

# Pembroke Center Associates

## Newsletter

### Brown Women in Comedy



(L-R) : Lauren Corrao'83, P'16, Suzanne Whang SCM'86, Marin Hinkle'88, and Tara Schuster'o8

The Pembroke Center Associates commencement forum, “A Sense of Humor: Brown Women in Comedy,” offered the perspectives of alumnae working in comedy on how their personal experiences shaped their comedic voices and what it is like to be a woman working in the comedy business. Moderator Lauren Corrao'83, P'16, a member of the Women's Leadership Council, which co-sponsored the forum, framed the conversation. “You forget how rare it is to be a female in any industry these days, but as you will see throughout our discussions about women in comedy, we are still very much in the minority,” said Corrao.

Responding to a question about whether or not women are funny,

Marin Hinkle'88 recalled being in graduate school working on improvisation. “I would take every character that was given to me and make her incredibly noble and incredibly ethical,” said Hinkle. “When I got my first critique of my work, I had this great teacher, Paul Walker, and he said, ‘You have to learn not to be so Brown.’ And as you were all walking in, I had this moment where I thought, ‘Oh my God, I get to be really Brown today.’”

Discussing the challenges of not having more women in the industry, Suzanne Whang SCM'86 observed, “Here's the thing about statistics . . . those numbers don't resonate for me . . . Those numbers have nothing to do with who I am and what I create. If I believed in statistics, first

of all I wouldn't exist because I'm a stage four cancer survivor.” Whang added, “I'm a female, minority comedian living in Hollywood with no boobs, so I shouldn't be working ever, and yet I am—so I obviously don't care about those statistics.”

Hinkle recalled her first day walking onto the set of the television series, *Two and a Half Men*. Nine days before, she had given birth to her son by caesarian. She observed there were about ten writers, nine men and one woman. When she introduced herself, she said she had a nine-day old son. “I was really nervous and I apologized and said, ‘And by the way you guys, if my breasts get a little full, there may be a little leakage and I'm sorry.’

## Pembroke Center Associates Council

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## From the Director

Supporting student research is an essential part of the Pembroke Center's work. Each year, thanks to the generosity of the Associates, we present students from any discipline with research grants to pursue their intellectual passions and undertake complex research in support of honors theses and senior capstone projects. We also celebrate academic excellence with prizes for outstanding honors theses.

During Commencement weekend, the Pembroke Center asked our undergraduate research grant and prize recipients to make presentations about their research projects to the Pembroke Center Associates Council. We also invited their families for what is always an energizing event. This year we had the pleasure of hearing from six seniors:

- **Navarra Buxton'13, Anthropology**  
Steinhaus/Zisson Pembroke Center Research Grant  
*"Open Doors Case Study: The Effects of Pre- and Post- Release Employment Readiness Programs in the U.S. on Reducing Recidivism Rates among Women"*
- **Julia Ellis-Kahana'13, Sociology**  
Barbara Anton Internship Award  
*"Sailing a Social Movement into a Social Non-movement: A Case Study of Self-Empowerment for Safe Abortion in Morocco"*
- **Kenna Hawes'13, Community Health; Music Theory and Composition**  
Linda Pei Undergraduate Research Grant  
*"Restoring a Culture of Respect: Community Perspectives on Addressing Intimate Partner Violence on American Indian Reservations"*
- **Emma Janaskie'13, Modern Culture and Media**  
Ruth Simmons Prize in Gender and Women's Studies  
*"The Constant State of Desire: Thinking Sexual Specificity of the Abjected/Fluid Female Body with Kristeva and Irigaray"*
- **Sisa Mateo'13, Gender and Sexuality Studies**  
Joan Wallach Scott Prize  
*"Electra's Flesh: A New Life and a New Language for a Bruised Heroine"*
- **Catharine Savage'13, History; Gender and Sexuality Studies**  
Helen Terry MacLeod Research Grant  
*"The Personal Is Academic: Women's Studies and Ethnic Studies at Brown University"*

To read about the work of our prize recipients, please turn to page 4. We also feature the work of Sohini Kar, a graduate student from Anthropology, who received the Marie J. Langlois Dissertation Prize. We reported on our grant recipients in the Winter/Spring 2013 issue of this newsletter, which you can access on our website at [www.pembrokecenter.org](http://www.pembrokecenter.org).

Thank you for your membership support of the Pembroke Center Associates. You make it possible for us to support Brown student research.

Sincerely,



Kay B. Warren  
Director



Marin Hinkle'88 and Suzanne Whang SCM'86 share a laugh during the forum

There was . . . crickets. Now, that show has a lot to do with breasts, there is a lot of comedy to be done with that kind of stuff, with women and bodies. They did not find that funny. Breasts are not to be talked about in terms of leakage or breast-feeding. That was a moment in my insecurity when I realized I'm not in Kansas anymore and I'm in a different world."

"Risk taking is probably the most important thing you can do as a comedian and as a female comedian in particular," observed Tara Schuster'o8. "I was always really, really nervous to take a risk and only recently have seen that

you have to lean into your voice. Voice is the root of comedy, your point of view."

Whang spoke about what is necessary to take care of oneself in such a demanding industry and how her six-year battle with breast cancer changed her. "I had spent my entire adult life saving, fixing, rescuing, and being everyone else's mentor and superhero. So, all my arrows were pointing out. I was just giving until I collapsed." She explained, "As soon as I came out of the cancer closet . . . it was a tsunami of love. People didn't come resenting me. They showed up ecstatic to reciprocate. They said, 'You've been gypping us

out of half a friendship. When we're not doing well, you rush in and love us back to life and when you're not doing well, none of us know."

"I found out what I'm made of, but I found out that every single person that I thought was my friend was, and who gets to find that out?" asked Whang. "Ultimately, it made me a better person and I ended up seeing it as an incredible gift because I'm a lot happier and healthier than I was before I had cancer."

**To view the video of the program, please visit: [www.pembrokecenter.org](http://www.pembrokecenter.org)**

### **Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women**

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# 2013 Pembroke Center Prize Recipients



Established by President Ruth Simmons in 2008, this Pembroke Center prize recognizes an outstanding honors thesis related to women or gender. **Emma Janaskie'13**, a Modern Culture and Media concentrator, has received the honor this year.

Janaskie's thesis, titled "The Constant State of Desire: Thinking Sexual Specificity of the Abjected/ Fluid Female Body with Kristeva and Irigaray" explores feminist theory and the politics of aesthetics. Janaskie examines the work of feminist scholars Elizabeth Grosz, Julia Kristeva, and Luce Irigaray in order to develop a theoretical account of sexual difference, subjectivity, language, and the body. Janaskie turns to Karen Finley's performance art piece, *The Constant State of Desire*, in order to raise the question of women's self-representation and as an aesthetic example that dramatizes cultural representations of sexual violence and women's abjection. Her thesis aims to disrupt representations of the female body that denigrate it relative to the male body as well as those that presume a universal body unmarked by difference.



Named for Joan Wallach Scott, the founding director of the Pembroke Center and the Harold F. Linder Professor of Social Science at the Institute for Advanced Study, this prize honors an outstanding honors thesis in Gender and Sexuality Studies. **Sisa Mateo'13**, a double concentrator in Comparative Literature and Gender and Sexuality Studies, has received recognition this year for her honors thesis, "Elektra's Flesh: A New Life and a New Language for a Bruised Heroine."

Mateo produced a full-length theatrical script and a rehearsal blog and directed public performances of her play, *The Elektra Project(ion)*, which creates an alternative myth of female subjectivity. Her thesis uses her script and the work of cultural theorists to engage with the Greek myth of Electra and its subsequent traditions and rewritings in the modern West. Her thesis engages with the female body and cultural notions of femininity and seeks to find a language of gender and the body to explore the many writings of Electra.

Mateo will serve as a Teach for America corps member in the Mississippi Delta. After she completes her two-year teaching commitment, she hopes to pursue graduate work in Comparative Literature and Feminist Performance Studies.



The Pembroke Center annually awards the Marie J. Langlois Dissertation Prize for an outstanding dissertation in the area of feminist studies. The Pembroke Center has awarded the prize to **Sohini Kar**, a graduate student in Anthropology, for her dissertation, "Creditable Lives: Microfinance, Development, and Financial Risk in India."

Kar explores how microfinance lenders and borrowers negotiate the often-divergent ethics of financial sustainability and locally constituted obligations and relationships. Over the past decade, the rapidly growing for-profit (and highly profitable) microfinance sector in India has extended credit to the poorest populations under the auspices of the government's "financial inclusion" policy, aimed at inclusive growth. Kar examines credit as a site of encounter between global finance, state and institutional norms and regulations, and the situated everyday practices of the urban poor. She investigates the kinds of moral, ethical, and cultural norms financial institutions deploy to manage the risk of enfolded the poor into expanding financial networks, and how these practices produce new economic subjects.

Kar has accepted the position of Harvard College Fellow in the Department of Anthropology at Harvard University. The program selects "exceptional scholars who have recently completed their doctoral work and have demonstrated excellence in teaching."