

WOMEN'S CENTER ANNUAL REPORT 2002-2003
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The mission of the Women's Center is to educate, advocate, and provide support services for the achievement of women's equity at the University and within the community at large. Special attention is focused on, but not limited to, women who face additional challenges due to their race, ethnicity, socio-economic class, sexual identity, religion, age, and physical or mental ability. This mission is accomplished through the major components of the Women's Center: Educational Programming/Cultural Events, Advocacy, Support Groups/Services, and the Violence Against Women Prevention Program.

This year we had approximately 25 students on staff that were work-study, student labor, interns, or volunteers. The student staff is a diverse group of mostly undergraduate students representing a variety of majors and semester standing. This year we implemented a new employee evaluation with the student staff, which provided them an opportunity to assess their own accomplishments and areas of improvement, to provide feedback to the supervising full-time staff, and to make suggestions to improve the work of the Center.

In addition, our Advisory Board continued to remain active through their work on the various sub-committees, including Diversity, Recruitment and Retention, Programming, Strategic Planning, and the 100 Years of Women Scholarship. The Board consists of students, staff, and faculty from a variety of disciplines, as well as racial, ethnic, sexual orientation, and gender identities. This year our Advisory Board approved a revised Constitution, which reorganized the structure of the Board and outlined processes for board decision-making.

Again this year we held both a staff and an Advisory Board retreat in the Fall. Our student staff met to explore feminist activism, to discuss issues of diversity and appropriate responses to survivors of violence against women. Our Board met to approve the Constitution, to begin work on the guiding principles, and to discuss the Women's Center role in the Diversity Strategic Plan with the Vice Provost of Multicultural and International Affairs. During the year, our monthly student staff meetings became an opportunity to meet new administrators on campus, to spend time at each of the other cultural centers, and to discuss current issues on campus, such as the Diversity Strategic Plan and the UConn Creed.

Both our Advisory Board and student staff contributed to the development of a set of guiding principles for the Women's Center. These principles will help guide the day-to-day operations and interactions of the Center. The guiding principles are as follows:

The Women's Center strives to:

- Support the empowerment of all women through action and example.
- Promote a feminist* perspective and celebrate differences within and amongst all.
- Provide a safe and welcoming space, maintaining open mindedness and showing respect for all in times of crisis as well as in day-to-day interactions.
- Educate the UConn community and the community at large about all forms of oppression by way of community organizing, interaction and education.
- Affect global change through local actions and programs.

*Feminism is the belief that all women have the right to control their bodies and destinies; the right to live a life free of violence and abuse; the right to equal protection under the law, including equal access to education, employment, and power.

This year was again a year of accolades for the Women's Center. In September we officially recognized our 30th anniversary with a reception that was attended by many past and current

friends, staff, and students of the Center. Also in September, the Director received the 2002 Sneha Award for her ongoing mentoring and support of the activities of Sneha, a network of South Asian Women in Connecticut. Again this April, one of our undergraduate student staff received the Sybil Ludington Young Feminist Award from Connecticut NOW. This year's recipient Natasha Smith was honored for her work at the Center and in the University community on women's reproductive rights and issues of violence against women.

Also in April, five members of the student staff were recognized at the Student Life Awards:
Ahadu Chernet - Martha and Albert Cohen Scholarship
Valencia Louis for the UConn V-Day Campaign - Student Organization Advocacy Award
Michelle Noehren - Individual Community Service Award
Shanté Powers – Donald L. McCullough Leadership Award
Meredith Williams - Spirer/Deuker Student Humanitarian Achievement Award

In May, two of the above students were also recognized at the Women's Studies Graduation Party:
Michelle Noehren – Chase Going Woodhouse Prize
Natasha Smith – Gladys Tantaquidgeon Award

EDUCATION

This year we saw 11,765 participants attend the 209 education programs sponsored by the Center. The programs included films, workshops, trainings, lectures, and a variety of cultural events for which the Women's Center was either the primary sponsor or a co-sponsor.

This year we initiated five new educational programs as follows:

1) Jewish Women in Film Series

A collaboration with Hillel and the Rainbow Center. We screened a variety of films that examined the intersection of cultural, gender, and sexual orientation identities in Jewish women. Films included *A Biography of Lilith*, *Fresh Blood*, and *Kissing Jessica Stein*.

2) Life Balance Series

A collaboration with Student Health Services. This series is an opportunity for faculty, staff, and students to learn methods for dealing with stress to help enhance their academic and professional success. Topics included Massage, Reiki, and Aromatherapy.

3) *Last Chance for Eden* with Lee Mun Wah

A collaboration with the First Year Experience Program and the African-American Cultural Center, the Asian American Cultural Center, the Puerto-Rican/Latin American Cultural Center, and the Rainbow Center. In this program award-winning director Lee Mun Wah presented a workshop about his film *Last Chance for Eden*, an electrifying conversation about the pain and anguish of racism and sexism on individuals and their families.

4) 16th Annual Women's Health Update-Women's Moods

A collaboration with the School of Nursing and CIGNA. This program brought in experts in the areas of post-partum depression, stress and hormones, and women's humor. 225 participants from across the state attended this event.

5) Powerful Sisters: Black Women Moving from the Margins

A collaboration with the African American Studies Institute. This one-credit INTD course explored the herstories of women of African descent who have made their mark on history by succeeding in fields traditionally dominated by men. Twenty students enrolled in and

completed the course in Spring 2003. We hosted guest lectures by scholars and community activists, including Dr. Carolyn Denard, Joyce Hamilton, Dr. Deborah Muirhead, and Dr. Evelyn Simien.

In addition to these new programs, we continued to offer our annual programs that included: **Brown Bag Lunches** – This program was designed to give staff and faculty an opportunity to discuss current topics around issues of balancing work and family life. These included talking to teens.

Eating Disorders Awareness - In October, we co-sponsored programming in recognition of **Love Your Body Day**, a national day of action to speak out against ads and images of women that are offensive, harmful, dangerous, and disrespectful. In February, we distributed informational pamphlets and other resources during the annual Eating Disorders Awareness Week.

Thursday Night at the Movies – This monthly series was established as an attempt to offer students, particularly first year students, an alternative to the typical Thursday night extra-curricular activities. We showed a variety of films, which explored issues of women in music, definitions of gender, the achievements of African American women in the arts, the current state of feminism, and sexual assault.

The Vagina Monologues – A collaboration with SUBOG and UConn V-Day. As part of the national V-Day College Campaign, we organized the annual production of this play. In its second year, we held two performances with attendances of 430 and 450, respectively, and raised over \$8,500 for local charities. As mentioned above, the UConn V-Day Campaign received the 2003 Student Organization Advocacy Award at the Student Life Awards.

Annual Outstanding Academic Achievement Awards Ceremony – Again we honored, in collaboration with the Chancellor's Commission on the Status of Women, the highest-ranking female graduating seniors from each of the University's schools and colleges. We also recognized the two recipients of the 100 Years of Women Scholarship, an incoming first year student and an undergraduate student who have served as strong role models for young women in their home communities.

11th Annual Women's Advance Conference – This year's conference was entitled "UConn Women: Making Their Way in the World" and was held at the Hole in the Wall Gang Camp in Ashford. The day's highlights included a keynote by Patrice Gaines, an award-winning journalist, former Washington Post reporter, and author of *Laughing in the Dark: From Colored Girl to Woman of Color – A Journey From Prison to Power* and the inspirational *Moments of Grace - Meeting The Challenge To Change*. Also, we highlighted the talents and knowledge of University's female staff and faculty who presented workshops and exhibits on their areas of expertise.

Arts/Cultural Events - We worked with Campus Activities and the other cultural centers to hold the third **Cultural Explosion**, held during Husky WOW. We again hosted a section of the Connecticut Women's Hall of Fame, in addition to disseminating information about women's issues and events on campus. In the Spring, we co-sponsored the 4th annual International Women's Day Festival, along with SUBOG and the other cultural centers. During the afternoon of March 8th, a variety of performances occurred in the Student Union, including a UConn International Performance Showcase, including belly dancing, traditional Chinese instruments, and Irish dancers; *The Hunt* with Aparna Sindhoor, a dance theater piece based on MahaShweta Devi's short story 'The Hunt' about a tribal Indian woman and her fight against patriarchy and oppression; and a Poetry Slam with Alix Olson. Concurrently we held a Women's Herstory Month Poster Exhibit and *Women Telling Stories - A Screening of Films By and About Women*.

Collaborations with Other University Departments –Throughout the year we worked with students from Lambda Alpha Theta Latin Sorority Inc. and Mu Sigma Upsilon, a multicultural sorority, to participate and co-sponsor events such as R.A.C.E. – Recognizing and Celebrating Ethnicities, an Open Forum on Race and Gender, and a panel discussion on feminism. We continued to work with staff from the First Year Programs and Orientation Services, both in Undergraduate Education and Instruction, to incorporate information on diversity, gender, and violence against women issues into the syllabi for the FYE course, as well as the templates on WebCT.

Members of the Women's Center staff continued to speak to a number of classes and on-campus groups on issues of gender roles, sexual harassment, and issues of violence against women. Some examples of this year's engagements include 30 sections of the FYE classes, the Residential Life staff, the Departments of History and Modern and Classical Languages, and the School of Family Studies. We also provided sexual harassment prevention workshops to corporate and community organizations, including the Windsor Police Department, the Hastings Hotel, and Catholic Family Charities.

ADVOCACY

This year the Women's Center focused our on-going advocacy efforts in four major areas: access to childcare; mentoring for staff and faculty; responding to sexist advertising and flyers on campus and to incidents of racism and homophobia on campus; and enhancing the University's response to violence against women on campus.

Childcare – The Women's Center's staff and Advisory Board members continued to work with UCPEA, AAUP, and AFCSME to follow-up on the Childcare Feasibility study, which was conducted by Bright Horizons. Inc. This ad hoc coalition discussed strategies for keeping this on the University's agenda for facilities and funding priorities. As a result of this advocacy, the Chancellor established the Childcare Implementation Committee, and several members of the ad hoc group sit on this committee.

Mentoring – The Diversity Committee of our Advisory Board continued to host the Women of Color luncheon and the annual Women of Color Recognition Banquet. This committee is also creating a resource guide for women of color to learn about available on-campus and community-based resources. In addition, our Recruitment and Retention Committee of our Advisory Board has been working to develop a web-based mentoring site through which new female staff and faculty could search for and contact staff and faculty who have volunteered to serve as mentors. Representatives from this committee met with staff from UITS to discuss the design and maintenance of such a site. This project has now been folded in as one of the recommendations of the Mentoring Task Force, which was convened by OMIA this past spring. Staff from the Center provided technical assistance in the membership and charge of this Task Force and also served as an active participant. Staff from the Center also provides mentoring to students by serving as facilitators in the UConn Connects Program and teaching a section of the INTD 180 course.

Responding to Incidents of Sexism, Racism, and Homophobia – The Women's Center staff worked with students and staff throughout the University to address communications and behaviors that contribute to creating a hostile environment on our campus. Specifically, the Center worked with the other cultural centers to establish the Cultural Center Council (CCC). The CCC consists of representatives of the student staffs of each of the cultural centers. The purpose of the CCC is to create bridges across the various identity groups and to formulate proactive strategies for addressing sexism, racism, and homophobia on campus. In addition to

supporting the CCC, staff from the Center met with members of Sister-To-Sister, a discussion group for African American women, to discuss strategies for addressing barriers to accessing the Escort Service.

Response to Violence Against Women on Campus – This year we continued to train students as peer educators on issues of sexual assault, dating violence, sexual harassment, and images of women in the media. Students enrolled in Women’s Studies 271 and 272, the training mechanism for VAWPP, learned information on issues of violence against women, facilitation skills, and working with participants from diverse communities. In addition to conducting sessions in the residence halls and FYE classes, these students also facilitated a mandatory session for all incoming first year students during Summer Orientation. VAWPP also sponsored, in conjunction with several departments across campus, educational programs recognizing Domestic Violence Awareness Month and Sexual Assault Awareness Month. Approximately 4,047 participants attended the 125 educational sessions and awareness events sponsored by VAWPP this year.

We also worked as part of the Community Response Team (CRT) to provide services to survivors of sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking. The work of the CRT was particularly important this year, in light of several highly publicized sexual assaults on campus and the release of John Urban, a convicted sex offender who was arrested on the UConn campus. Additionally, staff from the Center collaborated with staff from the Dean of Students Office to finalize the Sexual and Relationship Misconduct Statement, which includes information about forms of violence against women, a definition of consent, and information about resources available on and off campus. The Center and the Dean of Students staff also met to discuss training issues for hearing officers in sexual assault complaints. We also met with staff from the Student Health Services to discuss protocols for providing services to survivors of violence against women during the summer when the Women’s Clinic will be closed. We again saw a consistent increase in the number of reported incidents, thereby increasing the number of services we provided to survivors.

In October 2001, we received a second round of funding (\$399,851) from the Department of Justice to continue our work on specific projects through December of 2003. We continued to work with the Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc. (CONNSACS) to establish and enhance Community Response Teams on 10 campuses throughout the state. Staff from the Center regularly attended the Connecticut Consortium for the Prevention of Sexual Assault to share information about programs piloted on the UConn campus. Some of those projects included:

- 1) Conducting focus groups with students from underserved populations on campus. We trained student leaders in the African American, Asian/Asian American, L/G/B/T, International, Puerto Rican/Latino/a, and non-traditional student communities to facilitate these focus groups. The intent was to gather information about the perceptions of and barriers to accessing services and educational activities regarding sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking. Three focus groups have been completed to date. In conjunction with these efforts, in April, the Center hosted a satellite broadcast of the CDC’s Public Health Training, entitled *Sexual Violence Prevention: Building Leadership and Commitment to Underserved Communities*.
- 2) Enhancing the Men Against Violence Against Women Program (MAVAW) to include issues of dating violence and stalking. We conducted training in the Fall for male peer educators. This group was responsible for organizing the Men’s March Against Domestic Violence in October and the White Ribbon Campaign in conjunction with *The Vagina Monologues*. We also sponsored a two-day visit by David Sloan Rider, from Men

- Can Stop Rape, who conducted a one-day training for MAVAW members and interested men from the community, a half-day training for youth-serving professionals, and a presentation entitled *The Power of Words: Strategies for Changing a Rape Culture*.
- 3) Designing training for Women's Studies faculty to identify and respond more effectively to students' disclosures. In collaboration with staff from WeCONNECT, Inc., the local rape crisis center, we designed a four-hour curriculum to address identifying sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking, how to make appropriate referrals, and resources available on and off campus. This training will be conducted in the Fall of 2003.

SUPPORT GROUPS AND SERVICES

Support services at the Women's Center consist of:

- *crisis intervention* - short-term individual counseling to anyone experiencing issues related to sexual harassment, sexual assault, relationship violence, or discrimination. Advocacy services may be a result of crisis counseling.
- *information and referrals* - the Center maintains a database of legal, medical, counseling, childcare, and other social service and feminist resources. The database consists mostly of providers from Northeast Connecticut, however services throughout Connecticut are also included.
- *discussion/support groups* - these groups vary every semester. Some function as support groups, psycho-educational groups, or discussion groups. This year we continued to provide the Women's Book Club, and Between Women. We also established a Caregivers of the Elderly support group, which was facilitated by a graduate student in the School of Human Development and Family Studies.

OUTREACH

The following are some of the outreach activities conducted by staff, which are not included in our service or program attendance statistics:

- ◆ Served as a drop-off site for the children's book drive for the Hispanic Health Center
- ◆ Provided books and resource materials on the impact of war on Afghan women from our Library for the Office of International Affairs' conference *Afghanistan Reconstruction and Reconciliation Rebuilding a Nation*
- ◆ Met with representatives from University of Fort Hare to discuss strategies for enhancing gender equity in the workplace
- ◆ Midnight Breakfast Volunteer
- ◆ Staffed a table at the Human Services Fair
- ◆ Staffed a table at all of the sessions during the Parent Orientation Resource Fair
- ◆ Staffed a table at the Graduate Student Resource Fair

- ◆ Staffed a table at the Student Job Fair
- ◆ Staffed a table at the Student Health Fair
- ◆ Staffed a booth at the Admissions Open House Resource Fair

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