

**Task Force on the Status of Women:
Comments from Feminist Action at Middlebury (FAM)**

On September 30, 2007, Feminist Action at Middlebury met to discuss concerns and suggestions for the Task Force on the Status of Women. Here is a brief summary of our main concerns, comments and suggestions.

1. Blue Light Phones

The issue of blue light phones on campus has been on FAM's agenda for many years. While we are very happy with the phones that have been installed, we feel that more needs to be done. The general premise of blue light phones is that a person is supposed to be able to see one at least one light from every other in order to be able to run from one phone to the next. That is not the case at Middlebury. In addition, many people claimed that they would not know how to use the phones if they were in an emergency situation. We have been told that there are more blue lights on campus that have not been installed and that are in storage. We would suggest installing these lights and informing incoming freshmen how to use the phones during orientation.

2. Social Houses

After reading the 1997 report from the Task Force, we noticed that little seems to have changed regarding the atmosphere of social houses. Numerous FAM members noted the "predatory mode" of male students at weekend social house parties who generally "prey" on freshmen girls.

One female senior (not present at the meeting) had previously noted the profanity, sexism and homophobia often present at social house parties. Commenting on "Modapalooza" on September 29th 2007 she said, *"I had to get out of there. It was totally not my scene. It was a bunch of drunk sweaty guys yelling 'You fucking pussy. Get out of here you fucking faggot.' I totally couldn't handle it"*. This type of atmosphere is unacceptable and very alienating for certain groups of people. Like the 1997 report suggests, we would recommend making social house leaders participate in residential life training and encourage participation of female members on the executive boards.

3. Health Center

FAM members noted that while the Health Center generally offers comprehensive and sufficient resources, there is a lack of communication with the student body regarding these resources. One student noticed a disconnection between the Health Center and the students and spoke for many when she stated that she often was hesitant to go to the health center because she didn't know if her problem would get solved or if the health center could provide what she needed. We suggest some type of forum such as a lunchtime speech or a seminar for making the services and the staff more visible and more well known.

In addition, the fact that Middlebury does not have a nutritionist on staff (or one that is known to the students) was a source of concern. Due to the prevalence of eating disorders and body image issues, an on-campus nutritionist is essential.

4. Rape/Sexual Abuse/Sexual Harassment

Situations of sexual assault/ acquaintance rape are still issues of great concern for many Middlebury women. We have several suggestions in order to combat this issue. First, FAM has discussed organizing a sexual violence awareness session during first-year orientation. We feel that a basic self defense class as well as general information about how to protect oneself (i.e. never let anyone else handle your drink) is necessary for female freshmen. We also feel that a program used at other schools which involves programming essential phone numbers (public safety, the police department, Porter Hospital) into all cell phones would be beneficial. In addition, we feel that the signs found in many bathrooms regarding sexual violence resources need to be updated. As far as we know, these were created in 2000 and contain many phone numbers and names of people which are no longer relevant. Finally, in light of the recent debate regarding student and faculty sexual relations, we feel that all freshmen should be informed about laws regarding situations of sexual harassment in the classroom and what to do in case they feel their rights are being violated.

5. Certain on-campus parties

During each year there are numerous on-campus parties which many people find offensive, alienating, or inappropriate. For example, the annual "Naughty School Girl/Dirty Professor" dance party at Tavern in September and the upcoming "Surrender Your Booty" party sponsored by Cook Commons in which softcore porn will be projected create sexualized environments which can be uncomfortable and potentially dangerous for many students. We feel that there needs to be discussion regarding what types of parties are appropriate and what kind of atmosphere is created when these types of party themes are combined with alcohol.

6. Public Safety Crime Report E-mails

While it is necessary and beneficial for public safety to make the student body aware of on-campus crimes and attacks, we feel that in order to convey the seriousness of these offenses, more time and consideration needs to be taken on the e-mails sent out to the student body. One student, in reference to an e-mail from spring 2007 which simply described the two perpetrators as "muscular" and "more muscular" men with brown hair, acknowledged that these e-mails often turn into campus jokes. When these e-mails are sent out carelessly, it makes the incident seem trivial and prevents the student body from acknowledging the seriousness of the offense. We suggest that if e-mails are sent out before detailed information is known, that should be clearly stated. Also, once more information is gathered, update e-mails should be sent.

7. Majors

While there is the ongoing debate regarding the representation of female students and faculty in economics and in the sciences, it was also noted that there are less evident problems in majors which are often seen as "women's majors". For example, one student

explained how she abandoned her English major because of the "rigidity" of the curriculum. She described how in certain classes, there was absolutely no diversity regarding the literature (i.e. the cannon of "dead white men") and how she often felt marginalized in her courses because of the strong focus not only on men, but on "sexist men". We feel that the curriculums in certain disciplines, English, Literary Studies, etc., need to be reevaluated to take these concerns into consideration.

8. Getting Female Faculty to Stay on Campus

It was noted how many female faculty members are only on campus for one or two years which makes it difficult for female students to find long term role models or to form relationships with female faculty. Several students commented that they wished there were more female faculty members invested in the community and willing to participate in school events. While we understand that this is a difficult subject that has many different components including social aspects, family, work interests, etc. we feel that the Middlebury community would be greatly improved if more female faculty members were tenured or in tenure track positions in order to encourage role-model relationships with female students. We feel that offering on campus day care is related to this topic and has the possibility to positively affect this issue.

Feminist Action at Middlebury

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