

Women's VU

Margaret
Cunningim
Women's Center

V A N D E R B I L T U N I V E R S I T Y

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MAKING CONNECTIONS

Reaching out is crucial for new students

by LYNN GREEN

Members of the class of 2003, still preoccupied with decorating their dorm rooms and learning their way around campus, may not realize that the choices they make in the next few weeks could have a dramatic impact on their experience at Vanderbilt.

Research on college life shows that students who make connections *during the first six weeks of school* are far more

likely to persevere to graduation than those who don't make connections.

This year's freshman class includes more than 900 young women, most of whom will be standing on Alumni Lawn in four years, eager to receive their diplomas.

Others will decide to leave before graduation, and the university has made a concerted effort in recent years to identify why these students leave and to offer support to those who are struggling.

Nick Sieveking, director of the Psychological & Counseling Center, has been instrumental in developing the "Decision Tree Program" which offers counseling to students who are thinking about withdrawing from school. He says Vanderbilt has two reasons to lower its attrition rate: an institutional one and an individual or compassionate one.

While Vanderbilt has a retention rate comparable to its peer schools, improving the rate might help the university move up in college rankings. At an individual level, withdrawal from school is often viewed as a tragedy by the student and her family. "It's a tragedy for those who leave here with a sense of a failure — who think they failed or who think the university failed them," Sieveking says.

He notes that "you can't generalize at a university like this about why people leave; there are so many individual reasons." But for many of those

who receive counseling, the reasons for leaving are linked to "fitting in."

The general perception is that women, in particular, feel more pressure from the Greek system and from rigid standards of appearance — body image, clothes and makeup, for example. But Sieveking says the perception may be based on the fact that "women feel more free to talk about it. Men may feel bothered by the same thing, but they aren't willing to open up about it."

In talking with freshmen who feel that they don't fit in, counselors are guided by research emphasizing the importance of *connections*.

Peers and professors

In particular, making connections to peers and to professors are "two of the most profound factors in retention," according to Bonnie Daniel, who heads Vanderbilt's Parents and Family office and co-teaches a course on college student affairs.

Building relationships with others on campus, including professors, can make the difference "between feeling marginal and feeling like you matter," Daniel notes.

Sieveking says research at the counseling center supports this contention. In the Century-End Advisors program, a randomly selected group of students was tracked during their four years at Vanderbilt. They were interviewed, individually and in groups, about their experiences on campus. Last spring, just before graduation, the students were asked to name "critical incidents" that would stand out in their memories. One

continued on page 2



MOVING IN, BRANCHING OUT: Making quality connections with people and organizations is critically important for young women starting college.

Making connections *continued from page 1*

student chose as a critical incident “the first time her advisor recognized her and called her by name.”

Linda Manning, a psychologist and director of the Women’s Center, says it’s important that students “connect with their faculty members, and not just in the classroom. Get to know them as people.” She urges students not to wait until they have a problem to make connections with faculty. “If you have a connection in place, then when you have a need to ask advice, there’s someone already in place to help you.”

Manning, who taught a course in the psychology of women last semester for the Women’s Studies program, says feminist psychology has demonstrated that connections and relationships are vital for all women, not just college students. Jean Baker Miller, Carol Gilligan and others have developed a relational model that sees connections with others as the central organizing feature in women’s lives.

“If you and I have the right kinds of connections, we feel better about ourselves and we want to go out and connect with other people,” Manning explains. “Vanderbilt students are driven to achieve, to succeed, to get all they can from this experience. There’s a part of that attitude which is very positive,

but it also creates enormous pressure.” That pressure, in turn, creates more need for growth-fostering connections.

“If they just make a connection to someone, it’s like flipping a switch — the load lightens up,” says Melinda Borthick, a psychologist at the counseling center who supervises training for RAs in how to identify and help troubled students.


For some new students, coming from small towns or sheltered environments, the choices available for connections on campus can be overwhelming. Any students “outside the mainstream” also face special problems in adjusting to life at Vanderbilt, notes Ross Scott, assistant dean of students. Those with minority status on campus — racial, ethnic, religious or socio-economic — often complain that it is especially difficult to “fit in.”

Ironically, for these minority students, “the way they feel the most different is the way they need to feel the most connected,” Borthick points out. She advises such students to find a group or organization they can identify with, whether it’s the Baptist Student Association or Lambda (for gay and lesbian students). “They have to find their own niche,” she says.

For students in the majority, dealing

How to connect . . .

- Try out as many extra-curricular activities as possible during the first six weeks of school
- Read campus publications like the *Hustler* and choose one academic or social program to attend each week
- Talk to other students in your classes and form study groups
- Talk to faculty members after class and take advantage of their office hours
- Visit campus centers, like the Women’s Center and the Black Cultural Center, which are eager to welcome new students.

with a new level of diversity can also be a challenge. “New students will be meeting people who are very different from them in any number of ways, from the obvious, such as race and ethnicity, to less obvious differences in backgrounds, traditions and lifestyles,” says Manning. This gives incoming freshman an opportunity to enrich their college experience by making *quality* connections with people who can give them new perspectives. 



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The lowdown on Southern feminism:

A poet's guide to acting ugly and talking back

by KATE DANIELS

Assistant Professor of English

When a little girl is perceived to be getting out of line down here — squirming in church, punching her brother, yanking her ridiculously large hair bow off her head — it's a good bet the nearest adult will turn to her and say admonishingly, *Don't act ugly*. While the perfectly static state of *being pretty* remains the heart of the mainstream definition of Southern womanhood, *acting ugly* is the lifeblood of Southern feminism. I am positive there is no living Southern feminist worth a hoot who didn't spend a good chunk of her adolescence acting ugly as sin. It does get in your blood. Once you experience that first rush of living like Scout Finch instead of Little Eva, it's hard to go back to serving Lorna Doones and sweet tea on a silver tray to the great-aunts and the pastor's wife.

My own formative moment of ugliness came when I was twelve or thirteen and sitting through an annihilatingly dull testimonial from a pair of sister missionaries, recently returned from China, at the Baptist Foreign Mission Board in Richmond, Virginia. This must have been 1965 or so, and I was in the company of my fellow GAs — the Girls Auxiliary of the Baptist Church. Mostly to keep myself awake, but also to divert myself from the alarmingly pious narrative of female life booming through the microphones, I sneaked a sliver of broken mirror from my purse. Catching the glitter from the overhead lights, I began spelling out what we thought of as “nasty” words on the side wall of the auditorium. One moment there was only the blandly imposing reach of beige concrete before my eye; the next, the word *hell* was flashing across in script that disappeared almost as soon as its reflection effervesced, glassily, onto the wall. The word *breast* glittered and darkened, then *pubic*, *pregnant*, *sex*.


I was thrilled. No one could read my words but me, but what did that matter? Not only did the act nullify my boredom, it won me the admiration of my girlfriends who had never witnessed such boldness from one of their own. Too,

there was the instantaneous, secret relief that subversive acts always gratify us with. That it was a textual act was a fact not lost on me even then. Consigned to silence by my age, sex and socioeconomic status (working class), I “wrote” my way out of nonentity. Unknown to me, at that moment, my feminist writer's spirit was born. I am sure of it.

Because gender roles remain so hyperbolically enacted and enforced in this part of the country — think sororities, cheerleaders, the Junior Cotillion, country music, SEC football and the region's affinity for Laura Ashley couture — you can't always recognize a Southern feminist by her outward appearance. Years ago, I was a Bunting Fellow at Radcliffe College, and then, shortly after, I taught briefly at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Up there, in those days, it was a fairly good bet that the woman in the nylons and full make-up wasn't reading Cixous and Chodorow in the bathroom. But down here, a feminist just might resemble your favorite Southern stereotype, so it always helps to look more than once. Anyone can recognize that Rosa Parks was acting *extremely ugly* when she refused to step to the back of the bus. But don't forget that when Scarlett O'Hara rose up in that turnip field and cussed God, she was acting ugly, too. And when I take my own body as the subject for my poems, I hope to God I'm acting ugly.

I love being southern and living in the South. I love the Southern language and the porch-sitting, church-going, talk culture that continues to thrive here. For the

rest of my life, I want to hear slow-talking, vowel-bending people saying *CEE-ment*, *them boots* and *y'all ain't right*. The older I get, the less I can be away from the language of the South and stay sane. But there's a lot of talking back to do to this

culture. For Southern she-poets, acting ugly is one way to do it. I hope my work is part of that. 

Daniels is the author of three volumes of poetry, including *Four Testimonies* (LSU Press, 1998). This essay originally appeared in the July 1999 issue of the *Women's Review of Books*.



PHOTO BY JEFF FRAZIER

Kate Daniels at a poetry writing workshop for undergraduates

“Anyone can recognize that Rosa Parks was acting *extremely ugly* when she refused to step to the back of the bus. But don't forget that when Scarlett O'Hara rose up in that turnip field and cussed God, she was acting ugly, too.”

Janet Brooks' "Bella Flora" on exhibit at the Women's Center

Using intense color and dramatic detail, artist Janet Brooks records her observations of the natural world in vibrant watercolor.

Her watercolors are showcased in "Bella Flora," an exhibit at the Women's Center from Sept. 1 to Oct. 15.

A native of Texas who grew up in a coastal town on the Gulf of Mexico, Brooks says her "favorite activity as a child was to play outdoors — climbing trees to watch leaves and birds, lying in the grass to watch insects, lizards and frogs, roaming the neighborhood to look at gardens and flowers."



JANET BROOKS

As an artist, she uses her skills of observation to begin the process of portraying flowers in watercolor. "Upon close study of individual flora, I find a realm both delicate

and dramatic, intricate and intense," Brooks says in an artist's statement. "I try to convey a sense of heightened awareness and a feeling of connection to the natural world."

Her watercolors begin with a sketch which is enlarged and transferred to watercolor paper as a line drawing. She



"Solstice," a watercolor on paper, is among the works by Janet Brooks on display.

then begins adding loose washes and layers of color, and eventually begins to accentuate areas of detail.

A graphic designer for Thomas Nelson, a Nashville-based publishing company, Brooks has been an art instructor for several local institutions, including Belmont University, Cheekwood and Watkins Institute. She has participated in juried and invitational exhibitions in California, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, Texas and Tennessee. Her recent shows

in the Nashville area include An Evening with the Arts, at the Performing Arts Center earlier this year, and the membership show of the Visual Arts Alliance of Nashville (VAAN). Brooks also serves as a board member and exhibition committee member for VAAN. She received her B.F.A. and M.F.A. from the University of Texas at Austin.

Brooks will be honored at a reception at the Women's Center on Wednesday, Sept. 8, from 4:30 to 6:00 p.m.

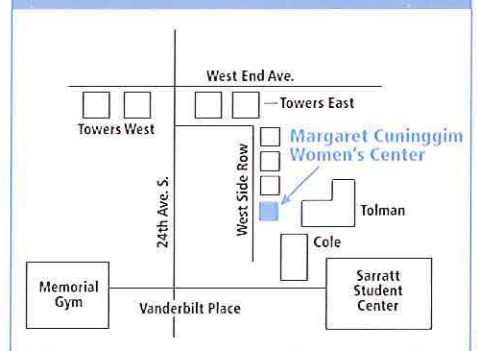
New writers' workshop starting this month

Karen Essex will lead another session of her well-received workshop, "Writing a Woman's Life," beginning Sept. 13. The workshop is designed to focus on the issues and techniques involved in writing about women's experiences.

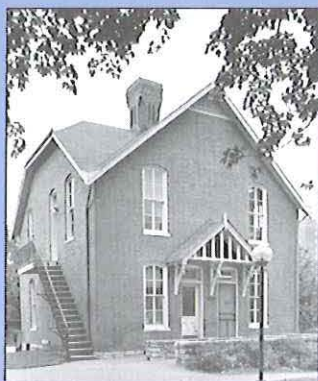
Essex is a biographer, journalist and fiction writer who has written a book about the life of pin-up legend Bettie Page. She began the writing workshops at the Women's Center last fall and has described them as "the most gratifying thing I've ever done." Previous sessions have filled quickly with participants ranging from tenured professors to young mothers with babies.

The 10-part series meets Monday nights in the Women's Center library from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. Writers from all walks of life and all levels of experience are welcome. Cost is \$195 for Vanderbilt students and \$245 for others. For information or to register, call Essex at 354-6450.

How to find us . . .



The Cuninggim Center is located in the Franklin Building at 316 West Side Row.



SEPTEMBER

Thursday, September 2

New Female Faculty and Administrators Reception. The Women's Faculty Organization and the Women's Center host their annual reception for new female faculty members and administrators. 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. Please reply to the Women's Center at 322-4843.

Tuesday, September 7

Creative Life Planning Group meets over lunch every Tuesday to share problem-solving information with other women and provide support in life changes. New members welcome. Noon to 1:00 p.m. Women's Center Director Linda Manning will lead a discussion of women and depression during group meetings on Sept. 14, 21 and 28.

Wednesday, September 8

Brown Bag Lunch for Lesbian and Bisexual Women. This monthly meeting is for faculty, staff, and graduate student women in the Vanderbilt community who identify as lesbian or bisexual. 11:45 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Any questions, contact Hilary Forbes at 322-6518 or hilary.forbes@vanderbilt.edu.

Artist's Reception for Janet Brooks. 4:30 to 6:00 p.m. See article, page 4.

Thursday, September 9

Dissertation Writers Group for Women holds an organizational meeting with Darlene Panvini, assistant director of the Center for Teaching, as facilitator. Noon to 1:00 p.m.

Monday, September 13

Book Group meets to discuss *Einstein's Wife: Work and Marriage in the Lives of Five Great Twentieth-Century Women* by Andrea Gabor. 5:15 to 6:15 p.m.

Thursday, September 16

Reading Sisters. This book group, focusing on the work of black women authors, meets to discuss *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison. Noon to 1:00 p.m. Everyone is welcome.

Friday, September 17

Students with Kids meets the third Friday of each month to discuss the challenges of balancing family and graduate school. 2:00 to 3:00 p.m.

Tuesday, September 21

Breakfast for Staff and Faculty. The Women's Center is hosting a breakfast at the University Club to honor Beverly Bond and Lauren Brisky, who were recently promoted to vice-chancellor positions. A \$5 fee is being charged for the breakfast. 7:30 to 9:00 a.m. Please contact Hilary Forbes at 322-6518 or hilary.forbes@vanderbilt.edu to attend.

Women's Center Advisory Board Meeting. 3:30 to 5:00 p.m. SAE House, 2500 Kensington Pl.

Saturday, September 25

Food for Thought Shopping Tour. Students learn where to shop for good food on this tour of Nashville food stores. 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Register with Hilary Forbes at 322-6518 or hilary.forbes@vanderbilt.edu to reserve your spot.

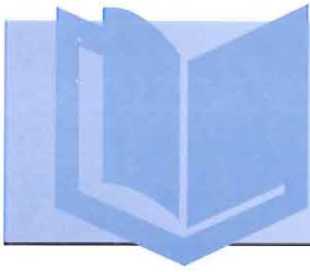
Thursday, September 30

ABCs of Car Maintenance. Pat Claybaker, co-owner of The Workshop, leads a popular annual workshop on how to care for your car. 6:00 to 7:30 p.m. Branscomb Rec Room. Registration is required. Contact Hilary Forbes at 322-6518 or hilary.forbes@vanderbilt.edu.

Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center Calendar of Events

PLEASE SAVE AND POST.

Unless otherwise stated,
all events are held at the
Cuninggim Center,
Franklin Building, 316
West Side Row. For more
information on these
listings, call 322-4843.



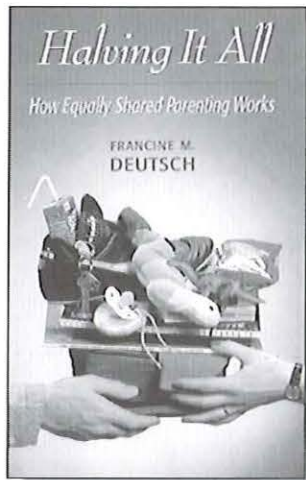
Spouses work toward equally shared parenting

Halving It All: How Equally Shared Parenting Works (Harvard University Press, 1999) by Francine M. Deutsch is an informative study of the ways dual-earner families share and divide parenting responsibilities and tasks. Over 400 couples with at least one child under 18 at home participated in the study, which was sponsored by the National Science Foundation.

Many of the families, all from New England, are profiled in some detail by the researcher, a professor of psychology at Mt. Holyoke College. She describes couples who share childcare and housework equally, some families in which the traditional roles appear to be reversed, and families where the mothers do most of the parenting, despite the fact that many work full-time outside the home. She found that many couples who claim to espouse shared parenting do not in fact practice it. Many who do share equally are working-class couples who work different shifts so that one parent is always at home, and not infrequently the distribution of duties among parents changes over time. Deutsch also discusses superwomen and former superwomen, male resistance to sharing childcare, women's ambivalence about equal parenting, and how relatives and friends often sabotage a couple's sharing of responsibilities.

The writer is optimistic that the future will bring equality. She describes how couples become equal sharers, avers that one should aim to be to be a good parent rather than a good mother

or father, and illustrates why she believes that "equally shared parenting benefits not just children, but women and men, and their marriages."



women, such as Indira Gandhi, Mary Leakey, Helen Keller, Rachel Carson and Mary Pickford, are household names today, but other notable women, including Jiang Qing, Lise Meitner and Jean Nidetch, may not be familiar to many readers.

In **Woman: An Intimate Geography** (Houghton Mifflin, 1999) Pulitzer Prize-winning author, Natalie Angier, who writes about biology for *The New York Times*, sets out to uncover "What makes a woman?" She discusses the biology and psychology of females and shows how they differ from and are similar to males.

Both men and women can learn much about both sexes from this very readable and informative work. Angier

tackles such topics as human eggs, sperm and fertilization; gender and chromosomes; male and female sex organs; breasts and breastfeeding; hysterectomy; menopause; love and female aggression.

The editors of *Ladies' Home Journal* enlisted the assistance of a group of female historians to help select the names of 100 of the most notable women of this century. Their biographies have been included in the beautifully illustrated **100 Most Important Women of the 20th Century** (Meredith Corp., 1998), which has a foreword by Barbara Walters.

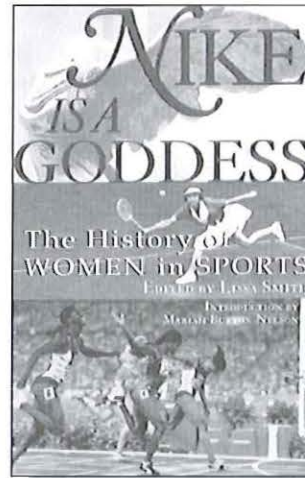
Most of the

Lissa Smith is the editor of **Nike is a Goddess: The History of Women in Sports** (Atlantic Monthly Press, 1998), a collection of 13 original essays, each focusing on a different sport or category of sports. Award-winning author Mariah Burton Nelson wrote the introduction. The contributors are top female sportswriters who trace the history of women in each sport, discuss notable female athletes, and illustrate the tremendous changes that have occurred for female

athletes this century. Some advances resulted from Title IX legislation but many reflect the changing position of women in society. Sports like soccer, ice hockey and sailing have only recently become acceptable and popular sports for women.

Articles trace female achievement in the fields of golf,

gymnastics, equestrian events, tennis, track and field, skiing, basketball, swimming and figure skating. Over 40 million girls and women in the United States now participate in sports, and today young girls, who see considerable media coverage of women's athletics, are being inspired by role models in many fields.



VANDERBILT *women in the news*

Beverly Bond and **Lauren Brisky** have been named to vice-chancellor positions, the first women at Vanderbilt to hold that rank in the administration. The pair will be honored



BEVERLY BOND



LAUREN BRISKY

Sept. 21 at a University Club breakfast hosted by the Women's Center. Bond, a Vanderbilt alumna, was named vice chancellor of alumni and development, capping a 20-year career at the University in

fund-raising and alumni relations. Brisky was appointed vice chancellor for administration, a post in which she will oversee human resources, financial operations, facilities planning and several other university support services.

Ronnie Steinberg, professor of sociology and director of the Women's Studies program, has been elected chair of the Tennessee Economic Council on Women. The council was



RONNIE STEINBERG

authorized by legislation passed in 1998 and began meeting this summer to investigate the economic concerns of women in Tennessee. Steinberg says the first priority of the council will be to gather information and identify significant economic issues for the different constituencies of women in the state. Tennessee women lag behind in several economic measures, including the number of women-owned businesses and the percentage of women above the poverty level. Steinberg, one of 21

council members from across the state, has written widely on employment issues and the gender wage gap.

Meaghan Mundy is this year's chair of the Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center Advisory Board. Mundy is a graduate student in educational leadership at Peabody. She worked at the Women's Center as an undergraduate and headed volunteer services at the Community Partnership House before beginning her graduate studies. The Advisory Board meets

twice each semester to advise and guide the center's staff on the issues facing faculty, staff and student women at Vanderbilt. Chair-elect of the board is **Linda Campbell**, a contract specialist at the Medical Center.

Ghaneh Fananapazir, a senior from Potomac, Maryland, won the spring semester Images of Women Essay Prize for his paper on HIV and women. The prize is given by the Women's Center for the best paper written for the Images of Women course. It includes an award of \$100. Fananapazir's paper examined the lack of HIV/AIDS research and prevention programs aimed at women.



FRANCENE GILMER

Francene Gilmer has been named director of the Career Center, which provides employment services and information for students. Gilmer has served as associate director of the center since coming to Vanderbilt in 1988. She succeeds Linda Bird, who resigned over the summer to pursue other opportunities. In addition to her work at the Career Center, Gilmer has held several leadership roles at the university. She is chair of the Committee on the Status of Women and Minorities and has previously served

as president of the Staff Advisory Council and acting director of the Black Cultural Center.



Seventh and eighth grade girls get hands-on experience in biology at the Girls and Science Camp held on campus in June. The camp was conceived by Virginia Metzgar, teacher in residence at Peabody, as a tool to interest more girls in the study of science.

A N N O U N C E M E N T S

- Looking for short-term rewarding volunteer work? Women are needed for **Better Decisions**, an eight-week course that teaches decision-making and life-planning skills to inmates at the Tennessee Prison for Women. Volunteers work one-on-one with an inmate/partner for one-hour weekly sessions during the eight weeks, September 20-November 8. Training for volunteers will be held September 11-12. Please call Kathy Masulis at 832-8327 for more information.
- Here's your chance to tell about your **first time**. Local women filmmakers, GoldPitt Productions, are making a documentary in which women tell stories of the first time they got their period. The documentary is for educational purposes, for women's studies classes at universities and for middle and high school girls. GoldPitt is seeking "first time" stories from women of color, women from different cultures, religions and socio-economic backgrounds and women of various ages. If you would like to participate, call GoldPitt Productions at 385-3490.
- The Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation **Race for the Cure** is scheduled for Sunday, November 7. This annual 5K walk/run raises funds for breast cancer research, and the Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center is organizing a team to participate. Contact Hilary Forbes at 322-6518 or hilary.forbes@vanderbilt.edu for more information.
- The Women's Center is hosting a roundtable conversation this month for **undergraduate men** to air their opinions on feminism and gender roles. Excerpts from the discussion will be carried in a future issue of *Women's VU*. The group will meet from noon to 1:00 p.m. on Thursday, Sept. 23. Pizza and soft drinks will be provided. If you would like to participate in the roundtable, or you know someone who has interesting opinions to share, contact Lynn Green at 343-4367 or e-mail Lynn.L.Green@Vanderbilt.edu.
- For updated information on the programs and services of the Women's Center, visit the center's **web site** at: www.vanderbilt.edu/WomensCenter/womenctr.htm



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