

Faculty Profile

Diana Fox and Ten Years of Women's Studies Scholarship on the Web

Diana Fox, Associate Professor of Anthropology, remembers well the moment of inspiration that led to the creation of the *Journal of International Women's Studies*, an online, cutting-edge, scholarly publication that she founded in 1999 and has edited ever since. "I had already been aware of internet publishing and its potential for reaching those without access to print scholarship. But the point was really confirmed when I was in Cuba at a Women's Studies conference at the University of Havana in 1998." Many of the scholars there weren't aware of what was happening in the field around the world. Like others in the developing world, the university lacked resources for print journals and its women's studies office had only one computer and a staff that was just learning to use it. Still, it was the promise of the technology that struck Dr. Fox. "To stay engaged with colleagues around the world, I thought, a person only needs occasional access to a computer...and no paper!"

Diana Fox has developed her idea into a leading journal in the field of Women's Studies and if longevity reflects success, the *JiWS* is proof positive. The journal turns 10 this year. Originally, the journal was hosted by the Women's Center at North Adams State College (now the Massachusetts College of the Liberal Arts), where Dr. Fox was the Center's director and overseer of the college's Women's Studies minor. When she took a tenure-track position in BSC's Anthropology Department in 2000, Fox brought the journal with her to Bridgewater and to a new electronic address (www.bridgew.edu/SoAS/JiWS/).

From the time of its inception, the *Journal of International Women's Studies* has filled a void and makes connections between scholars and others in the field. "There was, I think, a disconnect between feminist scholarship and feminist activism. The journal tries to be a link between these two endeavors," Fox notes. In fact, an open-access, free, peer-reviewed journal has become a form of activism itself." At the core of the *Journal's* mission is a simple assertion: awareness of the plight, challenges and achievements of women in other parts of the world is necessary if change is to happen. As women's studies increasingly embraces gender studies, relationships between femininity and masculinity and



GLBT concerns, the *JiWS* publishes articles, essays and literary works across these related fields.

Though it has never appeared in print, the *JiWS* possesses all of the features that scholars would recognize in other leading journals in their fields. Dr. Fox is joined by two associate editors and a 29-member editorial board made up of scholars from institutions across the United States as well as Malawi, South Africa, and Finland. The journal is peer-reviewed and listed in the International Social Science Index of scholarly citations, both of which serve as markers of its caliber. True to the field, the journal is multidisciplinary, which means it is flexible about writing styles and emphases, citation practices and topics. Among the journal's November 2007 issue, for example, were full-length articles on the construction of "woman" as a category in Kashmir, female emancipation and the concept of "liberation" in Sri Lanka, wife-battering in Africa, a literary deconstruction of Shakespeare's character *Caliban* (from *The Tempest*) as a symbol of subaltern resistance, and the work of the YMCA in the United Nations "Decade for Women" (1975–85). "The common thread is that they all analyze the central categories—woman, and increasingly gender—and provide a bridge between scholarship and activism," Fox explains. "All these themes and issues have to have a transformational quality." The journal's most recent issue is composed of the winning and short-listed entries to the UK- and Irish-based Feminist and Women's Studies Association essay competition for 2006. "This is the fourth year that we have published FWSA contest essays. It's a great way for us to forge connections and show multiple perspectives."

Over the past ten years, the *Journal* has developed an important reputation in the field as a meeting ground for ideas among feminist scholars throughout the world, but particularly from places where scholarly

discourse was isolated or muted. To be a vibrant journal means also to be willing to embrace change; that is, to be open to new and revisionist ideas and to be an ongoing voice of inclusion. Even a cursory look at the subjects examined in the past issues of the *JlWS* shows it to have been remarkable in reflecting the dominant debates and changing approaches of the leading scholars in the field. Fewer contributors to the journal write about women and gender in the ways that the leading scholars did even 10 or 15 years ago. Fox notes that “few scholars write about women’s experiences as being a product of particular regions or nations alone... The latest scholarship sees women’s and gender experiences as *transnational* phenomena.”

In many American colleges, the presence of an academic journal or university press on campus often goes unnoticed, the product of a rather common separation of research and teaching functions in higher education. Not so with the *JlWS*. One goal that Fox has emphasized is that the Bridgewater State community should be much more than simply a host for a journal whose contributors largely reside elsewhere. In short, the *Journal* gives back to BSC. At a general level, she says, “the journal helps to explode the idea that a regional college like ours must have a regional perspective.” Placed alongside the College’s many other global initiatives, the *JlWS* opens yet another window on the world. Professor Fox and other members of BSC’s Women’s and Gender Studies program routinely use articles, reviews and discussions from the *Journal* in their classroom pedagogy and invite students to use this resource in their research. “I think the *Journal* has shown our students that scholarship about women on one hand and women’s experience, on the other—here and around the world—are not two separate, distinct things. The *Journal* articles are about *real* lives in other contexts and they give our students perspective on how to view and value their own lives.. Moreover, using the *JlWS* in the classroom demonstrates a point that is simple but profound: new, fresh and good ideas come rather often from other, often overlooked parts of the world.

And what lies ahead for the *Journal* in its next ten years. Dr. Fox and the editors will hardly rest on their well-won laurels for long. One challenge they plan to tackle is making this international publication even more international—to include scholars from even more countries among the members of the editorial board and among the authors submitting work. Growing the *Journal*’s diaspora of scholars won’t happen overnight, but through conference discussions, word-of-mouth and internet discovery, the community is poised to expand. A second, more perennial and intractable challenge involves brass tacks. The *Journal*’s success thus



far has come from hard work from its editors and goodwill from the College. “The account balance is always less than \$1,000,” Fox notes, and while it’s not her aim for the *Journal* to become a major financial earner, a more comfortable margin would be nice. “As we grow, so will our sources of revenue. Royalties from bibliographic sources, for example, will help.”

But the top priority for the *JlWS* in the next decade involves another challenge: how to make the journal more accessible *linguistically*. The journal is currently published only in English and this poses a conceptual hurdle given the diversity of its global clientele. Unfortunately, the cost of in-house translations is prohibitive. Still, Fox and her colleagues plan to move ahead to make the *Journal* more multilingual. In addition to publishing the abstracts for some English-language articles in other languages, the editors will consider republishing selected whole articles that have already appeared in English a second time, in other languages. One recently published piece on women’s activism in Honduras will appear again in a future issue at the author’s request, this time in Spanish, so that more women’s activists in the Spanish-speaking world could access the ideas. “This is an example,” Fox said “of how the mission of the *JlWS* is actually working.”

Like a charm. Happy anniversary, *JlWS*. Many more.

—Andrew Holman is Professor of History and Associate Editor of the Bridgewater Review.