

4-6-2001

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University of Dayton

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Recommended Citation

University of Dayton, "University of Dayton to Establish a Women's Center as a Forum for a Women's Issues on Campus" (2001).
News Releases. 10482.

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April 6, 2001
Contact: Teri Rizvi
rizvi@udayton.edu

NEWS RELEASE

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON TO ESTABLISH A WOMEN'S CENTER AS A FORUM FOR WOMEN'S ISSUES ON CAMPUS

DAYTON, Ohio — The University of Dayton will establish a women's center on campus next year to coordinate and promote women's programs, services and resources and address gender equity and violence against women.

The center grew out of the recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Women's Issues, a presidential task force that suggested ways the University of Dayton could enhance the role of women on campus.

"The committee recommended establishment of a single, visible center to provide information, education and coordination necessary for an inclusive and strong campus community," said Brother Raymond L. Fitz, S.M., president.

UD's women's center will open in fall 2002. An executive director is expected to be hired by next spring. The center, administered out of the president's office, will conduct programming ranging from preventing sexual assault and dealing with eating disorders to coordinating women's history month activities and women's retreats.

"The center will coordinate and initiate programming and advocate for and represent the needs and concerns of women students, faculty and staff," according to Kathleen Watters, associate professor of communication and co-chair of a working group that proposed the center.

The 16-member working group, comprised of faculty and staff and advised by a student group, conducted an inventory of programming on campus that supports women students, faculty and staff; visited women's centers at Duke University and the University of St. Thomas; and commissioned a focus group study before recommending that UD create its center.

"We're aware of the power these centers can bring to campuses," said John Geiger, senior vice president for academics and provost. "There's a lot of energy and momentum behind establishing a center here."

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OFFICE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS
300 College Park Dayton, Ohio 45469-1679
(937) 229-3241 (937) 229-3063 Fax
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During the past decade, numerous Catholic colleges and universities have established women's centers. "On the landscape of American higher education, women's centers continue to be standard fixtures on campuses," Watters said. "Over the past 15 years, women's centers have become a vital, indispensable resource for colleges and universities seeking to address gender discrimination and inequities and striving to create diverse learning communities."

Women's centers began to appear on college campuses in the 1960s to meet the needs of homemakers who sought a college education, according to a report by the President's Advisory Committee on Women's Issues. In the 1970s and 1980s, legal and societal pressures prompted some campuses to start centers. During the mid-1980s and into the 1990s, "the central mission of campus women centers shifted to issues of sex discrimination, sexual harassment and violence against women," the report said. "For students, faculty and staff, women's centers became the 'first call for help' for women experiencing discrimination, harassment or sexual assault. Centers, which had started as a means of access for returning women students, became places where all women on campus — students, faculty and staff — turned for resources, guidance and support."

Women are now more likely than men to attend college immediately after high school and to earn bachelor's degrees, according to "Trends in Educational Equity of Girls and Women," an Education Department study released last year. On UD's campus, women students outnumber men, and 100 of UD's 390 full-time faculty are female.

"I definitely think women on campus will use a women's center," said Megan Pullem, vice president of the Student Government Association and a member of the student advisory group. "There are so many different places for women to go on campus for support and services, but there's not been one designated place. There are a lot of things a women's center can be used for — research on women's issues, health concerns, sexual assault education and support, social issues. This can only help our campus."

Students support the initiative. A student organization called SAFE (Students Advocating Female Equality) won this year's annual Miryam Award for enhancing the climate for women on campus and donated its \$500 award toward the establishment of the center.

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For media interviews, contact **Kathleen Watters** at (937) 229-2378, **Lisa Rismiller**, executive assistant to the president, at (937) 229-4122 and **Megan Pullem** at (937) 229-4444 or 331-9545.