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## Letter from the Editor

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## Journal for Women & Gender Centers in Higher Education

Dear Readers,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the inaugural issue of the Journal of Women and Gender Centers in Higher Education (JWGCHE), published by the Flora Stone Mather Center for Women at Case Western Reserve University through the generous support of Dr. Lillian Emmons. This journal is dedicated to publishing a breadth of scholarship and creative work to advance the knowledge of women and gender equity centers in higher education.

In the 1960s, women's studies courses began to appear in colleges and universities across the country and soon led to the development of women, gender, and sexuality studies (WGSS) programs and departments, simultaneously with women and gender equity centers. Boxer notes, situated within the context of the academy, "women's studies had a very clear purpose to transform the university so that knowledge about women was no longer invisible, marginalized, or made 'other.'"<sup>1</sup> From the beginning, the goal of women's studies and women's centers "was not merely to study women's position in the world but to change it."<sup>2</sup>

Institutionalizing WGSS into college and university curricula is a radical act and an important step toward broader social change. Yet, Bubriski and Semaan remind us that WGSS programs must see promoting feminist teaching as a beginning point, not an end, asserting, "course readings and classroom discussions are critical for understanding feminist discourse and analysis, but we must also teach students to merge feminist theory with social action in order to transform systemic gender, class, and race inequalities."<sup>3</sup> This community engaged action has largely been the driving force behind women and gender equity centers in the last 60 years.

As feminism is a guiding theoretical perspective in WGSS, the concept of the public good is a guiding idea in higher education scholarship. Tony Chambers, an education scholar who focuses on student racial justice movements, defines the public good as "a vision and destination of a 'better state' that we can know in common that we cannot know alone."<sup>4</sup> I

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted on p. 10 of Ginsberg, A. E. (2008). *The evolution of American women's studies: Reflections on triumphs, controversies, and change*. Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> P. 91 in Bubriski, A., & Semaan, I. (2009). Activist learning vs. service learning in the women's studies classroom. *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, 7(3), 91–98.

<sup>4</sup> Chambers, T., & Gopaul, B. (2008). Decoding the public good of higher education. *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, 12(4), 59–91.

believe women's and gender equity centers are deeply rooted in both feminism and the public good. It is our responsibility to have an impact on practice and policy in higher education that seeks to end injustice by raising our awareness of other ways of knowing and mutual engagement within our communities. One of the most substantial ways the public good can be reinvigorated in higher education is through feminist knowledge production and feminist community action enacted in part by women and gender equity centers.

Since the 1960's women's centers have been a catalyst in higher education supporting women's access to higher education and fostering a greater understanding and potential for gender equity. Despite our growth and importance in higher education, women's centers and their work are under-researched.<sup>5</sup> This lack of inclusion of women's knowledge in the academy is intricately tied to the founding of all of our women and gender equity centers. As we approach our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary at the Flora Stone Mather Center for Women, we are expanding our mission to be a community space and a social innovator, empowering women and advancing gender equity through research-informed action.

At the center of our strategic plan and expanded mission is the sharing and producing of knowledge for and by women and gender equity centers in higher education. We call this initiative The Women's Center Educational Learning Lab, or The WELL. Usually when women's centers come across challenges that have not yet been sufficiently studied or solved, we use existing research and common practice at other women's centers to implement programs to address those challenges. The WELL takes a unique approach by implementing that program as an applied research project, utilizing assessment or participatory research methodologies to explore and improve our programs and disseminate best practices. We know you are all doing this work too, and we want to help you share it with your colleagues past, present, and future.

The WELL is a fitting name for this initiative. The well of knowledge commonly refers to a never-ending source of knowledge or the Greek mythology of the Spring of Macedonia, where the well was believed to be a fountain of knowledge that inspires whoever drank from it. In this difficult political time with the attacks on critical race theory and reproductive justice you might feel like you are in the 2009 Margaret Atwood novel *The Year of Flood*, where two survivors of a pandemic reflect on their fictional journey that "sucked into the well of knowledge, you could only plummet, learning more and more, but not getting any happier."<sup>6</sup>

I prefer to consider The WELL through Patricia Hill Collins' work; as a contribution to the overall well of knowledge that we as humans have access to.<sup>7</sup> Collins reveals how white supremacist patriarchal power relations have historically dominated this well,

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<sup>5</sup> Davie, Sharon L. (2002). *University and college women's centers: A journey toward equity*. Greenwood Press; Pasque, P. A., & Nicholson, S.E. (2011). *Empowering women in higher education and student affairs: Theory, research, narratives, and practice from feminist perspectives*. Stylus Publishing.

<sup>6</sup> P. 188 in Atwood, M. (2009). *The year of the flood: a novel*. Random.

<sup>7</sup> Collins, P. H. (1990). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. Unwin Hyman.

shutting out subordinated group's contributions. Contemporary feminist ways of knowing demand we challenge inequities of sexism, racism, colonialism, class, and all other forms of oppression. This expansion of feminist thought throughout the academy, thanks in part to women and gender equity centers, is just one realization of fulfillment of that activist goal. Thus *The WELL* and this journal can expand whose lived experiences are being utilized as the foundations for meaning-making and knowledge in higher education.

As the editor of this journal, I want to express my gratitude to the team of dedicated board members, reviewers, and our Managing Editor, Hannah Regan, who have helped us to select and develop the articles for this issue. Their expertise and professionalism have been invaluable in ensuring the quality of our content. Our first issue includes articles on topics such as women's center herstory, the purpose and mission of women's centers, and innovative programs to prevent gender-based violence. I thank our authors for their contributions to growing the well of knowledge on women and gender equity centers, and hope you enjoy reading their scholarship as much as I did.

In closing, I want to invite you to join us in our mission to promote women and gender equity centers in higher education. We welcome submissions from scholars, practitioners, and activists who share our commitment to this important work. Together, we can create a more diverse, inclusive, and equitable system of higher education.

Sincerely,

Angela Clark-Taylor, PhD  
Editor-in-Chief

Executive Director, Flora Stone Mather Center for Women  
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