By design, the WSRC is a vibrant and diverse community of interdisciplinary scholars from around the country and around the globe. Clearly devoted to not being provincial or US-centric, the WSRC believes that international engagement fosters an environment that empowers Scholars and others to become compassionate, global citizens. We also believe that the international backgrounds of the Scholars should be recognized, studied, and appreciated as a form of diversity, a factor that is sometimes overlooked when we think of diversity only in terms of three American racial/ethnic groups – white, African-American, and Hispanic.

As mentioned above, Scholars within the WSRC have created Study Groups that convene members with similar interests. Study Groups provide Scholars with forums for focused thought and action. One of the Study Groups, the World Cultures Study Group (WCSG), emerged out of the need to
communicate effectively about global experiences by facilitating the sharing of personal and cultural information with a focus on gender. Members of the WCSG are committed to understanding our globalized world and putting that understanding into practice.

Brandeis is rich in international resources. For example, on many occasions the members of the WCSG have partnered with the Gender Working Group (GWG) at the Heller School for Social Policy and Management and with the International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life. We also collaborate with the International Students and Scholars Office. Together we have created or supported each other’s speaker events. Our close cooperation has led to discussions of the global dimensions of gender, health and civic engagement. We welcomed undergraduate students who are part of Project Plus One at Brandeis University to share ground-level experiences in the Bairo Pite clinic in Timor Leste. Their efforts to mitigate health calamities in the community were supported by the Ethics Center, but they also presented their work to the WSRC.

Through our association with the GWG, we have been presented with opportunities to increase our understanding of projects supported by such organizations as the U.S. Peace Corps, Barakat, Cultural Survival. Sometimes Scholars are moved to work with them. Many collaborative projects such as participation in ‘Deis Impact and speaker events on female genital mutilation (V-Day) have ensued. Our partnerships are drawn from
Education, Anthropology, Black and Ethnic studies; History; Literature; Judaic and Middle Eastern Studies; Sociology and Women’s Studies. We provide what has come to be known as “a safe space” for conversations that question key social, economic, political and cultural transformations.

The World Cultures Study Group asserts that understanding the world’s myriad cultures enhances self-knowledge and increases awareness of one's own identity as a culturally and socially defined individual. As an example, the group explored “political borders” and the impact of humanitarian aid. The ensuing conversation drew from our experiences of Israel under Ottoman and then British rule; the partition of India; Trieste’s plight with separation from Yugoslavia; and Alsace, which shares more with Germany but remains a French town. We also focused on US immigration policy and shared concern for young, unaccompanied minors who cross the border from Mexico into the United States. These children’s vulnerability exposes them to exploitation by human traffickers on both sides of the border. Do we create borders because we want to create “others?”

Members of the group examine the essential connections between social values and practical policy. Our work is published in journals of the U.N. and other organizations that attract professionals in the field. For example, “Embedding Gender Resource Gap Differential in Planning to Address Issues of Access: Ownership, Safety, and Equality for the Urban Poor

Shivani Bhardwaj, Rajashree Ghosh, and Sunita Kotnala appears as chapter
7 in the U.N. publication, State of the Urban Poor Report 2015

Gender and Urban Poverty.

Defining violence against women as a crime against humanity, this subject is at the core of many of our research, art and activism projects. We invite external speakers who have in-depth knowledge and experience to share their research as well. An example was Vidya Sri’s superb presentation of the difference between “arranged marriage” and “forced marriage.” This speaker demonstrated that forced marriage exists in the U.S. as well as countries of South East Asia and Africa. Another speaker, Dustin Smith, spoke of the uphill task of working with civic bodies in India to eliminate violence against women in India.

On the other hand Brandeis faculty member Robert Lang’s efforts to change women’s lives in Tanzania by developing solar stoves was a positive lesson that we celebrated. Valentine Moghadam described women’s role in the Maghreb region and their participation in the Arab Spring. Islamic feminism, we learned is not a contradiction in terms but rather is thriving in Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria. (See table for a glance at the scope and work of WCSG)

By inviting multiple perspectives, the World Studies Culture Group integrates philosophies of inclusion, activism, coalition building, collaboration, listening and shared responsibility into its very model of operation. For example, every member convenes a meeting, leads a discussion and receives support
from the rest. This collegial atmosphere welcomes all Scholars at the WSRC and enables us to participate in focused conversations on women’s collective challenges and culture.