Douglass Residential College’s 1st Annual Global Summit on Women’s Health and Dignity for the 21st Century

“The Global Summit has made me remember to realize the importance of not treating people as objects, but as human beings. Humans everywhere have values that are important to them and we should not let our own values prevent people from making their own decisions.” – Student Reflection from the Douglass Global Summit Evaluation

Overview

Douglass Residential College hosted its first annual Douglass Global Summit on November 22, 2014 at the Douglass Student Center at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. The event, which was cosponsored by the Rutgers Centers for Global Advancement and International Affairs (GAIA Centers), the Rutgers Institute for Women’s Leadership, and the Rutgers Douglass Campus Dean, brought together over 250 individuals to learn about, share ideas on, and create possible solutions to global women’s health challenges. This year’s theme was Women’s Health and Dignity for the 21st Century, which was reflected throughout the day’s events.

The daylong student driven Global Summit included a keynote, panels, breakout sessions, and a student contest. Additionally, the Douglass Global Village Public Health House exhibited a photo display reflective of women’s health; and the Women and Creativity House led the nine Douglass Global Village Learning Communities in a program-wide collaborative performance referencing performance works by artists Yoko Ono and Marina Abramovic, among others.

The event galvanized the Rutgers student body to respond to global health disparities and to critically voice their concerns on a number of important women’s rights issues in the United States and worldwide, which included: sexual violence, domestic work and the care economy, sex education, maternal health, LGBT rights, and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Keynote

The keynote address by Dr. Nafis Sadik was delivered by three Douglass student leaders (Patrice Williams, 2016; Srividya Malladi, 2016; and Michelle Muska, 2015). Unfortunately, Dr. Sadik was unable to attend due to medical circumstances. The speech highlighted the significance of women’s health in the context of the MDGs and the 20th anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development. To promote and respect human rights, Dr. Sadik wrote, is the “difference between people as objects, and people as agents: between regarding people as pawns on the policy chessboard, and recognising them as the players, the decision-makers, the
drivers of policy; autonomous individuals intimately concerned with the direction of their own lives.” She also provided thoughts on the ways in which this generation can build on the progress that has been achieved over the last twenty years. She called on the Global Summit attendees to: 1) understand that gender is not a niche or minority issue; 2) remember that words are meaningless without action; and 3) insist on zero tolerance for gender discrimination. These powerful suggestions resonated with attendees throughout the day.

“The Douglass Effect”

Following the keynote, Dr. Francis Barchi, Professor in the Rutgers School of Social Work, led her students in a presentation on The Undergraduate as a Global Citizen: Student Attitudes and Engagement on Global Issues at Rutgers University. In the spring 2014 semester, Dr. Barchi’s class interviewed a sample population of Rutgers University undergraduates and assessed their perceptions and engagement on global women’s health issues. They presented their results at the Global Summit. It was clear from this panel that Rutgers University comprises a growing global community, but what was especially noteworthy was how the Douglass community plays a significant part in global engagement on campus. Apparently, Douglass students are more inclined to grasp global issues and are more active on campus promoting social justice issues than other Rutgers students. The term the “Douglass Effect” was coined to demonstrate the impact that Douglass Residential College has on students’ enhanced global perspectives.

Breakout Sessions

Over lunch, students and guests attended breakout sessions facilitated by experts on a wide-range of subjects, including:

- Maternal Health: Access, Solutions, and Education; led by Michele Y. Molano, Executive Director, Global Women’s Health, Merck / MSD
- Global Reaches of Campus Activism; led by Kaila Boulware (2015), Antoinette Gingerelli, (2017), and Madison Little, (2016)
- Sustaining Women's Health in the Age of Climate Change; led by Yeniva Mass and Lora Minicucci, Women’s Environment and Development Organization (WEDO)
- Beyond the Media: Gender & the Economics of Ebola; led by Professor Tefera Gezmu, Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy

Contest

In the afternoon, attendees watched in admiration as thirteen undergraduate students vied for cash prizes during the contest on the twentieth anniversary of the United Nations International Conference on Population and Development. Students connected their presentation to themes of sustainability, governance and accountability, human rights and dignity, place and mobility, and health. During the presentations, summit attendees were asked by the contestants to take a personal pledge to end gender-based violence, write and call elected officials to stop the shackling of pregnant women in jail, critically grapple with cultural relativism, and understand the importance of the care economy. Contestants regarded their presentations as an opportunity to create social change and to garner support for issues that they are passionate about.
The contest judges were Yeniva Mass, from WEDO; Tefera Gezmu, a Professor at the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy’s Public Health Program; and Karen D’Alonzo, the Associate Dean for the PhD Program & Associate Professor, Division of Nursing Science. They deliberated on the finalists based on a set of criteria that graded the presentations on their form and content.

The winners were as follows:

- **1st place**: Radhika Srivastava 2015, Biology  
  Health Outcomes of Female Family Caretakers
- **2nd place**: Yamiesha Bell 2015, Political Science, Africana Studies, Women’s & Gender Studies  
  The Shackling of Our Mothers: The Attack on Womanhood in NJ Prisons and Jails
- **3rd place**: Sarah Stern 2015, Social Work; Social Justice  
  Sexual Empowerment of University Women: Mobilizing Against Rape Culture
- **Honourable mention**: Kaila Boulware 2015, Public Health; Raven Jenerson 2017, Social Work  
  Recognize, Educate, and Deliver: END Sexual Assault

**Conclusion**

The Global Summit offered Rutgers University a space to grapple with global problems and consider themselves as active participants in creating solutions. At the conclusion of Dr. Sadik’s Keynote in the morning, attendees were given one piece of advice:

> In your future lives, you should not aim too low. You can achieve a world without extreme poverty – but that simple achievement should be only the first step. You should aim to move on from there, towards truly equitable, sustainable development, and full human rights for everyone. That’s a lofty ambition, but it can be done. It starts with you all assembled here today, each one of you working individually, and all of you working together.

Douglass women and the Rutgers University student body are of the generation that will be advocating for women’s rights in the post-2015 development era and this summit provided them with the building blocks to ensure that gender equality is realized in the 21st century. The event inspired future global leaders to make a difference in their communities and to improve the health and dignity of women and girls worldwide.