Meet Gloria Thomas, CEW’s New Director

Gloria's dissertation research focused on the factors that influence career success for women faculty. She finished her doctorate in 2003 but left Ann Arbor in 2001 to become the Associate Director of the ACE Fellows Program in Washington DC. During her eight years at ACE, she also worked as a Sloan grant administrator and as the Associate Director of ACE’s Office of Women in Higher Education. All of her previous work experiences mesh perfectly with her new director role. “There are,” says Gloria, “many exciting and unique aspects to CEW,” including:

- The comprehensiveness of the Center’s mission. “You just don’t find such an extensive range of services in most college and university women’s centers. We serve not just students, but also faculty, staff, and community members. In addition, we conduct research and advocate for policies that support women and men, both locally and nationwide. That’s a rare and wonderful breadth of commitment.”
- The fact that CEW has a long history as a valued component of the University of Michigan. “Unlike women’s centers on many campuses that are totally responsible for finding their own funding, CEW has strong institutional support.”
- The honor of representing CEW, which is a highly regarded model among higher education centers.

“I wondered at first how it would be to come back to CEW as the director, working with some of the people I’d known here eight years ago. But that has turned out to be great. It’s wonderful to be among old friends, reconnecting with people all over campus and meeting so many new colleagues.”

Gloria Thomas, CEW Director

She’s been CEW’s new director since January 1, 2009, but Dr. Gloria Thomas has been dreaming of returning to the Center for the Education of Women for longer than that. “When I sensed that it was time for me to move on from my position at the American Council on Education, I began to think about where I’d like my career to take me—all the while knowing that my ideal job would be to direct a center like CEW.

“And so, when I heard my former boss Carol Hollenshead announce her retirement during a Washington conference, bells went off in my head. My ACE supervisor and mentor urged me to follow my dream and apply for the CEW directorship. That I did so, and that I got the job, is just so very exciting for me.”

While a doctoral student at the University of Michigan’s Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education, Gloria spent six years as a member of the CEW research staff, working closely with Carol and other members of the Faculty Work-Life Study team and serving as Coordinator of the Women of Color in the Academy Project.

The youngest of eight children from Chester, Pennsylvania, Gloria earned an undergraduate degree in English at Swarthmore and a master’s degree in English from Villanova. She then worked for eight years as the Associate Dean of Admissions and Director of Minority Recruitment at Swarthmore before coming to Michigan.

Meet OGloria OThomas, OCEW’s ONew ODirector
Having arrived in January as the new director of CEW, I already know what a wonderful opportunity this is for me, both personally and professionally. I am delighted to be the newest member of the CEW family. I step into a position that has benefitted from stable, outstanding leadership since the Center’s beginning. Fortunately, the role comes complete with a talented and loyal staff, as well as supportive university and community leaders who demonstrate their commitment to CEW financially and with their time and influence. Over the past decades, CEW has been driven by its mission of service, research, and advocacy. At this point of transition for the Center, I am eager to build on our solid foundation by initiating a strategic planning process. It will allow us—CEW staff and all of our major stakeholders and constituencies—to refine and refocus exactly what we mean by service, research, and advocacy. Staff retreats are already underway to begin this dialogue internally.

After synthesizing and analyzing staff comments and responses to salient questions about CEW’s mission, vision, and guiding principles, we will reach out to many of you: our supporters, program participants, scholarship or counseling recipients, faculty or staff partners, on- and off-campus collaborators, and all other constituents who engage in important ways with the Center. We invite your participation as we undergo this organizational examination to determine our future path and direction.

In addition to strategic planning, much of my time these past three months has been spent getting to know campus-based partners and exploring both internal and external collaborative opportunities. Two new collaborative initiatives are now underway on campus:

- The Faculty Work-Life Study
First conducted by CEW in 1996, this second study will be funded by the Office of the Provost. It will examine progress the University has made on faculty career satisfaction, knowledge and use of work-life policies and programs, and a host of other variables.

- A one-day conference to convene postdoctoral fellows from across the campus
This initiative is supported by the UM Diversity Council with matching funding expected from other sources. The goal is to connect postdocs, who are often isolated as they focus on their own research, and to provide a network and other career path strategies for them. The session will be open to all, but particular attention will be placed on participation of women and postdocs of color.

This informative issue of the CEW newsletter shares many other details of activities and events at the Center. As you read these pages, I know you’ll be as impressed and proud as I am about the breadth and value of the Center’s contributions to the local and national communities.

At all times, I invite your input and feedback on everything we do. I look forward to greeting you at some upcoming CEW event, and I especially hope to hear from you about participating in our strategic planning process.

Gloria D. Thomas
gthomas@umich.edu
A Strong Family Background
Born to an Afro-Cuban mother and Australian-Irish father, Soledad O’Brien and all five of her brothers and sisters graduated from Harvard University. Her parents are educators who “raised us to value education and to believe in success through hard work….Though in some homes children may be labeled ‘the smart one or the athletic one,’ my parents never did that. We lived with the message ‘We expect all of you to succeed in any ways you want…. You may have to work harder than someone else, but you can figure it out.’”

O’Brien also had role models in her four older siblings. “I watched them excel and said to myself, ‘Hey, if they can do it, so can I.’” Her mother had a number of family mottos, like “In this family everybody plays together” and “Don’t let other people define who you are.” Now, says O’Brien, she and her husband are raising their four children with the same messages.

A Journalism Career and Motherhood
O’Brien was an English major who planned to become a doctor. While taking an organic chemistry class with her older sister Estella, however, O’Brien realized that Estella—who’s now an eye surgeon in Harlem—“clearly got the science better than I. I could memorize a ton, but I didn’t have a scientific mind.”

What then? Without a career goal “it’s easy to flounder, but I was lucky.” She got an internship at a TV station in Boston and knew right away that she’d found her world. “I loved the people running down the halls, trying to get the scripts done in time. I loved the screaming. I knew it was exactly what I wanted to do.”

She describes herself as the person “who has to be in the front row with pencils sharpened, who makes list, who has to be there early and be prepared.”

After years as an anchor and reporter on various TV stations and networks, O’Brien was asked by her bosses at CNN to switch her career focus to creating longer pieces, such as her recent 6-hour documentary *Black in America.* “I miss breaking news, jumping on a plane to cover a story. I get to do some of that, but my life has changed. With four kids it’s harder.” As for her work with documentaries: “I’ve discovered that I’m good at dealing with issues that are entrenched in America” and that people have a hard time talking about.

She is now working on two new projects: *Black in America, Part Two* and *Latino in America.*

The Importance of Mentoring
O’Brien says she’s had “tons of mentors” throughout her career. Some people seem to think that mentoring means “I’ve found Person X, and they’ve agreed to stick it out with me for the long term.” But O’Brien has found it more effective to have several mentors–bosses and colleagues she can contact for “in the moment” mentoring when she needs advice, especially since these busy people “don’t have time to hear the whole story.”

O’Brien also values the peer mentoring she gets from her sisters (about being a new mom, for example) and from girlfriends who know her well and can give honest, constructive feedback.

“I’m a good mentee. If I get advice from someone, I follow up: ‘Thanks. Here’s what I did. Your advice helped.’” O’Brien says she’s also proud to advise others. “There are several people whom I mentor. I’m too busy to be fully invested in someone else’s career, but I’m very willing to offer my advice in short conversations.”

Leadership
In the course of her work, O’Brien has met and interviewed many famous and not-so-famous leaders. Asked to identify an aspect of leadership that she’s observed in these people, O’Brien described “a certain amount of stick-to-itness; not giving up; the ability to just keep going–whether they’re community leaders in New Orleans after Katrina or whether they’re running for president. It’s my message when I give commencement addresses: ‘Just keep doing the work.’ That’s also terrifying because you have to do the work; there are no shortcuts.”
“While responsible commanders turn children away, others seek them because children, with their under-developed concepts of death, are fearless and effective in battle, seeing it as a game. For girls, soldiering may offer an opportunity to escape oppressive traditional gender norms and learn leadership skills.”

Radhika Coomaraswamy, UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict

Working to protect children from becoming child soldiers

“Nothing binds nations together more than the need to protect children.” Radhika Coomaraswamy’s commitment to turning that aspiration into practice in all parts of the globe led former U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan to appoint Coomaraswamy to the post of Under-Secretary General, Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict.

On February 11, Radhika Coomaraswamy spent the day with CEW as the Christobel Kotelawala Weerasinghe visiting lecturer. As part of her public address, Coomaraswamy told the story of Moi, a young Ugandan boy. “He was playing with his friend when guerrilla rebels attacked his village. He was abducted with his friend and made to carry loot from their village. On the way to the rebel camp, his friend fell and broke his ankle. The commander of the group shot his friend in the head. Moi was taken to camp, beaten, drugged and trained to be a child soldier. He was made to attack his own village and kill and steal from family and friends.”

Ms. Coomaraswamy’s U.N. mission is to understand the factors that drive children to become child soldiers, to negotiate with the state and non-state forces that hold them, to reintegrate them, where possible, into their communities and prepare them for a peaceful and productive future.

A lawyer and former chair of the Sri Lanka Human Rights Commission, Ms. Coomaraswamy has also done outstanding work as the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women. Her reports to the U.N. Commission on Human Rights addressing violence in the family, in communities and during armed conflict, and her work on international trafficking, have positioned her to intervene on behalf of women throughout the world.

While at CEW, Radhika Coomaraswamy participated in informal morning conversations with faculty and staff members, students and community members drawn to her work. In the afternoon, she presented the Christobel Kotelawala Weerasinghe Lecture on “Children and Armed Conflict.” Ms. Coomaraswamy explored the factors that make children vulnerable to recruitment as child soldiers. She pointed out that, while international law posits that children younger than 18 do not have fully developed capacity for moral judgment, in many societies (and our own, historically) children are expected to assume adult responsibilities at younger ages. For the U.N., the protection of children under 18 from harm or exploitation is both a treaty mandate and an aspirational goal.

Although the archetypal image of a child soldier is of one violently abducted, drugged, threatened and made to commit crimes against his or her own people—and that is true in many cases—many children are recruited willingly. In some cases, families are asked to contribute a child to the cause; in others, they see armed service as an opportunity to ensure that the child will be fed and cared for. Other children join voluntarily to redress injustices against their ethnic group or community, for material benefits like food and shelter, to support the ideology of the armed group, for revenge, to escape their homes, or even as an avenue to social mobility. Some are drawn to romantic notions of martyrdom and heroic death. Refugee camps are particularly fertile recruiting grounds: many child soldiers are orphans.

While responsible commanders turn children away, others seek them because children, with their under-developed concepts of death, are fearless and effective in battle, seeing it as a game. For girls, soldiering may offer an opportunity to escape oppressive traditional gender norms and learn leadership skills. For that reason, it can be particularly difficult to repatriate girls, since they often do not want to go back home. Sexual exploitation may also make it difficult for girls to be reintegrated into their communities.

As the international community has moved toward International Criminal Court indictments and Security Council sanctions against leaders who recruit and use child soldiers, Ms. Coomaraswamy has undertaken negotiations with a growing number of such leaders for the release of their child soldiers, and she is experiencing some success. According to Ms. Coomaraswamy, it takes at least three years of work with children to support their recovery, hold them accountable for their acts of violence, teach them self-sufficiency skills, and diminish the likelihood that they will re-enlist. Another major focus of her work is to ensure that providing education—peace education, in particular—is an integral part of response to humanitarian emergencies, so that children can see a positive future for themselves.

CEW Leadership Council Member Emerita Menakka Bailey created the Christobel Kotelawala Weerasinghe Fund in honor of her mother, who continues to dedicate her life to advancing women’s lives and promoting cross-cultural dialogue.
Beth Sullivan has been appointed for a three-year term to the board of the College and University Work Life Association, starting in January 2009. This national association supports the work of professionals who research or develop work-life programs and policies within higher education. Sullivan is CEW’s Senior Associate for Advocacy and Policy.

CEW Director Gloria Thomas has been appointed by University President Mary Sue Coleman as the Chair of the President’s Advisory Commission on Women’s Issues.

In March 2009, Dr. Thomas conducted a workshop with Estela López, Director of the Latino Policy Institute, at the American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education (AAHHE) annual conference “Preparing Latina Leaders: Surmounting Challenges, Creating a Personal Vision.”

At the April 2009 Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) conference “Shaping Faculty Roles in a Time of Change,” Dr. Thomas presented the keynote address, along with Dr. Gary Rhoades, Secretary General of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). The topic of their presentation was “Restructuring Academic Work: New Career Paths for Faculty.” At the same conference, CEW researchers Dr. Jean Waltman and Dr. Louise August presented “The Contingent Faculty Win-Win Equation: Using Research Findings to Develop Effective Practices for Non-Tenure Track Faculty.”

“Black Female Faculty: Role Definition, Critical Enactments and Contributions to Predominately White Institutions,” by Dr. Venice Sule, CEW Post-doctoral Fellow, will be published in the 2009 issue of Journal About Women in Higher Education. The article explores how Black females, the largest community of women of color faculty, simultaneously define their professional roles and contribute to predominately White research institutions through a series of critical enactments.

The Women of Color Task Force, a project staffed by CEW Program Coordinator Janice Reuben, has won an inaugural U-M Distinguished Diversity Leaders team award. The award was established to shine a light on those staff members who work toward achieving a welcoming, supportive and inclusive working environment. It is intended to celebrate those who embrace the value of diversity and recognize how it helps set the University apart.

Dr. Ellen Kossek, Professor of Human Resource Management and Organizational Behavior at Michigan State University, joined CEW for the month of March as a Jean Campbell Visiting Scholar.

Along with Kathleen Donohoe of University Human Resources, CEW Associate Director for Advocacy Susan Kaufmann has launched a cross-campus collaboration to ensure a comprehensive, coordinated response to dating, domestic and sexual violence affecting members of the University community. Sponsors of the effort include Laurita Thomas, Associate Vice President and Chief Human Resource Officer; Dr. Robert Kelch, Executive Vice President for Medical Affairs; and Dr. Lori Pierce, Vice Provost for Academic and Faculty Affairs.

Carol Hollenshead, CEW Director Emerita, was named an Institutional Champion of Diversity Awardee by the National Center on Institutional Diversity at the University of Michigan.

Data collection has been completed for “Contingent Faculty in a Tenure Track World,” a CEW research project investigating the work lives of non-tenured teaching and research faculty.

“Satisfaction and Discontent: Voices of Non-Tenure-Track Faculty,” an article by CEW researchers Jean Waltman and Inger Bergom, appeared in the April 2009 edition of the online journal On Campus with Women.

Susan Kaufmann presented her research paper, Michigan Women in the High-Tech Knowledge Economy, to the Federal Women’s Program at the Environmental Protection Agency in Ann Arbor in March 2009. In October, she will speak to the Wolverine Caucus, a group of UM alumni employed in and around state government, many of whom hold legislative staff positions.

Kaufmann will also join the staff of the Imagine Fund in discussing the impact of Proposal 2, the 2006 anti-affirmative action amendment, at the June 9, 2009 conference of the Michigan American Council on Education Network for Women Leaders in Higher Education. The Imagine Fund is a private non-profit organization dedicated to advancing diversity in Michigan higher education by supporting scholarship creation.

Michigan Difference
Campaign Summary

Thanks to you! More than 365,000 donors made gifts to UM totaling $3,200,733,103–128% of the original $2.5 billion goal. CEW had campaign gifts of $4,555,388–130% of our $3.5 million goal. CEW also had planned gifts of over $10.7 million. Thank you for allowing us to provide:

- Over 10,000 free counseling sessions for women and men in the University and the community
- Over 500 programs and workshops reaching over 11,000 participants
- $1,773,250 million in scholarship awards to 348 women
- Opportunities for 13 visiting scholars from universities in the U.S and around the world–Australia, Nigeria, India, Japan, and South Africa
- A web-based online library catalog that allows anyone to view CEW’s resources anytime, from anywhere
- Two to three world-class speakers annually.

We share this success together, so from all of us at CEW a heartfelt thank you!
Thank you

The Center remains thankful for all the many individuals, families and foundations who choose to support CEW. Without such gifts, many lives would go untouched by the power of the Center’s programs, services and support. The Center staff, CEW Leadership Council and clients offer our heartfelt thanks.

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Over Forty Years of Providing Service, Research and Advocacy
Dr. Howard Adams encourages self-motivation and self-sufficiency at the 2009 WCTF Conference

Based on feedback from last year’s online conference evaluations, the Task Force unveiled a revised conference format this year—workshop sessions expanded from 90 minutes to two hours; and the revival of the WCTF marketplace in the Modern Languages Building, featuring more than 20 retail vendors and nonprofit exhibitors. In addition, several new workshops were offered, including sessions on energizing the workplace by building high quality connections; understanding privilege, power and influence in group dynamics; and using your voice for effective presentations.

As part of its eco-friendly strategy, the conference planning committee provided a recyclable shopping bag as part of the conference registration packet and asked presenters to reduce the number of handouts distributed during the sessions. Several of the presentation handouts were emailed to workshop participants and will be available on a campus internet site for future access.

Conference sponsors included the Office of the Senior Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, University Human Resources, the UM Health System Human Resources Office, the Center for the Education of Women, and Borders Express-Briarwood Mall.

Save the date for next year’s conference—Friday, March 5, 2010!
CEW’s Twink Frey Visiting Social Activist program provides activists the opportunity to spend a month at CEW working on a project while stepping away from their usual activities. Each visit is intended to give the selected activist time for reflection, research and/or planning related to her area of activism. Activists can interact with University faculty and students, with other policy activists, and with community members in Ann Arbor, Grand Rapids and elsewhere in Michigan. Anne Ladkey, Executive Director of Women Employed (WE) in Chicago and the 2007 visiting activist, recently reflected on the experience.

Anne spent her time at CEW researching and developing a persuasive business case for providing low-wage workers with adequate wages, benefits such as sick time and health insurance, and greater scheduling predictability. She was particularly interested in identifying and using studies that support the finding that businesses actually save money (e.g. in recruitment and retraining, in customer satisfaction and repeat business) when they provide adequate sick leave and other benefits to their workers.

While WE was aware of some of the data supporting such a business case, the organization was eager to develop examples in order to use the business case to convince employers to consider offering benefits to low-wage workers. However, they needed to delve deeper into this area of research before creating such examples.

Anne noted, “The nature of my job doesn’t allow me to focus single-mindedly on one issue of importance, making the time at CEW invaluable.”

CEW invaluable.” As a busy non-profit director, Anne emphasized, she relished this unusual opportunity to “completely get away,” to slow down, and to re-consider the balance between thinking, planning, and acting. While Anne appreciated the respite from regular responsibilities, she acknowledged that finding even a month to step away from her usual role was difficult.

Upon her return to WE, Anne said, “We integrated the business case research right away. People were waiting for it.” Since then, WE has offered programs on the business case for improving the work lives of low-wage workers, using research and methodological tools that Anne learned about at UM. Most satisfying, according to Anne, was that “I discovered a whole area of research I didn’t know existed: positive organizational scholarship.” A group of UM faculty is involved in this emerging research area, studying how positive organizational cultures are linked to employee engagement, customer satisfaction, and increased profit. Anne has remained active with this cutting-edge group of scholars, and WE has participated in studies conducted by faculty in UM’s Ross School of Business.

Reflecting on the experience of being an “activist in residence,” Anne pointed to several aspects of the TFVSA program that enabled her to accomplish much in a short time span:

- The “intellectual resources” of the University of Michigan, including faculty, library resources, and the many speakers and other programs offered across the campus.
- A “high-level set of guides” who allowed her to make the most of her time and experiences. In advance of her visit, CEW staff identified faculty for her to meet. During her stay, CEW’s librarian assisted her in searching University library holdings and online databases, providing additional articles and sources of information as needed.
- CEW colleagues with whom to reflect on her work as it developed, something that would have been harder to do in isolation.
- The dramatic change in her day-to-day activities and the unconstrained opportunity to plan her own schedule and priorities.

Anne explained that, as an executive director, her schedule is regulated by many other schedules and demands, that she has frequent evening and weekend commitments, and that she usually delegates in-depth research to other staff members. At CEW, without competing demands or routines, Anne had the freedom to make decisions slowly, to focus deeply on a single question, and to push boundaries in new ways.

The TFVSA program, established in 2005 to bring social activists who work on gender equity issues to the Center for the Education of Women, was made possible through a generous gift from UM alumna Twink Frey and her husband James McKay.

This spring, CEW hosted Mallika Dutt, the founder and executive director of Breakthrough, an international human rights organization that uses music, art, radio and television to promote values of dignity, equality and justice. While on campus as a Twink Frey Visiting Social Activist, Ms. Dutt developed a document that outlines Breakthrough’s mission and approach to cultivating a global culture where human rights for all people are respected, protected and fulfilled. This description of Breakthrough’s vision, along with examples of its strategies, provides a methodology for use by other organizations. A paper by Ms. Dutt will be posted on the CEW website in May 2009 and a video of her presentation will be online in May as well.

Over Forty Years of Providing Service, Research and Advocacy
**Books of Interest**

As a new feature in each newsletter issue, we will review books that CEW staff members have found interesting, thought provoking or useful. We will list upcoming books at the bottom of this page and invite you to read along with us.

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One of the books we occasionally recommend at CEW is *Composing a Life* by Mary Catherine Bateson. It delivers a message that resonates with women, giving them a way to think about their lives not as straight lines to personal and financial success, but as a series of complex and interwoven stages that add richness to their lives. Bateson writes, “Life is truly an improvisatory art, about the ways we combine familiar and unfamiliar components in response to new situations, following an underlying grammar and an evolving aesthetic.”

Bateson began to explore this idea as a way to make sense of her own life after a revolution in Iran dislocated her and her husband and robbed them of years of work, their papers and their home. Forced to leave with nothing, she struggled to start again and to make sense of the new direction her life had taken. Bateson discovered, and explores in this book, “the value of lifetimes of continual redefinition.”

Bateson expands on this idea of “improvisation and change” in the lives of five women friends, showing us in rich detail the conflicted effects of gender, race, relationships, financial success and personal failure.

Through these five examples of “lives of multiple commitments and multiple beginnings,” Bateson urges us to see that even when we don’t recognize that some new path is part of a larger pattern, we can trust that what we are weaving, through our commitment to embracing change, is a richer and fuller life. But she understands how difficult that change might be. She says, “If change were less frightening, if the risks did not seem so great, far more could be lived. When you watch people damaged by their dependence on continuity, you wonder about the nature of commitment and the need for a new and more fluid way to view the future.”

In our current economic reality that pushes many people unwillingly toward the edge of personal and financial crisis, it may seem paradoxical to be discussing value not in continuity and safety, but in risk and change. But if we step back from our immediate fears and needs, and are willing to look long, Bateson’s book, although almost twenty years old now, is still an excellent guide for modern times. What is ultimately appealing about this book is the realization that the life we create for ourselves, and how we define the success of that life, is really, wholly in our hands. *Eilisha Dermont*


Marian Wright Edelman, founder of the Children’s Defense Fund, spoke at the University of Michigan’s Martin Luther King Jr. Day Symposium about *The Sea is So Wide and My Boat is So Small*, her recent book calling for “charting a course for the next generation.” While Edelman’s focus is on children, improving women’s lives has a positive impact on the lives of children as well, she notes.

The book includes a series of letters to groups Edelman considers essential to improving the lives of children in the U.S. and the world, ranging from parents and educators to national leaders and citizens. Early in the book she states her concern that “our nation and world have…become less safe, less just, more precarious and balkanized,” resulting in negative effects on children’s lives.

Edelman presents a frightening overview of a single, typical day in the lives of American children, with four children killed by abuse or neglect and 3,477 children arrested. Much of the book refers to what she has called the “cradle to prison pipeline” affecting poor children, especially poor children of color. She points to the child welfare system (foster care), lack of maternal and child health care, underserved schools, and an increasing criminalization of children’s behaviors as contributors to this pipeline.

As Edelman calls us to action, she compares America to a wealthy family with six children, of whom only five are fed, clothed, sent to good schools with after-school enrichment opportunities, and provided with good medical care and abundant love. She describes the sixth child as cold, hungry, neglected, often ill, and falling behind in school. Edelman urges a reprioritization of U.S. commitments, with children’s welfare at the top.

*The Sea is So Wide…* combines data on issues ranging from pregnancy and childbirth risks to educational opportunities for poor children with a faith-based perspective grounded in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Edelman’s vision for the future draws on her many years of research and work as a children’s advocate, her personal perspectives on raising children and a belief in our society’s responsibility to care for all. *Jeanne Miller*

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We hope our reviews prompt you to explore these books. Our next newsletter will include reviews of **A Jury of her Peers: Women Writers from Ann Bradstreet to Annie Proulx** by Elaine Showalter and **A Long Way Gone: Memoir of a Boy Soldier** by Ishmael Beah.
“Have you,” asks Dr. Valerie Young, “ever caught yourself having one or more of these thoughts about yourself and your performance?”

“If I were really smart, I wouldn’t have to work so hard.”
“I should know this without having to study.”
“I can do this by myself. If someone helps me, it means I’ve failed.”

If so, you may be one of many high achieving women who suffer from the “imposter syndrome.” Speaking to a packed crowd of University of Michigan women faculty members and graduate students, Young described the characteristics, possible causes, and coping strategies of the imposter syndrome at her January 27 workshop, cosponsored by CEW’s Women of Color in the Academy Project and the Junior Women Faculty Network.

Young defined the imposter phenomenon this way: Capable people—women more often than men—sometimes experience an inner sense of intellectual phoniness, believing that they have fooled others into thinking them to be competent and fearing that they are likely to be “discovered” at any moment.

According to Dr. Young, women—especially academics, who are particularly susceptible to the imposter syndrome—may credit their successes not to their talents but to good luck, good timing, the generosity and support or the mistakes of others.

They may adopt a number of strategies to mask their sense of incompetence:

- Working extremely hard in order to make up for “ineptitude,”
- Keeping a low profile by not expressing their ideas, opinions, questions
- Qualifying their comments with such statements as “This may be a dumb question…” or “You’ve probably already thought of this…”
- Procrastinating or not finishing tasks
- Using humor and charm to deflect their perceived weaknesses

Where do such feelings of incompetence come from? There are obviously several possible causes, says Young, but at this event she focused primarily on the messages children learn from their families. That is, some families set unreasonably high expectations for their children. And some families establish roles for siblings (“the smart one,” “the quiet one,” “the troubled one”) that children then spend their lives trying to merit or discredit.

Young offered a number of practical strategies that women can use to counteract bouts of self-doubt, including the following:

- Break the silence; name the feeling and talk about it with fellow “impostors.”
- Contextualize feelings of incompetence; normalize it by analyzing where they’re coming from (“Of course, this is happening to me right now because…”)

What Every Women Needs to Know about Competence, the Imposter Syndrome, and the Art of Winging It

- Tell, tell, tell. Learn how to self-promote without being a braggart.
- Ask, ask, ask. If you are attempting a new task, remind yourself that it is OK to ask for help or to ask questions.
- Find the humor in imposter situations.
- Act “as if” you are intelligent and talented when you’re feeling otherwise.
- Master the art of “winging it.” Find your comfort zone for improvising in situations.
- Review (“How will I act the next time?”) and reward your successes.

Dr. Young, a nationally recognized consultant and writer who specializes in the Impostor Syndrome, recommended these books for more information on the topic:


You can also read much more about her work and about the suggestions mentioned in this article by visiting Valerie Young’s website www.ImpostorSyndrome.com.
CEW Responds to Tough Economic Times

In the midst of a recession that has hit the state of Michigan particularly hard, the Center for the Education of Women offers a range of programs and services to help individuals find jobs and manage their finances.

Attendance has been particularly high for this semester’s regular Job Search Series, a 5-week program that covers such topics as career decision-making, on-line job sources, resumes, cover letters, interviewing techniques and negotiation skills. Participants always find these sessions helpful not only for professional advice and feedback but also for the chance to network with others in the community who face similar challenge.

CEW’s counselors are another valuable resource for the community and for UM faculty, staff and students, increasing numbers of whom face their own or their partners’ loss of employment. Our free counseling services provide these individuals support and guidance as they search for new jobs, change careers or return to school.

CEW’s information resources offer a way for job seekers to prepare for their job searches. Books on all aspects of job searching from networking to interviewing are available for use in the library or for check-out. In addition, we have books on returning to the workplace after a break and on entrepreneurial options. Through the CEW website, anyone can search the library resources, learn when programs are offered, or link to additional web-based sources of information.

While there is no denying that the job search process is especially challenging during these difficult economic times, it is gratifying when our participants tell us that CEW programs and services have given them renewed confidence and valuable job-hunting skills.

In April, the Center will also offer our popular Job Search Clinic, a one afternoon workshop that presents condensed versions of the topics covered by the longer Job Search Series. In addition, CEW has delivered a slate of financial programs this semester, full of practical advice about budgeting, starting a business and buying a home, as well as scholarly presentations about women and the economy.

Sample Resources in CEW’s Library

Expert resumes for people returning to work. 2008.
Encore: Finding work that matters in the second half of life. 2007.
The career coward’s guide to changing careers: Sensible strategies for overcoming job search fears. 2008
The savvy part-time professional: How to land, create, or negotiate the part-time job of your dreams. 2006

The CEW Library resources are available 24 hours a day online at www.cew.umich.edu

Scholarship Celebration Date Moving to Fall
Mark your calendars for the 39th Annual Scholarship and Fellowship Awards Ceremony, Tuesday, October 13, 2009. We’ve changed the time of year for the ceremony in order to make it easier for scholars to attend (it used to be held in April, on the last day of classes) and to strengthen the connection between CEW and scholars beginning in the Fall term. Look for detailed information about the event in early September.

Applications are currently being evaluated for the 2009-2010 academic year. Scholars will be selected in June, and awards will be available for use beginning in the Fall term, as always. Applications for the 2010-2011 academic year will be available this October and due in January 2010.

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