

U of Minnesota Women's Center Involves Male Allies

By Michael Grewe, Master of Social Work student and intern at the University of Minnesota Women's Center

During the last several years, an increasing number of male-identified students, staff and faculty have asked the Women's Center at the University of Minnesota the same question: How can men become more involved as advocates for women's equity on campus?



Michael Grewe

There were few answers or resources to provide. Sporadic programs have educated men about patriarchy, issues facing women and transgender individuals, or effective ways to interrupt sexism in everyday interactions with friends, family, and colleagues—but it was far from enough.

Leaders at the Women's Center appreciated men's growing interest in both women's equity and reinventing masculinity, and wondered how to fill that void.

Last spring I inquired with the Women's Center about doing my Master of Social Work practicum with them. We connected about the need for men to take responsibility for their sexism and have access to resources on campus where they could learn to be allies for gender equity.

However, I was cognizant of the identities I would bring with me to the Women's Center. As a white, able-bodied, gay, male-identified person entering a unit that had been historically staffed by female-identified individuals, I'd face challenges that would require me to reflect on my privileges and how to negotiate my identity in certain spaces.

But I was very excited about working with the amazing staff at the Center and creating pipelines and avenues for men to become gender equity advocates.

In the beginning

When I started in fall 2011, the staff and I began to look for strategies and opportunities to involve men in our work and for similar initiatives across campus. We knew that this task would not be easy. By the time they reach college, men have been inundated with messages that promote ideals of what it means to be "a man," often by devaluing and exploiting women.

Additionally, at a large university like Minnesota—with about 52,000 students and 20,500 employees—it's difficult to connect and to partner with other students, staff, faculty or units in sustainable ways.

We realized that we needed to talk to people—not just male-identified ones but also many of the women who participate in our programs. So we began by conducting a needs assessment to explore these research questions:

- Should the Women's Center house programs designed to help men to become advocates for gender equity?
- In which kinds of programs are male-identified individuals interested in participating?

What was needed?

Our research design was a needs assessment with mixed methods, using an online survey format consisting of both quantitative and qualitative questions.

A total of 424 people completed the online survey needs assessment, 131 of whom were male-identified. The results gave us some fascinating insights into our research questions:

- *Most respondents (49.8%) agreed that the Women's Center should provide programming for men;* women and people of other gender identities tended to agree more than men. Those who agreed indicated that men have a need for education around issues of sexism, patriarchy and masculinity that is currently unaddressed at the university.

- *Those who disagreed (22.5%) responded that they believed the Women's Center should focus on programs specifically aimed towards women.* Some also worried about our capacity and resources to run such programs for men without reducing current programs for women.

- *Participants agreed that cross-departmental and university-wide collaborations around male-specific programs were lacking*—whether or not they thought the Women's Center should house such programs—and many discussed the need for departments to provide social justice programming for men.

- *Men indicated that they found the most engaging types of programs around these topics to be speakers who discuss gender equity, and classes that focus on masculinity and male gender roles,* and discussion groups that talk about gender. Men said that free incentives and relatable messaging were key marketing strategies to attract them to programs on gender equity.

Practical implications

This needs assessment has a number of implications for practices and policies within the Women's Center:

First, it showed that there is a stated need for men to be educated about the issues and challenges facing women today, including the ways that patriarchy harms people of all gender identities—though in profoundly different ways.

Second, if the Women's Center provides such outreach to men, it needs to be clear about why such programming is necessary and how it relates to its mission of advancing equity for women on campus.

Finally, it illustrated the importance of collaborating with other departments across campus rather than trying to go it alone.

To address the needs vocalized in our survey, the Women's Center has created a number of programs that aim to increase collaborations among departments and to address the lack of anti-sexism education for men on campus:

- *We established a Men's Advisory Board* this spring as a way of connecting male-identified students, staff and faculty from across campus who are passionate about issues of social justice and gender equity.

Modeling what several universities across the country

Men said that free incentives and relatable messaging were key marketing strategies to attract them to programs on gender equity.

are doing, it aims to provide men with an opportunity to identify ways that the Women's Center can reach out to male allies, as well as educate the broader population of men about ways to challenge sexism.

Not only does it provide a sounding board to voice issues and needs from men on campus, but it also allows those in the room to realize the potential for collaborations across campus. Contacts include people from offices of athletics, residence life, sexual assault prevention, Greek life, student affairs, orientation, academic advising and multicultural affairs, who can strategize ways of reaching out to men across campus.

Board members are currently in the process of establishing a set of common values around masculinity and sexism, and they are beginning to strategize how the board can best effect change on campus.

- *In April we hosted Dr. Tracy Davis*, director of the Center for the Study of Masculinities and Men's Development at Western Illinois University. He discussed barriers and strategies for successfully inviting men to advocate for gender equity with more than 75 students, staff and faculty attending.

The Women's Center was able to connect with a number of male-identified people after the event, including recruitment for the Men's Advisory Board.

To gather support and promotion for this talk, we reached out to a number of departments across campus and received enthusiastic replies: 14 offices and student organizations signed on as event sponsors, signaling a thirst by many on campus to discuss the topic.

- *Dr. Davis also facilitated a round-table discussion* for staff members of the Women's Center, the Aurora Center (our sexual violence advocacy and prevention service) and members of the Men's Advisory Board.

We explored ways of cross-department communication and of developing a common strategy around educating and informing men about issues of sexism and patriarchy. Additionally, this gathering made room for conversations around ways our departments could create longer-term and marketable programs to men.

The Women's Center expects this project to start a sustainable effort to involve men in anti-sexism work at the University of Minnesota. It has been able to make a number of connections with male allies passionate about eliminating sexism, racism and other forms of oppression, due in part to the intentional outreach and programming that it created.

Plans for next year include holding a one-day men's leadership summit to help them to develop understanding and skills to become advocates for social justice.

Reflecting on my work over the past year, I have learned an enormous amount about myself and about doing this work in authentic, collaborative and sustainable ways.

Though there are no clear or obvious strategies to involve men in gender equity advocacy, our staff is optimistic about the energy and collaborative spirit the Men's Advisory Board will bring to the Women's Center and ultimately to the entire campus. ■

Michael Grewe is a student affairs professional who will receive a Master of Social Work degree from Augsburg College in Minneapolis MN on July 1. He plans to continue there as assistant director of campus activities and orientation, and coordinator of LGBTQIA services. Contact him at: grewe@augsborg.edu

2012 Development Opportunities

Title IX at Forty

May 9-11, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor
<http://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/home/research/sharp-center/title-ix-at-40-conference>

College & University Work/Family Association (CUWFA)

May 16-18, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor
<http://www.cuwfa.org/2012-annual-conference>

Leadership and Women of Color

May 16-17, Spelman College GA
<http://www.spelmanwomenofcolorconf.com/index.html>

Leaders Institute 2012 (AAWCC)

June 18-22, Hyatt Regency Inner Harbor Hotel, Baltimore
<http://leaders.ccbcmd.edu/>

National Council for Research on Women (NCRW)

June 20-22, Georgetown University Conference Center DC
<http://www.ncrw.org/events/2012/06/20/ncrw-annual-conference-2012-strengthening-womens-economic-security-and-leadership>

Regional Leadership Forum (ACE)

September 19-21, North Dakota State University
http://www.acenet.edu/Content/NavigationMenu/ProgramsServices/Leadership/InclusiveExcellenceGroup/Programs/Regional_Leadership.htm

Conference for Pre-Tenure Women

September 24-25, Purdue University
<http://www.purdue.edu/wro/pretenure/>

National Association of Collegiate Women Athletics Administrators (NACWAA)

October 7-9, Kansas City KS
<http://www.nacwaa.org/>

HERS Wellesley Institute 2012-2013

October 11, November 8, 2012; February 7, March 14, 2013
<http://www.hersnet.org/documents/2012-13AllInstitutes9-7-11.pdf>

Hawaii Women in Higher Education Conference

October 12-13, Pacific Womens College Honolulu
<https://sites.google.com/site/hawaiiwomeninhighereduc/>

Women in Educational Leadership Conference

October 14-15, Embassy Suites, Lincoln Nebraska
<http://cehs.unl.edu/edad/partnerships/welc.shtml>

Wisconsin Women in Higher Education (WWHEL)

October 25-26, Carroll University WI
<http://www.wwhel.org>

National Women's Studies Association (NWSA)

November 8- 11, Oakland CA
<http://www.nwsa.org/conference/>

Women's Leadership Institute 2012

November 26-30, Ritz Carleton, Laguna Niguel CA
<http://www.acui.org/programs/professional/program.aspx?id=16499> ■