

**UCLA**

**CSW Update Newsletter**

**Title**

Q&A with Allison Carruth

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**Author**

Carruth, Allison

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Allison Carruth is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English at UCLA. Her fields of research and teaching include post-1945 American literature, contemporary fiction and new media, food studies, science and technology studies, globalization theory, and the environmental humanities.



# Q & A with Allison Carruth

**Professor Allison Carruth recently joined the faculty of the Department of English at UCLA. She is also an affiliated faculty member at the Center for the Study of Women and at the Institute of the Environment and Sustainability. Last year, she served as a respondent at CSW's "Life (Un)Ltd" symposium on May 11, 2012. She is currently working with CSW Interim Director Rachel Lee on organizing "The Politics of Seeds," a symposium that will take place on May 17, 2013. She kindly agreed to talk with us about her research and the upcoming symposium.**

*What drew you to UCLA?*

*I have long admired UCLA as a public research university that has cultivated a strong culture of cross-disciplinary research and teaching and that has particular strengths in both the humanities and environmental science / studies.*

*What classes will you be teaching?*

*I hope to teach a wide range of classes, from "post-1945 American Fiction" and "Literature and Science" to "Food Writing and Food Politics," "Art/Science and 21st-Century Environmentalism," and "Contemporary Environmental Literature and Media."*

*How did you get involved with CSW?*

*I was fortunate that Rachel Lee invited me to participate in last year's "Life (Un)Ltd" symposium as a respondent. The symposium was an intellectually exciting forum for re-thinking my own research on the literary and cultural history of industrial agriculture and on the contemporary food movements being developed through nonfiction, new media art practice, and environmental activism/policy. I was struck with how well the symposium brought together research on reproductive technologies and fertility politics with research on postindustrialism and environmental justice. I am delighted to be affiliated now with the Center*

**I think of the environmental humanities as a capacious field (comprised of historians, literature and new media scholars, philosophers, and art historians) that has opened up new areas of research on the profound importance of culture—and of cultural differences—in how societies define nature, understand particular ecosystems, and respond, both politically and scientifically, to environmental crises.**

*for the Study of Women and to be a participant in the “Life (Un)Ltd” research project, which are each pathbreaking in bridging work in the humanities, social sciences, and life sciences and, more specifically, in making gender studies and feminist theory central to both science and technology studies (STS) and environmental studies.*

*Environmental humanities is a relatively new field of study. How did you become interested in it? Why is it important that environmental humanities be interdisciplinary? Why is the Department of English at UCLA a good fit?*

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*has tremendous strengths in both literary history and a number of interdisciplinary fields (such as seventeenth- and eighteenth-century studies, postcolonial studies, and literature and science). Professors Elizabeth DeLoughrey and Rob Watson have been leaders in the fields of ecocriticism and the environmental humanities along with Ursula Heise, who joined the faculty this year. Both the international reputation of the department and the opportunity to work with three senior scholars in the environmental humanities make UCLA an ideal intellectual and professional home. I also am delighted to have the opportunity to affiliate with both the Institute of the Environment and Sustainability and the Institute for Society and Genetics.*

*Can you tell us about “The Politics of Seeds” symposium that you are organizing with Rachel Lee and CSW? How does it fit into the “Life (Un)Ltd” research project?*

*The “Politics of Seeds” symposium builds on two prior events I organized: a conference at UCSB in 2009 on “Food Sustainability and Food Security” and a conference at the University of Oregon in 2011 on “Food Justice: Community, Equity, Sustainability.” Taking our inspiration from a conversation at the “Life (Un)Ltd” symposium last year on the “corporate-owned seed,” “The Politics of*



UCLA CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF WOMEN  
presents

# THE POLITICS OF SEEDS

A SYMPOSIUM

FRIDAY **May 17**  
9 am to 5 pm • TBD



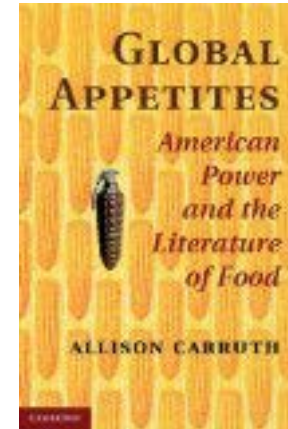
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the University of California Humanities Research Initiative,  
Institute of the Environment and Sustainability,  
Institute for Society & Genetics, Department of English  
and Dean Scheberg and the Division of Humanities

The multi-year “Life (Un)Ltd” project addresses the question of what impact recent developments in the biosciences and biotechnology have had on feminist studies. In this year, we are exploring the rich connections between food, ecology, propagation, and metabolism. On May 17, 2013, CSW will host “The Politics of Seeds,” a symposium that will address how gender, ethnicity, and race shaped contemporary cultural and political movements related to seeds. How has global climate in relation to economic and cultural crises affected food systems and place-based heirloom seeds? What sociological, ethnographic, and humanistic methodological tools have we integrated into the study of food culture and food politics and to what ends? To what extent has research by corporations and engineers redefined the ecology of seeds and how have political and artistic forms of resistance intervened?

**Taking our inspiration from a conversation at the “Life (Un)Ltd” symposium last year on the “corporate-owned seed,” “The Politics of Seeds” symposium aims to explore how particular communities of women as well as issues of gender and race have shaped contemporary social movements related to edible and medicinal seeds. In addition, we will discuss the opportunities and challenges that current seed development research (from the development of new GMOs to heritage wheat breeding) pose to agricultural communities around the world.**

*Seeds” symposium aims to explore how particular communities of women as well as issues of gender and race have shaped contemporary social movements related to edible and medicinal seeds. In addition, we will discuss the opportunities and challenges that current seed development research (from the development of new GMOs to heritage wheat breeding) pose to agricultural communities around the world. Finally, we will delve into the importance of cultural practices and traditions related to seeds, and we will compare political and artistic forms of response to seed patent laws, and GMO markets. Our speakers include scholars from anthropology, literature, gender studies, cultural geography, environmental studies, molecular biology, botany, crop and soil science as well as a small group of artists, policymakers, and activists. This event will highlight issues relevant to CSW and the “Life (Un)Ltd” research project in addressing current struggles to maintain cultural practices such as seed saving, medicinal plant harvesting, and community-supported agriculture in the face of the global markets in seed patents, commodity crops, and pharmaceuticals. Gender is central to this struggle for what scholars variously term “food sovereignty” and “food justice.”*



Your book, *Global Appetites: American Power and the Literature of Food*, is being published in March by Cambridge. Can you tell us about it?

*It explores how both industrial agriculture and countercultural food movements shape U.S. prosperity and power in the century since World War I. I develop this argument by focusing on a wide-ranging “literature of food,” a body of work that comprises literary realism, late modernism, and magical realism along with culinary writing, food memoir, and advertising. From Willa Cather’s 1913 novel *O Pioneers!* and Toni Morrison’s 1981 novel *Tar Baby* to Novella Carpenter’s 2009 nonfiction work *Farm City* and the playful bioart installations of the Center for Genomic Gastronomy, I make the case that American food power is central to the story of how globalization impacts regional cultures and ecosystems. The book aims to speak to scholars of American literature and culture as well as those working in the fields of food studies, agriculture history, science and technology studies, and the environmental humanities.*