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Theme Invites Discussion of Women's Power, Women's Justice

Sept. 20, 2016

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Illinois Wesleyan's campus community will wrestle with notions surrounding the intellectual theme "[Women's Power, Women's Justice](#)" in classes and in co-curricular programming during the 2016-17 academic year. The intellectual theme is selected annually by a working group of students, faculty and staff.

Women represent over 50 percent of the world's population, yet their opportunities to lead self-directed and meaningful lives are still challenged by cultural expectations, religious ideologies and political restrictions throughout the world.

Earlier this month a luncheon served as an introductory kickoff to the annual theme which is designed to encourage deep thinking and discussion of its many aspects. More than 200 students attended the luncheon; many of the students are enrolled in one of the more than 25 courses related to the theme. Carole Myscofski, director of the Women's and Gender Studies program, said it is particularly exciting so many faculty have aligned their courses with the theme because discussions about equality for women are not limited to just one subject or just one course.

"That is one of the many points of this theme," she said. "The potential of girls and women should be unlimited and powerful, but cultural injustices have – in the past – limited our abilities to choose our own paths and our own lives. The theme of 'Women's Power, Women's Justice' invites us to cross, intersect, and transcend boundaries in the ways we think about others and ourselves."

After watching a video montage on topics ranging from the women's suffrage movement in the United States to a chastity certification ceremony in Africa, students at the luncheon were invited to discuss some of the issues women face.

At one table, some students were appalled at the idea of 10-year-old girls being sold into marriage, but the students recognized they view such practices from the lens of the Western world. "We see this is an issue, but it's confusing to determine if it is really an issue for that culture or if that's just the way the culture is," said one student. "How do you get someone who fundamentally thinks everything their culture is doing is right, to change? And should an outsider even try?"



Kickoff discussion topics included the challenges of gender expectations for males and for females.

adequately," according to the site. "This is the heart of the justice that women still seek: not anger against men or hate for social norms, but sharing and self-determination on their own terms."

Theme organizers and students acknowledge much work remains to be done. Alex Doorenbos '20 said his group of students believed that steps forward – more female leaders in business, more women attending college in the U.S. than ever before, more women in politics at every level – can create a false sense of progress. "In reality we're not even close to where we need to be and a lot more needs to be done," he said. It will take much more than a few people doing a little, he said. "It's going to take everyone doing a lot to make a big difference for women's power and women's justice in our world," said Doorenbos.

More than two dozen [events](#) related to women and social justice will be held on campus during the rest of the semester, with more events planned for spring 2017. Follow the theme on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).



Students discussed a wide range of topics relating to the "Women's Power, Women's Justice" intellectual theme at a kickoff luncheon earlier this month.

Another table of students grappled with gender expectations. The group of both males and females believed it is far more acceptable for women to express their emotions than it is for men. "In many ways, men in general can't do that. If they do, men are viewed as weak," one student said. The students felt Western society accepts women who dress in more masculine ways, yet it does not accept men who dress or act more effeminately. In an interview after the luncheon, biology major Clifford Klimas '17 said his group of students also discussed expectations of gender roles regarding childcare. "The male isn't always the breadwinner. It's okay if he stays home [caring for children]. There shouldn't be a stigma around that."

To help students in defining the notions of women's power and women's justice, organizers offer some explanatory guidelines on the annual theme [website](#).

"Failure to guarantee equality leaves women unable to choose their own life paths, work at satisfying jobs, receive fair compensation, address pressing health care needs, and care for themselves and their families