

# Why do we still need Women's Resource Centers?

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Today women comprise a full 50% of the undergraduate population at most universities and colleges, including Michigan State University and the numbers are similar for graduate students. Instructional staff at MSU is nearly 40% female and women comprise over 60% of the support staff at MSU. So why is a Women's Resource Center still necessary? While the numbers might indicate greater parity with men, gender equity has not been fully achieved. For instance, fewer women are in positions of leadership than men and on average women remain employed in lower paying jobs. Race and sexual orientation also contribute to disparity in that white and heterosexually identified women fare much better than those who identify as women of color and/or LBGT. Women students are still disproportionately clustered in particular disciplines with many fewer in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) disciplines as compared to the social sciences and liberal arts. Although majors are a matter of choice, women students are steered in particular directions, from elementary school through college, to choose majors that are gendered (with both pay and societal implications). Though the number of women compared to men in the instructional system is 40%, most of those women are not in the tenure system which makes their jobs more tenuous. More women are concentrated in the Clerical/Technical area of staff employment than in higher paid positions. In other words, women still face many obstacles in their study and employment at MSU. Additionally sexual harassment and sexual assault remain issues for all members of the campus community – students, faculty, and staff alike. Pay equity at every level of employment remains biased against women and they continue to struggle with balance in the work/life arena, often assuming more of the responsibilities for family than their male counterparts.

Due to the systemic forms of oppression faced by women, from young undergrads to seasoned professionals and faculty members, systems and initiatives must be implemented to assist the development of women as respected contributing members of the campus community. Women faculty, staff and students still require expanded opportunities for leadership development and professional growth. The work of social justice across gender, race, class, and sexual orientation is still occurring on a daily basis. A Women's Resource Center committed to the development of women as full participants in the life of the campus community remains vital to the university. Following are some statistics from MSU and the United States illustrating these points:

- **Student Composition**
  - Women made up 50% of the undergraduate population at MSU in 2012 (MSU Office of Planning and Budgets)
  - Women were 56% of all graduate students at MSU (Diversity and Inclusion Report, 2011/2012)
  
- **Faculty and Staff Composition**

- Women comprise 40% of the instructional staff at MSU with most women in the nontenure system. Women represented 33.3 % of the tenure system faculty in 2012 (Diversity and Inclusion Report, 2011/2012)
  - Women of color make up approximately 2.4% of all full professors nation-wide (Employment, Title IX info, the MARGARET Fund of NWLC)
  - Women represent 62% of the support staff workforce at MSU with most of those women employed in the clerical/technical area (Diversity and Inclusion Report, 2011/2012)
- **STEM Disciplines**
    - In the STEM fields, stereotypes about women and men's abilities still negatively affect women's opportunities as well as student performance (National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education, Title IX at 40)
    - At the college and university level, women have made significant gains in some areas but only modest gains in others. Women now earn over half of all Bachelor's degrees in biological and social sciences. However, in mathematics, physics, engineering and computer science the proportion of women earning Bachelor's degrees has remained stagnant or in some instances declined (National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education, Title IX at 40)
    - Women received only 11% of PhDs in STEM disciplines in 1972 and by 2006 received 40%. However, the vast majority were in the life sciences and just over 20% were earned in computer science and engineering (National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education, Title IX at 40)
    - Of the women who earned PhDs in the STEM disciplines only 27% are members of university faculties. The dropout rate from faculty positions is higher than that of men (NSF Career Balance Initiative)
    - Nationally, in the field of physics, for example, women receive only 16% of PhDs and drop out of the field at earlier points than men. In 2006 women were 17% of assistant professors, 14% of associate professors, and only 6% of full professors (Simmons, 2010, Women in Physics in the US)
    - In contrast, in the highly female-dominated nursing profession, only 9.6% of registered nurses are male and the average pay in that field is substantially less than that of doctors (The Registered Nurse Population: Findings From the 2008 National Sample Survey of Registered Nurses. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Service Administration)
- **Sexual Harassment, Sexual Assault, and Intimate Partner Violence**
    - 62% of college women students report being sexually harassed at their university. 80% of those who experienced sexual harassment report being harassed by another student or former student. Fewer than 10% of the victims of harassment report it to a university employee and for many, it is the fear of either retaliation or the concern that nothing will be done that prevents them from reporting their experiences (AAUW)

- 27% of all women have experienced some sort of unwanted sexual contact (CDC)
  - 1 in 5 women and 1 in 71 men are the victims of rape at some point in their life (CDC)
  - 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men are the victims of intimate partner violence at some point in their life (CDC)
  - 1 in 6 women and 1 in 19 men are stalked at some point in their life (CDC)
  - 80% of rape victims experienced their first assault before the age of 25 (CDC)
- **Pay Equity**
    - On average, women earn 77% of what men earn in the United States with women of color earning even less (National Committee on Pay Equity, AAUW). Black women earn approximately 64% and Latino/Chicano women earn approximately 52% of what white men earn in the work force (National Committee on Pay Equity)
    - Women represent 48% of the national work force but are disproportionately represented in the service sector which traditionally renders lower wages (National Committee on Pay Equity)
      - 61% of employed women are in educational services
      - 82% of those employed in the social services are women
      - Women comprise 77% of those employed in hospitals with the majority being in either nursing or in clerical/technical areas
      - 51% of all retail positions are comprised of women
      - All of the above mentioned positions typically pay lower wages than do manufacturing jobs generally held by men
      - Women are nearly twice as likely as men to work in part-time jobs often due to family responsibilities and therefore experience significantly less earning potential than do men in similar fields (United States Department of Labor)
      - Two thirds of minimum wage earners in the United States are women (National Women's Law Center)