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10-22-2021

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Recommended Citation

Zodrow, Andru, "The Gender Justice Center Looks Forward to the New Academic Year" (2021). *The Spectator Online*. 440.

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The Gender Justice Center Looks Forward to the New Academic Year

Andru Zodrow , Managing Editor

The COVID-19 pandemic led to a bare-bones 2019-2020 school year, without the opportunity for clubs to gather at pre-pandemic capacity. Seattle University's Gender Justice Center is embracing the new year with a spirit of renewal after a strenuous year.

Gender Justice Center leader Isabella Maffei, a third-year student studying public affairs and political science, is excited to reopen the office on the main floor of Chardin Hall, which was not available to students last year.

"We are definitely in a reboot year, just because we were not very active last year because of the pandemic. Our goal is to create a safe space for everyone on campus and have some good events which promote the center," Maffei said.

The Gender Justice Center hosts conversations about gender justice issues and promotes gender equality through various forms of event programming.

"We are considering doing a clothing swap later in the year, we do hygiene product drives and we hold community talks around different issues surrounding gender," Maffei said.

Gender Justice Center leader Keira Cruickshank, a fourth-year student studying sociology, creative writing and Spanish, underscored the importance of overcoming gender disparities in a holistic and inclusive manner.

"We are asking students what they need from the Gender Justice Center, because as a resource center for transgender, non-conforming, female and gender diverse students, having resources that are supportive of what they need is one of our goals," Cruickshank said.

The center, which was renewed at Seattle U in 2017, promotes trans-inclusivity and liberation from gendered marginalization by creating a physical space for students to find community.

Club participant Audrey Graves, a fourth-year psychology student, described how the creation of gender inclusive spaces occurs.

"Being around people who are very open-minded, and taking time out of our days to support one another," Graves said.

Inter-communal dialogue and support has been a consistent ethic of the center, which has held student poetry performances, sex education workshops and hosted advocates including current Seattle City Council candidate Nikkita Oliver.



“Having the physical space is wonderful for us to achieve this because it’s a place where we can meet up regularly and try to build community,” Graves said.

Maffei highlighted the importance of the center promoting growth this year as a key to the club’s future success.

“We are definitely hunting for new voices and new leaders to join the club, and also new members,” Maffei said.

The club plans on hosting an event Nov. 10, in addition to visiting C-Street and Campion, to promote the center’s visibility.

Cruickshank hopes to attract new first and second-year participants.

“Making connections and reaching out to people is a challenge. Basically, everyone is new to campus or hasn’t been on campus in the past year,” Cruickshank said.

There are no prerequisite skills or experiences needed to be a part of the center, and those from all backgrounds and gender identities are invited to participate. The center leadership views this as a critical component to the organization’s success.

“Anyone can get involved ... and we are also looking to have more people involved with attending and leading events, so everyone is welcome,” Cruickshank said.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the club plans on hosting hybrid events and in-person programming. Maffei outlined the center’s accessibility and resources and emphasized the importance of community access.

“We try to make it as accessible as possible and try to keep it open as much as we can, and provide free hygiene products and even have a food pantry for folks, so your needs can be met here, which is great,” Maffei said.

Cruickshank highlighted that the center is not merely a set of public programs, but a place where students can seek support and push for larger change in the community.

“We have been talking about working on mutual aid projects, that is what a lot of people have been expressing interest in—both creating a strong community here and also finding ways to be involved with the larger community,” Cruickshank said.

As the campus community reopens to physical interactions and offices are dusted off after a year of dormancy, the Gender Justice Center is re-emerging as a space for support, dialogue and advocacy. Their presence on campus will continue to serve as an integral resource for transgender, non-conforming and female students as the campus, community and country continue to grapple with institutional inequity.