

HISTORY OF THE MARGARET SLOSS WOMEN'S CENTER

The first floor of Sloss House has been designated as the campus women's center space...The space has yet to be furnished, but with the use of temporary conference tables and folding chairs...women's programs have already begun to meet in the Sloss House women's center space.¹

The Margaret Sloss Women's Center was established primarily because of the efforts of several different individuals and groups. No documentation has been found that explicitly identifies individuals before the 1960s as catalysts for the creation of a women's center on the Iowa State University campus. However, we can probably assume that since the creation of Iowa State University, women in the Ames/ISU community in the late nineteenth century and early-mid twentieth century established the vision and foundation upon which women in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s created the reality of the Margaret Sloss Women's Center.

According to Shirley Karas, committees were established in the late 1960s to discuss issues concerning women in the ISU community. One committee was charged by Wilbur ("Bill") L. Layton (then Vice President for Student Affairs) and later on organized by Julia F. Anderson (then Associate Dean of the College of Home Economics), to discuss possible mechanisms for supporting women in the campus community.² Beginning in 1972, a group of women educators from Iowa State University began meeting on a regular, sometimes weekly, basis "for the purpose of developing plans for a coordinated, omnibus effort geared to meet the needs of women in our society."³ This group of women which met regularly to discuss the creation of a women's center at Iowa State University included women from different sectors of the university, including Ellen Betz, Nancy Cherry, Kay Holmberg, Marita Jones, Shirley Karas, Barbara Mathias, Phyllis Miller, Donna Nelson, and Jean Palmer. Initially the group decided to call itself the Women's Center Proposal Development Team (WCPDT); however, the group later renamed itself the Women's Center Committee and finally the Options Unlimited Committee. The women in this committee "brought to the group ideas and concepts based on [their] different areas of expertise but all motivated by a similar desire to lend [their] talents toward the development of women's potential."⁴

One of the goals of this group was to develop a proposal for a women's center at Iowa State University that would outline a plan for the creation, structure and goals of such a center. In January of 1973, A Proposal for a Women's Center was submitted by the Options Unlimited Committee to George C. Christensen (then Vice President for Academic Affairs) and to Julia F. Anderson. This proposal was distributed to several people on the ISU campus for their criticism and suggestions. Initial plans for the development, organization and administration of a women's center were included within this formal proposal. The purpose of the Women's Center was specifically stated in the proposal; the center was..... to provide Iowa with a model for coordinated programs of special interest to women and to contribute to the integration of women into the economic, educational, socio/cultural and political life of the state in a meaningful and productive way. To achieve this purpose, the center will provide, but is not limited to, programs directed toward (1) personal development, (2) occupational development, (3) women's studies, (4) research of concern to and about women, (5) training programs for people interested in administering, conducting and developing women's programs, and (6) provide a resource and consulting service throughout the state.⁵

These six proposed activities were to be supplemented by various support services coordinated, but not necessarily directly provided, by the center. The supplemental support services described in the proposal included “a child care facility, a library, an occupational placement service and a referral service to agencies within the state and local communities which provide financial, legal and other services to women.” The proposed model for a women’s center contained “programs of an on-going, stable nature as well as programs designed specifically for their short-term, flexible nature. Although stability is sought, out-datedness is not.”⁶ Although this proposal was quite comprehensive, it was neither the only nor last proposal for a women’s center.

According to Kathleen Newroe, a staff member at the university library, during a noon book discussion group at the YWCA in the late 1970s, the issue of support services for women on the ISU campus was raised once again. “The ‘Y’ had a number of programs,” Newroe stated, “but there was a question about the ‘C’ for Christian when women’s programs were needed for all faiths, including those of the international student and faculty population which was growing by leaps and bounds; and of the ‘Y’ for Young when the vision, especially for Lois [Hamilton] and me, included staff and students of all ages and women of the community.”⁷ In the Fall of 1978, as a result of their interest in services for women on campus, Newroe, Hamilton and Heather Johnson began working toward the establishment of a full-fledged Women’s Center on campus.⁸ Other university women who helped in this effort included Kathy Hickok, Sharon Mathes and Connie Tanczo.⁹ Over the next couple of years, Hamilton and Johnson met with a number of people to determine a possible place on campus for a women’s center, as well as possible funding for a women’s center.

While discussions of a location and funding for the Center continued, Hamilton, Newroe and Johnson worked on a proposal for the Women’s Center. Hamilton worked specifically on the structure of the Women’s Center and created an organizational chart, a 1980/1981 budget and key position descriptions for the Center. Newroe was responsible for writing a draft of the proposal which cited statistics from the 1970s showing a national increase in the number of women attending college. In the draft she argued that “as more women are entering such nontraditional fields as engineering, veterinary medicine and other sciences, Iowa State could undergo a substantial increase in its percentage of women students. To be competitive and attract top women students, some centralizing, infrastructural proof of support for women, like a Women’s Center, would demonstrate that Iowa State University had a commitment to equity for women.” In the draft of the proposal, Newroe also described the Women’s Center as a potential “support to university staff women as well as faculty and to women of the community, both those empowered through organizations like [the] League of Women Voters and NOW, and those in need such as abused and/or displaced homemakers and older women returning to school.”¹⁰ Johnson and Hamilton reviewed the draft and made suggestions for the final version of the proposal.

In order to move the proposal through the university’s structure, the proposal was presented to the University Committee on Women in February, 1980. Under the direction of Dr. Jean Adams, Chair of the University Committee on Women from 1979-1982, a new committee composed of members of the University Committee on Women was formed to refine and modify the Women’s Center proposal. In May, 1980, the University Committee on Women sent a letter to George C. Christensen requesting that physical space be allocated for a Women’s Center beginning September 1, 1980. In June, 1980, Christensen endorsed the request. In October, 1980, a number of subcommittees of the University Committee on Women was created, one of which was the Women’s Center Subcommittee. This subcommittee worked on establishing “priorities for the use of the Center space, and to discuss how Women’s Center services and activities would coordinate with and facilitate existing women’s programs on cam-

pus.”¹¹ This subcommittee included Rachel Christensen (Chair), Elizabeth Beck, Karla Michelle Haaland, Connie Tanczo and Debi Liddell-Westefeld. After several correspondences between Dr. Jean Adams and John Pace (Space and Schedules), in December, 1980, the Women’s Center was formally assigned the first floor of the Sloss House.¹² The Women’s Center Subcommittee met regularly to discuss building repair, furniture needs, a building use policy statement, and other logistical matters.

During the University Committee on Women’s meeting on February 18, 1981, the Women’s Center Subcommittee presented its suggestion for a name for the Women’s Center: Sloss Center for Women. After some discussion at the meeting about the name of the Women’s Center, members of the University Committee on Women voted to give the space the name “Margaret Sloss Center for Women.”¹³ The Women’s Center was to be named in honor of Margaret Wragg Sloss, the first woman to gain admission to, and graduate from, the ISU Veterinary School with a DVM. In March, 1981, the University Committee on Women sent a letter to Dean Lagomarcino, Chair of the Advisory Committee on the Naming of Buildings, “defining the women’s center space, explaining what it will be used for and explaining why the Committee on Women is asking that the space be named ‘The Margaret Sloss Center for Women.’”¹³ The Advisory Committee on the Naming of Buildings approved the request. At that time the Women’s Center Subcommittee focused its efforts on repairing the Sloss House. During the summer of 1981, specified areas of the Sloss House were repaired and restored.

On September 16, 1981, the Board of Regents formally approved the naming of the Women’s Center as the Margaret Sloss Women’s Center. Since 1981, the Margaret Sloss Women’s Center has been located in the Sloss House. Initially, the Women’s Center was located on the ground floor of the Sloss House and shared the house with the ISU Lectures Program; however, since 1985, the entire house has been the home of the Margaret Sloss Women’s Center. Although many believe the Sloss House was named for Margaret Sloss, the Sloss House was actually named after Thomas Sloss, Margaret Sloss’ father and a former Superintendent of Buildings and Grounds at ISU.

In 1981, the Women’s Center was staffed part-time by Rachel Christensen, the Coordinator of Women’s Programs in the Office of Student Life, and three-quarter-time by Connie Tanczo, Women’s Information Coordinator from the Academic Affairs Office. An Ad-Hoc Committee was formed in the Fall of 1982 to review women’s programs and services for women at ISU. Members of this committee included Donna Cowan, Richard Van Iten, Mary Ann Evans, Elizabeth Beck, Jean Adams and Augustine Pounds. The committee recommended combining the two part-time positions into one full-time position. Torry Dickinson was hired in the Fall of 1983 as the first full-time Director of the Women’s Center. She resigned only six weeks after she started as a result of what she believed was the lack of clarity concerning her specific duties and responsibilities. The University Committee on Women was then charged with the task of determining the purpose of the Women’s Center and the role, duties and responsibilities of the Women’s Center staff, particularly the Director. In 1984, the University Committee on Women and the Coalition for Women’s Concerns submitted a report, “Women’s Center Review,” in which they defined the goals, purposes and organization of the Women’s Center, and recommended upgrading the Director’s position and establishing an Advisory Board. After a national search, Debra Stuart, the part-time Acting Director of the Women’s Center, was selected as the full-time Director of the Women’s Center. However, she resigned within two weeks to move out-of-state. Another candidate, Peg Lonquist, was offered the Director’s position. Lonquist was the Director from August 1984 to August 1988; she resigned in 1988 to pursue her graduate education at the University of Minnesota. Mary Ann Evans served as Acting Director until 1989, when Judy Jones began her tenure as the Women’s Center Director. Jones was the Director from February 1989 until July 1993, when she re-

signed in order to start her own bed-and-breakfast resort, Pond Mountain Lodge and Resort, in Eureka Springs, Arkansas. After another national search, Celia Naylor-Ojurongbe was selected as Director and has been the Director since July of 1993.

Although there is some historical information about the Margaret Sloss Women's Center available at the Center, most of the information about Margaret Sloss and the creation of the Women's Center was donated to, and is currently being housed in, the Archives of Iowa State University's Parks Library.