



# The Women's Word

Volume 3, Issue 3

...for women's voices to be heard

April 2006

## From the Director's Desk

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We just had the Women's Center's annual recognition dinner, where we honored the talent and dedication of our students and celebrated a semester that included:

- **Healthy Body Image Week** entirely planned by students in the Body Empowerment Alliance
- **Sexual Assault Awareness Month** events entirely planned by students and led by the Gender and Violence Group
- Over 300 people at **Take Back the Night!**
- **Women in Power** panel with **PA State**

**Senator Lisa Boscola**, organized by WC staff member **Sarah Jefferson** and Women's Studies student **Elise Winderbaum '06**

- Music journalist **Joan Morgan** on remixing hip-hop and feminism
- **Sarah J** and **Nayla Raad** of the Women of Color Alliance kick-starting **The Movement** for a more diverse Lehigh
- Lehigh's 6<sup>th</sup> annual benefit production of **The Vagina Monologues** raising almost \$10,000 for Crime Victims Council, the

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## A Warm Welcome to Michelle Issadore!

By Kristin Handler, Director

As you know, after three years with the Women's Center, our former Sexual Violence Prevention Coordinator **Steve McAllister** is leaving to go to law school (see *The Women's Word*, March 2006, p.1). After conducting an extensive search and reviewing the materials of nearly 60 applicants, I am pleased to announce that the Center has hired an outstanding candidate as the new Sexual Violence Prevention Coordinator:

**Michelle Issadore.**

As our new SVPC, Michelle will continue the important work of coordinating, expanding and assessing a comprehensive program to prevent sexual violence at Lehigh. Among other responsibilities, she will advise students in the Center's **Gender and Violence Group** and in **Break the Silence**, our group of sexual violence peer educators and hotline volunteers.

Michelle brings to Lehigh both academic and programming expertise in women's studies, sexual violence prevention and college student development. Michelle graduated *cum laude* with a Bachelor of Arts degree from Brandeis University, where she double-majored in Psychology and Women's Studies, and minored in Near Eastern and Judaic Studies.

Cont'd on page 2....



**Michelle Issadore, the Women's Center's new Sexual Violence Prevention Coordinator**

### Meet the staff

**Kristin Handler, Director**

**Heather Sterner, Administrative Coordinator**

**Steve McAllister, Sexual Violence Prevention Coordinator**

**Clare Burchi '06**—*Origyns, The Women's Word*

**Marisa Enrico '07**—(*Studying Abroad*) *Body Empowerment Alliance (BEA) Co-Coordinator, Break the Silence*

**Chelsea Erdmanis '06**—*BEA Co-Coordinator*

**Sarah Jefferson '06**—*Co-editor of The Women's Word, Diversity Event Cooperation Coordinator*

**Leigh Dugan '07** — *Origyns, BEA, The Vagina Monologues*

**Marjan Maghbooleh '08**—*Co-editor of The Women's Word, Co-Coordinator of Gender & Violence Group*

**Alex Milspaw '07**—*Break the Silence*

**Nayla Raad '07**—*Diversity Event Cooperation Coordinator, The Vagina Monologues, Break the Silence*

**Annie Rapson '06**—*Publicity Coordinator, Co-Coordinator of Gender & Violence Group*

**Rachel Sansanelli '07**—*BEA member*

**Renee Simons '06**—*Graphic Designer, Origyns*

**Hailey Witt '07**— (*Studying Abroad*) *BEA member*

**Jessica Wren '08**—*BEA member/web designer, Co-editor of Women's Word,, Origyns*

## Welcome, Michelle! cont'd from page 1

In May 2006, she will earn her Masters of Education degree in College Student Affairs from Pennsylvania State University. While earning her M.Ed., Michelle has been a graduate assistant in PSU's Office of the Associate Vice President for Student Engagement, where her primary role has been to recruit, train and advise the student volunteers who staff Lion Support, PSU's peer crisis hotline. Michelle was also a graduate intern in the Center for Women Students, where she used her research for her Masters paper on college students' attitudes about rape to shape educational programming on sexual assault for new students. In October 2005, Michelle presented an interactive session based on her research entitled, "First-Year Students' Perceptions and Attitudes about Rape" at the Pennsylvania College Personnel Association's annual conference.

**And now, the person behind the resume . . .**

I invited Michelle to share her thoughts about the following questions:

**Tell us something about your family and where you're from.** I grew up in South Jersey -- Mount Laurel, specifically. I loved being within driving distance of cities, beaches and mountains. My dad is an attorney and my mom is a professor of Human Development and Family Studies at Penn State Abington. I have two older half-sisters and a younger brother, along with two little nieces. All of my grandparents are from the Philadelphia area, so it was and is wonderful to be close by.

**What inspired you to do sexual violence prevention work?** Both of my parents are feminists so I was always aware of the issues and surrounded by positive messages. I was a Psychology and Women's Studies major in college, and then received my Masters in College Student Affairs,

so sexual violence prevention is the ultimate combination of all of my passions. I have always been a tireless advocate for women's right to feel and be safe; education, outreach and support are all important pieces of this position and the Women's Center's mission.

**What motivated you to apply for a position at Lehigh?** Lehigh itself is a remarkable institution, with a great reputation and engaged students. The Women's Center and the Sexual Violence Prevention Coordinator position encompassed my beliefs about best practices and the way this work should be done.

**What do you like to do when you're not working?** I am a big reader, especially now that I won't only be reading for school. I love to travel, dance, ski, spend time with kids, see movies and visit with family.

**What is something people might be surprised to know about you?** I studied abroad in London and LOVED it, so when I see movies or ads with scenes from that city (or even worse, hear the accent), I become giddy. It's embarrassing, really!

**What woman do you admire most and why?** This isn't meant to sound cliché, but without a doubt I most admire my mother. She instilled me with the life lessons that have brought me to this point, she unerringly stands up for what is right and she is a stunning example of the kind of woman I aim to be. One of the things I am most proud of is being her daughter, and I know how happy she is that I will also be working on a college campus and continuing her activist work.

Michelle starts work at Lehigh on **May 22, 2006**. After that date, she may be reached at (610) 758-5808. Please join me in extending a warm welcome to the newest member of our Women's Center team!

## I Believe You

By Annie Rapson '06

**Rachel Griffin**, a sexual assault survivor, spoke at one of the key events during Lehigh University's **Sexual Assault Awareness Month**, sponsored by the Women's Center. On April 10, Griffin first spoke to the Women's Center staff and then went to Neville Hall to present her lecture "**A Passionate Voice for Advocacy**."

Her messages were simple, but had a lot of impact. First, she said, "What happened to me can happen to you." She was a typical high school student who invited a crush over to her house when her mother was not home. She trusted him. She let him inside her home. He raped her.

Secondly, Griffin explained the measures she took after the rape to make herself feel better. She tried to control her eating and as a result developed a severe eating disorder. And once Griffin got to college, she turned to alcohol. Neither of these things worked. In fact, her methods of "recovery" were making her life worse.

Finally, after staying silent for seven years, Griffin found someone she could trust enough to confide in: a peer advocate at her college. After hearing Griffin's story,

the advocate reacted by telling her, "I believe you."

That was Griffin's final and most important point: If someone ever trusts us enough to tell us his or her story, the first words out of our mouths should be, "I believe you." Nothing hurts someone more than for the legitimacy of his or her personal story to be questioned. For survivors to know that you support them, that you **believe** them, is more valuable than any hug or "I'm sorry," in the world.



**Rachel Griffin tells her story to Lehigh students. Rachel is a trained victim advocate and a Ph.D. student in Intercultural Communication and Higher Education at the University of Denver.**

## From the Director's Desk cont'd from page 1

organization that serves as the area's rape crisis center, Turning Point of the Lehigh Valley, which serves victims of domestic violence, and the V-Day spotlight 2006: Justice to "Comfort Women."

This is also a bittersweet moment, since we have to say goodbye to the graduating seniors. On the WC staff: **Clare Burchi** has been accepted into Lehigh's M.A. program in English literature.

**Chelsea Erdmanis**, a founder and coordinator of the WC's Body Empowerment Alliance, will pursue an M.A. in Counseling Psychology at the College of New Jersey.

**Sarah Jefferson**, a founder and editor of *The Women's Word* and a leader in the WC's Women of Color Alliance and the Movement, will be attending a graduate program in international law at the University of Edinburgh.

**Annie Rapson**, Women's Center publicity coordinator and co-coordinator of the Gender and Violence Group, hopes to find work in a non-profit organization in NYC.

**Renee Simons** has been accepted into the graduate program at Parsons School for Design in NYC. She's working as a freelance designer at Donna Karan this summer.

Graduating members of our sexual violence peer educator/hotline volunteer group, **Break the Silence: Kendra Belanger** is looking for sexual violence prevention or victim advocacy work in NYC.

**Lee Blaney** will be starting a Ph.D. program in environmental engineering at UC Berkeley. He plans to ride his bike to California.

**Amy Bogart** will be spending the next year of her life in Quito, Ecuador, where she'll be teaching English to native Spanish speakers.

**Ben Gucciardi** will be going back to his hometown, San Francisco, to launch a program for high school males called Sports Against Sexual Assault, a project of his new non-profit Organization, Soccer Without Borders. ([www.soccerwithoutborders.org](http://www.soccerwithoutborders.org)).

**Amy Rikoon** hopes to find non-profit work in the Philadelphia area.

**Leah Wallerstein** plans to work for a year at a non-profit in Washington D.C. and then enter a graduate program in clinical psychology.

**Each one of you has made invaluable contributions to the Women's Center. With deepest gratitude and admiration, I wish each of you the best of luck —Kristin**

## Women in the Workforce: All Positive Implications?

By Sarah Jefferson '06

"Arguably, women are now the most powerful engine of global growth." This statement appears in "A Guide to Womenomics," an article in the April 12, 2006 issue of *The Economist*. The article's central claim is that the increase in female employment has accounted for a large portion of global growth in recent decades.

The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth of a country can come from three sources: employing more people, using more capital per worker, or from an increase in the productivity of labor and capital due to new technology. *The Economist* claims that since 1970, women have filled two new jobs for every one taken by a man.

It is misleading, however, to think of women "entering" into the workforce as a novel trend, when women have been working in the home for centuries. What *The Economist* article underscores is the shift from women being employed in the *informal* sector to the *formal* sector. It is the formal sector which is accounted for in official statistics and which has had a profound affect on the GDP of countries around the world.

According to *The Economist*, the increase in female employment in the formal sector around the world has been facilitated by the decline in manufacturing work and the increased number of service jobs. This shift has reduced the demand for manual labor and has put men and women on more equal footing.

Women are also achieving equality and becoming an indispensable part of the global marketplace as entrepreneurs, managers, investors and consumers: "Women have traditionally done most of the household shopping, but now they have more money of their own to spend. Surveys suggest that women make perhaps 80 percent of consumers' buying decisions – from health

care and home to furniture and food."

Though the article's finding that women are "the most powerful engine of economic growth" is exciting and encouraging to women around the globe, this finding has several implications that the article fails to mention.

While it is certainly true that female involvement in the workforce has increased and is positively affecting economic development, this phenomenon does not always directly correlate with improved and equal working conditions for women.

**Liz Roth, '08**, and graduate student **Sarah Zurat '03**, members of the Progressive Student Alliance at Lehigh, recently attended the **United Students Against Sweatshops Conference in San Francisco**. The conference addressed the working conditions of laborers around the world, specifically those employed in sweatshops. A sweatshop is a workplace, often a factory, in which employees work long hours at low wages under poor conditions.

The conference inspired both Roth and Zurat to hold a lecture on Lehigh's campus about women and sweatshops. The lecture, "**Sweatshops, Women and Activism**," was held in April, and co-sponsored by the Women's Center and other university departments.

In their lecture, Roth and Zurat discussed the inadequate and detrimental labor conditions that women endure in many countries. Women are often found working in exploitive conditions and are underpaid and overworked, so it is not surprising that the majority of sweatshops around the world are filled by women employees. Sweatshop employers often target women because they are thought to have greater manual dexterity and to be more easily coerced or manipulated into working than male employees.

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# Take Back the Night!

By Alex Milspaw '07

"What do we want?!" the leader yells to the following crowd.

"A safe campus!" the students enthusiastically respond.

"When do we want it?!" the leader shouts back.

"NOW!" the students yell.

The experience of joining over 300 students at the Take Back the Night march on April 11 was one of the most exhilarating, hopeful and passionate campus event I have ever attended throughout my three years at Lehigh. I can remember back to freshman year when there was a sad 20 of us gathered together under our umbrellas shouting as passionately as possible in a spring downpour. It was so inspiring to see so many Lehigh students come together on such a beautiful day to stand up for a issue that is so important to the existence and well-being of half of our society – women!

Take Back the Night is an international event that raises public awareness of the serious problem within most societies around the globe – violence



**Break the Silence members (l-r) Amy Bogart, Kendra Belanger(head turned away) and Leah Wallerstein rally the crowd during the Take Back the Night March**

women experiencing sexual assault or harassment because it "challenges their manliness or brotherhood" is absolutely absurd and definitely a problem.

Violence against women is, without a doubt, a huge problem surrounding our campus, our community, our cities, our world. Education and awareness of the campus rape culture and how violence against women can be prevented is vital for students of all ages. The Take Back the Night march gives an opportunity to those members of our campus who aren't usually involved to become involved and to make a visual and vocal statement that they will stand up against violence against women.

Standing on the stone wall at the bottom of the Grace Hall steps and seeing and hearing my fellow students taking a stand against violence against women made me so happy I cried. To know that I was not alone in my fight for justice and peace gave me so much hope and courage to continue my life's goal of preventing violence against women.

I want to say THANK YOU to all of you who came out that Tuesday night to help fight for me, my sisters, my mother, my friends and women all across the world. I thank you from the bottom of my heart and hope to see you again next year.



**Annie Rapson (in white shirt) and Marjan Maghbouleh (in green), co-coordinators of Sexual Assault Awareness Month and organizers of the Take Back the Night March**

against women. It is crucial for this event to happen, especially on college campuses, because date rape continues to be an increasing problem, when it shouldn't exist at all.

Three percent of college women are assaulted every school year, according to a study by the U.S. Department of Justice. Using that statistic, we can estimate that approximately 60 sexual assaults per year, or two to three sexual assaults per week, occur at Lehigh. That's a problem. The fact that women are in emotional, physical and/or sexually abusive relationships, and feel hopeless and alone is a problem. The fact that a woman is afraid to speak up because of the negative repercussions and stereotypes that will be thrown back in her face is a problem. The fact that some men are afraid to speak up and stand up for

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## Women In the Workforce cont'd from page 3

So while women around the world are clearly contributing to economic development on the macro level of increased GDPs and profit gains, it is important to recognize all the implications of this phenomenon, both social and economic. One of the consequences of the increase of women employed in the formal sector is that more women are working in unfavorable and unequal working conditions. This is leading to women being exploited both economically and socially.

*The Economist's* conclusion that, "Despite the increased economic importance of women, they could become more important still: more of them could join the labor market and more could make full use of their skills

and qualifications," stands true, but it must also be scrutinized.

As women become more important players in the workforce around the world – in both developing and developed countries – it is critical not only to analyze the macroeconomic figures of growth and development, but also to consider the conditions of women in the workforce: What are women being employed to do? Under what conditions are they employed? And what is the social environment in which women live and develop? The answers to these questions, among others, will provide a better measurement of true "womenomics": the impact of women in economic development around the world.

## Reproductive Rights in Wichita, Kansas

By Sarah Jayne Smith '04, G'05



*Sarah at the Women's Center in 2004*

As a new member of the **Planned Parenthood Affiliate of Kansas and mid-Missouri**, I am working on the frontlines of the national battle against restrictive health laws and misleading sexuality education. I am one of only a handful of comprehensive sexuality educators for Kansas' largest city, Wichita, where the provision of high-quality comprehensive sex education in the public school system is being threatened.

Recently, members of the Kansas State Board of Education have sought to block access to comprehensive sex education in favor of an abstinence-until-marriage educational model. The proposal would require all public schools to adopt an abstinence-only curriculum in order to receive their state accreditation and funding. This has serious implications for Planned Parenthood's ability to provide comprehensive sex education to teenagers, since the classroom is where most teenagers are first exposed to medically accurate reproductive health information regarding contraceptives and methods of protection from sexually transmitted infections. This decision could also potentially reverse the current statewide trend toward fewer teen pregnancies, and deter teens from making the healthiest decisions about their bodies. The decision further erodes the right of communities to decide what is best for their young people, and removes information from the classroom that prepares teens to make informed decisions about their bodies.

At the same time, restrictive health laws are increasingly impacting individuals' access to clinical services. Mandatory delays for clinical services, requirements forcing healthcare providers to share biased information, and discouraging the utilization of medical family planning

through the use of contraceptives and pregnancy termination create more and more obstacles for the right to make personal and private reproductive decisions. This trend is not unique to my region. Nearly half of all states in the U.S. have enacted similarly restrictive policies in a continuous attempt to erode the laws protecting our constitutional right to reproductive freedom.

A discussion of sexual health education and services must also address the implications of the political control of women's sexuality and women's bodies. As I work each day in a clinic, I experience firsthand the social, economic and political injustices that affect women's bodies. Women are biologically and socially more susceptible to contracting sexually transmitted infections, and often face the social and economic hardships of unintended pregnancy without support. The erosion of access to medically accurate information and services increases the social and economic disparities between women and men in our society and fundamentally challenges a woman's ability to make decisions for and about herself.

Being in a clinic also allows me to witness exactly why family planning services work. I see women being empowered to make fully informed decisions and to access the services that they choose without regard to their socioeconomic status. Everyone who walks through our door is guaranteed accurate and individually affordable personal healthcare. Comprehensive sexuality education and medical access, however, should not be taken for granted. I regard the ability to make these deeply personal choices as a fundamental human right: The expansion of family planning services is the driving force for women's social, political and economic equality in the U.S. and worldwide.

***Sarah Smith joined the Women's Center staff as a Women's Studies intern in spring 2002, and stayed with us until she finished her M.A. in Political Science in fall 2005. Sarah was the editor of Origyns, the Women's Center's annual feminist journal, for 3 years, but as a founding member of our student staff, Sarah did pretty much everything at one time or another!***



# Thanks for Another Great Semester!!



*Most of the Women's Center staff and some of our Break the Silence volunteers say goodbye to the Spring 2006 semester at the end-of-semester Recognition Dinner*

**Back Row (left to right):** Heather Sterner, Marjan Maghbouleh, Jessica Wren, Amy Rikoon, Sarah Jefferson, Ben Gucciardi, Leigh Dugan, Chelsea Erdmanis, Steve McAllister

**Front Row (left to right):** Clare Burchi, Nayla Raad, Alex Milspaw, Annie Rapson, Rachel Sansanelli, Leah Wallerstein

**Behind the camera:** Kristin Handler