

Speaking as someone who has never seen, much less been inside, a Women's Center, I think Youngstown State University absolutely should have one. Even now, in 2019, women of all backgrounds are being discriminated against, and having a place for women to go to discuss these problems is important for all people at YSU.

A prime example of the problem with how women are treated is a Vindy.com article written on October 11, 2018 about a letter that was sent by a YSU professor to President Tressel. The article quotes the letter:

In August 2017, the Women and Gender center Initiative was promised ample funding and a central space to create a Women's Center at YSU," the letter says. "The YSU administration told us that we would have a space no later than January 2018. In January, we were informed this space would be 'delayed' and it has remained in such a state ever since.

The issue, however, is not with the article itself. Instead, I'd like to quote some of the comments left on website in reference to the article. First of all, there is not a single comment on the article in support of the professor or her request for a Women's Center. One comment, left by user jowjow, states, "YSU has no safe space for women, the letter continues,' Wa wa wa. The progressive left's self-victimization will never end." Two other comments left by users Billman and Windjammer mock the professor for being transgender. Another comment of note was made by user Dday, and reads:

The YSU Campus should be a safe-place for all the students and faculty - not just one building; not just for one group of people. As for the Lyden House incident - the victim knew the assailant plus waited a week to report the incident. Any assaults, or even uncomfortable/scarey [sic] encounters, should be reported asap!

While the commenter is correct that victims of assault or other incidents should report these incidents to the appropriate authorities immediately, that is not a valid reason to discredit the woman who was raped at Lyden house in September of 2018. Also, I question why they would even mention that she knew the assailant. Is that supposed to imply that it was in some way her own fault?

The reason we need a Women's Center on campus is because, unfortunately, not every student - or rather, not every person - is concerned about women's safety, as exemplified by the aforementioned comments. It's unfortunate that we're still dealing with issues of inequality. This should never have been a problem in the first place. However, it is a problem; a problem that requires a solution.

I don't think that YSU's women's center needs to look any certain way. I think that a building with several rooms would be ideal. I see it kind of as a student lounge, but for women. It should be equipped with a common kitchen area, some computers to do homework, and some comfortable places to sit while female students congregate. However, one important thing that it should have is a suggestion box. No one person knows everything that should go in it, so why not have a place for students to suggest additions or programming?

While on the topic of programming, I think there should be scheduled talks or presentations at least weekly, covering important topics relating to feminism, women's rights, and LGBT inclusion. YSU should bring in inspiring women from around the world to talk to students about these topics. Additionally, there should be events that encourage women to mingle and chat. The International Programs Office hosts a weekly "International Coffee Hour" to invite international and domestic students to come together to meet and talk to each other

while enjoying light refreshments. I think that similar events would be useful to a Women's Center at YSU.

I also think it might be a good idea for there to be programs that invite men to become educated on women's issues and join the discussion. While some male students are sexist, others are interested in learning about the struggles that other people face so that they can help to reduce these struggles and make the world a better place. I think it's important to offer these men a chance to hear what women have to say, to inspire empathy with women. While I'm not sure men should be able to freely enter the Women's Center and do whatever they want, taking advantage of the benefits it offers for women, I do think that they should be encouraged to learn and help bridge the gap between male and female students and people.

Another important demographic is LGBT people. Lesbians, female-leaning non-binary people, and transgender women definitely make up a portion of YSU's students and staff, and I feel strongly that they should be included. I think that women and LGBT individuals should all be encouraged to use the Women's Center, and programming and amenities should be sensitive to everyone's different orientations and identities. (Gender-neutral restrooms for people of differing gender identities are always a great idea!)

I think that the women and gender non-conforming people of YSU would enjoy having a Women's Center as a place to congregate. Every student has a use for a safe space where they can relax and do homework or anything else they need to, and a women's center is a great addition to the YSU campus for the 52% of students at YSU that identify as women, along with LGBT students who don't currently have a place of their own.

Unfortunately, while I do have some ambitious ideas for a YSU Women's Center, I do not have the knowledge required to figure out how to fund it based on YSU's expenses and

income. However, looking back at the Vindy.com article, it appears that funding for a Women's Center was already promised to the Women and Gender Center Initiative back in August 2017. Obviously, YSU's administration had some way to pay for it planned when that promise was made. Even if YSU refuses to pay for it, I'd be inclined to assume that there are grants available that the Women and Gender Center Initiative could apply for. Additionally, fundraising is always an option. A large portion of YSU Alumni and students would likely love to be a part of such an important project and could contribute a large part of the funding through donations. There are many options and resources available to secure funding for a Women's Center.

All things considered, I think that more emphasis should be put on YSU's diverse female-identifying students, staff, and faculty, and that a Women's Center absolutely should be built at YSU as soon as possible. It would be beneficial not only to female members of the YSU community, but also gender non-conforming members and even men. Creating a Women's Center at YSU is a great chance to seize the opportunity to educate and provide a feeling of acceptance and safety to all students, regardless of background.

Professors decry YSU's lack of a Women's Center. (2018, October 11). Retrieved March 6, 2019, from <http://www.vindy.com/news/2018/oct/11/professors-decry-ysus-lack-womens-center/> Used both for quotes from the article and for the comments on the article.