

***Iris* Turns 25**

by Ellen Barber

Since its photocopied beginnings as the Women's Studies Center newsletter, *Iris: A Journal About Women* has evolved into a magazine whose national readership makes it unique among student-produced publications. This year, *Iris* celebrates 25 years in print and positions itself to capture an even wider audience.

Gina Welch (Grad '04), the journal's coordinating editor, says the look of the semiannual publication "became much more 'zine-like" several years ago, when *Iris* shifted its focus toward young women. The journal's Spring 2005 "Milestones" issue, she says, officially "steps out as a magazine by having more color pages, more original artwork, more short departments, and stronger full-length articles."

But some aspects of the magazine have not changed. *Iris* still has "a commitment to reaching out to and widening the community of people who are actively working on creating a more equitable university, community, society," says Sharon Davie (Grad '69, '72), director of the Women's Center.

Founded in 1980 by Davie and Caroline Gebhard, then a doctoral student, *Iris* gradually began to include original poetry, graphics, and book reviews, and by 1983 had become "a journal by and about women." Today about 2,000 copies of each issue go to subscribers and national distributors.

The journal's content "has always been strong, honest, smart, and quite different from anything you'd find in mainstream magazines," says Welch. Even early on, *Iris* published pieces that garnered attention at a national level, winning praise from the *Chicago Tribune*, *Harper's*, and *Ms. Magazine*. And in 1993, *Iris* received the "Best in Virginia" award in the black-and-white magazine category. Subjects *Iris* has covered include scars, money, vampire movies, menopause, weight, feminism in primetime television, and Barbie's banishment from Iran.

Iris publishes nationally recognized writers and artists—such as feminist theorist Jennifer Baumgardner, scholar Margaret Stetz, cartoonist Linda Sherman, photographer Mary Motley Kalergis, and poet Gregory Orr—as well as students, faculty, alumni, and others. Recently published alumni include poet Sandra Beasley (Col '02), fiction writer Tara Yellen (Grad '03), and Danielle Pelfrey Duryea (Grad '98), whose essay “Reasonable Person: A Feminist Goes to Law School” appeared in the journal’s “Women in Action” issue.

Sponsored by the Women’s Center and the Studies in Women and Gender (SWAG) program, *Iris* receives additional support through subscriptions, grants, and gifts. Other schools and departments of the University support *Iris* by purchasing space in the journal to highlight their opportunities for women. And every year, the University Internship Program of the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service provides *Iris* with a business manager.

In 1998, the students who produce *Iris* gained a 3-credit course, SWAG 310/311: “Feminist Publishing and Scholarship,” which combines “rigorous academic work” with the “hands-on, A-to-Z putting together of this journal,” according to Davie. The magazine also has a Web site at <http://iris.virginia.edu>.

Now *Iris* is aiming for a bigger audience. A proposed three-year strategic plan would especially seek to involve alumni, both as major donors and as participants in the creation of the journal. By keeping its content fresh and incorporating professional graphic design, Welch believes, “*Iris* can be a staple read for progressive young women.”