

Wellesley

WHERE SCIENCE TAKES ROOT

THE MARGARET C. FERGUSON GREENHOUSES




WELLESLEY CENTERS FOR WOMEN: 35 YEARS OF ADVOCACY FOR WOMEN

This is a landmark year for the Wellesley Centers for Women: 2009–10 marks its 35th year of conducting research on women, the education and care of children, and the well-being of families. WCW also launched a \$3.5 million fund drive, the first in 10 years, aimed at spendable funds to keep its work on the cutting edge. And Susan McGee Bailey '63—the longtime executive director whose name has been synonymous with the Centers for 25 years—announced that she would be retiring at the end of the drive, in December 2010.

Bailey sat down with the magazine to look back—and ahead.

The Centers' mission is to conduct research with women's perspectives at the center and ensure that this work influences public policies and programs. Can you describe the path from research-on-paper to social progress?


 The mission has always been to look carefully at issues of importance to women and their children. We don't think that all women are the same, we don't think that all women's issues are the same, but we do believe that when you look at issues using women's eyes or experiences, sometimes the questions are different than those that would be asked otherwise. And if you don't ask the right question, the answer doesn't matter very much.

It's also very important to do careful scholarly research. But you have to make sure it reaches people who can implement the findings, change laws, and implement new practices or programs. A strictly university-based academic research project might see as its end goal developing some findings and publishing it in scholarly journals. That's certainly one of our goals. But beyond that, the work has to get off the shelf and into the public domain if it's going to influence changes in society.

I can give you an example of when we felt we've done that, in the area of school-age child care. When the project now known as the National Institute on Out-of-School Time was founded in 1979, no one was talking about latchkey children. Everyone just assumed that children were at home, taken care of by their mothers. It was not on the public agenda at all. Now, it's a major topic of public-policy consideration. We certainly haven't gotten where we ought to: We don't have high-quality affordable care for children before

and after school, for example. But particularly in the area of after-school care, the work that the Centers did helped put the issue on the public agenda. When the Clinton White House held a summit on after-school care, Michelle Seligson, who founded and directed that project until her retirement, was one of the lead organizers and keynote speakers at the conference.

In 1974, the wage gap had women earning 59 cents on the dollar. Where do we stand today?

 Women are now earning 78 cents on the dollar. We've made some progress, but we certainly haven't reached equity. The idea of women going to medical school or law school, starting businesses, or working outside the home—these are completely accepted today and not seen as unusual.

Where we haven't made as much progress is on issues related to work/family balance: Women are working, but women are still doing the majority of caregiving in the home. We certainly haven't reached equity in terms of pay. Only 15 of the Fortune 500 companies are headed by women. Job segregation is still quite extreme: Women are concentrated in the lower paying, service, or caregiving jobs. Even when you look at higher-paid professions that

are traditionally thought of as women's jobs, 83 percent of librarians and 92 percent of nurses are women. So we still have a great deal of gender segregation in the workplace and gendered assumptions about appropriate roles for men and women. I think that it is just as important to look at what is happening in terms of changing men's roles, because until men's roles change and what is assumed and expected of men, women's roles aren't going to change.

Because so many of the *former* barriers confronting women have tumbled, it's easy to assume that progress is inevitable and that things will just keep moving forward. But I think that's a dangerous assumption. We can go backward as well as forward, and it requires eternal vigilance.

Where will the Centers' focus be in coming years?

 Global issues have always been something that people at the Centers were involved in. But since 1995, we've been trying to build even further on our international work. We have UN status as an NGO, which is not usually granted to an educational institution. So while we are every bit a part of Wellesley College, we also function in some ways as a nongovernmental organization.

Our goal in our international work is to be an integral part of the global women's movement, to learn from what women are doing in other countries, as well as share resources and perspectives from our work. We believe that learning what women are doing in other countries will strengthen our domestic work. We are not developing projects where we send a group of people from our Centers overseas: Rather, we connect with women leaders in NGOs, government, and business in

WCW AT A GLANCE

About **100** full- and part-time staff members
45 research and action projects
3 postdoctoral research fellows
5 undergraduate interns
\$6.8 million annual budget



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—Susan McGee Bailey '63, executive director, Wellesley Centers for Women

developing countries to try to help support and strengthen their work. Among our international projects, two are particularly exciting. The first is to mainstream disability rights with the movement for women's and children's rights in order to maximize the effectiveness of all three efforts. We also have a new network of women leaders in countries where Islam is the state religion, or where large communities are governed by religious laws, to connect these women and help them network with each other.

Speaking of the future of the Centers, many of the issues we've been working on for 35 years (issues of child care, work/family balance, social

emotional health) remain. But I think we can learn from and grow by looking at what women are doing in other countries and incorporating this knowledge in our work here at home.

—JF

More about the Centers (including the \$3.5 million fund drive and its goals of achieving equity in education, advancing women's economic status, and promoting human rights and women's leadership around the world) can be found at <http://wcwonline.org>.

35 YEARS FOR WELLESLEY CENTERS FOR WOMEN

RESEARCH AND ACTION

- 1974–75** Center for Research on Women (CRW) founded
- 1979** School-Age Child Care Project founded, now known as the National Institute on Out-of-School Time (<http://www.wcwonline.org/nioist>)
- 1981** Stone Center for Developmental Services and Studies established to promote sound emotional health through research, education, and counseling. (Its mental-health counseling remains closely tied to undergraduate life, while the theoretical, educational, and research aspects are part of the WCW.)
- 1983** *Women's Review of Books* launched (<http://www.wcwonline.org/womensreview>)
- 1987** National SEED (Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity) Project on Inclusive Curriculum founded (<http://www.wcwonline.org/seed>)
- 1992** *How Schools Shortchange Girls* published, Susan McGee Bailey '63, principal author (<http://www.wcwonline.org/publications>)
- 1995** CRW and Stone Center join to become the Wellesley Centers for Women
WCW scholars participate in the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing
- 2001** WCW receives NGO status from the United Nations
- 2007** WCW and UNICEF cosponsor a conference in Bangkok on the rights of Asian women and children
- 2009** WCW launches 35th-anniversary fund drive for \$3.5 million, to run through December 2010



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