

PRESIDENT ALICE GAST Visits the Women's Center

By Kim Altiery '07



President Gast and Hailey Witt '07 in the Women's Center

On April 16, **Dr. Alice P. Gast**, the newly-inaugurated president of Lehigh University, was our special guest at our weekly staff development meeting. The goal of our meeting with the President was no different than any other Women's Center staff meeting: to have a great conversation and brainstorm ways to catalyze positive change in our community. We also wanted President Gast to know who we are and why we work at the Women's Center.

Each Women's Center staff member introduced herself and spoke briefly about her work at the Women's Center and her other activities in the campus community. The fourteen

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Saying Goodbye

By Kristin Handler, Women's Center director

After over six years as director of the Women's Center, I will be stepping down in June to fulfill a promise I made to myself: to finish my Ph.D. in English from UC Berkeley.

My primary goal in the last six years has been to create a stable, sturdy foundation for a campus Women's Center that would truly have a transformative effect on Lehigh. Our 5th anniversary celebration in the fall marked the completion of that first phase of building. The Center now has three permanent, fulltime professional staff positions, three [student-led programming groups](#), two [publications](#), and a sexual violence peer hotline, [Break the Silence](#). This year, over 50 students worked on WC projects, which included the major multi-event programs, Healthy Body Image Week and Sexual Assault Awareness Month—AND my (and many other people's) long-held dream of bringing **Margaret Cho** to Lehigh was fulfilled last semester!

It's because of the team of people dedicated to the Center that it has been able to grow and flourish, so what I'd like to do in this last column is to thank those people. First, I want to thank the Women's Center's incredible professional staff, who have built the Center

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Meet the Staff

Kristin Handler
Director

Heather Weaver
Administrative Coordinator

Michelle Issadore
Sexual Violence Prevention Coordinator

Kim Altiery '07—Gender and Violence Group

Leigh Dugan '07—*Origyns* editor, Body Empowerment Alliance (BEA)

Marisa Enrico '07--Body Empowerment Alliance co-coordinator, *Break the Silence*

Alisha Gonzales '09—Body Empowerment Alliance, Student Athlete Mentors project

Nina Granberry '08--Women of Color Alliance co-coordinator

Marjan Maghbouleh '08—*Women's Word* editor, Gender and Violence Group co-coordinator

Alex Milspaw '07--*The Vagina Monologues*, *Break the Silence*

Stephanie Palmieri '07—*Women's Word* editor, *Origyns* editor, Student Athlete Mentors project

Elisa Pennetti '10—Body Empowerment Alliance

Rachel Sansanelli '07-- Body Empowerment Alliance co-coordinator

Nayla Raad '07—*Break the Silence*

Liz Roth '08—Women of Color Alliance co-coordinator

Casey Ryan '09—Gender & Violence Group co-coordinator

Hailey Witt '07—Publicity coordinator, *Women's Word* editor, Body Empowerment Alliance

President Gast at the WC con't from p.1

Women's Center student staff members represent all three colleges: engineering, business, and arts and sciences. They are varsity athletes, sorority members, *Brown and White* editors, Big Sisters, tutors, choir leaders, club officers, members of The Movement, and more. They are inspired to work at the Women's Center because many have witnessed sexual violence, sexism and eating disorders on campus. All of them want to raise awareness of these issues and to make Lehigh a more equitable community.

President Gast listened attentively, and after we finished introducing ourselves, paused and said, "I am so impressed by all the talent in the room." We went on to discuss a common problem on Lehigh's campus that affects women: the recent rise of what [Ariel Levy](#) has termed "raunch culture," in her book *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture* (2005). Dr. Gast joined the discussion on how raunch culture can cause women to lose touch with who they really are and to be objectified. An example of raunch culture in mass media is the huge popularity of *Girls Gone Wild*. Lehigh's frequent theme parties with "Hos" in the title ("CEOs and Corporate Hos"), in which women compete to be the sexiest, exemplify a key aspect of raunch culture: women are not just being objectified by men. They are actively embracing their role as sex objects.

President Gast said she worries most about the pressures on students to be someone other than themselves, but that the Lehigh community shares this problem with other communities. Gast also said we can make our campus reflect our own values and not society's, by getting to know people for who they are, not what they look like. She put the responsibility on students to make these changes. Upperclass students need to be role models for first-year students to get them positively involved.

Dr. Gast also said men need to join the effort to make women feel more comfortable. Men can accomplish this simply by listening to what women have to say. If a woman is in a situation where she feels overlooked, Gast suggests she should find at least one ally or mentor to provide support.

College is a time in our lives where we are all trying to find ourselves and what we love doing, said Dr. Gast. We need to follow our own ideas of what will make us happy rather than what society tells us will make us happy. President Gast suggested that the Women's Center should try to be more involved with the first-year students, because of a statement she heard from almost every staff member: that for many of us, our only regret about working at the Women's Center is that we did not get involved with it earlier in our Lehigh careers.

Dr. Gina Ogden on the Heart and Soul of Sex

By Hailey Witt '07

[Dr. Gina Ogden's](#) presentation on spirituality and sexuality on March 20 was an overview of her findings about what it takes for women to be genuinely sexually satisfied. Most of the famous studies to date about sexuality, including the Kinsey Report in the 1950s and the Hite Report of the 1970s, focused on the mechanics and trends in sexual behavior. During Dr.



Ogden's studies, however, and after the publication of her book, *Women who Love Sex*, she realized that there is a deeper element which greatly contributes to people's sexual experiences but which had never been assessed in significant surveys of the population.

Ogden created the "Integrating Sexuality and Spirituality" (ISIS) survey and interviewed nearly 4,000 people about their subjective sexual experiences. What she found was that the non-measurable factors in a sexual relationship contributed most to sexual satisfaction, and that the women who reported being most sexually satisfied had taken time to develop the spiritual and psychological aspects of their sexuality, instead of allowing social expectations and stereotypes about sexuality to define their experiences. Ogden published her findings in her most recent book, *The Heart and Soul of Sex: Making the ISIS Connection* (2006).

Ogden spoke about her own relationship with her work, saying after the events of 9/11 she wasn't sure if what she was doing was really important. After a period of struggle she came to the realization that her work was vital in helping women to lead fulfilling lives.

At the end of her presentation, Ogden asked audience members to share positive and negative messages about female sexuality that they have received in their lives. Interestingly, people did not always agree about what constitutes a positive message. Ogden concluded by urging each of us to explore and appreciate our own unique sexuality.

Words Raise Worlds: Lenelle Moïse reads “Queer(ed) Poems”

By Nina Granberry '08

What were you doing on March 21 at 7 p.m.? You should have been at **Lenelle Moïse's “Queer(ed) Poems”** performance. Unfortunately, the Packard auditorium was filled with only eight spectators in the audience. But I eagerly awaited Lenelle's performance and began to reminisce about the other time I heard an awesome feminist poet speak. It was two years ago when Staceyann Chin spoke in Diamond Theatre for the Def Poetry Jam performance. She rocked my world. This little woman with a huge afro and big voice inspired me to the point that afterward, I went to my room and decided I would be a poet, too. Things did not turn out the way I intended for them to go; I realized I would never be a Staceyann Chin. Nevertheless, I knew I was in for a treat when I saw Lenelle Moïse with her long freeform locs, eclectic outfit and deep voice.

The tiny crowd did not detract from the energy, emotion, and excitement Moïse offered us. We were active in her performance: as she told us, “It's a tradition in Haiti where the storyteller cannot begin speaking until he or she is given permission from the audience. So, when I say ‘krik?’ you say ‘krak!’ All right?”

And so we did, throughout the entire performance. The poems she recited told us about her life. Moïse was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti and moved to America when she was two years old. She spoke of how she was an outcast in the projects, a foreign girl who did not know much about sex and drugs like her peers. The details within her poems made the listeners a part of her experiences.

Women's Center Coordinator Heather Sterner said it well, “I was impressed by how her performance made you feel that you were experiencing what she talked about, and you wanted to know more. Anybody can tell a story, but she told her stories in a way that you got caught up in the experience.



Lenelle Moïse on stage

We felt as though we were there watching Moïse get beaten up by Tall Thick, the bully in her apartment complex, in the sandbox play area in Brooklyn projects. People remembered their first sexual encounters and crushes when she told us of her first-ever attraction to another girl.

Moïse told us of how she started writing in her early childhood. She started when she was five years old, and her Uncle Segó was her inspiration. They stopped speaking after he disowned her for being a lesbian. From those experiences with Uncle Segó, she learned three things about what serious writing requires. “Write about what you're passionate about, meticulous editing, and a poem isn't finished until you've read it out loud.”

These nuggets of wisdom were very meaningful to me as a woman and aspiring poet. Once again, I was inspired to write, to speak truth to power – this time, though, I will not give up so easily as before. After the performance, I bought a chapbook and asked Moïse to sign it for me. I think all of us can appreciate and learn from the words she wrote to me: “Words raise worlds!”

Louis Yako Speaks Loudly for the Silent Hawks

By Liz Roth '08

Americans' perception of Iraqi women as timid, weak and submissive was shattered by **Louis Yako** in a talk titled "Iraqi Women: The Silent Hawks." His presentation was part of Women's Herstory Month at Lehigh.

Yako, an **Iraqi citizen and Fulbright scholar** in the **Masters program in English at Lehigh University**, spoke passionately of the active lives of Iraqi women going to college, working and thinking for themselves, especially in the northern region. He corrected a common misconception by saying that behind their veils, many Iraqi women are open-minded, progressive and radical.

Unfortunately, however, religious campaigns within Iraq, and the four-year United States occupation have made life increasingly more difficult and oppressive for Iraqi women. Statistics showing the number of women killed, raped, tortured and kidnapped each day in Iraq are hard to find and usually inaccurate. The suffering of Iraqi women is overshadowed by politics, religion and war.

During the talk, Yako discussed how women have always endured the greatest hardships in Iraq. Saddam's sanctions in the 1990s drove families into crippling poverty and left women with the responsibility of holding the family together.

With their role in the home, Iraqi women had to scrape food together, and care for sick and dying family members without medicine. Furthermore, in political and religious conflicts, women are used as tools to threaten and seek revenge on enemy tribes. Innocent women are captured and raped in order to send an intimidating message. During this heinous act, a woman's humanity is disregarded and her dignity is lost.

Yako emphasized how Iraqi women cannot be lumped into one category because of differences in geographical, religious, cultural and class backgrounds. As a result, women vary in languages spoken, clothing worn and life goals. Some women wear the veil and are

unwilling to go out in public unless they are accompanied by a male relative; others reject these traditions. The many differences among Iraqi women reflects the fact that Iraq does not have a unified stance on the position of women in the country.



Louis Yako is an Iraqi citizen and Fulbright scholar in the English Department at Lehigh

Yako told the story of a woman in the north who walked to school everyday by herself, wearing a skirt above her knees. Iraqi militia stopped her in the street one afternoon and demanded that she wear a veil and walk with a man to school. The woman refused. She spit on the veil and threw it to the ground. The next day, she was shot and killed on her way to school.

Yako ended his lecture with a bleak forecast for the improvement of Iraqi women's situation as a result of the Iraq War. Although the United States claims it is liberating women, the occupation is oppressing them even more. Additionally, the "gender experts" from the West are merely army majors, untrained in gender issues, who have accomplished nothing for the advancement of women in Iraq. To save their own lives, women are leaving Iraq in droves, most often as brides to foreign men. Yako, who has many sisters, is sad to see what is happening to Iraqi women. Through Yako's talk, we are hopefully one step closer to recognizing and ameliorating the plight of Iraqi women.

Keith Edwards' Message to College Men: "She Fears You"

By Marjan Maghbouleh '08

If you went to his program, you must be a rapist. If you *didn't* go to his program, you must be a rapist.

Keith Edwards' presentation, "**She Fears You**," makes some students feel uncomfortable and unsure if they want to attend.

"Why should I go?" Some students ask. "I'm not a bad guy or a rapist."

But Edwards' message to the Lehigh community on April 9 pushed students to recognize sexism and sources of violence in parts of society that most people overlook on a daily basis. His lecture highlighted the worries of many college men: proving masculinity and putting on a performance based on rigid male gender roles.



Keith Edwards spoke at Lehigh as part of Sexual Assault Awareness Month, sponsored by the Women's Center's Gender and Violence Group



Controversial posters like the one above peppered the campus in advance of Keith's visit

Edwards urges men to recognize their roles in ending sexual violence. Modern society and media treats rape as a women's issue, he said. There are plenty of resources for survivors, hotlines and advocacy groups.

"But these messages are part of a reactive approach," he said. "The problem is, we need proactive messages and a proactive approach. Saying rape is a women's issue is dumb."

On the contrary, rape is an issue perpetuated by what society teaches men, Edwards said.

"Men think they know the difference between consensual and non-consensual sex, but we were taught wrong by our schools, by Maxim Magazine, older brothers..." he said. "There is an epidemic of false denials, not false reports."

At a meeting with the Women's Center staff before his lecture, Edwards said his position as a privileged man makes it harder for students to dismiss his words. People listen to him because society holds a low standard for men.

"The bar is set low for good guys," Edwards said.

Edwards said his program ends up

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Keith discusses his fliers with the audience

opening the eyes of college men.

"They gain consciousness of things they've done – maybe not rape, but 'Oh, I didn't treat her as well as I should have.'"

When athletes or fraternity members – statistically shown to be the majority of perpetrators at college – get upset by his speech, Edwards is pleased.

"It's good if it pisses you off, like the guys who think they're being targeted and get angry," he said. "If you don't like the image you have, it's a tremendous reason to confront teammates and brothers. It'll make a difference in the world."

Audience members voiced their concerns with the fliers posted around campus to promote his speech. One flier read, "Men can stop rape," with "can stop" in smaller, less decipherable text. Another flier simply stated, "She fears you."

"What made you uncomfortable about the fliers?" Edwards asked the student audience.

Some responded that the fliers unjustly assumed all men are rapists. Others were frustrated the fliers instilled in women a sense of unwarranted fear of all men. Edwards addressed these concerns and urged students to take a closer look at society to understand why women are taught to fear men – and what that means for the male population.

During the meeting with the Women's Center staff, Edwards admitted his lecture is probably not a good long-term strategy for ending sexual assault.

"You can't change 22 years of socialization," he said. Every action, however, makes a difference.

"Speakers are a good catalyst for other short-term efforts," Edwards said. "And a series of short-term efforts makes a big impact."

with me: administrative coordinator **Heather Sterner**, sexual violence prevention coordinator **Michelle Issadore**, and former sexual violence prevention coordinator **Steve McAllister**. I want to thank our **50 (!) former and current WC student staff** members. I wish I could name you all here, but every one of you has contributed something of lasting value to the WC. To all our **student volunteers** in Break the Silence, the Body Empowerment Alliance, the Gender and Violence Group and the Women of Color Alliance, I deeply appreciate the time and dedication you have given to these Women's Center projects. To the many **LU staff and faculty, community members, alums, and Women's Center colleagues** across the U.S. who have given advice and encouragement, please know that every kind word and gesture of support have sustained the Center and me as an individual.

Many of the students who have worked at the Women's Center say that the experience changed their life—or at least changed their Lehigh (**Annie**, I told you I'd quote you on that!). In your life after Lehigh, I hope all of you who have contributed to the Women's Center will keep the WC in your hearts, as I will.

Finally, I want to give thanks and a special shout-out to the graduating members of the Women's Center staff:

Kim Altiery has accepted a job as a chemical engineer at F.L. Smidth, a local cement company

Leigh Dugan will continue her work in the theatre and hopes to get an internship with a theatre company

Marisa Enrico has been offered a position with Teach for America in New York City and is 90% sure she'll take it

Alex Milspaw will be pursuing a M.Ed. in Lehigh's Counseling Psychology and Human Services program. She will continue her work as an in-home therapist for foster children, a youth advocate, and a fulltime nanny for two beautiful twin boys!

Steph Palmieri will be the graduate assistant for the varsity field hockey team at Lehigh while she pursues a masters in Lehigh's Secondary Education program

Nayla Raad will be joining the Peace Corps in Morocco, where she will be working on small business development for rural women.

Rachel Sansanelli will be entering the Ph.D. program in developmental psychology at Temple University

Hailey Witt has accepted a position as a campus organizer for the Public Interest Research Group

We are also saying goodbye to so many of the students who have selflessly given hours of their time to **Break the Silence**: I want to say thanks and good luck to **Brian Ade, Racine Henry, Alex Hobson, Sarah Thomas, Allie Warshaw, Chris Diggs, Dana Grimley**, and **Olivier Lewis**.

**WITH RESPECT AND ADMIRATION—
I WILL MISS YOU**

Women's Center Contact Info:

Mailing Address:

Women's Center
Room C207, University Center
29 Trembley Drive
Bethlehem, PA 18015-3064

Hours: M-F, 11am-6pm
Phone: 610-758-6484
Fax: 610-758-6960

Email: inwnc@lehigh.edu

Web: <http://www.lehigh.edu/womenscenter>

**BREAK THE SILENCE SEXUAL VIOLENCE
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Available 24/7 during fall and spring semesters
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Sexual Violence Prevention Coordinator:
610-758-5808

Editors of *The Women's Word* :

Marjan Maghbouleh mam204@lehigh.edu
Hailey Witt hmw2@lehigh.edu