

THE BURDENS OF PRIVILEGE

Sowing the seeds of empowerment

by NICOLE L. McDONALD

Vanderbilt is an institution with a wealth of resources which make it a place of privilege. But as members of the Vanderbilt community, do we really understand what this privilege affords us, how we benefit from it, and how we can and should use it?

Peggy McIntosh, the Margaret Cuninggim Lecturer for 1999-2000, will speak to us about privilege and its significance in our lives and our culture. McIntosh is associate director of the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women and co-director of the National S.E.E.D. Project on Inclusive Curriculum.

McIntosh describes empowerment as the central theme of her work on power, privilege, and women's development, and connectedness as the key to under-

mining privilege systems in the United States.

"All my work, I think, sets a pattern for a changed way of writing academically, which is acknowledging one's personal experience, but not generalizing too much from it, [while] at the same time trying to think systemically," McIntosh said in a recent telephone interview from her office at Wellesley.

McIntosh earned a Ph.D. in English from Harvard University. She became aware of systems of unearned advantage while teaching English early in her career. She credits English with "encouraging her to read between the lines, [and] to look at the assumptions behind what is said." McIntosh began to understand privilege systems while exploring the sociological and historical context in which texts were written.

"Learning without it [sociological and historical context] is like learning in a vacuum or learning in isolation," says McIntosh.

Education is not very empowering if "what we take away from it — what we have students take away from it — is little bunches of stuff we can't connect and can't make use of. The fragmented teaching of the university has had the effect of making most graduates quite

inactive with regard to noticing systems that are at work in the culture, and trying to help humanity to do a better job of itself. There are political uses of fragmenting knowledge. It's a kind of divide-and-conquer mechanism, whereas connected knowing, in which

The 1999-2000 Margaret Cuninggim Lecture

UNVEILING PRIVILEGE:
*Unpacking the Invisible Knapsacks
of Class, Race, Place, Gender and Sexuality*

Dr. Peggy McIntosh

Monday, February 28 • 7:30 p.m. • Wilson Hall, Room 103

This year's lecture is co-sponsored by the Opportunity Development Center University Series on Valuing Diversity



Dr. Peggy McIntosh

students and faculty are asked to make some synthesis, to put things together, that can be empowering. It's the difference between seeing merely the twigs of a tree, and seeing the trunk of the tree and the roots, and understanding the kind of organism that these particular knowledges came from."

For the past twenty years, as co-director of the National S.E.E.D. Project on Inclusive Curriculum (Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity), McIntosh has worked to help educators across the country understand the ways in which "they were educated to deal with diversity and to make connections — to see whether they, teachers, are still doing what was done to them." It is no

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Sowing the seeds of empowerment *continued from page 1*

coincidence that the National S.E.E.D. Project on Inclusive Curriculum has seed as a part of its title. The S.E.E.D. project began as monthly professional development seminars serving teachers in grades 9 through 12 and has flourished into a national program for kindergarten-12 educators. S.E.E.D. now trains teachers to lead seminars in their own schools.

So what is privilege? In her pivotal article, "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women's Studies" (1988), McIntosh describes privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets, advantages, provisions, assurances, and opportunities available to particular individuals on the basis of skin color and gender. She suggests that whites and males are carefully taught not to recognize the advantage at which privilege puts them.

According to McIntosh, the tremendous disparity of wealth in the United States is evidence of white privilege. "Not all whites are wealthy, but most of

Peggy McIntosh will lead a series of workshops on Tuesday, Feb. 29. See page 8 for details.

the wealthy are white. Most white people who are wealthy feel we have earned our wealth. The fact is, doors have opened for us at every interval. Doors have opened for people who are oblivious that doors have opened for them,

"Most white people who are wealthy feel we have earned our wealth. The fact is, doors have opened for us at every interval."

and they dream that the way the money has been distributed reflects worth and deservedness. We know that millions and millions of people are struggling below the poverty line. White privilege teaches that's where they belong."


The problem associated with this type of system is that "unearned advantage not only oppresses those who are disadvantaged, but also puts those who are privileged at a disadvantage," McIntosh contends. "Unearned advantage makes the receivers irritating to be with at the very least, and genocidal at worst. That is, it inculcates the idea that a few of us deserve to live and others don't deserve it as much as we do. That's practically a genocidal view [that] teaches us that they may not make it, but tough."

McIntosh believes several things need to be done to eliminate systems of unearned privilege. We need to use language and patterns of thought which do not reinforce paradigms put in place by those in power. Women need to take themselves seriously. They need to ask themselves who defined the standard of excellence to which they aspire, and recognize that there are other ways of being excellent beyond those identified

and developed by white males. Finally, white males and others who benefit from systems of unearned advantage should, as a matter of choice, ask themselves: "How can we use our unearned privilege to weaken systems of unearned privilege?"

"You can't be guilty of the circumstances you were born into," McIntosh says. "You didn't ask to be born male or female. You didn't ask to be born a skin color and ethnic heritage. You were just born. And figuring out what powers accrue to you shouldn't be a matter for blame or guilt. Men shouldn't be either blamed or guilty for having been born male. They didn't decide. White people shouldn't be blamed or guilty for being born into a society that advantaged them. But hav-

ing seen the fact that one wasn't really working within democratic principles, that doors kept opening for one without one's knowledge, then, [as] a matter of free choice, it is possible to ask 'How can I use the power I have to alter power systems and the distribution of power?'"

It is important, for their own sake, that people with privilege ask this question. As she delivers her lecture on privilege and oppression, Peggy McIntosh hopes she can encourage people to "take themselves more seriously, that is, to be italicized to themselves." 

Nicole McDonald is a first-year doctoral student in the department of leadership



and organizations at Peabody College. Her research and personal interests include African-American college students, student socialization, and conflict resolution.

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Jan Rosemergy wins Werthan Award for service to women

For 20 years, Dr. Jan Rosemergy has worked in the tradition of Mary Jane Werthan to support the advancement of women at Vanderbilt.

Later this month, Rosemergy will be presented with the Mary Jane Werthan Award to honor her efforts as a leader in the drive for gender equity at the university.

"I have been involved with the Women's Center for many years and have known many of the individuals who have received this award previously," said Rosemergy, director of communications and community relations at the John F. Kennedy Center. With typical modesty she adds, "I'm not sure I deserve it, but I am thrilled and honored to be in their company."

The award is presented annually by the Women's Center to honor an individual who has contributed significantly to the advancement of women at Vanderbilt. It is named in honor of Mary Jane Werthan, the first woman to serve on the Vanderbilt Board of Trust.

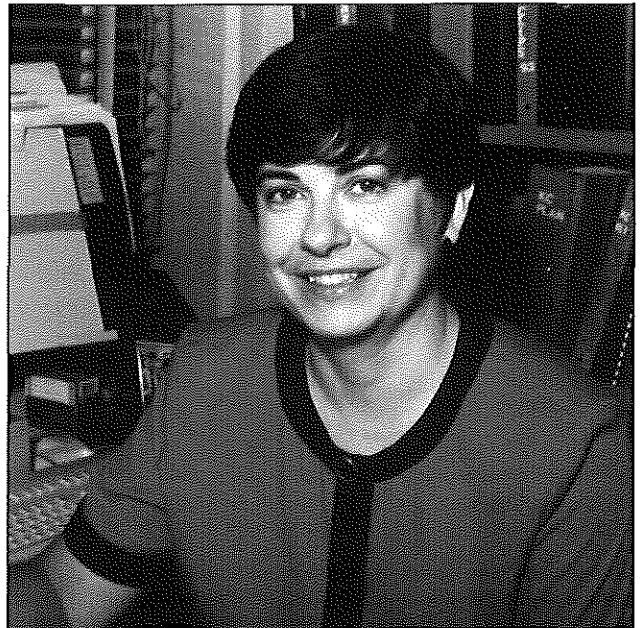
As its founding resolution states, the award "recognizes the debt that women at Vanderbilt University owe to those individuals who have had the vision to see how things ought to be, the courage to persist in their hopes over time, and the skills necessary to bring new attitudes and practices into being."

During her 20-year career at Vanderbilt, Rosemergy has shown both vision and persistence in working for gender

equity. When she first came to Nashville 20 years ago, an experienced university administrator nearing completion on her Ph.D., she applied for a job at Vanderbilt, but was considered only for clerical positions. Rosemergy says networking and persistence eventually led her to a position at the Kennedy Center.

Through her involvement in the Elizabeth Langland case in the early 1980s, Rosemergy became involved with a group of people who were working to improve the lot of women at Vanderbilt. Langland sued the university in 1983 after being denied tenure by the English department. Although she eventually lost in federal court, Langland's case galvanized the campus movement for women's rights.

In the years since, Rosemergy has demonstrated her commitment to women's issues by serving in a host of university and community organizations. She has been staff co-chair of Women for Equity at Vanderbilt (WEAV), president of the Women's Center Advisory Board, a member of the University Committee on the Status of Women and Minorities, and



Jan Rosemergy in her office at the Kennedy Center.

president of the University Staff Council.

"By working on staff issues, I feel that I am also working on women's issues," Rosemergy says. "The majority of staff are women, and I am keenly aware that most women are clustered in jobs with lower classifications."

As a manager, Rosemergy says one of her goals is to help employees (of any gender) advance up the career ladder. "I always encourage them to take advantage of opportunities to improve their skills and training."

Rosemergy says she has benefited tremendously in her work at Vanderbilt from the care and support of several mentors. She notes in particular the help of Susan Wiltshire, Nancy Ransom, and Pat Pierce, all leaders in the effort to advance women at Vanderbilt. Additionally, she says, "we couldn't have accomplished what we have without the support of progressive men," like Bill Jenkins, a past Werthan Award winner who was a key figure in bringing talented women into university administration.

Rosemergy will receive her award Feb. 28 in a ceremony preceding the Margaret Cuninggim Lecture. The award includes a \$1,000 prize, made possible by a gift from Mary Jane and Albert Werthan.

Previous Mary Jane Werthan Award winners

- 1988** Mary Jane Werthan, first woman on the Vanderbilt Board of Trust
- 1989** Marillyn Craig, librarian, Jean & Alexander Heard Library
- 1990** William A. Jenkins, vice chancellor for administration
- 1991** Miriam McGaw Cowden, member, Vanderbilt Board of Trust
- 1992** Susan Ford Wiltshire, professor of classical studies
- 1993** Antonina Filonov Gove, professor of Slavic languages & literatures
- 1994** Dale A. Johnson, professor of church history
- 1995** Nancy A. Walker, professor of English & director of women's studies
- 1996** Patricia A. Pierce, director, Opportunity Development Center
- 1997** Gary F. Jensen, professor of sociology
- 1998** Nancy A. Ransom, former director, Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center

Househunting?

Advice for the harried homebuyer

Buying a home can be the biggest decision you make in your life besides getting married and having children, according to Amy Barnes, a realtor with Village Real Estate.

Barnes and Kim Miller, a lender with Pulte Mortgage Corporation, will discuss the basics of purchasing a home, whether it is your first or not, in a program sponsored by the Women's Center. The discussion will be held Wednesday, Feb. 9 from noon to 1:00 p.m. in Sarratt, Room 189.

As a realtor who has been through the process with many buyers, Barnes notes that, for many people, the process of buying a home is emotional and stressful. She plans to share information and advice that can help you avoid some of that stress by being better prepared. Barnes will give an overview of the house-hunting process, while Miller will provide information on the financial options available for buyers.

Calculating the human toll of U.S. policies

For most Americans, U.S. policy toward the nations of the Middle East is a distant and baffling topic, but these policies have a human impact that all of us should understand.

Three authorities on the situation in the Middle East will present a program at Vanderbilt Feb. 17 designed to increase awareness of how U.S. foreign policy affects the lives of women and children and how we as citizens can influence legislators to support or change current policies. The program is co-sponsored by the Women's Center and Project Dialogue and will be held in the Towers East formal lounge.

The speakers include:

- Ilise Cohen, director of the Middle East Education Committee of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), a Quaker organization. After graduating from Washington University, Cohen lived in Israel for two years, working with Arabs and Jews on community projects. She speaks to groups throughout the U.S. on the status of women in the Mideast and how to support peace efforts.
- James Ray, professor and chair of the Vanderbilt political science department, who has written on international relations, foreign policy analysis and cause of war.
- Angela Schindler of the Nashville War Resisters League, who visited Iraq last summer and will give a first-hand account of the impact of U.S. sanctions.

Living with Dying: a cancer conversation program

Lois Green, nurse, social worker, and storyteller, will share her honest and often humorous life story of "Living with Dying," in a program at the Women's Center this month. First diagnosed with breast cancer in 1986, Green learned in 1997 that her cancer had reappeared and spread to her liver. As a former nurse, she understood the terminal significance of this diagnosis.

As she sees her time in this world coming to an end, Green feels a personal and spiritual mission to educate people about how to live life and not fear death. She believes that death should be viewed not as "the enemy," but simply a part of living. Green will share her life and philosophy with us on Friday, February 25 at 12:00 noon. Bring your lunch and join the conversation. Due to limited space, contact Hilary Forbes at 322-6518 or hilary.forbes@vanderbilt.edu if you plan to attend.

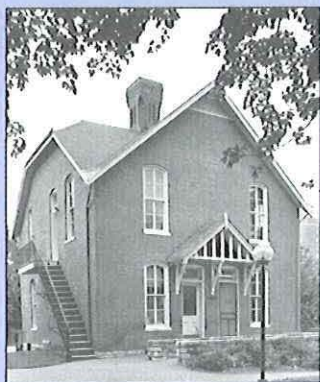


'Zora Speaks' in one-woman play

The life and times of novelist Zora Neale Hurston will come to the stage of Vanderbilt's Sarratt Cinema Feb. 2 in a play by writer-actress Dietra Gay Kelsey.

Hurston, a participant in the Harlem Renaissance, had nearly disappeared from the literary radar screen before her work was recently rediscovered. She is perhaps best known for her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

In portraying Hurston, Kelsey takes the audience to Harlem, Haiti, and eventually back to Florida, where Hurston died in poverty and obscurity in 1960. The 7:00 p.m. performance is co-sponsored by the Women's Center.



FEBRUARY

February 1 / Tuesday

12:00 noon - 1:00 p.m.

Creative Life Planning Group meets over lunch every Tuesday to share problem-solving information and provide support for life changes. New members welcome.

Also meets Feb. 8, 15, 22 & 29.

February 2 / Wednesday

7:00 p.m.

Zora Speaks. Actress and writer Dietra Gay Kelsey presents a one-woman show on Zora Neale Hurston, noted author and folklorist. Sarratt Cinema. *See page 4 for details.*

February 3 / Thursday

5:30 - 6:30 p.m.

Career Connections Reception. Students and mentors participating in the Career Connections program will have an opportunity to meet each other at the Women's Center.

February 9 / Wednesday

12:00 noon - 1:00 p.m.

Buying a Home. A realtor and a mortgage lender give advice on shopping for and financing a home. Sarratt, Room 189. *See page 4 for details.*

February 10 / Thursday

12:00 noon - 2:00 p.m.

Dissertation Writers Group for Women. Dr. Darlene Panvini, assistant director of the Center for Teaching, serves as facilitator. *Also meets Feb. 24.*

February 14 / Monday

5:15 - 6:30 p.m.

Book Group meets to discuss *Lady Moses* by Lucinda Roy. Facilitated by Elsie Pettit.

February 16 / Wednesday

12:00 noon - 1:00 p.m.

Brown Bag Lunch for Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Women's Issues will feature discussion of *The Gilda Stories* by Jewelle Gomez. Open to all students, staff, and faculty. Contact Hilary Forbes at 322-6518 or hilary.forbes@vanderbilt.edu if you have questions.

February 17 / Thursday

12:00 noon - 1:00 p.m.

Reading Sisters will discuss *Wounded in the House of a Friend* by Sonia Sanchez. Contact Hilary Forbes at 322-6518 or hilary.forbes@vanderbilt.edu with any questions.

4:00 p.m.-5:30 p.m.

The Human Impact of U.S. Foreign Policy: Life for Women and Children in the Middle East. Towers East Formal Lounge. *See page 4 for details.*

February 25 / Friday

12:00 noon - 1:00 p.m.

Living with Dying, a conversation about cancer with Lois Green. *See page 4 for details.*

February 28 / Monday

7:30 p.m.

Unveiling Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsacks of Class, Race, Place, Gender and Sexuality. The Margaret Cuninggim Lecture by Peggy McIntosh is free and open to the public. Followed by a reception to honor McIntosh. Wilson Hall, Room 103.

February 29 / Tuesday

Peggy McIntosh meets with students and faculty in a day-long series of workshops. *See page 8 for details.*

Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center Calendar of Events

PLEASE SAVE AND POST.

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



Campus environment can foster eating/exercise problems for students

by LYNN GREEN

RECOGNIZING A PROBLEM

Do I . . .

weigh myself every day

skip at least one meal a day

count calories and fat grams every time I eat

exercise because I have to, not because I want to?

Am I . . .

on my way to an eating disorder?

HELPING A FRIEND

Learn

as much as you can about eating disorders.

Be honest

with your friend about your concerns.

Be firm

Avoid making rules you cannot uphold.

Tell someone

Don't wait until the situation is life-threatening. Talk to a counselor, a nutritionist, or a trusted adviser.

© Eating Disorders Awareness Prevention

A college campus is the perfect place to learn new things — including disordered eating habits.

The tumultuous, high-pressure environment, the influence of peers, and the campus attitudes toward body image can all combine to skew a student's self-esteem, and her choice of foods.

"It's a problem on most college campuses, and obviously it's a problem on ours," says Becky Spires, Vanderbilt's Wellness Fitness Coordinator.

It's not unusual for Spires to overhear a student in the Rec Center announcing her plans to spend an hour on the treadmill to work off the cookies she just ate. "We have one of the smartest groups of disordered eaters around," says Spires. "They know the exact chemical equation on how to burn off a certain amount of calories."

Some students arrive at Vanderbilt with healthy eating habits, and soon find themselves munching on pizza and chips at 3 o'clock in the morning. Others might be worried about a friend who is painfully thin.

After hearing students' concerns about eating problems, Spires decided to organize a task force on the subject. The Eating Disorders Task Force, with representatives from several parts of the university, has been meeting since July to gather information on the extent of the problem and the resources available on campus to help.

In talking about eating disorders, Spires says, it's important to picture the continuum of eating habits, with healthy eating on one end, and eating disorders like anorexia and bulimia at the other end. All of us fall somewhere on that continuum, and our position on it may change at different times in life. Many college students have "disordered eating" patterns, which can put them at

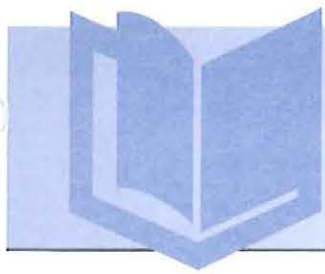


risk of moving to the end of the continuum and developing a full-blown eating disorder. The most important thing the university can do for these students, Spires believes, is to promote awareness of the problem and present healthy concepts of body image.

"We realize that you can't eradicate eating disorders from a college campus. Can you change attitudes? You can try," says Spires. In the long run, that means changing the community's values. At Vanderbilt, one place to start would be the stereotypical image of the ideal VandyGirl, as a thin, bleached-blond young woman in a short skirt. Eventually, both men and women must "change the way [they] look at body image," says Spires, acknowledging to themselves that "what you want and what you know is right are two different things."

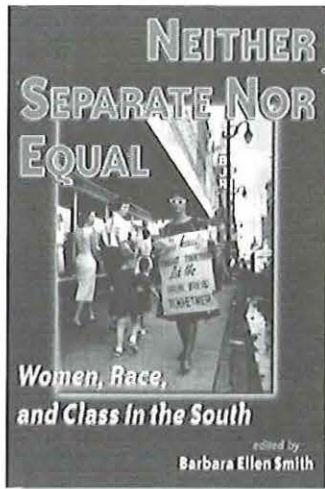
Information on body image and healthy eating will be available at the Wellness Center during Eating Disorders Awareness Week Feb. 12-19.

The Psychological and Counseling Center is launching a new group for students who feel that food and/or exercise are controlling their lives. For information call Carol Gibson or Michele Patterson at 322-2571.



Examining the impact of Southern culture on women

Neither Separate Nor Equal: Women, Race, and Class in the South (Temple University Press, 1999), edited by sociologist Barbara Ellen Smith, focuses on the lives of Southern women, examining both their historical legacies and the social forces that influence them today. Despite patterns of migration and current trends toward cultural globalization, the editor believes that Southern culture retains much of its strength and influence.



Tradition has always been important to Southerners, many of whom are from conservative religious backgrounds and who retain varying degrees of beliefs in white, male, ethnic and class supremacy. According to Smith, "in this time of profound economic insecurity and sociocultural change, when all manner of social problems tend to be blamed on poor women and children and those whose skin is anything but white . . . the experiences of racially diverse women in a region legendary for both white supremacy and male supremacy are important to explore." The editor, an associate professor of sociology and the director of the Center for Research on Women at the University of Memphis, contributes a chapter on social relations and includes a dozen selections by experts in the fields of geography, law, anthropology, adult education, sociology, history and women's studies.

As Smith notes, many of the essay-

ists "treat race as a compass, a relationship so central in Southern history that women in diverse circumstances and political struggles tend to orient themselves in terms of it." Among the topics discussed are the history of race and gender in a Native American community; relationships between white employers and black domestic workers; and labor activism in Central Appalachia.

Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women? (Princeton University Press, 1999) evolved from an article Susan Moller Okin wrote for the *Boston Review*. Okin, a professor of ethics and political science at Stanford University, argues that many cultural traditions are difficult to recon-

cile with feminism. For this reason, she believes that acceptance of multiculturalism can impede progress toward gender equity.

While there is increasing pressure for western societies to tolerate the cultural practices of immigrants and indigenous populations, many customs are based on beliefs about the inferior status of women and on male control over women and children. Practices abhorred by most feminists include genital mutilation, polygamy, arranged marriages of young girls to older strangers, denial of education and health care to girls, and punishment for rape victims. The writer

believes that minority group rights, the special rights designed to preserve minority traditions, benefit mainly the male members of these groups.

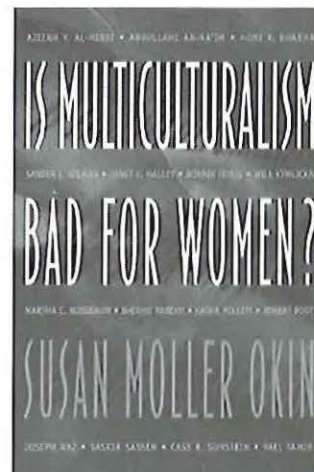
Fifteen experts have contributed essays discussing Okin's theories; most agree with some of her conclusions but dispute others. In her response to their comments the writer concludes that we need "a form of multiculturalism that gives the issues of gender and other intragroup inequalities their due — that is to say, a multiculturalism that effectively treats all persons as each other's moral equals."

In **The Most Beautiful Girl in the World: Beauty Pageants and National Identity** (University of California Press, 1999) Sarah Banet-Weiser examines a topic rarely considered worthy of scholarly or feminist study. Many feminists believe that beauty contests are demeaning to women; others, including many

contestants themselves, are not comfortable with the swimsuit component of many competitions.

The subject of beauty pageants is more complex than it seems, Weiser contends, since "pageants are not only about gender and nation, they are also always (and increasingly visibly) about race and

nation." The researcher focuses on the Miss America pageant and illustrates how it has changed since the first contest in 1921.



W O R K S H O P S

Peggy McIntosh, authority on inclusive teaching, to meet with students and faculty groups

Peggy McIntosh, associate director of the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women and co-director of the National S.E.E.D. Project on Inclusive Curriculum, will share her expertise with Vanderbilt students and faculty in a series of workshops on Tuesday, February 29.

The S.E.E.D. Project holds teacher-led faculty development seminars in public and private schools throughout the United States. These seminars focus on enabling teachers to present a more gender-fair and multiculturally equitable school curriculum. McIntosh's research and writing has also focused on systems of privilege.

All of the programs listed below have limited space available for participants. If you would like to reserve a space, or would like more information on any of these events, please contact Hilary Forbes at 322-6518 or e-mail hilary.forbes@vanderbilt.edu.

• **7:30 a.m.-9:00 a.m.**

Feeling Like a Fraud

McIntosh will speak to women faculty and graduate students at a breakfast sponsored by the Women's Center.

• **9:30 a.m.-10:30 a.m.**

Heterosexual Privilege and Religion

The Carpenter Program in Religion, Gender, and Sexuality at the Divinity School is hosting a coffee break for Divinity School students and other interested students.

• **11:00 a.m.-12:15 p.m.**

Five Interactive Phases of Seeing Myself and the World

The organizing committee for McIntosh's Vanderbilt visit is hosting a class discussion for Women's Studies minors and students in three Women's Studies classes.

• **12:30 p.m.-1:45 p.m.**

A Discussion with Graduate Students: Surviving White and Male Privilege within the "Knowledge" System

The Women's Center is hosting a lunch program with McIntosh for all graduate students.

• **3:30 p.m.-5:00 p.m.**

Developing More Inclusive Teaching Methods

The Center for Teaching is hosting a workshop for faculty.



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