



October
2008

Voices

Letter From The Director

Kathleen Holgerson

As many of you are probably aware, our campus has been deeply impacted by the issue of sexual assault in our community. UConn has been in the spotlight recently because of two recent highly publicized incidents. I would like to take this opportunity, while the conversation about sexual assault is a very public one, to remind us of several things.

First, these past few weeks are not, and should not, be the only time we as a community are addressing issues of sexual assault. We have many offices that provide relevant services for survivors of sexual assault, and they come together in our Community Response Team (CRT). The goal of the CRT is to offer a seamless service delivery network for survivors of sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking. The Women's Center offers crisis intervention and advocacy and the Sexual Assault Crisis Center of Eastern Connecticut and the Domestic Violence Program of United Services, Inc. offer 24 hour hotlines, counseling, advocacy, and referrals to survivors of sexual assault and dating violence.

Second, we have been asked on numerous occasions "What is the Women's Center doing in response to these sexual assaults?" Our response is that we are always addressing these issues on campus in an attempt to be proactive in preventing violence against women. Our Violence Against Women Prevention Program (VAWPP), which was established in 1980, has served as the point program on campus for providing education, advocacy, and support services on these issues. As part of our work on campus, we do and will continue to conduct workshops during Summer Orientation, in the First Year Experience courses, and in the residence halls, as well as to sponsor events such as Take Back the Night, the recent Clothesline Project and the Red Flag campaign.

Third, much of the conversation in recent weeks has focused on what women need to do to stay safe. The prevention work we have done to address sexual assault has tried to focus on moving the conversation and the community response beyond that conversation into education and discussion about *what role do we all have as members of the University community to prevent and eliminate sexual assault, dating violence, stalking, and sexual harassment.* It is

important to point out that many of the recommendations for "staying safe" are traditional "risk-reduction" strategies which focus only on what women "should do" in order to reduce their risk of assault. We are concerned that this exclusive focus on risk reduction, rather than on prevention, can set up a victim-blaming dynamic. This means we also need to encourage men to be a part of the solution and to look at what they can do in terms of both prevention and risk reduction.

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YOUR VOTE IS YOUR VOICE!
USE IT NOVEMBER 4!!!

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We do recognize that risk-reduction strategies, such as self-defense classes, etc., can for many women be a source for feeling empowered. We encourage individuals to determine what strategies will be most effective in any given situation. But these strategies only speak to a very limited picture of what we know about sexual assault. It is important to note that women are at most risk of being raped by someone they know, as more than 80% of all rapes are acquaintance rapes. (*U.S. Justice Department*). For more information about risk reduction strategies for both women and men, please visit our website, specifically the *Issues* section on *Sexual Assault* at http://womenscenter.uconn.edu/issues/sexual_assault.php.

Finally, we are continuing to work in collaboration with other campus entities to address not only incidents of sexual assault, dating violence, stalking and sexual harassment, but on the climate which supports and/or promotes violence against women. We are an active member of the Vice President of Student Affairs' Task Force on Campus Climate/Violence Against Women, which was convened in January of 2008. The Task Force is working on a report that will identify specific issues that contribute to violence against women on campus and will make recommendations of specific remedies. We are also active with the Provost's Commission on the Status of Women. The Commission's Committee on Sexual Harassment/University Climate has been charged with updating and facilitating the adoption of the revised Discrimination Harassment Policy and with making recommendations for continuing to address factors which contribute to sexual harassment and hostile work environments for women students, staff, faculty, and administrators.

If you are interested in becoming more involved with the work that has been happening on campus, please stop by or contact me. We have a very active, dedicated, and passionate community of folks who are deeply engaged in the work of ending violence against women. We hope you will accept this invitation to join us and make a statement for **"What will you do to end violence against women?"**



The Young Woman's Vote

Kelly Eblen

Young women across the country have a lot at stake this upcoming election. Reproductive rights, civil rights, and human rights are the over-arching political issues, directly affecting women, being discussed on all sides. These include and are NOT limited to, abortion rights, access to birth control, changes in affirmative action, and same sex marriage. The young women's voice has the potential of making a crucial difference in the vital decisions left to the two presidential candidates. Yet in order to be heard, she first must vote.



This semester the Women's Center is working on a Civic Engagement Project, focused on enhancing political interest of young women across campus and beyond. Through our efforts, we hope to stress the importance for women of our generation's vote. Previous election statistics indicate that women between the ages of 18 and 24 years old vote less than any other age group. This statement could be partially due to the visible barriers present. Age and gender gaps between our generation and today's lawmakers obstruct our country's leaders from sincerely concentrating their attention on the political issues directly relevant to young women. They need to hear from us! We are striving to make women on campus more aware of their power to develop their

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Building A Community of Practice: The Women's Center Retreat

By Kerri Brown



Student staff members get to know one another at the start of the day.

everyone in the room. Some of us were strangers. But still, we were together, making up (what we later learned) a Community of Practice.

After going through the nuts and bolts of working at the Center the full-time staff turned the discussion towards the current issues surfacing on our campus. The forum opened to the students and what came was a flood of ideas, opinions, and concerns. We discussed an individual's sense of safety and how to preserve it. We talked about body image, reproductive rights, and the upcoming presidential election.

And through the conversation, we came to recognize the dimensions of our own identities. We learned about different "levels of oppression" plaguing our society and the privileges endowed to certain groups of people. These are unearned advantages that grant them unknown dominance. Each member of the staff created a chart with 6 areas of privilege/oppression: race, age, gender, ability, social class, and sexual orientation. We were then asked to check off whether in each area we had privilege or whether we were oppressed. A main conclusion that rose from this activity was that though we are all aware of our areas of subjugation, we are often not as conscious of our privilege, which surrounds us constantly. Each of us has a responsibility to recognize privilege, because it is those with privilege that, often unconsciously, create the areas of oppression. By being intentionally aware of privilege, we can all work together to stop oppression in our community.



Veteran staff perform the "Herstory of the Women's Center" interpretive dance.

And that was just in the first hour. What followed were numerous group activities to try and fortify our role in the UConn community. To do so, we had to realize the different levels of community and how we first must create a healthy, respectful environment within the Center. Here, we discussed how at the Women's Center we are a Community of Practice. We are collectively learning in a shared domain, and though we share the common interest of gender equity, we each bring something different and equally vital to the cause. We all have our own opinions but what became clear when we spoke with each other and worked through our ideas together was the increasing strength of our united, individual voices.



By the end of the retreat, conversation became more open as staff members became more comfortable with each other.

Our Community of Practice also acts as a living curriculum for its apprentices. While attending the retreat, we were learning and growing. The workshops emphasized communication and cooperation and had us working together in pairs and small groups before opening

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100 Years Of Women



www.insideafricanart.com

The 100 Years of Women Scholarship was established in 1992 to honor a current UConn student (who will be enrolled for the Fall semester) or a high school senior planning to enroll at UConn who, as a role model or advocate, has advanced the role and contributions of women in society. This past spring, three students received the award, granting them scholarship for the Fall 2008 semester.

The three recipients are well rounded women who demonstrate a perpetual commitment to the progression of women's rights. **Tellisa Collins** wants to encourage and empower black women in Hartford and New Haven. She hopes to accomplish this by obtaining her master's degree in Social Work. Tellisa's perseverance is evident in both her academic and personal life. She has never ceased in the drive it takes to conquer her goals, despite many obstacles that could have hindered her spirit. "This scholarship will allow me to achieve the training I need to become a compassionate effective social worker of color in my community," Collins said.

Molly Ferguson is currently a UConn graduate student in English Literature. After receiving her graduate certificate in Women's Studies, she began teaching Gender in Global Perspective as well as Women and Poverty. "I believe that having a lasting impact on women's

issues must result from not only participating directly in activism, but from raising awareness in others," Ferguson said. Through her work inside and outside the classroom, she is constantly reminded of the potential young women have to change the world. And as an educator, she hopes to continue to facilitate the process of awareness in others who will embrace activism.

Mia Freedenfeld is a 3rd year undergraduate working towards a double major in Women's Studies and Sociology with a minor in Human Rights. Her commitment to women's rights was always present and began at home, where she witnessed and admired her mother's strength as a woman. Her incessant devotion to women's issues gained momentum at UConn, where she embraced her interests and became involved with the Women's Center and the Violence Against Women Prevention Program. In the spring of 2008, she furthered her involvement and awareness on a global scale by participating in the Honors in Cape Town, South Africa study abroad program. While there, she not only took gender equity classes, but also worked at Place of Hope Women's Shelter and volunteered at Rape Crisis Cape Town Trust, a rape crisis center in Cape Town.

The Women's Center would like to congratulate these three women who fully embody these principles.

The 100 Years of Women Scholarship is an award given to aid those students who demonstrate an active interest in issues surrounding gender equity and social justice on campus. If you would like to contribute to this scholarship, please use the attached pledge form.

(Continued from page 2) **Vote**

political representation and collectively present their personal opinions in order for their voices to be heard.

To reach our objectives, we have many promotional plans for the weeks leading up to Election Day that will help young women become more aware of the recent political issues. And in collaboration with other student organizations on campus, we aim to provide valuable information regarding the voter registration process itself and get as many UConn students, especially women, registered and excited to get out and vote.

The Women's Center is more than happy to provide anyone with additional information if they are interested in learning more about specific issues or helping us to stress the importance of voting and having your voice heard. Young women have the power to make a difference and change the political landscape for our generation. So ladies, get out there and **VOTE November 4th!**

**OUR LIVES
BEGIN TO END
THE DAY WE
BECOME SILENT
ABOUT THINGS
THAT MATTER.**

Meet the New Members of the Women's Center Staff!



www.allposters.com

Kerri Brown is a 3rd semester English major with a concentration in creative writing. Her vision for her work at the Center is to combine her work on the newsletter with her effort to promote equality on campus.

Senior **Brittany Florio** is a Horticulture major, minoring in Women's Studies. Brittany is a TA with VAWPP and is looking forward to working with her peers to get creative with the Center's outreach efforts.

Joining the Women's Center is first year student, **Emily Pizzale**. She hopes to fuse together what she learns in the classroom as a Psychology major with what she experiences here.

Senior **Kelly Eblen** is working towards her English major with a minor in Human Rights. With her internship with us this semester, she hopes to gain a greater understanding of Women's Rights as Human Rights.



Maddie Ardito has been involved with theater for the past 9 years, is a Theater Studies major and has recently taken on a Women's Studies minor. This year, she is working on encouraging civic engagement, raising awareness on election issues, and collaborating with others to get people to the polls to vote and have their voices heard.



First year Nursing student, **Nisha Wali**, joins the Center and looks forward to getting involved with and helping the UConn community as well as learn more of what she can do to serve it.

A senior majoring in sociology, **Erin Basile** is looking forward to helping students learn new and important information about equality and their rights.



Nisha working with Kelly C. at this year's retreat.

Kelly Corrigan is a senior, majoring in



Psychology, Sociology, and Criminal Justice. She is working on a Title IX project for the Center.

Julia Levina is a senior Communications and Marketing major who hopes to help make the Women's Center a more visible and understood place in the UConn community.

Majoring in Communication and Art, **Kelly Walters** hopes to gain more awareness on issues that face women today and ways in which we can prevent or eliminate them. She is our Graphics Specialist this year.



Stephanie and Kelly W. work together at the retreat.

Dana Behuniak is a sophomore Psychology major who transferred here from Emmanuel College. Through working at the Center she looks forward to connecting with new people and helping

out.

Senior English and Women's Studies major **Kayla Most** is looking forward to the knowledge she'll be gaining as an intern with VAWPP in such a comfortable and safe space.

Stephanie Keeseey is a 7th semester Animal Behavior major. She is a TA with the VAWPP program with the goals of raising awareness and helping others.

Senior **Kaitlyn Widlak** is a History and American Studies major, with a Human Rights minor. She looks forward to being a part of such a strong organization on campus and working on human rights issues, particularly gender equity.



Kim Thoms is an Allied Health-Diagnostic Genetic Sciences major with a Molecular Biology minor. At the Women's Center, Kim is a VAWPP Intern and works with the Reproductive Rights Coalition.

Something's Happening

Pam Heath-Johnston

On April 17th, over 100 AFSCME (clerical) and CEUI (maintenance) staff attended a session on the topic of a civil work environment. The event was sponsored by: CEUI; AFSCME; the Women's Center; the Department of Human Resources; the Office of Diversity & Equity; and the Office of Audit, Compliance & Ethics.

The focus of the session was to educate staff about the vision of a work environment that is free of harassment, bullying, discrimination, and violence. Opening remarks were provided by Donna Munroe, Associate Vice President of Human Resources & Payroll Services and Dana McGee, Director of the Office of Diversity & Equity.

The remainder of the session was facilitated by Kathleen Holgerson, Director of the Women's Center, Leslie Maddocks, Secretary/Treasurer & Chief Steward of CEUI, and Carol Millette, Vice President & Chief Steward of AFSCME. Policies were reviewed, supporting resources provided, and thought provoking questions were posed by the facilitators and participants. Additional presentations were made



by Rebecca Myshrall, Labor Relations Associate in Human Resources and Kimberly Fearney, Assistant Compliance Officer from the Office of Audit, Compliance and Ethics. The session ended with a presentation on dealing with conflict and assertiveness by Pamela Schipani, Director of Housing Services.

This event is the kick-off for more events to come on topics of workplace violence and harassment. As a reminder for all employees, the University's Code of Conduct specifically forbids discrimination and/or harassment in the workplace. In addition, the President annually issues the University's Policy Statement on Harassment.

If you feel you are a victim of discrimination or harassment, please know there are several offices on campus that can assist you with reporting. You may contact the Office of Diversity & Equity (ODE) at (860)486-2943, Human Resources at (860)486-5684 or you may use Office of Audit, Compliance & Ethics' (OACE) confidential REPORTLINE which is available 24 hours a day/7 days a week at 1-888-685-2637.

New To The Center!

Body Image Committee



www.campaignforrealbeauty.com

The Body Image Committee is a volunteer group at the Women's Center that focuses on body image, eating disorders and media influence. Several ideas coming from the first meeting included how our group would address issues such as how the media portrays women, what real women look like, and women's health. On October 15th, the committee participated in Love Your Body Day, and participate in Eating Disorders Awareness Week in February. The

committee is also looking for any other great ideas! The Body Image Committee meets every Monday evening from 6-8pm in the Women's Center and anyone is welcome to join at any time. If you have any questions, please contact karyn.blanchard@uconn.edu or just come to the meeting!

Reproductive Rights Committee

The Reproductive Rights Committee is a volunteer group of students interested in women's health, access to health care, and reproductive rights. We will help to develop student-oriented programming to educate students about issues that will include: reproductive rights, contraception, STDs, abortion, access to reproductive health care, and more. Meetings are Tuesdays at 5pm in the Women's Center.



Matters of the Heart Partnership

Kathy Fischer

Last spring, the Women's Center was invited to partner with the Eastern Highlands Health District (EHHD) to locally implement the *Women's Healthy Heart Project* (WHHP). This initiative came about through a grant they received from the Connecticut State Department of Public Health. The goal of this project is to promote healthy lifestyles and to improve the cardiovascular health of all women age 55 and over

in the EHHD 10 town district. This will be accomplished by increasing the knowledge of and access to cholesterol and blood pressure screenings; healthy eating programs and opportunities; resources on the signs and symptoms of heart attack and stroke; and opportunities for physical activity.

On September 26, despite torrential downpours most of the day, the Women's Center hosted a successful Women's Health Heart Fair. Participants included the Visiting Nurse Association (VNA) East, Celebrate Women, the Wise Woman Program, the UConn School of Pharmacy, and Health Education. There were activities, give-aways, information, healthy snacks and free blood pressure and cholesterol screenings.

In the next few months, the Women's Center will be hosting cardiovascular health workshops targeting young senior women as part of this collaboration. Participants who complete the workshops will receive free blood pressure monitors. More information and dates will be forthcoming.



(Continued from page 3) **Community of Practice**

the conversations up to the group as a whole. Topics we discussed included how we could maintain our Center's sense of community, personal challenges we feel we presently face in today's culture, and how we can all offer support and strength for each other.

We are different: an obviously apparent, cliché statement. And on September 13, this was not unusual. Yet what prevailed were not our differences, but rather how together these diversities are crucial in preserving our community and maintaining the Women's Center.

University of Connecticut

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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.

Women's Center Pledge Form



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