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Commission for Women

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Kurth discusses role of Ombudsman's Office

College can be a frustrating and at times daunting experience for students. Not only are they faced with new educational challenges, but adjustments are required in adapting to and learning about a new environment, new living quarters, a new roommate and a new institution. To help students better understand and cope with life at UTK, the Office of the Ombudsman provides guidance and assistance.

"Our office focuses on students who have problems related to being a member of the university community," said Dr. Suzanne Kurth, Ombudswoman and associate professor of Sociology. "We deal with all kinds of questions and problems ranging from the semester transition to parking."

Kurth stressed that students can feel free in discussing their concerns openly at the Ombudsman's office. "The number one thing about our office is confidentiality. Students may feel apprehensive about coming here and raising questions. In our office we explore their options and, while they may not necessarily take action on their concerns, they can talk freely about whatever is bothering them," Kurth noted.

This year the Ombudsman's office has taken extra steps to publicize the service they provide for the student community. "When I entered this position mostly seniors and juniors came by primarily because of a lack of familiarity. We have put out posters and made an effort in the departments and residence halls to make students more aware of us," said Kurth. In addition, Kurth's office has, in conjunction with the Task Force on Race Relations, advertised in the Beacon and is putting out a brochure.

The Ombudsman's office hears a variety of complaints from students. "Problems we get usually reflect what is going in the student cycle," said Kurth. "Early in the fall people are disturbed about roommates, housing contracts, financial aid, and parking. As the term progresses, students raise other problems such as 'I'm in the wrong class, I've been misadvised, or I need to drop a class.'"

A common problem facing seniors is fulfilling the necessary graduation requirements. "Students receive their senior standing sheet and discover they lack certain hours," Kurth commented. She added that more students need to be aware of the senior standing sheet. "After they've achieved a certain number of hours, students can acquire a senior standing sheet which lays out for them by categories what requirements they have fulfilled and what they still need to graduate. Students should get one the first chance they can and then have time to make necessary adjustments in their scheduling."

Kurth further noted that her office often acts as a liaison between students and faculty members or department. "We try to find the most effective way for students to resolve their problems. We get people to talk together and work things out." To help cope with such problems Kurth said students need to become more familiar with their rights and responsibilities. "A lot of students aren't aware of Hilltopics and should be."

The transition to semesters has not caused as many problems for students as Kurth had anticipated. "Most students seemed to have lined things up in advance," Kurth noted, however, that because of the change students in certain programs are facing greater pressure in getting the classes they need. "Now there may be only two or three opportunities to fulfill requirements whereas in the past there were more. Hopefully this will ease up once the transition has been made."

In many cases the Office of the Ombudsman acts as a referral service for students. "If someone comes in with a personal problem we are glad to talk to them but if it is more appropriate for them to talk to someone else we put them in contact with the appropriate person or department," said Kurth. "Many students don't know what kind of services are available to them on campus. We try to make students aware of opportunities and programs such as the counseling center and programs which assist them with academic problems ranging from test anxiety to math anxiety."

Kurth said she sees a fair number of international students. "In many cases they don't have the same means of acquiring information or the same sort of networking as U.S. students." Kurth said her office tries to help them sort out their difficulties or put them in contact with the appropriate individuals or offices.

Students have also voiced concerns this semester about the change in grade point average related to awarding honors and high honors. Kurth said in such cases where university policy is clear her office cannot do much other than advise students of the change.

If students or other members of the UTK community would like to contact the Ombudsman Office, it is located in the University Center, room 346. The phone number is 974-4311.

WHET seeks new members

Women in Higher Education in Tennessee (WHET) is currently seeking members to assist in encouraging and promoting a favorable attitude toward women at all levels of high education.

WHET's primary goals include promoting the expansion and improvement of programs for the further development of the causes of women in higher education in Tennessee and to provide an opportunity for involvement in activities for professional growth. In addition, WHET hopes it will serve as a major coalition of women within the higher education community who can work with other professional organizations to build strong movements of collective advocacy of women in higher education.

WHET grew out of a 1979 state conference sponsored by the Commission on the Status of Women. Regional representatives were elected who drafted by-laws and nominated a slate of state officers
Are Video Display Terminals Safe?

Academics have thought that their jobs were among the safest for many years. After all, the biggest danger was getting calluses from writing too much with a pen. A new plethora of data, some of it dubious, seems to indicate that the pen’s replacement, the video-display terminal (VDT) may be a significant health hazard.

The VDT has been implicated in a number of health problems ranging from impaired vision to miscarriages. Over 19 million people, most of them women, currently work at VDTs in the United States, and that number will more than double by the mid-1980’s. Since the VDT’s introduction in the 1960’s there have been constant complaints from workers. The most common have been eyestrain and headaches, although stiff necks and sore wrists have also been reported.

It is those health problems that are being addressed by new legislation that regulates VDT use in the workplace. Legislators in Suffolk County, New York enacted the first VDT regulatory law in the United States. Businesses that operate more than 20 VDTs must provide a fifteen minute break every three hours for workers who use the terminals more than 26 hours a week. Furthermore, employees must contribute 80% of the cost of eyeglasses and yearly eye exams. By 1990, adjustable chairs and nonglare screens will be compulsory for new equipment.

The most alarming new evidence has come from the Kaiser-Permanent Medical Care Program study. The study surveyed 1,600 women who had become pregnant since 1984. It was found that expectant women who spent 20 or more hours a week at terminals were twice as likely to suffer a miscarriage during the first trimester than non-VDT users. Dr. Edmund Van Brunt pointed out in his discussion of the study that job related stress and poor working conditions could be additional factors, but there seems to be a significant correlation between VDT use and miscarriage.

The Hen House Project also postulates a correlation between VDT use and miscarriage as well as birth defects. In this study, chick embryos exposed to low levels of radiation showed an increase in the number of birth defects.

Computer manufacturers have quickly responded to health concerns by shielding against radiation leakage and putting in anti-glare features, but one problem is that most VDTs in the workplace are over 10 years old. The verdict on miscarriages is still out, but the problems with eye strain and physical strain still exist and are well documented. This seems to be one area where intervention could not only increase productivity but insure better health for VDT users.

WHET seeks new members

... (cont. from pg. 1) who were installed in April 1980. Currently there are 39 WHET members representing 11 higher education institutions and the Tennessee Higher Education Commission. State officers include a president, first and second vice-president, secretary, treasurer and six regional representatives, two each from East, Middle and West Tennessee. Wyline Vrba of the UTK Science Alliance is presently 2nd vice-president and Camille Hazeur, Director of Affirmative Action, is an East Tennessee representative. Since its inception, WHET has held at least one state-meeting every year, except 1987. At the annual state-wide WHET conference, traditionally held in the spring, guest speakers address various topics of interest to women in higher education. Panel discussions and workshops are also organized on such topics as stress and daycare.

In addition to the state-wide WHET conference, local and regional chapters hold meetings. As of yet, East Tennessee does not have any chapters. Plans are currently being made to hold the next annual meeting in the spring of 1989. If you would like information about this state-wide conference or if you would like to become a member of WHET, contact Wyline Vrba at 974-4561.

Cancer linked to HPV

While AIDS has become a significant health problem for several hundred thousand Americans, another serious virus has been largely overlooked by the media. Human papilloma virus (HPV) is sexually transmitted, sometimes painful and often incurable. It currently affects millions of Americans including a large number of teenaged girls.

As a rule, HPV, which manifests itself most often as genital warts, has not been considered a serious virus. The body cannot get rid of the virus and it remains latent for decades. If the warts are not painful, however, many physicians have not seen it as a problem, until now.

Recently, some types of HPV have been linked to cervical and other cancers. Since most carriers do not have external signs of the virus, they are unaware of the risk and the disease goes unnoticed.

The Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta estimate that there are nearly one million new cases of HPV yearly, most among young women in their teens. Current projections are that between 5% and 15% of those with frequently occurring genital warts develop cancer. The most common is cervical cancer, but HPV has also been implicated in cancer of the vulva, vagina, anus and penis.

So far, the incidence of cervical cancer has not matched the rise in HPV cases, but the latency period seems to be from 5 to 40 years. Women with Pap tests showing HPV-linked cervical dysplasia are becoming more and more common. Researchers now believe HPV is involved in as many as 90% to 95% of all cases of dysplasia and cancer of the cervix.

The danger is even greater for younger women. Because a teenager’s cervix has more developing cells than an adult’s, it is more vulnerable to HPV. Many children’s hospitals have reported an increase in cervical cancer among teenagers, formerly quite scarce.

How can women prevent getting HPV or reduce the risk of getting cancer if they already have the virus in their system? Research indicates that the presence of one or more co-factors is required to trigger the disease. Among them is smoking, use of birth control pills, and the presence of other veneral infections.

Women who have more than one sexual partner or who have recurrent genital warts, should get a Pap smear at least every six months (more frequently in the case of warts). Women with venereal warts or who propose having intercourse with someone who has them should use a condom to prevent transmission.
Osborne examines women in Thailand

For many Americans, their perceptions of Thailand and the treatment of women in Thai society have been colored by the films "Anna and the King of Siam" and "The King and I." Thailand, however, has undergone tremendous change since the mid-19th century reports Dr. Martha Lee Osborne, associate professor of Philosophy and head of Women's Studies at UTK. Osborne visited Thailand this past summer and found that women in Thailand have made strong gains over the past century, yet in many respects still lag behind Western standards of equality for women.

Osborne noted that Thai history contains several accounts of exceptional women. "Strong women have emerged from time to time," said Osborne, "and women. Strong women have emerged. Women become involved in prostitution because of the tourist trade. In virtually every hotel there is a massage parlor and tourists expect this as a service. I met one woman, a sociology professor, who opened a hotel without a massage parlor. Guests complained and she opened one," said Osborne. "As she told me, 'It's business.'

Women become involved in prostitution for economic reasons as a rule. "Young rural women move to large cities, like Bangkok, expecting to find work and often end up employed in massage parlors." Osborne noted, however, that the stigma of being a prostitute is not great possibly because many of the women send the bulk of their money home to their parents. "Generally women do not remain in prostitution very long. They send most of their money home and are able to amass enough income to buy a farm and settle down."

Osborne added that positive steps are being taken to address prostitution and assist women involved in it. Programs have been implemented to rehabilitate retired prostitutes by providing them with job and skills training.

In rural areas, women engage in work similar to men and their relationship with men seems fairly egalitarian. "There is some division between what a man or a woman's work, but rural labor is, by and large, shared. In the north, for example, women traditionally take charge of the finances. But this could be a service they provide for the husband who would then make the major financial decisions."

The government, now in its Sixth National Economic and Social Development Plan, is taking some steps to address women's issues and has created subcommittees on women's activities and rural development. "Government perceives women as a group they're eager to work with and is receptive to implementing social change to help them. There are grass roots activities going on under government sponsorship to assist women."

Osborne, however, is unsure of the productivity and effectiveness of some of these programs. "While visiting the village of Wangthong, we witnessed a government program designed to educate women about such activities as clothes making, food production and stove preparation. Instead of working with the women to find out their needs, the government came in and imposed roles on the women. It was not the kind of grassroots activities I was expecting."

Economically, Thai women lag behind their male counterparts. "There is an equal pay law which stipulates equal pay for equal work. Yet, like women in the United States, women in Thailand are paid less than men. Women receive 67 bhat (the Thai currency unit) for every 100 bhat earned by men."

There still exists in Thailand a notion of protectionism surrounding women and the work they perform. Osborne commented that the state forestry school receives 4,000 applicants yearly and admits 170 candidates, 140 men and 30 women. "They only select 30 women because of the problems school officials feel they'll face when they begin working, particularly in rural areas."

Like other developing countries, unchecked population growth contributes to slow economic growth. Thailand does not officially try to limit the number of children families can have, but instead tries to control population growth through education. "You will see signs which read 'Children make you poor,'" said Osborne. Information about birth control and birth control devices are readily available. "About 65% of all married women practice some form of birth control with the Pill being the preferred method."

Abortion is illegal in Thailand except in cases of rape or where it places the mother's life in serious jeopardy. "There have been attempts to legalize abortion, but these measures have failed. Still, about one million women yearly seek illegal abortions and of those about 10,000 die from poorly performed procedures."

The development of women's studies programs in Thailand is about 15 to 20 years behind the U.S. "At a couple of the top universities, such as the University of Bangkok, they are doing research and will be ready to start implementing courses in a year or so. They have an activist conception of women's studies. People are interested in helping women with economic re-habilitation, alternate forms of employment, etc. But at present, I found little in the way of course offerings."

Within the precepts of Buddhism lie perhaps an interesting picture of women in Thai society. "As with most other major world religions, Buddhism claims not to be sexist. Buddhists argue, for example, that future reincarnations of Buddha could be female. However, Buddhist nuns are never

(cont. on page 4)
9 to 5 wants to organize
Knoxville chapter

The organization 9 to 5, the National Association of Working Women, is interested in starting a chapter in the Knoxville area. Debby Seagraves, Field Organizer at the southeast regional office of 9 to 5 in Atlanta, is looking for at least four to five women interested in starting a chapter in Knoxville and helping determine what would be the priorities of a Knoxville 9 to 5 chapter.

9 to 5 is a non-profit organization with about 20 chapters nationwide and members in almost all 50 states. "Our purpose," said Seagraves, "is to help working women workers gain rank and respect in the work world."

The philosophy of 9 to 5 is that women who enjoy office work should have some way to educate and enrich themselves. "We're not a union," said Seagraves. "We address specific problems women face because they work in an office."

Included among the activities of 9 to 5 are legislative activism, education, family issues, and medical agenda. "We have a legislative agenda and lobby in Washington. At present, we're lobbying for passage of the ABC Bill, Act for Better Child Care," commented Seagraves.

9 to 5 also investigates various medical issues pertinent to female office workers, such as the affect working at a computer terminal has on women. "We have information on a variety of issues important to office workers such as stress management and assertiveness training."

Aside from being a women's legal and medical advocate, 9 to 5 also serves women who need counseling and referral advice. "We have a job problem hotline which women can call. We'll refer them to the proper type of attorney or agency to get help in dealing with their problem," Seagraves stated. Women who call the job problem hotline have to be members of 9 to 5 or are asked to join. Annual membership is $25. The hotline number is 1-800-245-9TOS.

Seagraves said a local 9 to 5 chapter in Knoxville would be designed by Knoxville women to address its own interests. "Local chapters plan and sponsor a variety of activities which fulfill their own goals. Some of our chapters have offered seminars on topics like stress management, career planning and resume writing. We believe there's comfort in networking and local chapters provide this."

Seagraves would assist the organizers of a Knoxville chapter by providing technical help and national support. "There is not a chapter in Knoxville at present and I would be willing to come and do whatever I can to help get one started."

Services which 9 to 5 offers to local chapters include planning events, providing films, finding appropriate speakers and providing literature on women's issues.

Women interested in helping organize a Knoxville 9 to 5 chapter can contact Seagraves at 88 Walton St., Suite 202, Atlanta, GA 30303. Seagraves' phone number is 1-404-522-5446.

... Women in Thailand

(cont. from pg. 3)

fully ordained. They follow eight rules as compared to 227 rules for monks (one of which is that they can't touch a woman). Buddhist nuns also can't help people make merit and they receive less training than boys."

Osborne added that some Buddhist women are trying to elevate the status of women within Buddhism. "Professor Thammas at the University of Bangkok edits the International Women Buddhist Newsletter which tries to educate Buddhists about the role of women in their religion."

Osborne concluded that people in Thailand want to see change in the role and treatment of women in their society. "There is support from university and government officials to elevate the status of women. But they want the process to be evolutionarily and orderly. In many ways Thai women are very modernized, but a lot of deep seeded traditional attitudes still exist and it takes time to change them."
First female bishop elected

The Reverend Barbara C. Harris became the first woman elected as a bishop in the history of the Episcopal Church. Harris was elected on September 24, 1988 by the nation's largest episcopal diocese, the Diocese of Massachusetts.

In a statement distributed to Boston delegates before the voting began Harris said, if elected, she would contribute "my peculiar gifts as a black woman and as a woman priest" to the diocese. Harris' election is the latest move by the episcopal church toward opening its top ranks to women.

Career workshop slated

The Knoxville Women's Center is sponsoring a Career Decision Making Workshop on Thursday, December 1 from 7-9 p.m. and Saturday, December 3 from 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. The focus of the workshop will be on career identification through evaluation of skill, interests, aptitudes and personality assessment. Resume writing and developing interviewing and job hunting skills will also be covered. The cost of the workshop is $30. For more information contact the Knoxville Women's Center at 546-1873.

CFW meeting set

The Commission for Women has scheduled its next meeting for Thursday, December 1 at noon in the University Center. CFW meetings are open to the public. For more information, contact the CFW at 974-4739.

Networker seeks input

The Networker is a newsletter which addresses issues relevant to women. We try to include news items and announcements that will be of interest to women on campus. If you have an announcement or would like to see a particular issue addressed, contact Carol Guthrie at 974-4739. The deadline for the next Networker is January 6, 1989.

Don't ignore personal safety

Campus safety continues to be a concern among students, faculty and staff. While extra efforts are being made by the Dean of Students Office and the Police Department to upgrade safety measures on campus, we must not forget our own role in protecting ourselves. Be aware of personal safety. Don't walk alone at night. Avoid dark areas of campus. Utilize the van escort service. Always lock doors. Remember, don't make yourself an easy target for attack.

Brown Bag Luncheon scheduled

The Commission for Women is sponsoring a Brown Bag Luncheon on January 17, in the Crest Room of the University Center. For more information about the speaker and topic, contact the CFW at 974-4739.

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For additional information concerning Women's Studies, contact Dr. Martha Lee Osborne at 974-2409 or 974-7212.
ACE-NIP works to advance women in administration

The American Council on Education's National Identification Program (ACE-NIP) was formed in 1977 to help increase the recognition and promotion of highly qualified women administrators in education. The goal of ACE-NIP is to bring women of high ability and potential from all ethnic backgrounds into contact with seasoned administrators and leaders in education, government, and the private sector in a cooperative effort to assist women to advance.

ACE-NIP is one of the primary ways by which the American Council on Education Office of Women addresses its primary goal of advancing talented women in academic administration.

The Tennessee ACE-NIP engages in state-wide activities designed to encourage women at all levels of their professional careers. Tennessee ACE-NIP sponsors periodic state-wide conferences and regional programs designed to bring together administrators and those interested in developing careers in educational administration to focus on topics of mutual interest.

The goals and priorities of Tennessee ACE-NIP are set by a Tennessee State Planning Committee made up of representatives from the various higher education sectors within the state. Included on this committee are a network of campus representatives throughout the state who assist in bringing events sponsored by Tennessee ACE-NIP to the attention of women at each state college and university. Tennessee ACE-NIP invites and encourages academic women to participate in its various programs and activities.

Tennessee ACE-NIP is not a formal organization and there are no dues. Women who wish to be identified are asked to complete an affiliation form available on campus from state coordinator Mary Jo Hoover.

For further information, contact Hoover at the College of Law, phone 974-6790.