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Women's Center History

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UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA
1883-2008
CELEBRATING 125 YEARS

WOMEN'S CENTER
HISTORY

Kay Mendick, Director
Why was it created: In the early years of UND, women’s roles were clearly defined. Generally, the philosophy was that if the women were controlled, then the men would be under control also. As a result, women were strictly supervised. Women were trained in the graces and etiquette of the day. They were told what to wear and when they could go out. The appearance of the women at any event was of the utmost importance. Because of these restrictions on women and the courage of some who did not feel it was equitable to have their lives so restricted, a woman’s organization was formed.

When was it created: In 1908, a woman’s organization was formed by Ella Fulton, who at the time was the Dean of Women at the University of North Dakota. This would be an affiliated organization for women and would be called the Women’s League. It occupied an unused dining area in the women’s dormitory.

What was the aim and scope of the department: To sponsor various social activities on the campus.

THE FIRST STAFF MEMBERS:

From what locations did they come: The original organization (1908) was formed by Ella Fulton, who was the Dean of Women at the University of North Dakota.

THE FIRST STUDENTS:

What were their living accommodations at the University: Most women attending the University of North Dakota resided in Davis Hall, which was built in 1887 for women.

THE EARLY PROGRAMS/SERVICES:

Were there specific services that seem dated and sound peculiar today: The first services that were provided to and for women were social activities. The general philosophy at the time was that if women were controlled, then the men would be under control also. As a result of this, women were strictly supervised. Women were trained in the graces and etiquettes of the day. They were told what to wear and how to act. The appearance of women at any event was of utmost importance. This in and of itself is very outdated and would appear to be very restrictive in today’s world.

THE DEPARTMENT’S EARLY RESOURCES:

Does the building where the department first resided still exist? No. Davis Hall was demolished in 1965.

Was the space shared with other departments: Davis Hall was built in 1887 for housing women. The residence hall was the scene of most of the social and cultural activities on the campus. From it’s construction, the President of the University lived in the hall until the completion of the President’s House in 1903. The University dining room occupied the basement until the completion of the University Commons in 1911.

OVER THE COURSE OF TIME:

How has the mission of the department/program changed over time:
In the early days, women at UND were seen and not necessary heard from outside of the classroom – and in many cases, not even inside the classroom. Women were tolerated, not celebrated for their achievements, their contributions, their role in society. In fact, in the early days, one of the biggest roles that women would play with regard to a collaborative effort was to sponsor social events wherein one would learn how to dress, how to act, how to speak.

In 1974, a separate facility at 316 Harvard was designated the Women’s Center by UND. Dr. Nancy Huntsman informally served as the first coordinator and was responsible to a board of directors. This was an unpaid position. The Women’s Resource and Development Center was also located in this facility. A library was
maintained as a speaker's bureau. In 1974, funding was obtained for a half-time coordinator, partially from University Fee funding. The major decisions of operating the center and managing the organization were left up to the members of the executive committee of the organization. The coordinator was responsible for such things as publicity, the care of the house, budgeting, and serving as the liason between the center and the University administration.

In 1975, the Women's Programs defined goals were to study status and roles of women in a changing society and provide opportunities for groups awareness of common needs and concerns; to support and coordinate programs and activities serving women in the University and the Grand Forks area; to prepare and activate women for a more effective role in society; and to serve as a vehicle by which the interests and concerns of women could be brought to the attention of the appropriate officials. In 1976, the goals were redefined and included the goals to provide for the education and awareness of women and to combat sexism. Ms. Laura Taylor (no other information found on this individual) helped with the project.

In 1975, administrative responsibility for the Women's Center was placed in the Division of Student Affairs with direct supervision provided by Dr. Michael Kaelke, Dean of Student Development. When Dr. William Bryan succeeded Dean Kaelke, he took an active role in the supervision of the center. That active role began to clarify a difference of opinion with the student group over the coordinator and to whom she was responsible. The coordinator remained as a part-time position under the direct supervision of Dr. Bryan. Dr. Bryan believed the Women's Center Programs should respond to the needs of women on campus with a broader focus.

In 1977, Dean Bryan appointed an advisory board which represented a broad constituency and included both women and men, students, faculty and staff; Barbara Berry was appointed as the chairperson. This group met that spring and throughout 1977-1978. In 1977, the name of this office was changed to the Office of Women's Programs and it was moved to the remodeled second floor of the Canterbury House. UND funded a full-time coordinator, Ms. Linda Volz. The student group (Women's Resource and Development Center) no longer shared the facilities. Women's Programs continued to report through the Dean of Students Office and programming dollars were increased. The office emphasized working with the rest of the campus in joint programming efforts.

In 1978 Women's Programs moved from the Canterbury House to its present location at 305 Hamline St. That year Dean Bryan became Vice President for Student Affairs and Women's Programs reported to Gordon Henry, Associate Dean of Students and later to Assistant Dean Schwartz.

Lois Christal was appointed coordinator of Women's Programs in the late 70's and the office began reporting to the Dean of Students Lillian Elsinga.

In 1987 Nancy Nienhuis was appointed coordinator of the Women's Center and the focus or mission of the center was to reconnect with other departments on the campus to provide collaborative efforts in serving women on the campus and in the community with regard to issues that were impacting their lives. Ms. Nienhuis was instrumental in building a strong bridge with the student population. Numerous outreach activities were initiated to bring awareness of women's issues to the student population.

In 1990 Donna Oltermans was appointed coordinator of the Women's Center. Ms. Oltermans continued working with student groups but the focus of women's issues began to narrow maintaining a strong focus on the violence that is committed against women.

In 1999, Kay Mendick was appointed Director of the Women's Center. A Task Force initiated by VP for Student and Outreach Services, Dr. Robert Boyd in 2000, gave the directive to look at the mission and the focus of the Women's Center. The results of this task force and the initiation of programs to follow turned the focus back towards collaborative efforts to serve women on the campus and in the community with regard to a more broad look at the issues impacting women's lives, coupled with the celebrations of the amazing strides
women have made. Today, the Women's Center celebrates the diversity of people and of thought. The contributions made by women of yesterday are celebrated throughout the year. The glass ceiling is still very evident, but strides are being made with more and more women competing for positions of power in fields that were at one point in time off limits to them. Women make up over 52% of the student body population and are entering the once referred to “non-traditional” fields of study at rates never seen before. With this age of technology and instant information, women want to know where they stand; why they stand in such a stead or position and what to do about their individual situations should there be someone or something blocking their progression towards their own charted destiny.

**How has the staff composition changed:**
In the early days of female students, faculty and staff working on what was once termed “women’s issues”, a handful of individuals would come together for a specific cause or function. The staff at the Women’s Center has grown from 2 permanent staff positions with one or two work study positions to a staff of 2 permanent staff positions; 2 graduate student assistants; and 4 undergraduate student positions. In 2000, with the development of the IMPACT Personal Safety Program, the staff grew to include six more individuals (3 female instructors; 3 male instructors) to a team in 2007 of 12 IMPACT Instructors (6 female and 6 male).

**Were policy/program changes internally driven or were they the result of community needs, national/regional trends, funding issues, etc.:**
Policy changes would coincide with UND policies and procedures. Program changes are typically driven by community needs, national trends, funding issues, etc.

**Partnerships with other units – Have there been changes, why:**
The Women’s Center today enjoys partnerships with numerous departments on and off the campus. The collaborative efforts made between the Women’s Center and others is a strategic part of its programming activities.

**Has the department needed to move from one building to another, and, if so, what effect did this have on the department:**
Organizations focused on women’s issues has moved from its initial location in Davis Hall in the early 1900’s to a house on Harvard Street, to the Canterbury House, to its current location of 305 Hamline St. The moves throughout these decades as allowed for more space for staff, functions, resource materials, etc.

**When and under what conditions did the departments use graduate students:** The Women’s Center began utilizing the expertise of graduate students for the purpose of outreach education to students in the late 1980’s and graduate students are utilized today for the same main purposes as stated above.

**How has the department’s relationship with the local community changed over time:** Since the mid to late 1980’s, the Women’s Center has enjoyed a collaborative relationship with numerous agencies in the Grand Forks area. The main agency would be the Community Violence Intervention Center. The Women’s Center and the Community Violence Intervention Center co-sponsor numerous events relative to the effects of violence on the lives of women.