

Open Letter Regarding the Women's Resource Center

Sr. Mary Louise Gude, CSC
Assistant Vice President Student Affairs
316 Main Building

Dear Sister Mary Louise:

This year's Student Senate Committee on Gender Issues decided to make the Women's Resource Center one of our projects. Given that next year marks the thirtieth anniversary of women at this University, this project is especially appropriate. As such, we made several visits to the center and held meetings with the president to determine the current status of the center.

Upon doing this, we found the center to be somewhat inadequate. While the Women's Resource Center provides a beneficial service, it appears that it is not being used to its fullest potential. Our first concern is that many women on campus are not aware that the center exists. Kelly Smith, the president, reports that the only people who have used the center this year are graduate students doing reports. The purpose of the center should be to serve the women of the Notre Dame community with any concerns or issues they may have. Yet no one here ever uses it for real concerns. This is most likely due to a general lack of awareness about the center. However, our concerns do not end at its lack of visibility. Currently, the WRC does little more than provide information about resources for various women's concerns, such as pregnancy and sexual violence. Furthermore, this information seems to be outdated and inadequate in many instances. Additionally, we have concerns that Counseling is unavailable, few events are sponsored, and few necessary services, such as workshops, are available there. This is primarily due to the lack of human and financial resources necessary for the desired development of the WRC.

Our Center seems especially lacking when compared to those of our peer institutions. Other schools' equivalent centers offer such resources as self-defense classes, women and money education series, women's author series, Telling Her Story Brown Bag Lunches, discussion groups, art exhibits, spirituality gatherings, film series, poetry, seminars on how to fix cars, massage workshops, and many other such resources. While some of these things are available at Notre Dame, there is no one organization to connect these all together. These programs would be far more beneficial if there was some cohesion between them. The function of our center, therefore, should be to create unity and provide these types of services to our women. Certainly this may seem to be a daunting task, and it will continue to seem so as long as we allow the center to continue understaffed and under-funded.

As next year will be the thirtieth year that women have attended this university, we think that this is an especially important issue to look into. Based on information given by the current volunteers at the Center, we have several recommendations for the improvement of the Center. The most important one is for a full-time staff member to work at the Women's Resource Center. Someone whose job it is solely to coordinate events for the Center could make great improvements in the communication of the Center with different women's resources on campus and at St. Mary's College. This could also expand the center so that it dealt with issues such as general living and information as well as sexual violence and pregnancy. Ideally, this would be a paid person who served the Center and our women as a full time job. Should it prove impossible that a full-time paid staff member be made available for this position, we feel that it could perhaps be offered as an internship. Another area which needs improvement would be the quality of available information. If there was more money allocated in the budget for the Center, updated books and videos could be ordered. Also, a newsletter could keep people updated and bring the Center closer to the students. Once the Center itself was improved, there would need to be an increase in publicity so that the women of Notre Dame could be aware that these resources are available to them. More involvement with the student body would make sure that it functioned to cover issues important to women here. We also felt that moving the Center from its third floor LaFortune office to the Counseling Center would bring it closer to the students and make people feel more comfortable in using it.

We feel that this is an important concern and that the recommended improvements would improve the well-being of students, especially women, here at Notre Dame. Thank you for your concern.

Sincerely,

Lindsay Zika
Student Senate Committee on Gender Issues