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## The History of the Flora Stone Mather Center for Women at Case Western Reserve University

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## Journal for Women & Gender Centers in Higher Education

**Journal for Women and Gender Centers  
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### **The History of the Flora Stone Mather Center for Women at Case Western Reserve University**

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#### **Abstract**

In this article, we present the history of the Flora Stone Mather Center for Women at Case Western Reserve University, written around the time of its founding. We put this in conversation with the proposal which was submitted to university administration as justification for the creation of the Center for Women. In pairing the snippets of the proposal with details of the Mather Center's present programming and resources, we are able to show how we are living up to the mission of our founders and the benefit to our campus community of having a women's center on our campus.

*Keywords:* historical profile, center founding, retrospective

## **The History of the Flora Stone Mather Center for Women at Case Western Reserve University**

In 2023, we at Case Western Reserve University are celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Flora Stone Mather Center for Women.<sup>1</sup> During this time, we have been looking through our archives and have re-discovered some of the history of the center that has been forgotten. In this article, we present the history of the Mather Center's creation as it was written at the center's opening in 2003, by Kathryn Karipides, Samuel B. and Virginia C. Knight Professor Emerita of Humanities, with help from many others involved in the process of creating the center. We then present selections from the original proposal written by the committees Prof. Karipides describes, coupled with information about how the Mather Center is living up to that mission twenty years later.

### **An Historical Profile of The Journey to The Center For Women At Case Western Reserve University**

Writing a living history is a process. We hope that in the near future we will have a comprehensive history of this journey. For over 30 years students, faculty, staff, alumnae, and administrators at this University have been committed to making this dream come true. Each person in this mass of individuals has a part in the story. Weaving all of it together will be a gift of thanks to all who have taken part in making this dedication a reality.

It is most important to acknowledge our legacy which dates back to 1888 when The College for Women was founded. Flora Stone Mather was the leading benefactress of the College. She worked most generously on behalf of the College for Women and was fully devoted to the education of women. Her name was given to the College in 1931 and it became known as Flora Stone Mather College for Women (FSMC) under the trusteeship of Western Reserve University. The name, Flora Stone Mather, is engraved in the history of this University.

Recollections from 36 years ago to the present: The year 1967 marked a remarkable change in this University. It was the year when the Federation or "Agreement of Consolidation" was approved by the boards of Western Reserve University and Case Institute of Technology.

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<sup>1</sup> Editor's Note: This article did not undergo peer review as it contains primarily content that was previously written for a different purpose, and new text is predominantly contextualizing.



This was the beginning of the demise of FSMC. (The last class to graduate from Flora Stone Mather College was 1972.) FSMC was always recognized for its outstanding liberal arts curriculum and for developing exceptional women leaders.

The late sixties was a tumultuous time nationally and locally. There was student unrest and disgruntlement on campuses all over the country. It was also the time of the Second Wave of the feminist movement launched by Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, published in 1963. Change for women was in the air.

At this time Elizabeth Hastings, Dean of FSMC, expressed interest in a Women's Resource Center. She obviously saw the handwriting on the wall and was thinking of the future of education for the women at the University. She enlisted help in 1967-68 to conduct a survey of Mather alumnae 15 years out of school to learn what they were doing. Her purpose was to assess traditional and non-traditional fields for women (Lois Schock and Pru Randall were part of this committee). Hastings started a Dean's discretionary fund for a Women's Resource Center.

During this same time and in her own quiet way Elizabeth Walker, the Associate Dean, was making waves. Long before the sexual revolution she convinced the administration that they had to have a contraceptive clinic. This was accomplished with the cooperation of Planned Parenthood and the University Health Services. A clinic was established in the basement of the health service with a separate entrance and separate files. In 1968, she thought the time had come for a co-ed dormitory. She prevailed with the administration. For the dean who always considered herself the spinster dean, she was the most revolutionary for women's rights.

In September 1969, the President of the University appointed a Commission on Education at Mather and Adelbert Colleges (CEMAC). The CEMAC report, published in January 1970, called attention to the special educational needs of women and the University's obligation to meet these needs. The Commission recommended establishing a Mather Institute modeled in part on the Radcliffe Institute. It advocated for continuing education for women to help and encourage women to reach their professional goals. An area of concern was the importance of displaying evidence that the University was demonstrably promoting professional equality for women.

In the late 1960s, a women's caucus group advocated for women's studies. They approached Bo Heald, chair of the American Studies Program, and asked for courses in women's studies. The first such course was taught in 1970.

By the early seventies, across the nation, women's voices were sounding with a persistence and insistence to be heard and acknowledged. Nationally, Gloria Steinem was actively leading the way. She co-founded Ms. Magazine in 1971. Everywhere it was evident that women's issues could not be ignored.

In 1971, President Toepfer established the President's Advisory Committee on the Status of Women in the University. Patricia Kilpatrick chaired this committee. The report was submitted in January 1973 following intensive research (a questionnaire and interviews with women from all areas of the University). During this same time and to the mid seventies there was an informal women's center that resided in the Spartan Room on the third floor in Thwing Center. It was generated, organized and run by students and may have been registered as a club. Things quieted down some during the eighties but there remained an undercurrent of women's voices craving to be heard.

In the late 1980s, two events stand out as memorable for women at this University. In 1987, Patricia Kilpatrick was named the first woman vice president at this University. This was glorious news for all women on this campus. In 1988, The Flora Stone Mather Alumnae Association (FSMAA) had their Centennial Celebration of the Establishment of Education of Women at Case Western Reserve University. This superbly organized and splendid day-long symposium focused on the higher education of women: yesterday, today, and tomorrow. It was exactly what the women on this campus needed. It generated an excitement and empowerment. Women on this campus were not going to sit back and wait, they became proactive.

In the 1990s, a host of women worked toward the achievement of a women's center at the University. The history of this process is difficult because so many people were involved in a multitude of ways. We are still piecing together all that occurred and listing all who took part. Please understand that the names mentioned are not meant to be the comprehensive list of all who worked on this effort. It is a beginning. The safe thing to do would be to list no one, but we want to be among those who write women back into history, not out of it, as our society is prone



to do. If you have a story to tell, or a name to add, especially yours, please let us know so that everyone can have the recognition deserved.

In December of 1990, Professor Jerry Liebman, Chair of the Faculty Senate, appointed an ad hoc committee to study the status of women faculty at the University. Members of this committee were: Susan Case, Michael Grossberg, Kathryn Karipides (chair), Robert Lawry, Janet McGrath, Mary Lou Miller, Lucille Mayne (she had also served on the 1971 committee), Ann Penn, Marcia Peatchers, Benjamin Segall, and Angela Woollacott. The report was completed in June 1991.

Although the 1971 study was different in many ways, the committee found that we were still confronted with the same issues and many of the same deficiencies with respect to the status of women in the University. One of two overriding recommendations was that there be appointed a University Committee on the Status of Women Faculty, with members appointed jointly by the President and the Faculty Senate. Professor Karen Moore chaired the first Committee on the Status of Women Faculty in AY1992-93. Under her leadership the first proposal for a Women's Resource Center was drafted.

Having a voice in the Faculty Senate was encouraging but no assurance that the committee's recommendations would be readily supported. Nevertheless it was progress. Chairs of this committee include Antoinette Graham (1993-94), Janet McGrath (1994-95), Patricia Brennan (1995- 96), Nahida Gordon (1996-98), Margaretmary Daley (1998-2001), Sue Pearlmutter (2001-02, 2003- 04), Laura Chisholm (2002-03). Throughout this time the Women's Faculty Association (WFA) was also a strong voice for women faculty.

In spring 1994, the Association of Women Students (AWS) resurfaced with a core group of women who fulfilled the guidelines for recognition as a student organization under Student Activities. This group was steered by Christina Welter, Kristen Manter, April Golda, Olga Chwascinska, Colleen Sanders, and Sara Kersey, to name just a few. This student organization was a vital component in the journey. By fall 1994, they were in full swing. The AWS organized a dynamic series of discussions and speakers. One such meeting was with the FSMAA bringing together women from several generations, all with an interest in supporting women's issues, both on campus and in the greater community.

Working in concert, the Committee on the Status of Women Faculty, the Women's Faculty Association, and the Association of Women Students were united in their mission - the establishment of a women's center at CWRU.

In April 1995, under the leadership of Janet McGrath, the Committee on the Status of Women Faculty and the Association of Women Students drafted a revised proposal for the creation of a Women's Resource Center at CWRU. In January 1995, the Faculty Senate appointed a Women's Resource Center Task Force. Members included John Aram, Cynthia Beall, Lynn Cates, Kathy Chapman, Barbara Collins, Susan Jaros, Joyce Jentoft, Gwen Johnson, Beth McGee, Meenoo Mishra, Jennifer Newman, Pru Randall, Danielle Ripich (chair, spring 1996), Mim Rosenthal, Amy Sachs, Janet Short, Susan Troia, Christina Welter, and Angela Woollacott (chair, fall 1995).

The proposal was submitted and the Faculty Senate voted in the spring of 1996 to support the founding of a University women's center to promote and organize resources and activities for women students, faculty, alumnae, and staff at CWRU. A task force was formed by the Senate to develop plans for the Center's organization and budget. It was about this time that the name Women's Resource Center was changed to The University Women's Center.

Working analogous to the women at the University was the FSMAA. They had always advocated for women's education and to perpetuate the legacy of Flora Stone Mather. In 1997, the FSMAA board decided to fund a major colloquium on women's issues. Alberta Kelvie was president of the Association and served as chair of Woman 2000: Forging a Vision which took place on April 8, 2000. In Bert's own words, "Sponsorship of this symposium is a logical extension of the FSMAA's long-term interest in the issues that impact women's lives and in the establishment of a full-fledged women's center on the campus of CWRU."

In 1997, Suzanne Ferguson, Chair-Elect, Faculty Senate, and Acting Chair, Task Force on the Women's Center, proposed that the women's organizations on campus join in a coalition of women's groups becoming the University Women's Coalition (UWC) (precursor to the Center for Women). She actively solicited and received pledges from the academic deans (Scott Cowan, then Dean of the Weatherhead School of Management, led the way) and received a generous gift from the FSMAA.



In spring 1998, three students from AWS made another visit to the CWRU President. This visit was a success. President Pytte designated \$100,000 toward the funding of a physical space and for hiring a coordinator for the purpose of a women's center. In 1997, under the guidance of Suzanne Ferguson and Pru Randall, the University Women's Coalition took two very significant steps toward becoming a center (in function if not yet in name) - the UWC took up residence in the first floor of Bellflower House and hired Dani Robbins-Zulich as its first director (half time).

The UWC was a smart way to transition into a full-fledged Center for Women. Not long after the success of Woman 2000, Dani Robbins-Zulich took a full time position in Texas. For two years the UWC was under the leadership of part-time interim directors (graduate students, one was Amanda Booher) with advisement from faculty member Eleanor Stoller in 2000-01 and Jacqueline Nanfito in 2001-02.

Concurrently the President's Advisory Council on Women was appointed in fall 2000. Members of this Council were Barbara Andelman, Mary Barkley, Amanda Booher, Patricia Higgins, Susan Jaros, Susan Nickel-Schindewolf, Ann Penn, Clare Rimnac, Julie Setele, Lynn Singer, Cyrus Taylor, Ariann Weitzman, and Angela Woollacott, council chair. Angela went on leave spring semester 2001 and Mary Barkley became chair and Alice Bach joined the Council. In the summer of 2001, the Council submitted a proposal for a comprehensive women's center on CWRU's central campus. It received the endorsement of Jim Wagner, Interim President, and Lynn Singer, Interim Provost. An executive committee (spin off of the Council) was named to work on budget and to carry out the search for a full-time director. Members of the committee were Alice Bach (chair), Joanne Eustis, Nancy Johnson, Dean Patterson, and Anne Hiltner.

And here we are!! Today we can celebrate the fruition of all of these efforts and express our gratitude for the hard work and persistence that led up to this day. We know it wasn't easy. All of the people mentioned, and many others yet to be listed, gave freely of their time and creative efforts to push ahead, sometimes in the face of formidable opposition. We hope that they - and you - enjoy the sweet success that this day represents.



## **The Mather Center: As Proposed And As Is**

In August of 2001, the President’s Advisory Council on Women in the University presented a “Proposal to Establish a Women’s Center at Case Western Reserve University.” Here, we present selections from this proposal, and demonstrate that the Mather Center is in many ways living up to its goals.

### ***Rationale – Performance.***

“We believe a Women’s Center will improve CWRU’s performance in terms of national benchmarks of women’s participation in higher education, on which the University currently falls short. As our consultant Dr. Donna Lisker, Director of the Duke University Women’s Center, points out in her report, women now attend college in equal or greater numbers than men. This 20-year trend peaked in 1997 with women constituting the majority (56%) of enrolled college students in the U.S. and project to reach 58% by 2010. However, CWRU currently has only 37% female undergraduates – a discrepancy of nearly 20 percentage points off the national average, which cannot be explained solely by the fact that CWRU excels in science and engineering, traditionally male-dominated fields.” (proposal, pg. 5)

Dr. Lisker’s predictions were entirely correct. According to IPEDS data, women made up 57.2% of college enrollees by Fall 2010, and in Fall 2020 were 58%, suggesting that this percent holds strong (Knapp et al., 2012; National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). Case Western Reserve University, in Fall of 2022, had 48% undergraduate women enrolled (Office of Institutional Research, 2023). While this still puts CWRU behind national average, the gap has closed significantly. However, with specific regard to CWRU’s emphasis on STEM fields, CWRU is at or above national average in several areas of STEM, including engineering and earth and physical sciences (Hauser et al., 2022). We see significant improvement, then, for women’s presence in CWRU classrooms and especially in STEM fields.

“CWRU also falls short of national averages in terms of percentage of women faculty, particularly in the upper ranks of faculty positions...CWRU lags seven percentage points behind national trends in its percentage of women faculty, both at the full professor level and across the board in all ranks.” (proposal, pg. 5-6)



Although CWRU still falls behind in percentage of women faculty compared to national average, the representation has increased dramatically at all levels since 2001. Given the promotion line from Assistant to Full Professor, the increased number at the Assistant level is reassuring, and suggests more women should be reaching the upper levels in the years to come.

**Table 1: Percent of Women Faculty in 2001 and 2023**

Faculty Rank	2001		2021 National %	2023 CWRU %
	National %	CWRU %		
Full Professor	19.7	12	35.9	24.2
Associate Professor	34	Not available	47.3	42.7
Assistant Professor	44.7	Not available	53.9	47.8
Non-Tenure Track*	51	48	57	62.8
All ranks	36	29	47.9	41

\*Combines ranks of Instructor and senior instructor at CWRU, and all instructor/lecturer positions from IPEDS for clarity.

Source: 2001 data from women’s center proposal. 2023 CWRU data from office of institutional research. 2021 National data from IPEDS (most recent year available)

### ***Vision and Mission***

“Our vision for a Women’s Center is a prominent, central hub of communication, education, research, and programming by and for women, men, and gender-oriented groups on campus. Through its programs, services, and advocacy for gender equity, the Center will foster the full and active participation of women students, faculty, staff, and alumnae in their personal, professional, and educational pursuits. The Center will stand for CWRU’s commitment to gender equity and will represent our values of fairness, mutual respect, and diversity. Its guiding principle will be inclusiveness and diversity (emphasis original), so that women and (emphasis original) men will initiate programs related to concerns of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation.” (proposal, pg. 9)

The Mather Center is living up to this original vision in so many ways. In the next section, I describe our goals, which support our achievement of this vision.

### ***Goals***

**Education.** “Priority will be given to provide education and supportive services to women students in the important area of sexual health, harassment, and assault. The Center will also interface with CWRU’s Women’s Studies Program by exploring opportunities to mount

joint programs and build curriculum. The outcomes will be a richer curriculum in gender/women studies and wider array of educational opportunities, including extracurricular activities and mentoring for students, leadership training for faculty and staff, and continuing education for alumnae.” (proposal, pg. 11)

Today, the Mather Center provides leadership institutes for both faculty and staff members, in addition to coaching and providing general training such as on Title IX. For students, we provide a variety of educational programs on topics such as healthy relationships, consent, and bystander intervention, through the support of a Department of Justice grant. Although we do not formally partner with the Women’s and Gender Studies program as we are not a curricular unit, our staff has taught in the program previously, and we are aligned in the work we do to promote equity on campus through both curricular and extracurricular paths.

**Research and scholarship.** “The Women’s Center will serve as an institutional umbrella for ongoing disciplinary and interdisciplinary research focusing on women and gender.” (proposal, pg. 11)

The Mather Center not only conducts internal research and evaluation on its own programs, but also contributes to a culture of research more broadly. In addition to publishing research briefs highlighting our strong programs, especially those related to gender and STEM, we also house the Journal for Women’s and Gender Centers in Higher Education, to publish work specifically on women’s centers and their contributions to higher education. We also provide grant funding to staff, faculty, and students for research and professional development related to feminism and gender equity. Several of our staff members also keep up independent research agendas, which is often connected to gender equity in various ways as well.

**Services.** “The Center will deliver services that emphasize women’s safety and health issues, including...rape and sexual assault counseling, and advocacy on campus for women’s health issues.” (proposal, pg. 11)

We have two confidential advocates housed in the Center, one full-time and one part-time, to help students who experience sexual violence on or around campus. They can help students understand their options and guide them through the reporting process, connect them with additional resources such as counseling, and escort them to hearings. We also do broader



educational program to equip others to better know the processes and encourage bystander intervention.

**Outreach.** “The Center will reach out to the Cleveland community as well as to people on campus.” (proposal, pg. 12)

Although the speaker series described in the original proposal is no more, we have found other ways to connect to our broader community. We offer programs such as eSTEAMed, which allows CWRU students to connect with local K-12 students and help them understand opportunities in STEAM fields in college. For younger students, there are one-day programs, while older students engage in a five-year cohort model that connects them with a mentor and provides ongoing support through high school graduation. Student groups such as Period. advocate for menstrual poverty and visit the local juvenile detention center to provide menstrual products.

**Advocacy.** “The Center will advocate gender equity on campus and in society and help facilitate solutions to achieve equity...the outcome will be more effective recruitment and retention of women students, faculty, and staff.” (proposal, pg. 12)

We engage in advocacy on campus through various techniques. In 2021, Executive Director Angela Clark-Taylor and then-postdoctoral fellow wrote the first Status of Women and Gender Equity at CWRU report, describing the progress toward equity on campus and the places where there is work to be done. Dr. Clark-Taylor also sits on the Faculty Senate to promote consideration of the impact of policies and decisions on women and minoritized genders on campus, and stays in communication with university leadership on these issues as well.

## Conclusion

It is apparent from Prof. Karipides’s history that it takes a village to make a Women’s Center. So many people, particularly women, worked tirelessly for years to bring this vision to life. Twenty years later, in reviewing the original goals, it feels like we are truly doing the work they hoped we would be, and more besides. As we celebrate our anniversary this October, we look forward to another twenty years and places we can continue to grow, such as strengthening relationships with the Women’s and Gender Studies program, and building connections with other groups on campus to continue meeting our goals.