

Women's VU

Margaret
Cunningim
Women's Center

V A N D E R B I L T U N I V E R S I T Y

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LOOKING BACK:

70s activism paved way for Women's Center

by LYNN GREEN
WOMEN'S VU EDITOR

When the Women's Center opened its doors 20 years ago this fall, the event marked both the beginning of a new era and the end of a determined struggle for women at Vanderbilt.

The founding of the Women's Center represented the culmination of efforts by a small group of activists who pushed to improve the status of women at the university.

This unlikely collection of advocates — faculty, staff and students, some of whom had no prior involvement in women's issues — made the opening of a permanent center for women on campus their top priority.

From the first efforts in early 1972, until November 1, 1978 when the Women's Center opened, many of those who got involved became energized by what they discovered and persisted in pressing the university toward more equitable treatment of women.

Nancy Ransom, who was chosen as the center's first part-time director, notes that although the group of activists was small, it led to significant gains for women at Vanderbilt.

The founding of the center is proof that "people can be extremely effective if they have a firm goal and they are realistic in pursuing that goal," Ransom said. "They had a vision, and they took one step at a time to achieve it."

Much of the activity revolved around the Commission on the Status of Women, a little-known but influential group which met from 1972 until its

final report was issued in September 1976. The commission was appointed by Chancellor Alexander Heard at the urging of Professional Women at Vanderbilt, an ad hoc group of faculty and staff women who were concerned about the status of women.

In the early 70s, when the issue of women's equity came to the forefront, there was little diversity at Vanderbilt, particularly on the faculty. Susan Wiltshire, now a professor of classics, came to the university in the fall of 1971. She

remembers sitting in the back row at her first faculty meeting and looking out at "a sea of bald white heads."

By 1972, however, the tide was beginning to turn and many women were no longer willing to accept the status quo. When Chancellor Heard agreed in April of that year to appoint a commission to investigate the status of women, the *Vanderbilt Hustler* noted dryly that the discontent of women on campus was "part of a movement which seems to be spreading across the nation."

Martha Craig Daughtrey, now a federal appellate court judge, remembers that she encountered a difficult atmosphere when she became the first woman on the Vanderbilt Law School faculty in 1972.

"I can tell you it wasn't fun. A lot of us in those years were angry most of the time," says Daughtrey, who had expected to find an "enlightened" attitude about women's rights when she left the local prosecutor's office and came to academia. Her first letdown came when she discovered that two male constitutional law professors were opposed to the Equal Rights Amendment.

Daughtrey was named to sit on the Commission on the Status of Women when it was first organized in 1972, and she went on to serve as one of its chairs before leaving the university in 1975 [when she was appointed to the State Court of Criminal Appeals].

Among the faculty women joining Daughtrey on the commission was Antonina Gove, who had come to Vanderbilt in 1969 as an assistant professor of Slavic languages. One of Gove's first

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remembers sitting in the back row at her first faculty meeting and looking out at "a sea of bald white heads."

The lack of women did not seem unusual to Wiltshire at the time; after all, she did not have a single woman professor during her undergraduate and graduate studies at the University of Texas and Columbia. When she came to Vanderbilt in 1971, there were only 16 women on the 295-member Arts & Sci-



NINA GOVE



MARTHA CRAIG
DAUGHTREY

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Paving the way *continued from page 1*

experiences at the university was to serve on an A&S committee that was revising the governance of the college. She was the only woman and the only junior faculty member on the committee. Gove says she soon realized that almost every college committee had just one woman, usually an assistant professor, due to the minimal number of tenured female faculty.

Gove had "very mixed feelings" about her appointment to serve on the Commission on the Status of Women. One of those feelings was surprise. Soft-spoken, with no particular interest in the women's movement, Gove says she had never been an activist on any issue. "My appointment speaks volumes about what [kind of] women were on the faculty here," says Gove, now a full professor and one of the few commission members still at Vanderbilt two decades later.

Gove served on the commission for the entire four years of its existence and served as co-chair with Jan Belcher, director of the News Bureau, in its final year, 1975-76. [Belcher, remembered as a key part of the commission by many of her colleagues, later left Vanderbilt

and moved to Virginia, where she recently died of breast cancer.]

"I didn't have my consciousness raised until I was on the commission," recalls Gove, who turned out to be a key figure in the eventual opening of the Women's Center.

During its first years, the commission was a "do-it-yourself effort," according to Daughtrey, with little staff support, an uncertain agenda and infrequent meetings.

Realizing the huge task they faced, commission members pressured the administration to hire a staff person for the panel. Finally, in 1975, the administration agreed that a full-time staff assistant could be hired for a one-year term; it was a decision that some administrators may have come to regret.

Chosen to serve as the commission's "coordinator" was Mary Lesser, who had recently moved to Nashville from Boston. Lesser had been active in the anti-war and civil rights protest movements during the 1960s and was trained as a sociologist. She had strong beliefs about the women's movement and about how to study the situation at Vanderbilt.

Lesser, who now teaches sociology at Quinnipiac College in Connecticut, says that by 1975 many schools had already done campus-wide studies on gender questions. Although Vanderbilt came somewhat late to the issue, the work of its commission turned out to be "more comprehensive than what was done on many other campuses," particularly in its inclusion of staff women.

Lesser recommended that the commission hold brown bag lunches with women all over the campus to gather information about their problems. "I was very aware of how the little person often got left out and was eager to give staff people the opportunity to express their ideas," Lesser recalls. The commission mapped out a strategy to hold sessions in each work environment of the university, including the hospital.

Some of the sessions were heated, especially those with hospital laundry workers, who raised many occupational safety and health issues. Some hospital

Vanderbilt Unzipped

In commemoration of our 20th anniversary, the Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center is hosting a t-shirt design contest. We are looking for creativity, humor and positive female images. The design may include up to five different colors and should be no larger than 13" x 13". Submit your design by Friday, October 16 to Hilary Forbes at the Women's Center. Either stop by the center at 316 West Side Row or mail it to Box 1513, Station B. The winner of the contest will be announced in November and will receive a \$75 gift certificate. Contact Hilary Forbes at 322-6518 for more information.

administrators were disturbed enough to suggest that the commission be "disallowed" from holding further meetings.

The commission continued its work, however, with a core of eight to ten active members who were devoted to the cause. Along with the women faculty, staff and students on the panel were a handful of men, including Charles Federspiel and Lewis Lefkowitz, both members of the Medical School faculty who served on the commission during its important final year, 1975-76. Like Gove, Federspiel says he was surprised by his appointment, since he had never been vocal on women's issues. Reflecting recently on the events of that era, Federspiel recalled that the administration chose many "non-activists" to serve on the commission. "They may have been surprised before it was over by what those people accomplished," Federspiel speculates with a grin.

Working with the commission "sharpened my interest" in the plight of women at Vanderbilt, says Federspiel, who along with Lefkowitz became committed to the cause. "It seemed to me that this was something very important."

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After collecting reams of data and many heartfelt personal accounts from women at Vanderbilt, the commission began the process of preparing a final report on its findings to submit to the chancellor. "At some point, these uppity women and few males on the commission realized there needed to be some recommendations" in the report on how to improve the situation, Federspiel said.

Eventually the commission agreed on several recommendations, with its top priority being the establishment of a Women's Center that would serve as a "clearinghouse . . . for the receipt and expression of women's concerns." This recommendation came at the end of a 200-page report, "Women at Vanderbilt," that detailed a litany of complaints by women students, faculty and staff.

In *Gone with the Ivy: A Biography of Vanderbilt University*, historian Paul Conkin writes that the commission's report "resembled no other committee report at Vanderbilt; it shocked many administrators. . . . It raked the university over the coals on a number of issues — failure to provide complete or adequate data, failure to conform to the recent requirements of Title IX, and above all for the fact that 'women on this campus seldom receive equal treatment with men.'"

The administration received the report in September, 1976 and reacted at first with stunned silence. Although the commission had requested that the report be widely disseminated on campus, it was not released for several months. The *Hustler* began reporting on the delay and wrote in an editorial on Dec. 10, 1976, "Apparently, the Commission did its job all too well and in the process found some things that the University would rather they had not discovered."

Administrators were concerned about legal difficulties in publishing the report, due to ambiguities and purported misquotations contained within it. Gove and others took a tough negotiating stand, however, and in January 1977, the chancellor's office released the report.

Although the commission had expired and Lesser's job had ended, the struggle over the report had not. For more than a year after its release, a group of women kept up the pressure to see that the recommendations were implemented. This group, the Women's Concerns Committee, was instrumental in the eventual funding of the Women's Center and the hiring of its first director.

Mary Lesser, who left Nashville shortly after her stint at Vanderbilt and returned to New England, is among those gratified to hear that the Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center is celebrating its 20th anniversary. "It is wonderful to know that these things not only happened, but endured," Lesser said.



20 years and counting

As the Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center celebrates its 20th anniversary, we are reflecting on the events of the past that brought us here, as well as the mission that will guide us in the years ahead. The freshmen women entering Vanderbilt this semester had not yet been born when the Women's Center opened its doors in 1978. Although women have made tremendous progress in the past 20 years, at Vanderbilt and elsewhere, much work remains to be done. Women still make only 76 cents for every dollar that men make. Even though we represent 51% of the population, we hold only 9% of the seats in the U.S. Senate and 12.6% of those in the House of Representatives. Our hope for the future is to empower young women to make a difference.



LINDA MANNING
Women's Center
Director

When the Women's Center began 20 years ago this fall, its then part-time director, Nancy Ransom, had a one-room office on West Side Row. Today our staff of five occupies all of the Franklin Building, and our programs and services for women have increased dramatically since those early days. Lectures, workshops, art exhibits and ongoing groups highlight the opportunities and challenges facing women today and promote campus discussion of gender-related issues. This year, in celebration of our 20th year and the 150th anniversary of the Seneca Falls Convention that began the fight for women's suffrage, we, together with the Women's Studies program, are sponsoring a very special group of speakers and activities. Come and join us for the celebration!

The center welcomes all women and men who would like to participate in its programs. We also want to hear your suggestions for future directions. Call us if you are interested in joining a focus group this semester. We want to include your voice as we plan for the next 20 years of supporting women at Vanderbilt.

September 1998

M 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.

CELEBRATING
20 YEARS
1978-1998
Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center

Friday, August 28 - Monday, October 26

Art Exhibit of works by Aletha Carr on display weekdays from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Tuesday, September 1

Creative Life Planning Group meets every Tuesday from noon to 1 p.m. and is open to all women at Vanderbilt and in the local community. *Also meets Sept. 8, 15, 22 and 29.*

Wednesday, September 2

Dissertation Writers Group for Women will hold an organizational meeting at 4 p.m. with Dr. Darlene Panvini, facilitator. *See next page for details.*

Thursday, September 3

Reception for New Women Faculty from 4 to 6 p.m. is sponsored jointly by the Women's Center and the Women's Faculty Organization. All women faculty are welcome to attend and meet their new colleagues.

Wednesday, September 9

Organizational Meeting. Brown bag lunch discussion group for staff and faculty lesbian and bisexual women. 12:15 p.m.

Monday, September 14

Book Group will discuss *A Room of One's Own* by Virginia Woolf. 5:15 to 6:15 p.m.

Tuesday, September 15

Advisory Board of the Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center will hold its first meeting of the semester at 4:10 p.m. in the Sarratt Student Center, Room 118.

Wednesday, September 16

Women on the Web. Librarians Chris Germino and Melinda Brown will guide us to information sites on the World Wide Web for and about women. Join us at noon in the Central Library Classroom on the 6th floor. *Note: No food or drink is permitted in this room.*

Thursday, September 17

Writing a Woman's Life, a creative writing workshop, holds its first meeting from 7 to 9 p.m. The workshop will be led by writer Karen Essex. *See next page for details.*

Tuesday, September 22

ABCs of Car Maintenance. In a popular annual program, Pat Claybaker, co-owner of The Workshop, offers tips on how to care for your car wisely. Specific questions may be submitted in advance to the Women's Center. The evening begins at 5:30 p.m. with light refreshments in Sarratt Student Center, Room 118. The workshop will start at 6 p.m. and end around 7:30. Registration is required; please contact Hilary Forbes at 322-6518 or e-mail hilary.forbes@vanderbilt.edu.

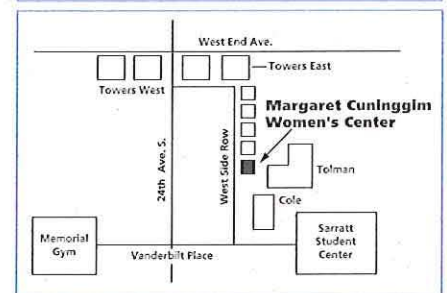
Thursday, September 24

Managing Menopause. Join us for this informative lunch-hour program as Dr. Deborah Kondis speaks about the physical changes and challenges faced during menopause. Noon to 1 p.m. *See page 7 for details.*

Thursday, October 1

Women & Investing. This new series begins with the program, "Preparing for Financial Independence: A Woman's Guide to Prudent Investing," led by Melanie Dean of Morgan Stanley Dean Witter. 5:30 p.m.

How to find us . . .



'Writing A Woman's Life' workshop planned

A creative writing workshop designed to focus on the issues involved in writing about women's experiences will be held at the Women's Center this fall. The workshop will be led by Karen Essex, a biographer, journalist and fiction writer whose best-known work is a biography of pin-up legend Bettie Page.

Essex notes that historically "literature has largely been written in the male voice and from the male perspective, placing men at the center of the story and women at the periphery in support and marginal roles." Although this is changing to some extent, "there are still lingering problems in bringing the truth of women's authentic experiences to the page," Essex says.

Participants in the workshop will read and discuss fiction that presents female characters, memoirs, biographies and selections from their own works. The 10-part series begins Thursday, Sept. 17 from 7 to 9 p.m. in the Women's Center library and will continue on Thursday nights through Nov. 19. Essex says writers from all walks of life and all levels of experience are welcome. Cost is \$195. For more information or to enroll, call Essex at 269-8675.

Dissertation support group to meet

Each semester the Women's Center sponsors a Dissertation Writers Group for women. The group provides problem solving, trouble shooting and moral support for women who are writing doctoral dissertations.

This semester, an organizational meeting for the group will be held Wednesday, Sept. 2 at 4 p.m. at the Women's Center. No additional participants are admitted after this meeting. The group is facilitated by Dr. Darlene Panvini, assistant director of the Center for Teaching.

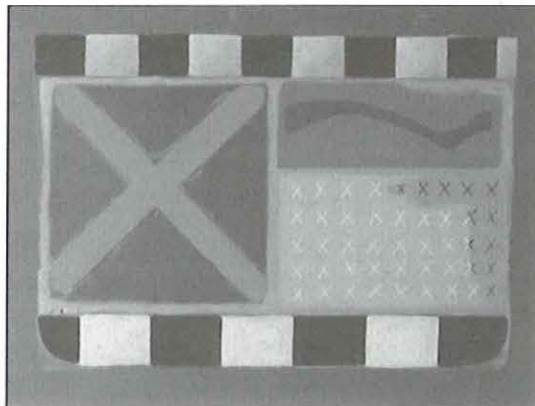
Participants should bring to the meeting a typed abstract of their dissertation including their name, department, school, campus and/or home address and phone number. Students who are unable to attend should call 322-4843 and send their abstract to Panvini in care of the Women's Center, Box 1513 Station B.

Center exhibits works by mid-state artist

Artist Aletha Carr, whose works are on exhibit at the Women's Center, finds her primary inspiration in the landscape — "the shape of the land, the space, the sky, and the way we alter the landscape to meet our needs."

Carr's paintings have been exhibited widely and selected for several juried art shows in the Southeast. A resident of Columbia, Tenn., she was born in Florida and received bachelor and master of fine arts degrees from Florida State University.

Carr says she studies color relationships in nature and attempts to replicate them in paint. "I like contrasts: hard edge with soft, dark with light, transparent with opaque," the artist says. She is one of several women artists whose work will be featured at the Women's Center this year.



Paintings by artist **Aletha Carr** (right) will be on display at the Women's Center during September and October. Shown above is "Excel I," a large-scale acrylic.



Coming this fall



Lucia Gilbert, a noted authority on the psychology of women, will give the Margaret Cuninggim Lecture Nov. 5. Gilbert,

winner of the Caroline Wood Sherif Award for teaching and scholarship in the psychology of women, will discuss shifting gender perspectives.

Historian **Joan Jacobs Brumberg**, who will speak here Oct. 8, is the author of *The Body Project*, an incisive look at how teenage girls regard their own bodies.

Elizabeth Higginbotham, professor of sociology and criminal justice at the University of Delaware, will speak Nov. 11. Higginbotham will address

the ways in which race, ethnicity and social class shape the working conditions and wages of women.

Judy Norsigian, a member of the Boston Women's Health Book Collective which published the groundbreaking women's health manual *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, will appear on campus Oct. 14. Norsigian helped to revise the latest version of the book, *Our Bodies, Ourselves for the New Century* (reviewed on page 6).

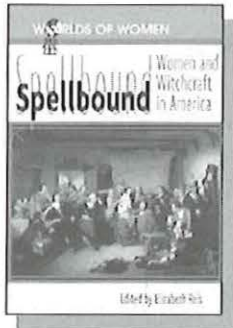


Women's Studies essay winner

Margaret A. Bensfield, a sophomore from Washington, D.C., has been named the winner of the Images of Women Essay Prize. Bensfield's paper, "The Truth Behind Rosie the Riveter," was written for the Images of Women course during the spring semester. The prize is given by the Women's Center and includes an award of \$100.



Examining the link between gender and witchcraft



Spellbound: Women and Witchcraft in America (SR Books, 1998) is a fascinating work on the role played by gender in witchcraft and spiritualism. The work traces the

history of witchcraft from 17th-century New England to present-day goddess movements. Elizabeth Reis, who teaches history and women's studies at the University of Oregon, edited the book and contributed one of the dozen chapters.

In the colonial era, witches were believed to have made a pact with Satan, and accusations of witchcraft were usually made against females, especially those whose behavior or situation deviated in some way from what was considered appropriate for women.

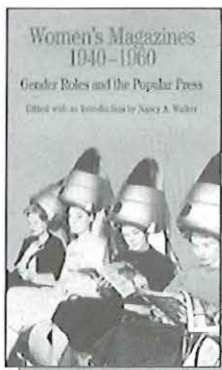
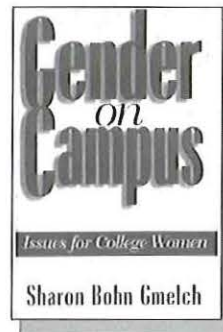
Chapters examine the role of gender conventions in the notorious Salem trials, as well as other accusations of witchcraft from the 17th and 18th centuries; there are also articles on witchcraft among Native Americans, on black women and the Spiritual churches of New Orleans and on modern forms of goddess worship. There is little connection between the traditional meaning of witchcraft and the modern nature-centered neopagan rituals embraced by many contemporary feminists and other women. Due to the negative connotations of the term, some of these women shy away from being called witches, while others proudly accept the title.

These new works and more than 2,000 other volumes are available for reading and research at the Center's library.

While Sharon Bohn Gmelch's **Gender on Campus: Issues for College Women** (Rutgers University Press, 1998) is aimed primarily at young women entering college, it is a useful guide for all college students and their parents. Gmelch, the director of the women's studies program at Union College in Schenectady, New York, offers practical advice on virtually every facet of college life in which gender may play a part.

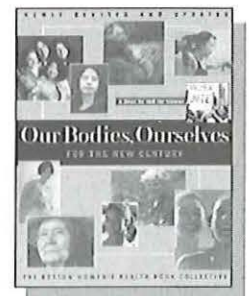
Her topics include sexism in the classroom, sports, feminism and young women, body image, substance abuse, rape, language and gender, images of females in the media, and women and work. One quarter of the book is devoted to various aspects of diversity and the final chapter deals with campus safety, an issue of particular concern to many parents and students. Each chapter includes lists of resources — books, videotapes and relevant national organizations — for those seeking further information.

Nancy A. Walker, a professor of English and former director of women's studies at Vanderbilt, has edited **Women's Magazines, 1940-1960: Gender Roles and the Popular Press** (Bedford/St. Mar-



tin's, 1998). Walker analyzes women's roles as portrayed in a dozen of the most popular women's magazines of the period, including *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Seventeen* and *Better Homes and Gardens*. Selections from the periodicals are arranged by such topics as Women and the Workplace, Homemaking, Fashion and Beauty, and Marriage and Motherhood. The articles and advertisements illustrate how American society viewed women's roles and how these were evolving. Among the selections are: "Housekeeping Need Not be Dull" from 1941; "Why I Am Against the Equal Rights Amendment" from a 1945 *Ladies' Home Journal*; "Are You Too Educated to be a Mother?" from 1946; "How to Help Your Husband Get Ahead" from a 1954 issue of *Coronet*; and from 1956, "The Married Woman Goes Back to Work."

The Boston Women's Health Book Collective has produced a new edition of its well-known guide: **Our Bodies, Ourselves for the New Century: A Book by and for Women** (Simon & Schuster, 1998). This volume has been completely updated and for the first time includes a section on online women's health resources. The original edition of this work appeared in 1970 and had been revised several times. As the millennium approaches, the Collective has renewed its efforts to empower women by enabling them to understand their own bodies and take charge of their own health care.





Managing menopause

As the baby boom generation reaches the age of 50, the once-neglected topic of menopause has received a sudden avalanche of attention. More women than ever before will soon be experiencing the symptoms that accompany menopause, which occurs in U.S. women at an average age of 51.

To address some of the questions that arise during this "change of life," the Women's Center is hosting two lunch-time programs on Managing Menopause:

- On Thursday, Sept. 24, Dr. Deborah Kondis will discuss some of the medical and physical issues related to menopause, including hormone replacement therapy. Kondis is gynecologist in private practice and an OB-GYN instructor at the Medical School.

- On Thursday, Oct. 8, Nancy Anderson, a therapist at the Psychological and Counseling Center, will focus on the emotional and psychological side of menopause, including mood changes, grief, anger and frustration.

Both programs will be held from noon to 1 p.m. at the Women's Center. Participants may bring lunch; drinks will be provided.



VIVIAN PINN

Dr. Vivian Pinn:

NIH head of women's health research to speak on campus

A physician who directs women's health research for the National Institutes of Health will speak at Vanderbilt Sept. 23.

Dr. Vivian Pinn has served as director of the Office of Research on Women's Health at NIH since 1991. She has been widely honored for her work on women's health issues and was named one of the 10 most important women in medicine by *Ladies' Home Journal* in 1995. Before joining NIH, she was chair of the pathology department at Howard University College of Medicine.

Pinn's speech, at 4:30 p.m. in Light Hall, is free and open to the public. A reception sponsored by Vanderbilt University Medical Center will follow. The event is part of the Centennial Speakers Series sponsored by the YWCA of Nashville, which is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year. VUMC is one of the sponsors of the Centennial Speakers Series.

Hilary Forbes to direct Women's Center programming

Hilary Forbes brings a keen interest in women's issues and a familiarity with the special concerns of Vanderbilt women to her new role as assistant director for programs at the Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center.

"We are extremely fortunate to have Hilary join us," said Dr. Linda Manning, director of the Women's Center. "Her educational background, her volunteer activities focused on women's issues, her knowledge of Vanderbilt, and her experience with programming make her the perfect person for the job."

Forbes joined the MCWC staff this summer and is moving for-

ward in her efforts to organize interesting and meaningful programs for and about women.

During her two years as a graduate student at Peabody College, from which she received a master of education degree in May, Forbes served as a graduate assistant with Dean Brock Williams in Vanderbilt's Office of Housing and Residential Education. As part of her work there, she coordinated the Residential Life Series, which helps freshmen students deal with such issues

as date rape, alcohol and drug abuse, sexually transmitted diseases and diversity.

Forbes says her interest in women's equality began early, when her parents were "the only ones in our neighborhood with an ERA bumper sticker." Her interest grew during her undergraduate years at Smith College, where she also became involved in diversity issues.

As part of her new position, Forbes says she hopes to focus on involving more undergraduate students in the programs and mission of the center. "I'm excited about joining the Women's Center and continuing the programs already offered, but I would also like to make this center better known and used by undergraduate students," Forbes says. "And I'd like students to think of the Women's Center as a place for more than just white women." Forbes says she is looking forward to working with students to achieve this goal. "I see changing the image of the center as a collaborative effort."



HILARY FORBES

MCWC Assistant Director for Programs

Announcements

- Join the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation **Race for the Cure** on Sunday, Oct. 4 at Centennial Park. The Women's Center is organizing students, staff and faculty to form a Vanderbilt team for the race. Participants can take part in the 5K Walk for Women, 5K Walk for Men and/or the One-Mile Fun Run & Walk. Registration is \$12 per team member. To join the team, contact Hilary Forbes at 322-6518 or e-mail hilary.forbes@vanderbilt.edu for more information. Proceeds will go to local and national breast cancer education, screening and research programs.
- Test drive a new BMW and help fund the fight against breast cancer as part of **The Ultimate Drive**, a joint project of the Komen Foundation and BMW of North America. BMW will donate \$1 to the foundation for each mile you drive. The Nashville event takes place Aug. 31. For information and reservations, call toll-free 1-877-4-A-DRIVE.
- Looking for short-term rewarding volunteer work? Women volunteers are needed for **DECISIONS**, an eight-week program that teaches decision-making and life-planning skills to inmates at the Tennessee Prison for Women. Volunteers

work one-on-one with an inmate-partner for one-hour weekly sessions for eight weeks, Sept. 21-Nov. 9. Volunteer training is scheduled for Sept. 12-13. For more information, call Kathy Masulis at 352-7218.

- **The Institute for Emerging Women Leaders in Higher Education** will be Nov. 14-18 at the University of Maryland. The institute is sponsored by NAWE and is aimed at entry-to-mid-level women professionals in higher education. Deadline to apply is Sept. 7. For information, call NAWE at 202-659-9330 or check the web site at www.nawe.org.

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