Women’s Center Program Review 2014-2015

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
# Program Review
## University of Cincinnati Women’s Center
### 2014-2015

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March 16, 2015

Debra Merchant
Vice President for Student Affairs
600 University Pavilion
University of Cincinnati
Cincinnati, OH 45221-0638

Dear Vice President Merchant:

It is our pleasure to submit this program review for the UC Women’s Center. It is the result of five months of collaborative effort on the part of dozens of individuals and offices, and serves to highlight the strengths and unique contributions of the Women’s Center at the University of Cincinnati. The review also points to areas of opportunity for both the Center and the university, outlining a series of recommendations designed to strengthen the ability of the Women’s Center to meet its stated mission as well as chart a path for the Center’s continued national leadership among campus-based women’s/gender centers.

Throughout the review process, the Women’s Center was consistently described as vibrant, relevant, and needed on the UC campus. As external reviewers with deep experience in campus-based women’s centers, we are pleased to report that the UC Women’s Center is a national model for its individual and institutional advocacy, unique student experiential and leadership opportunities, innovative educational programming, and expertise in guiding students in translating theory to practice.

We are particularly thankful to Dr. Amy Howton, interim director of the Women’s Center, the Women’s Center staff, and the program review’s Advisory Committee for the additional time, effort, and expertise they invested in this project. Without their efforts, this review would not have been possible.

We know you, your division, and the university will consider the details of this report carefully and we look forward to the continued impact of the Women’s Center on the UC campus and as a national leader. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this important review process.

Sincerely,

Amber Vlasnik
Lead External Reviewer

Tamika Odum
External Reviewer
Section One: The 2014-15 Program Review

History of the UC Women’s Center
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, with the initial staff connecting students and staff to resources and events that were off-campus. The name of the unit changed in 1998 from Women’s Programs and Services 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. For example, in 1991, the Center expanded to include support and advocacy for gay students, and the Center added women faculty and staff to its constituency by assuming responsibility for the Women’s Initiative Network (WIN) in 2004. 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.

As the Women’s Center entered its fourth decade of service at the University of Cincinnati, the Center developed a strategic plan to sharpen its focus and prepare the Center to meet the demands of an increasingly diverse university. The strategic planning process was guided by the Center’s mission and values and by the mantra of the university’s strategic plan “to place students at the center.” The current mission statement, vision and goals (printed below) are products of this process.

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**UC Women's Center Mission Statement**
To promote equitable and safe environments on campus for women through advocacy, research and education.

**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.

**Goals**
Goal 1: Increase and improve student safety in interpersonal relationships.
Goal 2: Identify and help eliminate institutional barriers that impede the full participation of women in the university.
Goal 3: Increase student activism in UC and beyond.

Available: [http://www.uc.edu/ucwc/about.html](http://www.uc.edu/ucwc/about.html)
Purpose/Charge of the Program Review
With the input of Women’s Center staff and supporters, Interim Director Dr. Amy Howton created the following charge for the UC Women’s Center Program Review:

**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.

With the support of 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.

Process: Project Leadership and Early Framing
As outlined in the charge for the review, a lead external reviewer (Ms. Amber Vlasnik, see “About the External Reviewers” for biography, starting November 2014), external reviewer (Ms. Tamika Odum, see “About the External Reviewers” for biography, starting December 2014), and Advisory Committee (see “About the Advisory Committee” for biographies, starting November 2014) were identified to start the process.

The Advisory Committee 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

Amber Vlasnik, Lead External Reviewer and Co-Chair of the Advisory Committee

Dr. Howton and Ms. Vlasnik convened the newly formed Advisory Committee in November 2014 to discuss the review process and the Advisory Committee’s role in it, as well as their hopes for the process. Ms. Vlasnik also met with the Women’s Center staff to explore these topics and seek preliminary print sources for the report.

These initial meetings of the lead external reviewer with the UC Women’s Center Program Review Advisory Committee and the staff of the Center revealed the following hopes for the program review process. As a result of the program review, the following were deemed possible, desirable outcomes by those who would be most involved in the review of the UC Women’s Center:

TO EXPLORE

• What constituents or topics, if any, are not represented in UC and/or Women’s Center’s programming and services?
• Are there needs, support, and/or resources for programming around gender and masculinities?
• How does the campus currently understand the mission, services, programs, activities, and expertise of the Women’s Center?
• What resources are needed for the Women’s Center to continue and/or increase its activities, impact, and reach on the UC campus and surrounding communities?
• What can outreach look like/be for the Women’s Center to students, to the campus, and to multiple off-campus communities?
• What are thoughts about the current name of the Center, and would the campus and the Center be better served by a different name?
• What are the existing sources of support and resources for faculty and staff, particularly after the transition/relocation of the WIN/WILD initiative to the Provost’s Office?
• What integrated/aligned services and resources for women exist across UC—as well as
  gender-based resources and services available to the UC community—and what is the
  Women’s Center’s place in these?

TO COMMUNICATE
• What the Women’s Center offers to UC and the communities it serves, underscoring the
  Center’s incredible accomplishments and contributions to UC and the field of
  women’s/gender centers over the past 36 years.
• The vast, deep expertise of the Center and its staff.
• An open, compelling invitation for involvement in the Center, across the campus and
  across constituencies.
• A definition of feminism that excites, engages, and educates UC about the important
  work of the Center for gender and social justice.
• How the Center helps students to connect theory to practice and prepare for their work
  and civic lives through meaningful, cutting-edge experience-based learning and service.

Additionally, the Advisory Committee learned about the history of the UC Women’s Center (Dr.
Howton) and campus-based women’s/gender centers (Ms. Vlasnik), reviewed draft listening
session and interview questions, worked to develop a project timeline, and gave input about
constituency groups and individual invitations to the listening sessions scheduled for December
2014.

Process: Listening Sessions and Interviews
With the coordination of the Women’s Center, the two external reviewers conducted five
listening sessions and three individual interviews in December 2014. The listening sessions were
organized by the following constituency groups: faculty (n=5); senior Student Affairs
administrators (n=5); mid-level Student Affairs administrators (n=23); Women’s Center student
leaders (n=3); and the Women’s Center staff (n=5). 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.

Because the term was ending, there was lower student participation in the December listening
sessions. Two additional student listening sessions were scheduled for January 2015, including
an open session (n=32) and a session for RECLAIM and WILL students (n=8). Student
participation was diverse across gender, race, and year in school, and included undergraduate and
graduate students. Additionally, the reviewers met with the Advisory Committee in January 2015
to discuss early themes and conducted a second listening session with Women’s Center
professional and student staff (n=7) in which the staff received critical questions from the
reviewers in advance of the meeting. These questions emerged from the December 2014
listening sessions and included themes about the adequacy of the Center’s current space, the
name of the Center, how the Center currently serves/could serve faculty and staff, and the role of
RECLAIM on campus and within the Women’s Center’s current mission.
All listening sessions and interviews, regardless of when they were conducted, utilized the following questions, which were designed to explore the above hopes for the review process and to fulfill the charge of the program review.

QUESTIONS FOR THE LISTENING SESSIONS

- Please introduce yourself, and also complete the sentence, “My connection with the UC Women’s Center is…”
- What does UC want/need the Women’s Center to do?
- What does the Women’s Center do well?
- What does the Women’s Center uniquely do at UC? in the community?
- Where/how would you like to see the Women’s Center grow? What opportunities do you see?
- In a few words, what do you want in a Women’s Center? What do you want in its leader (director)?
- Please complete the sentence, “My hope for UC in regards to the Women’s Center is…”

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

- In your view, how does the Women’s Center fit into UC’s institutional goals and priorities?
- In your view, what are the areas of expertise of the Women’s Center?
- In what ways does the Women’s Center currently support the work of your division/office?
- How could the Center be better positioned to support your office’s goals/work?

The external reviewers were pleased with turnout for the listening sessions—which totaled 88 participants (duplicated; unduplicated headcount is 81). To the reviewers, this speaks volumes about the perceived importance of and the commitment to the UC Women’s Center. All participants, including the students, were well educated on many aspects of the UC Women’s Center as well as the Center’s theoretical underpinnings. They provided invaluable feedback, ideas, questions, and unprompted statements of support, for which the reviewers are grateful. This process could not have occurred without their time and sharing; their participation continues to be greatly appreciated.
Section Two: Findings

This section outlines multiple sources of data that inform and contextualize the UC Women’s Center’s Program Review. There are three main sources of data: listening session findings, benchmarking with peer institutions, and the women’s centers literature, including the 2015 revised CAS standards. The section is organized around the listening session findings, with benchmarking and the women’s center literature woven throughout, as appropriate.

Listening Sessions (December 2014, January 2015)
This section shares the thematic findings of the eight listening sessions and three individual interviews conducted in the program review process. It is organized in the following sections: 1) Strengths of the UC Women’s Center; 2) Women’s Center’s Unique Contributions to UC; 3) Growth Opportunities for UC and the Women’s Center; 4) Women’s Center Leadership; and 5) Hopes for the UC Women’s Center.

1) Strengths of the UC Women’s Center
An early question in the listening sessions related to what participants felt that the Women’s Center did particularly well on the UC campus. There were immediate and diverse responses to this question, as well as many shared themes across the multiple listening sessions and constituency groups. The major themes are highlighted below.

Advocacy for individuals, groups, and institutional change. The most emphatic—and often the first—response from participants was that the UC Women’s Center is particularly skilled at advocacy in the broadest possible sense. The Center was widely held as being effective in advocating for individuals, groups (particularly women-identified and LGBT students), sexual assault survivors (through RECLAIM), and for institutional change. RECLAIM was often mentioned as an example of the Center’s effective advocacy, particularly for the Center’s work to share skills with other employees and administrative units to support survivors. Additionally, RECLAIM was lauded for its strong confidentiality; as one participant noted, “You never hear chatter about sexual violence cases or the stories of survivors through RECLAIM. You can trust them to be confidential.”

The staff’s expertise, commitment, and passion for social justice and gender equity was noted on several occasions; the staff were widely regarded as trusted, competent professionals who regularly went the extra mile to ensure that individuals had what they needed to succeed and to push UC when the institution needed to change. One employee noted that the Women’s Center staff members have “always been strong, scrappy, good allies, leaders, and advocates.” Many participants also acknowledged that Women’s Center staff members were often pulled in many

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

2 Detailed information about RECLAIM is available at http://www.uc.edu/ucwc/reclaim.html
directions in relation to advocacy, as they are often asked to advocate for employees as well as students. Student affairs practitioners particularly noted that they were grateful for the Women’s Center’s support of women employees, since there were few places for women staff to go if they need resources, support, a listening ear, or a place to ask questions about critical issues they faced in their work life such as gender-based discrimination, harassment, or employment issues such as salary inequity, parental leave, and work-life balance, among others. The Women’s Center is a long-time, trusted source for this kind of staff advocacy and support, and fills an important campus need. Participants also noted the Center’s provision of faculty advocacy, with faculty expressing appreciation for the Center’s attention to workload issues, status of women, and the number of women in academic leadership across the institution. Center advocacy for faculty and staff was seen as central to many participants, since supporting employees around gender equity and diversity issues is a key way to also support students and fulfill the Center’s mission.

Importantly, participants pointed to the above forms of individual and group advocacy as having a lasting impact on the institution. Participants noted WIN and WILD, RECLAIM, and the Women’s Center’s policy advocacy as formally and permanently changing the structure of UC. Additionally, Center advocacy through RECLAIM, for example, was noted for positively impacting campus climate; in the words of a student, “RECLAIM literally makes UC a better place, each and every day.”

Women’s centers have long played an advocacy role on their campuses (Chamberlain, 1988; Martin, Morrow, Robbins, Spencer, & Vlasnik, 2012), and it is a core tool of women’s centers to enact their missions (Kunkel, 1994, 2002). It is perhaps easiest to imagine women’s center advocacy for individuals (e.g., a student in crisis) or groups (e.g., student parents, women-identified students), and institutional advocacy can be, at times, more difficult to define. While institutional advocacy manifests differently across women’s centers, it is widely understood by women’s centers as “identifying emerging issues affecting women within the institution and providing leadership in setting up machinery to provide solutions” (Chamberlain, 1988, p. 93). It is therefore possible to formally advocate for institutional change through chairing task forces or commissions on the status of women, such as the UC Women’s Center’s leadership role in issuing status of women reports and in leading the Student Parent Task Force, Sexual Offense Response Team, and Sexual Violence Prevention Task Force, as well as less formal means such as working collaboratively with colleagues to address identified issues with a particular institutional policy or practice. The UC Women’s Center is clearly effective in advocating at all three levels—individual, group, and institutional—and it is a core piece of their identity and brand with the UC campus.

**Asking tough questions.** Linked with the Center’s advocacy, the Women’s Center was widely lauded for being a steady, strong voice for women’s issues and gender equity. Interestingly, several participants across listening sessions also noted that the Center’s adeptness at raising difficult questions is also part of what makes the staff’s jobs more difficult, as consistently raising critical questions can be a vulnerable position for the Women’s Center and, particularly, its leader. Center staff members were also praised for their openness in discussing critical campus issues related to diversity in authentic, transparent ways. The Women’s Center was noted for its expertise in raising issues related to women and gender, for its willingness to ask
tough questions to administrators and to the campus community, and for its ability to work collaboratively with diverse stakeholders to resolve identified issues. Consistent with the women’s center literature, in which women’s centers are described as agents of change that “were created to raise and examine new questions about women’s lives, roles and expectations” (Gould, 1989, p. 219), the UC Women’s Center was described as asking critical questions related to gender equity. This function is also consistent with the newly revised 2015 CAS Standards (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, forthcoming).

Creating impactful, relevant student leadership experiences. All constituency groups noted that the Women’s Center creates impactful student leadership experiences that are best practices in bridging theory to practice and build career, professional, and civic skills. While many people mentioned Women in Leadership and Learning (WILL) and RECLAIM as examples of leadership experiences available through the Women’s Center, listening session participants also noted a variety of independent programs such as Start $mart (a salary negotiation workshop designed to help close the gender pay gap), Elect Her (training to encourage women students to run for student government and other student leadership positions), and Women’s Center advising of student organizations such as UC Feminists. Students, in particular, felt heard by Center staff and supported in building skills that they identified; one student noted, “Students can start being leaders here.” In all, Women’s Center staff members were praised for their excellent informal and formal mentorship of students, their strong supervision of student interns, and for their contributions to students’ personal, career and professional success. Students also appreciated that the Center staff reached out about leadership opportunities rather than waiting for people to apply, as well as the Center’s careful sharing of leadership opportunities and experiences among students; they reported a strong sense of fairness in the Center’s offering of diverse leadership opportunities. Student affairs staff also noted the Center’s provision of well-crafted internships and volunteer opportunities.

Leadership is a key component of contemporary women’s centers (Davie, 2002a; Marine, Helfrich, & Randhawa, forthcoming), including the challenging of traditional ideas of leadership. Davie (2002a) writes, “the particular beauty of the women’s center’s contribution [to transformation of old notions of leadership] is the constant melding of ideas and action, of the academic and the experiential that is at the heart of… ‘the women’s center’ ” (p. 449). It is important to note that women’s centers, at their core, create feminist leadership experiences, which can share attributes with offerings from other areas of the university but offer a unique framework for social justice work that centers gender and the experiences of women in ways that are not typically replicated by other campus units. A feminist student leadership experience teaches a unique core in which students learn to analyze power and privilege on interpersonal, social, and structural levels as well as chart pathways towards equity and inclusion across diversity. The desired outcome of feminist leadership opportunities is most often educating students about how to engage with complex social issues, work for justice and inclusion, and be civically engaged as students and as alumni. Consistent with these commitments to exploring leadership through a feminist, intersectional lens, the UC Women’s Center offers multiple feminist leadership opportunities on an annual basis, with differing levels of involvement from

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3 Detailed information about Women in Leadership and Learning (WILL) is available at http://www.uc.edu/ucwc/we/WILL.html.
which students can choose. A full listing of the UC Women’s Center’s feminist student leadership opportunities can be found here: [http://www.uc.edu/ucwc/we.html](http://www.uc.edu/ucwc/we.html).

**Creating and maintaining safe space.** The Women’s Center is particularly skilled at creating safe spaces, safe conversations, and at helping students grapple with issues of identity. The provision of safe space cannot be understated as an important, core component of campus-based women’s centers (Kunkel, 1994, 2002; Gould, 1989; Nicolazzo & Harris, 2014), and must be continually attended to as centers provide programs, services, and advocacy to their multiple constituencies. Community perception of women’s center safe space is also critical, and begins with students’ first interactions with an office. Students consistently identified the UC Women’s Center as a positive environment; one noted, “The Center is not like other offices, which can be cold. They really know you and make you feel welcome.” A graduate student noted that “the Center staff get to know you, which makes you want to visit more, which increases your investment in the Center and encourages you to become involved in Center programming and leadership opportunities, which increases your interest in being involved in activism for social change in your community.” This comment is consistent with other students, who noted that the Women’s Center is a place where they “fit” and feel included regardless of their level of knowledge about different issues. Safe space allows for students to grow, change, and belong. A student shared, “The Women’s Center offered me opportunities that no one else did. The staff met me where I was. I felt heard for the first time, like people cared about what I had to say. I felt empowered to speak up. In the end, I found a community here.” Faculty also lauded the Center for this work, noting that “our students view the Women’s Center as a lifeline, as central to their experience at UC.” The important work of the UC Women’s Center to create and maintain safe space is also linked to retention. Students are most likely to be retained when they feel a sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012), which UC students involved with the Women’s Center uniformly reported in the listening sessions.

**Intersectionality/collaboration.** The Women’s Center was widely regarded as a model collaborator and a strong ally for other offices. Student affairs colleagues felt supported by the Women’s Center as individuals and as professionals, and students reported learning about other Student Affairs units through the Women’s Center. Several staff members noted the openness of the Women’s Center staff to feedback and their willingness to receive and act on constructive feedback and critique.

Every group interviewed discussed intersectionality as being at the forefront of the Women’s Center’s work, and as a trusted guiding principle for their approach to issues on campus. The Center was praised for its complex understanding of oppression, as well as its speaking out against not just sexism but racism and other oppressions. The external reviewers were impressed that individuals in all listening sessions discussed intersectionality as the framework for the Center’s work and that so many examples of the Women’s Center’s application of the theory were given both in terms of intersecting identities and intersecting oppressions. This is a strong testament to the Center and its staff, as they are clearly working to also educate the campus about intersectionality and providing critical examples of intersectionality in action. As intersectionality is—at its core—a feminist approach that centers the experiences of women of color (Collins, 2000), the UC Women’s Center’s enactment of intersectionality can be
understood as a key manifestation of its feminist identity and example of how it operationalizes that identity for the benefit of student learning and the UC campus.

**Theory to practice.** Many noted the skill of the Women’s Center in enabling students to understand theory, specifically feminist theories and intersectionality. Through Women’s Center activities, students practice what they learn, reflect on it, and bring it back to the classroom. In the words of one student, “When I started, I was all practice. The Women’s Center helped me to learn the theory, and encouraged me to pursue formal education and it was great. The Women’s Center met me where I was and helped me go further.” Additionally, WILL was uniformly identified as a “gem” and best practice in relation to linking educational programming, activism, and the curriculum.

There are many sources in the women’s centers literature about the multiple ways that centers can bridge theory to practice (e.g., Weis, 2011), particularly through collaboration with women’s studies programs (e.g., Parker & Freeman, 1999; Zaytoun Byrne, 2000; Green, 2002). Zaytoun Byrne (2000), writes, “Women’s centers…play a unique and valuable role in enhancing learning. By providing and promoting community service, political activism, program planning and implementation, office management, peer counseling, research, and writing, women’s centers engage in feminist pedagogical methods. These opportunities not only link theory to practice and realize the goals of feminist teaching, but also are consistent with depictions…of what researchers of cognitive development define as the most effective strategies for fostering intellectual development” (p. 48). The UC Women’s Center bridges theory to practice in all the ways identified by Zaytoun (2000), and has an active relationship with Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies that formally links the Women’s Center to UC’s curriculum.

**Outstanding educational programs.** The Women’s Center is known for providing the campus with outstanding educational programming that is steeped in feminist and critical pedagogies, inclusion, and intersectionality. Student affairs colleagues noted that the Women’s Center’s programs are a best practice and can be trusted to be of the highest caliber; there is a high degree of confidence in the quality of Women’s Center programming. Participants noted that the Center’s provision of education around sexual violence prevention and advocacy is particularly needed on campus, and that the Center does an excellent job of getting students involved in program planning. The Women’s Center’s staff members were noted as excellent mentors to students in the programing planning process. Specific mentions were made of Start Smart, Elect Her, the Female O, UC It’s On Us, and Lynn Rosenthal as recent examples of outstanding programming.

**Research and gender-based expertise.** Administrators noted that the Center was “very solid in feminist thinking and incorporating it into their approaches and curriculum.” Faculty appreciated the research focus of the Center, which gives the Center academic depth and gravitas as well as an increased ability to work with faculty across the disciplines. WILL was mentioned multiple times as a best practice for its provision of coursework and experiential learning that deepened the UC student experience.

The staff members were widely seen as experts about diversity and inclusion in ways that center gender, and were trusted collaborators and allies. Staff were also noted for having a pulse on
gender-based issues and for their ability to contextualize changes in policy and law, share best practices, and lead the way on women’s and gender issues. Center staff members were often praised for their careful, research-based advocacy related to gender-based violence and Title IX, as well as their expertise in this area. While Title IX has appropriately garnered great attention in recent years, women’s centers—including the UC Women’s Center—have long been engaged in the work of educating the campus about gender-based violence and bringing forth the most recent scholarship across multiple disciplines and fields in order to generate best practices for prevention education, survivor support, and culture change. The listening session participants acknowledged the longstanding work of the Women’s Center in this area as well as the ongoing need for their participation in conversations about gender-based violence, including Title IX. In the words of a faculty member, “UC needs the Women’s Center to do education related to sexual assault, because [the Center’s staff] are the only ones doing it from a research-based, feminist perspective.”

**Offering student-centered resources and support.** Students identified several areas in which they appreciated the work of the Women’s Center in offering resources and support. They reported feeling informed and up to date on current issues, and that the staff of the Center was transparent in their decision-making and offerings of support. Several students noted that the Center helped them to feel more comfortable at UC; one student noted that the Center is her “bridge to UC and my main way of interacting outside of my classes.” Students reported the Women’s Center to be, more than any other place they regularly visited, student-centered. They felt acknowledged in the space, and that their words, experiences, and ideas had value. The women’s/gender center literature describes centers as “typically at the heart of the most pressing student issues for women on campus” (National Women’s Studies Association, 1990, p. iv), and students in the listening sessions consistently named the UC Women’s Center as a location where important student issues were explored, discussed, and addressed.

**Additional strengths of the Women’s Center.** Participants noted other strengths, often to the agreement of others in the room. First, the Women’s Center makes excellent use of the resources it has, showing skills at prioritizing needs, utilizing staff time wisely, and enacting cost efficiencies. Several participants noted that the staff is one of best assets of the Women’s Center; they were termed “friendly,” “engaging,” and “one of my favorite parts of the Women’s Center.” Last, the Center was praised for its work to move the needle on campus climate, particularly in relation to mentoring, survivor advocacy, and women’s leadership development.

With these strengths noted by its 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 (Kunkel, 1994, 2002), as well as newer areas of focus for women’s/gender centers such as leadership (Davie, 2002a, 2002b). To be recognized by the UC community for excellence in these core functions speaks highly of the work of the Women’s Center, and indicates that it is operating successfully within the parameters of the field of women’s/gender centers.
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. Another way to frame this question is, “What important activities might not get done or occur if UC did not have a women’s center?” Responses are grouped thematically.

Advocacy around gender-based violence prevention and survivor services. The single most common answer to the question of what the UC Women’s Center uniquely does on the UC campus was advocacy, particularly as it related to issues of gender-based violence prevention, survivor support, and Title IX. RECLAIM was mentioned in every session as a critical manifestation of this form of advocacy. One participant noted, “There is nothing else like [RECLAIM] on campus. It would be a terrible disservice to UC if there was no longer a program like that.” There was broad agreement that the Women’s Center—through RECLAIM and its gender-based violence prevention advocacy—approached complicated issues of interpersonal violence in a way that no other unit is currently doing or even could do. Through their advocacy, the Women’s Center “challenges traditional ways of talking about the issues,” and provided a place where the UC community can imagine something other than the current reality related to sexual violence; for example, the Women’s Center was a leader in talking about consent culture on the UC campus, which challenges people to rethink cultural norms and practices. In the words of one student who is a RECLAIM advocate, “We’re explicitly, unapologetically feminist, and we bring diverse ideas and practice to our work. We ask tough questions and model what could be rather than reiterating what is.”

It is important to note considerable national discussion about the roles of women’s/gender centers and current Title IX compliance efforts. The Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR)’s Dear Colleague Letter (2011) caused colleges and universities across the nation to reexamine their Title IX responses to see whether they met the clarified standards from OCR. Most institutions found that they were not meeting the requirements of Title IX, and institutions with women’s/gender centers often found that their center was a playing an important role in filling the gap—particularly related to survivor advocacy and prevention and education efforts—often with minimal or no resources. Centers engaged in this work as part of their missions to eliminate gender-based barriers and support women-identified students, who are disproportionately affected by sexual violence. Effectively naming, addressing, and working to prevent sexual violence and harassment is critical in a center’s mission to advance gender equity, as is the provision of support and resources to survivors: in fact, these are named roots of women’s center work (Kunkel, 1994, 2002).

As institutions began to act to address the issues outlined in the Dear Colleague Letter, women’s centers were able to lend their expertise about gender-based violence, their many professional connections across their institutions and in the community, and years of best practices in the provision of advocacy, education, and prevention to their campuses. However, institutions often worried about issues such as confidentiality, particularly as related to survivor advocacy in women’s centers, so much so that the Office for Civil Rights included explicit clarification in 2014 guidance that “non-professional counselors or advocates [such as those who work or volunteer in women’s centers, including front desk staff and students] are valuable sources of support for students, and OCR strongly encourages schools to designate these individuals as
confidential sources” (p. 23). While confidentiality for survivors is a critically important issue, the national discussion about whether women’s centers were confidential sources under Title IX seems to have created an oversight about women’s centers’ other areas of gender-based expertise and long-standing contributions to sexual violence prevention. In reality, women’s centers play ongoing roles on their campuses in addressing gender-based violence, in how the issues are framed, and as trusted advocates and subject matter experts (Holgerson, Graham, & Beetham, 2014).

The lead external reviewer conducted benchmarking and best practices interviews with several current and former women’s center professionals across the country, asking what unique roles women’s centers played in relation to advocacy and gender-based violence prevention. Their responses were consistent with the offerings and perception of the UC Women’s Center by listening session participants. For example, a staff member from the Women's Resource Center at Georgia Institute of Technology noted, “We help our campus understand sexual violence as an issue of social justice and as a gender-based issue, versus other departments that may approach survivor advocacy from a public health perspective, for example, or prevention from a bystander intervention vantage” (M. DeMaeyer, best practices interview with lead external reviewer). Additional interviews were conducted with the director of the University of Connecticut Women’s Center (K. Holgerson, benchmarking interview with lead external reviewer) and the Executive Director of the School and College Organization for Prevention Educators (SCOPE) (M. Issadore, best practices interview with lead external reviewer), who referenced a forthcoming position statement from the Association of Title IX Administrators (ATIXA) about the role of advocates in the Title IX reporting and intake process, which may be helpful to discussions at the University of Cincinnati.

Listening session participants consistently and uniformly named advocacy around gender-based violence prevention and survivor services as a hallmark of the UC Women’s Center and as something that no other unit was able to do in the same way. Because of its explicitly feminist orientation, which is rooted in research and decades of best practices from the field, the Women’s Center uniquely contributes to survivor advocacy and gender-based prevention efforts on the UC campus. The provision of these forms of advocacy, education, and prevention efforts is critical to the mission of the Center to advance gender equity and to promote equitable and safe environments on campus for women, and only strengthens UC’s ability to meet its Title IX obligations.

Creating feminist community. The Center was widely lauded for building community, especially community based on feminist principles, and for creating spaces in which power hierarchies are minimized. Also noted was the Center’s ability to build community in which differences were appreciated and could be explored. Davie (2002b) writes, “women’s centers have the opportunity to create openings for learning—for [] encounters with otherness and with our own ignorance” (p. 21). Listening session participants described the Center as fulfilling this function in its creation of feminist community, especially since the Center is able to “meet people where they were.”

Students identified the Center as a place for them to go for social interaction, resources, education, and support, and where they could both watch staff members work across difference
and practice those skills themselves. Students noted specific programs such as the Friday Night Chats, which allowed them to mingle and learn about other students in a comfortable setting, as well as Soul Café, which built community across the weeks because students would see the same people and were able to build friendships with like-minded people across different groups. The women’s center literature includes many references of how centers build feminist community on their campuses (e.g., Bengiveno, 2000; Murray & Vlasnik, forthcoming). Kunkel (1994), in describing the work of women’s centers in building community, noted “a community of women who might not otherwise cross paths can provide empowerment and strength to go on” (p. 19), indicating the role of women’s centers in student retention. A student in a listening session noted, “When I go in [the UC Women’s Center], I feel like I’m part of something greater than me, because I’m a part of a great community, a movement.” Again, the activity of creating feminist community can be linked to students’ sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012) and is another means by which the UC Women’s Center works to retain students.

Lastly, staff appreciated the Center’s work to create feminist spaces in which they could also participate. There is, unfortunately, often a dearth of spaces for staff to engage in feminist community in the academy, and many women’s/gender centers directly or indirectly support staff and faculty in their missions or activities (Davie, 2002b; Goettsch, Holgerson, Morrow, Rose-Mockry, Seasholes & Vlasnik, forthcoming). The UC Women’s Center fulfills an important campus function by including faculty and staff in their creation of feminist community.

**Demonstrating UC’s commitment to gender equity and women.** The Women’s Center is a leading manifestation of UC’s commitment to gender equity; as one participant noted, “Even the Center’s existence sends a message of university commitment.” The Women’s Center is the only administrative unit with “women” in the name—which students consistently mentioned across listening sessions—and is a primary provider of programming about gender issues on campus. Gender is a critical dimension of diversity, and the Women’s Center is where expertise about women, gender, and gender equity in higher education “lives” on the UC campus. Participants noted the Center’s dedicated mission to promote equitable and safe environments on campus for women, as well as the Center’s vision to create a diverse and inclusive learning environment for women students. They reported that the unique nature of this mission and vision, with its wide scope and deep impact, was a key way that the University of Cincinnati demonstrated its commitment to women-identified students and to gender equity. In the words of a faculty member, “we want to know that someone wakes up every morning concerned about women’s issues, the experiences of women, and about women in all their diversity.” The Women’s Center fulfills this function.

**Programming about women and gender.** The Center is unique in its provision of programming about women and gender issues that helps the UC community to identify power, privilege, and gender-based barriers through an intersectional lens. Women’s/gender centers have a core function related to programming (Kunkel, 1994, 2002), and have a long history of providing innovative programs across dimensions of diversity (Buford, 1988; Goettsch, Linden, Vanzant, & Waugh, 2012). The 2015 release of the updated CAS Standards for Women and Gender Programs and Services (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, forthcoming) will formally expand programming to encompass gender and masculinities, and has
a contextual statement that documents this shift (Goettsch et al., forthcoming). The UC Women’s Center was noted by listening session participants for its excellent programs related to women and gender, which places it in line with the forthcoming changes from CAS.

While listening session participants acknowledged that other units may also touch on issues related to women and gender, consensus was clear that the Women’s Center is the expert on these topics. As UC’s only dedicated administrative unit to the exploration of gender—a critical, relevant dimension of diversity and a cornerstone of student experience—the Women’s Center was consistently identified as best situated to raise conversations about gender, power, privilege, and the lived experiences of diverse people as they relate to gender.

**Consistent safe space and highly trusted referrals.** While many UC offices offer safe space, participants noted that the Women’s Center is a “particularly important one for campus, in which there is the privacy to talk about what’s unique to people’s identities and experiences.” Staff and faculty, in particular, noted that the Center is a well-established safe space that can find or create solutions for individuals in need. Several participants noted that, without fail, people are sent to the Women’s Center or to the Office of the University Ombuds if someone doesn’t know where to go or how to solve problem, and that there is never worry about sending people to the Women’s Center for fear of how they’d be treated. Participants noted the high level of professionalism, focus, and advocacy provided by the staff, and named the staff as trusted resources for students and supporters of faculty and staff success.

**Connection to academics, particularly Women’s, Gender, & Sexuality Studies.** While participants noted multiple areas where this relationship could be strengthened, all constituency groups noted the long-standing relationship between the UC Women’s Center and the Department of Women’s, Gender, & Sexuality Studies as positive, unique for an administrative unit, and a testament to the relevance and cutting-edge nature of the UC Women’s Center’s work. The formal connection between the UC Women’s Center and UC Department of Women’s, Gender, & Sexuality Studies is a strong model in the field of women’s/gender centers, where the establishment and maintenance of formal ties with the academic program is understood as difficult, at best (e.g., Wenniger, 1994; Cook, 1998; Green, 2002) and also to be of great value (Brooks, Chapman, & McMartin, 2002; Vlasnik, Bethman, Cottledge, & Beetham, 2014). Across the nation, the majority of women’s/gender centers and women’s studies programs are not as closely or formally linked as those at the University of Cincinnati; their close alignment should serve as a point of pride for UC in the fields of women’s/gender centers and in Student Affairs.

The women’s center literature includes many references to the fundamental importance of the relationship between women’s centers and women’s studies programs (e.g., for an overview of benefits and difficulties of collaboration, as well as its urgency, see Brooks, Chapman, & McMartin, 2002). Generally, women’s centers are described as locations in which feminist theories can be put into practice in ways that are rewarding for the student, the classroom, and the community (Zaytoun Byrne, 2000; Brooks, Chapman, & McMartin, 2002; Wies, 2011). This aligns with the assessment of listening session participants, who praised the Center’s expertise in connecting theory to practice as it relates to feminist theories and issues. They particularly noted WILL as an example of Center expertise, and participants felt it was an excellent, research-based
program that is sometimes overlooked by the campus community or is overshadowed by other leadership and advocacy programs offered by the Women’s Center such as RECLAIM. Overall, student affairs colleagues across listening sessions recognized the value of this formal working relationship at UC and wondered how to leverage the UC Women’s Center’s connection with academics in order to reproduce this strong relationship among other Student Affairs offices and their aligned academic units. Clearly, the UC Women’s Center is viewed as a divisional leader in linking their work to the curriculum and forging strong partnerships with academic programs, most notably with the Department of 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. Several participants noted their support for how the external reviewers framed the question as being about growth and expansion, not merely change, as it allowed them to think more broadly and creatively about the question.

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

- The growth of established programs, specifically Start Smart 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, as outlined below.

The need for increased resources for the Center was raised in every listening session and was often a response to multiple questions posed by the external reviewers. For this question about growth opportunities, participants discussed how growth would be difficult without increased resources, especially in relation to staff. One participant noted, “The staffing needs in the Women’s Center are serious. I don’t think it’s ethical to have only one person serve 46,000 students related to sexual violence, for example.” Another participant stated, “Right now, the Women’s Center is home to so many things. [The current interim director], especially, does everything. What if she only had to do her one job?” Other participants noted that changes in staffing have destabilized key programs of the Women’s Center, particularly RECLAIM, WILL, and programming for women of color. Increased staff would also potentially increase the diversity of the Center staff, as several participants noted their hopes for men, women of color, people with disabilities, and veterans to have an increased presence on the Women’s Center’s staff.

It is noteworthy that in all sessions, participants acknowledged the Herculean efforts of the current and past Women’s Center staff, who wear many hats and are faced with high expectations from many fronts. Several individuals noted that the “office is pulled in many directions” yet has been able to complete an enormous amount of work despite its small staff; this comment was always met with broad agreement. In short, the Center staff are widely seen as effective, but consensus is clear that increased FTE is needed in order for the Center more humanely and effectively enact its current mission and certainly for the Center to grow.
Another resource concern arose related to space, with participants noting that the Women’s Center is in a small space that is not always the best for its functions, particularly related to privacy. The lack of private space—specifically, enclosed offices—for staff was noted. Participants shared ideas for space that would draw people to the Women’s Center, including lecture spaces, a classroom, or a small meeting space. The Women’s Center needs to be in a location that supports its mission, and there was not consensus that the current location fit the mission of the center, particularly as it related to the creation of safe space and confidentiality for RECLAIM and a space that allows for a formal link with the curriculum, such as a classroom or an office for WGSS faculty.

Outreach and programming related to particular student identity groups was another salient theme related to growth possibilities for the Women’s Center. Various constituency groups were identified with which the Women’s Center could establish or expand their outreach and/or programming. The most common suggestions were men and graduate students (discussed in subsequent paragraphs), but also mentioned were international students, student parents, women veterans, commuter students, and nontraditional women students. Additionally, students indicated an opportunity for the Women’s Center to increase their presence in fields where women are underrepresented (e.g., STEM) in order to help prepare women-identified students for the workforce.

A critical constituency that the Center is uniquely prepared to engage is men. Participants were excited about the possibility of the Women’s Center expanding its mission and scope to address men and masculinities through their unique feminist, intersectional lens. In the words of a male student, “Women need a women’s center, but UC needs spaces for all of us to engage [about gender-based issues]. I would be excited to have these conversations at the Women’s Center.” UC would benefit from the expertise of the Women’s Center in leading these conversations as well as the longer-term potential to move the needle on critical campus climate issues related to gender.

Graduate students are another area of potential growth for the Women’s Center, and UC would benefit from increased services and opportunities for this population. Students noted that there were not enough opportunities for graduate students to participate in formalized leadership programs such as RECLAIM (recruitment happens before graduate students arrive on campus) or WILL, which is only for undergraduate students. Graduate student participants wanted to be involved in more formal ways as supporters of the work of the Center and as recipients of Center services. However, WILL and RECLAIM are not the only ways for graduate students to become involved in the Center or develop leadership/career/activist/civic skills. There is enormous opportunity to think through what the Women’s Center can uniquely provide to enhance the graduate student experience, as well as how graduate students might enhance Women’s Center programming for undergraduate students.

A final area of potential growth for the Center is to increase its marketing so as to increase the number and diversity of students reached. Participants lauded the Center for its sharing of information about programs and services, but indicated that there were other aspects of the Women’s Center that were not broadly getting out to the campus community. While participants used the term marketing, the external reviewers discussed whether branding is a better term to
describe the ideas and concerns raised in the listening sessions. For example, students talked about the need for increased visibility and messaging to students about why the Women’s Center is for everyone and to share that it’s an inclusive space. Staff discussed not always knowing who was welcome at programs: could staff attend, too? who is invited? Faculty talked about wanting the Center to “better share its story” of how they serve the campus community and are a national model for women’s/gender centers. While all groups used the term marketing to describe their ideas, branding is perhaps a better term to describe participants’ desire for the Women’s Center to be widely recognized for its work and utilized by an even broader base of individuals. The term speaks to larger issues of perception of the Women’s Center and the communication of its value to the university community.

4) Women’s Center Leadership

The practitioners who work in campus-based women’s centers are vital to the direction, tone, activities, and vision of their centers. As Marine (2011) writes, women’s centers “represent the very heart of feminist engagement with the academy. As a microcosm of women’s leadership, this engagement is vitally shaped by the commitments of those who lead and support women’s centers, whose values in turn direct the work yet to be done” (p. 16). Staff—often the most valuable resource a center has—must be carefully selected, trained, and supported in their work.

As the UC Women’s Center transitions in three key 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 the directorship of the Center. Listening session participants were asked what they wanted in the leadership of the Women’s Center. There was broad consensus that the leader of the Women’s Center must be someone who already has background knowledge about women’s centers and experience in higher education. In the words of a listening session participant, “The Women’s Center leader must be strong in theory, knowledgeable about Title IX and experienced in survivor advocacy, and have an awareness of the higher education environment. There is not a lot of time for a learning curve—UC needs a leader who can start making an impact on day one.”

Listening session participants expressed that the following qualities were desired in the leader of the Women’s Center:

Vision. The Women’s Center leader must see the “big picture” of how higher education, UC, oppression, power, and privilege operate, with the end goal of removing gender-based barriers so that students are able to be successful in all aspects of the UC campus environment. The leader should be able to articulate a vision for the Center and its work, and should be able to express how oppressions are linked and the work of the Women’s Center is therefore linked to the work of other individuals, units, and organizations on the UC campus. Additionally, the leader must be an innovator who sees “multiple paths to the end goal” and can link Center efforts to recruitment, retention, and graduation efforts at UC. Gould (1989) writes, “[women’s centers and their allies] must help our institutions to see that correcting the problems identified on behalf of the new majority of their students help not only those students but the entire institution as well” (p. 227); in other words, the Center leader must be a “systems thinker” who understands and can share
widely how the removal of gender-based barriers for women-identified students benefits the entire campus.

**Strong student affairs orientation.** The leader must be student-focused and demonstrate care and compassion for students. Able to connect with diverse students, the leader can seamlessly work with faculty, staff, and administrators to advance and address student concerns. Student participants shared that the women’s center leader must be able to encourage their growth and development, as well as able to reach out to diverse groups of students. Students felt that the women’s center’s leader must be personable, involved, willing to serve the community, and invested in encouraging their broad participation in building social justice and social change. In the words of one student, “The Women’s Center currently has and needs a leader who’s invested [in the community and in social justice issues]. The Center teaches people to be invested about something beyond just career and family, so we need someone who also models this commitment.”

**Able to partner with faculty.** Faculty, staff, and administrators all mentioned the need for a center leader who was connected to UC’s academic mission. Student Affairs staff valued the Center’s link to Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (WGSS), and want a leader who can continue this critical link between student affairs and academic affairs. Faculty asked for leadership that is able to continue as well as expand past partnerships with academics while serving as a bridge between the faculty and student affairs. Faculty valued a women’s center leader who can continue to bring feminist theories and best practices from the fields of women’s/gender centers and women’s and gender studies to the all aspects of the Women’s Center’s mission and activities.

**Willingness to speak up and be a leading voice for diversity and equity.** There was broad consensus that the Women’s Center leader must be able to hold the university and division of Student Affairs accountable around gender equity and diversity issues. The leader must not be afraid to speak up and speak out, even if they are one of the few voices on an issue, and must be able to respectfully push campus leaders to make decisions and progress towards the fulfillment of the Women’s Center’s mission. While this is necessary, a faculty member cautioned that UC must also support the center leader so that s/he can have a voice: “The Women’s Center can be marginalized quickly, so we need a leader who can speak up but also who is supported in doing so. S/he shouldn’t be the only voice.”

**Advocacy.** The leader of the Women’s Center must be an advocate in multiple ways. First and foremost, listening session participants expressed the desire for “an advocate for women-identified students in all their diversity.” This advocacy must occur on the individual and institutional levels, and should include advocacy for the needs of faculty and staff, particularly as it is relevant for the success of students. Lastly, the leader must be an advocate for the Women’s Center and its staff, and push for the needed resources, staffing structure, and professional development so that the Center can do its work.

**Experience institutionalizing efforts related to gender equity.** Staff and faculty expressed a strong preference for a leader with experience institutionalizing efforts to advance gender equity. In the words of one staff member, “UC needs someone who makes sure that the Women’s
Center’s efforts are institutionalized so that all can benefit. Additionally, we need to make sure that the efforts of the Center are formally a part of the campus, and don’t just reside in the Center’s staff and their expertise. If a staff member leaves, we need their work to continue.”

**Transparency.** Participants expressed a desire for a leader who is a clear communicator and sharer of critical information. Students want a leader who hears, not just listens, to their concerns.

**Visibility.** The leader of the Women’s Center must be present on campus, including at student events and to the faculty, particularly those in the Department of Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies.

**Knowledgeable about resources and willingness to connect people with opportunities.** Students, in particular, noted the need for the Women’s Center leader to be knowledgeable about campus, community, and national resources. They appreciated that past and current leadership was very willing to say, “You’d be great for this opportunity” or “Did you know that this resource could help you with your goals?” Students want a leader who is able to recognize leadership potential in students and is also willing to help students network and find opportunities on campus. Staff noted the need for the leader to be able to pull resources from many sources, including donors, grants, cost-sharing, and other innovative means to fund critical projects of the Women’s Center.

In terms of formal education and degree requirements, multiple participants stated that the women’s center directorship should be at least a master’s required position, and that a doctoral degree was preferred. This suggestion is in line with national trends for a well-established center such as the UC Women’s Center as well as a campus the size of the University of Cincinnati. It is important to note that among women’s center practitioners, there is some disagreement and potential concern about the terminal degree requirement (see Vlasnik & Debutz, 2013, for a detailed map of the field and considerations for requiring a terminal degree), but these regional and national conversations among women’s center professionals take into account institution type and the needs of the center and campus. Particularly because of UC’s research mission, a doctoral degree—or equivalent terminal degree—is appropriately preferred for the leader of the UC Women’s Center.

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…” Below are the compiled responses from the eight listening sessions and three individual interviews, in the words of the participants. Answers have been grouped thematically, with the numerical majority of comments pointing to the need for greater support for the Women’s Center so that it can more fully enact its mission.

Just as it is important to note what Women’s Center constituents shared in the listening sessions, it is equally important to note what is absent. For example, no participants said that the Center was irrelevant to the UC campus or no longer needed, that the current mission is all that the Center should our could do, that the Women’s Center should serve students only, that it should
not grow, or that it was adequately resourced for its work. Rather, participant statements speak to their support for the continued growth and expansion of the Women’s Center.

“My hope for UC in regards to the Women’s Center is…”

MISSION / PHILOSOPHICAL

- That the Women’s Center to be a vibrant place for students and faculty to create community around activism and research.
- That the Center is situated so that it can be a leader and have a seat at the table for important issues.
- That UC values the legacy of advocacy in the Women’s Center and trusts its expertise
- Continued partnership
- To be a national leader in women’s/gender issues (higher education practitioners come to UC to benchmark, to see how it’s done).
- That student and employees to feel safe (holistically). When on campus, they know that people have their backs. If something happens, they have a place to go.
- That the Women’s Center is a destination. That people go to the Women’s Center for support, a friend, and a champion, not just because they might be in crisis.
- That the university does not undervalue this amazing resource.
- For the Center to be a central place for gender issues.
- That RECLAIM continues to be framed as survivor advocacy program with a social justice/feminist framework.

GROWTH

- To expand the Women’s Center. The Women’s Center isn’t noticeable enough, and needs to be more so. We (students) can collaborate, can come together, and push for it.
- Expansion, to flourish, to provide programming/services on a larger scale.
- That collaboration continues to expand and the Center’s reach is broadened.

SUPPORT

From Administrators

- Sincere collaboration from administrators.
- More consistent support by administration.
- Sustained, coordinated commitment from administration.
- Respect and acknowledgement from campus and its administrators.
- That administration will give the support it promised in relation to staffing needs.
- That the administration would have a presence at the huge, well-organized campus events led by the Women’s Center.
- That UC is truly open and invested in having a conversation like the opportunity provided in the listening sessions, so that administrators to prove that they’ve invested.
- That administrators do our job for a day (RECLAIM).

Resources

- Empowered with resources to complete its mission (whatever that is).
- Lots more resources, including money and staff.
- Permanent staff, including filling recently vacated positions.
• More staff. The Center has ideas and excellent programs but need staff to carry them out the way they should be carried out.
• To grow in terms of staff and resources as well as students and their reach.
• That UC makes a bigger investment in the Women’s Center in terms of resources and staffing. (Broad agreement from participants at this listening session).
• To put resources into what it does well, as well as document what the Women’s Center cannot do for resource reasons so we can look at that list and respond as a community.

Overall
• That the institution matches the passion, drive of the staff. The staff is so committed, positive, and keeps moving forward.
• That the Center receives recognition and support for their amazing contributions.
• Ownership/investment on the part of UC – understanding Women’s Center to be part of campus.
• Well supported and resourced to have broader impact on all students.
• That the physical location is one that can enhance its mission.
• More support from university. If there is a resource they can give, they should. In the literal (material) and in the fuzzy way (“We support you.”).
• That UC practices what its preaches in terms of diversity and supports the Center with the resources it needs.
• Priority. To realize how many students this office is supposed to serve and prioritize appropriately.
• For the Center to be in a sustainable place.
• Greater capacity and reach.
• To improve the foundation of Women’s Center and continue to build on it. Trust the expertise of the Women’s Center. Let them decide their direction.

ACTIVITIES
• To strengthen collaborative relationships. Expand partnerships.
• More programs like $tart $mart.
• More on men and masculinities.
• More services/outreach to international students and student parents.
• Sex education in a feminist way – implement peer education around other topics, too.
• To formalize programming for women of color.
• To formalize antiracist work.
• To educate and let people know it’s there (expand its reach).
• To see a coalition between Women’s Center and Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (WGSS).
Section Three: Recommendations

This section outlines a series of major recommendations that 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; rationale is included, when appropriate. Many of these recommendations are interrelated, which is also noted below.

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). Faculty, staff, and administrators were open to changing the name of the center, while students were more hesitant, particularly if the name change removes “women” from the title of the center. Students strongly preferred names such as the Center for Women and Gender rather than naming men in the title; they suggested a tagline or motto for the Center that would make it clear that men are welcome, as well as an educational push/branding initiative that educates people about the mission and name of the Center. Note that

- A name change requires an expansion of Center programming and services to include men and masculinities.
- A name change requires an expansion in mission.
- A name change must be broadly and consistently communicated to the campus community.
- A name change requires the programmatic, staff, and fiscal resources to enact and communicate the above programming and services.

The upcoming release of the CAS Standards (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, forthcoming) includes substantial revisions as well as a name change for the standards from “Women Student Programs and Services” to “Women and Gender Programs and Services.” This name change is explained in the contextual statement (Goettsch et al., forthcoming), and was not intended to compel women’s centers to change their names, but rather to acknowledge complex discussions in the field of women’s/gender centers and in the discipline of women’s and gender studies about the naming of programs and services. The authors of the contextual statement explain these discussions as the following:

Some prioritize the importance of directly naming the primary target of sexism and gender discrimination by using the term women (as in women’s center). Others assert that use of the term women reproduces an essentialist framework that privileges a monolithic category of women while the term gender (as in gender studies and gender equity center) is more inclusive of individuals and their diverse experiences of gender and of gender-based inequity and discrimination. For some, the term gender also more explicitly encompasses masculinities and services for men, which women’s centers have provided to varying degrees. Others have observed that replacing the term women with gender
could erase the history of the struggle to put women’s lives and experiences at the center of attention, opening the door to co-opting the goals of that movement and shifting resources, energy, and attention away from addressing the status of women (Berger & Radeloff, 2011). (Goettsch et al., forthcoming, para. 4)

These concerns were also present in the listening sessions, and provide an accurate summary of the feedback, hopes, and concerns of participants across the sessions. In addition to the revised CAS Standards (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, forthcoming), the women’s/gender center literature can assist UC in thinking through its provision of services and expansion of gender-inclusive practices (e.g., Nicolazzo & Harris, 2014; Marine, Helfrich, & Randhawa, forthcoming).

Based on the listening sessions and discussions with key campus stakeholders, the external reviewers suggest a name change that retains “women” in the title while also adding “gender.” Examples of this configuration in the state of Ohio include Denison University’s Center for Women and Gender Action (http://denison.edu/campus/gender), and a UC peer institution example includes the University of Houston’s Women and Gender Resource Center (http://www.uh.edu/wrc/). The chosen name for the Center should reflect the history of the Women’s Center, the culture and mission of the University of Cincinnati, and be appealing and recognizable to diverse campus constituencies.

**Clarify areas of focus for the Women’s Center.** The UC Women’s Center’s current areas of focus are included in its mission statement: advocacy, education, and research. The program review process confirmed these areas of focus but also uncovered concern that the Women’s Center is currently over-identified with RECLAIM in the eyes of the university community, at times to the detriment of their other important work. Listening session data pointed to additional areas of expertise and means by which the Center works to achieve its mission. Areas of additional focus that emerged from the listening sessions included: leadership and civic engagement; community building; theory to practice; and resources and support. These areas are in line with the women’s/gender center literature and are also a more detailed representation of the Women’s Center’s current activities. For assessment purposes, it is desirable that all Center activities should fit under at least one of the determined areas of focus. For branding purposes, it is desirable that the areas of focus are talking points, about which Center staff, students, and allies can faithfully and accurately describe the range of the Center’s mission and activities on the UC campus and beyond.

**Space should better reflect the functions of the Center.** Several space concerns emerged in the review process, including private offices for full-time, permanent staff or an office that can be used by any staff when needed for privacy/confidentiality reasons. A private back door for individuals seeking services through RECLAIM is preferred, as is a flexible meeting space that allows smaller student groups and classes—particularly those in Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies—to meet inside the Center. While listening session participants thought that the Center’s close proximity to Ethnic Programs and Services and the LGBTQA Center was critically important, they expressed doubt that the Center’s current space fit the needs outlined above, particularly as they relate to privacy and student gathering space. Physical space is a requirement of building safe space, and the Women’s Center should be in a location that is
desirable to students and amenable to faculty and staff who work with the Center in support of students. Additionally, physical space should be large enough to accommodate groups of students to gather and engage in the feminist community that the Center is so adept at building.

**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.** Long-standing staff vacancies have limited the ability of the Center to do its work on campus and in the greater Cincinnati community. Current vacancies—most specifically the directorship of the Center—should be filled, and if the name if changed, a staff member should be hired to address programming for men and masculinities. While less common to have a position focused on men and masculinities, UC would be at the forefront of a growing trend, especially in light of Title IX clarifications and the realization that men and conventional understandings of masculinity must be challenged in order to transform campus climate and prevent gender-based violence. Given the UC Women’s Center’s well-established tradition of gender based violence prevention and education and its expertise in feminist survivor advocacy, the Center is the most logical location for FTE in this area.

**Clearly communicate a named champion for women faculty and staff at UC.** The Women’s Center is clearly an advocate for faculty and staff issues—particularly as they are connected to student success—but confusion remained among listening session participants about who is the “champion” for faculty and staff issues as they relate to gender. Faculty and staff described this confusion as stemming from several sources, including the transition of WIN/WILD from the Women’s Center to the Office of the Provost and the restructuring of Student Affairs that placed another layer of administrative hierarchy between the Women’s Center and the Vice President of Student Affairs, who sits at Cabinet and would have the ability to raise issues brought forth by the Women’s Center in this senior leadership setting. As a result, faculty participants in the listening sessions requested that a high level champion be named, resourced, and communicated to the UC community.

It is the belief of the external reviewers that the Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) performs this function, but it is clear that employees—particularly faculty—do not see that this is a key function of the CDO role. It is also necessary to clarify the relationship between the Women’s Center (which serves as an advocate for gender equity and has significant expertise in the area of identifying and removing gender-based barriers) and the Chief Diversity Officer (who is UC’s named champion for improving campus climate and ensuring access, equity and inclusion across diverse campus constituencies, among other duties). The working relationship and partnership between the Women’s Center and the CDO—the structure of which is already in place—should be clearly communicated to the UC community.

**Clarify that the Center serves students first, but also faculty and staff so that they can better serve and support students.** A thriving women’s/gender center serves as a recruitment and retention tool for undergraduate and graduate students and for staff and faculty; for example, WGSS faculty noted that the Women’s Center helps them to recruit students and faculty and to create a climate in which feminism and feminist scholarship are respected. Given the gendered nature of labor in the academy, a women’s/gender center resourced to address student concerns can also significantly reduce role stress for women faculty, who can refer students in need, crisis,
or seeking connection to the Women’s Center. It is noteworthy a student shared, “faculty and staff deserve a space they can go to about [gender-based] issues, too.” Listening session participants clearly saw the Women’s Center as a logical and important source of support for faculty and staff, particularly so that they can fulfill their roles on campus.

Serving faculty and staff was identified as critical to the mission of the Women’s Center by listening session participants. Many participants noted that the Women’s Center needs to serve all campus constituencies in order to improve the overall status of women and effectively address gender-based issues for students. The mission of the Women’s Center is difficult to achieve without involving faculty and staff.

**Increase Center services and opportunities for graduate students.** As noted in a previous section, students noted that there were not enough opportunities for graduate students to participate in formalized Women’s Center leadership programs such as RECLAIM or WILL. Graduate student participants wanted to be involved in more formal ways as supporters of the work of the Center and as recipients of Center services, particularly in the area of building leadership/career/activist/civic skills. The Women’s Center can uniquely provide feminist, social-justice leadership development opportunities to enhance the graduate student experience, and the Center also stands to gain from thinking through how graduate students might enhance Women’s Center programming for undergraduate students. With additional staff and/or fiscal resources, the Center could extend greater support and opportunities for graduate students and satisfy this need, which was discovered in the listening sessions.

**Strengthen the relationship between the Women’s Center and the Department of Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies.** All parties noted an opportunity to deepen the existing relationship between the Center and WGSS. While the Interim Director of the Women’s Center is an important link—as she typically teaches in the academic program and is a part of the faculty—more intentional connections can be made in regards to programming (see below), encouraging students to move between the Center and academic program in a seamless fashion, and providing opportunities for student activism and experiential learning that enhances the classroom experiences for all WGSS students and faculty.

**Link educational programming to curriculum whenever possible.** Faculty and staff expressed a strong preference for programming that was formally linked to the curriculum whenever possible. An example of this is the Center’s work to connect Elect Her (training to encourage women students to run for student government and other student leadership positions) with Political Science classes, a model which could be expanded to other programs, particularly if the timing of programming was flexible (e.g., offering keynote lectures mid-day in order to coincide with popular class time blocks and working to bring classes to the programming). While students did not express this idea, they had a strong preference for finding some way that students would have to participate in Center programs or activities during their years on campus; this recommendation fits this need. Assessment can occur of student learning as well as the faculty member’s assessment of how his/her classroom discussion and course content was enhanced by class participation in Center programming.
**Build the Center’s capacity related to assessment.** The Women’s Center has a strong reputation in the area of assessment and Student Affairs staff referenced their programs as exemplars in terms of linking program objectives to student learning. The UC Women’s Center has many unique programs among its peers nationally—namely WILL and RECLAIM—and the external reviewers see opportunity to advance the national reputation of the UC Women’s Center, build the field of women’s/gender centers, and advance knowledge in student affairs through increasing the Center’s capacity to conduct assessment, particularly longitudinally. Currently, there are no studies that examine the impact of women’s center involvement during undergraduate or graduate years or that examine alumni’s long-term learning from Center involvement. WILL and RECLAIM offer two important opportunities to assess immediate and long-term impact of the UC Women’s Center on students and alumni and for the Center to create knowledge for multiple disciplines. There is limited literature about assessment in women’s centers (Goldsmith, 2002; DiLapi, Goettsch, Holgerson, & Rietveld, 2008; Howton, Dietzel, Fulbright, & Rismiller, 2011), and UC Women’s Center staff members have already generated scholarship about this topic (Howton et al., 2011). The UC Women’s Center’s outstanding efforts to create meaningful feminist experiential learning opportunities that challenge diverse students to work collaboratively for social change deserve greater and wider exploration as best practices in student affairs and higher education.


Nicolazzo, Z., & Harris, C. (2014, January/February). This is what a feminist (space) looks like: (Re)conceptualizing women’s centers as feminist spaces in higher education. *About Campus, 18*(6), 2-9. doi: 10.1002/abc.21138


About the Advisory Committee

Raquel Boose
Undergraduate student, RECLAIM advocate, and member of Women in Leadership and Learning (WILL)

Raquel Boose is a third year student at the University of Cincinnati, pursuing a career in Social Work with a minor in Psychology. In addition to being a full-time student, Raquel dedicates her time to co-curricular components such as RECLAIM and WILL. She is a first-year member of WILL (Women in Leadership and Learning) and a second year member of RECLAIM, our campus peer advocate program dedicated to ending sexual and gender-based violence. Her involvement at UC and personal life revolve around her passion for feminism, advocacy, and social justice. By making a difference on her campus, Raquel hopes to make a difference in her community and ultimately our culture.

In Raquel’s words: 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.

Dr. Amy Howton
Interim Director of the Women’s Center and Co-Chair of the Advisory Committee

Dr. Amy Howton currently serves the University of Cincinnati as the Interim Director of the Women’s Center. For the past eleven years, her progressive responsibilities in the Women’s Center include sexual assault survivor advocacy; feminist leadership and activism development programming; coordination of volunteer and academic internships; program evaluation; and supervision of student workers, graduate assistantships, and full-time staff. In addition to co-curricular education, Dr. Howton is an affiliate faculty member in the Department of Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and is committed to creating transformational educational opportunities to bridge theory to practice. Dr. Howton is active in regional and national professional associations, including those focused on campus-based women’s centers, campus sexual violence response, and action research.
Dr. Howton earned her M.A. in Women’s Studies and her doctorate in Counselor Education, focusing on organizational change. As a participatory action researcher, her research aims to create change through the research process itself. Her action research dissertation, Reform From Within: An Ecological Analysis of Institutionalized Feminism in Our University set out to strengthen a strategic partnership between the Department of Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and the Women’s Center. She is passionate about experiential learning; civic engagement; and the critical role higher education should play in social change.

Dr. Amy Lind
Mary Ellen Heintz Endowed Chair and Professor of Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies

Dr. Amy Lind is Mary Ellen Heintz Endowed Chair and Professor of Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. She served as WGSS Graduate Director between 2008-2013, with the exception of 2011-2012, when she was a Taft Fellow. She is a Faculty Affiliate in Sociology, Romance Languages & Literatures, and the School of Planning. Her areas of scholarship and teaching include critical development studies, global political economy, postcolonial studies, queer theory, transnational feminisms, social movements, and studies of neoliberal governance. She has held distinguished visiting professor positions in Ecuador, Bolivia and Switzerland and has delivered over fifty invited lectures at institutions around the world.

Dr. Lind earned a Ph.D. and M.R.P. from Cornell University in City and Regional Planning, and holds a B.A. in Women’s Studies and Latin American Studies from the University of California, Santa Cruz.

Dr. Susan Mahoney
Assistant Director (Leadership Initiatives), Student Activities and Leadership Development

Dr. Susan Mahoney has worked in the field of higher education for over 15 years. She has worked in campus recreation at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, University of Maryland, and Indiana University. Most recently, she served as the Associate Director of Campus Recreation at Missouri State University where the department was breaking ground on a new 100,000 square foot state-of-the-art aquatics and wellness center. Since 2012, Dr. Mahoney has worked at the University of Cincinnati in the Student Activities & Leadership Development (SALD) office working first at the Program Coordinator of Club Sports and now as the Assistant Director of Leadership Initiatives. In her current role, the SALD office is launching a Student Leadership Academic Certificate set to start enrolling students in courses in the Fall of 2015.

Dr. Mahoney earned an Ed.D. in Higher Education Student Affairs with a concentration in Athletics Marketing from Indiana University and a M.A. in Recreation, Parks, and Tourism from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. She received her B.S. from Elon University in
Psychology. She is currently enrolled in the Online Curriculum and Instruction Training Graduate Certificate at the University of Cincinnati, which she is scheduled to complete in May 2015.

**Dr. Bleuzette Marshall**

**Chief Diversity Officer**

Dr. Bleuzette Marshall serves as Chief Diversity Officer for the University of Cincinnati. A UC alumna, Dr. Marshall has worked at UC and the UC Foundation for nearly 21 years, starting in Ethnic Programs and Services and at the African American Cultural and Resource Center and most recently in development at the UC Foundation.

From 2007 to 2013, she assisted the Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) and the President's Diversity Council. As a respected member of the UC administration, Dr. Marshall gained an awareness of UC culture that is essential in moving the university forward as UC continues to implement the Diversity Plan and build on the accomplishments of the university's first Chief Diversity Officer Mitchel D. Livingston, who retired at the end of 2012.

Dr. Marshall holds three degrees from the University of Cincinnati, including a B.A. in Psychology (1992), a M.Ed. (2001) and a Ph.D. in Educational Studies (2009).

**David Schmutte**

Undergraduate student, RECLAIM advocate, and Women's Center representative on the Student Advisory Committee on the University Budget (SACUB)

David Schmutte is a fifth year senior who is studying Criminal Justice at the University of Cincinnati. Within the Women's Center, David is involved in three main ways: as a RECLAIM advocate, as the treasurer of UC Feminists, and as the Women’s Center’s representative for the Student Advisory Committee on the University Budget (SACUB). Similar to other RECLAIM advocates, David has worked with on-campus student groups by giving presentations about consent. David is also on the executive board of UC Feminists, a student group which works to educate and create dialogue around feminist issues through an intersectional lens. Serving as their treasurer, David ensures that UC Feminist receives funding from the university and is able to access these funds when the organization hosts events. David was also placed on SACUB as one of two representatives of the Women’s Center. SACUB participates in the budget planning process, making recommendations for the use of the university’s general fees. As one of the Women's Center’s representatives, David works closely with interim director Dr. Amy Howton to demonstrate to SACUB how the Women's Center uses their budget.

**In David's words:** 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.

Dr. Robin Selzer
Assistant Professor in Professional Practice and Experiential Learning (ProPEL) and former interim Director of the Women's Center (2001-02)

Dr. Robin Selzer is an Assistant Professor in the Division of Professional Practice and Experiential Learning at the University of Cincinnati. She teaches the Exploring Health Professions course and oversees the pre-health internship program. Dr. Selzer has 18 years of experience in public, private, and distance learning universities. She began her career in Student Affairs at the University of Cincinnati Women's Center where she worked her way up from volunteer to Acting Director. She brings a multidimensional lens to her work and has experience in Enrollment Management, Academic Affairs, Alumni Relations, and Pre-Health Academic Advising. Dr. Selzer is the immediate past President of the University of Cincinnati Undergraduate Academic Advising Association and still serves on the Board. She also serves as the University of Cincinnati Institutional Representative for the American Council on Education (ACE) Ohio Statewide Women's Network and on the Executive Board. Her Ph.D. is in Higher Education Administration from Loyola University of Chicago where her research explored the experience of body image among African American sorority women.

Leisan Smith
Director, LGBTQ Center, and former graduate assistant of the Women’s Center (2001-02)

Leisan Smith, a native of Columbus, Ohio, joined the UC family as an undergraduate student. Her professional experiences and passion include working with and advocating for students, especially those students whose voices are not always heard. Her experiences include overseeing a YWCA program for teen moms and their children, being a high school principal, and running an Upward Bound Program.

Leisan is a member of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority Inc., MUSE Cincinnati’s Women’s Choir and is a 2012 YWCA Rising Star. She earned a B.A. in Communication and a M.Ed. in Educational Foundations with a graduate certificate in Women's Studies from the University of Cincinnati.
Carol Tonge-Mack
Assistant Dean of Recruitment and Retention Initiatives, College of Arts & Sciences

Carol is the Assistant Dean of Recruitment and Retention Initiatives with the McMicken College of Arts and Sciences (A&S). Carol has two primary objectives: ensure students transition from applicant through matriculation and then provide innovative strategies for persistence and ultimately, graduation. In 2007, she engineered the first Cultural Competence Training Series for the Academic Advising staff in A&S. Three years later, the team received the Marian Spencer Diversity Ambassador Award.

Prior to Carol’s arrival in Cincinnati, she advised hundreds of students at the University of New Hampshire (UNH) and spearheaded the transformation of the Connect Program. She received her B.A. in History from Middlebury College in Vermont, her M.A. in Teaching, and M.Ed. in Counseling from the University of New Hampshire.
About the External Reviewers

Tamika Odum  
External Reviewer

Tamika Odum founded the Odum Group in 2007, specializing in consulting related to the development of non-profits, strategic planning and conflict resolution. The Odum Group also specializes in editorial assistance ranging from copy editing to manuscript preparation and research. Tamika’s specialty is in facilitating trainings, workshops and lectures related to organizational leadership, diversity (including but not limited to race, gender, class, sexual orientation and/or ability) and sociological scholarship (structures of inequality, family, medical sociology). She has been an invited lecturer and workshop facilitator for many national and regional organizations, including developing a day long pre-conference for Creating an LGBT Support Model for College Campuses for the first Annual Conference Expanding the Circle in San Francisco, California. Tamika has worked with universities and other nonprofits across the United States for over 7 years and is an expert in the field of women, gender and sexuality studies and has over 10 years experience serving as a practitioner and a faculty member.

Tamika served UCWC for five years as Program Manager and provided critical leadership to the launching of the LGBTQ Center. More recently, she served as the Director of the Women's Center at Xavier University and has served in leadership roles at the state and national level in campus-based women's work and student affairs. Currently she is serving as Assistant Professor of Sociology at UC Blue Ash while finishing her PhD in Sociology, with a research interest and expertise in intersectionality.

As a scholar, Tamika has taught a variety of sociology courses, including but not limited to Introduction to Sociology, Race in Modern Society, Barriers to Equality, Queer Theory, Gender and Society, Sociology of the Family and the Sociology of Health. She has been published in The Encyclopedia of Race and Racism and has presented at numerous conferences. She has received several awards and honors including the Taft Enrichment Award and a University Research Council Summer Fellowship.

Amber Vlasnik  
Lead External Reviewer

Amber Vlasnik has worked in the field of women’s centers for over twelve years, leading the centers at Louisiana State University and Wright State University, and serving as affiliate faculty in women’s studies at both institutions. Nationally, she was elected by her peers to the Women’s Centers Advisory Council of the National Women’s Studies Association (NWSA) and has twice worked to review the CAS Standards for Women Student Programs and Services, including the most recent review, which proposes a name change and major
expansion of the standards to encompass “Women and Gender Programs and Services” (forthcoming in 2015). In Ohio, Amber was the founding chair of the Women’s Centers Committee of the Greater Cincinnati Consortium of Colleges and Universities (GCCCU) and the Southwestern Ohio Council for Higher Education (SOCHE), the only joint committee between the higher education associations. In recent years, the growing GCCCU/SOCHE Committee began work to advance the field of women’s centers by publishing issue briefs on critical and/or emerging topics; the issue briefs, two of which she authored or co-authored, have garnered attention and acclaim among women’s centers, student affairs, and diversity officers across the nation. As a respected, award-winning higher education administrator, teacher, and diversity advocate, Amber is committed to the success and inclusion of all who live, work, and study in higher education, and to educating citizens to be prepared to meet the demands of a changing global society.

Amber holds a M.A.L.A. with concentrations in gender, law, and higher education from Louisiana State University and a B.A. in International Studies and Spanish from St. Norbert College in Wisconsin. She is a doctoral candidate in Higher Education and Student Affairs at The Ohio State University. Her research interests include women in higher education, women's centers, feminist methodologies, and the internationalization of colleges and universities.