



# Voices

## University of Connecticut Women's Center - 35th Anniversary

### Letter from the Director

Kathleen Holgerson

As you'll see while you read through this edition of *Voices*, we've had a lot going on here at the Women's Center. On November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2007 alumnae, students, staff, and faculty gathered together to recognize the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the University of Connecticut Women's Center. The theme for the event was "Standing on Our Sisters' Shoulders," and we gathered together to honor our herstory of feminist activism, organizing, and building community on the UConn campus. We also took that opportunity to show off our new home on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of the Student Union.

In preparation for the event, we asked invitees to forward us both a song that reminded them of their time at the Center and comments about the impact their

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### Standing on Our Sisters' Shoulders: Recollections from the 35th Anniversary Celebration

By Tess Bird



During the 35th Anniversary celebration I sat at the corner table quietly hunched over a laptop computer, hoping I could keep up with the conversation. As the editor of the Newsletter, I was assigned to taking notes during the "Herstory Panel," a panel designed to enhance cross-generational dialogues. After dinner and before a dance that included four decades of music, those in attendance sat at festive tables and listened intently to the recollections of the Women's Center's role in the Women's Movement. I was eager to hear what the speakers had to say, aware that this was the easy part; interpreting my notes later was sure to prove difficult.

The panel included three women from the Center's herstory: Carol Buch, who was here in the beginning, during the formation of the Center in 1972; Dr. Maria D. Martinez, who came to the Center as an undergraduate back in 1986; and Valencia Louis, who started the UConn V-Day Campaign and came here as an undergraduate in 1999. The panel opened up discussion around many issues and themes including childcare, diversity, language, intergenerational conversations, and feminism as an ongoing process. As the current Director and panel facilitator Kathleen Holgerson summarized, the event reflected the continuance of issues and the shifts in how we talk about them.

Carol Buch, who now teaches in Women's Studies here at UConn, called the panel a "process of remembering" opening up the idea of continuity, even in memory. A 1968 graduate of college and young mother, Buch came to UConn with her

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Dancing at the 35th Anniversary

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## New Student Staff Spring 2008

This semester, four new interns have joined the staff of the Women's Center. They are:

- **Andrea Anton**, an HDFS major with a Women's Studies minor, is working to create a passive programming campaign to promote engagement in political processes and issues impacting women and gender equity.
- **Jessica Kelly** is developing workshops focusing on specific topics around media literacy. She is majoring in English with a Women's Studies minor.
- **Dinah Louis**, a Women's Studies major, will be working with other Women's Center staff on developing a women's health workshop.
- **Jillian Robichaud** is an HDFS major with a Sociology minor. She is working on outreach efforts and coordinating around social activism projects.

Also joining us this semester is **Ryan Barone**. He is a full time staff member in Residential Life and is volunteering his time to lead the Men's Project. This is a 10-week group for men related to masculinity, violence against women, and violence prevention.

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husband in the early 1970s and soon became aware of the beginnings of the Women's Movement on campus. It didn't take long before she found herself involved in a developing feminist consciousness. What she saw in the years before the Women's Center was officially established in 1972 was a coming together of women, working towards the same goals of equal opportunity: "What really struck me during those years was the sense of equality - there wasn't a real hierarchy between the women."

Among the energy and hope of the era, Buch recalled a part of the struggle. She says of the time: "I think that was one of the most powerful experiences of my life, to gather with other women... gathering and talking about our girlhoods, different kinds of experiences we had... but we were groping for language." When she returned to UConn in the 1990s to pursue Women's Studies, Buch found a much more developed language to describe the kinds of things her generation was struggling with. This language developed over time as the Women's

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## Updates from the Violence Against Women Prevention Program

Contributors: Matt Lin, Jackie Vanase, Christopher Jackson, Stephanie Keesey

VAWPP 2008 kicked off with our spring retreat, with time for each VAWPP peer educator to get reconnected with each other, refocus on our goals, and reaffirm our commitment to the cause. Recently, there has been an increase in the number of enthusiastic VAWPP peer educators who have undertaken a rigorous curriculum which taught us to be informed, knowledgeable, and sensitive to the dire – but unspoken of – situation in stalking, dating violence, domestic violence, and sexual assaults on UConn Campus.

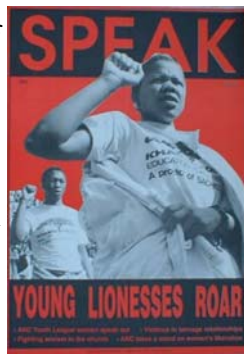
Four VAWPP-ers have stepped up as team leaders for four distinct but interconnected aspects of our activism: Jackie Vanase and Chris Jackson (heading up the creative and dramatic arts education group and new Video "VAWPPumentary" project), Brittany Florio (handling Summer Orientation and VAWPP recruitment), and Caitlin Torino (supporting the Women's Center and VAWPP event planning).

Chris Jackson and Jackie Vanase, the team leaders for the Theater Production and Video Production Team,

are looking forward to using theatrical skits to enhance workshops and reach a crowd we would not ordinarily present to. They are doing a workshop for the True Colors Conference using comical scenes to demonstrate a need for clarifying boundaries and respecting each other when it comes to sex and dating. They will also be going out in the streets and capturing video clips to compile into a UCTV show and, in the future, a VAWPP video. Don't be surprised if you catch them on TV or see them providing you with a bit of dining hall dinner theater!

Spring semester in the VAWPP program means that it is time to start thinking about Summer Orientation ('08) and next year! A dedicated team of students are brewing plans for our biggest recruitment effort to date. We hope to cast our net wide and deep to welcome in the next cohort of talented and dedicated VAWPP-ers! Students currently involved in the program plan to target large lecture classes in the social sciences and within first year programs to inform students

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www.femarch.freeseerve.co.uk



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Movement brought together a wider variety of voices and experiences, also a goal of the Women's Center.

In the 1980s, Dr. Martinez noted the lack of women of color involved with the Women's Center and desired to change the face of the Center. At first she was hesitant about going to the Women's Center because she was told that "this is not a place that you go if you're not gay." Determined to find out for herself, she realized that this

perception was not true and became involved with the work of the Center. She eventually went on to form the "Grupo de Mujeres Latinas" of the Women's Center in 1989, struggling against the reputation that the Women's Center had on the University campus. "There are still some of those tough issues that we are discussing today," Dr. Martinez said, and even though efforts are continuous to encourage dialogues about race and class, she believes "that as far as attracting women of color, we've come a long way." Now the director of the Center for Academic Programs, Dr. Martinez said, "I do credit the Women's Center for giving me the support I needed back then."

Valencia Louis also found support in the Women's Center in the 1990s and fully agrees that we are here now because we are *standing on our sisters' shoulders*. Loving every moment of her experience with the Center, Louis remembers wanting something specific to focus on. Issues surrounding diversity, body image, and domestic violence were the talk of the day in 1999. Domestic violence was and still is underreported in all communities, but it was even more invisible in communities of color. In regards to domestic violence against women of color, Louis noted that

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about the various ways to be involved with VAWPP. We are



also excited to be debuting the VAWPP recruitment video! Produced by Elizabeth Barbeau as part of a summer internship, the montage highlights the power of one voice to create change while also emphasizing the important connections we create within our work. In response to the first showing of the video, current VAWPP-er Jaimie D'Allacco shares, "I've got chills." Come see what it is all about! Students interested in becoming a VAWPP Peer educator can enroll in WS271 for Fall of 2008.

As for the summer, once again there will be a limited number of paid positions within the VAWPP to lead summer orientation sessions related to sexual consent and violence against women. Applications will be available in mid-February and can be downloaded from the Women's Center website: [http://www.womenscenter.uconn.edu/VAWPP/sublinks/join\\_vawpp.php](http://www.womenscenter.uconn.edu/VAWPP/sublinks/join_vawpp.php). Paper screening will begin on March 25th. Questions regarding summer orientation facilitation can be directed to the VAWPP Coordinator, Betsy Cracco at :

[elizabeth.cracco@uconn.edu](mailto:elizabeth.cracco@uconn.edu).

Also new in this semester's curriculum are "Listening Sessions" which serve to strengthen our abilities to negotiate heavy conversations which we may encounter in our line of work.

The VAWPP Outreach Team has a busy semester ahead of them. While they have many projects and goals, the biggest outreach event will be the organization and coordination of *Take Back the Night* on April 16<sup>th</sup> at 7 pm in the Student Union Ballroom. The night will include a rally, a march, and speak out for those whose lives have been affected by violence. The team, including Caitlin Torino, Kimberley Thoms, Katie Boynton, Andrea Tovar, Stephanie Keesey, Amanda Pollina, and Marybeth Fafalla are very excited about planning TBTN, describing it as an intense and moving night. Other projects for the semester include articles in the *Stall Street News* (put out by the Health Education Department) about the prevention of violence; increasing the facilitation of our workshops to a wider demographic of students on campus; the creation of "Consent Coasters" for local bars and pubs, dining halls and the student union; and the coordination of Sexual Assault Awareness Month in April.

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you didn't really see it, "not on Lifetime, not in the paper..." When she realized violence did affect women of color, she said "that was the 'ah-ha' moment where I was like, 'oh I have to look into that.'" Louis soon formed the UConn V-Day Campaign, a student organization whose mission was to end violence against women and which annually produces *The Vagina Monologues*. Louis directed *The Vagina Monologues* for two years.

Recalling her more poignant experiences of the Center, Louis jotted down a few words to describe her time in the brown house, the location of the Women's Center before it moved to the Student Union: "It was a house, but it was a home... comfortable... family... connection... safety... fun... I think of sitting in the lounge, just talking, and being able to talk about anything you wanted, *anything*... food... journal making... projects... support groups... I don't know what I would have done without the Women's Center."

Is this what it really comes down to for many of us? A place to talk openly? A kind of place you become slightly dependent on? I know that's when I start to really feel like I am doing



something important, when we can come together in a space like the Women's Center and really see that the continuity of our conversations are important, that our language gives us a kind of home, and that feminism survives.

A co-student-staff member, Lauren Donnelly, discussed the importance of language as a process and for the language of the feminist consciousness to be accessible to more women. Is it the language and the intergenerational conversations that carry us forward? I perked up in my seat a little and exchanged glances with several people when Carol Buch asserted the need for intergenerational conversation and later joked that eventually we may need the whole Student Union to accommodate our efforts in the Women's Movement.

We talked about the future, what will we look like in another 35 years? There were hopes for peace, for more choice, education about feminism being incorporated into curriculums at all levels... a continuance of the process. A friend whispered privately to me, "We'll be doing this with flying cars." I can only hope that those flying cars will be vehicles for ending sexism and promoting ongoing conversations about feminism.

*(Continued from page 1)* **Letter from the Director**

connection with the Center had on them. Here are some of the responses we received:

"I have served on some of the committees... and have met and had the opportunity to work with some amazing and inspiring women. I also have attended several workshops including the Women's Advance which have helped to enrich my life and challenge me to grow."

"I was in the Rape Education Program class in 1993 and was a peer educator the spring of 1994. It was my first exposure to the Women's Center and organized women's advocacy. I don't think it is an exaggeration to say that it changed my life. I began to look at everything differently - media, politics, interpersonal relationships... The Women's Center helped me to create a foundation for my work and continues to be a place where I go for both inspiration and growth."

"I've never felt particularly female or womanish but always felt warmly welcomed and accepted by everyone at the Women's Center. Caring about each individual,

understanding that we are all different, and making me feel okay that I am who I am, that's what I've received in the few years I've been coming here. Thank you."

"My time at the Women's Center definitely impacted me in different ways. I truly enjoyed having a place to go to on campus where I know I would be encouraged to take risks in my education as well as being around individuals who wanted to make a difference. At the Women's Center, I was never afraid to speak my mind or share my opinion. My thoughts of celebrating diversity were reinforced and I learned how to apply it to my every day life. Now that I am employed as a fulltime therapist at a residential treatment center for teenage girls, I try to apply my knowledge that I have acquired at the Women's Center to help empower these young women. The Women's Center was definitely a highlight of my college years. The support, education, and empowerment that I received will last a lifetime."

"The Women's Center has helped me learn how to empower myself and other women, how to challenge sexism and other forms of inequality as well as bringing strong, intelligent and proactive women into my life (which is a priceless support system)."

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## One Year From Now

By Andrea Anton and Kathy Fischer

An informal survey was conducted during the fall 2007 semester by Women's Center intern Michael Hardej. The goal of this survey was to assess students' interest and involvement "one year from now" in the upcoming presidential election. The survey was given to UConn undergraduate students from various cultural centers as well as students in First Year Experience courses. The survey addressed matters ranging from why students are or are not involved in the campaign to what issues candidates should address. The results found were not surprising. Many of the students surveyed are not registered to vote, although eligible, and many of those who are registered, still did not vote in the last election.

The issue that rose to the top from men was the Iraq War, with global warming as a close second. For women, the issue that rose to the top was Higher Education, with the Iraq War, Human Rights, gay marriage and reproductive rights basically tying for second. With regard to the engagement, or lack thereof, there were many opinions as to why. Both women and men reasoned that students do not care, they are uninformed, or they are simply lazy. One of the most popular responses was that students do not feel their vote matters. This seemed to have some impact on whether or not students registered to vote and whether they educated themselves on the process or exercised their right to vote.

Although the candidates may not know who *individual* young people are voting for, they do know *collectively* if they are voting and for whom. When the candidates see that young people are *not* voting, they don't feel the need to spend their time and money identifying or addressing issues of importance to them.

Let's consider the fact that there are approximately 21,000

undergraduates enrolled at the University of Connecticut, with the majority eligible to vote. In the 2006 election, the number of University of Connecticut students on the Storrs campus who voted jumped from approximately 250 to over 1000, and Joe Courtney won the 2<sup>nd</sup> District House seat by only 83 votes. While the turnout is still very poor relatively speaking, Courtney, at a recent UConn event, credited this increased voter turnout in making the difference for his successful bid for the seat in the House.

If each person made the commitment to educate themselves on the issues, the candidates, the *simple* process of voter registration, and exercised their right to vote, just imagine the impact. Collective power is made up of individuals, and together we can affect change.

**Your voice *does* count and your vote *does* make a difference!**



*Andrea Anton, an intern, is working to create a passive programming campaign to promote engagement in political processes and issues impacting women and gender equity.*

*Kathy Fischer is the Associate Director at the Center.*

# Women's Center Events

March 2007

For detailed information on events and co-sponsors, please visit the Women's Center website: [www.womenscenter.uconn.edu](http://www.womenscenter.uconn.edu)



## March is Women's Herstory Month

**5<sup>th</sup> Blue Grit: Making Impossible, Improbable and Inspirational Political Change in America with author Laura Flanders** - Wednesday, 6 pm, Konover Auditorium, Thomas J. Dodd Research Center

Laura Flanders is the host of "RadioNation" heard on Air America Radio and syndicated to non-commercial affiliates nationwide. She is the author most recently, of *Blue Grit: Making Impossible, Improbable and Inspirational Political Change in America* (Penguin, 2008). She is also the author of *Real Majority, Media Minority; the Cost of Sidelining Women in Reporting* (Common Courage Press, 1997) about which Susan Faludi wrote, "If only there were a hundred of her." Katha Pollitt called it "Funny, angry, fact filled and brilliant."

**19<sup>th</sup> LUNAFEST - A Celebration of International Women's Day** - Wednesday, 7 - 9:30 pm, SU Theatre

Filled with stories of reflection and whimsy, hope and humor, grace and perseverance, LUNAFEST films are renowned for celebrating the talents and stories of women. Our films include many off the traditional "festival circuit." Collectively, LUNAFEST films captivate audiences, compel dialogue and arm those who participate with both the knowledge and the motivation to make a difference in their communities. Proceeds will benefit The Breast Cancer Fund and the Cultural Centers. Tickets for the filmfest are \$5 for students and \$7 for staff, faculty, and community members.

**20<sup>th</sup> Am I a Dirty Word?** Wednesday, 7 - 9 pm, Student Union Art Gallery

Beth Barbeau, curator, says "Feminism has become a dirty word in the minds of many contemporary Americans, including many educated, liberal, progressive women and men. I do not believe the claims from popular culture that feminism is dead or has out-grown its usefulness." This show highlights work by students that is the result of critical engagement with feminism, and the students involved are "engaging in a tradition of feminist artists/activists sharing themselves and their stories in an effort to initiate a conversation about issues we consider very important and very personal. I wanted to give young women the opportunity to show how they

integrate feminism into their work and deal with issues such as sexuality, body image, gender and identity, while at the same time placing myself within a context of other feminist artists."

**26<sup>th</sup> Smart \$tart:** Wednesday, 6 pm – 9 pm, PRLACC

\$tart \$mart Workshop will cover the following topics:

- The personal consequences of the gender wage gap: what a \$1.2 million loss over one's working lifetime means.
- Resources for benchmarking reasonable salaries and benefits: learn about job titles, their functions and salary ranges, the impact of market realities on salaries; compare skills and accomplishments to job requirements and market to target a realistic salary range.
- Negotiation: how to aim high and be realistic; practice negotiation through role play exercises.
- Know your bottom line: develop a "bare bones" budget to pay rent, buy groceries, repay student loans, and other basic expenses.

FREE. Registration required; call the Women's Center.

**27<sup>th</sup> Thursday Night at the Movies – Constructing Public Opinion: How Politicians and the Media Misrepresent the Public** - Thursday, 7 pm, Women's Center

In this insightful and accessible interview, Professor Justin Lewis demonstrates the way in which polling data are used by the media to not just reflect what Americans think but to construct public opinion itself. Exploding the myth that most Americans are moderate or conservative, *Constructing Public Opinion* demonstrates the way in which political elites help to promote the military industrial complex and how the media sustains belief in an electoral system with a built-in bias against the interests of ordinary people. Well illustrated with graphics and many examples of media coverage, it is the first film of its kind to present a critical analysis of media and public opinion.

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"The Women's Center has provided networking opportunities and solidarity building activities that have been a major influence in my professional commitments at UCONN."

While we are proud of our herstory, we are working to address current issues on campus, as well as looking towards planning for our future. This semester, we are focusing our education and advocacy efforts in the following areas:

- Feminist leadership development
- Politics (both encouraging participation in the political process and creating critical dialogues around issues of gender, race, and intersectionality)
- Work/life flexibility
- Media (both developing media literacy and creating accountability with local media outlets)
- Cross-generational dialogues
- Sexual harassment
- Women in the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) fields
- Listening as a revolutionary act as related to violence against women
- Pay equity

We are fortunate to have many collaborators across campus who are partners in our work in these areas. We will highlight some of our specific initiatives in future newsletters. We know we still have a long way to go to achieve gender equity on campus, but we are looking forward to sharing the story of our work along the way.

**Groups at the Women's Center****Between Women**

A discussion group for women who love women... or think they might. Come and discuss fun topics, movies and more with women who share your feelings and experiences.  
Meets every Wednesday, 8 pm, Women's Center

**Graduate Women's Group**

For more information contact Erin Sullivan at [ees04003@gmail.com](mailto:ees04003@gmail.com).

**Stronger**

*A support and discussion group for UConn Women*

"What is a healthy relationship?"  
"How do I 'get strong' after an abusive relationship?"  
"How do I heal from sexual assault or abuse?"  
For more information and to register, contact Betsy Cracco at the Women's Center at 486-4738 or [elizabeth.cracco@uconn.edu](mailto:elizabeth.cracco@uconn.edu).

**The South Asian Tree (TSAT)**

Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka. Do you identify with one of the countries listed above either through self or family? If so, come join in on dialogues of balancing South Asian heritage with North American ideologies and the implications it has on day to day experiences including life at UConn. Facilitated by Bandana Purkayastha, Bidya Ranjeet, and Shanthi Rao. For more information contact Bidya Ranjeet at 6-4040.

University of Connecticut

Women's Center

Student Union, room 421  
2110 Hillside Road, Unit 3118  
Storrs, CT. 06269-3118  
(860) 486 4738 Phone  
(860) 486 1104 Fax  
[womensctr@uconn.edu](mailto:womensctr@uconn.edu)

[www.womenscenter.uconn.edu](http://www.womenscenter.uconn.edu)

Kathleen Holgerson  
Director

Carol Millette  
Administrative Assistant



Tess Bird  
Newsletter Editor

Kathy Fischer  
Associate Director

Betsy Cracco  
VAWPP Coordinator

*The mission of the 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.*