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The Director's Column

“If you have justice you don't need charity” Ben Cohen

This month's column starts with the words of Ben Cohen (co-founder and CEO of Ben and Jerry's Ice Cream), who spoke at a recent Honors Colloquium lecture. In many of our Women's Studies courses we ask students to look beyond community service or charity to find the institutional reasons why we need such service. We ask students to take on action projects that aim to address the causes of social problems. A component of an action project might be to educate ourselves and others about a social problem and ways to bring about social change. Taking such action is a way to seek social justice, rather than provide charity. A good way to learn more about this process is through an article written by URI Professors Donna Bickford and Nedra Reynolds, “Activism and Service-learning,” in *Pedagogy* 2.2 (2002) 229-252, accessible on-line at <http://0-muse.jhu.edu.helin.uri.edu/journals/pedagogy/v002/2.2bickford.html>

If we look at the speakers the WMS program sponsored on campus this semester, we see that they are all engaged in activism, working for justice: Anuradha Mittal advocates for food and sustainability, Rev. Richelle Russell promotes the rights of gay people in the U. S. to marry, Rose Weaver (“Menopause Mama”) teaches justice for elders through entertainment, and Werner Fornos is active globally for women's education and empowerment through his work on population.

Social action may take place locally as well. PAGE (Promoting Awareness of Gender Equality), a URI student group has numerous social action projects. Another example: On a cold November night I walked around campus with a group led by the Student Senate to find areas that are poorly lit, or unpaved, or need blue-light emergency phones. Students and key administrators including President Carothers participated in this well-organized walk to improve the safety of the campus community.

The WMS Program at URI has a proud history of working for social justice, and this year we honor that history in our 25th anniversary celebration on April 16, 2005. I hope you all—students, faculty, and graduates of the program -- will join us in that celebration. Recently, students in Professor Grubman-Black's course COM 325 (Communication in Interviewing) began videotaping interviews of founders and leaders of the WMS program as part of our oral history project. A picture of five of our founders appears on the internet version of this newsletter. For this 25th anniversary year, every issue of the newsletter will carry information about a WMS event taken from our timeline project. (See below) We invite alumni/ae to send short notes about their memories of the WMS Program to be included in future issues of our newsletter or read at the anniversary dinner. Please send these notes to wmsdir@etal.uri.edu

Students, you may now be writing papers for your courses. Please be aware that the WMS Program gives an award every spring, the Patricia Farnes essay award, for the best paper on a feminist topic. If you would like to submit a paper now, we will be happy to keep it on file. Faculty may also submit papers. Visit our website for details. You will find information about our other prizes and scholarships as well.

Best wishes for the end of the semester and the holiday season.

WMS timeline: 1971 the first course at URI focusing on women was offered. Professor Bernice Lott, at the request of a group of students, taught the first course on Psychology of Women.



Left to right: Judith Anderson, Mary Ellen Reilly, Karen Stein, Bernice Lott, Mathilda M. Hills