

The Feminist Humanities Project (1997-2009)

Launched in the spring of 1997 and ending this year (June 2009), FHP was one of three major research initiatives of the Center for the Study of Women in Society (CSWS) at the University of Oregon. It grew out of the successful collaborative efforts of the CSWS Research Interest Group, Reclaiming the Past, and over the years morphed into the Wired Humanities Project (WHP), an initiative cooperatively supported by CSWS, the Office of the Vice President for Research, the Graduate School, and the College of Arts and Sciences. WHP is now a part of the Yamada Language Center.

FHP's founding faculty, Barbara Altmann, Louise Bishop, Zoe Borovsky, Clare Lees, and Regina Psaki, working closely with Judith Musick, defined the objectives of the Initiative to closely mirror those of CSWS – to support, generate, and disseminate humanities research on women and gender – and to apply emerging new technology to the effort.



Joined soon by Dan Gilfillan (our first Graduate Assistant), Jan Emerson, and Stephanie Wood, the group thrived, collaborations deepened, and ideas for projects, both individual and collective, grew.

Supporting Humanities Research on Women and Gender

Reclaiming the Past

Our goal was to support the literary and historical research of our faculty by exploring forums and methods for collaboration, application of new technologies,

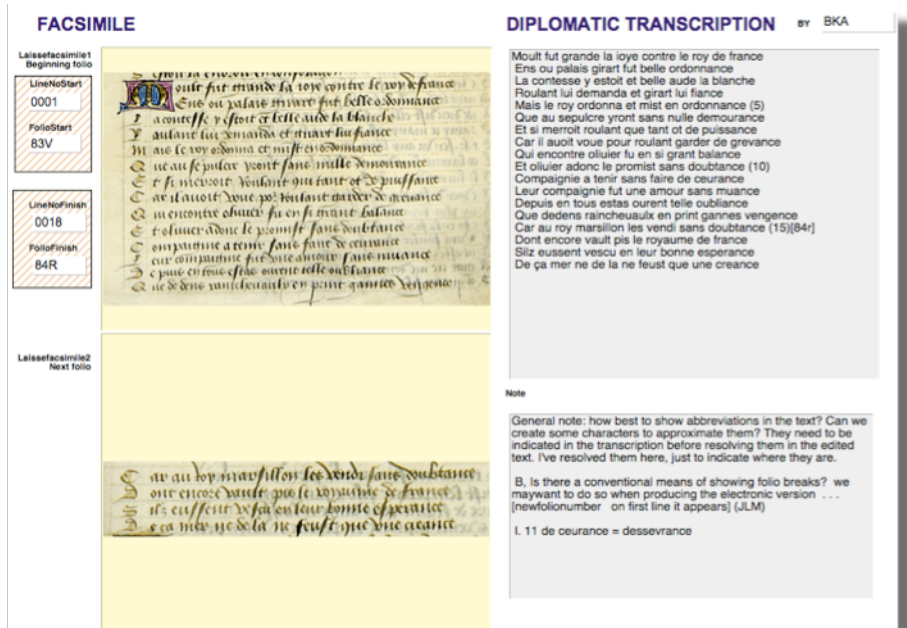
and expanding funding for conducting meaningful primary research on women and gender. Our core faculty, from Romance Language, Comparative Literature, English, Germanic Languages and Literatures, and History, had two areas of strength – Medieval Europe and Early Mesoamerica. They were bound together by shared commitments to collaboration and inter-disciplinarity, a delight in learning each other's vocabularies and perspectives, affection and humor.

The group traveled to England one summer to spend two weeks trolling the great libraries and museums of London and Oxford. Some were literally in tears when they first beheld <http://www.ouls.ox.ac.uk/bodley/library/rooms/dh> at Oxford. Enchantment gave way to complete engrossment as they gazed on old manuscripts that required their combined expertise in Greek, Latin, Old and Middle English, Old and Middle French, German, and Nahuatl to translate. Our rooms at Wadham College, Oxford, with their stone stairs deeply worn by thousands of students over hundred of years, were a comforting environment for our scholarly group. We spent each day on our own individual research and convened in the evening in our common room to share and discuss the discoveries of the day. Books, articles, presentations, websites, jobs, tenures, and promotions came out of this extraordinary field trip.

Generating Humanities Research on Women and Gender

Medieval Europe and Mesoamerica

While much of our preliminary work and even a fair amount of basic research was internally underwritten by CSWS and other units already mentioned, the objective was to generate long-term externally fundable projects that would support not only the individual scholar but also collaborating scholars, graduate students, and the infrastructure necessary to replicate success. Our content strengths were medieval Europe and early/colonial Mesoamerica, and both areas rely on the close reading of old manuscripts. Our parallel commitment to digital humanities made it possible to conceive and build such fundable projects and, with WHP's growth, to build tools such as virtual archives, distance online research environments, and digital editions. Projects we generated include the following:



The Electronic Galién, under the direction of Barbara Altmann, with Gina Psaki as its principal collaborator, this project is producing a digital scholarly edition of a Middle French manuscript, the only known copy of which is held at the University of Oregon. This account of the Monglane dynasty in a series of four epic texts is a clear statement of historical masculinity worthy of inspection and discussion. Working closely with the Knight Library, FHP/WHP has created an online database focused on each laisse (paragraph) of book four that shows a facsimile of the page, its transcripts, translations, and analysis. With two unsuccessful submissions to NEH for funding, Altmann plans on revising and re-submitting a grant proposal to take this project to its next stage.

The Gender in Early Mesoamerica Online Searchable Database (GEM) was our first exploration into the use of databases to atomize and analyze primary source content. By adding a feminist filter (themes and keywords that reveal gender relevant content), we created a platform for comparative analysis. If, for example, one searches for images and text that relate to “childbirth,” one finds a host of materials - some of which lead to surprising questions such as the relationship of “breast milk and warfare” in Aztec history.

Description: An Aztec or Nahua midwife massages a pregnant woman, apparently in preparation for childbirth in this image from the colonial, sixteenth-century Florentine Codex. The corresponding text discusses the interaction between the relatives of the expecting mother and the midwife, in arranging for her assistance. This scene may represent the laboring period rather than the actual birth because the reclining posture was not the usual indigenous woman's position for the final birth. If it is indeed a reclining birthing posture, it may be indicative of European influence.

Culture: Nahuas

Citation Information



The Virtual Mesoamerican Archive (VMA) is a portal web site for advancing research and teaching about Mesoamerica, 1800 B.C.E. to 1800 C.E. Although still primarily “self” funded, this archive of scholars’ biographies, repositories and collections, digitized material available on line, and online essays, scholarly websites, and learning objects is used by scholars, students, writers, and indigenous language speakers all over the globe. The VMA, an open site, grew out of our experience with GEM and the frustration of having to secure individual permissions for all materials included.

Digitized Materials

A portal to images of Mesoamerican cultural heritage materials, archeological sites, and manuscripts on the web.



Quick Search:

Advanced Search

Search for specific materials by type, origin or contributing institution.

SEARCH PAGE

“women”

RESULTS (partial)

Maya Vase Database, Kerr Number: 956
**FAMSI (Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican
Studies, Inc.)**

[Repository Profile](#) [More Info...](#)



Maya: Ceramic Figure, Woman with Book
State University of New York at Albany

[More Info...](#)



Maya: Clay figurine
**National Museum of the American Indian , Smithsonian
Institution**

[Repository Profile](#) [More Info...](#)



Maya: Female Figurine
**Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection , Harvard
University**

[Collection Profile](#) [Repository Profile](#) [More Info...](#)



Maya: Jaina Figure
State University of New York at Albany

[More Info...](#)



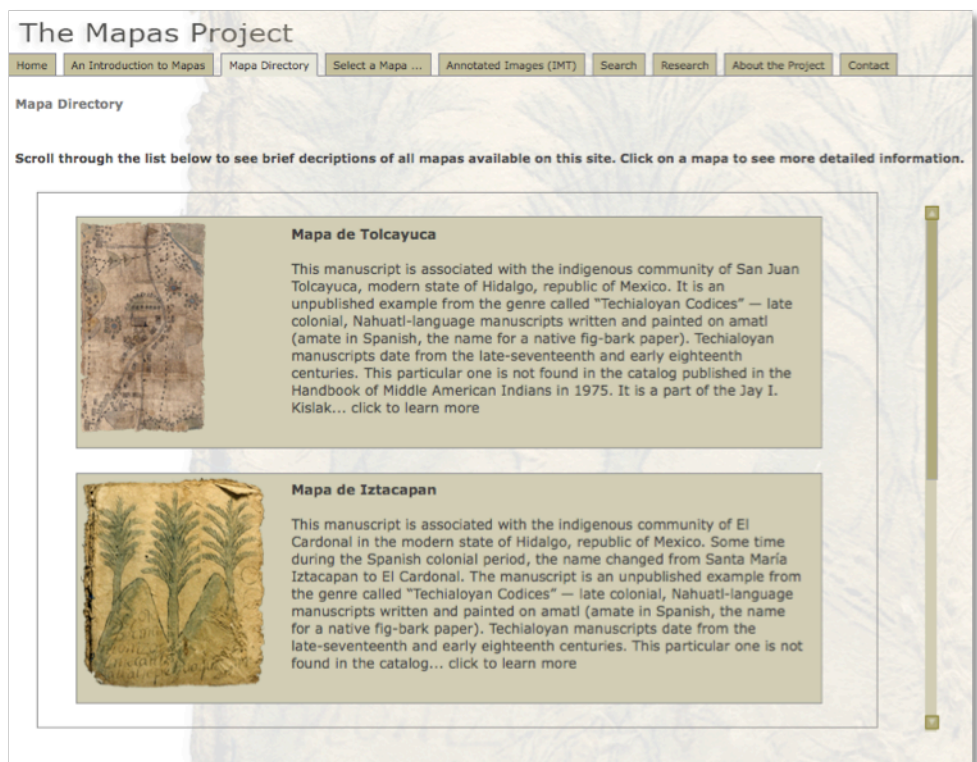
Maya: Jaina Figure
State University of New York at Albany

[More Info...](#)



The Mapas Project (add link), under the direction of Stephanie Wood (ethnohistorian) and Judith Musick (technology coordinator), the Mapas Project is a distance research environment for transcribing, translating, and analyzing colonial Mexican indigenous pictorial manuscripts. Once again, we were driven to collaborate with repositories, such as the Library of Congress, to digitize manuscripts so that we could isolate the details about women for advancing our research on Mesoamerican gender ideologies prior to and after European contact. The project received major funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities for two years beginning in 2006. The project has mounted and completed the analysis of four manuscripts and, with funding from a second grant (currently pending review), will soon upload an additional 10 to 15 manuscripts.

The Directory Page is scrollable and provides a description of each manuscript.



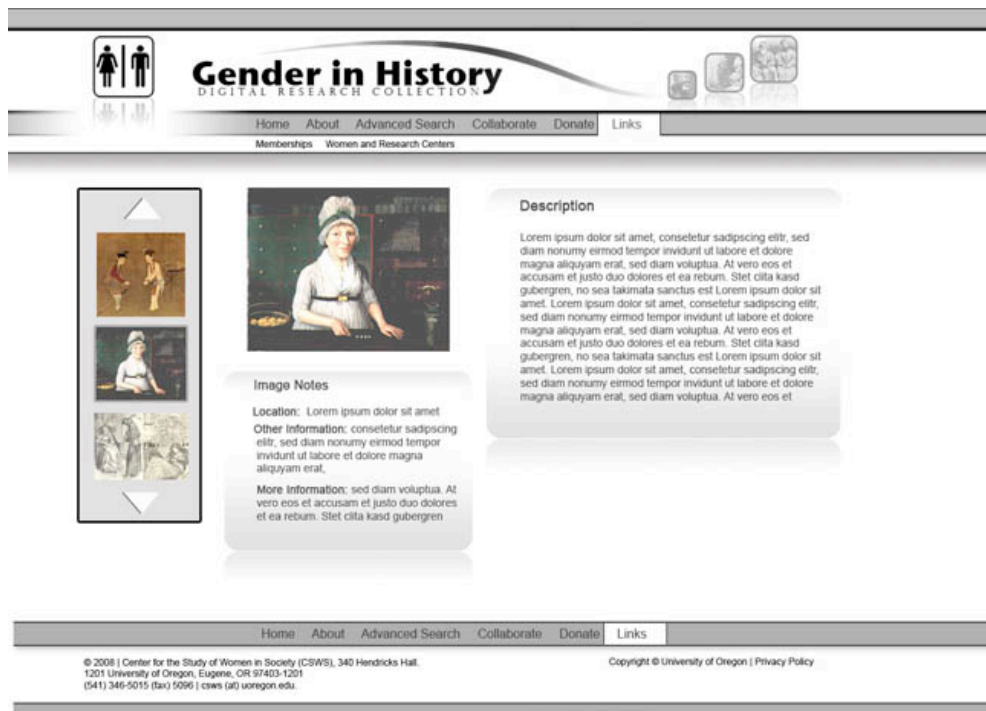
Each manuscript can be closely examined and every element, pictorial or textual, is translated and/or described. It is also possible to search across all mapas. Below is an illustration of partial results from a search on the term “women.” We have just completed a preliminary essay in which we extract and analyze all references to women in the first four manuscripts that we atomized for the Mapas Project. It is currently going through a peer review process and will soon be attached to our Research web page. This essay will be expanded once we have more manuscripts in the Mapas Project database.



The Online Nahuatl Vocabulary (add link) has just won funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Science Foundation for a three-year expansion and enhancement. We created this as a tool for facilitating manuscript translation. It is also a template that will be used for other indigenous languages of Mexico and the U.S. Northwest.



The Gender in History Digital Resources Collection (GENDHIST), not yet available on line, is a database begun in mid-2008 that employs an adapted version of the Distance Research Environment. It will incorporate the Image Markup Tool or Text-Image Linking Environment to annotate works of art that are being digitized in a cooperative effort between the AAA Library, the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, and Special Collections. We have a number of faculty working on selected images, drawing from Women's and Gender Studies, Art History, English, Romance Languages, and community volunteers. WHP staff have already begun design on the website, which appears in prototype below.



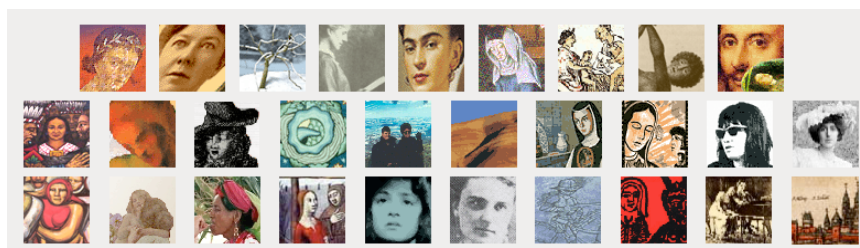
Dissemination: Humanities Research on Women and Gender

Teaching the Past in the Present

The objective of this project was and is to support the inclusion of the latest scholarly material on women and gender in history in the teaching of humanities at all levels of instruction with specific attention to grades 8 through 12 and lower division university courses. This multi-year collaboration of university and secondary school humanities teachers was launched with a highly successful conference in the fall of 1997. Parts of this initiative were the adoption of a scholarly journal, the creation of 29 digital teaching units, a team-taught course, and finally, a summer institute in 2008.

Medieval Feminist Forum. FHP hosted this professional journal of the Society of Medieval Feminist Scholarship for five years. Gina Psaki and Jan Emerson, FHP coordinator and, later, dissemination coordinator for CSWS, managed the journal while it was at the University of Oregon.

Gender in History Digital Teaching Units. Working closely with UO faculty and a handful of local high school teachers, FHP developed 29 Digital Teaching Units for Gender in History. WHP staff continues to work with some “DTU” faculty to update their sites for current courses.



Teaching and Tea

FHP hosted monthly meetings and periodic workshops on topics of gender in history, bringing together University faculty from our project with local middle- and high-school teachers. The monthly meeting became a vehicle for participants to create digital teaching units on their research topics and then to present a PowerPoint distillation of the unit for comment and discussion.



The Gender in History. This team-taught course was last offered in the fall of 2003, the fifth time it was taught. It was coordinated by Stephanie Wood and included up to 20 faculty members per term, each presenting on her own research. The course was enormously popular. It was first taught as a seminar with only ten students, two of whom were so inspired they stayed at UO for Masters degrees in history, and then the course was opened up with an enrollment cap of 40 and had no trouble filling.

Mesoamerican Cultures and their History, a summer institute funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities and taught in 2008, was the capstone of the Reclaiming the Past trajectory. Directed by WHP, this institute brought twenty-six schoolteachers and several lecturers from around the country to the UO to use and create digital teaching materials related to early Mesoamerica. Our emphasis was on technology and gender, with presentations on “Finding Women in Early Mesoamerican Cultural Heritage Materials,” “Rethinking Malinche as Malintzin,” and “The Virgin of Guadalupe as Tonantzin.”

