

**Annual Report**  
**Institute for Research on Women, Rutgers University, 2014-2015**

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**I. OVERVIEW**

2014-2015 was an extraordinarily productive year for the Institute for Research on Women (IRW). Our greatest accomplishment was undoubtedly “Marking Time: Prison Arts & Activism,” a multi-component project to explore the cultural aspects of imprisonment with a focus on art produced by prisoners and in response to mass incarceration. In addition to “Marking Time,” IRW had a highly successful year of core programming, running a seminar, Distinguished Lecture Series, and undergraduate learning community on the theme of “Feminist Optics: Gender and Visual Studies.” The following report provides a brief summary of IRW’s activities and initiatives in the 2014-15 academic year.

**II. MARKING TIME: PRISON ARTS & ACTIVISM**

Serving as an expressive tool, a means of political protest, a survival technique, and a vernacular that is often hidden from sight, prison art is an important way for prisoners to convey their experiences behind bars. IRW’s “Marking Time: Prison Arts & Activism” project had three primary goals: to promote the significance of prison artistic practices as vital components of contemporary culture and vernacular arts traditions; to facilitate the development of networks and support for prisoners, artists, scholars, and organizations working in the field; and to provide a forum to examine the impact of prison systems on culture and specific populations. With activities continuing from October 2014 to June 2015, “Marking Time” constituted a very important part of IRW’s academic year.

The first component of “Marking Time” was a three-day conference on prison art and activism—the first of its kind—that included scholars, artists, activists, and community groups. Thanks to generous funding from the Ford Foundation, Puffin Foundation, and New Jersey Council for the Humanities, IRW was able to bring more than 125 participants from throughout the United States, as well as Mexico, Ireland, Serbia, and Venezuela to Rutgers for the conference, which was held on October 8-10, 2014. “Marking Time” featured a wide range of panels, workshops, lectures, poetry readings, performances and presentations. Reginald Dwayne Betts, poet and author of *A Questions of Freedom: A Memoir of Learning, Survival, and Coming of Age in Prison* and *Shabid Reads His Own Palm*, gave the keynote address. The conference also incorporated two days of film screenings. In their evaluations, participants and audience members described the programming as “inspired,” “transformative” and “top notch.” They expressed appreciation for the fact that formerly incarcerated people and community activists were central to the programming. Many also commented that they took advantage of networking opportunities with people who approached prison arts from different perspectives.

Alongside the conference, IRW curated a month-long exhibition of art by current and formerly incarcerated individuals on six different sites throughout New Brunswick: Alfa Art Gallery, Rutgers Art Library, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Heldrich Hotel, New Brunswick Public Library, and the Zimmerli Art Museum at Rutgers. Contributing artists included Ojore Lutalo, who turned to art as a creative survival strategy during two decades in solitary confinement, and Dean Gillespie, exonerated

through the work of the University of Cincinnati's Innocence Project after serving 20 years in prison for crimes he did not commit. Lutalo's collages and Gillespie's collection of miniaturia, including a model of a dinette created from cigarette wrappers, were displayed in the Rutgers Art Library. Jesse Krimes displayed his epic *Apokaluptein: 16389067*, a work created from smuggled prison bed-sheets and newspaper clippings, at the Zimmerli Museum at Rutgers-New Brunswick. The New Brunswick Public Library showed photography by Ron Levine, whose work focuses on a rapidly increasing demographic group among prison populations—the elderly and aging—as well as a selection from Family Crisis Services' *More Than a Rap Sheet: The Real Stories of Incarcerated Women*, featuring photographs of incarcerated women in Maine, accompanied by their poetry. Alfa Art Gallery hosted *Prison Obscura*, presenting rarely seen photography created by prisoners, the Heldrich Hotel showed the abstract paintings of formerly incarcerated artists Jaso Nomo and Gilberto Rivera, and artist Mark Strandquist installed his public art project *Windows from Prison* on the Eagleton Lawn.

### ***Marking Time: Prison Arts & Activism***

#### *Comments from evaluations*

“This was truly an inspiring conference. It was impressive to see all those directly impacted by mass incarceration, community members, academics, artists, and activists all in the same space, sharing stories, ideas, and resources. I believe that what you have done is a model for others to take up and build off of.”

“The content of this conference was top notch. The program, artists, output, and research were all excellent.”

“The organization was phenomenal. So many interesting and diverse topics.”

“...it was a safe and creative atmosphere. An oasis...”

“Nothing short of amazing! Great job, a major feat pulled off.”

A third component of the “Marking Time” project involved prison-based public education. Aware that studies show a correlation between arts programs in prison and increased self-confidence and expressivity, as well as diminished recidivism on the part of prisoners, IRW organized a 3-day art workshop at Mountainview Youth Correctional Facility in Annandale, New Jersey, where arts programming has recently been exceptionally limited. In collaboration with Donald Roden and Chris Agans of the Rutgers Mountainview Program, and NJ-STEP, we engaged instructor J.D. McGuire to lead a workshop entitled “Walk a Mile in My Shoes” on March 11-13, 2015. The workshop was designed to enable prisoners to make their own shoes entirely out of cardboard. Based around an object—the prison boot—that is inclusive, equalizing, and represented all the young men in the Mountainview facility, this endeavor enabled students to explore and engage with basic 3D design and the principles of building. By asking the students to make something meaningful from limited materials, the workshop fulfilled a key learning objective—for the students to develop problem solving skills in relation to creativity. The workshop therefore enabled students to cultivate a set of competencies that could readily be applied in other contexts.

The fourth and final component of “Marking Time: Prison Arts & Activism” involved the creation of a resource guide intended to benefit incarcerated individuals, artists, scholars, and activists. To make the guide compelling, we invited “Marking Time” participants to submit short articles based on their presentations, as well as images, poetry and other written material in response to the conference. IRW also compiled an extensive list of organizations working on prison art and benefiting incarcerated individuals, artists and activists. The result is a substantial publication, more than 50 pages long, which will be printed in June 2015.

### III. CORE PROGRAMMING

#### IRW Interdisciplinary Research Seminar

The theme for IRW’s 2014-15 interdisciplinary seminar—and for all of its core programming—was “Feminist Optics: Gender and Visual Studies.” Throughout the year we engaged in a broad conversation about how feminist scholarship has challenged practices of looking in the academy and beyond, and opened up new avenues of engaging the visual world.

In total 23 individuals participated in this year’s seminar: 10 faculty members, 1 professor emerita, 4 graduate students, 2 Global Scholars (from the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore, India and the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México), two Mellon Postdoctoral Fellows, a visiting postdoctoral scholar affiliated with Critical Caribbean Studies at Rutgers, a visiting scholar from China affiliated with the Women’s and Gender Studies Department, a visiting doctoral student from Brown University, and a Douglass alumna. Scholars attending the seminar were associated with the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, the Mason Gross School of the Arts, the School of Engineering, the School of Communication and Information, the Zimmerli Museum, and the Departments of English (Newark and New-Brunswick), Fine Arts (Camden), Sociology, Spanish and Portuguese, History, Women’s and Gender Studies, and American Studies. Seminar participants came from a diverse array of countries including India, Mexico, Iran, Chile, England, Lebanon, and the United States. Seminar fellows’ projects encompassed a wide range of methodologies and theoretical perspectives showcasing participants’ research on topics as varied as “Gay and Lesbian Visual Culture in the Early Twentieth Century” and “Multiplexed Molecular Level Phenotype Profiling of Breast Cancer Circulating Tumor Cells.”

In addition to presentations by fellows and guest lecturers, IRW held a workshop on scholarly publishing for seminar members. Led by Andy Mazzaschi (*Signs*) and Peter Mikulas (Rutgers University Press), seminar members learned about the intricacies of publishing in academic journals and how this process differs from publishing scholarly monographs.

Final evaluations by participants praised the supportive interdisciplinary environment of the seminar: One seminar member described the experience as “cordial, animated, constructive, and stimulating.” Another said that “my perspective has been enlarged and enriched. I have benefited greatly from the interaction with my colleagues and from hearing their responses...Reading a wide range of papers and discussing them was wonderful.” Asked how the participation in the seminar has affected their work, a third seminar member responded: “It has been a ‘high’ and given me so many ideas for future projects. The scope of disciplines presented by participants left me breathless.” In short, IRW’s seminar continues to provide a truly interdisciplinary and diverse space, exemplifying the kind of academic environment that SAS and Rutgers value.

***IRW Seminar on Feminist Optics: Gender and Visual Studies***  
*Comments from evaluations*

“Invigorating is the word. This has been a phenomenal experience and space.”

— *Graduate Student*

“This is exactly what my doctoral research needed.”

— *Graduate Student*

“There is no other rigorous, intellectual, and productive space like IRW.”

— *Postdoctoral Scholar*

### **IRW Distinguished Lecture Series**

During the 2014-15 academic year, IRW planned talks by seven Distinguished Lecturers, esteemed academics and artists from within and outside the University. A snow day necessitated the cancellation of our March 5 lecture by University of California-Berkeley Professor Shannon Jackson. All the remaining lectures attracted audiences of 80-100 people, including faculty, graduate students and undergraduates from departments including Art History, American Studies, History, English, Latino and Hispanic Caribbean Studies, Anthropology, Sociology, and Women’s and Gender Studies, as well as members of IRW’s undergraduate learning community, and local community members interested in public intellectual debates and issues. We incorporated our lectures into the SAS and Douglass passport programs and in consequence many undergraduate transfer students attended our lectures. Faculty teaching courses in several disciplines also encouraged students to attend.

- In ***The Edge of Encounter: Sexual Narratives and the Limits of Representation*** (September 18, 2014), Juana María Rodríguez (University of California-Berkeley) used the biography, *Vanessa del Rio: Fifty Years of Slightly Slutty Behavior*, to consider how racialized gender and class inform the ways in which individuals understand subjectivity and consent. Centering her inquiry on the life on an aging Afro-Latina porn star, she addressed “problematic pleasures,” those moments where the lines between consent and coercion are frequently blurred, to explore the relationship between images, text, experience, and knowledge production.
- In ***From the Down Low to the First Gay Rapper, Or Tracing a Trajectory from Glass to Plastic*** (October 30, 2014), C. Riley Snorton (Cornell University) explored the ways in which sexuality—as a register of power—produces discourses about blackness and its dislocations revealed by the question, “who is out in hip hop?” Reading such a question symptomatically, Snorton offered plasticity as a tactic to negotiate the conditions of the “glass closet,” a space characterized by hypervisibility, confinement, spectacle, and speculation that figures black sex in public.

- In *Saya Woolfalk: World Builder* (December 4, 2014), New York-based artist Saya Woolfalk discussed her projects *No Place*, *The Empathics* and *ChimaTEK*. *No Place* is a fictional future where plants and humans change gender and color, and transform into the landscape when they die. *The Empathics* are a group of women who physically and culturally metamorphose as they merge identities and cross species. *ChimaTEK* is an Empathic corporation, designed to sell products that give users access to a chimeric existence through the creation of personalized virtual avatars. Woolfalk has displayed these projects in museums across the U.S. and around the world.
- In *Social Practice as Feminist Strategy in Modern and Contemporary Latin American Art* (February 29, 2015), Tatiana Flores (Rutgers-New Brunswick) described the way in which social consciousness has been one of the defining features of Latin American modern and contemporary art. Her paper addressed the work of Latin American women artists, examining the intersection between activism and feminism from the early twentieth century to the present day.
- In *The Art of Elizabeth Demaray: Disciplinary Transformation in Art and Science Collaboration* (February 19, 2015), Elizabeth Demaray (Rutgers-Camden) discussed several art works she has created in which science is an integral component, and which raise questions about humans' complex relationships with the natural world. Her work has involved building listening stations for birds that play human music, culturing lichen on the sides of skyscrapers in New York City, and designing alternative forms of housing for hermit crabs out of man-made materials. Demaray described how integrating art and science can support innovation, raise awareness of ecological issues, and highlight the work of individual scientists.
- In *A Serial Biography of the Wayward* (April 16, 2015), Saidiya Hartman (Columbia University) presented a speculative history of Matty Jackson, a fictional assemblage drawn from court records, designed to illustrate the story of black, intimate life under normative conditions of "unfreedom." Matty's story, set in the aftermath of slavery, revealed the encroaching criminalization of everyday existence for black women between 1890 and 1930. These women appear as anarchic or "wayward" when considered in light of the state's lego-political regime and the emerging racialized, carceral system.

### **IRW Undergraduate Learning Community**

Since the 2007-8 academic year, IRW has pioneered the development of an undergraduate learning community based in a research institute, offering advanced undergraduate students an intimate yet rigorous environment for intellectual growth. With the support of the Office of Residence Life, IRW ran two semester-long learning communities (Fall 2014 and Spring 2015) led by Ghassan Moussawi, a doctoral student in the Sociology Department at Rutgers-New Brunswick and former IRW Seminar Fellow.

Under Ghassan's guidance, a total of 29 students from 18 majors, ranging from Biology to History and from Psychology to Business, participated in IRW's learning community during 2014-15. Participants attended IRW's Distinguished Lecture Series, gathered to discuss related readings, developed their own research projects related to IRW's annual theme, and worked with mentors

(faculty, visiting scholars or advanced IRW graduate student fellows). In addition, participants met with Women's and Gender Studies librarian, Kayo Denda, for a tailored research methods class. In the fall semester, students enjoyed a special screening of the documentary "Paris is Burning," followed by a discussion about the themes of intersectionality, gender, sexuality, race, and visual studies in the movie. In the spring semester, students enjoyed a special presentation by Guggenheim award winning documentary filmmaker Kathe Sandler, who showed clips from her 1993 film "A Question of Color" and moderated a discussion on how colorism takes on different forms in different time periods and geographical contexts. Evaluations described the Learning Community as a personalized environment that enabled students to thrive, while at the same time providing a safe space to learn and grow.

***IRW Learning Community on Feminist Optics: Gender and Visual Studies***  
*Comments from evaluations*

"I have never been in such a comfortable classroom environment when it comes to open dialogue....I wish it was for more than once a week."

"I love how much support the IRW community has to offer me. I really feel like I have someone to turn to in the academic community to talk about my research."

"I feel like my voice matters, my ideas are important enough to be discussed and that I have a safe space to communicate these ideas."

"The IRW promotes amazing research that I never knew existed at Rutgers."

Next year's learning community will be led by Sara Perryman, a doctoral student in the Women's and Gender Studies Department at Rutgers-New Brunswick. Ms. Perryman, a former graduate student representative on IRW's Executive Committee, is writing a dissertation entitled "Eco-Sensoriums and Geographies of Risk: Detroit, Michigan's Affective Futurity." An accomplished teacher, she is the recipient of a Rutgers Graduate School Award for Excellence in Teaching. Her research and teaching interests include feminist geography, critical race theory, post-industrial American landscapes, feminist theories of embodiment, and the relationships between food deserts, poverty, and urban farming. She is certain to contribute greatly to the 2015-6 learning community.

#### **IV. OTHER INITIATIVES AND PROGRAMMING**

##### ***A. Rethinking the Asia 'Pivot:' Challenging Everyday Militarisms and Bridging Communities of Women***

During November and December, 2014, IRW/WGS Mellon Fellow Annie Fukushima, in conjunction with the Center for Women's Global Leadership, Rutgers University Libraries, and the Department of Asian Languages and Cultures, organized a series of events under the banner of "Rethinking the Asia 'Pivot:' Challenging Everyday Militarisms & Bridging Communities of Women." The series of events was designed to explore the effects of contemporary and historical

militarized interventions in the region by the US, including gender and sexual-based violence, and community and environmental degradation. The events began with an international webinar on November 25, 2014, with scholars and activists from Japan, South Korea, Mexico, Okinawa, Guam, and the Philippines discussing efforts to build peace and security while challenging pervasive militarism. “Rethinking the Asia ‘Pivot’” also incorporated a series of film screenings about the detrimental effects of a US military expansion to Jeju Island, as well as a digital exhibit designed to engage issues of militarism from a visual perspective. The events culminated with a one-day symposium on December 4, 2014, featuring a keynote address by Cynthia Enloe (Clark University) entitled, “How Asian Women are Making us all Smarter about Militarism.” The symposium also incorporated a series of panels that provoked a generative conversation about the histories, technologies, visual, and narrative representations of militarism, and their implications for policy.

### ***B. Negotiating Basics for Women Entering the Academic Job Market***

On Wednesday, November 12, 2014, IRW sponsored its sixth annual professional development workshop for graduate students designed to demystify the process of negotiating for an academic job, making participants aware of the kinds of resources and perks that could be asked for and how these vary by discipline. This year’s panel featured four faculty members of different ranks and from different disciplines: Yarimar Bonilla (Assistant Professor, Anthropology and Latino and Hispanic Caribbean Studies); Laura Fabris (Assistant Professor, MSE/School of Engineering); Chie Ikeya (Associate Professor, History); and Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel (Professor, Latino and Hispanic Caribbean Studies and Comparative Literature). Each panelist spoke briefly about their own experiences negotiating for salary, research allowances, and other benefits, and then answered questions from the audience. During lunch, the panelists met in smaller groups with participants to answer disciplinary-specific questions. Every participant also received a two-page handout on negotiating tips prepared by IRW. This event was co-sponsored by the Office for the Promotion of Women in Science, Engineering, and Mathematics and the Office for Institutional Diversity and Inclusion.

### ***C. Trans Studies and the Challenge to Hetero/Homonormativities***

Rutgers University Press awarded a contract to former IRW Director Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel and IRW Associate Director Sarah Tobias for their book *Trans Studies and the Challenge to Hetero/Homonormativities*, which features the work of speakers in IRW’s 2012-13 Distinguished Lecture Series as well as writings by participants in the 2013 spring colloquium. The book encourages a broad conversation about the most recent redefinitions in Women’s, Queer and Sexuality Studies in dialogue with debates in Trans Studies. It combines academic essays with short, critical pieces by activists. The book is scheduled for publication in early 2016.

### ***D. Co-sponsorships***

As part of our commitment to collaborating with other units, IRW continued to co-sponsor a large number of events with a diverse spectrum of centers, departments and institutes, including the Office for the Promotion of Women in Science, Technology and Mathematics, the Interpreting American History Committee, Women’s and Gender Studies Department, the Center for American Women and Politics, Office for Institutional Diversity and Inclusion, and the Center for European Studies. Our “Marking Time” conference was sponsored by an exceptionally wide-ranging group of university units from New Brunswick, Newark, and Camden, and also a variety of external organizations, including Alfa Art Gallery, American Friends Service Committee’s Prison Watch Program, New Brunswick Public Library, Prison Creative Arts Project at the University of Michigan, and PUEG Center at UNAM (National University of Mexico). The Director and Associate Director

continue to cultivate significant relationships and pursue possible collaborations with many Rutgers units and organizations outside the university.

## V. FELLOWS AT IRW

During 2014-15, the Institute for Research on Women hosted two Global Scholars and two Mellon Fellows. Our Global Scholars were Gerardo Mejía, a visiting graduate student from the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, and Hema Swaminathan, an Assistant Professor at the Centre for Public Policy, Indian Institute of Management Bangalore, India. Gerardo Mejía is completing an M.A. in Political and Social Studies with a project entitled “Historia político-conceptual del concepto trans y teoría política” (A Political and Conceptual History of the Concept of Trans in Political Theory). His areas of interest include: feminist studies, sexual diversity, racism, discrimination, HIV/AIDS, and public policy from the perspective of gender and human rights. Dr. Swaminathan is working on two related projects that will result in a framework for theoretically meaningful interpretation of gendered patterns of household asset ownership. In the first project, she is developing normative measures of gender asset gaps, and in the second project, she is clarifying the relationship between asset ownership and wellbeing.

This academic year we also continued to host Dr. Annie Fukushima, our third Mellon Fellow, shared with the Women’s and Gender Studies Department. Dr. Fukushima has a Ph.D. in Ethnic Studies from the University of California at Berkeley. Her book manuscript, *Migrant Crossings: Asians and Latinas/os in the United States*, explores the sex trafficking of Asian and Latinas/os into the United States from countries as diverse as Peru, Korea, and the Phillipines. Through an analysis of case studies, she explores the shifting meaning of trafficking through a series of dichotomies (such as visibility/invisibility; victimhood/criminality). Her work makes scholarly interventions in the fields of Women’s and Gender Studies, American Studies, Ethnic Studies, Media Studies and Law. Dr. Fukushima has been an active participant in the academic community at Rutgers, co-organizing a fall symposium, and giving several compelling presentations about her work.

We were also delighted to welcome Dr. Maya Mikdashi (Ph.D. Anthropology, Columbia University, 2013) as our fourth and final Mellon Fellow. Dr. Mikdashi’s dissertation, entitled “Sex, Secularism and Sectarianism: Practicing Citizenship in Contemporary Lebanon” explores how economic, religious, and historical phenomena shape Lebanese law, which in turn serves to transform religious and secular Lebanese practices. Her focus is on the practices of strategic religious conversion and advocacy for a secular personal status. In her book manuscript, Dr. Mikdashi focuses on the gendered aspects of these practices to investigate the occurrence of secularism in a Muslim majority country. Her work traverses the fields of queer theory and legal anthropology and raises questions about how feminism, liberalism, secular modernity, and religion are conjoined and disjoined in a legal context.

## VI. TOWARDS 2015-2016

IRW’s annual theme for 2015-2016 is “Poverty.” The seminar will bring together a strong cohort of faculty and graduate students from departments including Sociology, History, and Women’s and Gender Studies, as well as from the Schools of Nursing (Camden), Planning and Public Policy, and Education, to engage this theme from multiple disciplinary and theoretical perspectives. This theme will also be central to our undergraduate learning community and Distinguished Lecture Series. The last decade has been marked by growing concern about sexual rights in the geopolitical arena, and an

explosion of groundbreaking academic work in gender and sexuality within the social sciences and humanities. In the United States, studies have shown that large swaths of undocumented people, non-married, racialized women, rural and urban children, gender nonconforming people, and those with more marginal queer identities languish in growing states of poverty. In consequence, IRW is also planning an April 2015 conference on sexuality and poverty, which will bring together academics and activists to explore this relationship in greater depth. We hope that the School of Arts and Sciences and the Office of the Chancellor will continue to support our infrastructure and programming as we continue these important endeavors.

<b>IRW Staff 2014-15</b>	<b>About IRW</b>
<p><b>Director</b> Nicole R. Fleetwood, Ph.D.</p> <p><b>Associate Director</b> Sarah Tobias, Ph.D.</p> <p><b>Program Coordinator</b> Colleen Martin</p> <p><b>Undergraduate Learning Community Coordinator</b> Ghassan Moussawi</p>	<p>At the forefront of feminist research for over thirty years, the Institute for Research on Women (IRW) advances innovative, interdisciplinary, feminist scholarship on gender, women and sexuality. Part of the School of Arts and Sciences at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, IRW was founded in 1977 by faculty and administrators seeking to expand feminist scholarship and activism beyond the university's fledgling Women's Studies program. Today, IRW supports a broad range of programming designed to stimulate research on women and gender within and across the disciplines, throughout and beyond Rutgers. Promoting faculty and student connections and building intellectual community are also central to IRW's mission. Affiliate members of IRW currently include almost 900 faculty, graduate students, and advanced undergraduates drawn from a wide range of disciplines at the New Brunswick, Newark and Camden campuses.</p>