

University of Connecticut Women's Center

# Voices

## LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Kathleen Holgerson



Welcome to the first newsletter of 2010. So much has happened in the past semester. In this edition of *Voices* we are hoping to catch you up on the events and activities that have kept our staff busy since you last heard from us. I do want to take a moment to share with you some thoughts about some of the critical incidents that have affected our community since we last connected.

Last Fall, our community struggled with the aftermath of the death of Jasper Howard, the young man who was stabbed to death on the Storrs campus. At the Women's Center, our reaction and discussions were encircled by the fact that we had just been actively involved in all facets of the 2009 University Metanoia on Preventing Violence Against Women. An example of the dissonance that we experienced in that month... The night of the candlelight vigil for Jasper Howard, I was driving home, and I heard a promotion for a show that was to be aired the next day on a local radio station. In that promotion, the commentator talked about how given the recent incidents of violence on Connecticut campuses they would be exploring the questions of what

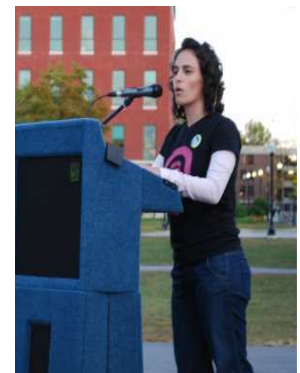
responsibility do colleges and universities have to keep students safe, and to parents to keep their kids safe, and what should we expect from campus security and police. And I said out loud, to no one, "REALLY?"

I can't help but be struck by the juxtaposition of the question to a week full of activities and events that focused on how do we **prevent** violence against women. (For more information about the Metanoia, visit <http://www.metanoia.uconn.edu>). Metanoia is a University of Connecticut tradition in which the community comes together to focus our attention, through critical dialogue and reflection, on an issue that is significantly impacting the campus. In the Fall of 2009, after the What Will You Do? Rally, a group of students answered that question by



*Students gather to pay their respects to Jasper Howard*

lobbying the administration for a Metanoia on the issue. They were clear it needed to be a University-wide event; it needed support from all levels of the institution; and it had to focus on **prevention**. This Metanoia was also significant in that it coincided with the 30 year anniversary of the 1979 Metanoia on Violence in Our Community. The Metanoia Planning Committee consisted of students, staff, faculty, and community members from across the UConn campuses. The week consisted of events that examined how we can learn from the past; provided space and voice to speak out about the issue; named the connections between violence against women and violence against communities of color; engaged student leaders in discussion about their role as active bystanders; and made a call to men to step up and step out of the "man box."



*Former Women's Center staff member, Brittany Florio speaking at the "What Will You Do? Rally"*

And two weeks later, a young man is stabbed to death on our campus. And the conversation here and across the state sounds something like – "how could this have happened here?" Why is it we can spend a week focused on preventing violence and then ask, but how did this happen here? How is it that folks can ask during the Metanoia "Is this really relevant to our classes?" When will it take something short of tragedy that hits the news to get us to stop keeping the epidemic of violence at arm's length?

*(continued on page 3)*



As the project leader (pictured above), Alison Berk, so eloquently quoted Gloria Steinem at the opening of 2009's Take Back the Night: "The truth shall set you free. But first it will piss you off." That's definitely one way of putting it.

In 2009, as a member of the Women's Center staff, I took part in my first Take Back the Night, a tradition that has empowered survivors, supporters, allies, and advocates against sexual violence around the world since 1976. At first, I thought I would only be observing the event, and helping my coworkers where they needed it, as this is a major spring event for the Violence Against Women Prevention Program (VAWPP), the Women's Center, and the community. I thought that maybe I'd pass out flyers and set up chairs. Maybe I'd take notes so I could write this article. That would probably be it. I couldn't have been more wrong.

Through a whirlwind of picket signs, chants, and tears, I learned what hid in the cracks of silence: the reality that grasped to the words of survivors, the honesty that marched with us through the dark April rain. I saw the veracity dancing in the radiance of every candle, hundreds coming together to light up pieces of the night. I recognized the harsh truth of violence, and I broke free from the chains of conforming calm. To say I was worried is wrong; to say I was concerned is an

## Take Back The Night

### Shatter the Silence and Stop the Violence

understatement. I have to once again quote Gloria Steinem and say I was pissed off.

As anyone should be. In VAWPP we share the startling statistics that on a college campus, 1 in 4 women will experience some form of sexual violence; outside of a campus, 1 in 5 women. According to the FBI's 2008 Hate Crime Statistics, 1,617 hate crimes stemming from sexual orientation were reported in the United States. And those are just the few that were reported. Across college campuses, high schools, on the news, television, and from the advice of loved ones, women are taught that it is *our responsibility* to protect ourselves. We need to walk in groups at night. We should carry our keys in a balled fist with our cell phone fully charged in the other. We shouldn't wear revealing clothing if we're going to be walking past dusk. If *we have to* walk at night alone, we should wear baggy clothes and sneakers. We should constantly be prepared for the worst and hope for the best. In other words, we should fear the night.

What pisses me off is the fact that people are attempting to mask a monster with pepper spray and rape whistles. They are trying to shift the focus from the guilt of the perpetrator to the responsibility of potential victims. The majority of society tells women to fear the unknown, that asylum from sexual assault exists in physical preparation from the "dangerous" situations we put *ourselves* in (dangerous, meaning: walking alone at night, drinking too much at a party, wearing revealing clothing, etc). It is believed that if women can just follow simple guidelines, the amounts of rape will be reduced. This rationale says that rape and sexual assault in itself will not be abolished, but at least the numbers will go down. It pisses me off that this widespread solution to sexual assault and violence against women is through quantity, not quality. Through all these warnings and mounting fear, the great majority of this social pandemic, yes PANDEMIC, goes unnoticed, if not ignored.

It pisses me off that this form of risk reduction (which does not actually

prevent the crime from happening), does not address the fact that in 90% of reported rapes, the victim knew their attacker. It was a family member, a neighbor, a partner, a friend. The way many people are taught to view sexual assault is extremely narrow and does not hold the perpetrator accountable. Instead, it puts the blame on the victim, creating the cultural notion that the crime against her could have been prevented; that she somehow is responsible.

But how can someone be prepared to protect themselves against someone they trust? The simple answer is, they can't. It pisses me off that women are the ones who are expected to be educated about sexual assault and violence, but men commit 98% of rapes. Shouldn't potential rapists be held as responsible as potential victims? Today's most common method of raising awareness about sexual assault does not educate both women and men about how they can truly prevent such violence from occurring.

We do things differently here. Our focus is REAL prevention. This does not mean changing the route walked home at night or how to hold your car keys in a balled fist. It means changing a culture's attitude. It means questioning song lyrics and dorm posters. It means talking to friends, family, and anyone else who will listen about everyday language and derogatory terms about women. It means being critical viewers of media and conscientious consumers. It means being personally accountable for your choices, actions and your behavior.

The popular attitude facing sexual violence, along with evidence and statistics that further supports the harsh reality of domestic and sexual violence, angers me. And where there is anger, there is provocation. And with such a catalyst working within me, I prepare for another spring semester and another Take Back The Night. As a member of VAWPP, a staff member of the Women's Center, and as a UConn student, I invite any organization, all faculty members, staff, and every student to join the survivors, supporters, allies, and advocates against violence to take back the night this year on **April 21, 2010**.

—By Kerri Brown, Newsletter Editor and VAWPP Facilitator



## LUNAFEST® 2010

### Celebrating Women Through Film and Fundraising

By Anoush Mushegian and Kerri Brown

In the spring of 2010, the Women's Center will host its third LUNAFEST® at the University of Connecticut. This night of film and fun is created and funded by LUNA®, "The Whole Nutrition Bar for Women®." LUNAFEST® is a national film festival and traveling charitable event dedicated to promoting awareness towards real-life issues, including: women's health, motherhood, body image, relationships, and diversity. It also allows women to own their voice as the creators behind these films with a message. Through LUNAFEST®, everyone is able to unite and celebrate the accomplishments of women.

The celebration also greatly benefits two worthy causes. The national benefiting organization, The Breast Cancer Fund, is a pioneering charity whose mission is to identify and eliminate the environmental causes of the disease. The local community beneficiary, Violence Against Women Prevention Program (VAWPP), is a vital part of UConn's community that continues to create and maintain a high level of awareness, education, and prevention against violence against women. VAWPP makes it possible for conversation on such a prevalent topic happen through the entire community. Peer facilitators strive to reach the minds of students and faculty alike, no matter the organization.

With 2009 marking its eighth season, LUNAFEST® was hosted in a record-breaking 170 venues nationwide. The event thus far has raised over \$200,000 for the Breast Cancer Fund and over \$470,000 for other women's non-profit organizations.

LUNAFEST® and the Women's Center would like to thank all who contributed to making 2009's festival successful, particularly our "Blue Moon" sponsors: Mansfield OB GYN Associates, Juran Institute, and A STEP ABOVE Catering for their generous and unyielding support. Together we raised over \$4,200.00.

Please join us on April 6th, 2010 for our third LUNAFEST®, a night that is sure to be full of awareness, empowerment, and celebration. *More information can be found at our [Alumni Connections website](#).*



## Letter from the Director *(continued from page 1)*

For those of us who are working every day to end violence against women, we understand that this act of violence is part of that web. That we cannot end violence against women without ending men's violence against each other. And we also understand that while certain forms of violence may be more *visible* in some communities, that does not make any community immune from violence. So if we really want to answer the questions, "How did this happen here?" and "What should we expect of our colleges and universities relative to violence on campus?" we have to be ready to answer the question the students have been asking for two years – What Will You Do? **Notice the question is not "What will someone else do?"**

In late May, we welcomed Venida Rodman Jenkins as our new Violence Against Women Prevention Program Coordinator. Venida served as the Project Director of the OVW funded Consortium Violence Prevention Project (CVPP) at Seton Hall University. In her role there she was responsible for the overall program, which included collaborations with a variety of University departments; providing training and educational workshops for students, administrators, faculty, and community service agencies; and providing crisis intervention, advocacy, and referrals for survivors of sexual assault. She is also an Adjunct Professor at the New York Theological Seminary teaching courses on pastoral care and counseling and domestic violence. An ordained minister, Venida's additional experience includes work as a Student Support Counselor and as the Rape Crisis Advocate/Diversity Outreach Coordinator at the Bergen County Rape Crisis Center. She has provided service to her community through her volunteer affiliations as a Trustee with the New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault (NJCASA), the Chairperson of the Women of Color Caucus with NJCASA, and as a Facilitator with the National Coalition Building Institute.

We are fortunate that during these difficult economic times that the University administration recognized the essential nature of this position to the campus community and supported our refilling it.

Finally, a word about the tragedy in Haiti. As usual, our students are taking initiative and answering the call of "What will you do?" As have many groups on campus, they are raising funds to support the relief efforts. And as we have said on numerous occasions, even in the midst of local and global tragedy – gender matters. If you are interested in more information about how, please contact us for links to articles on the impact on pregnant women, the need for dignity packets being fulfilled by the UNFPA, and how the U.N. is directing relief efforts to women to ensure fair distribution in communities.

The past semester, and more recently the past few weeks, reminds us all that we have a lot of work ahead of us...





## The Women's Center Makes Waves Fall Semester 2009

By Kerri Brown

There's something graceful about a ripple effect. Dip your toes in a pond, and you'll cause a calm echo of infinite circles, reverberating softly through tranquility. It's almost poetic. Yet such a ripple can also be fierce. Cannon ball into the same pond with a running start, screaming at the tiptop of your lungs and you'll cause a boom. Instead of whispering through the water, you'll disrupt the surf completely, with splashes and swells. You'll make waves. It's liberating and empowering.

Reflecting on the Fall 2009 semester, it is not an overstatement to say that the Women's Center made plenty of waves with campus-wide involvement. We cannon-balled into UConn's academic and social realms with events that heightened awareness of sexual assault and domestic violence to speakers who pushed our campus to question what is 'normal' and why this is acceptable. The Women's Center dove deep into the confining social constructs of the University and caused quite a splash.

Starting the second week of October, the Women's Center collaborated with the University of Connecticut's administration and various student groups to host a weeklong focus on preventing violence against women, a week titled: **Metanoia: Preventing Violence Against Women**. In 1979, the University of Connecticut introduced its first Metanoia in response to a brutal sexual assault against a graduate student as well as various incidents of racist violence. The theme focused on "violence in the community." Thirty years later, such an event was still very much needed, for the same reasons.

The 2009 event kicked off with a student-run candle light vigil called, "What Will You Do?" with support from: the Asian American Cultural Center's acapella group (A-Minor), the University's Resident Halls Association, and President Mike Hogan. Students also spoke out against the violence that is prevalent on our campus, including Women Center and VAWPP alumni Emma Blandford, Brittany Florio, and Phil Brown-Wilusz. Students and administration alike discussed the pertinent need for a culture change on our campus. The vigil was a fusion of emotions ranging from frustration for needing such an event to take place at all, acknowledgment of the deep seeded causes, to hope for a future of gender equity.

The week of Metanoia concluded with great success through the Storrs and regional campuses. We look forward to making this an annual focus, and hope to further involve the support of the campus, alumni, students, and local community.

Waves continued to splash throughout the semester and later in October, the Women's Center sponsored two keynote events, including a visit from the Female Orgasm duo, Marshal Miller and Dorian Solot. For two nights, the Student Union Theatre filled to capacity as many students, both men and women, joined to understand, discuss, and celebrate one's sexuality. During the interactive lecture, the pair split the audience up and the men joined Marshal in a separate venue while the women stayed with Dorian in the theater. This approach to discussing sex inhibited the amount of overwhelming self-consciousness that can come with such a topic and allowed an open dialogue to happen.

The Women's Center's mission rippled through campus again when they co-sponsored, along with SUBOG and the other cultural centers, November's Month of Kindness guest speaker, author Tim Wise. His lecture, titled, "Between Barack and a Hard Place," addressed the many forms of racism that still thrive within our country, particularly the unrecognized white privilege that many people do not realize is woven into our country. The last point he made about recognizing privilege and being accountable for one's privilege echoed through his lecture. He made it a point to highlight that there is no middle ground for privilege. You either have it, or you don't. He made us question why some people in our country have it and others do not. Why was this systemic oppression in place? Wise's visit spoke clearly to the Women's Center community. The focus on privilege in it's many forms is core to the work of the Women's Center. Our mission is to abolish not only sexism, but the other oppressions that inhibit a individual's right for equality.

After Tim Wise's visit, the mix of feelings circulating through the Women's Center seemed unanimous: we were angered at the amount of inherited racism in our country; we were inspired to make a difference, keeping Wise's many stories and facts in mind; we were hopeful for more people to stand up and question all that is unjust, all that is not fair; we were ready to hold ourselves accountable for our own privilege.

Gaining campus-wide support and involvement in spreading the Women's Center messages of gender equity kept everyone quite busy. We look forward to another semester, full of steam and ready to advocate, educate, listen, and support anyone and everyone we can to do this work. We cannot do this alone and invite the entire campus and alumna/alumni communities to continue to partner with us to create real change. Keep a watchful eye out for upcoming spring events, including LunaFest, Take Back The Night, Smart Start, and more pro-active Spring Weekend involvement, as the Women's Center continues to make waves throughout campus.

For other ways to get involved, please visit the Center in person or online for information.



## Violence Against Women Prevention Program Updates From Teaching Assistant, Caely Flynn

During the Fall semester, the Violence Against Women Prevention Program (VAWPP) had multiple successful projects.

The week of Metanoia was a week full of events that involved VAWPP. Brenna Harvey and Krissy Dolce were members of an opening panel that discussed past Metanoias, the current Metanoia, and future issues related to Violence Against Women.



VAWPP T.A.'s Krissy Dolce and Brenna Harvey

The week continued with guest speakers, lectures, and activities all focusing on ending gender and sexual oppression. Among the speakers, the Women Center sponsored public educator/activist, Tony Porter, as well as Project Manager for the Women of Color Network, Tonya Lovelace, to give a lecture inspired by Metanoia's focus on violence against women. Tony Porter gave a lecture titled, "A Call To Men: Breaking Out of The Man Box." The lecture focused on the important role men play in ending many different forms of violence. He discussed ways of deconstructing masculine stereotypes, as well as practicing gender equity across campus. VAWPP students as well as the Women's Center student and full time staff also had the privilege of meeting Tony Porter in a smaller setting, which enabled a highly informative dialogue between the staff and Mr. Porter on the many social obstructions standing in the way of achieving gender equity.

VAWPP students, former and current, co-wrote an article featured in the *Hartford Courant* entitled [Violence Against Women: Roots Run Deep](#). They were also interviewed on WHUS to promote the Metanoia and its relevance to the campus community. VAWPP was also quite busy the week of Metanoia with peer-facilitated workshops, particularly highlighting the intersection between violence against women and the concept of human rights..

In conjunction with Domestic Violence Awareness Month, the Clothesline Project was implemented. A change from past years, the project expanded out to Husky Village, South Campus, and the Student Union. The project was covered by the *Daily Campus*, the *Hartford Courant*, ([Tears in the Wind, by Kathleen Megan](#)) and *UConn Today*.



As a response to students' requests for a self-defense class, The Women's Center, VAWPP, Off-Campus Student Services, UConn Police Dept., Community Standards, and the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life combined forces to develop a workshop that combined the risk reduction techniques with true prevention education. The workshop also included presentations from UCPD, Community Standards, and the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life. For the spring semester, the group is planning to expand the project and have an actual self-defense class accompany the event.

## Reproductive Rights Committee Updates From President, Emily Pizzale

Last semester, the Reproductive Rights Committee doubled our member base and led a campaign against "crisis pregnancy centers" (CPC). Part of our growth came from the committee's avid advertising. We began a campaign against Crisis Pregnancy Centers, flying the campus with warnings about the centers. Our ads and increased support succeeded when CPC ads were removed from our University's bus line. We also held an educational panel on crisis pregnancy centers and the newly introduced Stupak Amendment. The panel included Gretchen Raffa of Planned Parenthood of Connecticut, as well as Jillian Gilcrest, executive director of Connecticut's NARAL. This huge success showed our members that we are all capable of moving toward reproductive freedom if we are persistent, strong-willed, educated, and enthusiastic about our cause. The discussion had a very large turnout and a healthy debate followed.

The Reproductive Rights Committee also traveled to Washington D.C., where, for thirty-six hours, we received lobby training, sat in on our state representative meetings, and were able to ask them questions concerning the future of reproductive rights and potential of another Stupak-like amendment. The trip was a whirlwind: we left New Haven at midnight, traveled to D.C., had a fulfilling and educating day, and traveled back to Connecticut, exhausted and inspired.

In April, we are also looking forward to attending our second Reproductive Rights Conference at Hampshire College. On April 9-11, 2010, campus and community activists will gather at Hampshire College to unite for reproductive justice. Conference speakers address reproductive freedom as it relates to a broad range of social justice initiatives including economic justice, health care reform, racial equality, freedom from violence, immigrant rights, climate justice, and LGBTQ rights, just to name a few.

**The Reproductive Rights Committee meets on Thursday nights at 7pm at the Women's Center. Open to all.**

# CAMPAIGN COLLEGE

*UConn Women to Win*



## **University of Connecticut Trains Young Women to take on Political Office on Campus and Beyond**

The University of Connecticut has been selected as one of 10 Campaign College sites for 2010. Campaign College is the only program in the country that encourages and trains young women to run for student government positions on their college campuses.

Through Campaign College, the UConn Women's Center in association with Undergraduate Student Government, Student Activities, Community Outreach and the Department of Student Services and Advocacy, and local AAUW Chapters will bring together students with leading members of the UConn and Storrs communities.

“Here at UConn there are many students involved in student government, but we simply aren't seeing the different leadership styles that women bring to the table being represented,” said Kathleen Holgerson, Women's Center Director.

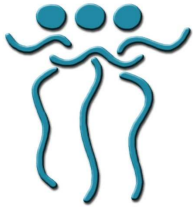
“We are hoping to prepare our university women for positions of leadership they may hold at the collegiate level and for years to come after,” said Nisha Wali, Program Assistant UConn Women's Center.

Campaign College offers a day-long training that teaches college women how to run for and win student government positions at their schools. Funded by the American Association of University Women, the Women & Politics Institute and Running Start, this unique workshop leads the way in addressing the disparity between the high percentages of women in colleges and universities and the low representation of women in student government.

UConn was chosen as one of the 2010 sites through a competitive application process. Other schools that will host 2010 Campaign College training include the University of North Carolina-Wilmington, Northern Michigan University and the University of Texas at Arlington.

More information regarding Campaign College can be found at [www.aauw.org/education/LeadershipPrograms/CampaignCollege.cfm](http://www.aauw.org/education/LeadershipPrograms/CampaignCollege.cfm)

**Contact:** Kathy Fischer, Associate Director, Women's Center  
860/486-4738, [kathy.fischer@uconn.edu](mailto:kathy.fischer@uconn.edu)



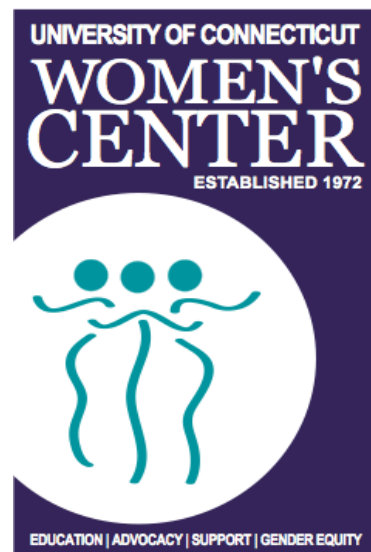
## Support The Women's Center

EDUCATION . ADVOCACY . SUPPORT . GENDER EQUITY

The University Of Connecticut's Women's Center is committed to our work with students, staff, and faculty in an effort to promote gender equity on campus. Our efforts are spread widely throughout the University Community and support all aspects of the University's mission of teaching, research, and service. We are a key contributor, along with our colleagues at the other cultural centers and the corresponding academic institutes, to the University's priorities of supporting an engaged undergraduate experience, enhancing the institution's research portfolio, and increasing the diversity of our community. While we are proud of our successes, we need your help to support and enhance this work.

With your help, we can continue our advocacy work at this institution. Your financial support also allows us to provide financial support to:

- to students engaged in scholarship and activism around issues of gender equity and social justice on campus to attend national conferences;
- to recipients of the 100 Years of Women Scholarship, who are recognized for their demonstrated commitment to women's issues through service to their community or school and their high academic performance;
- to host our annual Women of Color luncheon and awards ceremony, which serve to create networking opportunities for women who are underrepresented on campus and to recognize the recipients of the Women of Color Award for their distinguished service and their commitment to enhancing quality of life for and/or service as a role model for Women of Color; and
- to support our continued work to educate our community to help prevent and eliminate sexual assault, dating violence, stalking, and sexual harassment on campus through our Violence Against Women Prevention Program.



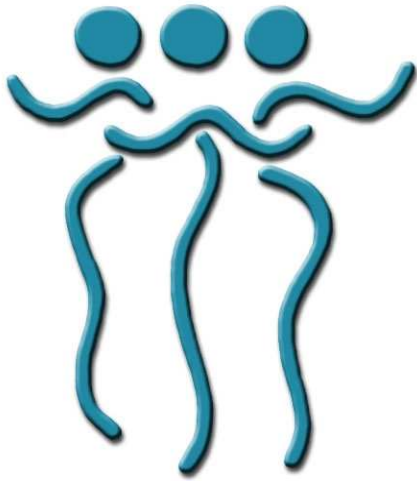
For more information on ways to give please visit our giving page at <http://womenscenter.uconn.edu/support/give.php>

Or, visit the [UConn Foundation's giving site](#) and select "other" under Purpose and include one of the following designations under Other Purpose:

Women's Center: #20447

100 Years of Women Scholarship: #30231

289500  
University of Connecticut  
Women's Center  
2110 Hillside Road, Unit 3118  
Student Union, Rm. 421  
Storrs, CT 06269-3118



# Voices

*Where all the pieces come together.*

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 women who face additional challenges due to their race, nationality, class, sexual identity, religion, age, and physical or mental ability.