

Women on Campus: profiles gathered by the Women Mentoring Women initiative at the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of Yale University

Victoria Blodgett

Director, Graduate Career Services; Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

Jessica Cronce

Doctoral candidate, Psychology; McDougal Fellow; Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

Kathryn Douglas

Assistant Director, McDougal Center; Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

Joyce Fernandes

Associate Director, Graduate Teaching Center; Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

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Victoria Blodgett

Director, Graduate Career Services

Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

Victoria Blodgett recently came to Yale after 15 years in Graduate Career Services and Student Life at Cornell University. Victoria earned her B.A. and M.Ed from Keene State College in New Hampshire, where she worked as a Graduate Assistant at the Instructional Innovation Center and as a residence hall director.

Q: What led you to choose a career path in education?

A: In some ways I think I was always headed for a career in education. I worked in various jobs as a kid including as a counselor in day camps, in various program director positions in the town recreation department, and I even worked in educational films for youth athletic programs; however, I think I realized that my eventual career path was heading toward education during my junior year in boarding school. I thought it amazing that there were faculty members who lived in the residence halls. The small living/learning environment was like a magical elixir for me. Being able to learn in a communal environment where there was consideration of the whole student, where there was a commitment to both the academic and the personal development of students was wonderful. Having mentors live in the residence hall with you, very similar to the Yale College model, was a spectacularly supportive learning environment. The change from the less personal public school to that more intimate environment was a good fit for me.

When I went on to college, I wanted to stay in New Hampshire so I went to the teachers college – Keene State College. I didn't really know what I wanted to major in--I was interested in many areas of study--so I bounced around and finally landed on American Studies, because it offered me an opportunity to study so many of the areas in which I was interested. Maybe more importantly, I discovered there were people called "hall directors" who actually got to live in the residence halls but didn't have to teach. So, I thought, "this is even better than my experience in prep school." My first intentional career decision was to go in that direction. That is to say I wanted to go in directions that supported student learning and scholarship, but not necessarily as a professor.

While I was a Residence Hall Director, we started an experimental program that was our version of the "freshman year experience," teaming staff people with full professors in the classroom. We each taught our area of specialties. So, my professor's specialty was sociology and my specialty was working with students on things like time management, study skills, how to organize yourself for test taking, etc. Working with her in that cooperative model, which included a living/learning component (i.e., all of those students lived together in a residence hall, were in the same classrooms, and shared us as mentors), inspired me to teach. I caught the bug. After three years as a hall director, I went back to get my high school teacher certification and a Master's degree. That was my second intentional career move. I loved being in the classroom and being in the teaching role. I've always been drawn to teaching roles. Even my jobs as a camp counselor,

youth athletic coach and town recreation supervisor were teaching opportunities. I think that if you are a teacher, you are always a teacher.

Q: How did your experience in education shape your decision to pursue a career in administration in an academic setting?

A: I was a high school teacher for a couple of years and loved it, but I was also a trailing spouse. My partner took a position at Cornell. We moved to Ithaca, hoping that a high school teaching opportunity would continue there, but it just wasn't going to pan out for me. So, I went back to university administration, this time working with Graduate Students. My work experience and my training went in two different directions. I pursued an American Studies degree as an undergrad because I was interested in everything; I eventually went into teaching after completing a Master's degree in education, but most of my work experience has been college administration. You can study college administration on a graduate level, but I didn't choose to do that. So how did my experience in education influence my decision to pursue administration? Well, the short answer is, it was by default. I was the trailing spouse; I needed a job; there was a huge university where we were living; the teaching jobs weren't panning out; so I thought, "I'll go back into student affairs." That's how I actually started working with graduate students. At Cornell there are about 6000 graduate students and they were just about to open a new graduate student center, so they hired me to be the first person to develop and run that program.

Q: Given how eclectic your background has been and that you've been able to try out different things, what would you say, thus far, has been the most rewarding aspect of your career?

A: I have the opportunity to work with the most interesting, brilliant young people on the globe. Imagine that I get to do that! How did I stumble into that? Every day I feel lucky to have the honor of doing that. To sit across the desk from people like you, you are the people who are going to change the world or have the world's future in your hands. I know it's not going to be me that fills that "change the world" role, but I love that I am in support of you and your quest to do it! That is the most rewarding thing that I can think of: that I'm in a much honored position. Oh, and I laugh every day. There is an old adage: "If you find something that you love, you'll never have to work another day in your life." I'm close to that. I can't think of anything else that I would rather be doing. This is great.

Q: What part do you see mentorship playing in your role as Director of Graduate Career Services? That is, how do you or will you serve as a mentor to students?

A: I think that good mentors spend time trying to assess what their mentees need and what their mentees want rather than just deciding "I'm going to be this." It's not about me; it's about you; it's about students; it's about staff; it's about helping whomever else that I'm responsible for get through whatever process it is that we're getting through. It has nothing to do with me. So, it's my responsibility to help them do a little research about where they are in their development and process; where they are in their personal

development; their professional development; their academic development, their career development, and how is it that I can play a role in helping them to reach their personal and professional goals. If one student comes in and says, “I don’t think that I have free choice about my career,” due to any number of factors, then my job is to help them either realize that they do have free choice or figure out ways to help them feel as if they have some free choice (i.e., what aspects of their career do they have free choice over?).

Q: What would you like to do as the newly appointed Director of Graduate Career Services?

A: Well, I have lists of things that I would like to do. I want to create enough opportunities so that any graduate student feels as if they have some event that applies and is useful to them. Which is easier said than done. Those opportunities can be at any point in their time as a student at Yale University. So, if at some moment they are thinking, “I have some concern about being a woman in a predominantly male field,” then I want to be able to provide events that help them to problem solve those issues. I would love to offer everything to everybody. But that isn’t realistic. I do think that I can be a conduit of information for events and activities that are happening that might provide for most needs. Our office will contribute to that array of events; we’ll be one of the many resources for graduate students seeking career advice and information. I hope that over the course of their time here, a student will have access to anything they need or want to help them make good career decisions. But, in order for them to really know what that is, they need to be aware of career related services, and our office from the first day that they arrive. It is important to teach them that not every career event will happen within a single year. They will need to attend events throughout their time at Yale. My ultimate goal is that graduate students understand that what they are going to do after they leave Yale is an intentional process in which they play the primary decision making role.

Q: What advice would you give to female graduate students who are interested in pursuing a career in academic administration?

A: You need to do a little research on the field of Academic Administration. Take opportunities to volunteer, for a day or week in whatever office it is that you think might be interesting. Arrange for some informational interviews with those who are in positions that you think are interesting. Administration is an awfully big word. It can be truly anything from career services to academic advising, to policy making, alumni relations to managing dining halls. I suspect that there are more people at Yale as administrators than as faculty. Again, we are in a position that supports the classroom activities. We administer the process of education. Universities offer an amazing learning opportunity for students. It is your opportunity to say, “As a graduate student, I’d love to be involved in or learn more about some co-curricular aspect of Yale.” In my own experience, I was inspired by the people integral to university education who contribute in roles other than that of professor. If that’s inspiring to someone else, great. Try it out now, while still deciding what role you would like to play – what job you would like to have.

I think of this decision making stage as a set of research questions about yourself: “What can I do? Who am I? What do I really want to do? What kind of environment do I want to work in? What kind of environment do I want to live in?” Those are self-guided research questions. Once you’ve discovered the

answer to all of those things, the secondary set of questions is, “Who offers that? Who wants what I know?” Using myself as an example, the question is “who wants someone like me who has particular expertise in working with graduate students?” It won’t be the predominately undergraduate institutions. They won’t be interested in hiring me because I’ve been working with graduate students for so long. They may look at my experiences and they’ll think, “She can not longer relate to undergraduate students.” So who does want what I know? I need to figure that out with some additional research.

In summary, I’d say experiment, but treat the career decision process as a series of legitimate research questions. Don’t walk into your future backwards. Walk into it absolutely forward. The key is to make your career process an intentional act.

October 2006

Jessica Cronce

Doctoral candidate, Psychology; McDougal Fellow

Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

Jessica Cronce received her B.S. in 1999 and worked for several years at the Addictive Behavior Research Center at the University of Washington in Seattle before returning to graduate school. She was recently appointed McDougal Fellow for Women Mentoring Women (WMW), a new position in the GSAS designed to promote WMW programs and services.

Q. Tell me a little about your current research:

A. Working with my advisor Dr. William Corbin, I am conducting a lab-based study that will hopefully inform our understanding of how alcohol affects cognitive processes involved in decision-making. This information can in turn be used to inform alcohol-related prevention and treatment efforts.

Q. You worked several years in your field before deciding to come back for a Ph.D. What made you decide to come back to academia?

A. I always knew I would come back for graduate school, but at the time that I received my Bachelor's degree, I didn't have the kind of research experience necessary to get into some of the programs I was interested in. I was fortunate enough to be able to spend four years at the Addictive Behaviors Research Center where I initially worked as a Research Publications Editor and then later as a Research Coordinator. In this latter role I had the opportunity to actively contribute to the design of new research. I realized that in order to continue in this vein and be able to conduct my own research, I needed to go back to grad school. Around this time, there was a transition going on in the lab, as projects were ending and it seemed like a natural time to move on.

Q. What are some of the challenges you face or have faced in coming back to school?

A. Finances were initially a big challenge. I made much more working at the ABRC than I do with a stipend, although the stipend here is generous. Moving geographically has also been a challenge, as I had established a great social network and it is difficult to pick up and establish a new network. The biggest challenge has been negotiating multiple roles. In my job, I was used to devoting all of my time to research, and now I have to balance research with coursework, teaching, clinical responsibilities, and departmental/university service.

Q. Do you have any mentors other than your advisor at Yale? And if so, how did you establish a relationship?

A. Dr. Mary Larimer at the University of Washington was my undergraduate advisor, and continues to provide mentorship on personal and professional development. Our relationship began when I chose to be paired with her for an honors research project, a formal advisor relationship set up by the university, and has grown over time. In her capacity as the Associate Director of the ABRC, Dr. Larimer encouraged me to apply for the Research Publications Editor position. All along, she has supported me and provided me with a wealth of opportunities that have helped me to advance professionally. Dr. Larimer was especially supportive of my move back to graduate school.

Q. Who has given you the most support in your endeavors?

A. My Dad. He has been very encouraging all along.

Q. What would your advice be for a young woman pursuing a career in Psychology?

A. The field is both highly rewarding and highly demanding. Total commitment to it is a good idea. Taking time off helped me find direction for my doctoral research by giving me valuable experiences with which to test the waters. I recommend working in a research lab if this is the direction a student wants to go in, or for clinical work, to get involved in peer counseling or a crisis hotline.

Q. Do you have any advice for women pursuing their Ph.D.s?

A. I advise to seek out multiple sources of support. I benefit greatly from multiple advisors and mentors, and family and friends here and at home. Feeling well supported helps me take intellectual risks.

Q. What do you hope to accomplish as the Women Mentoring Women fellow at the McDougal Center?

A. I want to facilitate accessibility to resources that will assist women in their professional and personal development and establish a community of female graduate students and faculty as a way for graduate women to draw on support. I am thrilled with the faculty and administrators who support WMW, and excited that Alexandra Lord is coming to speak both on careers in and out of the academy and on confidence for women.

August 2005

Kathryn Douglas

Assistant Director, McDougal Center

Recruiting Coordinator, Graduate Career Services

Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

Kathryn Douglas holds an MFA in Museum Studies from Syracuse University and an MFA in Creative Writing and Literature from Bennington College. She currently teaches creative writing through the University of Gävle, Sweden and has taught Women's Studies at the University of Buffalo.

Q. Could you briefly describe what you do at McDougal Center?

A: I wear many hats at the McDougal Center. I develop programs and advise fellows for *Palimpsest: Yale Literary & Arts Magazine*, Women Mentoring Women, Career and Professional Development and Academic Writing. I provide general support for all McDougal fellows, and have recently initiated an on-going professional development series for them. I serve as communications coordinator for the center, including graphic design and website maintenance. A large part of my work is serving as Recruiting Coordinator for Graduate Career Services (GCS) – bringing alternative career opportunities to PhD and Masters candidates.

Q. Since you serve as program advisor for Women Mentoring Women, could you tell us the history of WMW program at McDougal Center?

A: Women Mentoring Women began as a self-matching database developed by McDougal Fellow Angelica Bernard, who worked with GCS Director Mary Johnson in collaboration with Women Faculty Forum to launch the database.

Two years ago, I was asked to promote and develop the Women Mentoring Women database, and appointed McDougal Fellow Jessica Cronce to work on the programming. This year we added a second fellow, you! We've actually moved away from the original database, although our main focus has been in line with Angelica's original impetus – to promote and provide mentoring opportunities for women graduate students. We currently use a small group mentoring model, where one faculty member meets with several graduate students, providing mentoring, peer-networking and peer-mentoring opportunities. We provide opportunities for graduate women to meet with women faculty or alumna through a dinner discussion series, offer lunch and coffee cards to any women faculty and women students who would like to meet in the Hall of Graduate Studies, and develop programming on mentoring and on topics of interest to women students.

Q. Could you tell us the types of mentoring you have received?

A. To be perfectly honest, I had to think about this question for a long time, as I didn't think I'd had a lot of good mentoring! I always had (and have) a lot of support from my family, but as a young woman I didn't have someone saying to me "You can do pretty much anything you want, and this is how you do it: a, b, c" – which is the kind of encouragement and information I think a good mentor can provide. I have several great groups of peers – long time friends and associates – and much of my reading life revolves around women's memoir and biography – my efforts, I think, to find role models, parallels and examples of how to proceed with a life! **Composing a Life** by Mary Catherine Bateson, for example, describes the circuitous career paths of several successful women. It has helped me put my own career path, which has included a slow start, changes in direction, and time out for child-birth and child-rearing, into a positive perspective.

I realize that I did in fact have one really good mentor as an undergraduate at SUNY Potsdam, Georgia Coopersmith. I was studying fine arts, and working in the art gallery. At this point in my life I was finishing my BA after the birth of my first child, and going to graduate school hadn't even occurred to me! But I was very inspired by Georgia and the work she was doing as Gallery Director. She provided opportunities for me to learn graphic design and basic museum practices, encouraged me to apply to graduate school, and recommended me to the Museum Studies program at Syracuse University. She also pushed me, and made some suggestions that were hard for me to take at the time – but I see them now as essential to my growth.

A lot of what I got from Georgia was through sheer observation – I saw her focused, step-by-step development of a state-of-the-art collections facility, a community/college support organization for the gallery, an outstanding calendar of professional exhibitions and publications, an internship program and visiting artist series – all within a relatively short time. I learned a lot about administration, organization, community-building, generous supervising, efficiency and creative problem-solving – skills I have developed over the years and use in my current professional life.

Even after I was accepted into the MFA program and left Potsdam. Georgia introduced me to her colleagues in the field at professional meetings, brought me back to Potsdam to serve as Acting Director of the Gibson Gallery when she went on sabbatical, and kept me informed about opportunities. She saw something in me that I didn't see, and she helped me to see it too!

Q. What about the mentoring you have given to other people?

A. I've been focusing this year on providing professional development opportunities for McDougal fellows, in collaboration with the coordinating fellows – a form of mentoring I think. We're trying to get fellows to think about the kinds of skills and experiences they might receive in the fellowship that they can take into their long term careers. I provide McDougal fellows with information and support to help turn their programming ideas into realities. This work enables me to more fully assess what it is that I have to share knowledge- and skill-wise, and the students I work with mentor me as much as I mentor them! I also teach a creative writing class, and think of myself as a teacher-mentor. Beyond the basic coursework, I help students recognize their unique points of view, and push them to publish and to read beyond the assignments. Finally, as a Mom, I'm in often in the position of mentoring my children, when they let me!

Q. What are the most rewarding aspects of your career?

A. My work is most rewarding when I get to fully utilize my experiences and education—when the work is interesting and I get to learn something new. This is true of my current job, where I get to work with extremely interesting students and colleagues, take the occasional afternoon break to hear Edna O’Brien, Sharon Olds or Susan Gubar read, and am called upon to integrate administrative, organizational, interpersonal and creative abilities.

It is similar to the curatorial work I’ve done and loved, where a complicated set of skills and knowledge are called into play— developing an idea, conducting research, synthesizing texts and material objects into an exhibition which, in effect, tells a story through a multi-layered combination of text, objects, placement and graphics. When I first moved to New Haven, I curated an exhibition called “Who Built New Haven?” at the New Haven Colony Historical Society, a survey of work and workers in the Elm City which brought me to every small historical society in New Haven in search of information and artifacts. A great way to get to know a city!

I also worked for two seasons as Company Manager for the Elm Shakespeare Company, where I got to use my organizational, design, writing and people skills while intimately learning Shakespeare— page to stage.

Like my current work, these were big complicated projects that demanded a variety of skill sets, and had strong learning opportunities.

Q. What advice can you give to women graduate students?

A. Yale is an incredible community— people-wise, program-wise, facility-wise. Opportunities, big and small, can be found every day. I would advise graduate women to take as full advantage of the wealth of this university community as humanly possible. Don’t be shy! If an opportunity presents itself, act upon it. If you’re interested in a faculty member’s work and have a question about some aspect of it, send them an e-mail. If you’re having a problem, figure out who can best help you solve it. If you have an idea for a great project, forge ahead! One good example of a student taking full advantage of the university’s opportunities is when Jung Park, a McDougal Academic Writing fellow, pursued her idea of creating a graduate school literary magazine. She took on a proactive leadership role, and with support of the Dean and McDougal Center staff, *Palimpsest* was “born.” This Spring we will publish issue #5.

It’s great to take advantage of mentoring opportunities as they arise, and WMW is working to provide these types of opportunities. I would also strongly encourage students to actively seek out the mentoring and information they need.

December 2006

Joyce Fernandes

Associate Director, Graduate Teaching Center

Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

Dr. Joyce Fernandes was educated in India and received her B.S in Chemistry and Microbiology (University of Bombay) MS in Microbiology, (Maharaja Sayajirao University, Baroda) and a Ph.D in Developmental Biology (University of Bombay). Joyce's post-doctoral research was in the field of Developmental Neurobiology, and she worked with Haig Keshishian in the MCDB department at Yale University. She accepted a tenure-track position at Miami University, Ohio, where she juggled teaching as well as research responsibilities. She taught courses in Developmental Biology, Cell Biology and Neurobiology. She has published several articles in the journals, *Developmental Biology* and *Journal of Neurobiology*. Joyce has also worked on science education projects and has presented this work at meetings of professional societies such as Society for Neuroscience and Society for Developmental Biology.

Q. Could you briefly describe your research as a PhD and as a postdoc?

A. The focus of my Ph.D research was to study how muscles are made in the fruitfly, *Drosophila*. The animal goes through distinct larval and adult stages, each displaying characteristic motor functions (crawling vs flying). I focused on muscles in the thorax, which help the animal to fly. Most of the studies in muscle formation in *Drosophila* had been done on larval muscles, and there was not much information available about how adult muscles are generated. An interesting aspect was that some larval muscles were retained and modified to generate adult muscles, and this feature of "continuity" was fascinating for me. My work mainly contributed an understanding of the developmental milestones of muscle fiber formation, and also of the process by which neurons make contact with these muscles. I did this work at the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research in Bombay, India. For my postdoctoral studies, I worked in Haig Keshishian's lab in the MCDB department at Yale. My work focused on understanding how motor neurons and muscles communicate with each other to set up the characteristic pattern of fibers and innervation. A technique that was key to my work was the use of laser ablations to remove one cell at a time, either the muscle or the neuron. The resulting perturbations allowed us to make inferences about the role of each cell on the development of the other. These studies revealed to us that many aspects of the formation of adult muscle and motor neuron differentiation were similar to vertebrates (higher animals) than to the embryonic/larval stages of the animal.

Q. Could you briefly describe what you do as Associate Director of the Graduate Teaching Center?

A. I am mainly responsible for developing, planning and implementing programs and assessment activities for enhancing teaching effectiveness in the sciences. Our programs have included departments and courses, working with graduate students as well as post-docs. I work closely with GTC Fellows from the sciences to conduct these programs. Among the programs I developed this year are Teaching and Professional Development in the Sciences (TAPS), which was offered at the Medical School and at Science Hill; and the

Teaching Preceptorship program, in which participants observed lectures, and subsequently engaged in reflective exercises and discussions of teaching pedagogies. I also assist Bill Rando, director of the GTC, in planning and implementing various programs that are offered throughout the year.

Q. You recently made the decision to go into academic administration, who (or what) most influenced this decision?

A. I was in a faculty position at Miami University (Ohio) before I took up my current position. My move was mainly precipitated by the “dual-career-couple” dilemma. My husband had been working and living in New York for four out of the six years that I was in Ohio, and although I loved my job in Ohio, I felt it was time to make some lifestyle changes. The administrative position at the GTC interested me as it offered the possibility of being involved in improving teaching and learning experiences in the sciences. As a faculty member, I had been fascinated by the realization that teaching science can be fun, as long as you are able to connect often boring concepts to real world occurrences. My inclination to engage in continuous improvement of the classroom experience in part stemmed from a GTC workshop I had taken as a post-doc. I vividly remember how this had opened up a window to a new and exciting world of science education. I could not pass up the opportunity to be back in New Haven, working in familiar territory and living under the same roof as my husband.

Q. Could you describe your philosophy on mentoring?

A. In an academic setting, mentoring occurs in many different ways. It can be formal or informal, and moreover, it also depends on the stage of the mentee’s career. Undergraduates, graduates post-docs and junior faculty members all have different needs and the style of mentoring will differ accordingly. Students might need contact and discussions more frequently, whereas with post-docs and junior faculty, it could be more hands-off. Mostly, mentors may be approached for advice or to initiate a mentoring relationship, but sometimes, mentors may find themselves initiating a relationship when a need becomes evident. The most important attributes that a mentor ought to have are patience, availability, a listening ear, and most of all, not to expect that their advice should be acted upon. A mentor can be the bridge, but the mentee is the one that has to walk across it, (or not).

Q. You have conducted mentoring workshops geared towards mentors in the sciences, could briefly describe the program?

A. In the fall of 2005 I conducted an 8-part workshop on “Mentoring Undergraduate Researchers”. It was aimed at helping graduate students and post-docs become more effective as mentors through discussions, sharing experiences and becoming familiar with pedagogical approaches. The series was modeled on a program developed at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, called the Wisconsin Program for Scientific Teaching, and has been supported by the Howard Hughes Medical Institutes. It is designed to approach science education using perspectives from the laboratory research experience. The workshop series included

the programs Learning To Communicate, Setting Goals and Expectations, Identifying and Resolving Challenges and Issues, Evaluating Your Progress as a Mentor, The Elements of Good Mentoring, and Developing a Mentoring Pphilosophy. 14 graduate students and post docs completed this series and were awarded mentoring certificates.

Q. Could you describe the types of mentoring you have received throughout your career, as well as the types of mentoring you have offered others?

A. I did not actively seek out mentors. My approach was to identify a “desirable” trait and then make an attempt to practice it myself. For example, I learned from my graduate advisor not to procrastinate on writing manuscripts. There is usually a tendency to have as complete a story as possible before writing up and submitting a manuscript. I trained myself to consider it a work in progress and to construct a framework that would shape the progress of experiments and data analysis. From my post-doc advisor, I learned to appreciate the individuality of each student and the need for diverse approaches to bring out the best in different graduate students. During the six years that I was a post-doc, I overlapped with at least eight graduate students, each of whom had very strong and distinct personalities, strengths and challenges. I learned a lot about mentoring graduate students simply by observing how my post-doc advisor interacted with them on a day-to-day basis. Before I went off to my first academic position, one bit of (unsolicited) advice that I received from Bob Wyman, whose office was down the corridor from my lab, was to serve on committees whose mission would be exciting to me. Of course, at the time I had no clue about what serving on committees actually entailed. I took his advice and asked to serve on the University Committee on Teaching and Learning, which was a fabulous experience, and which did not seem like work at all.

The mentoring that I have offered has come in various flavors: mentoring undergraduate researchers, academic advising and career advising for undergraduates, and mentoring graduate students in the research laboratory. In the capacity of an undergraduate academic advisor, I advised about 40 new students each year on the choice of courses for the major. There would be the occasional student who would reluctantly and almost shamefully admit that they were not really pre-med, and I found myself taking the extra time to convince them that it was just fine, and to help them think about other choices that were as valid (if not more). Mentoring undergraduate researchers has by far been my best experience- it has been very rewarding to work with them through their 3-4 years of school, to train them in the rigors of the scientific enterprise, and to see them mature in the way they think about their research projects and in their ability to communicate science.

With graduate students, I have focused on training them in planning and executing. Especially with planning, you need to be able to do it multiple levels. I am a big believer in first charting out a big-picture plan with major milestones, and to then break it down into smaller chunks- a 6 month plan, which can include conference deadlines, papers, exams, vacation time, etc; the monthly plan, which can include an overview of major experiments/tasks, and finally a weekly plan to chart out the mundane but essential details that will enable completion of the major tasks. I like to be hands off in my approach to graduate mentoring- I do make my expectations clear, I don't expect from them what I wouldn't do myself, and I am always available for dialog and discourse.

Q. What advice would you give female graduate students or postdocs who are interested in pursuing careers in science or in academic administration?

A. For those interested in pursuing academic careers in the sciences, I would like to say that they should not be wary of juggling work and family- but rather, as was suggested in a recent WMW discussion forum, to emphasize the benefits of having a family, which can do wonders for time-management skills. I would advise graduate students and post-docs who might be considering careers in academic administration to be sure that they have an opportunity to really explore the new roles and responsibilities. It is not easy to move away from a research mindset, and perhaps they might want to consider “test-driving” such a position for a short period of time before they commit. It is natural for graduate students and post-docs to “freak-out” if they have to consider moving away from a research career. If they are worried about giving up research completely, it may be possible to become involved in ongoing research projects on campus (for example in the summer), in addition to the administrative position. I like to encourage folks to think outside of the box, because there are many ways in which a background in scientific research can be applied in the service of research and education.

Q. Do you have any particular advice for international female students in terms of graduate study and/or mentoring?

A. Become aware of the culture of education in the US – what are the expectations, how do students navigate through the maze of graduate study, what are the areas that you need to work on?. The office of International Students is always a good place to start. Although I came to the US as a post-doc, I remember being very curious about the manner in which students make choices about majors, graduate school vs professional school, etc. The concept of a liberal arts education was foreign (!!) to me. In India, where I was educated, you decide on a “track” in high school (science vs arts vs commerce). If you are a science student, you then decide whether to become an engineer, a doctor, or to go to 3 year college and major in a particular area of science. I was constantly engaging in conversations with grad students and undergraduates in the lab to find out how they make educational decisions and this was a very informative exercise for me.

Q. Who has been the biggest influence on you throughout your career?

A. Those shoes will most definitely fit my husband. I would like to think that he has nurtured what my parents instilled in me – aim higher and better – and most of all he gets the credit for daring me to go where no (wo)man has gone before. He graciously appointed himself the “trailing spouse” for most of my career, and when I made my recent move to New Haven, I took the title away from him (I hope). He does have a button that says “I support women in science,” and he wears it very proudly whenever he can.

April 2006

Connie Gersick

Visiting Scholar

Yale School of Management

Dr. Connie Gersick earned her PhD in Behavioral Science from Yale University. She is a Visiting Scholar at Yale School of Management; the Founding Faculty Director of the UCLA Women's Leadership Institute and Associate Faculty at Simmons School of Management.

Q: Could you briefly describe yourself and your research?

A: I am currently a visiting scholar in School of Management at Yale. I got my PhD here in 1984, in organizational behavior, then joined the faculty at the UCLA Graduate School of Management. So I've come back to my old department after many years away. I still teach executive education—I'm faculty director of the Women's Leadership Institute at UCLA—and I'm doing research and writing on women's adult development. I'm also a wife, and mother of two married kids. They're each expecting their first babies now, so pretty soon I'll be a grandmother, too!

My research has always focused on human development and change. My early work was about teams, and how they get work done over time. I have also studied professional re-relationships in academia—both the good ones that help us, and the dysfunctional ones that can discourage us. My current research is on women's adult development. It's a study of how women grow and shape their lives through adulthood, based on the life-histories of forty women artists, social service agency leaders, business owners and executives, inter-viewed when they were between 45 and 55 years old. This is the generation who graduated college just as all kinds of opportunities started to open up, but before anyone really knew how women could possibly have both careers and families. The major challenge for me has been to find the patterns and commonalities among these incredibly complex, varied lives. The themes that are emerging are about dilemmas of independence, of work, and of relationships, and about trade-offs that women make in order to put all the pieces together.

Q: During your PhD study, did you receive any mentoring?

A: Yes. I had a wonderful mentor here, Richard Hackman. He was my thesis advisor when I was a graduate student. He is a brilliant man, very caring about his students. One of his best qualities as an advisor is that he takes students' research very seriously. He absolutely does not believe that a dissertation is just something to get out of the way, he believes it should be your best work. I really appreciated that, and benefited from it.

He helped me figure out what I wanted to study, myself, rather than treating me as an apprentice to further his own research. And he made it clear that he cared a lot more about the quality of students' contributions than about pushing them to publish lots of papers to fill out their résumés. So Richard was great.

My husband, who is a consultant and a former academic, is also an extremely important person in my professional life. We are each other's first editors for anything we write. We talk with each other about our research and help each other working through problems. I've been asking my kids to read the chapters of this book I'm working on, and they have also given me some wonderful, excellent help.

Q: Do you think the mentoring relationship was very important to your career development?

A: Yes. When I went to graduate school, I had certain ideals about making a contribution to knowledge. Sometimes, the drive to succeed in an academic career can sidetrack you, and take all the joy out of your work. It can push you in directions you don't really want to go. But my advisor helped me stay focused on my ideals. When I worried that I couldn't do the work, he believed in me and told me I could do it. Knowing how high his standards were, his reassurance meant a lot to me. I should quickly add that he also gave me very good practical help when I was on the job market. He is very well respected, and his recommendation of me carried a lot of weight.

Q: Have you given any mentoring to students?

A: I hope so! I have tried to be supportive to my students in general, and I've also had some long-term mentoring relationships with a few students whom I'm still in touch with, now more as friends. I have tried to apply what I learned about mentoring from my own advisor, by helping my students figure out what they wanted to study, what kind of career they wanted for themselves, and how to make those things happen. Sometimes this has meant problem-solving with them about research and careers, sometimes about more personal issues. I've also tried to help them with job searches, help them handle journal reviews to get their work published, things like that.

I am also a mentor at Yale in Women Mentoring Women. For graduate students, I think it is really important to have somebody who can help you figure out what you want to do – somebody you feel safe talking to about how to deal with problems in life and work.

Q: Who/What is the most influence on your current career?

A: I have always loved learning and teaching and – since high school. I guess I'm just kind of an academic person!

Q: What is the most rewarding aspect for your career?

A: For me, I think two things – First, the opportunity to keep learning – hopefully learning stuff that will be helpful to people! And second, the opportunity to communicate what I've learned and to connect to others through my teaching and writing.

Q: How have you balanced life and career?

A: Academia is extremely demanding—you feel you should always be working—but it offers you a lot of freedom in how you use your time and when you do your work. So that career choice made it easier for me to be able to spend time with my kids. It did take me a while to realize that I needed to set aside certain “family times,” and discipline myself NOT to work at those times, though. Just as important, or maybe more importantly, I was able to balance career and family because my husband and I very much shared parenting and house work. We still do that today. I wasn’t trying to do it all by myself.

Q: What advice do you want to give to women graduate students at Yale?

A: It is easy to feel “on trial” as a graduate student. For lots of reasons, women tend to have less confidence than their talents warrant. Sometimes we worry too much about what we are supposed to do, and about proving ourselves, instead of thinking about what we want to do. I think it is important to keep in mind that this is your life, your work and that it is your choice to be here. I’d like to encourage women graduate students to remember why they came to school and what they want for their own careers and lives—and to ask for the help they need from their teachers. Graduate school isn’t necessarily easy, but it should be a wonderful experience—it should be fun!

February 2007

Erin McCarthy

Doctoral candidate, Italian

Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

Erin McCarthy received her B.A. and M.A. from Yale in 1998. She is the Coordinating Fellow at the McDougal Center, where she has worked for several terms organizing programs to enhance student life at Yale Graduate School.

Q. Could you briefly describe your current research?

A. My dissertation is on the arc of classicism in Italian literature from the 1500s through mid-1700s, specifically how classicism evolved between Pietro in the early sixteenth century and Gianvincenzo Gravina in the eighteenth century, both of whom were interested in classicist revivals.

Q. You have participated in Women Mentoring Women's small group mentoring with Dean Schirmeister and a group of graduate women. How has this experience been so far? Any disadvantages, advantages?

A. Dean Schirmeister is a great mentor. There are five women in the group, and Dean Schirmeister opened the meetings by focusing on what we wanted to discuss. One of the most valuable parts for me is listening to her own experiences—challenges, career path, book writing and taking care of family. The only difficulty has been trying to get everyone together at the same time. A big plus is the range of the group and potential for networking—group members all have different experiences and there is a good range in age.

Q. Aside from your advisor, do you have any other mentors at Yale? If so, how did you establish a relationship with them?

A. The new DGS in my department, Professor Marcus, has provided great logistical advice, especially in terms of considering my personal life situation vis a vis my graduate work. I actually met her last year in Italy shortly before she began her position at Yale. Having met her in more of a social/learning situation first made it easier to develop a mentoring relationship, as a personal relationship was translated into an academic mentorship.

As the Coordinating Fellow at the McDougal Center, I have also spent a lot of time with Student Life Director Lisa Brandes. I have learned a lot from her. She made an interesting choice I think in terms of staying in academia as an administrator rather than pursuing a teaching career. I also think she's a good role model in terms of balancing work and family.

Q. Do you find yourself in the role of mentor as the McDougal Fellow Coordinator or as a Teaching Fellow?

A. As a result of my involvement with the WMW program, I've definitely been more conscious of my role with students as mentor – they look at me as someone doing something they will be doing in a few years. I think they see me as not only their Italian teacher, but as them, ten years down the line.

In terms of McDougal fellows, I think I bring valuable information as a veteran fellow.

Q. As a fourth year PhD candidate, do you have any advice for graduate student women in their first few years of pursuing their PhD?

A. The first thing that comes to mind is to be open-minded within one's academic program and beyond, i.e. don't box yourself in to a dissertation that you will grow beyond or get attached to being an academic or a having a certain career. As we move through our research and related activities, things change. It's hard to know initially what opportunities will present themselves in the course of six years of study.

Q. You have some exciting news, a wedding in May of this year. Could you talk about the changes you envision in terms of graduate work?

A. People have told me that they are surprised I'm getting married as a graduate student. But I have always felt that a full life is important even though I'm a student--that other aspects of life still go on outside of my academic life. The tendency I think is to not consider graduate school as vocation but as life. I choose a more balanced view.

March 2006

Kate Ott

Research Associate, Women Faculty Forum

Yale University

Kate Ott is a Ph.D. candidate at Union Theological Seminary in New York, a youth minister, a wife, and mother of two (Eva, age 3, and Issac, 5 months). Kate received her undergraduate degree from the University of Wisconsin at Madison in English Literature and Women and Gender Studies in 1998 before receiving a Masters of Arts in Religion with a concentration in Ethics and Feminist Studies from Yale University. She has published several articles in *Women in Higher Education*, the most recent of which addresses “The Balancing Act of Graduate Students: Work and Family.”

Q: Tell me a little bit about your dissertation research.

A: My research is broadly concerned with the moral development of adolescents with a particular focus on the treatment of sexuality within Christian churches. My dissertation seeks to delineate the current religious economy of the United States, explore its historical roots, and illustrate how it implicitly influences the ways in which we view and interact with youth with respect to their sexuality. Within the dominant religious culture of the United States, there is a tendency to prescribe abstinence-only behavior in a way that marginalizes the moral agency of youth. Youth are being told “just don’t do it” without being given the opportunity to enter into a dialogue about the positive meanings and pleasure derived from sexual behaviors. This is not to say that Christian churches should not uphold abstinence as an ideal if it is part of their denomination’s doctrine; however, failing to engage adolescents in an open discussion of sexual morality may actually thwart abstinence efforts. The final section of my dissertation is devoted to outlining the existing sexual education curricula being utilized within Christian faith organizations and suggests how they can be better utilized to engage youth in this discussion and enhance their moral agency.

Q: Briefly describe what you do at the Women Faculty Forum.

A: Traditionally the person in my position has been responsible for coordinating WFF research and advancing related policy on campus. With the addition of Cindy Tobery, however, the WFF has allowed us to divide things and cover more ground. For example, coming from a science background, Cindy is very interested in how women in science function and develop as faculty members. I, on the other hand, have a strong background in women and gender studies, particularly in teaching and developing a gendered curriculum. I’m working on the *Gendering the Curriculum* project as well as the seminar series which focuses on a number of issues to address how society negotiates “public and private spheres.”

Although Cindy and I both have our specific interests, our efforts fall under one of the three main areas the WFF addresses—advocacy, policy, and research. Each year the WFF selects issues in these areas that need to be addressed. For the most part, we always focus on work/life balance, which can mean addressing issues of child care or how having a family fits into the tenure process. We select the specific issues based on what other universities and national women’s organizations are currently addressing, as well as in response to

current events such as the recent *New York Times* article, "Many Women at Elite Colleges Set Career Path to Motherhood," by Louise Story. Our goal is to bring policies in that help remedy some of the issues that women faculty face.

I really enjoy my work at the WFF. I don't think I could find a place that is more family-friendly or more supportive of my personal scholarship. All of the faculty members I've come into contact with through the WFF are extremely supportive; it is clear they are interested in nurturing the next generation of women coming into the university and making sure it is a better place for them.

Q: As graduate students, we are all asked to juggle multiple roles and responsibilities. As a wife, mother, graduate student, youth minister, and full-time Research Associate with the WFF, "juggling multiple roles" takes on a whole new dimension. How do you manage to keep it all together?

A: I really like what Associate Dean Pamela Schirmeister said at this month's WMW panel discussion on the benefits of having a family and a career – "It's not about balancing all of the different roles. It's about making the schedules work." In my case, it only works because I have a wonderful husband who shares 50% or more of the responsibility, and because I also have really great kids. My kids just go with the flow which allows me to bring them to participate in a lot of the things that I do. I also have a support network of at least 20 other people that helps my family function. This network includes neighbors, day care teachers, teenagers in my youth group, and friends with children of their own. I can't emphasize enough how important it is to surround yourself with people who support you.

In addition to seeking support, whenever possible I just try to make sure the different areas of my life work together. In fact, I feel strongly that each piece of my life helps keep the others going. For example, I'm putting my dissertation research into practice within my youth ministry. If I just sat home and wrote my dissertation, I think that it would be very theoretical, and I would be saying things about kids without even knowing them. So the fact that I can actually work in a youth group and be checked on what I'm saying in my research is helpful. My work at the WFF also helps to advance my scholarship and professional development. The reason I came to the WFF to work on women's issues in the academy is because I want to be an academic, and if I want to be an academic, I want to be one in an environment that's going to nurture me. Through all of this, my family motivates me to keep doing all of them.

Q: How do your graduate advisors and/or mentors fit into the support network you described?

A: I picked my Ph.D. program because I knew the school was family-friendly, but I also picked my four main advisors and mentors (Emily Towne, Letty Russell, Kristen Leslie, and Margaret Farley) because I knew that they were very supportive of my scholarship AND my having a family. I have this internal voice telling me that I have to go above and beyond to prove to people that a woman with a family can keep pace with students who are not raising children. Often times, it's my advisors who say to me, "Kate, you don't have to prove it. We know you can do it. Take today off. You don't have to write your dissertation in three months."

What is really unique is that none of these individuals have children, but they have been more supportive than some faculty who do have families. When I go over to their houses to have dinner and talk about what I am working on, they always want to see the kids; there is never a meeting plan that doesn't include the kids. One main reason I think they are so family-friendly is because they all value their own family and friend support networks. They know they've been nurtured by their families, by other women, and so they realize that regardless of what your situation is you need to be honored and nurtured.

Q: What characteristics did you look for when choosing your mentors? That is, how did you know that your mentors would be family-friendly?

A: It is hard to tell if you don't know the person well. When I went on my initial visit to Union Theological Seminary (my graduate program), I had to bring my then 6-week-old daughter with me. The visit consisted of brief, informal meetings with the Dean and several faculty members, and my daughter's presence at these meetings allowed me to gauge people's reactions to my family situation. Several people greeted us very warmly, whereas others did not. It was fairly clear from this single encounter who was family-friendly and who was not.

Obviously you have to gauge the appropriateness of bringing your child to a meeting before you ask. For example, you are probably not going to ask to bring your baby to a board meeting; however, if it's just an informal meeting to talk about your scholarship, why not? Seeing faculty interact with other people is also helpful in gauging how family-friendly they are going to be. For me it is easy, since most of the settings I work in are seminaries, I get to see my professors in non-classroom environments.

I also looked for mentors who met my definition of a feminist or womanist. The primary tenant of the feminist model I subscribe to is that we (women who are seeking an advanced education and pursuing our career goals) have a responsibility to all types of women who come after us. I knew from talking with my mentors that they felt a responsibility to bring other people up with them, so I knew they were going to subscribe to family-oriented ideals.

Q: What advice would you give to a female graduate student who is thinking about starting a family while in graduate school?

A: *First and foremost, I would say that there is no perfect time to have a child.* I remember someone telling me, "After chapter three is done is the perfect time to have a child." Although I believe in planning pregnancy, there is no way you can plan that precisely unless your whole life revolves around that chapter! Whatever your family situation is, it is going to give you better times and worse times, and your scholarship is going to fit into it.

Second, it is important to remember that kids go with the flow. Both women and men have all of these assumptions about the way that we are supposed to parent our children, but honestly, if you allow kids to go with the flow, they do. Somehow we need to shed the assumptions of society and our families, realize that we turned out okay and that our parents probably didn't do everything the books said they needed to,

and accept that our kids will be fine as long as we show them as much love as we can. T

Third, develop your support network! When you have a child in graduate school, lots of times you are not near your family, and you need to have other people around you who can act as a family support system for you. In all likelihood, you won't have that sort of network already, and it will be something that you have to actively nurture. You'll need to go out and look for friends who have kids who are going to come over and help baby-sit when you need it. You need the person who you can go to the coffee shop with and if your kid eats their cookie or spills their coffee, they're not going to mind. Not only do you need that from your friends, but you need that from your mentors. You need to develop that network while you are pregnant.

Fourth, believe in yourself and know that you can do it. Don't be afraid of what people will think or what it will mean for your career trajectory; you will find a way to manage the schedules. Also, be willing to put yourself out there; assume that having children is okay. When I e-mail someone, I don't ask if I can bring my child to the meeting, I explain why I have to. I spend enough time each week away from my children. If there is something going on after hours that I think it would be appropriate to bring my kids, my assumption is that it is going to be okay. It is often times just a matter of educating people, rather than trying to make it appear as if you are child-free when you have a school responsibility. Last, but certainly not least, really embrace the moment that it does happen. Enjoy each minute, because you never get those times back.

October 2005

Julian Wonjung Park

Alumna, English

Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

Julian Wonjung Park received her PhD in 2005. While at Yale, she founded the literary magazine Palimpsest. Julian is currently working on her JD at Boalt Hall School of Law at UC Berkeley.

Q. Tell me a little about your current studies and interests:

A. I'm currently studying intellectual property law, which is particularly strong at Boalt, along with international law, corporate law, and Asian Americans and the law. Aside from coursework, my research interests are varied: I finished a research paper on the Marxist and liberal ideology of the private sphere; I'm currently doing research on the Erie Doctrine as it intersects with international law; and of course, I'm working on revising my dissertation for future publication. Other than my academic interests, I've been very busy with law review and just finished interviewing for summer associate positions.

Q. You applied for law school soon after completing your Ph.D. from Yale. How did you make this decision?

A. Actually, I had thought about going to law school for a very long time, even before applying to English programs. I worked as a legal assistant for a law firm in San Francisco after completing my MA in English at Stanford, thinking that I would attend law school after a one year break. However, I felt that my reasons for wanting to go to law school then weren't compelling enough, and that I still had keen interest in studying English. When I came to Yale, I decided on a dissertation topic very quickly, found supportive faculty members to work with, and was really comfortable with the idea of becoming an English professor.

I applied to law school in 2004, however, for a number of reasons. Intellectually, I had always gravitated towards abstract, theoretical questions – my dissertation topic itself was on the topic of abstraction. But at the end of that journey, I realized that theory is not enough, that, in the words of the poet Wallace Stevens, we cannot live in a crystalline “bowl of white” because “one desires/ So much more than that.” What I desired was something more tangible, something that I could get my hands around, and I saw law as an ideal synthesis of theory and practice.

Another pragmatic reason I went on to law school is simply that law gives you more flexibility and choices, especially in terms of job location. After graduation, I plan on working for several years and clerking, but I eventually would like to segue back to the academe, ideally in a joint position in law and English.

Q. You took on a large and interesting project while appointed Academic Writing Fellow at the McDougal Center, creating a graduate literary magazine, *Palimpsest*. Could you talk a little about the experience, what you gained by it and whether it has affected your career path? Did you have any

mentors through the process?

A. Since college, I've always been passionate about ideas – especially ideas that engage my imagination. That is probably why I decided to major in literature and then pursue graduate studies in English. I found that writing about literature, especially as it intersects with philosophy, sparked my imagination in a way that other disciplines did not. Whenever I feel that creative spark – I think Cézanne called it his “sensation” – I get this great energy and excitement that carries me through a project, whether it is writing a paper, conducting research, or starting up a new organization. As with my dissertation topic, I felt that creative jolt when I came up with the idea for *Palimpsest*. Founding the magazine has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. I've always loved working on various publications since high school, but in this case, I felt an amazing drive to give my idea concrete shape – from the initial proposal stage to the recruitment of staff members, getting funding, coming up with the magazine's name, and selecting the submissions. The end result exceeded my expectation at all levels, and a great part of its success was due to the pool of talented and dedicated people who worked on the magazine.

I learned a great deal from the experience – the importance of taking risks when you believe in an idea, the ability to push through difficult times, and the joys of collective endeavor from which lasting friendships are forged. Throughout the process, the supervisors at the McDougal Centers (Lisa Brandes, Bill Rando, and Mary Johnson) were very supportive mentors who met with me on a regular basis to discuss the direction of the magazine and to act as liaisons between the McDougal Center and the Graduate School. They were attentive listeners, gave me sound advice, and served as good reality checks to my occasional bouts of hysteria. For example, I remember that at one point during production, I became very frustrated because we still had not received our computer for the *Palimpsest* office. One of the McDougal supervisors then gently said to me that sometimes we have to work with less than ideal situations and make the best of what we have.

It's already been five years since the first issue of *Palimpsest* came out, but I carry that experience with me. The knowledge of having helped create *Palimpsest* gives me a lot of strength and courage in law school...for example, I think it's what gave me the gumption to recently run for editor-in-chief of the law review at Boalt.

Q. Could you talk about your experiences with mentors as a young woman, as a graduate student, and currently?

A. I've had many great teachers and coaches during my various pursuits in school, figure skating, and journalism, but several people come to mind as “mentors” who've provided guidance at crucial points in my life.

My first mentor was my high school art teacher, Polly Dewine at Harvard-Westlake. I studied art (painting, drawing, and design) for six years in middle and high school, and Polly really encouraged me to pursue my creative interests, along with my strong academic inclinations. She was the first person who really valued my talents and served not only as a teacher, but also as a surrogate parent at times. During a particularly

difficult time in the tenth grade, for example, Polly recommended that I spend the summer at the Rhode Island School of Design. That summer in RISD's design program was one of the most memorable experiences of my high school years. I was able to spend several months doing what I loved, meeting new people, and experiencing life in a completely different environment. I felt thoroughly rejuvenated when I came back, and I think a huge part of my success and sanity the following year was due to that summer.

Looking back, I realize how pivotal she was during my formative years. She taught me so many things—not only about art, but about life as well. Whenever I complained about a difficult project, she used to say that “nothing worthwhile is easy.” I still hear those words whenever I'm faced with challenging tasks, like when I was completing my dissertation or starting Palimpsest. I think that's what sets a “mentor” apart from, say, a fine teacher, coach, or friend. A mentor strives to understand you as a whole individual, values and nurtures your talents, and provides a mature, guiding voice when you need it.

During college, my thesis advisor served as my intellectual mentor. I admired him enormously, not only for his brilliance and integrity, but for his ability to think outside the academic canon. When I met him, he had just graduated from Harvard's English department, and he was interested in the exploration of philosophical questions as they arise in literature. He introduced me to the thoughts of Ludwig Wittgenstein and the possibility of searching for meaning in literature (several years ago, he published his first book entitled, *Finding a Replacement for the Soul: Mind and Meaning in Literature & Philosophy*, 2004). He was also the first person who truly understood and appreciated how my mind worked. A large part of my decision to attend graduate school was based on my conversations and exchanges with him while writing my thesis.

When I came to Yale, I was immediately struck by another scholar of philosophy—Karsten Harries—whom I met in his Heidegger seminar. I remember reading his book *The Meaning of Modern Art* and being inspired by the depth of his inquiry and crispness of his style. He went on to become my dissertation advisor, along with English Professor Paul H. Fry—another exemplary teacher and scholar. I was very fortunate to have worked with both of them. They not only gave me invaluable advice during my graduate career, but they were very understanding and supportive of my decision to attend law school.

Currently, I'm still developing relationships with faculty members at Boalt. I've had the opportunity to work closely with several professors as research assistants or through my own research projects. I'm also realizing the increasing importance of having a mentor in the professional world. I'm involved in several mentorship networks—I belong to the *Asian American Bar Association* here that sponsors a mentorship program, along with the more informal mentoring that goes on in student organizations and the law review. I recently attended a bar association conference at Stanford where I had the opportunity to meet professors, practitioners, and activists from a number of law schools, firms, and organizations. They gave great advice about the importance of making your own opportunities, loving what you do, and integrating yourself in your work environment.

Q. Could you talk about your experience in being a mentor to others?

A. I don't think I've been a major mentor to anyone yet, although I've given plenty of academic and career advice. Currently, I have a first year law student that I'm mentoring on an informal basis through a student organization at Boalt. I meet with her periodically and try to impart what I've learned about law school—preparing for exams, applying for summer jobs, ways to maintain your emotional and physical well-being, and generally, just being a supportive person in her life. I definitely would welcome the opportunity to act as a mentor to someone in the future.

Q. Who has given you the most support in your endeavors?

A. For a lot of people, I think it's our parents who are our first role models and mentors. In my life, my mother has been an unwavering source of support and inspiration for all that I do. She has exemplified for me the way of the "Han," which means many things in Korean, but essentially expresses the concept of endless striving. She had a very difficult life: she was born during the Japanese occupation of South Korea, was raised by her mother, and struggled to get an education under challenging economic conditions. After she married my father, she immigrated to this country with a minimal grasp of the English language. She went on to build a very successful business and worked to give me the opportunities that I have today.

One of the many things she has taught me is the importance of finishing what you've started, no matter how hard it seems at the time. If you don't, it will be that much harder to complete other project you start. Even today, I talk to her almost every day, and she continues to amaze me with her wisdom, eloquence, and ability to see the beauty of the present moment.

Q. Do you have any general advice for women pursuing their Ph.D.s?

A. The best advice I ever got was from one of my dissertation advisors who said to write a little every day, no matter how you feel and what kind of day you're having. It may seem like a formidable task to write a dissertation, but there is great power in momentum—you'll be surprised with how much you can accomplish by chipping away at something on a consistent basis.

Another piece of advice I have is to have faith in your intelligence and abilities. As graduate students, we are trained to be critical, and unfortunately, that often translate into being critical of ourselves. One of the most important lessons I learned in graduate school is to have faith in myself and to trust my instincts. Let go of your insecurities and give yourself the benefit of the doubt, and I think you'll be astonished by what you are capable of.

March 2007

Pamela Schirmeister

Associate Dean

Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

Dr. Pamela Schirmeister received both her B.A. and Ph.D. in English from Yale. Before returning to the Graduate School, Dean Schirmeister worked for two years for Time Magazine as a reporter in the Paris bureau. She has published numerous scholarly articles as well as two books of criticism on 19th century American literature, another on teaching, an edition of Emerson's Representative Men. She has received teaching awards at Yale and NYU. Dean Schirmeister served as a panelist in last semester's WMW-sponsored discussion regarding the benefits of having a family and a career and continues to serve as mentor for WMW's Small Group Mentoring program.

Q: Over the years you have had multiple positions, including a journalist for TIME Magazine, English professor, and currently, associate dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at Yale. What, so far, has been the most rewarding aspect of your career path?

A: It would be hard for me to pin down a single aspect that I have found most rewarding. I like working with people. I love teaching. I also think building things is very interesting. I don't mean building houses, although in another life I would have loved to have been an architect. When you do journalism, you're shaping something. There is all of this information floating all around and you have to give it shape, and if you give it the right shape, you can actually make things happen. When you're writing a book it is, of course, all about shaping what you find, and in my job as associate dean, it is also about shaping. It is seeing what needs to be changed in order to produce the optimal environment for scholarship, and envisioning what the system ultimately needs to look like; it is a very satisfying thing to do. I think of teaching in that way, too. When you are in the classroom, the shape of the material or the session itself can seem haphazard, but you are trying to shape an experience for the students. That experience need not be architectonic. It can be about destabilizing what students think they know. As the instructor, you don't say, "You must leave this classroom knowing this," although you may. I would rather say, though, "You need to leave this classroom unable to answer this question."

Q: What (or who) was most influential in your decision to pursue a career in administration?

A: When I was a journalist I reached a point at which I decided that I was tired of always being the one on the outside. I liked the adventure of the work. However, I was always the one who didn't know. One of my colleagues in the bureau said, "You know, you can be a reporter for the rest of your life; some people like that, or you can go and get your Ph.D. and be an expert." Although the transition from *Time* to graduate school was difficult in some ways, I love the academic environment. I'm very interested in the interaction among different fields of knowledge, and this job is great for observing and learning about that. I've learned so much about the different disciplines, how they work, what their questions are, and I've learned so much from my colleagues. People learn in different ways. I learn by watching other people—by example.

That's where mentoring comes in. Your colleagues are always shaping your experience. It's not direct learning, but I think that it is important.

Q: What is your philosophy on women's mentoring (inside and outside of the academy)?

A: When you are a faculty member, you are mentoring students all of the time. There's a big difference between teaching or instructing and mentoring, although I'm not sure people always make that distinction. Instruction is when you go into a classroom and say "This is what you have to learn. Here it is. Now, I'm going to test you." Mentoring is much more about what's implicit in a given context and attuning people to that in a very indirect way. So, if a student comes to you and says "This is what I'm going to write my paper about." You can say "Yes. You should read this book and that book." Or, you could say "Have you ever read X?" and then ask them some questions to get them thinking about the process of what they're doing as well as the content about which they're writing. At a certain level, it doesn't really matter what they write their papers about. It matters that they start to be able to think in a certain way, and you can mentor people to do that.

Mentoring people is Socratic. If you think about the *Dialogues*, Socrates never gives his interlocutors answers, but at the end they are transformed. Mentoring is about transformation and how you get people to be the best versions of themselves. The best version of a self is not pegged to writing this paper or doing that activity; it is about the big picture and how the person inhabits a context. Mentoring involves the whole person. If you have a student who's about to go on the market, you owe them professionally a certain amount of instruction; you have to be very literal and direct. Some people would say that that is mentoring because it involves professionalization, but that is not mentoring at its best. For example, with my WMW small mentoring group, it's not for me to tell the students what they need to be mentored in. I don't know what they need. I have to listen to what they say. I have to get them to have a conversation amongst themselves, and then get a sense of what questions they have. That's mentoring: it is comprehensive; it involves the whole person; it's indirect; it's Socratic.

Q: Next week, WMW is sponsoring a panel discussion on mentoring across the span of one's career titled "Mentoring 101." Describe the type of mentoring that you have received in your role as a student, junior faculty member, and new administrator.

A: I had great mentoring when I was an undergraduate from all kinds of really talented people. During my senior year, after having completed 3 semesters of an intensive major, I decided not to write my senior essay. Had this been the final word, I would have lost credit for the current semester as well as the previous three. However, the director of the major invited me out to lunch, seemingly to discuss other topics. Over the course of lunch the topic of the essay came up, and rather than saying "You have to write one!" he inquired about an earlier paper I had written for him on Robert Frost. Through that discussion, he highlighted what about my paper had been interesting to him, how Frost's writings were related to other authors', and how drawing comparisons between multiple authors was often more interesting and stimulating than examining a single body of literature. I didn't realize what he was doing at the time, but he indirectly inspired me to write my senior thesis, and I ended up very glad that I'd done so. That was really

great mentoring.

After college, the quality of mentoring I received was uneven. It was relatively good at graduate school, less so when I was a junior faculty member, different from school to school. People are busy, and someone else's professional development is not always high on their to-do list. Sometimes, people are not even aware that mentoring is part of their job at all, and sometimes, even when people may dimly understand it to be part of their jobs, they aren't very good at it. At one department in which I taught, they seemed in fact to pride themselves on their lack of mentoring skills. Mentoring was simply not an integral part of being a faculty member.

The high-point of the mentoring I have received after college has come from the 3 deans with whom I have worked. They have all been remarkable in different ways. Any situation that falls within the compass of a dean's responsibilities could be handled a hundred different ways. All three of the deans with whom I've worked would explicate the process of decision making so that I could understand how the outcome was accomplished. Good mentoring always provides that reflective moment. I suppose that most mentoring works in that way, right? That's why I say that it is indirect. It's not just saying "Do this. Do that. Then, do this." You may do those things, but you may never get better at them; you may never get better at life, either. However, if you step back and reflect, and you often need help to do that, something very good can happen. Helping that process along is the mentoring part of it, I would say. These deans happen to have all been really exceptional at that helping process.

Q: You are currently serving as a faculty mentor for the WMW small group mentoring program. What are the unique rewards to mentoring multiple students simultaneously versus one at a time?

A: When you mentor someone one-on-one, you, the mentor, are often the focus. The student asks, "So what would you do?" and you reply "Blah, blah, blah." However, "Blah, blah, blah." is often taken as if it were undeniable truth. This can sometimes happen in the classroom too. Depending on the make up of the class, you have students who look at you as if you are an oracle. That's completely what you don't want to have happen. You have to provide them with the blocks that they need, but then they need to construct what they know themselves. The goal is to get them talking and thinking about a problem, and not waiting to hear about it or be told about it. You're not trying to get them to be like you; you're trying to get them to be like themselves.

Mentoring a group is far more collaborative. A student may say "So what do you do about this?" and I may or may not say anything. Someone else in the group can say something. It's a cooperative process of problem solving instead of pronouncement, which is terrific! One person isn't in the position of being the normative consciousness. I think that it is the indirection that is valuable, and a group allows that dynamic to happen. They start to bounce stuff off of each other and people become less shy. It is a more dynamic system and you get multiple perspectives instead of just one.

January 2006

Risa Sodi

Senior Lector and Language Program Director, Italian
Faculty of Arts and Sciences

Dr. Risa Sodi received her Ph.D. from Yale in 1996 and specializes in Jewish Italy and the Holocaust, as well as Italian film. She is the author of "A Dante of Our Time: Primo Levi and Auschwitz" as well as twenty articles on modern Italian literature and history. In addition to these scholarly pursuits, Dr. Sodi is a dedicated teacher and mentor to students inside and outside of her department (through the Women Mentoring Women Small Group Mentoring Program).

Q. Please briefly describe your current research (scholarly work).

A. My earliest research centered on the Italian author and Holocaust survivor Primo Levi. I had the good fortune of interviewing him in Italy in 1986 just before his death in 1987. That event set the course of my research and publishing up to this day. It also raised questions in my mind that I still explore through teaching and study: what was the nature of the Italian Holocaust and of Italian Holocaust literature? What distinguishes them? What is distinct about Jewish Italy, especially its history and literature? How does a minority culture live and express itself within a majority culture? Since becoming the Italian Language Program Director in 1996, I've also pursued research related to curriculum development and articulation, mentoring and training, and the role of culture in the language classroom.

Q. What (or who) was most influential in your decision to pursue a career in academia? Did you always know you wanted to be an academic?

A. Serendipity played a big part in my becoming an academic. It's actually my third career, after having worked for four years as an interpreter in Florence, Italy, and for a further four years as a grants officer at a U.S. public university. While I was running a university grants program, I was recruited by the French and Italian Department to teach an advanced Italian course. Prof. Thomas Cassirer recruited me and saw to it that I was automatically admitted to the master's program. Stepping into the classroom on my very first day, I realized that teaching and pursuing an intellectual life were *really* for me. Prof. Cassirer mentored me throughout my master's work and also after I moved to Yale. His warmth and faith in me were critical in helping me make the transition from the working world to academia, in helping me rebuff critics who felt that the field of Jewish Italy was too marginal a pursuit within the wider field of Italian letters, and in gently pushing me to deliver conference papers and publish articles. My first book was a version of my master's thesis; he helped me find a publisher. I'm proud today that it was the first book in English on Primo Levi.

Q. What, so far, has been the most rewarding aspect of your career?

A. The most rewarding aspect by far is my contact with undergraduates and graduate students. I like to help facilitate their goals and dreams. That may be by encouraging them to see themselves in a new light, or it may be through more mundane endeavors like writing letters of recommendation or reviewing fellowship applications. In any case, it is the exchange of ideas, experiences, and opinions with students that makes every day on the job a potentially exciting day.

Q. Please describe the types of mentoring you have received throughout your career.

A. I had bad luck with mentoring in college, but the mentoring I have received since then as a graduate student and as a member of the Italian Department has more than made up for that. My dissertation advisor, Prof. Paolo Valesio, stood up for me 100% (not that we didn't disagree on things -- we did, but I appreciated the give and take). The chairman of the Italian Department, Prof. Giuseppe Mazzotta, has always encouraged me to take an active part in the department and in campus affairs in general. The Director of the Center for Language Study, Dr. Nina Garrett, and Professor Millicent Marcus in the Italian Department, have shown me by example how to be a successful woman in academia, and both have involved me in projects and organizations that have expanded my horizons. There's an Italian expression, "rubare con gli occhi" or "to steal with your eyes," and some of my mentoring has come in the form of observing and assimilating the leadership I see displayed (in sometimes unexpected places) across campus.

Q. What is your mentoring philosophy?

A. I think more in terms of strategies. First, I get to know my "mentees" and their goals, and then we work collaboratively to help them realize those goals. That's a strategy that actually comes from being a grants officer, but is also valid in the context of teacher training and job preparation. I also have certain goals of my own for them, and my objective in that regard is to encourage them to assimilate those goals as their own goals. These include such basic tricks of the trade as writing lesson plans, good classroom preparation, developing a "teaching persona," keeping meticulous records, learning to control the classroom space, etc. By working together I hope to give my mentees the tools to see themselves in a new context (i.e., as the instructor of record in demanding language classes). The next step is to give them space (within a well-defined curriculum) to develop their own teaching styles, strategies and self-confidence. I firmly believe that if you can teach a language course, you can teach any kind of course; and if you can teach a language course at Yale, you can teach any course, anywhere. The trick is to convince them of that!

May 2007

Emilie Townes

Andrew W. Mellon Professor of African American Religion and Theology

Faculty of Arts and Sciences

Emilie Townes holds a Master of Arts from the Yale Divinity School, a Doctor of Ministry from the University of Chicago, and a Ph.D. from The Joint Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary/ Northwestern University Program in Religious and Theological Studies. Her books include Womanist Justice, Womanist Hope, In a Blaze of Glory: Womanist Spirituality as Social Witness, and Breaking the Fine Rain of Death: African and A Womanist Ethic of Care.

Q: Please briefly describe your current research.

A. I am currently working on the cultural production of evil. This project began 5 years ago and is an outgrowth of my work in the area of Black health care. I began to realize then, that health was more than the presence or absence of disease. Health also had social and religious aspects that needed to be addressed as well—health as cultural production. As I completed the manuscript on this work, *Breaking the Fine Rain of Death: African American Health and a Womanist Ethic of Care*, I began to see the larger implications of understanding how cultural production works. Evil has been a concept I’ve struggled with experientially and intellectually since my youth. I was born as the most virulent forms of segregation began to die out in my home state of North Carolina. However, I still remember the separate water fountains and service counters, as well as the “no coloreds allowed” signs hanging in some businesses. Being raised in an academic home that also was a religious one, I took these as markers of something being very wrong and ultimately evil. So, I have traveled a long intellectual and moral arc to explore how evil is a cultural production. I do so by looking at the interplay of history, memory, and the imagination through the creation of five stereotypes of Black womanhood—the Mammy, Sapphire, the Tragic Mulatta, the Welfare Queen, and the Pickaninny. The first four of these stereotypes represent a form of structural oppression or evil—identity as property, uninterrogated coloredness, empire, and religious values in public policy formation. The last, the Pickaninny, through the character of Topsy from Harriett Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, becomes the figure I use to explore the kind of solidarity we need to counter the first four images as well as a way to unhinge structural evil.

Q: What (or who) was most influential in your decision to pursue a career in academia? Did you always know you wanted to be an academic?

A. I definitely did not want to be an academic when I was growing up. It was the family business—both my parents were college professors and I was busy wanting to be my own person. It was not until I received a call from Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary after I had completed my Doctor of Ministry degree in 1982 that I even thought seriously about teaching. G-ETS had a growing population of Black women students who had begun agitate to have a Black female professor. I was one of two people in town at the time who had what the school considered enough book learning to meet that need. I met with two of the

faculty members, Henry Young and Rosemary Skinner Keller (who later became my doctoral advisor) to talk about the possibilities for a class. We came up with a course entitled “The Black Church and Feminism.” On the first day of class, I was driving to campus when I realized that I didn’t know the first thing about teaching—or so I thought. I realized it was too late to bail out and hoped for the best. When I walked into the room and saw over 20 students—female and male, Black and White—I opened my mouth and started talking and realized immediately that this was what I was supposed to do with the rest of my life. Because I had gone directly from undergrad to grad school at the University of Chicago, the last thing I wanted to do was start school again but I knew that I had to because a Doctor of Ministry degree was no longer enough to teach on the seminary level. It was at this point, when I was dragging my feet about going back to school, that I met Katie Cannon—the first Black woman to earn a Ph.D. from Union Theological Seminary.

When Katie learned that I was thinking of going back to school and putting it off she asked me if I realized that as we sat there talking in September of 1984, there were only five Black women with earned doctorates teaching in theological education. As that realization sank in, she then said “Can you afford to wait?” The next month I took the GRE and began working on my admissions applications. I have been extremely fortunate to have Katie and Rosemary as both mentors and now colleagues. For me, they along with folks like my mother have taught me the importance of listening as well as hearing when others speak. In addition, one must always try to open doors of opportunities for students and help guide them through the process of understanding not only one’s discipline, but the thorny politics of academic bureaucracies.

Q: Do you think you have a responsibility to foster diversity in the next generation of academics? If so, why?

A. Of course! The more diverse we are in academia, the more rigorous and analytical our work becomes because we have a wider variety of perspectives in which our work can be evaluated and responded to. This to me is a sign of excellence in our intellectual strivings.

My mother was the first Black woman to earn a doctorate in zoology (cell physiology) at the University of Michigan in the early 1960s. She rarely spoke of that time and when she did she noted how important her major professor and mentor, Dugald E.S. Brown was to her. Brown and his wife visited our family on occasion and although a rather unlikely pair for that era—he a White Canadian and she a Black woman from the South—I was always struck by the mutual respect they had for each other and the liveliness of their exchanges. From an early age, then, I learned that to succeed in academia, one needs not only a keen intellect, but one should not try to do this life in isolation or alone. The academic life must be something so compelling to you, that you find it to be a place of challenge and growth. It should be a place in which you feel yourself growing and once you are teaching or carrying out research or whatever one ends up doing, it should be a place in which you encourage those coming behind you to grow and stretch even more than you did at that point in your career. The challenges of academia are great—learning one’s discipline, continuing to explore and grow in it, learning the bureaucratic and political maze of being on a faculty or working with a group of people, finding time for your rest and renewal with family and friends. But the rewards are what Toni Morrison calls the dancing mind. It is that place where we meet each other both intellectually and

viscerally and then learn and grow from that meeting to be better scholars, teachers, researchers and, I hope, better people.

Q: What are the benefits or drawbacks to teaching in a seminary (versus a graduate religious studies programs or only an undergraduate program)?

A. In my short time at Yale, I've come to realize how much more peaceful and non-chaotic the seminary environment is. I never thought I'd say such a thing! But what I'm getting at here is that because most seminaries are smaller than a college or university environment, particularly the free-standing seminary background I come from, there may still be a remarkable amount of work to be done but because there is less bureaucratic red tape, it is not nearly as large a task as the university environment I find at Yale. However, the benefits outweigh this, I think. Here, one is able to have a great variety of conversation partners and a wider range of students at different points in their academic careers. On the best days, this creates an enormously rich environment for the classroom. It also challenges me more as a teacher because I cannot rely on a common set of experiences or perspectives that serve as the foundation for our work in class. This has encouraged me to explore more the different ways people learn and incorporate this more as I try to think through the various pieces of my job to teach African American religion and theology from the perspective of my own discipline of Christian social ethics.

November 2005

Teresa Treat

Assistant Professor, Psychology

Faculty of Arts and Sciences

Dr. Teresa Treat holds an adjunct position in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Pittsburgh's School of Medicine. She completed a joint Ph.D. program in clinical psychology and cognitive science at Indiana University before taking a post-doctoral position at the Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic. Throughout her graduate and post-graduate career, Dr. Treat has received a number of honors and awards for her exceptional contributions to research and teaching. Most recently, she was the recipient of Yale's Graduate Mentor Award. Given yearly to only three professors across the university, this award recognizes her many contributions to the scholarly development of graduate students.

Q: Please briefly describe your current research.

A: My primary program of research lies at the conjunction of two fields that traditionally have engaged in only limited cross-talk: clinical psychology and cognitive science. Historically, clinical psychologists have been very interested in the role of cognition in psychopathology; many of our theories implicate cognitive processing in the development and maintenance of clinical problems, and cognitive therapy has proven to be an effective approach for the treatment of numerous clinical disorders. Oddly enough, however, many of the models and methods of contemporary cognitive science have yet to be applied to clinical research questions. Thus, as an undergraduate psychology major, I became fascinated by trying to find ways to apply the formal theories and methods of cognitive science to help us understand the role of cognitive processing in a variety of clinical phenomena. My research focuses primarily on the application of these models and methods within the areas of eating disorders and sexual aggression. In the case of eating disorders, I'm interested in characterizing variation in the way women process other women's shape and weight, and then evaluating how that variability is related to eating-related difficulties. In the case of sexual aggression, I'm focusing on individual differences in men's perceptions of women and how they are related to male-initiated sexual aggression between heterosexual acquaintances.

Q: Who (or what) was most influential in your decision to pursue a career in science?

A: That would be Dick McFall, a professor in the psychology department at Indiana University. I had the good fortune to meet him when I was an undergrad psych major at Indiana. Another faculty member suggested that I would enjoy talking with him about the role of social information processing in sexual aggression, one of his many areas of expertise. We spent hours talking in the weeks thereafter, and I was hooked on clinical science for life. Dick's enthusiasm for and commitment to scientific clinical psychology were infectious, and his vision for a new generation of integrative researchers who were trained fully in both clinical psychology and another discipline (such as cognitive science or neuroscience) was positively inspiring. Another significant meta-message in those early conversations was that a career in science – that is, formalized puzzle-solving for the intellectually curious – can be not only stimulating but also a heck of a lot of fun.

Q: Could you describe the types of mentoring you have received throughout your career?

A: As a graduate student and post-doc, I flourished in mentoring environments that provided a combination of exceptional scientific training, honest and direct feedback, and steadfast support and encouragement. Early in graduate school, I experienced a significant crisis of confidence about whether I had “what it took” to succeed in the relatively unexplored area of quantitative cognitive-clinical science. Almost all of the cognitive scientists working in areas of primary interest to me had exceptionally strong quantitative and technical skills, whereas my background in these areas was more limited. I also was very aware of being one of only a few women in many cases, and occasional comments when I struggled with the material about how hard math is “for girls” worried me. My mentors’ staunch support and frequent reminders that skills are malleable (and that some people’s unconstructive comments deserve to be ignored) were critical to my staying the course. Their ready provision of both positive and negative feedback in a constructive fashion also made a big difference, because I always knew how I was doing and what specifically needed work. And the scientific training that I received was top-notch. Not surprisingly, as I began to acquire the armamentarium of skills necessary to succeed in a clinical research career, I became much more confident about and comfortable with being one of the ambassadors for the burgeoning field of clinical-cognitive science.

After joining the faculty at Yale in 2001, I sought out mentoring relationships with several senior faculty in my department and was fortunate to find them very responsive to my request. Kelly Brownell has been particularly helpful in this regard. I’ve benefited tremendously from his good counsel over the years, whether about wrestling with publication issues, seeking grant funding, or struggling to strike a balance between teaching, research, and service. Here again, the mentoring relationship has balanced encouragement and support with provision of the skills and constructive feedback necessary to succeed.

Q: What is your philosophy on mentoring?

A: I try to emulate my mentors when working with my own graduate students. I feel extremely privileged to work with such talented junior colleagues, and it really is a joy to help them realize their abilities and the ways in which they can advance psychological science. Part of what I do is provide support and clear feedback, and part of what I do is facilitate the development of critical skills – whether research skills, presentation skills, communication skills, or even emotion-regulation skills. A scientific career can be extremely stimulating and rewarding, but it also can be highly demanding and stressful on occasion. Thus, it can be very helpful for mentors to model and discuss effective strategies for managing and coping with career-related stress.

When initially approaching the mentoring task, I adopt a scaffolding model. Early on, I try to ascertain in collaboration with the student how much and what kind of scaffolding is necessary to help the trainee launch a successful scientific career. This needs assessment typically results in a highly individualized training plan, which the trainee and I then implement and periodically re-evaluate. I also attempt to facilitate trainees’ discovery and development of their particular identity as psychological scientists, as many students initially do not know exactly what they want to do or who they want to be. I try to strip away as

much of the scaffolding as possible by the time trainees leave Yale, while continuing to provide encouragement and problem-focused advice as needed. To the extent possible, it is very important for mentors to help students stand on their own two feet and have a clear sense of their scientific identity by the time they graduate.

Q: What advice would you give to female graduate students who are interested in pursuing academic careers in science?

A: Go for it! You're not going to know whether a career in science is for you unless you give it your very best shot. Be proactive about seeking out exceptional training opportunities and good mentorship. Don't sit around and wait for someone to offer to train or mentor you, or you may wait a very long time indeed. Actively and regularly solicit critical feedback on your ideas, take intellectual risks, and be willing to be wrong or to look "stupid." And pay a lot of attention to developing and maintaining good support systems, both professionally and personally, because they will help you to buffer against and respond effectively to questions you may encounter along the way about whether or not you are really valued, whether or not you are really capable, and whether or not you really belong.

September 2006

Meg Urry

Professor, Physics

Faculty of Arts and Sciences

Dr. Meg Urry completed her graduate training at Johns Hopkins University before taking a post-doctoral position at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Center for Space Research. She went on to spend 14 years at the Space Telescope Science Institute (which runs the Hubble Space Telescope for NASA) before becoming the first female tenured faculty member in the history of the Yale Physics Department in 2001. Dr. Urry has worked hard to increase the number of women and minorities in science by calling international attention to the barriers that contribute to their attrition.

Q: Please briefly describe your current research.

A: My research concerns super-massive black holes that are at the center of distant galaxies. These black holes release enormous amounts of energy – converted from gravitational potential energy when matter falls onto them. Sometimes this energy comes out as light, much brighter than star light and much more concentrated, or sometimes it comes out as outflows, like great huge jets that travel through space at nearly the speed of light. What we are trying to understand is the origin of the energy - how that energy is extracted from black holes and how it is channeled into either radiation or kinetic energy. We also want to know what are the demographics of black holes in our universe. When do they form? How do they grow? How are they connected to galaxies? We make observations from ground and space telescopes, at optical and also x-ray or gamma-ray wavelengths.

Q: What, so far, has been the most rewarding aspect of your career?

A: I've had very different careers. I'm going into my fifth year at Yale. Before that I was at the Space Telescope Science Institute (STScI) which is not an educational institution. There were very rewarding things there. It was an extraordinary opportunity to be working with a cutting edge instrument like the Hubble Telescope, and also being able to affect the program, that is, what observations are done, and why. But hands down, the winner is coming to Yale and getting to work with students. I get such a charge out of working with students. Teaching my undergraduates, or working with my graduate students and seeing them grow into mature scientists is richly rewarding. Sometimes I think I should have been in a university the entire time – I'm meant to teach people things.

Q: What (or who) was most influential in your decision to pursue a career in science?

A: My family. In particular, my father was probably the most influential in my decision to study science. He was a professor of chemistry. He was very, very supportive. I took physics because he suggested I take physics. I did some astronomy because he suggested it. It is true that I had always had that interest, but I just think that support from my family counteracted some of the negative feedback I got. I can remember

an undergraduate advisor, when I told him I was interested in astrophysics, who responded. “Oh, you really have to be a genius to be in that field.” Of course, the underlying message was that I wasn’t a genius. I think my parents’ support really counteracted that kind of feedback.

Q: What is your philosophy on mentoring?

A: The most important thing in mentoring is information. You are giving people information that will help them make the choices, the moves, the steps that will help them to succeed. Years ago I was involved in setting up a mentoring program at STScI. It turned out that the senior faculty had a wide range of ideas of what mentoring was. I was quite shocked by this, because I assumed everyone must have my own understanding. Of course, they don’t. One person told me that, to him, mentoring meant knocking on his door and asking him what research to conduct. This is so far from my understanding! I think that young scientists already have good ideas and know what they want to do. What they want, what they need, and what mentoring is for, is to give them the information they need to figure out the next step.

With undergraduates, mentoring may mean explaining the various career options and the benefits and pitfalls associated with each so that they can make an informed decision. For graduate students or post-docs, it is important to find out what they want to do. If they want to become a faculty member, I can provide first-hand knowledge of how to achieve that position. If they want to become a science writer or work at a government research lab, I may not be the best person to advise them. What I can do as a mentor, however, is help connect them with individuals who can inform them of the steps they need to follow. It seems obvious, and yet it is not so obvious, that information is the crucial element in climbing the ladder to success.

There are still a lot of scientists who say--in fact I’ve been told directly-- that if you need mentoring, you are not good enough. And I know that there are people who genuinely believe this. That is because they imagine that their own knowledge was somehow with them from birth or deposited in their brains by some visiting angel! But the fact is that people who are dismissive of the need for mentoring have almost certainly been mentored to within an inch of their lives. That is why they know the game and how to play it. They simply aren’t aware of where that information transfer is occurring, and therefore not aware of where it is not occurring for groups who fall outside the traditional system (like women who are in fields dominated by men).

Q: You recently authored an article printed in the *Washington Post* on the topic of gender discrimination in which you wrote,

“I watched women around me, especially young women, who were smart and keen to work hard, but who, after a few years in grad school or after a discouraging spell as a postdoc, decided maybe they weren’t cut out for science, or maybe they would find a non-academic job, or maybe they’d get married and have a family rather than a research career. I have no problem with any of these choices. What troubles me, though, is that I rarely saw men making them, especially the choice to stay home with kids. I think some

women use “family” as an excuse to leave science when science actually drives them away. This is a huge loss for our county—these women PhDs are some of the best scientists we train. We need their talent.”

Q: What advice would you give to women students who, for whatever reason, may be questioning their potential for a career in science?

A: I don’t presume to have all the answers, and broad general advice may not be right for everyone. That being said, I think if people recognize a change in attitude, that they have gone from great enthusiasm and success to a state where they are doubting their abilities, they should recognize that that is a classic pattern and that it is unlikely to be their abilities that are the problem. The advice I would give would be to find some other women in your situation to talk to and devise strategies for working your way out of it.

One good example is that women can talk themselves into doing poorly on exams, such as GREs or qualifying exams--that is, they fall prey to “stereotype threat.” The very stereotype that women don’t do well in science is sufficient to make even extremely talented women to perform below their abilities in stressful situations. You can counteract that effect if (a) you are aware of it and (b) you have some extra preparation to help you. For example, some departments have brief tutorials to help prepare students for the qualifying exam. Why don’t all departments do that? Why isn’t that standard practice? Instead we expect graduate students to, at best, work in a study group or at worst, to work alone. Why don’t we help them? Why don’t we say, “We know you’re smart enough to do this, that is why you are in graduate school, and here is what you need to know, and here is a reminder of how to do it.” Why do we max the stress?

Women who are discouraged should think really hard about how they got to be there--they were smart and accomplished and enthusiastic--and maybe the discouragement just comes from the toxic environment they find themselves in.

Q: Later this month, you are going to participate in a panel discussion on “The Benefits of Having a Family AND a Career.” Briefly, how have you balanced personal and professional commitments?

A: That’s assuming that I have! The first thing I should say is that I have a husband and two daughters--Amelia is 14 and Sophia is 11--and they are without question the best thing that ever happened to me ever. I mean, thank goodness I had them. I get so much joy and I learn so much from them. They are fabulous.

Now, at the time I got pregnant with Amelia, although that pregnancy was planned, I thought it was a terrible threat to my career. I was very, very worried. I didn’t want to tell anyone. I thought if I told them, they would think I wasn’t serious about science. (I think that attitude is changing, however.) At the same time, I was quite militant about it. I wanted a career and I wanted a family, and I felt very strongly that one should be able to have both, and darn it, I was just going to do it! I was going to make it happen! I have an enormously supportive husband. I think that’s probably the most important thing. He didn’t just “help” me with the children, he has half the responsibility, and I have half the responsibility. On some occasions, he took on more than half to take up the slack when I was working under a tight deadline.

Now I've come to see having a family as a great match for a high-pressure academic career. I used to think that it was enormously difficult to have both, but now I think, what are we grouching about? We have jobs that excite us, we get paid a decent amount, we have enormous flexibility in our hours, and it's hard for us to have children? What about the average person? Seventy percent of women with children work, and I'll bet you the majority of them don't have the flexibility and resources that women in academia have. So what are we complaining about? You know, it is hard to have kids, period. It's hard to wake up several times during the night and to get by on less sleep, but everybody does it, you adjust, and the human race goes on. So I think we should stop focusing on how hard it is, because that is a condition that applies to all parents, and start focusing on how the academic world, whether you are a graduate student or a post-doc or a faculty member, is extraordinarily friendly to families compared to most of the working world. I think it is a great environment in which to have a family. The most important thing is that you get enormous pleasure out of having a family. It makes all the small disappointments and troubles seem absolutely meaningless in comparison. It gives you great perspective. And it really highlights the power of women!

September 2005

Yuenan Wang

Doctoral candidate, Engineering and Applied Sciences

Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

Yuenan Wang was born in the HeiLongJiang Province of China. Following her undergraduate work at Tsinghua University in Beijing, she moved to Ithaca, NY to pursue a master's degree in the Sibley School of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering at Cornell University. Prior to enrolling in the Ph.D. program at Yale, she worked for a mechanical engineering firm for a year and a half. Yuenan joins Jessica Cronce as a 2006-2007 Women Mentoring Women McDougal Fellow.

Q: Tell me a little bit about your research.

A: I work in the MRRC (magnetic resonance research center) with my advisor Dr. Todd Constable. My dissertation research is focused on developing a non-invasive MRI technique to diagnose liver cirrhosis. As one of the leading causes of death worldwide, liver cirrhosis is responsible for more than one-half million deaths annually. Early diagnosis is critical for those patients. The current gold standard for diagnosing liver cirrhosis is biopsy. It can lead to sampling errors and complications such as internal bleeding; it also limits the longitudinal study of the effect of anti-fibrotic drugs. So there is a need to develop a reliable imaging method for assessing liver cirrhosis. I think this research has very important implications.

Q: What led you to pursue a career in academia?

A: My father is an electrical engineer. He began his career in a small company and later worked as a reviewer for patent applications. Now he teaches in college. Since I was a little child, he has been very into fixing things. There were always a lot of science books around our house. My family really encouraged me to pursue science and engineering as my initial interest. After I completed my master's program at Cornell and started working in the industry, I knew that I wanted to come back to graduate school. I knew that I wanted to conduct independent research and a Ph.D. is a must in order to do that. I feel that academic research has the greatest potential to contribute to society. If you conduct really great research, you can make a big difference to people's lives. You can apply your work to improve the way people live. Helping people is a very satisfying feeling.

Q: Do you have any mentors other than your advisor at Yale? If so, how did you establish that relationship?

A: Dr. Albert George was my advisor at Cornell, and he gave me a lot of help beyond simply understanding the academic material. He helped me to decide what I really wanted to do and how to choose courses that would help me advance toward that goal. He also helped me to develop other skills; in particular, he taught me how to make full use of the available resources at Cornell, and how to assert my intellectual needs effectively with other academics and professionals. I still have contact with him. I also participate in a group

led by Dr. Connie Gersick, a visiting scholar in the School of Management at Yale. I met Dr. Gersick through the WMW small group mentoring program this past year. So far, we've discussed how an introverted person can ask questions in front of a big audience at a conference, and how to balance family and career. She has been a very good role model, especially with regard to the latter topic. The group has met to have coffee at Starbucks, and Dr. Gersick also invited all of the group members to her house for dinner and a hike. I've been very impressed with all of the female faculty and staff who volunteer their time to the WMW small group mentoring program, and part of what I would like to do as a WMW fellow is to help the program expand.

Q: What would be your advice to a young woman pursuing a career in engineering?

A: Engineering is an applied science. You have to commit your time to model development and working the lab. This kind of work can occasionally feel isolating. So it is important to reach out to people, especially when you start a new project. Don't be afraid to ask questions! Your professors and your lab mates want to help you. Developing a sense of teamwork, even if you are working alone much of the time, can make the work less lonely. For example, for my research I often need a subject to scan in the MRI machine. Obviously, you can't scan yourself while you are conducting the experiment so you scan your lab mate, and he or she will borrow you later to scan for their research; teamwork is key.

Q: Any more specific advice for women pursuing their Ph.D. in general?

A: No matter what your discipline is, finding a balance between your personal and professional life is very important. For women especially, there is often a pull to become involved in several different things all at once: friends, family, coursework, publishing, departmental/university service, community service, etc. Effective time management is necessary to do all of the things you want to do without becoming overwhelmed. Also, many women in academia tend to underestimate the value of their personal time; a mentality of "I'll work today so that I can take time off tomorrow" typically results in cutting short your personal time. I find that I am most effective in my research when I take time to be with my husband and to do other things that I find personally fulfilling, such as helping others and contributing to my community.

Q: What do you hope to accomplish as a WMW fellow this year?

A: I'm going to work with my program partner (Jessica Cronce) to design and conduct events that will foster a sense of community among female faculty, post docs, grad students, and staff, with a specific focus on addressing the mentoring needs of female grad students. We have a number of exciting programs lined up for the fall. We are reprising one of our most popular panel discussions—Mentoring 101—and will have workshops or talks on how to increase your confidence in the classroom and when going on the job market, and how to establish life balance through effective time management. My biggest goal is to make more women aware of the existence of the WMW program. I would like to do this, in part, by collaborating with other McDougal fellows on joint programs. In particular, I feel that international women (like me)

represent an underserved group, and I would like to work with the two returning international fellows to help reach them. I also foresee an active collaboration with the career and family fellows.

September 2006