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# Womens

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VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY

The monthly newsletter of the Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center

May 2009, Volume 31, Issue 8

## Women Face the Biggest Hardships in this Economic Recession

by Stacy Nunnally  
director, Gender Matters

**It's May.** This is a month that typically signals celebrations like graduations, weddings, Mother's Day and the advent of summer. And though our celebrations will continue, we cannot ignore the looming and ominous being that is lurking over all of us... the economy. The economy; the economic downturn; the recession... whatever media buzz word is used, it is apparent that it has taken on a life of its own. Across the country, the world and the campus of Vanderbilt, we cannot find shelter from this creature that seemingly has all of us trapped in its midst.

**Here is the quick snapshot of the latest doom and gloom.** According to the March 2009, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Facts and Statistics, the economy has lost 3.6 million jobs since December 2007 (over 1.8 million jobs of those are recent losses). The U.S. has not seen this many job losses over such a short period of time since 1945 (Center for American Progress, Women and the Economy Facts and Statistics, February

2009). According to new data released by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 12.5 million workers are now unemployed. Unemployed Americans are finding it very difficult to find work. In fact it is estimated that one in four unemployed workers have been out of work and searching for a job for at least six months (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 59.9% of Americans hold a job, which is lower than any time since 1985. In Tennessee, the unemployment rate as of February 2009 is 9%. It was 6% in February 2008 (Kaiser Family Foundation, State Health Facts Online, March 28, 2009).

We all hear the overviews of the economy and its effect on America as a whole. But there does not seem to be a breakdown in the media analysis specifically on how women are fairing in these tough economic times. So *Women's VU* did some research to help answer the question, "How is 'the economy' affecting women?" We broke down the research into the following categories.

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William Aaron Pathfinder for Outstanding Community Service honoree, Ashley Walker, with presenter Lilly Massa-McKinley and fellow recipient Vanessa Rodriguez. Photo credit: Andrea Wall, Dean of Students

## Women's Center Student Leaders Honored at Magnolia Awards Dinner

The annual Magnolia Awards Dinner was held April 1st to honor student leaders whose activities have impacted the Vanderbilt campus. Among those honored that evening were several student leaders who have been a part of the Women's Center community. We would like to highlight their achievements and wish them well on their continued academic future.

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## MCWC Bids Farewell to our Librarian, Barbara Clarke

For almost nineteen years, **Barbara Clarke** has served the Women's Center in her capacity as librarian and in-house historian. She has been a witness to the many changes on campus regarding women's rights, as well as the many incarnations of women's center staff. Through all of this she has never lost her sense of humor or perspective, often making us laugh with her sharp wit and common sense. It is with a heavy heart that we say farewell to her, not knowing what will become of the Women's Center library. As of press time, no

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Our beloved librarian, Barbara Clarke (center), flanked by the two Women's Center Directors she faithfully served, Dr. Nancy Ransom (left, 1978-1997), and Dr. Linda Manning (right, 1997-2008). Photo: Misa Culley

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## Women's Center Student Leaders Honored at Magnolia Awards Dinner

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**Sarah O'Donohue** was awarded the Nora C. Chaffin Scholarship at the 2009 Magnolia Awards. This award was established in 1956 by the Women's Student Government Association in appreciation of the former Dean of Women's twenty years of service to Vanderbilt women students. A \$2,000 award is given to a (rising) junior who "has displayed service the University in the areas of student government, religious, literary and scholastic activities and in the arts."



Sarah O'Donohue received the Nora C. Chaffin Scholarship by presenter Courtney Salters. Photo credit: Andrea Wall, Dean of Students

**Ashley Walker** was awarded the William Aaron Pathfinder Award for Outstanding Community Service. This award acknowledges juniors or seniors whose uncommon community service efforts and leadership skills demonstrate vision, creativity, and innovation. This award, named in recognition of William Aaron '89, whose own pathfinding led to the creation of the Office of Volunteer Activities—now the Office of Active Citizenship and Service—celebrates Vanderbilt University's extraordinary history of service to the community. The recipients each receive a \$250 honorarium.

The Women's Center presented the Muliebrity prize to two students at the 2009 Magnolia Awards: **Elizabeth Claydon** and **Jennifer Risper**. Muliebrity means simply, "the state of being a woman." This award was established in 1996 by Vanderbilt

undergraduate students to keep comment alive on the fact that the state of being a woman in today's society is sometimes still quite a challenge. The Muliebrity Prize includes a \$250 check and framed certificate. It goes annually to an undergraduate student(s) who demonstrates leadership in activities that contribute to the achievements, interests, and goals of women and girls or that promote gender equity.

**Elizabeth Claydon** is a fourth year student in Peabody College. She will be graduating in May with a BA in Child Development and Medicine, Health and Society. Although Elizabeth has worked and volunteered in several areas on campus to



Muliebrity Award winners Elizabeth Claydon and Jennifer Risper with presenters, nominators and friends. Photo credit: Andrea Wall, Dean of Students

create positive change for women, a majority of her focus has been on eating disorders and body image. She has been an officer of the student group, IMAGE, for four years. In that time, Elizabeth has increased the presence of IMAGE on our campus by bringing in national speakers, increasing activities and creating more awareness around Love Your Body Day and Eating Disorder Awareness Week. Elizabeth is passionate about engaging our campus in dialogue about eating disorders and body image. Her commitment to women's health and advocacy is exceptional. We at the Women's Center have been honored to collaborate with her and are very proud to award this prize to Elizabeth.

**Jennifer Risper** is a fourth year student in Peabody College. Her list of accomplishments within the game of basketball is long and distinguished. She is captain of Vanderbilt's amazing (sweet 16) women's basketball team and was recently named defensive player of the year by the Women's Basketball Coaches Association. In a world where women's sports are often understated, underrated and underrepresented, Jennifer has a huge fan following. Many of her fans are young women and girls who look up to Jennifer as a role model, and who can see possibilities for themselves through Jennifer's accomplishments. This alone would qualify her for the Muliebrity Award. However, Jennifer's leadership and advocacy exist off the court as well. At Vanderbilt, she is the female basketball team's representative on the Athletes Against Assault Task Force. Through this role, Jennifer works to prevent violence against women on campus through advocacy and education. In addition, she dedicates her time outside of academics and basketball to service to several organizations, especially those whose mission involves mentoring girls and young women. She works with these young women on acquiring positive life skills and bolstering confidence and self-esteem. She understands that the best leaders do so in service to others. The Women's Center is honored to present this award to Jennifer who inspires young female athletes and non-athletes alike.

**Women's VU** is published monthly August through May at the Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN.

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**Deadline for newsletter:** Submissions are due on the 1st of the month preceding publication.



# Women Face Hardships in the Economic Recession

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## **Jobs and Unemployment:**

- Women who are heads of households have a higher unemployment rate than that of men and women in general (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics).
- Unemployed women are less likely than unemployed men to receive unemployment insurance benefits because of eligibility rules that disproportionately disqualify women (Institute for Women's Policy Research, September 2007)
- The compromise stimulus package that was passed by Congress cuts assistance to some programs that employ higher numbers of women (National Women's Law Center, March 2009). One example is the cut in the amount of assistance which goes to state governments. Six in 10 state workers are women (Center for American Progress). It is foreseeable that as state revenues fall, women will bear the greater proportion of the impending layoffs.
- The compromise stimulus package also provides for job creation in areas and fields typically underrepresented by women. For example, many of the immediate job creation projects are in construction labor which employs only 3.2% women (National Association of Women in Construction, NAWIC Facts, February 2008).

## **Housing and Mortgages:**

- One in nine mortgages is delinquent or in foreclosure. According to the National Women's Law Center, women are over-represented in the subprime housing market. Even though credit scores are equal or slightly better than men's, it is estimated that women are 30% to 40% more likely than men to have a subprime mortgage loan (National Women's Law Center). Thus the risks of increasing mortgage payments and foreclosures are greater for women.

## **Family Planning:**

- Loss of jobs often results in loss of health insurance. And even those who maintain health insurance may still have to make decisions between food and prescriptions. Things like birth control may seem too expensive. Planned Parenthood clinics are reporting increases in the number of clients seeking their gynecological and family planning services. High costs of contraceptives are an economic barrier that can lead to unintended pregnancies. And availability of contraceptives can be a challenge for those in rural or remote areas who might face transportation as well as economic challenges (Planned Parenthood Federation of America, "Affordable Birth Control," March 11, 2009).

## **Economic Insecurity:**

- One in 8 women in the United States is considered poor. This is more than 14.1 million women. Women are 40% more likely to live in poverty than men (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics).
- In Tennessee, 350,681 of the 631,494 people living in poverty are women (Kaiser Family Foundation). The 2007 poverty threshold for a family of four in the U.S. in 2007 was \$20,6501. (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics)
- Women working full time, year round, earn 23% less than their male counterparts. In Tennessee a woman makes around 74 cents for every man's dollar (Tennessee Economic Council on Women, "The Gender Wage Gap," October 2008).
- The median income of female-headed families with children is 57% less than the median income of all families with children (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics). Eight out of ten single-parent

families are headed by women (Hartmann, Heidi, "The Impact of the Current Economic Downturn on Women" Institute for Women's Policy Research, June 6, 2008). Single mothers are especially vulnerable to job loss because they cannot fall back on a spouse's income (National Women's Law Center).

- Energy and food prices have been on the rise. Between December 2006 and December 2007, energy prices rose 17.4% and food prices rose 4.9 percent (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Price Index, December 2007).

## **Work/ Life Balance:**


- In recent years, some attention to and improvements in work/life balance issues have been achieved. However, given the recession, I wonder if the economy will be used as an excuse to take back some of those successes. In 2006, 53% of employees felt they had a good work-life balance; that number fell to 30% in the first quarter of 2009 (BusinessWeek, March 27, 2009).
- The recession is threatening flexibility in the work place. Workers may feel pressured to give up work/life benefits like telecommuting and flex time (Shin, Annys, "As Cuts Loom, Will Working from Home Lead to a Layoff?" Washington Post, March 23, 2009). Management of varying levels may be heard saying, "You are lucky to have a job" (Shin, Annys).
- This is happening despite the fact that those who feel they have better work-life balance tend to work 21% harder than those who don't and that truly affects the bottom line (BusinessWeek, March 27, 2009).
- Employers should note that maintaining work/life balance does not have to be an expensive endeavor. Only 20% of employees use things like on-site gyms or health care service. The gift of time is actually the most appealing and most appreciated by employees. Over 60% of employees polled in a recent Corporate Executive Board study identified flexible schedules as the most important work-life balance program they could provide.


## **Retirement:**

- Benefits actually began decreasing before the economic crisis hit the media's radar. The share of private sector workers with a pension dropped from 50.3% in 2000 to 45.1% in 2007 (Center for American Progress). Both men and women have experienced a significant drop in their retirement savings due to recent losses in the stock market. But there is no doubt that women have significantly lower retirement savings than men (Hoffman, Ellen, "Can Women Bridge the Retirement Gap?" BusinessWeek, August 8, 2008).
- Women still do not obtain the same retirement benefits as men. The gender gap often used to describe difference in wages is also prevalent in retirement benefits. There are several reasons used to explain this retirement gap: women are more likely to take time out of the workforce to act as a caregiver to family members; women are more likely to work in low-paying jobs, in part-time jobs, or in jobs that do not provide retirement benefits (Center for American Progress). In addition women who work outside of the home could have an average loss of \$434,000 in earnings over 40 years due to pay inequities. These things can perpetuate the gap in retirement benefits and can cause women to experience higher rates of poverty in retirement (Hoffman).

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May 2009

 denotes Project Safe programming

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
					1	2
3	4	5 <i>Creative Life Planning Group, 11:30am-1:00pm</i>	6	7 <i>Vandy Moms: 11:30am-12:30pm</i> <b>MCWC celebrates our graduating student workers, 2:30-4:30pm, at the Women's Center</b>	8	9
10	11 <i>Book Group, 5:15pm-6:15pm</i>	12 <i>Creative Life Planning Group, 11:30am-1:00pm</i>	13	14	15	16
17	18	19 <i>Creative Life Planning Group, 11:30am-1:00pm</i>	20	21 <i>Vandy Moms: 11:30am-12:30pm</i>	22	
24 / 31	25	26 <i>Creative Life Planning Group, 11:30am-1:00pm</i>	27	28	29	

For details and descriptions of each group, please refer our website. Unless specified, most groups meet at the Women's Center.

May 2009

**MARGARET CUNINGGIM WOMEN'S CENTER CELEBRATES OUR GRADUATING STUDENTS**

At the Women's Center, we could not accomplish all that we do without the efforts of our student groups and student workers. Several of the students with whom we work are graduating, and we want one last chance to celebrate them and the work that they do. We invite the graduating student workers and students of Peer Educators, Every Two Minutes, AAA Task Force, L.I.F.E. Project and Vandy Feminists (and their families) to join us for a reception to reflect, talk and celebrate.

**Date:** May 7th from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m.  
**Location:** The Gallery at the Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center; Vanderbilt University  
For more information, please contact stacy.nunnally@vanderbilt.edu

**REGULAR GROUPS AND MEETINGS**

(Groups are listed alphabetically and are all sponsored or co-sponsored by the Women's Center.)

**BOOK GROUP**

Meets the second Monday of each month; 5:15-6:15 p.m.  
**What/Who:** The book group is open to new members at all times and is for anyone who loves to read. The following

books will be discussed this summer, so get a headstart!  
**May 11: *Lighting the Way: Nine Women Who Changed Modern America*** by Karenn Gore Schiff, led by Carmen Gherman

**June 8: *The Samurai's Garden*** by Gail Tsukiyama, led by Terry Rettberg

**July 13: *Eurydice Street: A Place in Athens*** by Sofka Zinovieff, led by Anne Spooner

**Where:** The Gallery at the Women's Center, Vanderbilt  
For more information, contact Jane Du Bose at jdbose@bellsouth.net or Carmen Gherman at cggherman@yahoo.com.

**CREATIVE LIFE PLANNING GROUP**

Meets every Tuesday; 11:30 a.m.-1:00 p.m.  
**What/Who:** A group for all dedicated to living life intentionally and creatively. Free and open to everyone and is usually attended by women between 40 and 90 years of age.  
**Where:** The Gallery at the Women's Center; Vanderbilt  
For more information, call 322-4843.

**VANDY MOMS**

Meets the 2nd & 4th Thursday of each month; 11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.  
**What/Who:** Open to all mothers of any age, partnered or single. This is a fun support network that provides advocacy for moms in the Vanderbilt and larger communities and provides programming to inform, empower and enrich.  
Please contact misa.culley@vanderbilt.edu for more information.

## Women Face Hardships in the Economic Recession

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- Social Security is an important program to both men and women. Without social security, over 66% of unmarried women over the age of 65 would fall below poverty lines. However there are gender gaps in Social Security benefits too. The Center for American Progress reports that women's median annual benefits reach only 70% of men's benefits (Hoffman).

This has just been a glimpse of the status of women in the United States. The compilation of statistics and facts listed above is by no means an all-encompassing look at the economic status of women. And I am definitely not an economist. This is just some of the information that could be obtained through basic research. There were, however, a couple of positive highlights that I was able to find along the way:

- A recent survey by the National Association of Women Business Owners reports that women-owned businesses are "holding their own." The report indicates that while women entrepreneurs are facing the same economic difficulties as other businesses, more than half say they have no plans to reduce employment and almost 25% say they actually plan to add jobs this year (National Association of Women Business Owners, Media and Stats section, Web: [www.nawbo.org](http://www.nawbo.org), April 2, 2009).
- The "opt-out revolution" myth was recently debunked. Heather Boushey, a senior economist on the Joint Economic Committee of Congress, said in a July 2008 *New York Times* article, "When we saw women starting to drop out in the early part of this decade, we thought it was the motherhood movement, women staying home to raise their kids. We did not think it was the economy, but when we looked into it, we realized that it was." According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, women are not working because there are not enough jobs. Women, like men, are experiencing downturns, layoffs, outsourcing, stagnant wages or the discouraging prospect of an outright pay cut (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics). It is great to have this myth that women "opt out" of the work place debunked. Unfortunately, it took a major economic recession to re-evaluate the research to see what was actually happening.

Hopefully the information compiled in this article gives an overview of how the economy is specifically affecting women and families. Of course, we are more than statistics. We are living, breathing people with real fears and concerns. One look at the website [MomsRising.org](http://MomsRising.org) will give you some of the first person, real stories from women all over the country who are doing what they can to maintain their families and pay for food. There are stories of women selling plasma weekly, who have become the sole wage earner in the family, and who are making choices between food and medicine. These stories of women across the nation verify that we are not just a summary of figures, facts and statistics. We are real, and we are in crisis.

### Stimulus Package and Gender Equity

As I was gathering the information and statistics for this article, I felt an increasing need to ask everyone to take action for women and for families. Pay attention to how the stimulus package is being spent. Make your voice heard to your state legislators about ensuring gender equity when dispersing funds to projects and job creation. Many states that are eligible to increase unemployment benefits through the stimulus package have not acted yet. Let state legislators know that this benefit is critical to women. And finally, let's all be

mindful of what is being cut. Programs and jobs are being cut that disproportionately affect women and families. Spending is not always a dirty word, especially in a recession. Strategic spending can be critical to the economic survival of women and families. Perhaps at no other time in our history have we been able to so clearly see the need for equity. Women need equal pay and equal benefits to achieve economic equality (and right now, just to achieve economic survival). With American families becoming ever more dependent on women's earnings and in this time of major economic downturn, we must hold fast to achieve this equity. (To contact your Tennessee state and federal representatives, please visit [www.capitol.tn.gov/legislators](http://www.capitol.tn.gov/legislators).)

*Stacy Nunnally directs the Gender Matters programming here at the Women's Center. She is on the steering committee for the Tennessee Economic Council for Women as well as the current Chair of the Board at Planned Parenthood. She can be reached at [stacy.nunnally@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:stacy.nunnally@vanderbilt.edu) or call (615) 322-6518.*

## MCWC Bids Farewell to our Librarian, Barbara Clarke

definitive plans have been made to continue the library as a resource or to dismantle it altogether. Some of you may also be aware that Barbara's talents as a librarian extend beyond our small jewel of a library; She assists the Center for Teaching, too. She is often here at the Women's Center in the early evenings, assisting students, staff and faculty with research questions. During her farewell reception, one first-year student named Kathy Makara shared this lovely story about meeting Barbara:

*"I had just flown into Nashville for three days to visit Vanderbilt and see if it was a place I could make a home for myself for two years. After visiting with the head of my department, and sitting in on a class, I had decided to wonder around campus to see if I could really "fit" here. It was a Friday, about 4:30p.m., when I see this little sign that says Women's Center, and I pop my head in the door to see if anyone is around. Barbara greets me with a smile, shows me around the women's center. Even though it is late in the day, she takes the time to answer all my questions and even has some of her own for me. She sends me on my way with a stack of information. She's the last person I talked to before leaving campus, and she sent me on my way with the feeling that I would be welcome back any time...and here I am one year later, saying goodbye to that smiling face."*

Most people might not be aware that the Women's Center here at Vanderbilt is well-respected throughout the country, often known for our groundbreaking programming. Most women's centers in the country, especially those at research universities like Vanderbilt, house a women's center library, making it possible for everyone to locate often hard-to-find books on women's history, the latest gender research, even little-known documentaries not often available in mainstream media sources. These small center libraries are essential to cutting-edge research.

We dedicate this issue to our friend and beloved colleague, Barbara Clarke. As editor of *Women's VU*, I rely on Barbara's eagle eyes to assist me in proofreading every month as well as her informative book reviews. We will miss her dearly and we know you will, too.

*submitted by Misa Culley, editor, Women's VU*

## Community Events and Volunteer Opportunities

**NASHVILLE NOW (NATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR WOMEN)** meets the 4th Monday of the month at the First Unitarian Universalist Church located at 1808 Woodmont Blvd., Nashville, 37215. Each meeting is from 6:30-8:30 p.m. and features networking and refreshments. These meetings are open to members, friends and those seeking more information. For additional details, contact [cynthianashnow@aol.com](mailto:cynthianashnow@aol.com) or 615-269-7141.

**Nashville CABLE** meets the 2nd Wednesday of each month from 11:30 a.m. – 1 p.m. For more information, contact [nashvillecable.org](http://nashvillecable.org)

### **VANDERBILT FACULTY & STAFF SUPPORT GROUP**

**What:** A weekly confidential support group for female Vanderbilt faculty and staff members who have been impacted by violence against women (dating/domestic violence, stalking, and sexual assault). Faculty and staff are welcome to attend at their leisure. No commitment required. Regular attendance is NOT required.

**When:** 12:00-1:30 p.m.

**Where:** Confidential, on-campus location

For more information, contact [vicky.basra@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:vicky.basra@vanderbilt.edu) or call 322-1333.



## Vagina Monologues Proceeds Boost Hardship Funds

In the last few years, the Women's Center has established several funds to assist women in times of need: the *Project Safe Violence Against Women Hardship Fund* provides monetary assistance to faculty, staff, and students who are victims of violence; *Finished Up* provides financial assistance to single mothers in the Vanderbilt undergraduate community.

This past February, Project Safe's production of *The Vagina Monologues* brought in \$7000 after covering all the production costs! The proceeds will be split between the Women's Center's Student Hardship Fund and the Faculty and Staff Hardship Fund. These monies represent a big financial boost to these newly established funds aimed at assisting women in dire need.

Please contact our office at (615) 322-4843 if you wish to donate to these funds or to our general programming fund. As always, we appreciate your support!

Have a wonderful and restful summer!

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### Women's VU is Going Green!

In an effort to save resources, *Women's VU* is now available for viewing on our website: [www.vanderbilt.edu/WomensCenter](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/WomensCenter)

- Go Green!** If you are interested in receiving *Women's VU* by e-mail, please contact [jeana.carlock@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:jeana.carlock@vanderbilt.edu).

A paper copy of *Women's VU* is also available and sent free, by request, to all members of the Vanderbilt community.

- Please send my free paper subscription to the address below.

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For all other mailing list changes, please contact [jeana.carlock@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:jeana.carlock@vanderbilt.edu)

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