

**Center for Undergraduate Research and Scholarship (CURS)
CURS Grant Funding Final Report**

Faculty Member:	Dr. Seretha D. Williams, Associate Professor of English
Amount of Award:	\$467.73
Student(s) Involved (if any):	Melinda McKew
Specific Outcomes:	On March 26, 2011, Melinda McKew, student, and Seretha Williams, faculty, presented formal research papers at SEWSA, a regional Gender Studies conference held at Georgia State University. The panel's theme was <i>Local Grown Activism: What's at the Root of Reproductive Justice Resistance?</i>
<p>Discussion and Comments:</p> <p>McKew, a Women's Studies minor, was able to build upon earlier research she conducted as a student in Williams's Introduction to Women's Studies course. In the introduction course, McKew and another student developed a take-action plan to establish a Sexual Health Peer Resource Center on campus. In the conference paper, McKew outlines the obstacles she encountered in her attempt to effect change on a college campus. McKew will continue her research on reproductive justice during her graduate studies in the Women's Studies master's degree program at Georgia State University.</p> <p>The CURS award covered the costs of registration, travel, and food for the three day conference.</p>	

**Panel Theme:
Local Grown Activism: What's at the Root of Reproductive Justice Resistance?**

The goal of our panel, "Local Grown Activism: What's at the Root of Reproductive Justice Resistance?," is to describe our personal encounters with institutional resistance as reproductive justice advocates and to explore the factors that continue to impede real change at the local level. In the first paper, a student will discuss the ways in which religious conservatism shapes the policies and practices of campus administrators and student government. Another student will, then, address the ways in which morality and sexual health are linked together and how these erroneous links deny sexual healthcare to citizens in the Augusta, GA, community. Finally, a professor of Women's Studies will discuss the difficulties of teaching students to confront issues of reproductive injustice, and she will question whether academics can "teach" activism.

Paper 1: "Reproductive Justice and the Conservative Campus"

Using my experience as a student-activist at Augusta State University, I examine the institutional, cultural, and religious barriers that make enacting and participating in reproductive justice and feminist activism difficult and challenging at a conservative Southern university. In particular, I will use three of my student experiences to demonstrate how a conservative administration coupled with a seemingly large conservative Christian population renders student attempts at reproductive justice and feminist activism incredibly arduous. These three student experiences are as a member of the short-lived Students for Reproductive Rights, a student organization; as president and vice-president of the Women's Studies Student Association, another student organization; and my failure at establishing a Sexual Health Peer Resource Center, which was to be a student organization. By using the feminist mantra, "The local is the global, and the global is the local," I will show how my experiences with reproductive justice and feminist activism at Augusta State University are indicative of larger macro-level trends, whereby the rise of religious fundamentalism and the dominance of conservative politics negatively impact women's lives, especially women and men's access to reproductive health care.

Paper 2: "Get Your Legislative Hands off My Body Politics: Reproductive Health in Augusta, GA"

Many hindrances to women's reproductive health care can be attributed to an individual's cumulative experience- the intersection of race, class, gender, and other social factors. In my community, political initiatives regarding reproductive health inherently cling to the aforementioned prejudicial factors and, in many respects, are informed by Southern religious fundamentalism and Christian ideology. The community politics of Augusta, Georgia, rest on an intrinsic moral resistance to reproductive justice and reproductive health care. I extend this further to delineate a culture of religious and moral idealism that has infiltrated the very democratic process that inevitably privileges health-care law over human rights. Comprehensive reproductive health care policy in Georgia has been nearly eliminated by the scare tactics and moral propaganda of state representatives who push bills through state legislature to deny the population access to knowledge, sending them unprepared and uneducated into a sexual society. The consequences that arise from lack of proper health care are left unaddressed, condemned, or placed on the shoulders of Georgia's taxpayers. Augusta's population is left now desperately needing preventative methods and a more comprehensive education. In this paper, I use statistics obtained from local county boards of health and my own personal experiences with reproductive rights to substantiate my reading of the dichotomized pro-choice and pro-life organizations in the community. I will also discuss the implications of current policy and outline the need for comprehensive sex education and grassroots reproductive justice in the CSRA, and the need for further research on this topic.

Paper 3: "Taking Action: Considering Feminist Pedagogy and Local Practices in an Introduction to Women's Studies Course"

Beginning in 2008, I began teaching the Introduction to Women's Studies course at Augusta State University. Because the course is the only common course all Women's Studies minors take, the course must focus heavily on themes, trends, and theories. However, I wanted students to develop the ability to apply the information they read in our anthology to real world practices; I wanted the imaginary boundaries between the classroom and the community to dissolve and the students to effect change on campus and in the community. Thus, I developed a Take Action project around which the entire course would revolve. Students, individually or collectively, were to identify a social justice issue, devise a plan for addressing this problem, enact this plan, report the results to the class, and then write a reflective essay commenting on the experience. The groups who elected to collect canned goods, books, or coats for the economically challenged members of our society or who organized workshops on clinical depression met with great success at attaining their group goals. In contrast, the groups who elected to address reproductive health issues such as promoting safe sexual practices or raising awareness about the personal and social benefits of breastfeeding met with unexpected resistance and were, more often than not, unable to meet the goals of their project. In this paper, I will focus primarily on two student groups: one who intended to raise awareness about breastfeeding and to lobby the administration to provide facilities on campus for students to nurse babies or to express milk and the other who lobbied for a Sexual Health Peer Resource Center on campus. I use this project as a starting point for discussing the broader problem of "teaching" activism from the front of the classroom.