

**VIUFA Status of Women Report**

**April 2017 AGM from Kathy Page**

**Making connections: EVA, WAC, SARP, and West Coast LEAF**

During the summer, I attended the Ending Violence Association’s teleconference and connected with members of the local Women’s Action Committee: Haven, The Women’s Centre, Zonta, Nanaimo Family Life, CFUW, as well as the VIUSU Women’s and Aboriginal students’ reps so as to build on established working relationships. I met twice with Michelle Good, the co-ordinator of the new Sexual Assault Response Program, SARP, an exciting new initiative supported by Nanaimo Family Life and The Haven. Her task is to improve the response and support for victims of sexual assault in Nanaimo, and a significant part of this work is creating a training program for volunteer responders for sexual assault victims, and finding, then training, volunteers. Michelle began training the first intake in October. I connected her with Dr. Carrie Chassels, who heads VIU’s Sexual Violence and Harassment Education and Response Steering Committee, SVHER, so as to foster collaboration and avoid duplication of effort. The SVHER committee has since been informed in detail of Michelle’s ongoing work, and one member of it has signed up as a volunteer. Similarly, I connected with Sarah Layla Robbie, who is the new West Coast LEAF Education Coordinator in Nanaimo. West Coast LEAF offers three workshops to middle and high school students in the area, including one on consent.

**FROSH week and onwards**

SW sponsored a table at FROSH to share with SARP, Haven and the Canadian Federation of University Women all of whom who volunteered during the day, along with Ellen Faulkner and myself. We used a “dirty laundry” clothesline to display the question “What can we do about violence to women?” as a backdrop, and handed out garden apples and *No Means No* buttons as a prelude to soliciting student awareness of, and thoughts on, the question. This was a busy and satisfying afternoon with about 100 students engaged.

**SVHER and other issues**

Once the academic year beganIregularly attended VIU’s Sexual Violence and Harassment Education and Response Steering Committee. Over the next six months we reviewed several drafts of VIU’s Sexual Misconduct Policy (at the time of writing this is on the brink of approval) and, I believe, improved it considerably.

I participated in a local letter writing campaign, protesting a possible return to cross-gender monitoring in Nanaimo police cells as a cost-cutting measure, and I drew the Executive’s attention to the possibility of gender bias in student evaluations of faculty.

**Events**

From October to March, I collaborated with the VIUSU Women’s and Aboriginal reps, a variety of local community groups, Dr. Colleen McVeigh of Worldbridger, and Dr. Sonnet L’Abbé of the Women’s March to Washington on a variety of events including:

**CODE: Debugging the Gender Gap**, **September 27th**. In collaboration with VIUSU and Ladies Who Code Island Chapter, CSW supported a screening of this documentary, which looks at the history of coding and the dearth of female software engineers, followed by discussion.

**Sisters in Spirit Vigil, October 4th** is a day to honour the lives of the missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls. Our event included a “Red Dress” installation, along with speakers and musicians; it took place outside at Shq’apthut, and concluded with a candle ceremony and shared food. We reached out to all faculty and students and were rewarded with an attendance of over ninety people.

In the week prior to **December 6,** the anniversary of the massacre at the École Polytechnique, and **National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women** we installed clothes- line projects protesting violence against women outside the Arts and Humanities building and in the Jardin de Quatorze. Members of the university community added to these lines in the following weeks. Similar installations were put up by community groups throughout the city and featured in an ongoing Twitter campaign. Our vigil was unfortunately cancelled due to inclement weather.

Following the election south of the border, I joined with co-ordinator Sonnet L’Abbé, Janis Ledwell-Hunt, Melissa Stephens, Kathleen Reed, Susan Juby, Cait MacDoald, Bill Eadie and others to plan the **Women’s March on Washington Nanaimo**. **January 21st** saw a turnout of about a thousand people with extensive media coverage before, during, and after the event, and a heightened sense of community engagement (as well as many people in pussy hats).

This year’s theme for **International Women’s Day (8th March)** was “Be Bold for Change.” SW collaborated with (in the sense of helping with or promoting) the organizers of at least sixteen events in the community and on campus—including a community flash mob, a dance performance, and a symposium on gender. SW brought two speakers, **Monia Mazigh** and **Deborah Campbell** (a human rights advocate and a journalist, both of whom could certainly be described as bold), to campus. These visits were supported by a grant from VIUFA’s PD fund, as well as SW funds, and generous contributions from International Education, Social Sciences, and Arts and Humanities. I collaborated with faculty in those areas in planning and realizing both the main and side events, achieving a broad reach and high degree of interconnection between visitors, faculty and students.

Over the two days **Monia Mazigh** was on campus, about 175 people, including students, faculty and members of the public, were able to connect with her and hear the story of her successful fight for justice. In addition to her scheduled talks, **Mazigh** gave three class visits to approximately seventy students and their instructors, delivering presentations tailored to topics previously chosen in collaboration with the instructors. A student journalist interviewed her for The Navigator, and she did a live radio interview with CBC. **Deborah Campbell’s** talk concerned her work as a journalist in Syria and other war zones. All in all our audience for both speakers’ events, including the class visits, was about two hundred, with over twenty faculty participating and many others engaged or informed in other ways via publicity and word of mouth. I’d like to reiterate my thanks to the donors and to the PD committee for helping to make this possible.

**Communication**

This work depends on connection and communication. Our VIU Status of Women Facebook page now has almost 200 followers. Please visit it! <https://www.facebook.com/VIUStatusOfWomen/>

**Passing the Torch**

I have enjoyed this year’s work and learned a great deal about our vibrant local and university communities, and the commitment of many in our community to women’s ongoing struggles for equal opportunity and freedom from violence. As a fledgling member of the VIUFA Executive I’ve also gained first-hand understanding of the huge amount of effort and thought that goes into maintaining and improving our conditions at work/terms of employment. I regret that pressures of other work mean I have to stand down. I’d like to thank you all for the opportunity to do this work, and extend special thanks to the CSW e-committee: Janis Ledwell-Hunt, Sonnet L’Abbé, Ellen Faulkner, Laura Cranmer, Zora Soprovich, and Colleen McVeigh.