

UCLA
CSW Update Newsletter

Title

Bruin Feminists for Equality Go to Washington

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/46t49187>

Authors

Petersen, Miranda
Duran, Myra
Le, Cindy

Publication Date

2010-05-01

BRUIN FEMINISTS FOR EQUALITY GO TO WASHINGTON

UCLA Students Attend Feminist Majority Foundation's National Young Women's Leadership Conference

by Miranda Petersen, Myra Duran, and Cindy Le

Over spring break three members of the student group, Bruin Feminists for Equality, were given the opportunity to attend the Feminist Majority Foundation's National Young Women's Leadership conference in Washington, DC, with the generous help of the Center for the Study of Women. The three of us, Miranda Petersen, Myra Duran,

and Cindy Le, participated in this three-day event that focused on a broad range of issues facing the next generation of young women in the United States and around the world. The conference featured speakers such as Eleanor Smeal, former president of the National Organization of Women (NOW) and current president of the Feminist Majority Foundation



from left to right: Myra Duran, Cindy Le, and Miranda Petersen

(FMF); Shelby Knox, who was the subject of a documentary on abstinence-only education in Texas, "The Education of Shelby Knox"; and Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-Washington, DC).

The timing of our trip to the nation's capital could not have been more serendipitous, as it ended up being the same

weekend that historic health care reform bill was passed by the U.S. Senate. The energy of the conference was extremely tense as the Stupak Amendment resurfaced, and our morning assembly was paused while conference attendees placed desperate calls to Congress members to make sure it would not be included in the final bill. In addition to the events surrounding health care reform, we were able to join more than a hundred thousand people in a historic march on Capitol Hill demanding comprehensive immigration reform.

The conference itself included several workshops on issues such as the re-introduction of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), birth control access, women in the media, and campus organizing. In addition, one of our members, Myra Duran, was asked to speak on a panel (see *photo*) about her own experience going undercover at a Crisis Pregnancy Center (CPC), and the insidious ways in which these centers carry out their anti-abortion agenda by misleading pregnant women and posing as comprehensive reproductive clinics.



While most of the workshops provided at the conference centered around topics most relevant to the FMF's own interests, there was one workshop that we felt was refreshing in its break from the norm: "Immigration Reform as a Feminist Issue". We were surprised and encouraged to see the FMF focusing on an issue which has not traditionally been viewed as a "feminist issue," although it is one that has strong implications for women in this country, and had personal relevance to many of the people attending the conference. A testament

to this was the popularity of the session, which packed a large room and drew many questions and emotional responses.

The workshop, titled "Access Denied: Women, Immigration Reform, and Reproductive Justice", focused on many immigration issues that have not only been neglected in the feminist discourse, but in the immigration debates as well. For example, Veronica Bayetti Flores of the National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health spoke about the human rights abuses that women in the

**LEAVING THIS CONFERENCE,
WE ARE MOTIVATED TO
EXPLORE NEW WAYS TO
ENGAGE OUR PEERS IN
DIALOGUE ABOUT WHAT
FEMINISM MEANS IN OUR
OWN LIVES, AND TO EXPAND
THE DEFINITION OF WHAT
CONSTITUTES A “FEMINIST
ISSUE.”**

country illegally have faced while giving birth, including incidents of women being handcuffed to their hospital beds during labor, women who developed infections from not being allowed to breastfeed or pump, and women whose children were immediately removed and placed in foster care against the mothers' wishes. She also spoke of transgender issues within the immigration debate, telling stories of transgender immigrants who have died in jail because their AIDS medication had been withheld. These are just a few stories out of many that highlight the importance of women's and LGBT issues within the larger need for immigration reform.

Attending this workshop stirred conflicting thoughts about the focus of larger feminist organizations, such as FMF and NOW, and emphasized the need to expand on issues beyond the traditional feminist areas of employment and reproductive rights. While it was inspiring to see young women from across the country collaborate and organize around feminist issues, younger generations have new challenges they must face, and the older feminist organizations are in need of catching up. We hope that FMF's expansion

on issues like immigration reform is a trend that will continue, because it is an attitude that is absolutely vital to keeping feminism alive in our younger generation.

Leaving this conference, we are motivated to explore new ways to engage our peers in dialogue about what feminism means in our own lives, and to expand the definition of what constitutes a “feminist issue.” We are determined to continue expanding our own conceptions of feminism to more fully and accurately include issues such as immigration and civil rights, LGBTQ rights, and class and race inequality. This conference was an amazing experience, one that has energized our existing feminist passions, as well as sparked new and exciting interests that we hope can be reflected through the organizing of Bruin Feminists for Equality.