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In the early 1970s, as colleges and universities nationwide began to open their doors to undergraduate women, spaces dedicated exclusively to female students became common features on campuses. These centers provided women with a space of their own on campuses that had historically served only men. Today, although women comprise a majority of college enrollees in the United States, these centers have remained integral parts of college campuses, centralizing resources related to sexual health, organizing campus-wide campaigns against rape, offering networking opportunities with female alumni, serving as safe, social spaces, and more.[[1]](#footnote-1) Currently, an estimated 400 colleges and universities operate such centers.[[2]](#footnote-2)

This report examines the organizational and spatial structure of women’s centers at 15 of the nation’s top research institutions, as well as their missions and services. These institutions compete among each other to attract undergraduate students. Included in this report are the University of California at Berkeley, Brown University, the University of Chicago, Columbia University, Cornell University, Dartmouth College, Duke University, Harvard University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the University of Michigan, Northwestern University, the University of Pennsylvania, Princeton University, Stanford University, and Yale University. Most of these institutions became coeducational in the 1970s, but others such as Cornell opened its doors to women shortly seven years after it was founded, while Columbia became the last Ivy League institution to admit female undergraduates in 1983.[[3]](#footnote-3)

At Johns Hopkins, there is currently no campus space dedicated to women. However, petitions for such centers began at least as early as 1986, when an Ad Hoc Committee on the Status of Women called upon the University to establish a women’s center.[[4]](#footnote-4) However, to date, little progress has been made on this front. A 2005 survey documented that students were generally unaware of the resources that Johns Hopkins provided to support women and to respond to sexual assault. This same survey found that male students tended to feel more welcome as members of the Johns Hopkins student body than women.[[5]](#footnote-5) These findings, coupled with the fact that the Department of Education has recently opened an investigation against Johns Hopkins on the basis that the University has possibly fostered a hostile environment toward women, may suggest a continued need for a women’s center. While no such center currently exists, the University has taken other steps to address gender equity on campus. The University recently launched an LGBT Center, and hired a Sexual Assault Prevention, Education, and Response Coordinator. Plans are currently underway to hire a Director of Gender and Equity within the Office of Student Affairs.[[6]](#footnote-6) Other resources for women include the SafeLine, a 24/7 hotline for victims of rape and abuse run by the Counseling Center, and an additional hotline run by undergraduate members of the Sexual Assault Resource Unit. A handful of student-run organizations also address a range issues related to women, from female leadership to reproductive health. Finally, an interdisciplinary Program for the Study of Women, Gender, and Sexuality offers research funding and courses for undergraduate and graduate students. Part of its former library remains unattended in the Greenhouse, available for student use.

Of the 15 institutions examined, all but three offer spaces dedicated to women on their campuses. 11 of the 12 women’s centers employ at least one professional to staff the center. In general, these centers serve as safe spaces for women, centralize resources (in particular, those pertaining to sexual assault and sexual health), offer referral services, provide support to student organizations focusing on issues relating to women, and engage in advocacy efforts on campus. Many also offer networking opportunities and mentorship, and several, including Brown’s Sarah Doyle Women’s Center and Duke’s Women’s Center, offer a library of works related to feminism and gender. As services for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students have expanded on college campuses, a growing number of these centers have become closely affiliated with other institutional efforts and offices that support those communities. The Gender Equity Resource Center at U.C. Berkeley, for example, serves both women and LGBT students, while the Sarah Doyle Women’s Center at Brown operates separately from the LGBTQ Center, but shares staff and resources with the latter. Others, however, remain entirely separate, such as the Cornell Women’s Resource Center.

At all of the 12 women’s centers, undergraduates and graduate students are heavily involved. At Yale, an undergraduate advisory board oversees all operations; however, Yale remains an outlier in this respect, as the other institutions employ between one and six professionals. At the Cornell Women’s Resource Center and the Northwestern University Women’s Center, a number of these professionals specialize in counseling services related to sexual assault, and at most of the institutions’ centers, professionals engage in advocacy work around campus rape, suggesting that women’s centers have grown to be important hubs for sexual assault resources that remain separate from Title IX Coordinators. In addition, some of these professionals hold other primary or secondary positions within their universities, which is perhaps a cost-effective way to staff women’s centers. Finally, the two women’s centers that reported their operating budget indicated that each receives between $18,000 and $20,000 from their universities to assist with campus programming. Others receive support from alumni donations.

U.C. Berkeley

Founded in 1972 as a resource for re-entry women who wished to return to higher education and to facilitate academic research about women, the Gender Equity Resource Center now serves the needs of the female and the lesbian, gay, and transgender communities at Berkeley, and maintains a relationship with research and academia.[[7]](#footnote-7) Available to all members of the campus community from 9am to 5pm Monday through Friday, GenEq occupies a space of its own on the Berkeley campus within the Student Center.[[8]](#footnote-8) GenEq employs three professionals. Its Director also serves as an Assistant Dean of Students, and thus is able to influence policy decisions affecting all undergraduates. For example, the Director has led Berkeley to address hate crimes and acts more effectively, and has helped to make the campus more inclusive to the transgender community. A second employee of GenEq is the Director of Women’s Resources; she is responsible for sexual harassment, sexual assault, and intimate partner violence resources; develops “empowerment programming” for women; and works with student peer educators. This position is separate from the Title IX Coordinators, who oversee compliance with the federal gender equity law. Finally, the Program Coordinator works primarily with students to provide leadership training, and advises student groups that focus on issues related to women and gender.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Brown University

The Sarah Doyle Women’s Center, established on the Brown campus in 1974, serves as both a resource and legal center for women. It shares both staff and resources with the LGBTQ Center, and is thus directly connected with Brown’s lesbian, gay, and transgender communities. The primary purpose of the Center is to help members of the Brown community “understand the connections between academic theory and feminist practice.”[[10]](#footnote-10) The Center maintains both its own library and gallery, which feature works related to feminism and gender. Undergraduate and graduate students primarily staff the Center and its library and gallery, focusing on programming, archival maintenance and research, peer education, and more.[[11]](#footnote-11) The Center also employs two to three professionals beyond students. The Director, who holds a Ph.D., also teaches courses at Brown, and an Assistant Director, also a Ph.D., is in charge of operational matters and advises the student staff.[[12]](#footnote-12) An attorney, who operates his own private criminal defense firm in Providence, also provides legal advice to Brown students three hours per week at the Center, which occupies its own building on the campus.[[13]](#footnote-13)

U. Chicago

There is no resource center for women at U. Chicago, although it offers an Office of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Student Life. Established in 2008, the Office provides “educational, social, and professional opportunities and resources” for the LGBTQ community.[[14]](#footnote-14) It employs a staff of three, including a Director and two graduate assistants.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Columbia University

Columbia University is the only Ivy League institution not to offer a resource center for women, although it is closely affiliated with Barnard College, a liberal arts college for women whose campus is located just across Broadway, and is accessible to all Columbia students. Students at Columbia are invited to take courses on the Barnard campus, and vice versa. Barnard itself offers no women’s center. However, Columbia’s Office of Multicultural Affairs offers programming and support for LGBTQ students and allies.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Cornell University

While the Cornell Women’s Resource Center has its roots in the early 1970s, it did not hire its first full-time Director until 1998, a position funded for two years by the Undergraduate Student Assembly.[[17]](#footnote-17) Today, the Center continues to employ a full-time Director who specializes in sexual violence prevention and counseling, and has an advisory board comprised of current undergraduates and recent graduates.[[18]](#footnote-18) The Center, which occupies a single room within a campus building, offers a small library and sponsors programs and events such as Take Back the Night, the Vagina Monologues, and Love Your Body Day.[[19]](#footnote-19) It also provides advisory support to student organizations working on issues related to women and gender, and offers referral services to other campus resources related to health, sexual assault, body image, addiction, and academic support.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Dartmouth College

Founded in 1988 as the Women’s Resource Center, Dartmouth’s Center for Gender and Student Engagement (CGSE) is housed within the Office of Pluralism and Leadership (OPAL), which provides advising, services, and resources to students of racial and ethnic minorities, as well as to the LGBTQ populations. Located in an apartment within the residence hall, the CGSE is open to the Dartmouth and Upper Valley communities five days per week, from 8:15am to 5:00pm. It operates a library of its own, which features several hundred works, and provides support, referral services, and resources geared toward the female and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities.[[21]](#footnote-21) The CGSE has a number of student coordinators and employs three full-time staff members, including a Director who holds a Ph.D. and previously served as an Assistant Dean, an Assistant Director who advises student organizations on gender issues and who coordinates campus-wide campaigns (such as Sexual Assault Awareness Month), and an Office Manager who oversees operational matters. In addition, a Program Coordinator staffs CGSE, although a separate office employees this staff member.[[22]](#footnote-22) The CGSE has an operating budget of between $55,000 and $60,000 each year (excluding salaries), although the majority of this budget comes from gifts and endowments. Director Reese Kelly estimates that the CGSE receives a total of $18,000 from the College.[[23]](#footnote-23)

Duke University

Founded in 1987 following a proposal submitted by a multicultural alliance of students, the Duke Women’s Center occupies office space and a lounge area within a residential quadrangle. The Center offers students a resource collection complete with feminist books, films, and journals, as well as student-written accounts of gender-based violence and other topics related to sexuality.[[24]](#footnote-24) In addition, the Center advises a number of student groups, and offers educational and social programs, support for student activism, and resources for those who have experienced gender violence.[[25]](#footnote-25)[[26]](#footnote-26) Undergraduate interns as well as six professionals, including two Gender Violence Intervention Services Coordinators who arrange and provide counseling and case management services, staff the Center. The professional staff is also comprised of a Director who holds a Ph.D. in higher education, a Program Coordinator who also serves as an Undergraduate Advisor at Duke, and an Office Coordinator.[[27]](#footnote-27)

Harvard University

Established in 2006 with roots in the early 1970s, the Harvard College Women’s Center occupies part of the basement of a freshman dormitory, and is available for student access most weekdays from 9:30am to 5:30pm, and then again from 6:00pm to 10:00pm.[[28]](#footnote-28) Its space includes a lounge and kitchen area, a conference room, two offices, and common workstation areas.[[29]](#footnote-29) A division of the Office of Student Life, the Center serves as a hub for all resources related to women and gender at Harvard (although Harvard has a separate Office of BGLTQ Student Life), provides funding for student programming, and offers educational, social, and networking opportunities.[[30]](#footnote-30) The Center employs three professionals, including an Administrative Coordinator, a Program Coordinator, and a WISTEM Program Coordinator who offers guidance to those Harvard women seeking to pursue careers in the science, technology, engineering, or mathematics fields.[[31]](#footnote-31)

U. Michigan

While U. Michigan does not provide a resource center for women, it does offer the Spectrum Center, an office dedicated to making the campus more gender inclusive. The Spectrum Center is open each weekday from 9:00am to 6:00pm, and is run by students and four professionals.[[32]](#footnote-32)

MIT

Since 1882, MIT has offered its female students a space of their own on campus, known as the Margaret Cheney Room. The Cheney Room, which is staffed by one Assistant Dean for Student Leadership and Engagement and a graduate student, offers events and programming, but primarily functions just as a community center and a safe space.[[33]](#footnote-33) Its upkeep is support by an alumni endowment.[[34]](#footnote-34) In addition, MIT provides a webpage dedicated to centralizing information and resources for women.[[35]](#footnote-35)

Northwestern University

Established in 1986, the Northwestern University Women’s Center operates each weekday from 8:30am to 5:00pm on the Evanston campus.[[36]](#footnote-36) An additional, related Center is located in Chicago, open three days a week. The Evanston Center, located in a house in the middle of campus, offers a variety of programs and events both educational and social, centralizes resources and referral information for women, and provides counseling (including both individual sessions and support groups) for those who have faced gender-based discrimination or sexual violence.[[37]](#footnote-37) Five professionals, a number of counseling interns, six student workers, and an advisory board jointly run the Center. The Director doubles as a psychologist who specializes in gender-based discrimination, harassment, and violence, while the Associate Director specializes in issues affecting the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities (Northwestern, however, has a separate office focusing on these populations). In addition, the Center employs another counselor who specializes in women’s issues, a Director of Programs, and a Program Assistant.[[38]](#footnote-38) The Center has a programming budget of $20,000, which enables it to sponsor and co-sponsor eighty to ninety programs per year.[[39]](#footnote-39)

University of Pennsylvania

Open from 9:30am to 6:00pm Monday through Thursday and until 5:00pm on Fridays, the Penn Women’s Center sponsors educational and social programs, highlights the work of female professionals and leaders, and offers resources related to sexual violence, health, and wellness. Founded in 1973, the Center also plays an “advocacy role regarding issues of gender equity, health, childcare, workplace discrimination, domestic and sexual violence, and mental health” on campus. Located in the center of campus, its space functions as a community center where women can relax, host meetings and workshops, and nurse (the Center houses a lactation room).[[40]](#footnote-40) Four professionals staff the Center, including a Director who holds a Ph.D. and also teaches at the University, two Associate Directors (one specializing in gender violence prevention and support and the other in race and diversity), and an Administrative Coordinator.[[41]](#footnote-41)

Princeton University

Established in 1971, two years after Princeton first opened its doors to undergraduate women, the Princeton Women’s Center now operates inside the campus student center. Staffed by two professionals, a Director (who is also employed by the University as an advisor and faculty fellow) and a Program Assistant, the Center offers referral services and sponsors educational and social programs and events.[[42]](#footnote-42) In addition, the Center advises Action Groups, which are student-led teams that engage in semester-long advocacy and activist efforts related to issues on and beyond the Princeton campus. The Center also connects female students to mentorship opportunities, and functions as a safe space for affiliates. [[43]](#footnote-43)

Stanford University

With roots in the early 1970s, the Women’s Community Center (WCC) is located on the first floor of a student affairs building that also houses the LGBT Community Resources Center. The WCC’s space includes a main lounge, conference room, workstations, and a library nook.[[44]](#footnote-44) It provides referrals to campus resources and services, including academic support, counseling and health services, and sponsors programs and events, many of which are planned by undergraduate and graduate interns and workers. The two professionals who staff the WCC include a Director (who holds a doctorate in education) and Associate Director, who also serve on the university level as Associate and Assistant Deans, respectively.[[45]](#footnote-45)

Yale University

Established in 1970, the Yale Women’s Center serves as an umbrella organization for campus groups working on issues relating to women and gender, and offers a space open to the community, educational and social programming, and sexual health supplies. The Center is located in a campus building, and is run primarily by a board of undergraduate students. One faculty member serves as the liaison between the Center and administration.[[46]](#footnote-46)

Conclusion

Johns Hopkins is on par with U. Chicago, Columbia, and U. Michigan, in that it offers a resource center for its LGBT populations, but has no center dedicated to women. It lags behind the 12 other institutions that offer both space and professional staff members to support their female students. As previously noted, however, resources for women do indeed exist at Johns Hopkins. Over the past two years, the University has established an LGBT Center, and hired a Sexual Assault Prevention, Education, and Response Coordinator to support victims of rape and abuse. The University has also announced plans to hire a Director of Gender and Equity within the Office of Student Affairs.[[47]](#footnote-47) Other existing resources for women include two hotlines, one run by the Counseling Center and the other by undergraduates, for victims of rape and abuse. Several organizations also address issues relating to women and gender, from female leadership to reproductive health. The interdisciplinary Program for the Study of Women, Gender, and Sexuality offers research funding and courses for undergraduate and graduate students. Assuming that the University does indeed hire a Director of Gender and Equity, it has many of the pieces necessary to build a women’s center similar to those at the twelve aforementioned universities.

Women’s Centers at 16 Research Universities

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Institution** | **Women's Center?** | **# Professional Staff** | **Year Founded** |
| Berkeley | Yes | 3 | 1972 |
| Brown | Yes | 3 | 1974 |
| Chicago | No |   |   |
| Columbia | No |   |   |
| Cornell | Yes | 1 | 1970s |
| Dartmouth | Yes | 4 | 1988 |
| Duke | Yes | 6 | 1987 |
| Harvard | Yes | 3 | 2006 |
| Michigan | No |   |   |
| MIT | Yes\* | 1 | 1882 |
| Northwestern | Yes | 5 | 1986 |
| Penn | Yes | 4 | 1973 |
| Princeton | Yes | 2 | 1971 |
| Stanford | Yes | 2 | 1970s |
| Yale | Yes | 1\*\* | 1970 |
| Johns Hopkins | No |   |   |

\*Room on campus dedicated to women

\*\*Faculty liaison between undergraduate staff and administration

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