WGS program hosts ‘Pop-up Panel’ on political correctness
For the first time this semester, the women's, gender, and sexuality studies program hosted one of their ‘Pop-up Panels.’ The panelist/audience discussions address topics of a divisive and polarizing variety in a format that is open to the student body. The hour-long event, which began at noon on Wednesday in the Memorial Union’s Bangor Room, discussed the concept of ‘political correctness’ and the connotations it often evokes.

Susan Gardner, chair of the women's, gender, and sexuality studies program acted as the event’s moderator and worked to facilitate a discussion that, in her words, would allow attendees to ‘hear lots of different perspectives, understand them better, and recognize that there can be a diversity of thought and perspective without the desire to change anyone’s mind or make anyone feel guilty about their perspectives.’ Certain guidelines were set by Gardner to keep the event’s conversation respectful and constructive at all times.

Among the four panelists were: Amy Fried, chair of the department of political science, Paul Grosswiler of the department of communication and journalism, Anila Karunakar, UMaine’s director of diversity and inclusion, and Miranda Snyder, a third-year student who serves as co-chair of the university’s Feminist Collective. Each of the four was chosen to “represent diverse viewpoints on the topic,” Gardner explained.

The ideas of free speech and censorship were raised by each panelist, to differing effects. Fried remembered the first time she heard the term ‘political correctness,’ and acknowledged that while it was once used as an affectionate term for rather rigid, by-the-book people, it is now often used in a derisive and insulting manner. The importance of free speech, she argued, is nevertheless paramount in university and college environments, even for the kinds of speech that are universally viewed as contemptible.

Karunakar, in her comments, explained that it is natural for language to change and that although some people may not enjoy it, unlearning something that is incorrect does not need to be difficult or painful. She further stated that people should want to improve themselves in their use of language, just as they do in other areas.

Snyder, who is studying secondary education specializing in English, has plans to become a high school English teacher. She expressed her view that teaching can be a form of activism, and that through regular exposure, adolescents will be less averse to concepts and ideas that others may find threatening or ridiculous.

“I feel very fortunate to have been invited to be a part of the panel,” Snyder said. "It was a pleasure to hear all the panelists' unique thoughts on political correctness and get a heightened sense of where my opinions fit into the larger conversation. It is necessary for people to recognize all their discomforts.”

Like his colleague, Fried, Grosswiler acknowledged the extreme division in political thought that is now visible on college campuses. He also echoed the argument that an increase of speech, not a reduction, is the best way to combat the vulgar and hateful types which are often heard in society, and which he had been subjected to throughout his career.

“The university's College Republicans club, which had been invited by the women's, gender, and sexuality studies program to several of their Pop-up Panels last year, was not invited to Wednesday's event. The group declined to discuss the event in detail with the Maine Campus.
Elena Maturo of Orono, 19, was found to be in possession …