



# Sex work a hot topic at student conference

Prostitution is not an everyday topic for an academic conference. But breaking down taboos is part of what the Sexual Diversity Studies Student Union stands for. The union's annual conference in March, "\$ex for \$ale: Prostitution, Government and Regulation," brought together professors, students, sex workers, and community members to discuss prostitution within an academic context. The conference was organized by a small, hardworking group of students, led by Sherrie Quinn and Nikki Stratigacos.

"We wanted to give the students a chance to learn something they wouldn't read about in their textbooks," said Stratigacos, an SDSSU executive. She added, "Sexual diversity also means diversity of sexual behaviours, not just sexual identities."

The two-day conference, held at Hart House, kicked off with a spirited keynote address from Carol Leigh, a.k.a. Scarlot Harlot. Leigh presented an overview of how sex workers are treated worldwide. The evening's panel, hosted by SDS Acting Director Scott Rayter, also included Valerie Scott of Sex Professionals of Canada, an advocacy group fighting for decriminalization, and remarks by Gerald Hannon, an activist, journalist and former Ryerson professor who was forced out of his job when the university administration discovered he was a part-time sex worker. Scott spoke about a number of court challenges



Keynote speaker Carol Leigh (a.k.a. Scarlot Harlot), centre, with conference organizers and SDS students Nikki Stratigacos, left, and Sherrie Quinn. Courtesy of David Rayside

currently in the works, and the need for decriminalization rather than legalization, which often leads to strict regulation of sex workers' practices, as well as controls on sex workers' bodies in the form of mandatory health testing. Hannon discussed the horrors of police-run "john schools," which often target new immigrants — easy prey for the police, since they are unaware of the intricacies of Canadian law surrounding solicitation and communication. Another important issue that emerged was the different experiences of male, female, and trans sex workers.

The conference continued the following day with a presentation by former SDS Program Director Mariana Valverde, who described how countries around the world are struggling to deal with prostitution as a profession and/or crime. Next, conference

organizer Nikki Stratigacos spoke about her experiences as a transsexual sex worker — in her words, a "tuition whore" who is putting herself through university with sex work.

The conference's other guest speakers included Todd Klinck of local club Goodhandy's, which bills itself as a "pansexual playground"; Kara Gillies of Maggie's, a Toronto organization run by and for sex workers; and Det. Wendy Leaver of the Toronto Police, who works in the Special Victims Section of the Sex Crimes Unit, investigating violent crimes against sex workers. Gillies' presentation depicted, through a creative role play, the way one Canadian police force collects information about sex workers; the police argue this gathering of information is for sex workers' protection. While many conference attendees objected to the presence

of a police officer among the speakers, Klinck spoke about the positive experiences that Goodhandy's has had in working with local police.

The conference drew a diverse audience and encouraged lively debate, but the atmosphere was one of respectful dialogue, offering participants new perspectives and insights. The sold-out event drew coverage from local media.

"I'm so pleased with the support we received from the rest of SDS," said Stratigacos following the conference. "The program, the professors, the students who were able to attend... You could feel the excitement in the air. This is just the beginning, because each year will get better and better."

See a video featuring highlights of the conference from *Xtra* reporter Michael Pihach at [tinyurl.com/sexwork](http://tinyurl.com/sexwork).



Reflecting on my year as Director at SDS, I am overwhelmed by how much has gone on at the Centre, and by the commitment from all of you who continue to make this such an exciting place to work. When I think that I was a Ph.D. student and a teaching assistant for our first SDS course when the program began as a Minor in 1998–99, it's amazing to see what we've accomplished.

We went from 20 students enrolled in the Minor to 100 students in total when we launched the Major in 2004–2005. We established the Centre for Sexual Diversity Studies in 2005, and named it after our major donor and long-time SDS friend, Mark S. Bonham, in 2006. And, as many of you know, in 2008, we launched the Graduate Pro-



Jason Krugier-Baum

## DIRECTOR'S LETTER

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gram (M.A. and Ph.D. — the first of its kind in Canada) and our undergraduate Specialist Program.

We now house about 140 undergraduate and almost 20 graduate students. We also have another 20 potential graduate students who are in-

terested in our collaborative degree and are awaiting news about their acceptance to U of T. Inquiries about the program are coming from around the world. And we now partner with 30 other graduate programs, making us one of the largest collaborative programs in the University.

Of course, being a cutting-edge program on the move is not without its challenges, given the current economic situation and the effects it has had on the University. What distinguishes our program — what David Rayside has always called “the little engine that could” — and our ability to roll with the punches has been the outstanding commitment of our donors, who include friends of the program, community members, faculty, U of T and

UC alum, and now, indeed, some SDS alum. Nothing we do here would be possible without that support, and our donors deserve extra-special thanks.

In this newsletter, we've highlighted a small fraction of the events we sponsor and the courses we fund. Visiting scholars and conferences allow our students to be exposed to rigorous academic scholarship. They give faculty and students opportunities to develop connections necessary for continued work in the field, and enhance their experience at SDS and U of T. I love what we've created here and what I continue to learn from those who mentored me, and those I now teach.

**Scott Rayter**  
*Acting Director  
Bonham Centre*

The Bonham Centre is pleased to congratulate the winners of this year's student awards:

### Patricia and Douglas Dadson Scholarship

Merike Andre-Barrett, Kirsten Heymann

### Sexual Diversity Studies Scholarship

Emma McKenna

### Rainbow Triangle Alumni Association Award

Tammy Sprung

### Emperor I Sergio Apolloni Memorial Scholarship

Stephanie Hjartarson

### Mark S. Bonham Scholarship

Jason Qu

### LGBTOUT Student Award

Athena Lam, Nikki Stratigacos

# New HIV/AIDS course offers 'more than just knowledge'

This term, SDS offered a new interdisciplinary course in the undergraduate program, made possible by an anonymous donation. Introduction to HIV/AIDS: Health, Sexuality and Gender (UNI 237) was created collaboratively by the Health Studies program and SDS, and was team-taught by a diverse group of instructors.

Mario Ostrowski (Immunology), an expert in the field, began the course with basic information about HIV/AIDS and what we have come to learn after three decades of the epidemic. Paul Hamel (Laboratory Medicine and Pathobi-

ology, and Director of Health Studies) examined the global political and economic forces that have led the epidemic to play out in the way it has, and the more general roles of socioeconomic factors in vulnerable health populations. Hamel also encouraged students to think critically about some of the work of “saviours” such as Bill and Melinda Gates and Bono, and what effect their efforts have had on the global political response to the epidemic.

Jennifer Levy, a postdoctoral fellow in medical anthropology who studies women with HIV/AIDS in Malawi, Kenya, and South Africa, began her sec-

tion of the course with an interrogation of “African AIDS” and how our understanding of Africa has been constructed in particular ways. She pointed to the root causes of the spread and devastation of HIV in Africa, linking it to gender, sexual, and racial politics, colonial history, and the economic policies of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

Scott Rayter, Acting Director of SDS, ended the course with some works that make us think about how we commemorate the dead and question representations of those with HIV/AIDS, from past to present. Examining the AIDS Me-

morial Quilt, video diaries by people living with HIV/AIDS, and cultural critiques that use humour and camp to challenge particular delineations of PHAs, students were asked to reflect on their own responsibilities as witnesses and agents of change.

Students in the course, who came from a range of disciplines, said they appreciated the breadth and rigour of the syllabus, as well as the team-teaching approach. “I have been deeply moved by the course material and will take away from it more than just knowledge,” said Health Studies specialist Andrew Leyland.





# A GENDER OUTLAW

‘D’on’t fuck anyone you wouldn’t want to be.” Words of wisdom from Kate Bornstein — author, playwright, and performance artist — during her appearance at University College in March. It was advice she’d received, she said, from an old woman on her deathbed, and it set up the theme of Bornstein’s talk. Questions of identity are central for the author of *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women and the Rest of Us* and *My Gender Workbook: How to Become a Real Man, a Real Woman, the Real You, or Something Else Entirely*.

Bornstein posed a few of those questions to the audience: “Am I a woman? Am I a man? Am I both?” And, most

importantly, “Do I look good in this outfit?” The line generated a laugh, but to Bornstein, who has been through several genders (male, female, tranny dyke) and survived decades of eating disorders, it was also a stark plea for acceptance and love that resonated with the room.

The title of the SDS-sponsored event was “Dangerous Dreams and Damned Desires,” and it was a very emotive affair. Audience members enthusiastically shared their dreams, wishes, and personal challenges, receiving advice and empathy from both Bornstein and fellow attendees. Even a request for a phone number was made public. Using her charm



During her talk at University College, Kate Bornstein deftly explained the way forms of oppression intersect.

Photo by zeebo

and Jewish shtick, Bornstein lit up the room.

A recent passion of Bornstein’s is suicide prevention, and this is the subject of her most recent book, *Hello, Cruel World: 101 Alternatives to Suicide for Teens, Freaks and Other Outlaws*. Her take: do whatever it is you have to do to make your life better. Instead of killing yourself, kill the version of yourself that is making you unhappy, and start again.

“Kate is not so much a queer

theorist as she is a sociological-psychological-sexual healer for every generation!” gushed SDS student Cinel Dwyer-Stone after the event. “I laughed, I cried, I hugged, I flirted. Not many better ways to spend an evening.”

Indeed, it was so much fun that there were still people lingering nearly an hour after Bornstein finished her performance. The author was still there, signing books, chatting, and doling out hugs.

## Taking stock of our schools

On Apr. 1, more than 150 people attended a panel discussion, co-sponsored by the Bonham Centre, called “School Safety for Whom? The Reality of Homophobic and Transphobic Violence in Canadian Schools.” Organized in response to Egale Canada’s first National Climate Survey on Homophobia and Transphobia in Canadian Schools, the panel focused on Ontario schools and how they can best respond to some of the issues highlighted in the survey results. The research was conducted by lead investigator Catherine Taylor (University of Winnipeg).

Former Bonham Centre Director David Rayside was in the audience. “What the sur-

vey revealed was what all of us anticipated: a disturbing level of harassment directed at lesbian and gay students, and an even more alarming pattern of exclusion directed at trans students,” he said. “The panellists displayed a range of vantage points, but all of them agreed that more proactive policy on school climate needed to be matched by supportive initiatives on the ground.”

SDS’s School Liaison Committee, headed by Jonathan Silin, worked closely with Egale Canada and its executive director, Helen Kennedy, as well as with the Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario, in planning the event. Other partners included the Centre for Urban

Schooling and Dept. of Theory and Policy Studies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE/UT), as well as several community agencies.

Opening remarks were provided by Lance McCready (OISE/UT) and Akim Larcher (Egale). The panel was moderated by Joe Flessa (OISE/UT).

The purpose of the evening was to look to the future, imagining new practices that would fulfill the goals of powerful equity policies already in place in our school boards. Panelist Tracey Peter (University of Manitoba) was co-investigator of the Egale survey, and its chief statistician. Among the other panellists was MPP Liz San-

dals, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Education and Chair of the Safe Schools Action Team. David Jason spoke from his perspective as a Grade 11 student in the Toronto District School Board’s Triangle Program. Teachers Amy Gottlieb and Jim Giles shared their experiences within the TDSB and the teachers’ federation. Rounding out the panel was Tara Goldstein (OISE/UT), whose research focuses on anti-homophobia and equity education.

The event was webcast live, allowing people around the world to participate through a chat room. A video of the panel will also be made available on YouTube.



# Profile: Alpen Razi

Master's student Alpen Razi suggests people take an SDS course to "find out for themselves how much they don't know about a subject that saturates so much of our existence."

His own introduction to sexuality studies was revelatory. It was in an SDS class that Razi first encountered postcolonial studies, an area that is now central to his work. The student is completing an M.A. in English, and has taken the introductory course with Mariana Valverde in the Bonham Centre's collaborative graduate program. This fall, Razi will begin a Ph.D. in English and Sexual Diversity Studies. His research focuses on the place of law and governance in

West Indian cultures throughout abolition and slave emancipation. He says both his SDS courses and English courses taught by SDS-affiliated instructors have been "astonishingly influential" in his academic path.

Outside the classroom, too, the Bonham Centre has been a home for this student. He calls it "a vibrant scholarly community that has been incredibly supportive in terms of intellectual and professional development."

Razi notes, "The folks here take the D in SDS very seriously." The program, he says, is unrivalled for "cross-disciplinarity and all-around big ideas."

Razi has taken full advantage

of opportunities to explore those ideas. One of his academic mentors, SDS and English professor Michael Cobb, calls Razi "creative, full of smarts, and brimming with a genuine desire to have classroom discussions and conversations go someplace challenging, new, and productive."

Another mentor, English professor Sara Salih, says she has often been "astounded by the fresh insights Alpen brings to texts I had assumed were familiar to me. This is surely every professor's dream, to be prompted into new thinking by the insightful, informed, and interested comments of a high-calibre student."



Jason Kryger-Baum

## We need your support!

To make a donation, or to discuss a planned gift to support the Bonham Centre for Sexual Diversity Studies and its students, contact

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## Q & A: Sara-Marni Hubbard

Sara-Marni Hubbard is a graduating student majoring in Sexual Diversity Studies and History, with an English minor. She has been the recipient of two SDS awards, and has also taken part in the University College mentorship program.

*What are your plans after you graduate?*

I'm going to grad school next year to do an M.A. in history at either Concordia or McGill. I see myself working in public health, immigrant health, and/or immigration, or continuing on in academia and pursuing a Ph.D. But I'm open to surprises.

*Why did you choose SDS? What impact has it had on your academic career?*

I feel like I didn't choose SDS but, rather, it chose me. I was taking classes that were cross-listed with SDS before I knew anything about the program. The classes very much spoke to my interests.

As far as how SDS has in-

fluenced my work, it has introduced me to areas that I didn't know were available for study in the academy. I remember reading Pat Califia's "The Surprise Party" in UNI 255 (History and Perspectives in Sexual Diversity) and thinking, wow, we can study really radical things in this field. Or listening to Prof. Scott Rayter's story about the "fruit machine" [a device developed to root out homosexual employees of the RCMP and civil service] and thinking, this stuff is a part of history that is overlooked by more traditional streams.

SDS helped me think beyond the typical academic topics and sparked my interest in pursuing understudied avenues of the history of sexuality. I have never felt boxed in by conservative constraints in SDS and that's totally informed my future work.

*Can you describe a memorable experience from your time in SDS?*

I took a great fourth-year seminar with Nick Matte called Race, Sex, Nation: The Body in 20th-Century America, which really helped to solidify my interests in public health and immigration. It gave me a foundation that I hope to build on in my grad work. And Nick is a fab teacher, very dedicated to helping his students improve.

*What would you tell someone about SDS if they knew nothing about the program?*

I would say go to the parties — they're always fun and the cheesecake is great. (I think I get invited to everything because I have really great party shoes.) I would also say that SDS is a community, and that many of the people involved with SDS are interested in helping students improve and are invested in their success. SDS has a network of really dedicated instructors and administrators, which makes U of T a less isolating place and provides a support and social network.



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