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How Conservative Women are Reclaiming College Campuses



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To begin, I would like everyone to imagine a drawing of a woman dressed in a perfectly pristine gingham dress. She has an apron on and her hair is evenly curled. In one hand she's reading a recipe out of a book, and with the other she's stirring batter. But what's striking about this drawing is that she's connected to a machine that's popping out not one, not two, not three, but eleven babies. Yes, she is a "baby-making machine" and this is the way the conservative women's organization that I founded at *UVA* was portrayed on the cover of the liberal magazine only two weeks after we began.

The organization I founded is called the *Network of enlightened Women*, or *NeW*. It's a contrast to the well known feminist organization *NOW*, *The National Organization for Women*, and it is a book club for conservative women. As Mr. Gilliam mentioned, I started it a little over two years ago at *UVA* and since that time we've now grown into a national organization, and I'm excited to share that story with you today.

In the process of starting *NeW*, I've really learned that I'm not just an isolated individual who felt pushed out of the college campus's institutions just because I had traditional values; but really there's a lot of other women on college campuses that feel the same way. To give you an idea of what we were thinking about when we started the organization, I'd like to read to you three questions that I put on our first flyer all over grounds for our first interest meeting. The first question, "Enjoy discussing the *UVA* hookup culture?" Secondly, "Are you confused about politics?" And third, "Are you not sure how you're going to balance your work and family?" If these questions are troubling you, join the *Network of enlightened Women*.



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Now this all began about two years ago when I had the opportunity to intern for my Senator, Senator Lugar, in Washington D.C. It was a wonderful experience. I had a great opportunity to be surrounded by other conservative women and rather than just defend my conservative beliefs from attack, I really got to get into the nuisances of the argument through those discussions. So when I came back to UVA at the beginning of my junior year, I really sought out an environment to continue those discussions.

Now, if any of you follow the newspaper at UVA you'll see there's news stories all the time on all kinds of different organizations: there's a belly dancing club, an archery club, a power lifting club, debating societies, a National Organization of [for] Women Chapter. So I figured among these over 500 clubs at UVA there had to be something for conservative women -- but there was nothing.

So then I looked on colleges throughout the campuses all across the country. There's databases online so I was able to look them all up and see if there were any organizations like what I was looking for. But again, I could find nothing. So at this point I'm really thinking, okay, either this has been tried and tried and tried again and has just failed miserably -- you know, this group of the population just doesn't work to have a group for them, or, for some odd reason this has never been tried.

And then I thought of one more place I should look before I should just start an organization like this. So I approached the *Women's Center*. Now the "Women's Center" -- it's a pretty innocuous sounding name, the *Women's Center*. You'd think it would be open to all women. Well unfortunately that wasn't the case. I scheduled an appointment with the woman who is now -- and please remember this -- she is now the Director of Diversity at the *Women's Center*. I scheduled an appointment with her. We had a great meeting. She took me all around the *Center*; told me all about their programs catering to all different populations. And at the end of the meeting I decided to ask her: Would you be interested in co-sponsoring an organization for conservative women? She looked at me like I was crazy, chuckled, and said, "Not here."

And this is when I decided to start *NeW*.

You see women have made great gains in the 20th century, and we're thankful for that. But unfortunately feminists have gone too far. They've opened the door to many careers, but at the same time have relegated those women who choose motherhood to second class citizens. Rather than giving women a choice, they've made the choice for them. And this is the message we get from our female professors all the time, and this is the message that was portrayed on that cover of that magazine when we were portrayed as baby making machines. So this is why we needed *NeW*. Unlike our radical feminist counterparts, we're culturally conservative. We embrace femininity. We embrace modesty. We recognize that there are differences between the sexes. And rather than focusing on our careers as the only way to add value to society and measure our self worth, we recognize the value of motherhood.



In *NeW*, we've created a community of conservative women. We meet regularly to discuss issues relating to gender, politics, and conservative beliefs. And our mission statement is "to cultivate a community of conservative women and to expand the intellectual diversity on college campuses." And you hear all about diversity on college campuses, but unfortunately that's often focused too much on descriptive diversity rather than true intellectual diversity. So there's two tracks of *NeW*. First and foremost we are a book club. We read books together and discuss them. And then secondly, we hold events to try to educate the larger campus.

So I'd like to first share with you about the book club. Now the book club serves as a wonderful organizational tool. I'm sure many of you have been involved in organizations where you go to meetings; you seem to wander aimlessly; and you're not sure what you get out of those meetings when you leave. Unfortunately, that's how a lot of clubs are run. But with *NeW* this doesn't happen. You see, before each meeting our women read a chapter from the book. They come to the meeting, where there's always cookies, and someone gives a speech about the book and summarizes the chapter we were supposed to read. And then, we discuss the chapters. So by the time you leave, you really have an understanding of what we have read. And in this book club, what I find so wonderful about it, is that we're really reading ideas and reading about people who are often purposely left off of our college syllabi. You see, I'm going to show you the need for *NeW* by looking at the institutional bias found in some university departments.

Now there's another -- I told you about the Women's Center, an innocuous sounding name -- there's another department that's institutionalized at UVA that has the same problem: the *Studies in Women & Gender* department. Once again, you would think this would be open to all women, but it's not. It has an inclusive department name, but it's exclusive in practice. You see, I'd like to share with you their introductory course. It's called "Women's Lives in Myth and Reality." It's the introductory course of the department so anybody that wants to major in this department has to take it. Now the description on the website reads, "This course will explore women's past and present circumstances and envision future possibilities and alternatives...." Well the reality for many women includes aspirations to have a traditional family. And this course says, it will "envision future possibilities." Yet, there's no section on this syllabi that talks about the traditional family structure or deals with questions about how women who are both ambitious and want to have careers, but also recognize the value in having families. It just assumes that there's only one right choice.

And again if you look on the SWAG department website for their overall description of what they're about, it says the "Studies of Women and Gender is an interdisciplinary program that seeks to analyze history and culture from a women's perspective." So we're trying to analyze history from a women's perspective. So I searched to see if I could find works by conservative women on this SWAG syllabus. And I searched and I searched and I searched. And after ten, I could find nothing. Rather, they had articles such as "Feminism a la Casa," bringing feminism to your house, and all kinds of different articles focusing on gender issues and trans-sexuality and bisexuality, but nothing on the traditional family. I really encourage you to read through some of these syllabi. It's actually quite laughable. But what we see here is lack of diversity and it really gets worse.



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Even the professors at UVA in this *Women's Studies* department reject us, *NeW*, as kind of the ugly stepchildren that they wished would just go away. I'd like to read you a direct quote from a *Time* magazine article on *NeW* -- and I quote,

Professor Ann Lane, a former Director of the UVA Women and Gender Studies program is embarrassed that NeW got her its start at her university. 'I'm not particularly opposed to the group's existence. I just don't like it,' she says. 'I particularly don't accept their premise that men and woman occupy such culturally different spaces.'

And the article continues,

Lane, who has not read NeW's Constitution, bases her opinion on Hoff Sommers' lecture and campus rumor. 'Someone told me that Lynn Cheney is a major contributor of theirs,' she says. Such hearsay, however, is wrong.

You see the SWAG has rejected us, and ignores us, and won't even take the chance to get to know what we stand for. And this just gives you an idea how the liberal ideas dominate the college campuses and really try to keep other people out. It's an institutionalized radical feminist department and it shows why *NeW* is so important to bringing the other side to college campuses. And this is why we are reading books. We're taking a proactive approach. We're not just complaining about what's going on; we're trying to educate ourselves and educate the larger community.

So I'd like to give you an idea of some of the books that we're reading. One of the first books that we read was called, *What Our Mother's Didn't Tell Us: Why Happiness Eludes the Modern Woman*, by Danielle Crittenden. This book focuses on the failures of modern feminism and how this really impacts our generation. For example, she writes on the hook-up culture that dominates college campuses: "The feminists have seemed to have made an alliance with those who push for greater sexual liberation. They claim that this empowers women, but really this hook-up culture just hurts us." You see, Crittenden points out that women suffer consequences from their behaviors later in life when they try to actually search out real relationships and can't find them. *NeW* challenges the merits of the hook-up culture and would like to see the dating culture revived. This is another example of how we are a culturally conservative organization.

And the second book we read was called *Great American Conservative Women* by the Clare Boothe Luce Policy Institute -- and this is one of my favorites. You see, this book is organized by profiles of conservative women such as: Star Parker, Phyllis Schlafly, Condi Rice, Elaine Donnelly -- a lot of great women. And these are women who are not only not on our syllabi, but also their ideas are not really presented. And I really like a quote from the late Jeane Kirkpatrick in this book. As many of you probably know, she was the first woman appointed to serve as the permanent representative to the UN for the U.S. -- and I think you'll enjoy a statement by her. She has three grown sons, and wrote an article called, "*Women Should Refuse to Choose Between Having a Family and a Career*," -- and I'd like to quote her.



She said,

People have often said to me what did I do that was the most interesting thing in my life. The answer, is having a baby. Having and raising babies is more interesting than making speeches at the UN, believe me.

Now the third book we've read is called *Talking from Nine to Five*, by Deborah Tannen, and to be honest, I don't even know if Deborah Tannen is a conservative, or a liberal, or even if she cares about politics. But what's so wonderful about this book is that she accepts and presents the basic premise that men and women communicate differently. And this recognition of the differences between the sexes is something that we embrace that our feminist counterparts don't. And she writes about how this impacts the career advancement of women; and so it's really interesting to see what those differences are and how we communicate and how we can capitalize on them to be more successful in the work world.

Now woman face some unique challenges, and this shows the need for *NeW*, to give women and other people the other side of the debate in a forum to discuss these important topics.

And now, the book club is great, but as many of you in the audience can attest, when you get a group of women together you never know what's going to happen. And this is what has exactly occurred with *NeW*. You see, we started as a book club, but once we got together we decided we didn't want to just stop there. We wanted to educate the larger campus as well. So I'd like to tell you a little about some of the events that we've held that are bringing true intellectual diversity to the college campuses.

Now first, how many of you have heard of the *Vagina Monologues*? A good response -- most of you have heard of this play. Now this is a play that's performed on over 500 college campuses around the country. What it comes down to is it's really a play that just exalts vaginas. Now I'd like to give you a little taste of what happens in one of these monologues. And don't worry, it's appropriate, although much in the play is not appropriate for polite company. But in this one monologue, a 24-year-old woman invites a fourteen year old girl into her car. The 24-year-old asks the girl to spend the night, feeds her vodka, slides into lingerie, and then teaches the young girl how to play with herself -- and this is not condemned by feminists. Instead, a feminist wrote the play and many of them perform in it annually. And the play gets worse. The girl says, "I realize later she was my surprising, unexpected, politically incorrect salvation." So in the *Vagina Monologues*, then, a pedophile is compared to salvation. After seeing this play for the first time, I realized that it objectified women; it made men look pitiful, and it glorified rape. And I did not understand why feminist and other outspoken women would not condemn this play.

In my first two years at the university no one challenged it because the feminists said it was good. Now *NeW* is reacting to things like this. We want women to be respected and treated -- treated like ladies, and not objectified for our bodies. So *NeW* decided to challenge this play. We wanted to expose it for what it was and to educate the larger campus on what really was going on. So we hosted Dr. Christina Hoff Sommers.



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She gave a talk titled, "Sex, Lies, and the Vagina Monologues." This exposed the play for what it is. Over two hundred people came out and we sparked a two-week long debate in our school newspaper over it.

Now this is what we really want to do. We're getting people to think about this play and not just take it for what it is, but challenge it, and really think about if it should be shown on campuses. We found this play insulting; so we challenged it.

But you know what? The story continues; and I think it gets better. A year later we decided we wanted to do something else when the play came back again that next February. You see, that first year they had shown the play at their time and we had held our speaking event the week -- the couple of days before, and we were kind of separate, you know, on separate realms. I wanted to bring us together to really talk about the play and debate it. I thought that this would be a great way -- so that we could expose what was going on and at the same time give them a chance to defend it.

So, the thing anyone logically would do: I emailed the directors of the play. It was a nice email, told her we would do all the work, 'cause I know they were busy putting on the play, if they would agree to debate us. We'd do an hour debate; open it to the public; we'd even have a moderator, so that it would make sure it stayed, you know, under control. But they decided they were too busy to do that.

So the next person I contacted was the director of the local *National Organization for Women* Chapter, and I asked her if she would debate us over the play. She did not feel "comfortable" debating it with us. Now remember, this is a play that's shown on over 500 college campuses. It's praised and raved about all over, and they all wear t-shirts that say, "I love vaginas." They're not reluctant to talk about it, but she was uncomfortable talking about it with us.

So we finally were able to get the president of the university democrats to debate the play with us. Again, it was a hugely successful event. We had standing-room only and really got to the merits of the play. But remember, as I told you in the beginning, both the directors of the play and the *NOW* Chapter president were too busy or too uncomfortable to come discuss it with us. But what I thought was so interesting, is they all came, and they didn't just come, they wore matching shirts, asked loud questions, and made their presence known. Suddenly they found the time and felt comfortable discussing the play. And I just think this shows they didn't want to actually engage the issue; they owned it; this was a praised play and they were not willing to defend it. We're bringing our ideas to the table and that's the value of *NeW*.

Now I've given you the basic outline of this club and why it's working at UVA, but the story doesn't end at UVA. You see, within six months of starting it I received an email from a student at *William & Mary*, who said that she was interested in starting a club of her own. She asked me if I'd be willing to help. Well, I was thrilled to help and went down to their first meeting to get them started. At this point we began our national expansion. I started recruiting women by speaking at events, getting a website launched, and writing editorials. And as you'll see in one of your handouts our website is at the bottom. So if you want anymore information on *NeW* you can go to www.enlightenedwomen.org.



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And we have a website up that tells all about our organization and what we're doing and even has a list of recommended books that are on there to supplement the college education. And by graduation from college we had seven Chapters up and running.

And I think there's three main reasons why this was really working. First, was self-selection. You see, the women that were starting these organizations were really coming to me. So I knew they were motivated and they were the ones that had been repulsed by what was going on, on the campus. So once they wanted to start it, they were determined to get it done right.

Second, I've tried to make this easy for them. You know, when you start an organization on a club, or start a club on a campus, you'd be shocked at how much bureaucracy you have to go to. You have to write a constitution; you have to submit it to your student council; you have to present to your club; you apply for funding -- and this all just takes time and energy and effort. Well I didn't want people wasting time reinventing the wheel, so I decided to put a disk together that had all the documents that we use for our *UVA* Chapter. And when a woman wanted to start it, I would just mail it to them and then they could use those documents, so they didn't have to waste time redoing the work. And really all you need to start an organization like this is conservative women and books. So it really doesn't have a lot of cost to get started on the campuses.

And finally I think this is working because these women all across the country were -- were repulsed by the hook-up culture that was dominating and also the feminist dogma that was being taught by so many of their professors, and this really pushed women to start *NeW* Chapters.

And then after we got those seven up and running, over the summers I mentioned earlier, a *Time* magazine article came out on *NeW*, and I started receiving dozens and dozens of emails. So I decided to hold the first annual *NeW* National Conference in Washington, DC. We brought over 40 women together from around the country and we spoke about the challenges we were facing on our campus and how we wanted to take a proactive role to solving these issues and discussing them. And there was just a tremendous amount of enthusiasm and energy at this conference -- and really launched us into more growth. We're now a recognized nonprofit organization with 15 campuses around the country. In Virginia, we've got *UVA*, *William & Mary*, and a Chapter at the *University of Mary Washington*. And then around the country, I'll just tell you some of our newest Chapters: the *University of Oregon*, *University of Florida*, *Arizona State University*, and since I'm from Indiana I was really excited that we finally got one started at *Indiana University* this semester.

So now I thought I'd share with you a little bit about what our Chapters are doing around the country this semester. Our *UVA* Chapter's reading a book called, *A Return to Modesty* by Wendy Shalit. Our *High Point University* Chapter is reading, *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Women, Sex, and Feminism* by Carrie Lukas. *Texas State University* is reading *What Our Mothers Didn't Tell Us: Why Happiness Eludes the Modern Woman* by Daniel Crittenden; and the *University of Mary Washington* is reading, *Women Who Make the World Worse* by Kate O'Beirne.



Now I'd also thought I'd share with you some of the events that we've held both at the *UVA* Chapter and at other Chapters. Our *UVA* Chapter, just this month, held a debate for Women's History Month. It was titled "Are We Getting It Right: The State of Women's Studies Departments," which questioned the legitimacy of women's studies departments all around the country. We brought in Jennifer Roback Morse, who is an author and public speaker, to come debate and talk about how we really don't need these departments; and the liberal women decided to bring in Amy Richards to come debate. It was another great event where we really got to the heart of the issue. And I think at least all on our side thought we won -- that we do not need these departments.

Some other events we've held is we did a coffee with Kellyanne Conway, who wrote the book *What Women Want*, and this book talks about how women vote in elections, and it was really interesting. You know, we hear everyday on the news about different populations of women -- we have the security moms, and the soccer moms and how different candidates are trying to get their votes. Well she came and really described those groups to us and what she thinks needs to be done to get women on your side of the voting.

We also held a panel called "Balancing a Career and Raising a Family." And I think this is one of the favorite events of many of our members. We had three local women come in and talk about their past; and, for instance, what kind of careers they felt worked with -- worked well with motherhood, and, you know, decisions they had made that they regretted, or thought were good, and the advice that they would give to pass on to young students.

And another great event our *UVA* Chapter did was a trip to Richmond. We went and saw the Capitol and walked around the Supreme Court building, and it was just a wonderful trip.

And our groups around the nation are also holding events. Like *UVA*, they found that they loved the book club but once they got this started they want to expand to the larger campus as well. Our *High Point University* Chapter just co-sponsored this past fall with *Young America's Foundation* a 911 commemoration, where they commemorated the date with a nice ceremony and flags representing each person that was lost on that day.

Our *Arizona State University* Chapter hosted Cathi Herrod of the *The Center for Arizona Policy*. She's a strong woman in a leadership position and I think this is great for that Chapter. They also sold carnations on *Valentine's Day* to try to bring back the romance to that day, because this is the day where the *Vagina Monologues* is always portrayed or always put on. And finally, they handed out pamphlets exposing the *Vagina Monologues* play for what it was.

Also, our *Tallahassee Community College* Chapter just did a book drive for their local *Big Brother, Big Sister* house. They collected books all fall and then brought them to this house to encourage literacy.

Now I've shared with you where we are. I'd like to talk more about our future. Concretely, we're very excited to announce that we're going to be having our 2nd Annual *NeW* National Conference in this summer in Washington, D.C. at the end of June. Now our first conference really focused on describing the organization, and informing people about it.



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From it, we were able to start another half dozen Chapters after people heard more about the organization. But this time it's going to be much more of an intensive training seminar.

You see, after working with these women around the country I've realized that we're all facing a lot of the same problem. For example: fundraising, marketing, and finding sponsors. One thing I think is really interesting at *UVA*, because of our tradition of student self-governance, you don't have to have a sponsor to start an organization. And so when I wanted to get started I was able to fill out the forms and get it started with a few friends. But at a lot of campuses they require you to find a sponsor that will vouch for your group, and come to meetings, and really put it under their name, so they're affiliated with it. Well, it's been really interesting is one of the challenges many of our Chapters' faces is finding somebody to sponsor the organization. You see, there's not that many conservative women in the academia that are on college campuses. A lot of the women that are their teaching were not willing to sponsor an organization like this. So that's a challenge you might not think of, but that's really popped up for many of our Chapters.

Now I'm confident that we're going to continue to grow in the future. You see, our organization has huge potential for growth because we are relatively new. And when people hear more about it every time we receive publicity, I always receive more inquiries from people about how they can start a Chapter on their campus.

There's three main reasons why I'm really confident that we're going to continue to grow. First, we've filled a niche. You see, on college campuses there's women's centers, studies on women and gender departments, new Chapters -- or, excuse me, *NOW* Chapters, and all kinds of groups focused on the Left. But right now, there's not anything focused solely on the Right -- and this is what we're bringing to the campus. We're giving a place for conservative women to talk about these issues that are really important to us.

Secondly, I think our flexible structure has made this organization really a good organization to expand. See, I've created a general framework; we're a book club and this can be translated to other college campuses and adapted very well. A little story about the *Tallahassee Community College*. They wanted to do this book drive that I had mentioned earlier, and so the Chapter president emailed me and asked me if that would be okay. Of course, I said that it was a great idea -- go for it. It turned out to be a big success. So after words I had her write up a report on it and send it to me, and then I emailed it out to all of the Chapter presidents. You see, when we do an organization like this that has the flexibility then they can all learn from each other. And I hope next year a lot of the other Chapters will do that as well.

Third, *NeW* actually gives women something. As I mentioned earlier, we're not a club where you come and you're not sure what you get when you leave. You know what you are going to get. It's a great place to build friendships. Also, it's a wonderful place to be associated with other conservative women. Our *UVA* Chapter, for example, is not just political science majors; the secretary next year is in the Engineering School. One of my friends that graduated with me is now working on *Wall Street*.



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We've got people who are in the Business School, in the Economics Department, all different kinds of departments. And so this is a great way to meet women across different fields that share similar values.

And [fourth], we're becoming more educated. As I said earlier, we're really taking this mission as important to educate ourselves; and we're a proactive group. We try to take the positive side on things and make an effort to make our lives and those around us better by really educating them on the issues.

You know, it's been so exciting for me to see how many conservative women there are on college campuses throughout the country who are willing to stand up for what they believe in.

In conclusion, from the tremendous growth of *NeW*, I am confident that we are shaping a new generation of women.

Thank you.