

COLUMBIA SPECTATOR ARCHIVE

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New handbook to guide women to CU resources

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Columbia and Barnard College women are developing a Women's Handbook to familiarize women to resources available to them on campus and in New York City.

The book, which will be available to students in January, will contain chapters about the history of women at the University, women's health issues, mental health, sexual harassment and violence, body image and eating disorders, community identification, sexuality, women and AIDS, and drug and alcohol addictions.

"It is principally a resource guide. We want to take all these issues and open a dialogue between students," said Carla Richmond, CC '92, co-coordinator of the handbook.

Richmond said women on campus should have a centralized source of information.

"It's not that the information is not out there. The idea is to make this information accessible, to put it into women's hands," she added.

Richmond said the handbook is loosely based on a similar book distributed at Duke University.

Students and one faculty advisor worked together on each section of the book.

Priscilla Ferguson, associate director of the Institute for Research on Women and Gender, was the faculty advisor for the chapter about women at Columbia.

“It’s called Herstory, about the presence of women at Columbia. It deals with the incorporation of women into degree or administrative programs,” Ferguson said.

“[The chapter also discusses] more issues such as the curriculum debates at Columbia, in particular since women have been admitted to Columbia [College],” she added.

The chapter will conclude with information about Take Back the Night and the increase in women’s studies courses at Columbia College, according to Ferguson.

Richmond said the handbook will also contain a list of women’s groups on campus and a partial list of groups in New York City.

Different chapters in the handbook were written by students from the Lesbian Bisexual Gay Coalition, Women of Color, Asian Americans Working for Education, the Women's Center, Take Back the Night, and the Gay Health Advocacy Project.

"This is written by women for women on campus. That's what's important," Richmond said.

Hilary Rubenstein, BC '92, the other coordinator of the handbook, said although students from a wide variety of campus groups have worked on the handbook, their work represents their own personal views, not the political affiliations of their organization.

"The woman who worked on the Women and AIDS chapter works for the Gay Health Advocacy Project, so she specifically knew a lot about women and AIDS," Rubenstein said.

Although women in campus organizations wrote for the book, Richmond said the issues discussed were not confined to their particular groups.

"It is important for us that this is a book for all women, and we are as consistent as we can in addressing all women in every chapter," she said.

Most students were asked to write because they had specific knowledge about a topic included in the handbook, according to Rubenstein.

"There is a feminist idea behind it about

bringing as many options to women as possible, but it is not a feminist manifesto," she said.

The book is slated for completion in January, but it has not been decided how the books will be distributed, according to Brinley Bruton, BC '93, a writer for the handbook.

Richmond said the book will be free of charge, and that 3,000 copies will be available to students.

Richmond and Rubenstein began work on the book two years ago, and they have received funding for the book from Group 20, the Student Initiative Fund, Columbia University Health Services, Columbia College Student Council, Barnard College Student Government Association, and the Engineering Student Council.

The coordinators of the handbook were unsure of the exact amount given by the student governments.

The handbook is organized in a style which can be revised and updated in future years.

"Hopefully this is just the beginning. What we'd like is for the Women's Handbook Committee to spend one year fundraising and revising it, and then publish it the next year," Richmond said.

"This book represents commitment at its best. It's idealistic in many ways, but practical also. It's good to see Barnard and Columbia working together," Ferguson said.