Executive Summary

Women’s Center
Program Review
2014-15

Mission
To promote equitable and safe environments on campus for women through advocacy, education, and research.

Vision
The Women’s Center will be integral to the University of Cincinnati’s efforts to create a diverse and inclusive learning environment for women students.

March 2015
As a member of two programs, RECLAIM and WILL, produced and ran by the University of Cincinnati’s Women’s Center, I hold the center responsible for making my UC experience so significantly special. The Women’s Center has provided me with the space and opportunity to grow as a feminist leader on my campus. Within the center, I have built community and relationships that I envision lasting a lifetime. As a first year student at UC, I was in search of a niche; I lacked confidence and direction. After spending a significant time in the Women’s Center, I found myself in a place of comfort and familiarity. The center has equipped me with confidence in myself, my ideals and my capability to continue in my activism even after graduation. In the University of Cincinnati’s Women’s Center, I find a place of support and family. Without it, my experience at UC would not be one worth sharing.

--Raquel Boose
Undergraduate student, RECLAIM advocate, member of Women in Leadership and Learning (WILL), and member of the UC Women’s Center Program Review Advisory Committee

The Women's Center has been incredibly influential to me over the past year. Quiet spaces are hard to find at the University of Cincinnati, but the staff of the Women's Center have done everything in their power to make the Center a safe and friendly environment. This is why I find myself always going to the Women's Center whenever I have free time, as it will always be a positive and calming experience. The Women's Center has also opened several doors that have helped me to get involved on campus. They were even able to help me get an internship with the University of Cincinnati's Police Department working with their sexual assault investigator. I can safely say that because of the Women's Center, I have felt more empowered and motivated in the past year than I have in my previous four combined.

--David Schmutte
Undergraduate student, RECLAIM advocate, Women's Center representative on the Student Advisory Committee on the University Budget (SACUB), and member of the UC Women’s Center Program Review Advisory Committee
Background

The University of Cincinnati Women’s Center is one of the oldest continually operating university women’s centers in the United States. Established in 1978 as Women's Programs and Services, the office first served as a referral center for female students. The name of the unit changed in 1998 to the University of Cincinnati Women’s Center (UCWC), as it is known today, to better reflect its increased scope as well as place the Center in the then-emerging national field of campus-based women’s centers. Over the years, the Women’s Center has grown its mission and evolved to best serve the needs of the UC campus. In 2013, the Women’s Center celebrated 35 years of service to the University of Cincinnati and surrounding community.

As the UC Women’s Center transitions in multiple ways—the Center’s restructuring under the division of Student Affairs, the transition of WIN/WILD from the Center to the Provost’s Office, and the retirement of the Center’s longtime director—the program review process sought feedback about how the Center could best serve the campus community. Interim Women’s Center Director Dr. Amy Howton created—with the input of key stakeholders—the following charge for a program review. Supported by Vice President of Student Affairs Debra Merchant, Provost Beverly Davenport, and Chief Diversity Officer Bleuzette Marshall, the Women’s Center’s Program Review formally began in November 2014, with a timeline for completion in March 2015.

Rationale: After celebrating a historical 35-year anniversary in 2013, the UC Women’s Center is creating an opportunity for reflection and strategic action by engaging the campus community in a comprehensive program review. The program review will assess current programming and services provided by the UC Women’s Center, identify strengths and opportunities for improvement, and make recommendations for continued innovative and transformative programming.

What: The review will consist of data collection and data analysis, culminating in a written summary report. Data collection will include both quantitative and qualitative data: existing quantitative data (i.e. Campus Climate Survey) will be supplemented with qualitative data collected through listening sessions and interviews with key stakeholders. Data analysis will identify emerging themes underlining the strengths and opportunities for growth, contextualized by additional research and benchmarking of campus-based women’s centers in peer institutions. Finally, a written report will be prepared to summarize the process, findings, and recommendations and will be presented to stakeholders and prepared for public dissemination.

How: Two external reviewers who have expertise and experience in campus-based women’s centers and higher education will be contracted to lead this project. A small, diverse advisory committee will be convened and charged with supporting this process through identifying relevant, existing data; identifying stakeholders to be included in listening sessions/interviews; refining guiding questions; and providing feedback to draft forms of the summary report. The lead external reviewer will co-chair the advisory committee with the Interim Director of the Women’s Center.

---

A detailed history of Women’s Center landmarks and accomplishments—including the Center’s 35th Anniversary newsletter—is available at [http://www.uc.edu/ucwc/about/history.html](http://www.uc.edu/ucwc/about/history.html).
The program review process utilized three main sources of data to inform and contextualize the UC Women’s Center’s Program Review: listening session and interview findings, benchmarking with peer institutions, and the women’s centers literature, including the 2015 revised CAS standards. The two external reviewers (Amber Vlasnik and Tamika Odum) conducted eight listening sessions and three individual interviews in December 2014 and January 2015. The listening sessions were organized by the following constituency groups: faculty; senior Student Affairs administrators; mid-level Student Affairs administrators; student open session; Women’s Center student leaders (two sessions); and Women’s Center staff (two sessions). Student participation was diverse across gender, race, and year in school, and included undergraduate and graduate students. Participation in the listening sessions totaled 88 participants (duplicated; unduplicated headcount is 81). Additionally, the external reviewers conducted three individual interviews with Provost Beverly Davenport, Chief Diversity Officer Bleuzette Marshall, and Vice President of Student Affairs Debra Merchant. All listening sessions and interviews utilized a standard set of questions, which are available in the full report (see page 4).

Findings

Findings are organized in five sections. Detailed descriptions of the findings, participant quotes, and full citations are available in the full report (see pages 9-26).

1) Strengths of the UC Women’s Center

Strengths of the UC Women’s Center include the following:

- Advocacy for individuals, groups, and institutional change;
- Asking tough questions;
- Creating impactful, relevant student leadership experiences;
- Creating and maintaining safe space;
- Intersectionality/collaboration;
- Theory to practice;
- Outstanding educational programs;
- Research and gender-based expertise; and
- Offering student-centered resources and support.

With these strengths noted by constituents, the UC Women’s Center is in line with the functional areas outlined in the women’s center literature: safety, education and awareness, support and advocacy, equity, and building community, as well as newer areas of focus for women’s/gender centers such as leadership. The UC Women’s Center is operating successfully within the parameters of the field of women’s/gender centers.

---

2 Benchmark institutions were defined by the Office of the Provost and included the following institutions of higher education: University of Connecticut, University of Pittsburgh, Syracuse University, Temple University, University of Illinois – Chicago, George Mason University, University of Alabama – Birmingham, University of South Florida, and University of Houston.


2) Women’s Center’s Unique Contributions to UC
This section builds on the strengths of the UC Women’s Center and what it does well, noting the areas in which the Center uniquely contributes to the UC community. Listening session participants identified the following:

- Advocacy around gender-based violence prevention and survivor services;
- Creating feminist community;
- Demonstrating UC’s commitment to gender equity and women;
- Programming about women and gender;
- Consistent safe space and highly trusted referrals; and
- Connection to academics, particularly Women’s, Gender, & Sexuality Studies.

3) Growth Opportunities for UC and the Women’s Center
Participants were excited to share areas where not only the Women’s Center, but also the university could grow in relation to women’s/gender issues. Major themes included the urgency of assigning resources to match the Center’s mission, growing outreach and programming related to particular student identity groups, especially men and graduate students, and stronger branding of the Women’s Center’s mission, services, and activities.

Participants also identified the following as best practices from the Center, of which they wanted to see more:

- The growth of established programs, specifically $tart $mart and WILL;
- More student leadership training and education. UC needs a roadmap and strategic planning in this area, and the expertise of the Women’s Center staff must be present at the table for this conversation;
- Expanded peer education; the Center has expertise in creating peer education opportunities, and more topics could be covered (e.g., one participant suggested “sex positive, gender-inclusive, sexuality-inclusive sex education.”);
- Increased capacity of the Center to write and publish about its work, in order to showcase the work of the Center and generate best practices for the field of women’s/gender centers;
- Continued mentoring and pushing students to develop as leaders;
- Continued consultation between identity centers and programs;
- Increased student reach about the excellent work the Center does;
- Expanded assessment of the Center’s faculty and staff efforts and their intended or measured impact on students’ learning and development, as well as staff effectiveness in mentoring student leaders;
- The expansion of WILL, including the possibility of involving graduate students in the program as participants, mentors, or another capacity;
- More formalized partnerships with and for the benefit of women of color;
- Continued efforts to formalize the Center’s anti-racist work;
- Expanded advocacy into critical gender-related campus issues such as the availability of childcare and lactation rooms;

• Continued modeling by the Women’s Center staff about how to collaborate, move among centers, and work together across differences, in the hopes that students who frequent the various Student Affairs offices in Steger will also increase their interactions and collaboration; and
• Increased, deeper connection with Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (WGSS), so that it is immediately evident to WGSS and Women’s Center students alike that the partnership is strong, thriving, and integral to the work of both units.

Participants also identified areas in which UC needs to act in order to increase institutional effectiveness in advancing gender equity, including:

• The clarification of the institutional goals around the status and advancement of women;
• More women to take on leadership positions at UC, so that the campus climate related to gender might also shift;
• The assessment of the needs of women on campus and a series of conversations that allow UC to reflect on whether we are meeting the needs of women in all their diversity;
• Having the Women’s Center at the table when discussing how to increase opportunities for women in leadership (e.g., when other units offer leadership training, the Women’s Center should be at the table due to its expertise);
• Working with the Women’s Center to better define what the Center does in the campus community and what it houses, and then promoting the Women’s Center in a way that speaks to its importance to UC;
• Encouraging other units to collaborate with the Women’s Center and incentivizing them to formally take on some of the work they share with the Women’s Center so that the Center can be freed to work on other aspects of its mission that might not be shared with other offices; and
• Increased resources to the Women’s Center.

4) Women’s Center Leadership
Listening session participants expressed that the following qualities were desired in the leader of the Women’s Center: vision; a strong student affairs orientation; the ability to partner with faculty; a willingness to speak up and be a leading voice for diversity and equity; advocacy; experience institutionalizing efforts related to gender equity; transparency; visibility; and knowledge about resources and willingness to connect people with opportunities. Detailed descriptions are available in the full report, as well as a discussion of degree requirements for the Women’s Center leader (see pages 22-24).

5) Hopes for the UC Women’s Center
The final question asked in each of the listening sessions was to complete the sentence, “My hope for UC in regards to the Women’s Center is…” Answers centered around mission/philosophy, the desire for the Center to grow, potential activities of the Center (particularly in relation to serving diverse constituency groups), and the desire for increased support in multiple ways: 1) from administrators; 2) resources; and 3) support for the Center’s staff and their activities. A complete list of participant hopes—in their own words—is available in the full report (see pages 24-26).
Recommendations

A series of major recommendations emerged from the UC Women’s Center program review process. They address the questions and concerns of the listening session participants and UC administrators who were interviewed, and draw from best practices in the field of women’s/gender centers as defined through benchmarking with peer institutions and the women’s/gender center literature. Recommendations are presented in unranked order; detail and rationale are included in the full report (see pages 27-31):

• Consider changing the name of the Women’s Center to more accurately reflect the center’s current work (gender) and its possible work (men and masculinities);
• Clarify areas of focus for the Women’s Center;
• Center space should better reflect the functions of the Center;
• Address the current staff vacancies in the Women’s Center and move towards a staffing structure that supports the expanded mission and purpose of the Center;
• Clearly communicate a named champion for women faculty and staff at UC;
• Clarify that the Center serves students first, but also faculty and staff so that they can better serve and support students;
• Increase Center services and opportunities for graduate students;
• Strengthen the relationship between the Women’s Center and the Department of Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies;
• Link educational programming to curriculum whenever possible; and
• Build the Women’s Center’s capacity related to assessment.

Full Report

The full report of the UC Women’s Center Program Review includes expanded data, benchmarking, grounding in the women’s/gender center and higher education literature, and extensive quotes from listening session participants. It also includes the photos and biographies of the Advisory Committee and external reviewers.

Advisory Committee

The UC Women’s Center Program Review was guided by an Advisory Committee, which was composed of the following members: Raquel Boose, undergraduate student, RECLAIM advocate, and member of Women in Leadership and Learning (WILL); Dr. Amy Howton, Interim Director of the Women’s Center and Co-Chair of the Advisory Committee; Dr. Amy Lind, Mary Ellen Heintz Endowed Chair and Professor of Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies; Dr. Susan Mahoney, Assistant Director (Leadership Initiatives), Student Activities and Leadership Development; Dr. Bleuzette Marshall, Chief Diversity Officer; Tamika Odum, External Reviewer and former Program Manager for Outreach and Education in the UC Women’s Center (2006-2010); David Schmutte, undergraduate student, RECLAIM advocate, and Women’s Center representative on the Student Advisory Committee on the University Budget (SACUB); Dr. Robin Selzer, Assistant Professor in Professional Practice and Experiential Learning (ProPEL) and former interim Director of the UC Women’s Center (2001-02); Leisan Smith, Director, LGBTQ Center, and former graduate assistant in the UC Women’s Center (2001-02); Carol Tonge-Mack, Assistant Dean of Recruitment and Retention Initiatives, McMicken College of Arts & Sciences; and Amber Vlasnik, Lead External Reviewer and Co-Chair of the Advisory Committee.

UC Women’s Center Program Review
Executive Summary p. 7