



Voices

Letter From The Director By Kathleen Holgerson

Can it possibly be May, 2010? Yet another semester has flown by, and we have been as busy as ever. And yet, even as I write this, we still have several of our signature programs happening in the next month. We'll be sure to report back on the Outstanding Senior Women Academic Achievement Awards and the annual Women's Advance Conference in upcoming newsletters. But for now, this edition of *Voices* will let you know about some of the incredible work the students who are connected with the Women's Center have been up to. The UConn V-Day Campaign hosted their 9th annual benefit performance of *The Vagina Monologues*, as well as their second annual performance of *A Memory, A Monologue, A Rant and A Prayer: Writings To Stop Violence Against Women and Girls*. A cohort of students secured funding to attend the 2010 Reproductive Justice Conference at Hampshire College. And not least of all, the VAWPP students have been producing interactive theater, planning Take Back the Night, and getting ready for the upcoming Spring Weekend, having designated themselves the Spring Weekend Freedom Fighters.

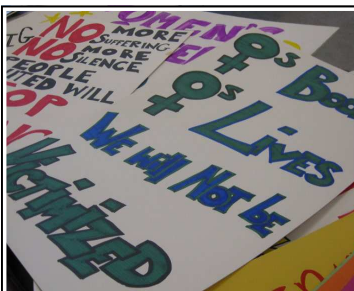


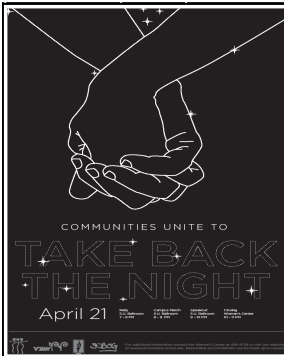
Photo courtesy of Jackie Martone.

Speaking of Take Back the Night, I write this the day after our 2010 annual event. So in addition to being a bit on the tired side, I am left reflecting on two powerful messages. First, the importance of the difference we make, whether we know it or not. So many survivors spoke last night about the importance of being heard and believed when they shared their stories with friends, colleagues, family, or professional resources. They also spoke about the damage that was done to their sense of themselves and the validity of their experiences when their stories were disbelieved, dismissed, or distorted into blaming them for the assault. As someone who has been doing this work for over 20 years, I am still learning the lesson of how our actions are perceived by others. How without even being aware of it, we can play a part in someone else's journey of healing, discovery of self, and finding their way to walk in the world.

The second message is the power of the collective. As some of you know, the Women's Center was born from the efforts of the Free Women's Collective. In our early years, we housed a number of collectives which were groups that addressed specific areas of identity and/or impact for women. Some examples of our early collectives included the Arts Collective, the Black Women's Collective, the Health Collective, and the Rape Crisis Collective. Our current Advisory Board came out of the work that was done to ensure the Center's commitment to collective decision-making by its many and varied constituencies. And that commitment to the collective and to representation by various constituencies was a major thread through last night's program. This year the students chose the theme "Communities Unite to Take Back the Night." The message was loud and clear – none of us can do this alone. And no subset of the University community is immune from the impact of sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking. This will not end if we work in isolation. Isolation keeps us from being accountable to anyone besides ourselves. Everyone one of us has a role to play, a decision to make, a chance to make a difference, not only for survivors, but for each other. The collective keeps us accountable. We hope you will be inspired by what you read here to accept your place in the collective work of ending sexism and all forms of oppression.

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The Violence Against Women Prevention Program (VAWPP) has been quite busy this semester. We are focused on raising campus awareness about the many ways sexual assault and dating violence is still very much present, while also providing the community opportunities to expand their knowledge and get involved. This semester, the peer educators split into different groups to complete many long term projects. The projects we worked on this year included:



Our poster for this year's Take Back the Night, designed by Kelly Walters.

Take Back the Night: Teaching Assistants Caely Flynn and Colleen Szabo were the project leaders for this campus-wide event that included guest speaker Gina Barreca, a candlelit march, and speak out for survivors. VAWPP decided this year's theme should be: "Communities Unite to Take Back the Night". VAWPP and the Women's Center would like to recognize that the Undergraduate Student Government (USG) helped fund this year's Take Back the Night. Over three hundred members of the community came together for the event, and it would not have been possible without the support of the entire community.

No Witness: VAWPP peer educator, Samantha Ribiero, directed an interactive play that reenacts a sexual assault trial, where the audience becomes the jury. The play first ran at Seton Hall College, and VAWPP was very happy to bring it to the UConn campus. It ran for two nights in the Student Union Theater and acted as a catalyst for an enriching conversation with the audience on what consent is and how to hold others accountable for their actions in a meaningful way.

Spring Weekend: VAWPP collaborated with the Undergraduate Student Government to help ensure a safer Spring Weekend. This included a group of VAWPP peer educators, led by VAWPP Teaching Assistant, Krissy Dolce. Known as the Spring Weekend Freedom Fighters, they worked to create more useful handouts to students, including: coasters with the definition of consent printed on them, information about dental dams and condoms, and t-shirts that celebrated UConn pride. The Freedom Fighters also led two different "Bystander Empowerment" workshops that heightened the sense of responsibility and accountability in the community. It provided students with ways to recognize unhealthy and violent behavior during the weekend and how to handle such situations.



VAWPP peer educators, Natalie Cullen and Maggie Wetter.



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

Equaltopia: VAWPP teaching assistant, Brenna Harvey proposed a sociology research project in which she would interview various social activists to determine if and how the UConn community is working to abolish the many intersecting oppressions. She worked closely with Krissy Dolce to create a visual representation of Equaltopia: a map to guide the view through places like the "Sea of Sexism", the "Land of Homophobia", and the "Nation of Racism" until they reached Equaltopia. Along the way, information is included about great support and resources on the UConn campus, including the Cultural Centers and the Community Response Team, a team of allies against sexual violence on campus. It also includes ways to stop oppressive behavior, actions that must be taken before gaining access to the Land of Equaltopia.

Also, after many requests for a self-defense program, the Women's Center and VAWPP decided to take on the challenge, along with Off-Campus Services and the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life. Core to the development of a program were conversations about the differences between risk reduction and prevention. The Women's Center defines risk reduction as solely lowering one's risk of being assaulted. This puts the responsibility on potential **victims** of making sure they are safe. Though this can help reduce one's risk from being assaulted, it does not actually prevent the crime from happening. It does not solve the greater social issue of sexual assault and domestic violence. Prevention, which VAWPP and the Women's Center promotes, works at getting to the roots of the violence and abolishing an entire cultural attitude that normalizes violence and blames victims.

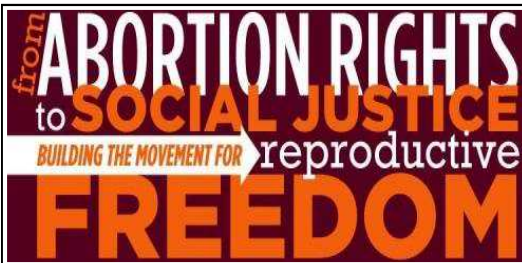
Many times, self defense is viewed as only reducing the risk of personally getting assaulted, but not preventing the crime from happening. Though it can be an empowering tool, it was imperative that we highlighted that only true prevention would stop such violence, which includes conversations with **both** men and women. True prevention involves potential perpetrators NOT committing the crime as well as empowering bystanders, who have the power to stand up and speak out against the violence.

Ultimately we decided to use a Rape Aggression Defense (R.A.D.) trainer for women to learn self defense. The R.A.D. program came to UConn from University of Hartford's Department of Public Safety. For more information on this program, please visit <http://www.rad-systems.com/index.html>. To ensure that prevention was addressed, we also included a simultaneous program for men to discuss their role in preventing violence against women, because sexual assault and violence against women is **not solely a woman's issue**.



Recognizing a Need for Justice

By Kerri Brown



<http://clpp.hampshire.edu/projects/conference/2010>

I've always identified as pro-choice. I had the innate, unquestioned belief that all women should have the right to choose what they do with their body. And I never gave it much thought. I never had to. I assumed *all* women in this country lived similar to me. Women in this country had the right to get an abortion if they chose. We *all* had access to birth control. We *all* learned about different contraception methods in high school health class. Growing up in a suburban, privileged, liberal town, I believed these to be inalienable rights, and I never felt directly connected to the cause, or that it actually *concerned* me.

Then, I began working at the Women's Center; and to summarize a complete self-revelation and social realization, things changed. I became aware of the current issues within our country and the challenges facing women worldwide. I am one of these women. Like many young women, I never realized that if I become conscious of our leader's decision making, and if I use my voice and yell loud enough, someone has to listen.

This could not have been clearer this in the fall, and this past semester. In the winter, the Women's Center's Reproductive Rights Committee, led by Michelle Farber, hosted an educational panel on crisis pregnancy centers and the newly introduced Stupak Amendment. According to [Planned Parenthood](#), Crisis Pregnancy Centers are fake clinics that "dissuade women from having an abortion. Some openly acknowledge this goal. Many don't. They masquerade as comprehensive health care centers. You'll find them listed under 'abortion,' 'abortion alternatives/services,' 'family planning centers,' and 'women's centers'" (Eastland). The Stupak Amendment was first introduced in the Fall of 2009 and strictly kept federal funds for abortion out of the public health insurance options. The panel included Gretchen Raffa of Planned Parenthood of Connecticut, as well as Jillian Gilchrest, executive director of Connecticut NARAL. The panel soon turned into a conversation between those who identified as pro-choice and those who were anti-choice. It was inspiring to see so many of the Women's Center staff members, Reproductive Rights Committee members, and members of the surrounding community come together and listen to the opposing beliefs. We had the opportunity to voice our own opinions, strive to provide complete, accurate information to participants, and advocate for reproductive justice. The positive synergy echoed through the Center for weeks after. The countless efforts of the Reproductive Rights Committee and Women's Center student staff were unparalleled in making sure the UConn community, as well as active members of Crisis Pregnancy Centers in the Storrs area, were aware and educated on the current issues facing women's reproductive freedoms. To make sure everyone at UConn was aware that our rights were at stake, the student staff members and Reproductive Rights committee members posted flyers around campus stating exactly what would be taken away from us. We also networked through email and Facebook to our classmates, and contacted our state representatives through phone calls and written letters, to tell them that we did not want **our rights** taken away.

Imagine our enthusiasm when the House rejected the amendment.

So why is it important to recognize these changes? Why can't we celebrate our accomplishments? How does this still *concern* us? For one thing, universal healthcare passed with synonymous language to the Stupak Amendment. Imagine our shock when in the end, such a giant step forward for *universal* healthcare meant a huge step back for *women's* health care. In theory, everyone should have access to healthcare. However, if the quality of healthcare is based on a person's gender, that is discrimination.

It is important to understand that our individual rights are eroding. It is crucial that we fight to engrave the changes into our society, to normalize our reproductive freedom in a culture that isn't quite there yet. Today, we see television shows on MTV exploiting teen moms. We expect everyone who has experienced an abortion to feel shame and guilt. We view virginity as 'pure'. But we have the power to claim and maintain control of our bodies and keep our right to choose to do whatever we feel right for ourselves. But we must constantly be aware that the choices we have are not currently assured. We cannot take our education, our freedom, or our bodies for granted. We cannot shortchange ourselves and our future generations. We must be conscious of our place in society and participate in impacting how decisions are made. We must recognize our privileges and fight against our oppressions. We must understand that each case and every person is unique. Despite clashing opinions, social stigmas, and bias judgments, we cannot waiver in our struggle against them.

The issues have been presented, and there is no longer an excuse to be unaware of personal rights. The Women's Center recognizes the global, national, and local changes that have and need to be made. On campus, we try to share the principles of a community of practice. At the Women's Center, we recognize that we are collectively learning in a shared domain and though we share the common interest of gender equity, we each bring something different and vital to the cause. We understand that there is strength in our united, individual voices. We strive to provide the UConn community of practice with information and conversation on many different topics, including reproductive justice. Through the exchange of ideas, beliefs, and actions with our friends, classmates, and educators, we can all move toward understanding the importance of reproductive justice.

Recently, many of the student staff members along with members of the Reproductive Rights Committee traveled to Hampshire College for the annual Conference for Reproductive Justice, with funding from the Undergraduate Student Government, with (*continued on page 4*)

Women's Center Celebrates V-Day

By Kerri Brown

VDAY
UNTIL THE VIOLENCE STOPS

In February, the Women's Center helped bring VDay, the globally recognized movement to end violence against women, to the UConn campus. The campaign included two nights of consciousness raising where students and staff partook in two different performances, including Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues* and *A Memory, Monologue, A Rant & A Prayer*.

The Vagina Monologues is a collection of monologues taken from interviews that Eve Ensler held with 200 different women. The women were of different race, sexuality, location, and class. For the past 12 years, *The Vagina Monologues* has given a voice to the silenced, taboo topics facing women including, but not limited to, sexual gratification, childbirth, body image, domestic

abuse, and sexual assault. The play serves as a space where women can reclaim the word, and through it, gain empowerment against the social oppressions facing them.

A Memory, Monologue, A Rant & A Prayer is a newer production co-edited by Eve Ensler and Mollie Doyle, comprised of an anthology of monologues, written "to stop violence against women and girls" (VDay website). This play is different than *The Vagina Monologues* because not only does it focus solely on violence facing women, it provides men with an opportunity to have a voice in the production and stresses the need for and importance of men's support in ending violence against women.

By engaging men in the efforts to stop the violence, it also highlights the importance of an empowered bystander. This semester, the Violence Against Women Prevention Program has made bystander empowerment a priority (see VAWPP article on page 2).

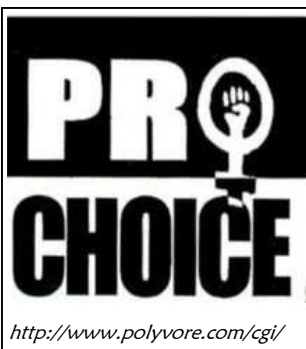
UConn's VDay Campaign could not have been possible without the local support of co-sponsors Hockanum Greenhouse and the Student Union Board of Governors (SUBOG), and the fine work of the volunteer cast, crew, and governing board. Director, Rachel Madariaga, would especially like to thank "Joleen Nevers, our advisor, and Kathleen Holgerson, Director of the Women's Center, for the advice they always gave and for the work to help us succeed."

This year, the proceeds from UConn's VDay campaign benefited the Sexual Assault Crisis Center of Eastern Connecticut, as well as, the Opportunities Industrialization Center of New London County, inc. If you would like to know more about the VDay Campaign or how to offer your support in ending violence against women, please visit the [Women's Center's website](http://www.womenscenter.org) or www.vday.org for further information.



Director, Rachel Madariaga, speaks at UConn's Vagina Monologues

Reproductive Justice (continued from page 3)

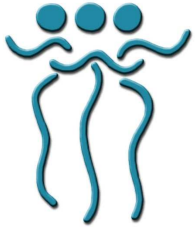


the hopes to further their knowledge and understanding of the reproductive rights and constraints facing women nationally and globally. This was the second year that the Women's Center participated in the Conference. With hundreds coming together, it is a weekend-long celebration, discussion, and platform for women and men from all over the country to join in a community of advocacy and support. The weekend includes an abortion speak out, so those who, by social stigmas, normally cannot voice their experience have an open, judgment-free space to do so. It also includes three days of workshops ranging from understanding the importance of comprehensive sex education, to natural methods of birth control, to the unionization of prostitutes in the United States. Women's Center student staff member, Mindy Brown explains, "It was such a refreshing weekend. Hampshire College became a community of so many different people coming together and working towards the same goal of Reproductive Freedom." This seemed to be the sentiments many participants shared after a weekend of meeting others, collaborating with different organizations, and working together to provide strategies to effect change.

Today, it will come as no surprise that I still identify as pro-choice. But as a young woman living in New England, with health insurance, access to birth control, and experience with comprehensive sex education, I recognize the right to choose what I do with *my body* is completely my own. Not every woman in this country is offered the same privileges, especially now, with universal healthcare on the chopping block. Not every teenager receives the same information in high school health class. It was only last year that President Obama got rid of his predecessor's abstinent only funding.

It is imperative to realize that though some may feel liberated, the majority is not. I know that I am one person; but I also know that the issues concerning reproductive rights impact everyone.

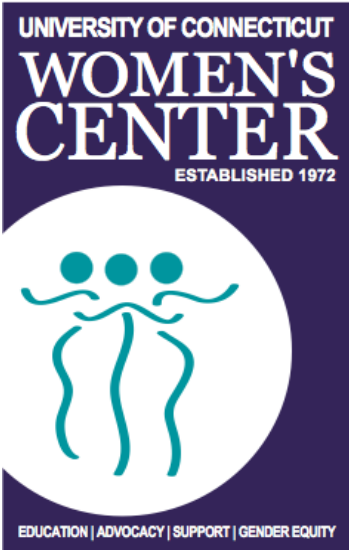
Please contact the Women's Center's Reproductive Rights Committee, at wcreproductiverights@gmail.com to get involved.



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 the 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 contributions to the University of Connecticut, as well as 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

Need Help Now?



contact the
Community Response Team

Domestic Violence Program,
United Services, Inc
(860) 456-9476 - Willimantic Area

Sexual Assault Crisis Services of
Eastern Connecticut
456-2789

Women's Center
(800) 486-4735

Student Health Services
(800) 486-4700

University Police
911 or (860) 486-4500 (for routine calls)



**National
Organization
for Women**

**Reproductive Rights
Committee**



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.