

Women's Center remains place for academic, social experiences despite locale, structural changes



Gwen Fischer, Resource Coordinator at the Women's Center.

Robin Trimarchi/DN

By Gwen Fischer
Diversions Contributor

There are lots of places for women to hang out on campus. Love Library has a nice environment for studying and plenty of books. The furniture is, well, furniture, and the atmosphere is... library. The women's lounge in the Nebraska Union has thick carpet and comfortable couches. This is a great place to nap or write that letter, but what if you want to watch TV? The Hollow on East Campus is nice for lunch with soap operas, but studying is tough. My point? There is a place on campus where you can study, look at books, talk with friends, eat lunch and check out Oprah Winfrey. This place is the Women's Center.

The Women's Center was first opened as the Women's Resource Center in the turbulent '70s. Feminism was in the air, and the WRC, as it was called, was a place for women to get together and talk about what was happening to themselves and to society. Women students were recognizing the educational system as sexist and unsupportive, and they got together to try and change that. Through the WRC, women sponsored rallies, marches, lectures and dances.

This time last year, some changes were made at the Women's Resource Center. Because increased funding was forcing increased accountability, the

structure of the center was forcibly disbanded. Even people who agreed with the university's perspective on management structure found the events of last spring repugnant. In the first of many changes, the Women's Resource Center was renamed the Women's Center, to fall in line with a move on the part of women's centers nationally and to reflect the increased role and services of the Women's Center.

The most dramatic change was the change in location. In a move that created twice the amount of space, the Women's Center moved to the third floor of the Nebraska Union. The Women's Center now boasts a large meeting room, new bookshelves and desks and even a copy machine. The new TV and VCR make it easy for the staff and speakers to present video materials, as well as provide relaxing television viewing for students using the lounge space.

The staff team at the Women's Center coordinates a variety of programs and services for students and community members alike. Each semester a wide offering of support and discussion groups meet in the Women's Center. From the Latina Reading and Discussion Group to the Sexual Assault Survivors Support Group, the programming is designed to meet the various needs of women on campus.

The support groups are coordinated through the counseling

program of the Women's Center. Peg Miller, a student pursuing a Ph.D. in counseling psychology, is the staff member who oversees the counseling program, which includes peer counseling and individual crisis counseling as well. Student volunteers can train with Peg to be a part of the peer-counseling program.

Volunteers and interns form a vital part of the Women's Center atmosphere. Students interested in volunteering can work with Amy Van Pelt, volunteer coordinator, to receive training in every part of programming. Besides the counseling program, volunteers and interns take care of the Resource Library, assist callers in finding services for women at the university and in Lincoln, maintain an employment opportunity listing, and do many other activities essential for the smooth operation of the center. This semester, interns are receiving credit for running the advertising program, designing computer software for the Resource Library, creating a men's outreach program and leading discussion groups.

The Resource Library contains more than 2,000 books and magazines purchased and donated over the course of 20 years. The focus of the collection is women and their concerns. Good fiction and practical health books rest side by side with scholarly works

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