

## New director heads VU Women's Studies

Ronnie Steinberg, a sociologist whose work has focused on employment issues including comparable worth and gender wage gaps, has been named to head the Vanderbilt women's studies program.



Ronnie Steinberg

Steinberg comes here from Temple University, where she was professor of sociology and an affiliated faculty member of the women's studies program. She also served as editor of *Women in the Political Economy*, a highly regarded book series published by Temple University Press, and has written three books on employment policy issues.

In looking at patterns by which employers devalue work done by women, Steinberg is regarded in her field as someone whose research "has applications in the real world," according to Karen Campbell, associate professor of sociology who was acting director of women's studies last semester.

Steinberg says she sees her new position as "an opportunity to work with a group of women and men who share my interests in women's issues and gender issues." Although she is not coming to Vanderbilt with an agenda for the program, Steinberg hopes "to take some steps to increase the visibility and legitimacy of women's studies as an intellectual discipline."

Women's Studies is currently offered at Vanderbilt as an interdisciplinary minor, with nine hours of required course work and nine hours of electives.

## Surviving sorority rush

*Self-confidence helps cope with stressful process*

by Kristin Lazure (A&S '99)

This month, in addition to the stress that comes with starting new classes, freshmen women will be worrying about sorority rush. For many women this process is more stressful than anything else at college, including academics.

One freshman who wishes to remain anonymous said, "I know girls who skipped Friday classes so they could start getting ready early for informal rounds." Informal rounds, called "open houses," took place in October and November. The three formal rounds and the preference round will take place this month.

Looking back on my experience with rush last year, I remember the amount of stress and anxiety in freshman dorms before and after rush rounds. Prior to rounds, most freshmen women would try on new outfits, old outfits, and other people's outfits trying to find the "perfect" clothes in which to meet sorority women and make a good impression. They would worry about where to put their compacts so they could freshen up their make-up between rounds. After rounds, freshman dorms were filled with women who were concerned about whether or not their favorite sorority houses liked them.

There will surely be the same type of stress and anxiety this month among freshmen women. At times it is difficult to imagine why people would choose to put this extra pressure on themselves.

According to Sandy Stahl, Assistant Dean of Residential and Judicial Affairs, over 600 freshmen and sophomores are registered for sorority

*continued on page 2*



Photo courtesy Brook Rabinowitz/Hustler

Sorority members celebrate last year's bid day.

rush this year. Overall, approximately 50% of Vanderbilt women join sororities, while only 35% of male undergraduates are in the Greek system.

Stahl attributes the level of Greek affiliation among women to peer pressure, family pressure, and the fact that sororities sell themselves to freshmen women. "A lot of girls get caught up in the fact that everybody is doing it, but sororities also market themselves well. They perform community service, and they are academic and social support groups," Stahl said.

But for some women, the experience of rush is a devastating one. A current sophomore who transferred to another university after falling through rush last year at Vanderbilt, said, "I transferred because I didn't feel like I fit in at Vanderbilt. When I fell through, I really didn't think that anybody liked me or wanted to be around me. I was genuine all through rush, but I just wasn't good enough for any Vanderbilt sorority girls. Maybe if

I had acted like somebody I wasn't, they would have accepted me."

This is a widespread view: to be successful in sorority rush, a woman must be willing to act like a fake.

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*"Self-confidence is about who you are, not the Greek letters you wear."*

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While there may be instances where this is true, Stahl instead describes sorority rush as an interview process, similar to interviewing for a job. It is a process based on self-confidence rather than deception.

Shelley Low, president of the Panhellenic Council, said, "Anybody who really understands our rush process knows that it is not fake. It may be awkward because it's forced socializing, but it's a way to meet people."

Low and Stahl believe the intense stress freshmen women experience during rush is unnecessary and avoidable, and the selection process for sororities is not demeaning or insensitive, as it is sometimes portrayed.

"Rushees usually don't understand that [rush] is not about wearing the right clothes or having an exciting conversation in one day. It's about developing relationships all semester," Low said.

New rush rules, which allow more opportunities for sorority women and freshmen to get to know each other, were designed to promote real relationships between these two groups, according to Stahl. Under the previous rules, freshmen were permitted to have conversations with sorority women only during rush rounds when nervousness was rampant.

The new rules have their share of problems too. Under current rules, sorority women are allowed to call freshmen to have lunch or some other one-on-one encounter.

"So many girls get so stressed out because they don't think they're getting as many phone calls as other girls," said Rachel Humphrey, a freshman who dropped out of rush.

These elements of the rush process often generate feelings of rejection among freshmen women at a time

when it is essential that they feel accepted by their peers.

To counter these problems, Panhel organizes a lecture for freshmen women in the fall called "You Are Bigger Than Rush." Women who went through the rush process speak on a panel to promote the idea that self-confidence is about who you are, not the Greek letters you wear. Independents, who chose not to go through rush or who dropped out of sororities, are also represented on the panel.

"Trying to be what they think the sororities want them to be is not going to benefit [freshman women]," said Stahl. "What really decides where you end up is how well your personality and interests click with the girls in a particular chapter."

Stahl disputes the popular idea that appearances are valued above anything else in rush. She said it is overall "appeal" that sororities are looking for.

"They want the whole package. Personality impacts appeal tremendously. There are women of all shapes, sizes and colors in all the sororities, which was not the case when I was in school," said Stahl. "I think we have a really open and diverse system. There are absolutely no barriers to joining."

Sororities are not for everybody, and they do not need to be. Some people say sorority girls are buying their friends, but others who have rewarding experiences see their sorority as a great way to meet similar people. Whatever the opinion, it is important to remember that this is an individual choice.

Sorority rush can effect women negatively, but it can also effect them positively. There is no foolproof generalization because everybody has a unique rush experience. The important thing to remember is that self-confidence should not be based on rush because everybody is bigger than the rush process. ■

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*A future issue of Women's VU will profile the experiences of independents, women who are not affiliated with sororities.*

**Women's VU** is published monthly September through June at the Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee.  
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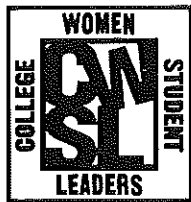
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# Re-examining feminism: Conference brings new perspective

by Laura DeVilbiss (A&S '99)

I attended the National College Women Student Leaders Conference in Washington, D.C. last June, with support from the Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center. The conference gave me new insights on feminism and reinforced my belief in the strength of women.

In preparing for the trip, a number of thoughts crossed my mind about what I would encounter. I was excited to be visiting Washington and the campus of Georgetown University. However, I was unsure how I would fit in with the other conference participants. I



didn't know if most of the women there would be lesbians, or if I would feel too young or too old to fit in. I wondered how I would get along with my roommate for the weekend, fellow Vanderbilt student Kathy Mead. While these concerns now seem insignificant, they all preyed on my mind. However, once I arrived, met my roommate and acquainted myself with the campus, I began to feel comfortable.

The conference began with an opening activity designed to focus the participants and generate enthusiasm. This activity was called "Finding Your Own Voice." Participants were asked to stand or sit in response to several questions. The question, "Are you

optimistic about the future?" evoked the greatest response. Almost every participant stood up in affirmation. As different women explained why they were optimistic, it became evident to me that the theme of optimism involved belief in oneself. This positive attitude also involved our willingness to work together, especially as women, and our knowledge that as women we can be extremely successful at what we undertake with the help of other women. My personal realization involves acknowledging that I am not the only one with optimism for, but also reservations about, the future. This realization also includes the recognition of the need for teamwork and support systems.

During the conference, I also realized that feminism means many different things. In my first year at Vanderbilt, I had heard very little about feminism. The attitude of Vanderbilt women seemed to be, "I am not a feminist, but I believe in equal rights." This conference opened my eyes to a broader perspective. Any strong female student leader can be a feminist. Feminists include lesbians and the straightest of straights. Some

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Students who are interested in attending the 1997 conference of College Women Student Leaders next June should contact Nancy Ransom at 322-4843.

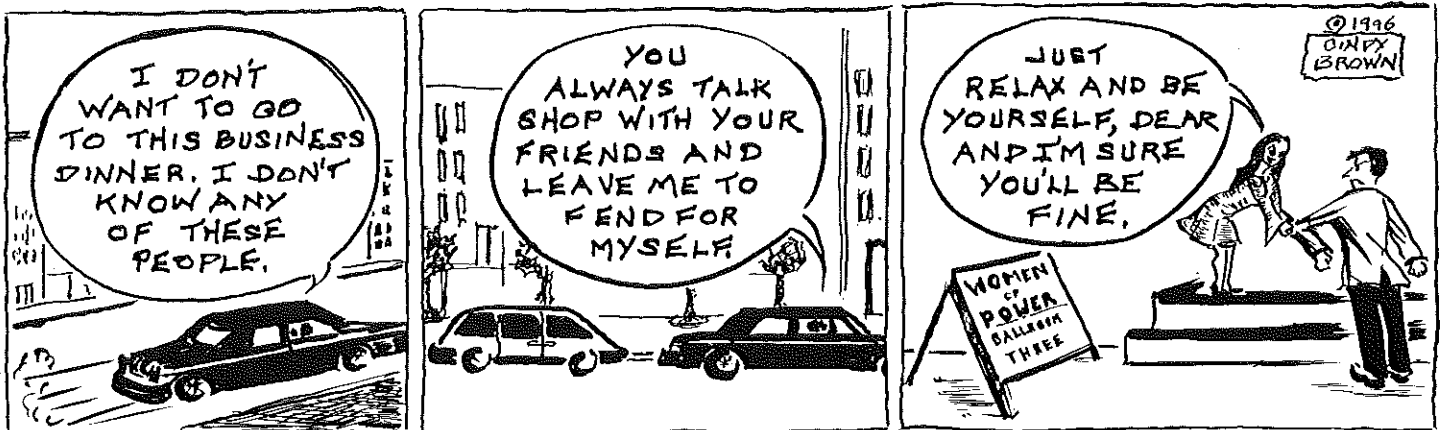
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are as hip as a flower child while others, as Kathy Mead pointed out, like to wear dresses and makeup and roll their hair. We also span every age group, each generation experiencing its own version of the struggle and responding in different ways.

For some reason, up until this point I felt that I did not fit the mold of a proper feminist. I realized, however, that I merely did not fit one stereotype of feminism. At this conference I found that one of the most important aspects of feminism is the strength of women. We acquire this strength through knowledge, wellness and diversity. As a group, feminists gain strength by combining our individual talents and working together. I was pleased to have the opportunity to attend a conference where I could meet so many strong women and begin to contribute my own strengths.

## Eating Disorders Group resumes meetings

A support group for students and others with eating disorders will have its first meeting of the semester on January 16. The group meets Thursdays from 5 to 6 p.m. at the Women's Center for discussion, sometimes with resource persons, on coping with disorders including bulimia and anorexia. For more information, call Gabrielle at 1-6197 or Hayley at 1-1062.



## Portraits capture subjects with photo-realism

For artist Mary Bruns, a photographic process helps to illuminate the figures she portrays in a collection of miniatures to be exhibited at the Women's Center.



Mary Bruns

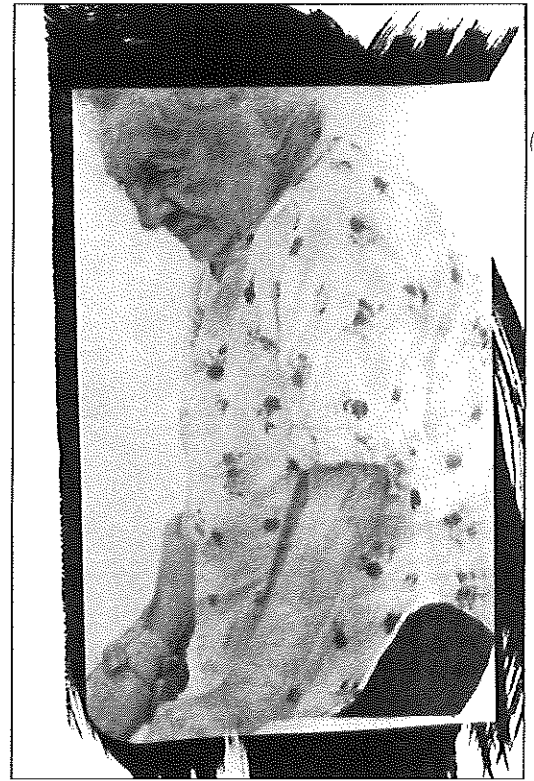
The 11 pieces in the exhibit are drawings done in cyanotype, a process in which each hand-drawn portrait is photographed, developed, and printed from a negative using only natural sunlight as a light source. Despite the startling reality of the drawings, "No actual photographs are reproduced or placed within a piece," Bruns explains. "The pieces are drawn to resemble photographs."

Many of the people portrayed in the exhibit are figures from Bruns' youth in small-town Iowa, "although any genre or geographic location gives me equal material," she says.

One piece, "Echo," (shown at right) shows an elderly neighbor the artist knew in Los Angeles. During the creative process, Bruns sometimes uses "another person to 'act-in' as the person I am elaborating on."

Bruns received a B.F.A. from the University of Nebraska and master of arts and master of fine arts degrees from California State University. Her work has been chosen for juried exhibitions at Cheekwood and the Berkeley Art Center, and she has had several recent shows at Cumberland Gallery.

"Cyanotypes" will be on exhibit from Jan. 13 through March 28. Bruns will be honored at a reception Jan. 15 from 5 to 6:30 p.m.



"Echo," a cyanotype by artist Mary Bruns, is part of an exhibit at the Women's Center.

## Women's Center News Notes

### Nominees sought for student leadership award

Nominations are invited for the Muliebrity Prize. The prize goes to an undergraduate student who demonstrates leadership in activities that contribute to the achievements, interests and goals of women and girls, or that promote gender equity. The deadline for this year's nominations is Feb. 14.

The prize includes a cash award of \$100 and a certificate. The award is made during the annual Kudos ceremony. For information, call Martha Young at 2-2664 or send e-mail to [young@library.vanderbilt.edu](mailto:young@library.vanderbilt.edu).

### Mentoring Award deadline

The deadline to submit nominees for the Mentoring Award is January 24. The award honors a member of the university community who has fostered achievement by Vanderbilt women.

### Student workers needed for MCWC positions

The Margaret Cuningim Women's Center has positions available for student workers during the current semester. Work-study students are preferred, but all qualified students will be considered:

- **Graphic designer.** A student with experience in desktop publishing is needed for computer design. Create program flyers/posters with Quark XPress on a Macintosh system with scanner. Salary for the position is negotiable depending on experience.
- **Office worker,** to do general clerical work and post flyers on campus.
- **Program assistant.** Help plan and implement programming for the women's center. Evening availability required.

For information, contact Nancy Ransom or Judy Helfer at 322-4843.

### Writers groups accepting new members

The Proposal Writers Group and Dissertation Writers Group, which meet each month at the Women's Center, will accept new members at their January meetings.

The groups provide trouble-shooting, problem-solving and moral support for women who are writing a proposal or have started their dissertations.

Students who are coming for the first time should bring a typed page with their name/address/phone/e-mail/fax and a brief description of their project.

Two organizational sessions are planned on Monday, January 13; proposal writers will meet from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m., and dissertation writers will meet from 4 to 6 p.m.

Nancy Ransom, director of the Women's Center, is facilitator for both groups.

# J A N U A R Y

Please save and post. Individual flyers for these programs may not be sent.

## JANUARY 7 / TUESDAY

Creative Life Planning Group meets weekly to focus on ways to improve problem-solving skills and make life changes, noon to 1 p.m. New members welcome. Call Judy Helfer at 322-6518 for more information.

## JANUARY 13 / MONDAY

Proposal Writers Group, 1:30 to 3:30 p.m.  
Dissertation Writers, 4 to 6 p.m.

Book Group meets to choose books for the next year. For more information e-mail [helferjt@ctrvax](mailto:helferjt@ctrvax) or phone 322-6518.

## JANUARY 14 / TUESDAY

Creative Life Planning Group, noon to 1 p.m.

## JANUARY 15 / WEDNESDAY

Artist Reception for Mary Bruns, 5 to 6:30 p.m. Her exhibit, "Cyanotypes," runs through March 28. (See article, page 4.)

## JANUARY 16 / THURSDAY

Eating Disorders Discussion Group meets weekly at the Women's Center, 8 p.m. For more information call Gabrielle at 1-6197 or Hayley at 1-1062. Also meets Jan. 23 & 30.

## JANUARY 21 / TUESDAY

Creative Life Planning Group, noon to 1 p.m.

## JANUARY 22 / WEDNESDAY

Women's Center Advisory Board, 4:10 p.m., Branscomb Private Dining Room.

## JANUARY 27 / MONDAY

So you think you'd like to go to med school? A panel of women medical students discusses medical school and medicine as a career for women and answer questions. 4:30 to 6 p.m., Sarratt 118.

## JANUARY 28 / TUESDAY

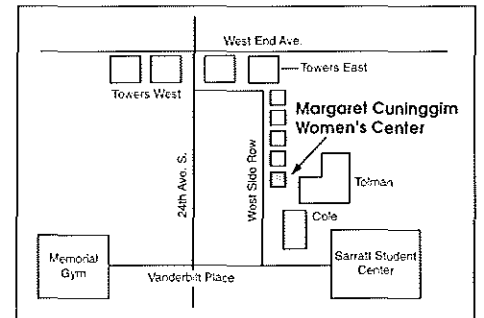
Creative Life Planning Group, noon to 1 p.m.

Freelance Writers Group, a group of women writers who meet monthly to get feedback from other writers and share information. January's meeting will focus on the business side of freelance writing: query letters, communications with editors, how to prepare manuscripts, etc. For more information contact Beth Grantham, facilitator, at 352-9214. New members welcome. 5:30-7:30 p.m.

## JANUARY 31 / FRIDAY

Faculty Women's Breakfast at the University Club affords a time to greet your peers and meet the new Women's Studies Program Director, Ronnie Steinberg. 7:30 to 9 a.m. Cost is \$5. Co-sponsored by the Women's Faculty Organization and the Women's Center. Reservations with payment must be received by January 29 at the Women's Center, 316 West Side Row.

### How to find us . . .



## Calendar of Events

Margaret  
Cuninggim  
Women's Center



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

## In the library...

### *New book examines experiences of slave women*

Barbara Clarke,  
Women's Center  
librarian



Historians David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine are the editors of *More Than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas*, an absorbing new work published by the Indiana University Press. It is a comprehensive study of slave women and of the importance of gender among enslaved peoples in various areas of the New World. Men and women experienced slavery very differently, and few researchers have addressed this situation. Gaspar and 14 other contributors discuss slavery and its impact on black women in the southern United States, in Brazil, Antigua, Barbados, Haiti and other islands in the Caribbean.

The writers discuss resistance among slaves and why women did not play as big a part in collective rebellion as did men. Most women were mothers who tried to hold families together and they tended to engage "in less confrontational or nonviolent forms of resistance that emphasized the need for creative struggle to survive dehumanization and abuse." They were not as free as men to run away, as that often meant abandoning young children or leaving other family members exposed to retribution. Most slave women would put up with a great deal in order to help prevent close relatives from being sold to other owners. The editors point

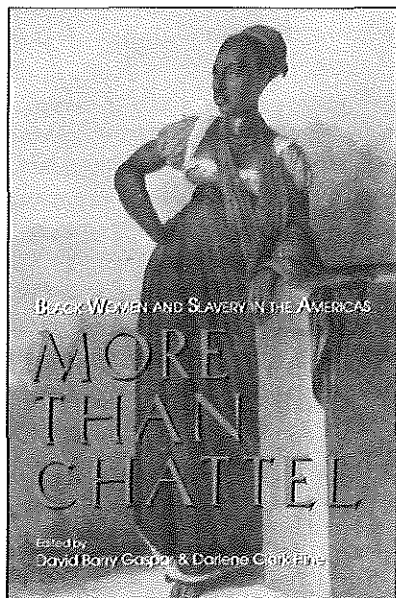
out that women slaves thought of themselves as being more than chattel and the personal property of others; the articles illustrate their battles to survive and be treated with dignity.

Female slaves were valued both for their productive work and for their reproductive capacity; theirs was a double burden. Slaveholders and other men frequently preyed upon enslaved women and girls, who were believed to be very promiscuous.

The experiences of slaves varied considerably in different eras and in different locations. In general, however, both women and men worked in the fields, usually doing similar work. Normally only men were trained in skilled crafts; some fortunate women worked in their masters' homes as housekeepers, cooks, nursemaids, or seamstresses. Slave nannies, while desiring freedom for their own offspring, socialized the white children in their care to support slavery. In

Charleston, many of the female slaves who sold their owners' produce in the market also sold their own goods for profit there. Occasionally enslaved women inherited slaves and some slaveowners were free blacks.

The contributors painstakingly researched many aspects of the lives of bonded women. Claire Robertson, an associate professor of history and women's studies at Ohio State University, analyzes slavery in Africa and shows how African influence survived among the descendants of those brought unwillingly to the Americas. Other writers discuss slave women and their work in homes and in the



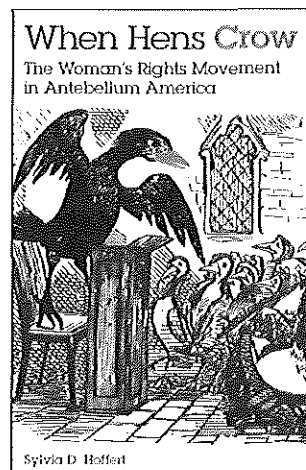
## Library Resources

The library at the Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center houses the only collection on campus devoted to gender, feminism and related topics. The library includes more than 1,900 books, as well as many journals, audiotapes, videotapes and a large collection of unbound material. Most of the books and audiovisual items circulate. Open from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. each weekday, the library is available to anyone in the university community for research, reference and reading.

fields, family life and childrearing, pregnancy and childbirth, health, nutrition and the growth patterns of children born into bondage, sexuality, rebellion and resistance, religious beliefs and slavery in urban areas.

Other new acquisitions in the library include: *Asian American Women and Men: Labor, Laws and Love* by Yen Le Espiritu; *When Hens Crow: The*

*Woman's Rights Movement in Antebellum America* by Sylvia D. Hoffert; *The Equity Equation: Fostering the Advancement of Women in the Sciences, Mathematics, and Engineering* by Cinda-Sue Davis, Angela B. Gino-rio et al; and *Feminism, Breasts and Breast-Feeding* by Pam Carter. ■



# Lifting the burden of osteoporosis

## *Weight-bearing exercise can help prevent bone fractures*

by Emily G. Bruno, RN, MSN

Regular physical activity is a key component in any woman's efforts to stay healthy. Exercise has been linked with the prevention of a number of diseases, including hypertension, heart disease, diabetes, and breast cancer.

Women who need one more incentive to exercise regularly should consider recent research on osteoporosis, a bone-thinning disease which is four times more likely to strike women than men. In those with the disease, bones thin and may break without trauma, most often in the hip, vertebrae, and wrist. Half of those who suffer hip fractures die within a year, and women who have the trademark dowager's hump from spine fractures have difficulty breathing, digesting food, and even finding clothes that fit. It has been estimated that women will suffer more than 5 million of these fractures during the next 10 years, at a cost of almost \$50 billion. Those at highest risk are postmenopausal white and Asian women with thin, small builds. Low calcium intake and use of cigarettes, excessive alcohol, and caffeine can increase your chance of developing this disease.

Prevention is the best approach for dealing with osteoporosis. Although 60 to 80% of bone mass is determined genetically, the remaining 20 to 40% depends on adequate calcium intake in a healthy diet (1000 to 1500 mg. per day), exposure to hormones either through regular monthly cycles, oral contraceptives, or hormone replacement therapy, and weight-bearing exercise.

Prevention should begin during the early years and continue throughout a woman's life. Bone mineral density increases rapidly in childhood and adolescence, continuing until around the age of 30. Simple modifications in diet and activity level in these early years can dramatically reduce a woman's future risk of fracture. Women in their 40s begin the slow loss of bone mass which accelerates with the cessation of menstrual periods. Postmenopausal women can lose more than 4% of their bone mass per year if untreated. Hormone replacement therapy is frequently prescribed at that time. The increased bone mass occurring as a result of hormone therapy is, however, sustained for only three years after cessation of the therapy and many women cannot or will not use medication. Exercise is, therefore, being widely suggested as an adjunct or alternative prevention.

*Appropriate exercise in a woman's early years can give her a lifelong benefit: higher bone mass and a lower risk of fractures in old age.*

Most research suggests that aerobic exercise without resistance loading will not increase bone density above that of sedentary women. Studies of astronauts and swimmers support the idea that gravitational force is necessary. The skeleton's response is directly proportional to the intensity and duration of the load for different sports. Running produces forces to the spine and pelvis of about two body weights, forces during weight lifting are five to six times body weight, and the bounding, jumping, and tumbling movements of gymnastics may impart as much as 18 times body weight.

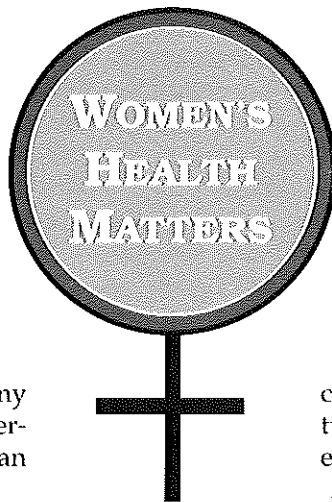
What, then, is appropriate exercise at different ages? The genetic influence on building bone mass is most powerful between early childhood and late adolescence; 50% of a woman's ultimate bone density

is determined by age 20. Exercise programs for girls in childhood and adolescence should stress school and team sports, such as soccer, volleyball, basketball, track, and even cheerleading. The finding that bone mass continues to be added after linear growth ceases (at about age 15 or 16) is important because that is when many young women stop participating in organized athletic programs.

College-aged women can participate in athletic programs at student recreation facilities on campus, at the YMCA or health clubs, where aerobics classes, running, biking, tennis, Nautilus and other weight machines are available. With appropriate exercise the average woman in her 20's and 30's can increase bone mineral density by as much as 10-15%. An increment such as this could postpone the major risk of fractures from age 60 to age 70.

Although postmenopausal women who participate regularly in weight-bearing exercise programs may not add to their bone mineral density, they may slow the inevitable loss. Machine-based resistance training which isolates muscle groups has been proven successful even for women in their 90s.

Many factors are involved in building and maintaining healthy bones. The interaction of physical activity and other factors, such as dietary calcium and hormones, is not perfectly clear; however, improvement in bone density through weight-bearing exercise does result in significant reductions in the risk of osteoporotic fractures in later years. An appropriate lifetime exercise program for both girls and women can help minimize the effects of this "silent thief."



# Announcements

## Petition drive

Join the effort to increase funding for breast cancer research by signing a petition available at the Women's Center. Campaign 2.6 is a plan by the National Breast Cancer Coalition to get 2.6 million signatures on petitions to the president and Congress demanding \$2.6 billion for quality breast cancer research by the year 2000. There are 2.6 million women living with breast cancer in the U.S. today, and more than 44,000 women die from the disease every year. The NBCC has launched this grassroots effort to overcome the chronic under-funding of breast cancer research. Add your voice to those speaking out by asking for the petition at the front desk of the Women's Center. The campus petition drive ends March 14.

## Conferences

The National Association for Women in Higher Education will hold its annual conference Feb. 26-28 in San Francisco. "Mapping the Fault Lines: Stresses and Strengths in the Academy" will explore the unsettled ground of higher education in a variety of panels, workshops and interest sessions. Deadline for early registration is Jan. 17. For information, contact NAWHE at 202-659-9330.

## Meetings

VU Women's Faculty Organization will meet Wednesday, Jan. 8 at 12:10 p.m. in the living room of Godchaux Hall. Come and connect with colleagues from across campus. Among the topics to be discussed are the challenges of two-professional couples.

## Exhibits

Women of Africa: Guardians of Culture, an exhibit of photographs, textiles, carvings, pottery, clothes and jewelry, continues at the Scarritt-Bennett Center through March 2.

## Call for papers

Crossing the Lines: A Conference on Contemporary Southern Women's Literature will be Oct. 9-11 at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville. Proposals for papers and panels from all critical perspectives are welcome; deadline for submissions is March 1. Presenters are encouraged to interpret "crossing the lines" broadly. Papers can explore a wide range of genres and topics, such as suburbanization, tradition, language and dialect, violence and landscape. For information, contact conference chair Suzanne McCray at the Center for Arkansas and Regional Studies, University of Arkansas, Old Main 506, Fayetteville, AR 72701.

## Call for volunteers

The Girl Scout Council of Cumberland Valley is seeking volunteers to serve as mentors for its Girl's High Adventure Program. The program promotes self-esteem and develops character and life skills for at-risk and underserved adolescent girls, ages 11 to 14. Classroom sessions are followed by a high adventure weekend which includes ropes courses, rappelling and horseback riding. Volunteer mentors attend a three-hour training session before their first class. If you are interested in becoming a mentor, contact Amy Reesman at the Girl Scout Office before Jan. 11: 383-0490, ext. 272.

## Awards

The Southeastern Women's Studies Association will present two awards for outstanding scholarship on women of color by women of color at the 1997 SEWSA Conference in Athens, Georgia. The awards of \$200 each will go to one undergraduate and one graduate student for papers given at either the 1996 or 1997 conference. To be considered, a paper must be based on original research by a woman of color. Two copies of the paper must be submitted by February 28. For more information, contact Nancy Ransom at the Women's Center.



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### Women's VU

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