

AS VOTERS, CAMPAIGN DONORS AND CANDIDATES —

Women are making a difference in politics

by **RONNIE STEINBERG**

Professor of Sociology, Director of Women's Studies

As we begin the new millennium, it's appropriate to consider how the growing involvement of women in politics has affected the workings of American democracy.

The answer is clear: Women are making a *significant* difference in the political arena.

Consider just one example from our judicial system. In May, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in a 5-4 decision that school districts can be held liable if they fail to stop a student from sexually harassing another student. The two women on the court, Sandra Day O'Connor and Ruth Bader Ginsburg, both voted with the majority.

The case involved a fifth-grade girl in Georgia, who said she had been repeatedly groped and taunted by a classmate. She complained to several teachers, but no action was taken against the boy. The majority and minority decisions in the case made clear that women and men can view such issues very differently.

Two views of Title IX

In Justice O'Connor's majority decision, she says:

The statute makes clear that, whatever else it prohibits, students must not be denied access to educational benefits and opportunities on the basis of gender. . . . Consider, for example, a case in which male students physically threaten their female peers every day. . . . District administrators are well aware of the daily ritual. Yet they deliberately ignore requests for aid from the female students. . . . The district's knowing refusal to take any action in response to such behavior would fly in the face of Title IX's core principles.

A minority dissent written by Justice Anthony Kennedy offers a different perspective:

In truth a school's control over its students is much more complicated and limited than the majority acknowledges. . . . The real world of school discipline is a rough-and-tumble place where students practice newly learned vulgarities, erupt with anger, tease and embarrass each other, share offensive notes, flirt, push and shove in the halls, grab and offend. . . . It is a far different question . . . to label this immature, childish behavior gender discrimination. Nothing in Title IX suggests that Congress even contemplated this question . . .

But the two women who sit on the Supreme Court, and the hundreds of other women who sit as judges throughout the United States, are not alone in their impact on the law and policy.

Women are also making a difference in electoral politics.

First, women are making a difference in election outcomes. The gender gap — a phrase coined by Feminist Majority Foundation President Eleanor Smeal in the late

1970s — refers to the differences between men and women in voting choices. In the 1996 presidential election, white women and black women and men were responsible for electing President Clinton. There was an 11 point gender gap, and a race gap more than twice that percentage.

According to the Center for the American Woman and Politics at Rutgers University, which has examined voting trends by gender over the last seventy-five years, the gap emerged in the early 1970s but only began to have an effect on electoral outcomes in the mid-1980s. The gender gap is remarkable in its consistency. It is also widening.

The gender gap exists because women, on average, are more likely to support candidates who support women's legal and economic rights; who support reproductive freedom; who oppose sexual assault and domestic violence; and who support gun control. They are more likely to support candidates who favor spending on public education, on universal health care, on support for the elderly, on welfare for poor women and the children who depend on them.

Women in office

In addition to wielding more power at the polls, women are making a difference as elected officials and increasingly so. To cite a few examples:

- In the 106th Congress, 65 (or 12.1%) of the 535 seats are held by women. Of the 65 women in Congress, 18 (or 28%) are women of color — 12 are African American, one is Asian American, and five are Latinas.



Women are making a difference *continued from page 1*

- To date, women have been elected to executive office in 48 of the 50 states.
- In 1998, 1,652 (or 22.3%) of the 7,424 state legislators in the U.S. were women. Since 1969, the number of women serving in state legislatures has increased more than five-fold.
- Here in Nashville, 11 of the 40 members of the Metro Council are women, up from just six on the previous council. [One of them is Vanderbilt's own Brenda Gilmore, director of mail services, who defeated an incumbent District One councilwoman in the August election.]

Not only are the numbers of elected women officeholders increasing, there is also strong evidence that women officeholders are reshaping the public policy agenda and changing the way government works.

Women officeholders, both Democrat and Republican, are more likely to give top priority or strong support to women's rights bills and to bills dealing with health care, children and the family, education, the environment, housing

and the elderly. A Center for the American Woman and Politics study reports that, among state legislators, women officeholders are more likely to favor the ERA, to oppose parental consent for abortion, to oppose prohibiting abortion, to oppose the death penalty, to oppose the use of nuclear power, and to oppose the privatization of government functions.

Women officeholders are more likely, as well, to bring citizens into the policy-making process. They are more likely to support government as a public process than government decision-making

“The gender gap in voting is having a strong impact on who gets into office and on what issues get onto the political agenda.”

behind closed doors. Women officeholders are more responsive to groups previously denied full access to the policy-making process.

Thus, the gender gap in voting is having a strong impact on *who* gets into office and on *what issues* get onto the political agenda.

The rise of women donors

Women are not only making a difference by running for office and by the strength of their voting power. Women are also financially supporting candidates — especially women candidates who support a women's agenda.

As Eleanor Smeal wrote in her book *Why and How Women Will Elect the Next President*, “The essential ingredient of any successful campaign is money — without money a campaign cannot get [to] first base. . . . Generally the candidate who spends the most wins the race.”

This observation is not particularly surprising. But the strength of the relationship between the rise of women's donor networks, and the increase in the number of women elected officials, is surprising.

Consider the case of Emily's List, the



longest-running donor network raising funds for women candidates. Emily's List — an acronym for “Early Money is Like Yeast” (it makes the dough rise) — was founded by 25 women in 1985. They gathered in a basement with

rolodexes in hand to ask their friends to give financial support to pro-choice Democratic women candidates. When Emily's List was first founded, no Democratic woman had ever been elected to the

U.S. Senate in her own right, no woman had been elected governor of a large state, and the number of Democratic women in the U.S. House of Representatives had declined.

By 1998, Emily's List had grown to 50,000 names. Emily's List raised \$7.5 million to elect seven new pro-choice Democratic women to the House of Representatives — the largest increase of Democratic women in a non-presidential election year. Emily's List also helped elect a new woman to the U.S. Senate. In seven elections, Emily's List has helped elect seven pro-choice Democratic women senators, 49 congresswomen, and three governors.

We have success stories closer to home in WIN (Women in the Nineties), a Nashville-based contributors' network that supports progressive women candidates running for state and local office. Since its founding in 1992, WIN has endorsed 50 candidates, two-thirds of whom have been elected. It has raised almost \$140,000 and is one of the top ten fund-raising groups in Tennessee. Of the 11 women elected to the current Metro Council, eight had the backing of WIN.

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Making a difference

continued from page 2

While women have made a difference in the political arena, they have not yet made enough of a difference.

According to the Center for Responsive Politics, 80% of all donors to elections are male; 90% are white; 46% earn incomes over \$250,000 annually. In Congress, 87.9% of the members are male.

In Tennessee especially, we must work harder to achieve parity. Women hold five (or 15%) of the 33 seats in the Tennessee Senate. They hold 14% of the seats in the House of Representatives.

According to a state-by-state study of the status of women conducted by the Institute for Women's Policy Research, Tennessee ranks 50th, or dead last among all the states, in its Political Participation Composite Score, which includes women's voter registration, women's voter turnout, women in elected offices, and institutional resources for women in the state. Tennessee ranks 44th in its economic autonomy index, despite TennCare. The index measures access to health insurance, educational attainment, women-owned businesses and self-employment, and percentage of women above poverty.

Finally, Tennessee ranks 45th in its policies on reproductive choice. This measure encompasses women's legal right to abortion and the ease of access to abortion, including public funding for abortion.

If Ellie Smeal and the Center for Responsive Politics are right, where Tennessee ranks among the states ten years from now will be significantly influenced by the actions of women as candidates, as political appointees, as voters and as financial donors in the years ahead.

Almost a decade ago, the media dubbed 1992 the "Year of the Woman" because of the growing success of women at the polls. Since then, we have learned that achieving parity and changing the public policy agenda cannot be accomplished in a single year, or even a single decade. Perhaps we need to designate the 21st century as the century of the woman.



NEWS *quotes*

Trends
point upward
for women

Women gain in the doctoral chase

The annual total of women receiving Ph.D.s has increased by more than 50 percent in a decade, growing at over twice the rate of the number of men getting those degrees, a new study has found.

As a result, a record 40.6 percent of more than 42,000 research doctorates awarded by United States universities in the 1996-97 academic year went to women, according to the annual study, by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago. The recent gains achieved by women are in keeping with a long upward trend in their share of doctorates. Women received just 9.1 percent of the Ph.D.s awarded in 1954, the lowest total since the collection of such data began in 1921. The percentage of female degree recipients doubled from 1954 to 1974, rising to 19.5 percent of the total, then doubled again in another 20 years, to 38.6 percent in 1994.

—THE NEW YORK TIMES, November 4, 1999

Employees perceive women as better managers

Women are perceived by themselves and their co-workers — even their male co-workers — as performing significantly better as managers than are men, according to a five-year study of gender and leadership skills.

Lawrence A. Pfaff, Ed.D., a human resource consultant working out of his own Michigan-based firm, found that female managers scored higher than their male counterparts in 20 skill areas. The population studied was 2,482 managers at all levels, from more than 400 organizations across 19 states.

The difference between the sexes, he says, "extends beyond the 'softer' skills such as communication, feedback and empowering other employees, to such areas as decisiveness, planning and setting standards." He believes that women have acquired nontraditional strengths in recent years, but that men have not broadened their skills in the same way.

—APA MONITOR ONLINE, September 1999

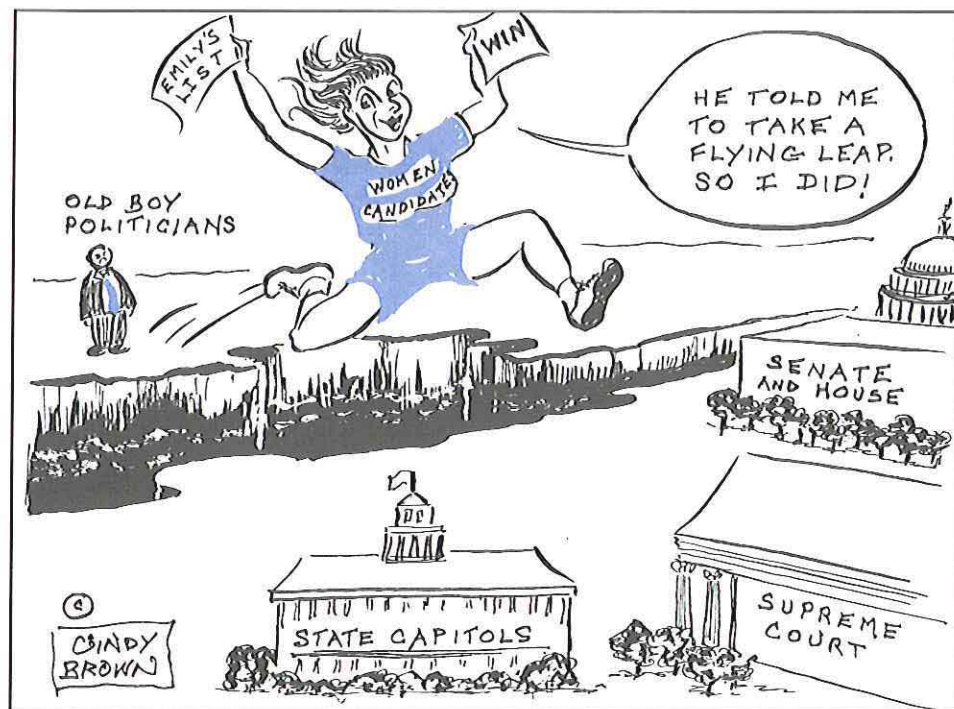
Women increase standing as business owners

Female-owned businesses have added plenty of muscle in recent years, and now they're powering the American job machine. Since 1992, the number of people employed nationwide at female-owned firms has grown 108%, to about 27.5 million. The number of people employed at small companies overall increased just 12% from 1992 to 1998.

"Women have been starting businesses for a decade, but these numbers tell us their companies are playing a much more significant role in the health of the economy," says Sharon Hadary, executive director of the National Foundation for Women Business Owners. There are now 9.1 million businesses owned by women, 38% of all firms in the USA.

Female-owned companies will keep hiring legions of workers, predicts David Birch of Cognetics, an economic research firm in Cambridge, Mass. "This trend will continue; it's not a blip," says Birch. "It represents a fundamental shift in the structure of the economy."

—USA TODAY, Nov. 12, 1999



Nominations sought for Muliebrity Prize and Mentoring Award

If you know a member of the Vanderbilt community who has worked to advance gender equity and the accomplishments of women, now is the time to consider nominating that person for one of two awards given annually by the Women's Center.

The deadline is February 1 to submit nominations for both the Mentoring Award and the Muliebrity Prize.

The Mentoring Award honors a member of the university community who has fostered the advancement of women. The Muliebrity Prize is given to an undergraduate student who demonstrates leadership in promoting the achievements, interests and goals of women and girls. Nominating forms for these awards are available at the Sarratt desk and the Women's Center.

Dissertation Writers Group offers ideas, support for graduate students

During the long and lonely process of writing a dissertation, it's encouraging to know you're not alone.

The members of the Dissertation Writers Group, which meets twice each month at the Women's Center, gain support by sharing the trials — and successes — they experience during the writing process.

One of the women might tell the group about her problem with writer's block, while another celebrates the accomplishment of finally finishing an important section of her work.

"They talk about whatever is on their minds," says Darlene Panvini, who is in her third year of facilitating the group. "It's a place to be aware you're not alone and to gain from the collective experience."

Panvini, who serves as assistant director of the Center for Teaching, was a member of the group herself when she was a graduate student in biology. She

took over the role of facilitator from Nancy Ransom, director of the Women's Center, who led the group for several years before her retirement in 1997.

Panvini says her primary role as facilitator is to encourage the students to set small, realistic goals. "I call it 'chunking it down.' Writing a dissertation is a huge task, so I encourage them

to break it down into manageable steps. It could be something as small as making a phone call or meeting with an adviser."

The group is open to any woman preparing a dissertation, at the proposal defense

stage or beyond. Panvini emphasizes that the group is *not* intended as a place for students to read their dissertations and receive a critique from other members. Rather it provides problem solving, trouble shooting and moral support during the writing process.

The Dissertation Writers Group will hold its organizational meeting for the spring semester Thursday, January 13 from noon to 2:00 p.m. If you are interested in participating, send your name, e-mail address, department, dissertation title, and your stage in the process to: Darlene.Panvini@vanderbilt.edu.

Mark your calendars!

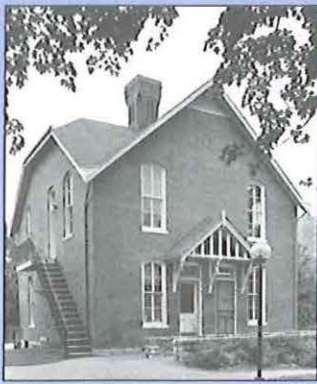
Margaret Cuninggim Lecture

Monday, February 28

PEGGY McINTOSH, an advocate of inclusive teaching methods and a noted scholar of systems of privilege, will give the Margaret Cuninggim Lecture on Monday, February 28.

McIntosh is associate director of the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women and founder and co-director of the National S.E.E.D. Project on Inclusive Curriculum (Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity). She is perhaps best known for her ground-breaking 1989 article, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," copies of which are available in the Women's Center library.

In addition to her lecture on Feb. 28, McIntosh will meet with members of the Vanderbilt community on Tuesday, Feb. 29 in a series of programs for undergraduates, graduate students and faculty members. Look for more details in the February issue of *Women's VU*.



**Margaret
Cuninggim
Women's Center**

**Calendar
of Events**

PLEASE SAVE AND POST.

Unless otherwise stated, all programs are held at the Cuninggim Center, Franklin Building, 316 West Side Row. For more information on the events listed, call 322-4843.

JANUARY 2000

■ **Tuesday, January 4**

12:00 noon - 1:00 p.m.

Creative Life Planning Group holds an "issues week," a personal time for group members to exchange life stories.

■ **Monday, January 10**

5:15 - 6:15 p.m.

Book Group holds a planning meeting for the year. Bring suggestions for books to read and, if possible, a review of the book you are suggesting. Also, bring friends and co-workers who are interested in participating.

■ **Tuesday, January 11**

12:00 noon - 1:00 p.m.

Creative Life Planning Group celebrates Virginia Smith's 91st birthday.

■ **Thursday, January 13**

12:00 noon - 2:00 p.m.

Dissertation Writers Group for Women holds an organizational meeting for the spring semester. *See article, page 4.*

4:30 - 6:00 p.m.

Artist's Reception for Ellen Parker Bibb whose exhibit, "Sojourns," will be on display from January 10 to March 3. *See article, page 7.*

■ **Friday, January 14**

12:00 noon - 1:00 p.m.

What's Next? A new monthly discussion group for post-docs, lecturers and adjunct faculty members. Facilitated by Alison Piepmeier. *See article, page 7.*

■ **Tuesday, January 18**

12:00 noon - 1:00 p.m.

Creative Life Planning Group.

■ **Wednesday, January 19**

12:00 noon - 1:00 p.m.

Brown Bag Lunch for Lesbian and Bisexual Women's Issues. Holly Maluk will present "Slides and Stories from an Anthropologist: Seeking Lesbian and Gay Community in South Africa." For information, contact Hilary Forbes at hilary.forbes@vanderbilt.edu.

■ **Thursday, January 20**

12:00 noon - 1:00 p.m.

Reading Sisters meets to discuss works by black women authors. Check our web site (www.vanderbilt.edu/WomensCenter/womenctr.htm) for this month's book selection.

■ **Tuesday, January 25**

12:00 noon - 1:00 p.m.

Creative Life Planning Group will hear relaxation specialist Sandra Roth Williams.

3:10 - 5:00 p.m.

Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center Advisory Board Meeting. Branscomb Rec Room.

■ **Wednesday, January 26**

3:00 - 4:00 p.m.

Financial Aid Forum: Ask the Experts. Representatives from the graduate and professional schools — Owen, Peabody, the Graduate School, the Law School, the Nursing School, and the Medical School — will discuss financial options and answer questions about applying for financial aid, including grants, loans, and scholarships.



Anthropologist predicts 'tomorrow belongs to women'

In *The First Sex: The Natural Talents of Women and How They are Changing the World* (Random House, 1999) anthropologist Helen Fisher maintains that women, regarded as the second sex in the past, will become the first sex in the new millennium. The writer, who teaches at Rutgers University, argues that the special talents of women will bring them greater power and influence in the global society of the future.

In prehistoric eras, women were considered roughly equal to men, but as societies adopted agricultural lifestyles, men assumed most of the economic tasks and political duties. The modern world is still recovering from this unequal division of power and labor. Fisher contends that the sexes differ in many fundamental aspects and that each has different natural talents. Males and females think in different ways and women's typical "web thinking," which involves a wider perspective, is in many ways superior to men's "step thinking," which tends to be more linear and more focused.

The aptitudes and skills of women predispose them to success in many fields. The writer illustrates why middle-aged women are particularly suited for positions of leadership and why she expects women to achieve success and make positive changes in fields such as medicine, law, business, education, poli-

tics and communications. In some of these fields, women are likely to predominate in the years ahead.

Fisher, who also discusses gender, love and sexuality, feels that most societies are developing more female perspectives on sexuality and that women are "creating an international air of sexual civility."

Several years ago a 16-year-old girl was deeply impressed when she read Mary Pipher's *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*, a study of the problems and joys of young girls. She identified with the lives of many of those in Pipher's book and wondered if she could expand on that study by enlisting girls to describe their own experiences of being young and female.

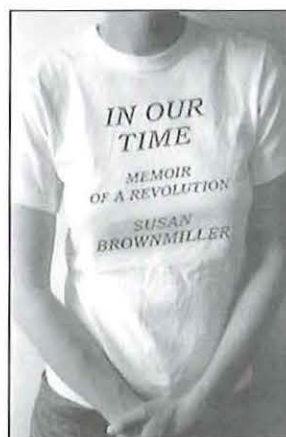
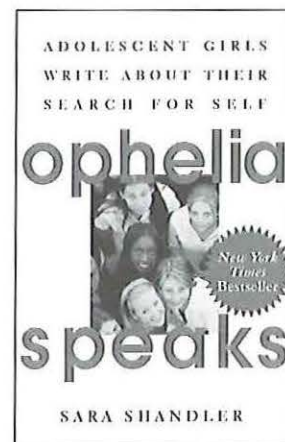
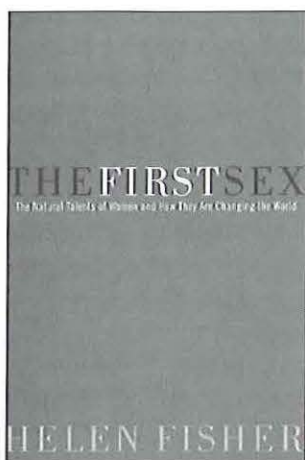
That enterprising teenager was Sara Shandler, whose *Ophelia Speaks: Adolescent Girls Write About Their Search for Self* (HarperCollins, 1999) has become a best-seller. She solicited material from 12- to 18-year-old girls from all over the country and received 815 contributions from a diverse group of writers. Only a representative selection of their essays, poems and diary extracts could be included; the girls selected their own topics and it is not surprising that there were more articles about eating disorders than any other subject.

The young writer

says she was "shocked by the wide gap between what we have been told to think, what we say we think, and what we truly think." Each section includes an introduction in which Shandler, now a student at Wesleyan University, discusses her own experiences and those of her friends.

Feminist Susan Brownmiller's *In Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution* (Dial Press, 1999) is a lively history of the modern women's movement. The writer, who was an activist in the struggle for civil rights in the 1960s, gravitated to women's rights in 1968, when she was a reporter and television newswriter experiencing sex discrimination at work and harassment in the streets.

Brownmiller interviewed more than 200 activists for this volume and has included many of their reminiscences in her sections on early feminists and activists, marches and demonstrations, movements and organizations, and changes in society and in laws. The writer also discusses the development of her landmark 1975 volume, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*.



'Sojourns' takes viewers on visual journey

Ellen Parker Bibb calls a new exhibit of her oil paintings "Sojourns," because the images "provide a visual escape from my daily routine."

Bibb finds her escape in trips to England and Italy, and by closely observing the beauty in scenes closer to home, including a vase of flowers spreading out before a window in a sitting room.



ELLEN PARKER BIBB
*Paintings on exhibit
at the Women's Center*

Fifteen of her oil paintings will be on exhibit at the Women's Center from January 10 to March 3. The artwork is available for viewing during the center's business hours, Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m to 5:00 p.m.

Painting provides a break from Bibb's work as an award-winning graphic designer, in which she creates everything from t-shirts

and fixtures to printed pieces, such as catalogs and letterheads.

By combining her work as a graphic designer with her interest in painting, Bibb says she has "the best of both worlds." As a designer, her work is client-based, but as a painter, she chooses "what I want to paint and when I want to paint it."

Although she has had an interest in art most of her life, it was not until she took a series of fine arts courses while pursuing a B.F.A. at Auburn University that Bibb discovered she

loved oil paintings. She describes her style as "impressionistic and expressionistic," using a loose, brushy stroke to convey an image. "I try to say as much as I can [on the canvas] with as little as possible. Your eye has to finish it off."

When she travels, Bibb says she spends a lot of her time finding things she wants to paint, such as the scene in a garden at Kensington Palace in London (*below, left*) or a curving street in Spoleto (*above*). She captures the images with her camera and paints from photographs when she returns home. Bibb's work was shown last year in "Artists Working at Cheekwood," where she studies with Charles Brindley.

The opening of the exhibit will be marked with an artist's reception for Bibb on Thursday, Jan. 13 from 4:30 to 6:00 p.m.



A Street in Spoleto



An English Garden

What's Next?

New discussion group tackles concerns of those between student/faculty status

Are you a post-doc, lecturer, or adjunct faculty member looking for others who can understand you? The Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center is sponsoring a new discussion group just for you. Come and talk with others about your job search, grant applications, teaching skills, current research, and other issues that are particular to the lives of those who are no longer students, but are not yet full-time faculty.

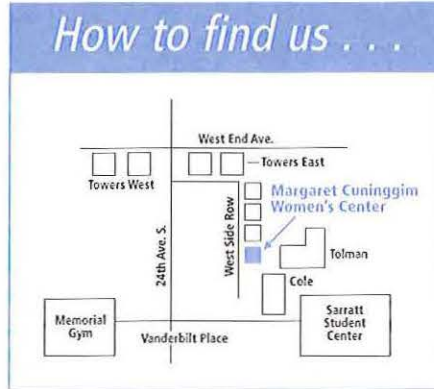
The group's first meeting will be Friday, Jan. 14, from noon to 1:00 p.m. at the Women's Center. Alison Piepmeier, a lecturer in English & Women's Studies, will facilitate this monthly group discussion. If you have questions, contact Piepmeier at alison.m.piepmeier@vanderbilt.edu.

A N N O U N C E M E N T S

• **Job Opportunity:** The Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center is seeking an editor for *Women's VU*. The person in this position coordinates all aspects of producing the newsletter, from concept through distribution. Experience in writing, editing and layout required. Proficiency in using a Macintosh and QuarkXpress preferred. This is a part-time position, averaging 10 hours per week. To apply, contact Dr. Linda Manning, director of the Women's Center, at 322-4843.

• Thanks to all members of the Vanderbilt community who joined the Women's Center team in the **Race for the Cure**. Race organizers have informed the center that our team was the largest participating in the "school" category. The Women's Center will receive a plaque to recognize this participation. Thanks to all of you who made this possible. Your hard work really made a difference.

• Karen Essex, an award-winning author who has led several writers workshops at the Women's Center, is planning a **weekend session for writers** next month. The group will meet Saturday, February 5, from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday, February 6, from 1:00 to 6:00 p.m. Sessions will be held at the SAE House, located at 2500 Kensington Place. The workshop will focus on the specifics of craft, style and form. Cost is \$175. To register, contact Essex at 279-0077.



The Cuninggim Center is located in the Franklin Building at 316 West Side Row.

• Looking for short-term, rewarding volunteer work? Women are needed for **Better Decisions**, an eight-week course which teaches decision-making and life-planning skills to inmates at the Tennessee Prison for Women. Volunteers work with an inmate/partner for one-hour weekly sessions from February 7-March 27. Volunteer training will be held January 29-30. Call Kathy Masulis at 832-8327 for more information.

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