

Feminist Group Promotes Campus-Wide Awareness

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When the term feminism arises in today's society, it evokes a confused mixture of knee-jerk anti-testosterone sentiment and memories of 1970s-era bra burning women's liberation rallies. While the disparity in the current status between men and women is highly debatable, the woman's quest for rights nationally and locally still rages on. That's where Feminist Action at Middlebury (FAM) comes in.

Current Co-president Elizabeth Brookbank '04 described FAM's role in the College community. "The group is a great way for a lot of people to find their voice on this campus and get involved," she said, "as well as being motivated by like-minded individuals who are working for the same social change that you are."

The group currently has 100 members, which FAM officials believes confirms the importance of the group. The president of the FAM last semester, Joya Scott '03.5, added that "we know we are not the only voice of feminism on campus, and we need to help each other out as much as possible."

Throughout its history, FAM has undergone many permutations and modifications, but the essential struggle of feminism proper has remained, explained Scott. She affirmed FAM's importance in the College community, saying that "contrary to popular belief, feminism is not dead. It is still an extremely active and relevant movement precisely because we do not yet live in an equal society."

Every year, several FAM events serve to remind the campus of this sentiment. The major initiatives that the group has brought to the fore include Breast Cancer Awareness Month, Domestic/Relationship Violence Awareness Month, "Take Back the Night Week" and Women's History Month.

The group's biggest accomplishment has been the "Take Back the Night Week." This year, FAM welcomes keynote speaker Sut Jhally who will discuss "images of women in the media and how they contribute to the normalization of violence," according to Brookbank. The club also plans to have a "Chick Jam," a "Speak Out" and film screenings to commemorate and highlight the pertinence of anti-violence education in today's world.

Brookbank explained that this week serves to "raise awareness around the issue of violence against women, especially college women." In light of recent murmurings as to whether the College holds an accurate record of sexual assault crimes, FAM's ideals and pursuits could not be more appropriate. Moreover, FAM plans to send out their own survey soon to measure the level of sexual violence on campus.

Yet, one of FAM's most sought-after concessions — blue light safety phones — has yet to be granted. Brookbank said that "FAM has been concerned with issues of safety and sexual assault policy on this campus for many years." While the campaign has not yet been successful, FAM perseveres in its endeavors because, as Brookbank explained, "it is easy to become complacent and think that there are no more changes to be made. This simply is not the case."

In addition to these major events, FAM has led the campaign for campus-wide emergency call boxes and instituted fundraisers for Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) after September 11.

The most imminent item on FAM's agenda is Women's History Month during which FAM will host several events, including movie screenings about issues like abortion and Thursday night dinners with speakers and home-cooked meals.

Brookbank said that in regards to the future of FAM her "hope is that we can continue with the energy that we have had all year through the rest of this semester and next year and the year after that. There are a number of issues to work on, but nothing will get done without devoted people."

So, with the perseverance of the original feminists and the concerns of a modern movement, FAM takes its well-earned place among other student groups at Middlebury and continually vies for progress and improvement.