</sup> This use of disciplined has more than one meaning. It conveys the construction of Women's Studies as a distinctive body of knowledge production embedded in the larger context of institutional structures and the construction of boundaries around the production and reproduction of knowledge. Both meanings challenge interdisciplinarity as it is valued in Women's Studies.

<sup>2</sup> The freestanding degree in Women's Studies began to be offered in the United States at Emory University in 1991 and at Clark University in 1992. York University in Canada began offering the freestanding PhD in Women's Studies in 1992. Some free-standing programs in Women's Studies require students to complete disciplinary clusters (Babb 1996). Other program models in graduate Women's Studies include: the independent study model; the consortium model and the graduate minor (Shteir 1997).

Freestanding or stand-alone graduate programs in Women's Studies facilitate the integration of knowledge from multiple disciplines simultaneously into a distinct epistemology that confers a specific identity and community membership (Anderson 1996; Boxer 1998; Allen and Kitch 1998; Side 2001; Wiegman 2001, in Buker 2003). Freestanding graduate programs in Women's Studies typically stand alone within university structures and grant degrees in Women's Studies, not in combination with another discipline.

Collaborative graduate programs in Women's Studies examine scholarly topics from the combined perspective of two disciplines, one of which is Women's Studies (Romero 2000).<sup>3</sup> Collaborative programs may require joint admission to a graduate program in a discipline and in Women's Studies (Armatage 1996) or may require admission to a graduate program in a discipline other than Women's Studies. Typically, collaborative graduate programs require that coursework be completed in the discipline and a specific identity and community membership may be closely tied to a discipline rather than to Women's Studies. Some collaborative programs in Women's Studies grant joint degrees in a discipline and in Women's Studies, while others grant degrees in the discipline with a certificate or notation of a concentration in Women's Studies.

### *Disciplining Women's Studies*

The freestanding graduate degree assures a prominent place for Women's Studies in the university and in the wider academic community. Disciplinary continuity, understood as the acquisition of cumulative levels of education within a discipline, is increasingly expected for the purposes of graduate school admission and academic appointment, but disciplinary continuity in Women's Studies has only recently been possible. The founders of Women's Studies programs were educated in disciplines other than Women's Studies, often the result of the 'elasticity' of the disciplines. As it is now possible to proceed from the BA level, to the MA level, to the PhD level in Women's Studies, the freestanding PhD in Women's Studies is likely to become the preferred terminal degree for academic appointments over collaborative degrees or degrees in other disciplines.

Women's Studies is also being shaped as a discipline from within its own professional associations. A decade ago, those who held office in the National Women's Studies Association and the Canadian Women's Studies Association were committed to Women's Studies as an intellectual project, but were appointed to other disciplines. Those presently holding office in both these associations, some of whom have earned Women's Studies degrees, are much more likely to hold appointments in Women's Studies. For example, the recently appointed Executive Director of the National Women's Studies Association is a graduate of the freestanding doctorate in Women's Studies and at least seven members of the National Women's Studies Association's 2005 Governing Council hold appointments, many of them as Directors, in Women and/or Gender Studies. All, except one, member of the 2005 Board of Directors of the Canadian Women's Studies Association hold academic appointments in Women's Studies programs and departments.

Initial concerns expressed about how graduates from freestanding Women's Studies programs might be displaced in university hiring processes (Friedman 1998) have proven to be unfounded and the expansion of Women's Studies, including its graduate programs, has increased

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<sup>3</sup> While disciplines in collaborative graduate programs are typically student-selected, disciplinary collaboration with Women's Studies is more widely available at some institutions than others. At the University of Toronto, for instance, twenty-eight academic units participate in the collaborative Women's Studies PhD program.

its visibility in universities and highlighted its contributions to interdisciplinary scholarship, and graduates from freestanding graduate programs in Women's Studies will be particularly well positioned to take advantage of the many opportunities that these changes present.

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## **Finding the Program that's Right for You**

As it originally appeared in the 1994 edition of the *Guide*

Karen Kidd and Ande Spencer

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Any reference book is only as good as the use you make of it. Although the guide that follows is packed with information, we realize only too well that: (1) its list of programs is probably incomplete; (2) its information will be obsolescent before it leaves the printer's office, and even more out-of-date by the time it reaches your hands; and (3) it supplies only the basic objective data, and leaves to you the more important task of evaluating the actual character and quality of the programs. We have gathered the information in this guide to help you get started, not to limit the scope of your inquiry.

As graduate students ourselves, we realize how daunting and mystifying the search for "the right program" can be. Although you learned a lot about the selection process when you chose your undergraduate institution/s, that knowledge will no longer suffice. You need to learn the new, and often unwritten, rules of graduate education.

The best source of information about graduate school is usually the Women's Studies faculty with whom you have already worked and developed rapport; seek them out, tell them what you're looking for, and ask their advice. Trips to the campus library and bookstore can also yield a wealth of information. Beyond the standard reference books on graduate programs, you will also find self-help books like Paula Caplan's recent *Lifting a Ton of Feathers: A Woman's Guide to Surviving in the Academic World* (Toronto, 1993), which supply practical suggestions and point you to other books and articles that can be helpful. Friends and friends-of-friends may also be a valuable source of "inside information" about specific Women's Studies programs and professors.

Still, there are a few things that everyone needs to know. When applying for undergraduate study, you probably gave serious consideration to the academic reputations of the colleges or universities you wanted to attend. But since graduate education tends to be focused at the departmental or program level, you now need to give more weight to the strengths of individual Women's Studies programs and their faculties. Excellent programs can exist at fair-to-middling schools and mediocre programs (or worse) can exist in some of the finest universities. When you complete your degree, people in the field are likely to estimate its worth by the caliber of your program, not simply by the name and reputation of the institution where it is located.

Also of paramount importance in graduate education is the working relationship between faculty and students, so before committing yourself to a program, you need to learn everything you can about the members of its faculty. Go to the library and find out what books and articles each has published, then read the book reviews and letters to the editor that followed publication. (If you don't yet know how to do a thorough literature search, ask your reference librarian for help. Now is the time to learn!) Talk with people you know to see if any of your faculty or friends is personally acquainted with the scholars whose work most interests you.

Then, having done your homework, take the initiative to establish personal contact with the professors with whom you might like to study. Write down a list of questions and pick up the telephone. If possible, schedule an appointment to meet with the professor in person, but, at the very least, talk with her/him by phone. Professors will probably be eager to give much more time and attention to prospective students who have been accepted by a number of programs and need to decide between them than they will be willing to give to individuals who have not yet applied

anywhere. So it is helpful to make contact at least twice---once before you apply and again after you have been accepted, when you are making your final choice. Although department secretaries can be enormously helpful and informative (building a good relationship with the secretary will yield countless dividends in any program!), you should nonetheless be wary if professors are inaccessible and you find yourself stonewalled at the secretary's desk.

After you have established contact with a faculty member, your questions might include *some* of the following: What does your program look for in prospective students? What does your program offer its students? What do you think are its strongest and weakest points? Approximately what percent of applicants are admitted? Of those, what percent are typically awarded fellowships and/or assistantships? What percent of students who enter your program actually finish and how long does it generally take them to complete their studies? What do you typically require of students in your classes or seminars? Do your course requirements reflect the typical expectations of your faculty colleagues? Do faculty tend to promote competition between students or are the relationships between students relaxed and cooperative? How do you, personally, like to mentor your students? How do the relationships between students and their academic advisers typically develop? Do you feel pressured to work closely with more students than time allows, given the demands of your teaching and research? Are you tenured and do you expect to stay in this program indefinitely? Are you planning to be away on sabbatical in the foreseeable future? How successful have you been in helping your students find funding for their research? and in helping them find employment when they finish their studies? Can you arrange for me to talk with some current students (or recent graduates) who have interests and/or backgrounds similar to mine? Is there attention to issues of diversity and difference in your program and can students like me expect to find networks for peer support? What are your current research projects? Would you be interested in working with a student whose interests include [list your interests] or is there someone else in the program that you could recommend I contact about work in these areas? How is Women's Studies situated within the larger university, i.e., does it have all the faculty, program funding, space, and library resources that its students need? Is the university committed to Women's Studies and to the work of women students more generally, or is the program situated in the midst of a chilly climate?

In asking such questions, remember that you have the right to know, and that attracting and advancing students is an important part of any professor's job. Although the list of possible inquiries is endless, by making them you will also gain substantive insights that can be discovered in no other way. Pay attention to the quality of your interactions with prospective mentors and heed your personal, intuitive reactions. We've all heard stories about superb scholars who are horrible as teachers and downright abusive as mentors; and we've all seen situations in which a simple mismatch of temperaments has made it difficult for a student to succeed. Ultimately, you are the only person who can judge whether the programs and professors that look best on paper will really be the best for you. Your choices and options are many and we wish you the best of luck!

## **Incorporating Women's Studies into a Traditional Social Science Doctoral Program**

Kimala Price

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There are many questions to consider when deciding to pursue a graduate degree. What are my intellectual interests? What are my future career aspirations? Academia? Public Service? Social Activism? Industry? What kind of graduate program is best suited to my needs and desires? What kind of financial aid is available? Why do I even want to go to graduate school at all?

I remember wrestling with these questions in the mid-1990s. I had taken a four year educational break. During that time, I worked for a number of feminist advocacy groups in Washington, DC. After a while, I grew restless, as I missed the intellectual stimulation of academe. I wanted to find a way in which I could connect my work experience in reproductive justice and social policy with feminist social and political theory. I wanted to be a *scholar* as well as an *activist*. It was a question of how best to go about this.

At the time, there were only a handful of doctoral programs in women's studies, including joint Ph.D. programs. Furthermore, I was interested in studying public policy and really wanted to be grounded in a traditional social science discipline in order to do so. Besides, I had been a political science major as an undergraduate. I eventually narrowed my choices to universities that had strong graduate programs in political science as well as strong women's studies programs where I could pursue either a graduate certificate or a masters' degree.

I ultimately decided to pursue a minor concentration in women's studies. The minor allowed me to systematically explore and challenge how gender, race/ethnicity, class and knowledge are conceptualized and studied within political science. It also raised questions about what it means to be a practicing feminist political scientist and was crucial in helping me shape my dissertation which focused on women's reproductive health policy.

Although I did well on the job market, I found being an interdisciplinary job candidate a challenge. After all, I had to work twice as hard to prove myself to multiple sets of departmental faculty. After undergoing eight, exhausting interviews for both faculty and postdoctoral positions in political science, public policy, women's studies and African American studies, I accepted a three-year postdoctoral position at a nonprofit research center. Not only has this position given me the time and resources to build a research and publication agenda, it has also allowed me to bridge my interests in policy research and reproductive justice advocacy in exciting ways.

Pursuing dual, yet complementary, tracks in graduate school wasn't easy. It took a lot of planning to make it work. For those of you considering a similar track, I would like to share a few strategies that I learned along the way.

**Be clear about what you want and then set specific criteria for selecting potential graduate programs in *both* disciplines.**

The questions posed at the beginning of this essay are a great way to start this process.

**Gather as much information as possible to make an informed decision.**

Conduct research on the courses offered, the teaching and research interests of faculty, the program requirements, whether the social science department in question is open to interdisciplinary work in

other departments, and other pertinent information. Consult graduate guides such as NWSA's guide, the various Peterson's Guides and guides produced by the professional association(s) of your social science discipline, such as the American Political Science Association's *Guide to Graduate Programs in Political Science*. It also helps to call departments/programs directly with specific questions. While it is good to talk with faculty, don't forget to talk to graduate students as well.

**Learn about financial aid options for support in your first year through the dissertation stage.**

One advantage to being interdisciplinary is that you expand your financial aid options. Great resources to check are the Peterson's guide *Getting Money for Graduate School* (2002) and Laurie Blum's *Free Money for Graduate School* (2000). I also checked the financial aid websites of potential graduate schools. These sites often provide information on funding support specifically geared toward graduate students.

**Know what the requirements are for both programs and then develop a strategy for finishing.**

Balancing the requirements for a dual degree was difficult. My women's studies certificate not only required taking an additional 18 credits, but also required writing a publishable thesis. This was in addition to my political science doctoral work. Creating a timeline for coursework, teaching, research assistantships, qualifying exams and a thesis or dissertation will help you stay on track and finish in a reasonable amount of time. Robert Peters' *Getting What You Came For: The Smart Student's Guide to Earning a Master's or a Ph.D.* (1998) is a great resource to consult for this task.

**Pursue teaching and research experience in both fields.**

In the long run, it will help you when you're on the job market, especially if you want to be considered for joint appointments. Keep in mind that many universities have research centers that focus on women and gender. These centers often hire grad students across the disciplinary spectrum and are great places to gain interdisciplinary research skills and training.

**Prepare early for the job market.**

Don't wait until you're on the verge of finishing your degree(s) to think about the job market. Learn the professional norms of both worlds early in your graduate career. Go to job search and other career development workshops within your department(s) and at your university's career center. Attend the talks of job candidates at your department(s) to see how they're done. Join both social science and women's studies professional associations, and present and network at conferences in *both* disciplines. It also helps to have an advisor who can help you navigate both disciplines as I had. To get a sense of what academic life is like from the job search to getting tenure, I suggest reading *The Academic's Handbook* (Daneef and Goodwin 1995) and *Ms. Mentor's Impeccable Advice to Women in Academia* (Toth 2002).

**Good Luck!**

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## **Focusing on Fit: Finding the Right Graduate Program for You**

Brandy L. Simula

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Determining a program's fit before entering that program can strongly influence your happiness there. By fit, I mean how well a program's philosophy, goals, and climate mesh with your own needs, goals, and personality. It is relatively easy to find program rankings, determine whether there are faculty members present with whom you would like to work, and whether the program offers the concentration you are interested in. However, it can be quite difficult to determine whether a program is a good fit for you. Although it is unlikely that you will find a program that meets your preferences in every way, it is likely that you will find that certain programs meet your academic goals more than others. The key is to determine the factors that are important to you.

A variety of factors influence whether a program will be a good fit for you. Which factors go into our definition of fit and the relative importance of each is something that is unique to each of us. My purpose in this essay is to share with you some common questions that students ask when they are attempting to determine fit and to demonstrate how you might go about determining which arrangement fits you best. These questions are intended as a starting point from which you can create your own set of questions to help you determine fit. It is important to know not only what arrangement is in place at each program, but which arrangement you prefer.

### **Would you be happiest in a large or small program?**

Large programs usually offer more courses, faculty members with whom you can work, and diverse areas of concentration but have larger class sizes and make it difficult to connect with faculty. Small programs make it easier for students to connect with faculty members and one another and facilitate collaboration but offer less variety of courses and fewer faculty members with whom you can work.

### **Do you prefer structure or flexibility in designing your plan of study and area of concentration?**

Highly structured programs make it easier to map out your plan of study and facilitate preparation for exams and the dissertation but can reduce your control over coursework and your plan of study. A more flexible program might allow you to create your own plan of study and include the courses that best serve your own goals but might make it difficult for you to ascertain what training you need and may make it difficult for you to determine whether you are meeting the requirements of the program.

### **Does the program offer fellowship or assistantship support?**

Fellowship support allows a student to pursue his/her own research goals while assistantship support provides students with research and teaching training. Assistantships facilitate relationships between students and faculty members but limit students' ability to pursue their own studies unless the assistantship duties are related to the research or professional goals of the student.

### **How do graduate students relate to one another?**

Programs that have fewer sources of funding than students often foster competition. Competition can motivate students, but often prevents collaboration. Programs that value collaboration over competition encourage students to work together on conference presentations and publications. In some programs, students across cohorts work together, while in others, students from different cohorts spend very little time together. Some programs value collaboration across concentrations while others encourage students to work with others in their same concentration. The diversity or similarity of students' backgrounds influences programs in many ways, including relations between students.

### **Does the program provide private, shared, or no office space?**

The availability of office space influences relationships between students and how much work students are expected to do on campus. Sharing office space can help to create strong bonds between students and can facilitate collaboration, but it can also be a distraction from work. Programs that provide office space to students usually expect students to be more visible on campus. Not having office space can mean that students have to work harder to form relationships and have to find another place from which to work. However, office spaces that are shared among many students are often not ideal places to work because there are many distractions.

### **Are computers provided in student offices, in a computer lab, or not at all?**

Even if you have your own computer, some of your courses may require you to use software that you do not have on your own computer. Sharing computers, like sharing office space, facilitates friendships and collaboration between students but it can also hinder your ability to get work done.

### **Does the program focus on preparing students for careers in Research I institutions or can it help students prepare for a variety of different career paths?**

Programs that focus on preparing students for Research I careers are usually very effective at preparing students for Research I careers but are not as effective at preparing students for careers in the private sector or at liberal arts schools or community colleges. Conversely, programs that can prepare students for a wide variety of career paths may not be as effective at preparing students for a Research I career.

### **Conclusion**

Knowing the answers to these questions and knowing which arrangement you prefer can help you to determine whether a program is a good fit for you. I don't believe that there is any such thing as a 'perfect' fit, but some programs will be a much better fit for you than others. Being in a program that is a good fit for you will positively influence your happiness and success in graduate school because you will be in a place that facilitates your work and feels right for you.

## Seeking a Vocation: A Journey Beyond the Ivory Tower

Katerine Rodriguez

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As a Colombian immigrant, attending graduate school had always been a dream. When I was considering graduate school, my parents were undergoing a divorce, and leaving behind my mother who was financially and emotionally devastated was not an option. I had a part-time job at a community college, so I decided to enroll part-time at Florida Atlantic University and help support my family. I applied to the Sociology Masters program because it was a more “respected” discipline than Women’s Studies; however, within the first semester, I felt the subtle, androcentric attitude of professors who made disparaging remarks about Women’s Studies. With courage, I finally pursued my passion by decamping to the Women’s Studies program.

In retrospect, when I entered graduate school I was clueless. As the first in my family to go to graduate school, I was not prepared for the mores of graduate school. Not only was my cultural background different, but I was going part-time and working outside the department. Although having a job gave me job experience within the context of community colleges, it isolated me from my program. I tried to be involved in the department, but events always seemed to conflict with my work schedule. On top of that, I was painfully shy at the beginning of my program especially around professors. Luckily, some of my Women’s Studies professors who had been my undergraduate professors did reach out to me.

Graduate school is definitely not the place where you can isolate yourself. My self-reliance was a vital quality that had brought me far, but in order to succeed, I needed to forge alliances. My classmates had figured this out sooner and were not afraid to align themselves with professors and each other, realizing that the relationships they were nourishing would further their academic pursuits. Most importantly, professors are the gatekeepers to future recommendation letters that can advance a student’s academic career. As I began to get more involved with my department, I learned to negotiate the politics of graduate school. I gained my voice and transferable skills inside and outside the classroom. My confidence and assertiveness blossomed as I sought guidance from my professors and classmates. Above all, I realized the importance of networking.

When graduation approached, I was proud of my transformation but conflicted about applying for doctorate programs. While my peers were preparing to climb the ivory tower, I had to figure out what I wanted even if it meant abandoning the prestigious dream of becoming a professor. So I decided to place aside my graduate school applications and focus on the job hunt process. The summer before graduating, I polished my resume by utilizing the university’s career center and asking for feedback from everyone I knew. My research skills came in handy when I spent hours at bookstores reading the latest job seeker manuals. To my disappointment, I found that the majority of career manuals were predominantly targeted at men until I came across *What Color is Your Parachute* by Richard Nelson Bolles. Bolles doesn’t cater to the ideals of the male dominated workplace/ misogynistic corporate culture by using stereotypical advice. Bolles’s commitment to using gender free language throughout his book addresses the world of work in a way that both genders can appreciate.

My last semester, I sent out resumes and focused on professional networking. I targeted my desired geography of companies by religiously searching the job vacancies of organizations where I wanted to work and joined professional organizations. Soon after graduating, I had an interview at another community college and had to undergo a series of rigorous interviews with a search committee where I had to give a presentation. I was amazed at how comfortable and calm I was. Everyone assumes that academic life is not the real world, but here I was employing all the major

skills, such as presentation, written/oral and research skills, I gained in my Masters program. I truly believe that graduate school is as real world as it gets, and various skills are highly transferable to the non-academic industries.

The other place that I interviewed was the Renfrew Center of Florida, a trailblazing treatment facility for women with eating disorders, for a position as Education Coordinator, to help adolescent patients transition back into school. Renfrew appealed to me the most because I would get the opportunity to work with young women. The company has many feminist-oriented core values. Its mission is to empower women through change and the backbone of treatment center is its interdisciplinary team that is composed of various professionals who work together across disciplines. The company also has a foundation to ensure that women from all walks of life receive treatment. The center felt I was an ideal candidate because of my specialized interdisciplinary knowledge of gender plus practical experience in areas of public health and Women's Studies which I gained from an internship at a Community Wellness Center where I worked with teenage urban mothers. I opted to do an internship instead of a thesis and in the end the internship opened the door in a field that I never would have imagined myself in. When I finally accepted the job, I employed the one skill that most women are never taught or discouraged to use: the art of salary negotiation. Women need the courage to voice their worth as employees; I felt empowered that I learned how to negotiate my value because I knew my future performance on the job would prove it.

At Renfrew, I was given a unique opportunity as a feminist educator in a medical context. Many pessimists warned that even a Masters, much less one in Women's Studies, would not ensure a job in today's market. But my specialized knowledge of gender combined with the transferable tools I gained from my program allowed me the opportunity to find meaningful work. Actually, in Paulo Freire's words, Women's Studies inspired me to seek my *vocation*, and put my concept of feminist knowledge into action.

## **You Can Handle the Truth: Monitoring Power, Privilege, & Oppression in Feminist Relationships**

Jennifer J. Gusman & Jeffrey S. Bucholtz

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Why do any of us choose a women's studies graduate program? After two years in our program, we believe that women's studies students are searching for a community and safe space from which they can work toward their aspirations to facilitate social change. As two graduate students in San Diego State University's Women's Studies department, we have experienced firsthand the positive, motivating and productive process of building such relationships. What we did not expect, though, was that even in a feminist environment, our desires to create a safe-space could, in fact, suppress the much needed and often uncomfortable acknowledgement that real power differences affected us. The need for this acknowledgement was highlighted by our program's admittance of its first and only male graduate student. His introduction to the program acted as a catalyst for an examination of both the valuable and dangerous aspects of creating relationships between privileged and oppressed groups. Through that process we came to understand how we had sabotaged some of our best intentions by ignoring one of the most important insights women's studies has proffered: that societal power differences structure our personal relationships whether we want them to or not.

Within the first few weeks of our program, our class quickly became emotionally invested in our growing friendships, and excited about our mutual desires to create a more just world. Our relationships developed rapidly, since as women's studies students we believed it important to create a safe space. However, in doing so, we often – unintentionally – would avoid highlighting the differences between individuals for fear of seeming non-inclusive and damaging the safe space we were working hard to establish. For our class, with its one male student, the fallacy of this approach would become glaringly obvious. Historically, women's studies has created a safe space for women to study and explore their subjugation to men, and for that reason, the presence of a man in our program created a fundamental change to that space. This made the gender differences between us all the more important to acknowledge, because with Jeff in the room, the social power inequalities between men and women that we so readily analyzed with respect to the outside world, now lived and breathed inside our own classes and conversations. Addressing this power difference proved difficult, though, as our unspoken assumption was that to acknowledge the gender difference was to threaten our community, our safe space.

Instead, many of the women in our class would tell Jeff that they didn't think of him as a man. While Jeff initially took this as a compliment about his incorporation into the program, during our studies we came across Ruth Frankenberg's discussion of the problematic "colorblindness" that seeks to erase differences in interracial alliances, but instead ignores them.<sup>1</sup> She calls this "power evasive discourse" and in our case, the women in the program were erasing Jeff's gender in an attempt to avoid the complex and painful realities it suggested about our relationships. In retrospect, we believe there are several reasons why the women in the program engaged in "gender blind" discourse. Perhaps the two most pertinent to this discussion are: 1) Over time, women's studies has become more and more focused on building alliances and this notion of inclusivity has been extended to men, and 2) as the women developed friendships with Jeff, they did not want to

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<sup>1</sup> Frankenberg, Ruth. 1993. *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

hurt him.<sup>2</sup> We continue to wonder how this focus on inclusivity and emotional safety in women's studies affects our ability to examine the workings of social privileges and oppressions within our relationships. Grateful for the camaraderie of other feminists, it can be both harder to recognize the operation of power in those relationships, and more painful to address.

As feminist author Uma Narayan points out, avoidance of difficult conversations about privilege and oppression exacts a heavier price on those of the oppressed group.<sup>3</sup> This price is illustrated by a classroom experience described by Jeff:

The class was engaged in a discussion of the ways men belittle women. One of the students expressed her anger towards men, and then turned to me to qualify her response by saying "We know not all men are like this." The conversation changed. When my presence was highlighted, all of these women seemed not to be angry with men anymore. An important discussion where women addressed their anger with men stopped to keep me from feeling uncomfortable.

Thus, in alliances between privileged and oppressed groups, the oppressed group member will get hurt or compromised, despite the "good will" from the privileged group member.<sup>4</sup> Recognizing and discussing this reality does not change it, but rather mitigates its effects by enabling group members to make deliberate choices regarding their interactions with an awareness of the potential effects.

Such a conversation might have prevented an uncomfortable situation in which Jeff made a deliberate choice not to participate in a class discussion on pregnancy and motherhood, but the women did not know how to interpret his silence. The result, as Jennifer recounts, was that at least one woman in the room felt silenced:

There was an undercurrent of tension, as eyes kept glancing at Jeff. His silence was unnerving, as it seemed to highlight his exclusion from the conversation. As the discussion went on, I began to question whether or not I should contribute and extend the conversation. Then the instructor pointedly apologized for excluding Jeff, and asked if he had anything to share. He didn't, but as the attention focused on him, I realized my opportunity to speak was gone.

Once we began to analyze power dynamics within the emotional safety we had created through our friendships, we were able to engage in a process of self-reflective dialogues about how power impacted our relationships. We believe that the need for this process goes far beyond the relatively few instances in which men are part of graduate level women's studies. Any group of students will need to maintain constant vigilance and open communication regarding the complex ways social privileges and oppressions impact them. Therefore, our unintentional replications of power-infused relationships, and our attempts to address them, have useful applications for any women's studies student/faculty who wishes to reconcile her/his hopes for a healthy and productive graduate program with the realities of power, privilege and oppression.

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<sup>2</sup> Dr. Oliva Espin, 2004. San Diego State University (personal communication, March 2004)

<sup>3</sup> Narayan, Uma. 1998. "Working Together Across Difference: Some Considerations on Emotions and Political Practice." *Hypatia* 3.2 (Summer): 31-47.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

## Surprises: Maternity, Scholarship, and Politics in the Academy

Pamela M. Rossi-Keen

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When I examined the third pregnancy test, hoping for some oracle of promise, I was disappointed to find that it, too, had one solid purple line and one faint shadow of another. The first two had been equally unconvincing. Or maybe I was praying against a bold positive. I wanted to enjoy—for just a little longer—the possibility that my husband and I were not about to be parents. Little did I know that this vague, seemingly variable, and certainly inconclusive stick was to be a metaphor for my life as a mother/scholar.

The next week, a blood test confirmed my fear: I was expecting our first child. The timing could not have been worse: At age 25, I had just completed my first term of courses toward my doctorate. I was impressing my faculty, and frankly, myself with my work. I was drawn irresistibly to the game of academe: big ideas, grappling for position, the library. My recent feminist awakening, the final catalyst that pushed me back to school, was invigorating my ambition and my independence. And then this baby.

The spectrum of emotions I experienced initially—regret, anger, fear, embarrassment, mourning—soon gave way to practical concerns. How would a child impact my young marriage? How would two graduate students on stipends with no maternity insurance fund the expenses of getting the child here? And what about the diapers and bottles and food once she was here? (I say “she,” because I was at least certain of the mission I was being given: to train a liberated woman from the time of conception, imbuing within her freedom of thought, the right to yell about injustice, and the love of her beautiful body.) Would my faculty and colleagues think that I didn’t take seriously the rigor of my work? Most pressing, would my colleagues take my feminism seriously when it seemed that I had jumped right into the wife/mother role? At the crux of this fear was my own deeply held belief in separate spheres: a myth—one of many—that constitutes the subjectivity of such a state.<sup>1</sup>

The myths and realities of my continuing experience as a mother/scholar will serve as the frame for this essay. For me, motherhood has been one surprise, negotiation and revaluation after another (including the announcement that my little feminist would be a “he”). In this essay I discuss the experience of the mother/scholar: in my case, a heteronormative, white, middle-class American woman who gives birth and nurtures a child while living the life of an aspiring academic.

**Myth #1:       The academy is a place of liberal thought and consequent accommodations.**

Faculty and colleagues should congratulate my enacted independence and appreciate me for my scholarly contribution alone. My university should support the constraints of my life, because it wants the use of my mind, and my body goes with that. The academy is a place of equal opportunity for those with and without physical liabilities.

**Reality #1:     The academy is often a conservative place, holding the corporeal male experience as normative, and thus makes few concessions for academics who do not share this experience. But others do make room.**

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<sup>1</sup> I do not use myth in this essay as a story that explains the way things are. Rather, I employ this term as a friendlier way of saying *lie*.

I received my first reality check while searching for a place on campus to nurse my son. The health center told me that there is no such designated area on campus, but I could do it on a bench outside, covered with a jacket. I declined, reminding the nurse that I teach nineteen-year-old boys. Though my unwillingness to expose my breasts to my students mystified her, she conceded that I could feed Owen in a basement restroom.

I contacted the Office of Institutional Equity, the university president's office, and the women's studies department asking them for a location or advice. I never heard from any of them.

Disappointed and perplexed, my husband and I figured something out: Daniel would bring Owen to school three times each day to eat. This meant that: 1) Owen was nursed in the car parked on the edge of campus; 2) Daniel had to ready Owen, leave his own work, and wait while Owen ate every day; and 3) I could count on no institution, but only on someone who claimed to love and then did it. This has far more merit than relying on an organization that claims to be based on equal opportunity and progressive thought.<sup>2</sup>

**Myth #2: Scholars with families divide their attention. Something is going to suffer.**

This myth was handed to me without delicacy or nuance, but simply stated (ironically) by a women's studies professor. I believe her exact words were, "You cannot do it all. If you have children, you'll never be a successful scholar." Before gagging on this bit of doom, let's explore what is meant by "suffer."

**Reality #2: Scholars who live an identity of scholarly inquiry and love find both aspects of their lives richer for participation in the other.**

Does "suffer" mean that, in fact, I will not be able to bake cookies biweekly? Or that, in lieu of philosophizing interpersonal dynamics I may be forced to go home to live them? Do we mean that the last ten pages of Nietzsche might not be read in time for class because of the burgeoning Übermensch in my home?

In my experience, I would not consider these trade-offs to be of the negligent sort. I do concede, however, a level of unpredictability and alternative nature to my education.

When Daniel and I are not in class, we split our time with Daniel. One person works and the other tends to Owen. We come together at dinner to share our days and strategize about the next few hours. On weekends, my parents make a four-hour car trip to spend Saturday with Owen, thus freeing Daniel and me to work unhindered. Several times, Daniel's mother has spent many days at our home, simply keeping Owen occupied while we do school.

This is the fruit of lived education: the realization that our parents still uncompromisingly love us and want us to succeed professionally (a fact that makes my devotion to Owen appear seminal and grand); the awareness that I detest being away from my baby for any stretch of time; that I am humbled by the experience of generational interconnectedness. And through the tools granted by my formal education, I can theorize this experience, understanding it in relation to the subjectivities of others. And I can realize my ability to accomplish more in half the time that I did before Owen.

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<sup>2</sup> And sometimes there are surprises. A professor whom I thought (wrongly) would be the most rigid about necessary adjustments for my maternity offered to let me nurse during his Medieval Art class. I never did, but I was always endeared to him for his kind offer and interpretation of motherhood as part of the package of a familial scholar, rather than as a nuisance.

**Myth #3: Your body has nothing to do with your work. Keep the personal and private separate and you and the academy will be happy.**

I was reminded of the impracticality of this nightmarish Cartesian assertion the morning I awoke late for the eight o'clock class I teach. The clock flashed 7:47. Barring the shower, makeup and breakfast rituals I usually perform, I still needed to feed Owen (now five weeks old), drive to campus and walk to my class. As Daniel gathered clothes for me, I frantically bundled Owen and put him in his car-seat, trying to ignore the fact that my chest was swollen to three times its normal size—needing to feed Owen—and that my son would not nurse for a few hours to come. In addition to the physical discomfort in my breasts and the psychological discomfort resulting from what seemed like cruelty (and the confused stares at my new voluptuous body), I had sat on a wet baby wipe the whole way to school, and my backside was now thoroughly soaked. It was time to face my 126 students.

**Reality #3: Your mind and your body are inextricably linked, and, if you opt to nourish your child from said body, then your mind, body, and the body of another are codependent—in and out of class, all day, every day.**

There was no hiding my predicament from my class. And frankly, why should I? Why should my students believe that I am nothing but a vehicle for conveying information, in the same way that a television does? I am not plastic or inalterable. I am penetrable. I am irritable. I have wet pants and a disproportionately large chest this morning, here's why, and let's talk about art because aside from these sometimes-uncomfortable bodies, we share a corporeal creative impulse and a need to commune about our distinct and shared realities.

**Myth #4: You'll fit it all in! Get your child on a schedule, hire a babysitter, and the baby can be inserted into your life.**

I was still in the "this-cannot-be-happening-to-me" stage when I told my brother and sister-in-law that I was pregnant. I was particularly animated as I tried desperately to convince myself that this child would not end my life. I was strategizing that we would hire a babysitter and I could take Owen with me to class, and Daniel could watch him the rest of the time. I don't think I convinced anyone—my more realistic siblings or myself.

**Reality #4: Your consciousness is consumed by the needy, disruptive, delicious child who has come from your body, and no amount of day planner negotiating will allow a compartmentalization of your life that alleviates the fullness of being that has overtaken your formerly cold regimen. Your former life is just that—former.**

But really, this is not something to mourn. Sitting in class becomes at once two things: distracting and empowering. I recall a particular seminar discussion in which I was tormented by thoughts of Owen: how I wanted to be with him, to know what he was doing, how he was feeling, if I was missing anything new, and wondering if he'd sleep in time for me to work that evening. Simultaneous to this reel of thoughts, I was successfully arguing feminist theory with my colleagues and faculty. The two worlds were one in my mind and in my lived experience.

### **The Final Myth/Reality: Conclusion**

The most exciting realization, in interpersonal, intellectual, and feminist theoretical terms, is that the changes brought into swift focus by Owen's arrival began before his coming and continue to go on

as he grows: my concerns as a feminist have changed as my life changes. School, scholarship, mothering and loving have merged together into an identity: the life of the mind/body with all its tensions and exhaustions and fears and joys. Mothering has become theory in practice; scholarship has become mothering in dialog. And the forces in my life will continue to negotiate an identity of welcomed surprises, at home in the academy.

## ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

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