Looking Back, Moving Forward

Greetings from the Comparative American Studies Program! I am grateful to Professor Shelley Lee and student Yujean Park for organizing our first official newsletter. We hope this publication will help to strengthen ties with our alumni and friends far and wide.

This has been an exciting year for Comparative American Studies. In Spring 2008, Wendy Kozol officially joined CAS as a core faculty member after many years of working to build and strengthen the program as a member of the CAS program committee. Along with Shelley Lee—who arrived in fall 2007 with a joint appointment in CAS and history—CAS now has four core faculty members who teach a range of courses in Asian American history, LGBTQ studies, human rights, militarism, and Latina/o studies. Last year 14 students graduated with a Comparative American Studies major, and, as you will read in this newsletter, many leave Oberlin to do a range of exciting things to make this world a better place.

Thanks to the energy and organizing of our faculty members, CAS continues to sponsor a number of events on campus. Shelley Lee invited Asian American studies and film studies scholar Celine Shimizu (University of California, Santa Barbara) and historian Lilia Fernández (Ohio State University) to share their research with faculty, students, and staff. Under Pablo Mitchell's leadership, and with Meredith Raimondo and Eric Estes's visionary planning, CAS will sponsor a mini-course in March taught by writer and activist Eli Clare titled Crip Theory, Activism, and Culture: Reframing Disability. Registration for this course was immediately filled by students eager to work with Eli after reading his book in class and hearing his lecture at Oberlin in 2006.

CAS is also fortunate to offer classes this spring by new and visiting faculty members in sociology, religion, and history. Rick Baldz is teaching a class on the sociology of globalization, and Angela Tarango is offering a course on Native American religions. Renee Romano, who is new to the history department (and with whom CAS hopes to collaborate), is teaching a course on the U.S. and WWII, as well as a seminar on historical memory.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the CAS program committee and its majors, alumni, and friends for making this an exciting space to work, research, and collaborate. We've come a long way in five years, and I look forward to seeing where we are when we celebrate a decade of Comparative American Studies at Oberlin College in 2013!

Warmly,
Gina Perez, Director

Eric Estes was awarded an Oberlin Shansi Faculty in Asia Grant. In May and June, he gave two university-wide lectures titled "U.S. Presidential Politics as Identity Politics" and "Diversity and Inclusion in U.S. Higher Education" at Shansi Agricultural University in China. He also gave a talk titled "Negotiating Identity Politics and Dominant Cultural Narratives" as part of a panel on the U.S. presidential election at the 2008 Summer Institute for the Study of the United States for China University Faculty at Beijing Foreign Studies University. Eric is co-teaching his course RELG 290: Meanings of the Memorial Arab with Professor David Kamitsuka this spring.

In fall 2008, Wendy Kozol joined the core faculty of Comparative American Studies. Her research and teaching interests are in visual culture studies with particular interests in feminist theories and methodologies; transnationalism and popular media; and citizenship, militarization, and human rights activism. Courses include Visible Bodies and the Politics of Sexuality, Feminist Research Methodologies; and Picturing War. Wendy is currently working on a book project on contemporary visual depictions of U.S. militarism, titled Visible Wars. As part of that research, she recently published an article in Peace Review titled "Visual Witnessing and Women's Human Rights" (January 2008).

Shelley Lee is delighted to be in her second year at Oberlin, in a joint appointment in CAS and history. This spring she is teaching CAST/HIST 246: American Orientations and CAST/HIST 342: Race, Gender, and American Social Movements. She is also co-teaching the second half of the American survey in the history department with colleagues Clayton Koppes and Pablo Mitchell. Next year, she will offer a new course on America in the 1970s. Shelley is working on a book project on Japanese Americans in pre WWII Seattle and has a forthcoming article in American Studies Journal about racial discourse in Hawai'i in the 1920s and 1930s.

Gina Perez is completing a co-edited anthology titled Beyond El Barrio: Everyday Life in Latina/o America, with colleagues Adrian Burgos Jr. (University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign) and Frank Guirad (University of Texas, Austin). Published by New York University Press, the book is an interdisciplinary look at Latina/o communities, both past and present. Pablo Mitchell (CAS and history) is one of the anthology contributors. Gina is teaching Militarization in American Daily Life this spring, a course she finds particularly provocative and timely. She is also grateful to have a sabbatical leave next year to complete her book manuscript on Latina/o youth, citizenship, and JROTC, based on research in Northeast Ohio.

Meredith Raimondo continues to write about representations of HIV, including recent essays on media representations of the "down low" and documentary film on the global pandemic. She will also develop several new courses during her leave next year, including queer theory and critical health studies.

Pablo Mitchell is working on a book project titled West of Seve Latina/os and the Making of Modern America. This spring he is teaching a U.S. history survey course, American Sexualities, with Clayton Koppes and Shelley Lee and a second course called Borderlands.

Read much more about CAS faculty members, course offerings, and alumni at www.oberlin.edu/CAS.

MEET OUR STUDENTS:

Alma Castro, third-year double major in CAS and politics
My focus is on Transnationalism and Border Studies. I wanted a major that incorporated elements of history, politics, and sociology while tying them together to try and understand the bigger picture. It is important to realize that although Oberlin as a whole has a strong sense of service work, CAS is one of few majors that requires its students to go out in the field and work in the community it is studying. I am ecstatic about a course called Situated Research. The class epitomizes what it is to be a CAS major because of the vibrancy of the students and the complexity of the texts. I only recently realized how important it is for me to be in a space where people dive deeply into the material they are studying. Comparative American Studies majors, as well as faculty members, are prone to peeling layer after layer of meaning from a single text. I would say we are environmentally friendly in that we can use and re-use a text until the very last drop.

Sara Boxell, third-year student
I would like to concentrate on Identity and Diversity with a focus on Asian American studies. I have switched majors many times since entering Oberlin. I came to CAS mostly because of my involvement in the Asian American Alliance on campus. Through this involvement, I became more and more interested in what Asian American Studies was all about. My interest was also furthered because our co-chair at the time, Kiri Meintert, had been the first CAS major to have an Asian American Studies focus. What I like most about CAS is the faculty. Through other Asian/Pacific American student organizers, I have been able to work with great faculty members, such as Pawan Dhall and Shelley Lee, both inside and outside the classroom.

Yujean Park, third-year double major in CAS and visual arts, minor in English
My concentration is in Identity and Diversity with a focus in Asian American studies, particularly the Model Minority Myth. Coming from a social justice background, my friends at Oberlin who had the same interests and goals as me were taking CAS classes and getting a lot out of them, so I started taking classes in the department. I found that those classes were my first opportunities to academically engage with topics that I really cared about and spoke to my personal experience. The community within the department is also extremely supportive and inspiring.

ALUMNI UPDATES

Jesse Carr '04
Concentration: Gender and Women's Studies, with a focus on African American Studies
For about four years after graduation, I lived and worked in Oakland and San Francisco, Calif. I was involved with several non-profit organizations working on issues related to violence, queer families, and racial justice. I was on the staff of a group called COLAGE (an organization for people with LGBT parents), and then on the staff of a group called Generation Five, which addresses child sexual abuse in a prison abolition framework (i.e., developing community interventions that do not rely on the state, police, or prison systems). Throughout this time I also volunteered with an organization called CUAW, doing crisis counseling for survivors of violence in the queer community (generally dealing with hate crimes, domestic violence, and police brutality). Near the end of my time in California I got involved with Just Cause Oakland, which does housing rights and anti-gentrification work; I got involved with JCO through another organization, Catalyst Project, which organizes white people to be involved in racial justice work. Then, in 2007, I decided to return to school and am now enrolled in the University of Michigan's American Culture PhD program. I plan to study connections between sexual violence and race, focusing on representations of violence, violence in institutional settings (such as prisons, schools, the military, etc.), and complicity with violence. I am excited to be starting my first research project this year, which will track media representations of the Abu Ghraib prison abuse scandals and how such representations were (or more accurately were not) able to mobilize people into greater opposition of the Iraq war and the larger war on terror.

Daniel Ritma Domaguin '06
Concentration: Identity & Diversity, with a focus on Native/Indigenous Studies
After graduation I served AmeriCorps* VISTA as a literacy coordinator at Brooklawn Child & Family Services, a residential treatment center for boys with emotional
"The two things I have found most valuable about the CAS major are the awareness of social issues and historical movements for change that the range of classes gave me, and the amount of writing that was involved in the classes, which really developed my writing skills."

—Barrie Newberger '07

Alumni Updates, continued

and behavioral disturbance and histories of abuse, neglect, and abandonment. I designed, implemented, supervised, and evaluated Brooklawn’s after-school tutoring program. As a member of the activities department, I also facilitated cultural, educational, and physical activities for the boys. After my year of service was complete, I entered the University of Michigan School of Social Work and am currently completing my last semester in the master’s program with a major in Interpersonal Practice with Children & Youth in Families & Society and a minor in Social Policy and Evaluation. My internship is at the Lincoln Secure Residential Treatment Center, where I serve as a therapist to delinquent and status offender youth, ages 14 through 20. I pay the bills working as a youth specialist at Ozone House Youth & Family Services, which includes a runaway and homeless youth shelter and a transitional living program. I also volunteer as the coordinator of the Filipino Youth Initiative at the Philippine American Community Center of Michigan and as the eighth-grade catechist at my community church.

Marisol LeBrón '07
Concentration Focus: The Performance of Identity
After graduation I worked for the Oberlin College Multicultural Resource Center as the Latino/a community coordinator. I worked with faculty and staff to create a strong community of support for Latino/a students and other marginalized students on campus. I also assisted Latino/a students in building community through a variety of programming initiatives that focused on exploring the complexities of Latinidad on campus and in the broader society. Currently, I am a first-year doctoral student in the Program in American Studies, Department of Social and Cultural Analysis, at New York University. My research explores representations of Latino/a citizenship and belonging in American popular culture (which means I watch way too much television). I am also working as a research associate for the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA), where I just published my first short article, "The Reggaeton Factor in the U.S. Elections. As silly as it sounds, when I’m writing, even to this day, I find myself wondering, “would this fly in a CAS class?” CAS definitely keeps me grounded.

Kimberly Yuan Meintert '07
Concentration Focus: Diversity and Identity in Asian America
After graduation, I moved to Vancouver, Wash., and worked for Americorps for 11 months. During that time, I worked at Free Clinic of Southwest Washington, which is a free health clinic for low-income uninsured people. I was especially responsible for the development and implementation of a free specialty health care referral program; doing that with no health care experience was pretty tough. Once I finished that, I moved to Portland and did some freelance grant writing for the program I had just helped to create. I just heard that the proposal I wrote in August 2008 was fully funded for $200,000. So that makes me feel pretty good about my persuasive writing skills.

Barrie Newberger '07
Concentration Focus: History and Practice of Social Change
After graduation I moved to Charleston, W.V., and worked as a legal assistant/client liaison for a non-profit law office. The office specialized in representing low-income homeowners against mortgage companies, servicing agents, and banks for predatory lending and illegal collection practices. In my line of work, writing comes up a lot; many non-profit and law offices ask for writing samples when applying to jobs and look very closely at them. Being able to write well is a huge asset. For example, I have made it to the final stage in the hiring process for a grant-writing position even though the organization knows I’ve never written a grant before. They have writing samples from CAS classes and are giving me a chance based on that.

CAS FACULTY AND STAFF

Comparative American Studies
Core Faculty:
Gina Perez, Associate Professor and Director
Wendy Kozol, Professor
Meredith Raimondo, Associate Professor
Shelley Loz, Assistant Professor

Comparative American Studies Program Committee:
Kazim Ali, Assistant Professor of Creative Writing
Jan Cooper, John Charles Reid Association Professor of Rhetoric and Composition
Pawan Dhingra, Associate Professor of Sociology
Eric Estes, Associate Dean/Director, Multicultural Resource Center, Adjunct Assistant Professor of CAS and History
Meredith Gadsby, Associate Professor of African American Studies
Daphne John, Associate Professor of Sociology
Harry Hirsch, Professor of Politics
Pablo Mitchell, Associate Professor of History
Renee Romano, Associate Professor of History

Administrative Assistant:
Judi Davidson

Student Representatives:
Max Beshers '10, Cordelia Loots-Gollin '11, and Yujean Park '10