

# WOMEN'S VU

The monthly newsletter of the Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center

VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY

May 2005, Volume XXVII, Issue 9

## Don't Miss It!

Join Vandy Moms on Thursday, May 12th from 11:30am-12:30pm as we host a special guest speaker from *GirlForce* who will discuss and answer questions dealing with building and maintaining self-esteem in our daughters. Vandy Moms was created over two years ago as a support network to provide advocacy and programming for moms in the Vanderbilt community. It is open to ALL mothers, partnered or single.

To more information or to RSVP, please contact [misa.culley@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:misa.culley@vanderbilt.edu) or call 343-4367.

## Barbara Clinton Honored with Mary Jane Werthan Award

by Linda Manning, Director,  
Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center

Each year at our annual Margaret Cuninggim Lecture, the Women's Center pays tribute to an individual who has contributed significantly to the advancement of women at Vanderbilt University. This award, named for Mary Jane Werthan, a Vanderbilt alum and the first woman on the Board of Trust at Vanderbilt, honors three qualities characteristic of the first recipient for whom it is named: vision, persistence, and extraordinary skill in interpersonal and institutional relations. It 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 practice into being. The



In March the Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center presented its annual Mary Jane Werthan Award to Barbara Clinton, Director of the Center for Health Services, for her inspiring and visionary impact on the lives of women at Vanderbilt and beyond. Barbara is shown here with Women's Center Director, Linda Manning, as she is congratulated by Dr. Frank Dobson, Jr., Director of the Bishop Joseph Johnson Black Cultural Center. (Photo by Misa Culley)

Mary Jane Werthan Award offers tribute to the humor, intelligence and graceful determination of those individuals whose work has enhanced our entire community.

*continued on page 6*

## INSIDE

- 2 Women's Center Seeks Project Safe Program Coordinator; Call for Art Entries--Deadline is May 15th!
- 4 In the Library
- 5 May Calendar
- 7 Laughter In Pain: Creating the Women in Academe Series
- 8 Announcements

For more information, please see our website: [www.vanderbilt.edu/WomensCenter](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/WomensCenter)

## Empowered Motherhood: Accountability and Action

A few months ago our Margaret Cuninggim lecturer, Dr. Louise Silverstein, commented on "becoming radicalized as a feminist" after the birth of her first child; that comment hit home for me. I had always prided myself on being a feminist most of my life, growing up on a healthy dose of biographies of Clara Barton, Amelia Earhart, Susan B. Anthony and the like. I remember giving reports in school to teachers who welcomed my questioning nature and odd topics of interest. I'm quite sure they enjoyed the break from the expected. My college years were filled with student protests, peti-

tion signing, a degree in international relations—I was going to change the world.

Now, years later, firmly entrenched in motherhood, I find myself refueling the fires of my early feminism—only the world I hope I'm changing will be that of my children. The last few years have seen an outpouring of motherhood books and the emergence of motherhood studies and MOMs groups. We mothers know these studies have hit a nerve, but often we are at a loss for what to do about it.

In February, a media firestorm swelled up around the release of

Judith Warner's new book, *Perfect Madness*, a book that I truly think was trying to hit that nerve. Warner, who is an accomplished author, having co-written a book with Howard Dean and written biographies of Hilary Clinton and Newt Gingrich, structured her book around the 150 interviews she conducted with mostly upper-middle-class white women in a pricey Washington, DC neighborhood. Admittedly, she knows this isn't a true snapshot of all mothers, but claims that these are the women who are largely depicted in the media and therefore exert a tremendous *continued on page 3*

Celebrate Motherhood: May 8th is Mother's Day



# Project Safe Seeks Program Coordinator

Project Safe at Vanderbilt University's Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center, is accepting applications for a Program Coordinator with experience in working with violence against women issues including sexual assault, dating and domestic violence and stalking. Project Safe is an inclusive campus-wide effort aimed at education and outreach, community coordination, prevention, and advocacy. The focus of our work includes educating and providing trainings for students, staff and faculty on violence against women. We also provide crisis intervention and advocacy for students, staff and faculty affected by violence. It is a full-time (40 hours a week) position with a start date of August 01, 2005

**Mission Statement:** The Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center advances equity at Vanderbilt, and in the larger community, through advocacy, education, and empowerment.

**Job responsibilities will include but are not limited to:**

Plan, develop and coordinate training programs for faculty, staff students and community partners; Provides direct services to Vanderbilt community in the form of crisis counseling, advocacy, and resource referrals; Coordinates resources and services to ensure a comprehensive response to victims; Co-chairs the VAW Task Force; Advises student organizations affiliated with Project Safe. Co-facilitates coordination between the campus and Nashville community; Participates in policy and protocol development. Collects statistics and provides semi-annual reports.

**Women's VU** is published monthly September through June at the Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN.

**Campus Address:** Franklin Building, 316 West Side Row

**Mailing address:** 2301 Vanderbilt Place, Box 351513, Station B, Nashville, TN 37235-1513

**Phone:** (615) 322-4843; **Fax:** (615) 343-0940.

**E-mail address:** [womenctr@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:womenctr@vanderbilt.edu)

Visit our website at:

[www.vanderbilt.edu/WomensCenter](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/WomensCenter)

Linda Manning, director

Jennifer Hackett, associate director

Vicky Basra, director, Project Safe

Barbara Clarke, librarian

Robin Van Arman, office manager

Misa Culley, editor (direct line 343-4367)

This is a copyrighted publication. Articles may be reproduced with permission of the editor. Letters to the editor are welcome. Send them to the above address or e-mail the editor at [misa.culley@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:misa.culley@vanderbilt.edu).

**Address changes:** Please contact our office manager, Robin Van Arman, at [robin.l.van.arman@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:robin.l.van.arman@vanderbilt.edu)

**Deadline for newsletter:** Submissions are due on the 1st of the month preceding publication.

**Qualifications:** Bachelor's Degree required (Master's preferred) in counseling, social work, psychology or related field with 2 years work experience in the area of violence against women. Individual must be available flexible hours including some weekends and evenings. The Program Coordinator must have excellent organizational skills, work well with others as well as work independently. **For more information,** please visit our website at [www.vanderbilt.edu/ProjectSafe](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/ProjectSafe) or [www.vanderbilt.edu/womenscenter](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/womenscenter). Send resume, cover letter, including a description of your philosophy on violence against women and what feminism means to you, and 3 references to: [linda.manning@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:linda.manning@vanderbilt.edu) or

Linda Manning  
Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center  
Vanderbilt University  
2301 Vanderbilt Place  
VU Station B # 351513  
Nashville, TN 37235  
(615) 322-4845

(All applicants must also complete an application online at [www.vanderbilt.edu](http://www.vanderbilt.edu) under joblinks.) Review of applications will begin May 20, 2005.



## Call for art entries

The Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center is currently accepting proposals for exhibitions. The Gallery at the Center is an intimate space with approximately 40 running feet. The Women's Center Arts Committee is interested in reviewing strong two-dimensional work by emerging female artists in the Middle Tennessee area with preference given to those with limited local exposure.

**Requirements for the proposals include:**

- A brief letter expressing interest in being exhibited
- A brief "artist statement"
- 10 slides or a CD with 10 works on it

Please send digital images formatted as either uncompressed tiff or minimally compressed jpeg files. Each file must be saved from an image or scanning program with the correlating extension (.tif or .jpg). Without these extensions we may not be able to view your files. Unreadable files will be returned. Images should be sized to (roughly) 8" by 10" at 100 dpi. Please title your images with your first and last initials, an underline, a submission number, a period, and the extension ex: JH\_1.jpg Please also submit an image list that corresponds to your numbering system including the following information File name (see example above); Title of piece; size in inches (h x w x d); medium; date of completion

**Please send to:**

Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center  
at Vanderbilt University  
2301 Vanderbilt Place  
Station B # 351513  
Nashville, TN 37235-1513  
attention: Jennifer Hackett

**PROPOSALS MUST BE RECEIVED BY MAY 15TH.**



# Empowered Motherhood: Accountability and Action

continued from page 1

amount of pressure on the rest of us. Many critics may agree with this line of reasoning, but her book doesn't touch on how to change this perspective. I, for one, do not belong to this affluent subset—I work a very part-time job here at Vanderbilt (i.e. no benefits) and my health insurance is covered through my husband's job here at Vanderbilt. I read her book strictly out of curiosity.

Warner valiantly tries to explain how this generation of mothers has become "control-freaks"—planning, measuring, micro-managing every milestone of our children's lives. As she explains, we, the women who grew up thinking we could *have* it all and *do* it all, have codified motherhood, in part to make up for the loss of employment opportunities or career track that we may have experienced. We have come to realize that our motherhood came with a cost—a loss of employment opportunities, loss of personal interests, loss of long-term economic security, not to mention a loss of social standing. We put our children first and oftentimes that meant putting ourselves last. We worry about grades, awards, the best preschool, all these symbols that validate that we are good parents. It is a crazy one-upmanship that will eventually become hard to keep up. I know this all too well, having spent many a night baking cookies for a party, sewing a costume for Halloween—been there, done that. Warner tries to identify this situation as being similar to Betty Friedan's "feminist mystique," by calling it "mommy mystique." Although her book isn't of the same caliber as Friedan's, it does encompass the brimming despair, guilt, pressure and anxiety that many mothers feel today.

Warner's second agenda, however, is a political one. She is hoping that this despair and angst will channel itself into a political uprising of mothers. In fact, this is already happening. Numerous grassroots organizations are popping up to support mothers in their quest for equity and a real life. Award-winning authors Ann Crittenden, Naomi Wolf and Barbara Seaman, have banded together to create MOTHERS (Mothers Ought To Have Equal Rights), an organization that hopes to harness the political clout of the 82.5 million mothers in the U.S. and force our government representatives to create family-friendly workplace policies. In her book, *The Price of Motherhood: Why the Most Important Job in the World is the Least Valued*, Crittenden, formerly a *New York Times* economics reporter, states that "motherhood is now the single biggest risk factor for poverty in old age." She argues, "Once they become mothers, women are often compelled to either quit their jobs, cut back their hours or take lower-paying part-time jobs." This results in an economic disparity between mothers and other workers that amount to a "mommy tax," the cost of lost earnings, unemployment benefits and worker's compensation. It is also reflected in lower Social Security benefits; mothers will generally have lower pensions and will twice as likely live in poverty as they age.

In part, the U.S. Census bears this out. In 1976 the U.S. Census Bureau began calculating the percentage of mothers who stayed in the work force. In 1976, that was 31%. In the latest figures, we see a remarkable decline in this rate—55% of mothers with infant children are in the work force as compared to a record 59% in 1998. Why the decline? Some feminists believe it is the lack of high-quality, low-cost daycare and the increasing numbers of mothers who jump to the "mommy track," taking low paying part-time work that allows them to be the primary caregiver in their families. As far as the U.S. Census Bureau is concerned, if you don't work, you don't count. In a story for *Mothering* magazine, writer Kristen Rowe-Finkbeiner, who used to be a political director of an environmental political action committee, claimed that "anyone who wrote 'full-time parent' as their occupation

on the U.S. Census form was automatically classified in the catchall category 995—"not in the labor force." She writes: "The absence of full-time parents in U.S. Census data is especially disconcerting because the census is supposed to provide a snapshot of American life

*"The absence of full-time parents in U.S. Census data is especially disconcerting because the census is supposed to provide a snapshot of American life that drives public funding, political policy, consumer marketing, and much more. Invisibility in the census thus has rippling repercussions and long-term financial consequences."*

Kristen Rowe-Finkbeiner  
for *Mothering* magazine, 2002

that drives public funding, political policy, consumer marketing, and much more. Invisibility in the census thus has rippling repercussions and long-term financial consequences."

To the now estimated 5.4 million stay-at-home moms, this must be a staggering realization, even more so for the 10 million single mothers with children under 18 years old. According to the Census, a full-time mom is only counted in the shadow of her husband's work, if she's even counted at all, a "double whammy," Rowe-Finkbeiner states, "unpaid and uncounted."

Hopefully that will change. In 1985, the Third UN World Conference on Women passed a resolution that directed countries to begin recognizing the paid and unpaid contributions of women in terms of national economic statistics and gross national product. In 1995, the UN Beijing World Conference of Women required governments to start keeping statistics in order to begin efforts to measure and value unpaid work.

In the meantime, until the government census catches up, there is something you can do—take action! Join a group, write your representatives, get active! In starting MOTHERS, Naomi Wolf hopes it will become a nationally recognized political lobby, similar to AARP, carrying powerful political clout and acting as a single-interest voting bloc, the kind that motivates politicians "to give motherhood issues a seat at the table."

*Misa Culley, editor of this newsletter, holds a BA in international relations and enjoys writing about politics, motherhood, and social issues. She can be reached at [misa.culley@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:misa.culley@vanderbilt.edu)*

## TAKE ACTION!

**MOTHERS (Mothers Ought To Have Equal Rights)**  
[www.mothersoughttohaveequalrights.org](http://www.mothersoughttohaveequalrights.org)

**NAMC National Association of Mothers' Centers:** [www.namc.org](http://www.namc.org)

**Mothers & More:** a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the lives of mothers through support, education and advocacy  
[www.mothersandmore.org](http://www.mothersandmore.org)

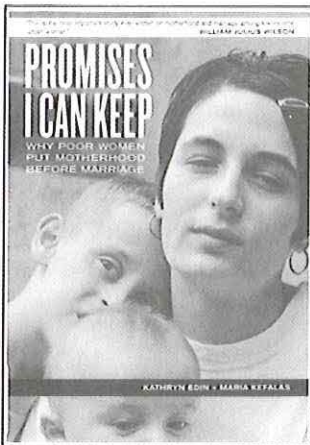
**[www.singlemothers.org](http://www.singlemothers.org):** dedicated to helping single moms by choice or chance face the daily challenges of life with wisdom, wit, dignity, confidence and courage since 1991.

**[www.mothersmovement.org](http://www.mothersmovement.org):** resources and reporting for mothers and others who think about social change





## *New release examines why poor women put motherhood before marriage; Feminist bell hooks writes about society and masculinity*



**Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood before Marriage** (University of California Press, 2005) by sociologists Kathryn Edin and Maria Kefalas is a fascinating look into the lives of poor urban single mothers. The researchers' primary interests were motherhood and family life, and in particular, why low-income women postpone marriage but do not postpone childbearing. Over a period of five years they focused on the lives of 162 poor single

mothers in several neighborhoods in the Philadelphia-Camden area. There were approximately equal numbers of Hispanic, white and African American mothers in the group.

One of the most surprising results of the research was that low-income single mothers do not reject marriage. In fact, they revere it so much that they prefer to wait until conditions are ideal for it but that time rarely comes. There is little connection between marriage and parenthood and to them divorce carries a greater stigma than unmarried motherhood. A good marriage is often an unattainable dream but motherhood is a necessity. While middle-class Americans consider that the heart of a family is the relationship between a man and a woman, poor urban women consider the mother-child bond to be the paramount factor.

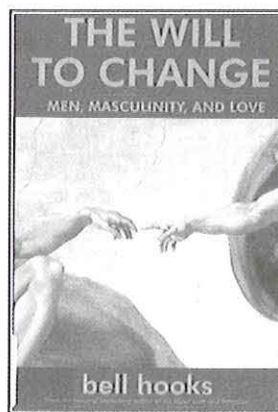
Impoverished urban women have few incentives to postpone childbearing, even though in theory they realize that young mothers frequently have to drop out of school and that it is difficult to work when they have young children. Their worth, to themselves and others, lies in their children, not in educational or workplace accomplishments. Few deliberately become pregnant but often they do nothing to prevent pregnancy. While some of the women had abortions, in general abortion is frowned upon and women are much more respected if they bear the child. It is difficult for them to understand why middle-class women usually postpone childbearing until they are married and settled into their careers.

Relationships between the single mothers and the fathers of their children tend to be very unstable though many women are living with the fathers at the time their children are born. To many middle-class Americans, the mothers in these blighted areas are not very selective about the men in their lives. Most of

the men do not have access to good jobs and many have problems with drug or alcohol abuse. Many fathers are involved in criminal activities, especially in the drug trade, and not infrequently spend time in prison. The women, often victims of domestic violence, do not have the options available to middle-class women.

Middle-class women feel that becoming a single parent at a young age would wreak havoc with their plans for the future, yet the urban mothers consider that motherhood is a stabilizing influence in their previously chaotic lives. Once they become pregnant they usually stay at home more and as mothers they achieve respect that they have not previously enjoyed. A child whose mother is there for him or her and who appears to be well cared for brings to the mother the greatest respect and praise from others.

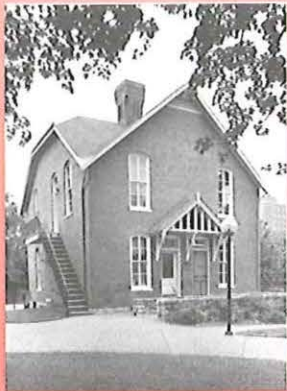
While it may be true that the mothers would not be so poor if they married the fathers of their children, this is often an unwise choice. In their discussion of the government's policy of promoting marriage, the writers feel that "Given the prevalence of these problems in the low-income population, promoting marriage will do more harm than good unless policymakers figure out a way to make low-skilled men safer prospects for long-term relationships with women and children."



In **The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love** (Atria Books, 2004) prolific feminist writer bell hooks tackles the complex topic of masculinity and illustrates why many American men and women are unhappy in their relationships. Much of the blame belongs to patriarchy, she feels, and adds that "I urge us to reclaim feminism for men, showing why feminist thinking and practice are the only way we can truly address the crisis of masculinity today."

Hooks believes that most men conform to patriarchy in at least some ways and that once men realize that they need to change most are willing to do so. The writer details how children, even those in families headed by single mothers, are socialized to patriarchal norms. Boys are taught that they should suppress their emotions and not show signs of weakness. The devaluing of boys' emotions affects males' *continued on page 6*





## May 2005 Calendar

### Please Post and Save

Unless otherwise indicated, all groups and events are open to the public and are held at the Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center at 316 West Side Row on Vanderbilt University's campus.

## EVENTS

### ONGOING:

#### *In Transition: The Art of Alysha Irisari*

This exhibition is in our gallery until June 15. Call 322-4843 for times to come see the exhibit.

**What:** Painted works, primarily a variety of styles of self portraits, will focus on the theme of personal choices, transition, and change.

**Who:** This exhibit is free and open to everyone. For more information, please contact 322-4843.

## REGULAR GROUPS AND MEETINGS

### SISTAHS READING SISTAHS

**Thursday, May 5, 12:30pm-1:30pm (Meets the 1st Thursday)**

**What:** A book group for everyone interested in reading African-American women authors. This month the group will be reading Eleanor Taylor Bland's, *Dead Time*.

This group is free and open to everyone!

For more info, please contact [jennifer.hackett@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:jennifer.hackett@vanderbilt.edu)

### CREATIVE LIFE PLANNING GROUP

**Tuesdays, May 3, 10, 17, 24 and 31**

**11:30am-1:00 pm (Meets every Tuesday)**

**What:** A group for all dedicated to living life intentionally and creatively. Open to everyone in the community and is usually attended by women between 40 and 90 years of age.

**Who:** This group is free and open to everyone. For more information, call 322-4843.

### CREATIVE WRITING GROUP

**Tuesday, May 10, 5:30-7:00pm (Meets the 2nd Tuesday)**

**What:** The Creative Writing Group is open to new members! We look forward to hearing your piece. No writing experience necessary. You can bring a piece or create one at the group.

**Who:** This group is free and open to everyone. It is led by Anna Sir, who will be doing some writing instruction as well as facilitation of the group. For more information, or to RSVP to the group, contact [annasir@bellsouth.net](mailto:annasir@bellsouth.net)

### VANDY MOMS

**Thursday, May 12 and 26**

**11:30-12:30pm (Meets the 2nd and 4th Thursdays )**

**What:** On May 12, we'll host a special guest speaker from *GirlForce* who will discuss maintaining self-esteem in our daughters.

**Who:** Moms of any age! Women who juggle! Open to all mothers, partnered or single. This is a support network that provides advocacy for moms in the Vanderbilt and larger communities. It also provides programming to inform, empower and enrich. To RSVP, contact [misa.culley@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:misa.culley@vanderbilt.edu) or call 343-4367.

### BOOK GROUP

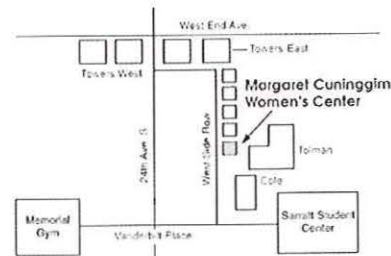
**Monday, May 9, 5:15pm-6:15pm (meets the second Monday)**

**What/Who:** The book group is open to new members at all times and is for anyone who loves to read.

The book group will read *Naked in Baghdad: The War As Seen by NPR's Correspondent* by Anne Garrels. For more information, contact Jane Du Bose at [jdbose@bellsouth.net](mailto:jdbose@bellsouth.net) or Carmen Gherman at [cggherman@yahoo.com](mailto:cggherman@yahoo.com).

### SUPPORT GROUP

**What/Who:** A support group for female students who are survivors of domestic/dating violence, sexual assault and stalking. This group meets weekly at a confidential time and location. All information shared is kept confidential. For more information, please contact [vicky.basra@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:vicky.basra@vanderbilt.edu) or 322-1333.



## In the Library

*Continued from page 4*

capacity to love or to be loving and hooks feels that patriarchy is a form of abuse against boys.

From the media particularly, boys receive strong messages that males deal with their emotions by acting out in anger and the writer shows how patriarchy contributes to male violence against women and other men. To become the complete humans men could and should be, hooks discusses how they can let go of patriarchy so that they can "learn the relational skills needed to build community at home and in the world."

m





Emily Baunach, Director of *Vagina Monologues* and Project Safe Director, Vicky Basra, awarded a check for \$5219.42 to Connie Griggs from Ujima House. The check represents the total proceeds from the 2005 V-Day College Campaign of the *Vagina Monologues*.



Photos by Misa Cullley

At our annual **Speak Out**, Women's Studies Associate Director, Alison Piepmeier, (above) gave the keynote address enlightening all of us on the staggering statistics that exist about violence against women. The event was a chance for survivors and for those working in the field to reach out and educate the public. Kacy Silverstein, graduate assistant at the Center, (above right) does the honors of introducing Alison and singer/songwriter, Candace Asher.

## Giving to those less fortunate... 2005 Annual Faculty-Staff Campaign

The time of year has come around again for the annual Faculty-Staff Campaign. Please consider giving to the **Domestic Violence Hardship Fund** of the Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center. This is a fund that is only used in cases of very strong need. Domestic violence has touched many of our lives in many different ways. Whether you are an adult survivor of severe childhood abuse, or a spouse being battered while working every day to support your family and hoping that maybe if you are just fortunate enough, you will be able to keep food on the table and the heat on so that your children will have a warm place to sleep and play. How many times have you or someone you've known thought "if I could only make it until payday? How am I going to keep the electricity on when the bill is due today and I do not get paid for another two weeks?"

If you or someone you know would like to give to the Domestic Violence Hardship Fund, please note on your check or on your pledge card the Campaign Account # R09080 (this is the account number for the Domestic Violence Hardship Fund at Gift Records). You may see it listed as Current Operations – Public Service Restricted Fund in the listing of option charities. --Submitted by Robin Van Arman, Office Manager, MCWC

## Remembering Andrea

*Andrea Dworkin*, radical feminist activist/author passed away on April 9, 2005 at the age of 58. The exact cause of her death has not been made public, but she had been in poor health for some time, and her condition was worsening in the week preceding her passing. Dworkin was the author of 13 books of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry, and was well known for helping to break the silence around violence against women. She was perhaps most well known for her tireless and unabashed efforts in fighting against the pornography industry and its impact on women.

Dworkin's death was an incredibly personal loss for many of us within the feminist movement and particularly the movement to end violence against women. A small group gathered in her remembrance on April 14th to read some of her words that most inspired us and to express appreciation for her courage and strength. We will greatly miss her fearless eloquence and leadership in the feminist movement.

Submitted by Emily Baunach



## Barbara Clinton Honored

*continued from page 1*

This year's award was presented to Barbara Clinton, Director of the Center for Health Services. The Center for Health Services is a very special organization. According to Barbara, "its mission is to support community health efforts that are within the control of community people. Its work is to link disadvantaged community groups to the wealth and resources of this university. And she believes that first among these resources is the energy and idealism of students and faculty."

One of these projects is the Maternal and Infant Health Outreach Worker program. As the first director of the MIHOW project, Clinton deserves much of the credit for the achievements of this program. Its focus on involving local people in the health and prenatal care of mothers and babies in rural areas and inner cities illustrates the kind of relationship between the Center and communities that Clinton has pushed for as director of the CHS. Today MIHOW serves families in six states - Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee, and West Virginia. Since it began, MIHOW workers have served more than 10,000 families. MIHOW is community-based and community-development focused. The local sponsors, local leaders, and local outreach workers are involved at every stage of program development. Barbara Clinton's leadership has had a major impact on women throughout the Southeast. Minda Lazarov, the current director of the MIHOW program comments, "Her leadership and vision have inspired the lives of women in the Vanderbilt community and throughout the SE--women of all backgrounds --she has the unique ability to connect with all kinds of women." Barbara's vision of community engaged scholarship has also had a significant impact on hundreds of Vanderbilt students. As Minda says, "She is continually reaching out for innovative ways to engage students in what we do--so this commitment to the community lives on."

Barbara also serves as a mentor and supporter for many women administrator's on campus – including me. Vanderbilt and the community are so very fortunate to have Barbara Clinton. And the MCWC is delighted to honor her many contributions with the Mary Jane Werthan Award.





# Laughter in Pain: Creating the Women in Academe Series

By Vanessa K. Valdés

A few years ago, I wrote in my journal a list of things I wanted to accomplish by the time I graduated with my doctorate. I wanted to continue to enjoy my teaching (check), present a paper at a professional conference (check), submit an article for publication in a refereed journal (not yet), and start some type of organization for women graduate students on this campus (check). That last one may seem odd,

given that it ostensibly has nothing to do with my professional development, as the others do. However, in my personal relationships and as a representative, and later Vice President, of the Graduate Student Council, I met and talked to graduate students from almost all the different departments on this campus. The one thing that stayed with me was that when I spoke with women, I felt a discontent that seemed consistent, regardless of race, sexual orientation, marital status, or number of years here. At first I found validation in knowing that I wasn't the only one who felt unsettled and lost. Later, the certainty that others had also been blindsided by the unexpectedly emotional journey that is graduate school no longer comforted me.

I began to ask why this was considered the status quo, why we the graduate students were discussing our quality of life in whispers, oftentimes with people outside our departments. While some of the men in my life confessed to feelings of professional inadequacy in private conversation, I noted that in class, they did a fine job of projecting a carefree attitude that conveyed nothing of the ambivalence of which we had spoken. For some reason, my women friends could not wear the mask as easily. As I enjoyed the benefits of free therapy at the Psychological and Counseling Center, I wondered about those who continue to feel that seeking treatment means an admission of craziness. Where did they go? For me, I needed to end the bouts of crying, the naps that went on for too long, the incompletes that accrued as I stared at my books not knowing where to begin the paper, but knowing it had to be perfect. Certainly a lot of these symptoms stemmed from events in my family life, but grad school didn't help. One administrator told me I should forget everything happening in that realm and just focus on my work. Another told me it was

foolish to look for happiness in grad school. I wasn't aware that I had consented to a life without joy when I decided to pursue a Ph.D. A fellow student told me that I would be shocked to know how many women sought help at the PCC, but never discussed it for fear of recrimination.

My desire to create a space in which women could honestly talk about their feelings stemmed from all of these experiences

and more. A dear friend of mine pointed out to me that she had never thought

about herself as much as when she was in grad school. She left her program soon after that. Many times this process is designed to be isolating. Each of us does our own original research, or helps a professor with his or hers. Often our lives are focused on the happenings of our own departments. Unless you are in a program that is interdisciplinary, many of us have little interaction with people of other disciplines. We're too busy writing a paper, teaching, taking class, studying, all in the pursuit of a tenure track job at a research one university. Anything less is failure. Never mind the failed relationships, the lack of sleep, the anxiety attacks. Forget the mounting debt from student loans that assist in your pursuit to live as your friends with "real" jobs do. This will all be worth it... right?

Last summer I wrote to an acquaintance who worked in the Center for Teaching about establishing something that addressed the experiences of women in graduate school. She suggested I contact the Women's Center, and from that moment it was a go. With the full support of Linda Manning and Alison Pingree, and working closely with Jennifer Hackett and Lisa Battaglia, the Women in Academe Series was born. As part of the Future Faculty Preparation Program (F2P2), students would receive credit for talking about their lives. In our sessions, we have discussed issues of authority in the classroom and how to establish balance in our lives. We have spoken with tenured women faculty as well as those who are on the tenure track. At the heart of this was the desire to know the joys and challenges of this academic life as experienced by women. I have met beautiful, talented, smart women who are doing the best they can in the pursuit of an advanced degree. I have spoken with faculty who wished the programs from

which they graduated had a similar forum. I sit back knowing that I have played a part in creating something that may make life at this university just a little bit easier, just for a moment.

Recently, a friend pointed out to me that this may not have existed, that I could have been turned away. This hadn't occurred to me. I am incredibly grateful to the Women's Center and the Center for Teaching for their response to my ideas. I am also appreciative of the lessons I have gleaned from this experience. You know when people say you can do anything? You really can. This whole thing was literally a sentence in my diary, and a year later we have sponsored seven different panels, a retreat, and a support group. Also, I know that there can be laughter in pain. I have heard, and shared, some truly horrific stories about graduate student life, but once there is acknowledgement that we have all gone through something, a little perspective is gained. Finally, I have learned that when you devote your time to your passion, it isn't work. I thank each and every one of the panelists and participants who have realized this dream of mine. You have enriched my life inordinately, and have heightened my graduate experience. Thank you.

*Vanessa K. Valdés is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese. For more information about the series or to submit an idea about something that you would like to see done in the future, please contact [vanessa.k.valdes@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:vanessa.k.valdes@vanderbilt.edu)*

m



## Kudos!

On Wednesday, April 20th, the Women's Center held an Appreciation Reception to thank the many volunteers and supporters who have helped us in our mission this year. We enjoyed good company *and* good food!



# ANNOUNCEMENTS

**2005 National Conference for College Women Student Leaders** will hold its **Purpose, Power Progress Conference** on **June 2-4** at American University in Washington, DC. Join student leaders from all over the country in a conference where you'll enhance leadership, advocacy, networking and also get to interact with successful women in the fields of leadership, finance and technology. Learn how to create practical solutions to challenges on your campus and community. For more information, visit [www.aauw.org/nccwsl](http://www.aauw.org/nccwsl)

**The Nashville Insight Meditation Group** can be very helpful in times of high stress (such as finals) or in your everyday life. It meets weekly on Wednesday nights in the Vanderbilt Divinity School's All Faith Chapel, from 5:15-6:15pm with 30 minutes of meditation, followed by a talk. It is free and open to the public. For more information, please contact [kathywoods@comcast.net](mailto:kathywoods@comcast.net)

**Nashville NOW (National Organization for Women)** will meet at the Nashville Peace and Justice Center at 7:00pm on May 23. For more info, please contact [CynthiaNashNOW@aol.com](mailto:CynthiaNashNOW@aol.com)

**Announcing the STAND Scholarship! Deadline May 8th!**  
STAND's Scholarship Committee invites young women who are preparing to enter college or who are current college first- or second-years to apply for one of two \$500 academic support scholarships. Applications are due by May 8th, 2005 for the fall semester. For more information on the application and its requirements, please call Jennifer Iliana Ortiz, Field Outreach Associate at (404) 524-5999 or e-mail [stand@wand.org](mailto:stand@wand.org).

## Save the Date!

**The Eighth Annual International Women's Policy Research Conference, *When Women Gain, So Does the World***, will be held **June 19-21, 2005** in Washington, DC. For more information, please refer to [www.iwpr.org](http://www.iwpr.org)

## Seeking participants for a study on Mother-Daughter Communication about Breast Cancer

The Department of Surgery at Meharry Medical College, in conjunction with the Nashville General Hospital Breast Center, the Vanderbilt-Meharry Cancer Partnership, the Vanderbilt-Ingram Cancer Center and the Vanderbilt Breast Center, has launched a research study to investigate how mothers and daughters talk about, and deal with, their risk for breast cancer and the incidence of the disease in their families. If you would like more information, or to see if you are eligible to participate, please contact: Monique Ornelas at 327-5670, [mornelas@mmc.edu](mailto:mornelas@mmc.edu); Jared Elzey at 327-5800, [jelzey@mmc.edu](mailto:jelzey@mmc.edu); Dr. Ana Grau at 327-6485, [agrau@mmc.edu](mailto:agrau@mmc.edu).

## Women's VU to change publishing schedule

The monthly newsletter of the Women's Center, *Women's VU*, will now be published August through May so as to better reflect the programming schedule of the Center. Catch our back-to-school issue on August 1st.

*Congratulations, Seniors! Have a great summer everyone!*



Printed on recycled paper

Vanderbilt University is committed to principles of equal opportunity and affirmative action

### Women's VU mailing list

*Women's VU* is sent free, on request, to all Vanderbilt students and to faculty and staff at a campus address. Subscriptions are available to off-campus readers for a suggested donation of \$10 per year. Please include your check, payable to Vanderbilt University, with your subscription.

- Please send my free subscription to a campus address. (Student subscriptions are free to *any* address.)
- Please send my subscription to an off-campus address. Donation is enclosed.
- Please correct my name on your mailing list.
- Please remove my name from your mailing list.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Student (specify school & year) \_\_\_\_\_

Staff  Faculty  Administrator  Other

Mail to the Women's Center, Vanderbilt University, Box 351513 Station B, Nashville, TN 37235

### Margaret Cunyngim Women's Center

Vanderbilt University  
2301 Vanderbilt Place  
Box 351513, Station B  
Nashville, TN 37235

### Return Service Requested