

**WomenNC**

**North Carolina Committee for CEDAW/CSW**

A 501(c)(3) Organization - <http://www.womennc.org>



# **Youth Involvement in Social Action and Human Rights Advocacy**

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WomenNC CSW 2014 Fellowship**



### Introduction:

The annual theme of this year's United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is the 2015 Millennium Development Goals. These eight goals include a wide range of human rights concerns from eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, promoting gender equality, improving maternal health care, and beyond. As a United Nations effort, the Millennium Development Goals bring together a plethora of organizations, fields of interests, and individuals dedicated to accomplishing and assessing the 2015 Millennium Development Goals. However, there is one significant group of voices missing from the discussion of the 2015 Millennium Development Goals—youth.

The lack of youth participation in social justice and human rights advocacy has been an issue threatening truly democratic access to the shaping of the global human rights movement as long as such efforts have existed. Youth, those who make up nearly twenty percent of the global population, those who are often impacted most by human rights injustices, find that they are least able to be involved in the revolutionary discussions that transform human rights.

My research explores the importance of youth involvement in social justice and human rights advocacy work. My paper calls on the voices of youth activists to articulate the obstacles that stand in the way of their organizing around issues of social justice. Finally, my paper offers an effective model for youth engagement in human rights work that was created in 2009 by North Carolina's very own WomenNC. The WomenNC United Nations Commission on the Status of Women Student Fellowship model is a best practice that promotes youth participation in a unique "local to global to local" human rights advocacy.



### Defining Youth:

The United Nations defines youth as people between the ages of 15 and 24 and recognizes that youth may be different depending on specific situations. The term youth refers to not only to an individual's age, but also to the stage in his or her life. As defined by the United Nations, youth refers to a population of young people who share experiences of *physical, psychological, intellectual, and emotional changes* as they transition into adulthood. These young people, between the ages of 15-24, are part of a politically and socially constructed group that is often marginalized and disenfranchised from many spheres of life. Most notably, youth have limited access to governmental and intergovernmental affairs. Like cultural minority groups or women, children have been historically left out of state politics. In this same vein, youth are an extremely diverse group. Youth culture is not homogenous and while it is important to recognize structural similarities that hinder youth participation, it is important to give attention to individual and local barriers to youth involvement.

### A Significant Youth Population

It is important to point out that youth make up a significant portion of the local, national, and international population. In many countries, youth comprise up to 50% of the national population. Currently, about 76 million youth make up the United States population.

- *The number of youth between the ages of 15 and 24 is 1.1 billion; youth constitute 18 percent of the global population. Youth and children together, including all those aged 24 years and younger, account for nearly 40 percent of the world's population. In many countries, youth comprise up to 50% of the national population. Currently, about 76 million youth make up the United States population.*
  - *Geographically speaking, the largest population of youth is concentrated in Asia and the Pacific.*
  - *Approximately 60 percent of youth live in Asia; 15 percent, in Africa; 10 percent, in Latin America and the Caribbean; and the remaining 15 percent, in developed countries and regions.*
- Working Group on Youth*



### Social Problems and The Impact on Youth

Additionally, youth are often the most vulnerable populations. Social problems facing society, disproportionately affect youth.

- About 85 percent of the world's population of youth live in developing countries. *Nearly half (45.9 percent) live in low-income countries, while another third (34.1 percent) live in lower middle-income countries. The remaining fifth (20 percent) of youth live in upper middle- and high-income countries.*
- *Approximately 238 million youth live in extreme poverty—that is, they live on less than \$1 a day; 462 million youth survive on less than \$2 a day.*
- *About 255 million young people live in the 19 countries with the largest poverty gaps; 15 of these 19 countries are in sub-Saharan Africa.*
- *Experts estimate that, in the 49 countries classified as having a high proportion of undernourished people, 110 million youth live in hunger.*
- *About 133 million youth in the world are illiterate.*
- *Youth comprise 41 percent of the world's unemployed people*

*-Working Group on Youth*

Despite the critical disadvantages youth face, they still remain on the outskirts of decision making and are left out of conversations where they are stakeholders. Despite, the large numbers of youth that make up our population, their engagement in human rights issues still remains low.

### Challenges and Barriers Facing Youth Involvement (as stated by youth)

This list is based off of the composited accounts of youth activist conferences that address the importance of youth involvement in social justice work:

1. Lack of access to business infrastructure because of status as youth
2. Lack of transportation
3. Lack of business meeting space to hold meetings for organizing
4. Lack of networks for organizing
5. Lack of funding to do research



### Proposed Solutions to Increase Access to Involvement in Initiating Change

This section lists the solutions proposed by youth conferences to increase their involvement in social action:

1. Funding Sources
2. Adult mentors
3. Partnership with NGOs to help give youth organizations legitimacy
4. Recognition of the work that they have already done towards making significant strides in achieving the MDGs
5. Transportation
6. Topic-specific ways to organize around social justice issues that will allow them to form networks of like-minded youth activists

### WomenNC Student Fellowship

The second part of my research investigation led me to partner with a local North Carolina organization that addresses the issues of the lack of youth participation in human rights and social justice work. All of my research, was of course, ironic because I myself am a young person with aspirations for social justice and face many of the barriers articulated from youth all over the world.

I am a twenty-one year old student in my junior year of college at Duke University. My major is Women's Studies and I have a minor in African and African American Studies. As the histories unveiled in my studies would suggest and prompted by my own experiences, I am truly passionate about issues of human rights and advocacy. I am especially passionate about women's human rights. It is for this reason that I could not explain both the excitement



I had in early August when I opened up an email from my university's women studies program describing the WomenNC UN CSW Student Fellowship. The program promised a funded opportunity to explore a research topic related to women's human rights, workshops that would develop my speaking and presenting skills as an advocate, and the opportunity to travel to New York City to present in front of the United Nations at the Commission on the Status of Women. I knew in a moment that there would be no opportunity to be involved in women's human rights work in a more fruitful way than this chance that was before me. This idea has been confirmed since becoming a student fellow and my formal research of the WomenNC student fellowship model has demonstrated that I am currently a fellow in a program modeling best practice strategies for youth engagement in social justice.

### UN CSW Student Fellowship

#### WomenNC

WomenNC is a North Carolina based non-profit that works to raise a generation that will honor women's human rights. WomenNC effectively serves the North Carolina Triangle and Triad area through areas of engagement that move towards the victory of women's human rights enacted locally, nationally, and internationally.

There are three key ways in which WomenNC raises awareness about women's human rights"

- ***“Leadership development training for board of directors, volunteers, and high school and college youth;***
- ***Advocacy for public policy change; and***
- ***Convening agencies/corporations to identify and develop positive policy and systems change.”***

**-WomenNC**



The annual result of WomenNC is the initiation of dialogues among diverse audiences of more than 8,000 people. The impact of WomenNC reaches far and wide in North Carolina and has impacted the community through everything from state leaders, faith based organizations, Women' organizations and so much more (**Appendix A**).

### **Introduction to WomenNC UN CSW Student Fellowship**

North Carolina's WomenNC is an organization that recognizes the importance of promoting youth participation in social justice work and human rights advocacy. WomenNC's founder, Beth Dehghan, created the model that first launched in 2009. Dehghan has been a human and women's rights activist in the Middle East, Europe, Canada and the United States for over thirty years. Dehghan began attending the annual CSW in 1995. Witnessing the lack of youth involved at the conference and hoping to see her passion for women's rights instilled within another generation, Dehghan took action. The WomenNC Student Fellowship is a unique and ambitious model that successfully responds to the calls of youth asking for the opportunities to advocate on behalf of women's human rights issues and have their voices heard.

The mission of WomenNC is to "lead young adults in the elimination of injustice against women and girls." This mission directly relates to my topic of expanding youth involvement in social justice and human rights advocacy. The WomenNC mission is reflected in the premiere program of WomenNC, the WomenNC Student Fellowship. This program is centered on youth involvement for social justice and women's human rights work. The program follows a local-global-local framework that exemplifies best-practice strategies for youth involvement.



### History and Overview of the CSW Fellowship As Told By WomenNC

*WomenNC's signature Student Fellowship program began in 2009 based on two primary objectives. The first goal was to provide a leadership training framework to engage young adults in our regional community. The focus was to facilitate the development of future leaders through a greater understanding of the inequities women and girls face in North Carolina. Awarded Student Fellows embark on intensive research, partner with organizations addressing the dynamics and challenges affecting women, and develop recommendations for improved conditions.*

*Through the **WomenNC CSW Fellowship Program**, students in the North Carolina Triangle and Triad area, are provided training and networking platforms to mobilize and influence their peers and respective communities to understand and value women's human rights and to engage in issues important to equality for women and girls. Student fellows engage in social justice and human rights advocacy by working in the following ways:*

- *Participating in evidence-based leadership and advocacy training and mentoring from social justice pioneers and academic advisors*
- *Conducting research on **United Nations CSW Priority Themes** and proposing solutions tied to local and global women's issues*
- *Representing North Carolina and presenting their research at the United Nations' annual five-day CSW Convention in NYC*
- *Facilitating and/or presenting advocacy trainings at local, state, and national forums*

-WomenNC

In its description alone, the WomenNC model seemed quite expansive and impressive. I began to investigate how exactly WomenNC created an effective fellowship



that gives youth the ability for women's human rights engagement at multiple levels. The answer lies in the "Local-Global-Local" model for student engagement.

### **Local**

The WomenNC Student fellowship model begins at its home in North Carolina. The program starts in August by sending the applications to the local universities, and will continue with student selections, allocating research topics, research, mentorship, public speaking training and dress rehearsal workshops. Based upon the topic that student fellows have chosen pertaining to the annual CSW goal, the student then finds a local organization whose mission matches the same topic. With his or her new community partner, the student fellow volunteers with the selected organization and investigates the practices that allow this organization to find success in tackling a particular women's social justice issue. Fellows are introduced to networks of people and organizations creating change in their own communities. Engagement at the local level exposes youth to the women's rights issues and as they exist and are combated in North Carolina. Most importantly, as student fellows learn about the solution-based organizations in North Carolina, they can identify best practices within the organizations and present them locally, nationally, and internationally.

### **Past North Carolina Community Partnerships with student fellows have included:**

Interact

Pretty in Pink Foundation

Student Action with Farmworkers

NC Stop Human Trafficking

Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Campaign of North Carolina

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Haven Duke-UNC Partnership

Lillian's List of NC

The HOPE Projects

North Carolina Farm to School Program

Girls Inc.

Justice Matters

North Carolina Commission Against Sexual Assault

MOVE - Mothers Overcoming Violence through Education and Empowerment

Furthermore, at this local level, students are joining and creating accessible networks of activists in their communities. WomenNC has brought together student fellows from schools all across the Triangle and Triad area. These schools include: North Carolina State University, Shaw University, Bennet College, Meredith College, University of North Carolina Gillings School of Global Public Health, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Duke University, and University of North Carolina at Greensboro. The youth recruited to the student fellowship come from a variety of different backgrounds. These students having majors ranging from social science, physical science, gender studies, law, mathematics and in between. Gender, race, religious and socioeconomic diversity are all represented in the student fellows of the WomenNC CSW program.

The students do not work alone either. Students are paired with adult mentor volunteers from WomenNC who are passionate about social justice and have experience as a women's rights advocates. These mentors guide student fellows along during their research and regularly provide feedback and support. During the nine month fellowship



period, WomenNC provides student fellows with professional research, advocacy, networking, and public speaking workshops.

### **WomenNC United Nations Fellowship Dinner**

One key element of youth involvement at the local North Carolina level is the opportunity for student fellows to report their work at the annual WomenNC United Nations Fellowship dinner. Spring of 2014 marks the 5<sup>th</sup> annual WomenNC United Nations Fellowship dinner. After dress rehearsals and coaching, student fellows present their research to a host of local officials, non-profits, academics, students, and community members. Students get the experience of advocating for an issue, on which they are now the expert, to the North Carolina community. This community gets the chance to be informed on the status of women in North Carolina. The event is attended by nearly 200 community members and in 2014 the student Fellows shared their research efforts on a panel with Feminist Majority's Eleanor Smeal.

### **Local to Global**

Next, youth involvement takes a big leap from local North Carolina to The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women Conference in New York City. Global issues facing women are discussed at the United Nations annual Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). "This two week annual conference in New York, established in 1956, attracts 6000-8000 participants from 190+ countries. The forums involve governmental and NGO's (non-governmental organizations), whose goals are to increase awareness of problems, share ideas to develop solutions-based initiatives, and report on the status and effectiveness of programs" (WomenNC).



At this international conference the WomenNC youth stand out among the thousands of adult participants gathered to advocate for various policy changes that revolutionize Women' Human Rights. The student fellows are among these voices advocating for change as they present their research findings and suggestions that are based upon the best practices that they have found in their local communities. In this way, students are not only given the platform to engage in social justice work in an area that they are not typically granted access, but they are also introducing North Carolina organizations that advocate on the behalf of social justice to a global audience. Hopefully, the local solutions introduced at CSW can be adapted at effective levels for issues faced by women in the national and international conference.

The conference has a plethora of learning and networking opportunities. When students are not giving their presentations, the days are spent attending CSW workshops that introduce new perspectives to social justice and women's rights advocacy. It is in this space, that the fellows hear from experts from all over the world who have dedicated their work to social justice work. The student fellows are also encouraged and trained on how to network in activist circles. It is through these networks formed at the CSW that the student fellows' work will continue in human right's work in spaces beyond their immediate community.

### **Global to Local**

The structure of the Local-Global-Local model would suggest that the student fellowship ends at local. However, when fellows return to North Carolina, their advocacy efforts truly begin. After the students come back from the CSW they are obligated to bring the reflection of their trip to North Carolina by presenting at a local symposium hosted by WomenNC. Student



fellows' work and advocacy efforts truly begin as they begin speaking at the local events and organizing workshops on their campuses or local news outlets. Student fellows are now *“ambassadors of the knowledge that they gained with their community partner and their findings and U.N. CSW experiences”* (WomenNC). Students can now offer global solutions to local service organizations.

As students bring their knowledge back to North Carolina, they will live on in a life of advocacy for Women's social justice. The continued commitment to social change has been a noteworthy aspect of the WomenNC CSW Fellowship alumni cohort.

### **Impacts of Local-to-Global-to-Local WomenNC CSW Student Fellowship**

#### **Voices of Youth (Appendix B)**

While WomenNC boasts many impressive feats in their widespread impact, what is most important is, of course, the impact that the WomenNC program has had on its alumni fellows. There is no better way to describe these impacts, than through the voices of student fellows themselves:

*“My experience with the WomenNC Fellowship program was both formative and rewarding as I experienced growth during the process and had the incredible opportunity to attend the Commission on the Status of Women.”*

*“WomenNC prepared me for being a youth activist at CSW by providing me with skills and advice when talking to government and nongovernmental organizations that may not be expecting young people at CSW.”*

-Molly Williams, CSW '13, *Domestic Violence: Education and Empowerment for North Carolina Victims – Mothers Overcoming Violence through Education and Empowerment*

*“WomenNC possesses an applied approach to community empowerment and education. Through its fellowship program, university students receive the opportunity to research, immerse themselves in an organization's practices, and present their findings to the*



*community all over the course of six months. The quality and intensity of this model prepares youth to actively and meaningfully participate in global dialogues at U.N. sessions that they may be learning about in the classroom, which enriches their experience at the U.N. and once they return to school.”*

*“WomenNC affirms the value of youth in envisioning and participating in solutions to global problems because the knowledge and passion of participants is valued and encouraged to grow throughout the fellowship.”*

*-Kimmie, CSW '11, Sex Education Policies and Adolescent Pregnancy in the United States and North Carolina*

*“When awarded the WomenNC Student Fellowship, I had the privilege of completing research on human sex trafficking in North Carolina. It is very rare for students to receive funding for social science-based research, making this fellowship one of the most unique student opportunities in the Triangle. My experiences at the United Nations conference were unforgettable. I was in awe of the amazing women and men from around the world; everyone seemed so innovative, thoughtful, and passionate. It was an opportunity to connect with the world community that cares about that status of women.”*

*– Katie, CSW Fellow '11, Sex Trafficking in North*

*The WomenNC Fellowship is one of the few, if only, supported opportunities students have to explore and present on women’s human rights issues outside of the classroom. For most students, the opportunity cost of this work is very high – many students work to support their education and volunteer in many leadership roles both on campus and in the community.*

*–Kristen, CSW Fellow '11, Child Labor in North Carolina Agriculture: Human Rights Frameworks for the Girl Child*

*“I am so grateful and humbled by the opportunity to be a WomenNC Fellow, and I wish to share this experience with other young women in North Carolina. Thank you WomenNC for the chance to present research at the United Nations and explore essential dialogue with students and activists from around the world. I would have never seen this chance to combine entrepreneurship, mobile innovation, and public health as crossroads of change without this fellowship!”*

*-Abby Bouchon, CSW Fellow '12, The Importance of Community Health Systems for Rural North Carolina Women*



Fellows themselves report all of the following as a result of their WomenNC experience:

### **Self-Efficacy and Leadership Skills Development**

- Transformation in public speaking skills and comfort
- Stronger Understanding of Community Issues and Organizations within North Carolina
- Networking Skills
- Research Skills
- Advocacy Writing Skills

### **Commitment to Women's Rights Issues**

- Continued work with Women's Right non-profit
- Returned to CSW after fellowship
- Transformed vision of later research and career goals
- Greater Participation and Advocacy on global scale
- Gaining the "feminist fabric" to life

### **WomenNC CSW Student Fellowship Internal Model**

The empowering force that allows WomenNC to transform their student fellows into lifelong human rights advocates would not be possible without a sound, strategic administrative framework that includes passionate volunteers and critical funding.



The team that runs the WomenNC student fellowship consists of ten- twelve youth and adult volunteers. All of these volunteer, regardless of their vast career paths, have a passion for women's humans rights and youth participation in advancing these rights. The six-month mentorship commitment begins when student fellows are selected. Mentors will spend between 2-3 hours weekly on their involvement with the fellowship. The time, effort and passion of these North Carolina professionals, students, and activists dedicated to their local youth, is what makes the program run.

Of course, alongside the passionate volunteers, funding is a critical component of the CSW Student Fellowship. In order to run this program annually it requires one part time program director to oversee the entire program August to April and one part time administrator. Each of these positions requires 20 hours a week. The expense of each fellow to be enrolled is \$3,200. The total Budget to run this program is \$36000 ( six fellows and staff). At present this program has been running by WomenNC board and volunteers and the expenses were limited to \$18500/ year (without staff).

### **Challenges to the WomenNC CSW Student Fellowship**

There are challenges that face the WomenNC CSW Student Fellowship program:

- 1- Lack of funding to hire program director and administrator.
- 2- Lack of large grants to run the program ( so far all the WomenNC's fundraising has been through individual donors and small community grants)
- 3- Lack of interest of the NC based foundation to this program ( most of leadership program funding is focused on K-12 )
- 4- CSW and UN registration ( WomenNC hasn't received her consultation status form the United Nations yet and needs to work with other NGOS to be able to register for CSW)



The tremendous support that WomenNC receives from its alumni serve as a sincere testament that WomenNC CSW Student Fellowship is a best practice. In fact, as students do offer constructive feedback, it often relies on expanding the fellowship program. Students ask their universities to commit to sponsoring one student fellow every year (already University of North Carolina has agreed). Students reflect and wish that the fellowship had been longer and given them the ability to do even more research under the guidance of their mentors. WomenNC CSW Fellows show sincere gratitude towards the WomenNC and the continued commitment to the program and its ideals emphasize that the WomenNC model is indeed transformative in nature. The fellowship catalyzes each student fellow through the dynamic local-global-local model. These are the young activists who will lead their generation and honor women's human rights.

The WomenNC UN CSW Student Fellowship model needs greater funding and replication by other communities seeking to increase the participation of youth in social justice work. The unique structure of the program is extremely pragmatic and maximizes the potential of both youth and adults committed to the generation of young people who want to advocate for their rights. In this moment nearing the end of the 2015 Millennium Development Goal where there exists a lack of youth involvement, it is critical that we adapt best practice models for youth participation.



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### Community Impact of WomenNC (Appendix A)

#### **Community Impact of WomenNC for 2013 (expanded explanation)**

The Fellowship program has been the impetus for WomenNC to seek engagement and partnerships with all sectors of the regional community: educational institutions, nonprofits, government, business, civic and faith-based organizations to develop young adults into leaders and advocates and increase awareness and support for women's human rights.

To this end, through our knowledgeable and professionally accomplished Board of Directors and partners, we serve North Carolina through

- **Leadership development** training for our Board of Directors, volunteers, and high school and college youth
- **Advocacy** for public policy change; and
- **Convening agencies/corporations** to identify and develop positive policy and systems change.

In 2012-13, Fellows and Board members conducted leadership and advocacy trainings, served as keynote speakers, and presented research in ten forums to help audiences of over 500 develop skills and increase their understanding of local to global issues that are barriers to women's human rights. Two advocacy workshops were for teens ages 13 to 15.

Topics for the forums were 1) *Status & Solutions to Eliminate Violence Against Women in N.C., U.S. & Globally*; 2) *Violence Against Women from the Global Perspective*; 3) *Human Trafficking in NC & US*; 4) *Immigrant & Refugee Women in NC*; and 5) *Rape Culture in Society & the Media*.

Advocacy partnerships & collaborations and awareness initiatives that increased our engagement



with the community were:

- 1) **Women's Orgs.** – participated in planning the Bi-annual *Draft Women's Agenda* for North Carolina Women United (NCWU);
- 2) **Business Sector** - presentation to Wake Chapter NC Association of Women Attorneys;
- 3) **Political Leaders** - provided informational display table and person-to-person advocacy at state women's conventions, attended by over 300; participated in NCWU (North Carolina Women United) Advocacy Day at NC Legislature;
- 4) **Healthcare Providers** - presented at Maya Angelou International Women's Health Summit on *Cultural Barriers Impacting Women's Health*; and provided information at Community Health Information & Education Fair; presented to NC Association of Women Dentists;
- 5) **Faith-Based Orgs.** - CSW Fellow was a guest speaker for United Methodist Women on *HUMAN TRAFFICKING: THE HIDDEN CRIME*, attended by 65-70; and
- 6) **State Advocacy Org.** – presented at NCCASA (NC Coalition Against Sexual Assault) for Human Trafficking Seminar.

Broader audiences were touched through television news interviews and talk shows, community and campus newspaper articles and announcements, and our listserv. Additional information on events, training, and collaboration; as well as research reports and relevant links is available on our website ([womennc.org](http://womennc.org)) and social media accounts.

As we expanded our reach into a broader segment of the community, requests for leadership training, advocacy presentations and training, and information and referrals increased. This resulted in a decision to expand our programming and began a leadership program for high school students, and a decision to increase the number of annual fellowships awarded to six (6). We have received endorsements from two of NC's largest public universities through their commitment for each to provide financial support for a fellowship and to promote and support

### **WomenNC Student Fellowship Feedback (Appendix B)**

Kimie: WomenNC possesses an applied approach to community empowerment and education. Through its fellowship program, university students receive the opportunity to research, immerse themselves in an organization's practices, and present their findings to the community all over the course of six months. The quality and intensity of this model prepares youth to actively and meaningfully participate in global dialogues at U.N. sessions that they may be learning about in the classroom, which enriches their experience at the U.N. and once they return to school.

WomenNC affirms the value of youth in envisioning and participating in solutions to global problems because the knowledge and passion of participants is valued and encouraged to grow throughout the fellowship. In addition to the fellowship experience, WomenNC works tirelessly toward local, national, and global change in various ways.

Due to the transformative experience I had through my fellowship, I organized a trip to CSW 56 this past February. I created an application, advertised the opportunity through various channels on campus, read through applications and interviewed applicants, and narrowed the pool down to four participants who attended the conference for free. My supervisor, the Director of Women's Studies at Colgate, also attended the conference. I applied for funding through a Colgate grant-giving program and coordinated all travel, lodging, and food logistics. I also organized supplemental



activities, such as a meeting with feminist author Amy Richards and a trip to the 9/11 Memorial. Prior to the trip, I held two preparatory sessions in which I presented about the historical context of CSW and facilitated discussions about CEDAW and opinions regarding its efficacy.

After attending the conference for two days, we hosted a Brown Bag in the Center for Women's Studies the following week titled "Reflections from the 56<sup>th</sup> Session on the Commission of the Status of Women," in which the participants discussed their insights from attending 6-8 sessions. The students also presented in one of the Introduction to Women's Studies courses a few weeks later. Evaluations from the trip were extremely positive and the students felt the amount of time at the conference, as well as the quality of the sessions leading up to and during the conference, were rich and stimulating.

1. What impact did the program have on your life?

Participating as a WomenNC Fellow in 2011 marked an incredible transformation in my life in regards to my comfort with public speaking, understanding of community issues and organizations within North Carolina, and larger participation in and commitment to women's rights on a global scale.

4. What impact did WomenNC have on your campus?

While three of the four fellowship recipients were from UNC-Chapel Hill the year I participated as a fellow, I believe the program had more of an effect on me than it did on my campus. Because WomenNC was still establishing itself as an organization and the other fellows and I had extremely busy schedules, we didn't advertise as much as we should have on such a large campus. Even though our presentation was not highly attended, I definitely incorporated what I had learned at CSW 55 into my classes my final semester of college and beyond. I believe creating chapters of WomenNC at various universities in the Triangle would be successful and am certain UNC would be a great place for one!

### **Kristen Brugh: 2012 Fellow. PHD student at UNC**

Kristen: My experiences at the UN and my work with WomenNC has helped me to focus my interests at the intersection of maternal and child health and salient issues for women in agricultural communities. Moving forward, I am committed to incorporating a gender and human rights lens to my doctoral dissertation work and future career goals.

The WomenNC Fellowship is one of the few, if only, supported opportunities students have to explore and present on women's human rights issues outside of the classroom. For most students, the opportunity cost of this work is very high – many students work to support their education and volunteer in many leadership roles both on campus and in the community. The funding for the WomenNC fellowship helps students to carve out time to learn, network, research, and visit the United Nations.

**Katie Star:** When awarded the WomenNC Student Fellowship, I had the privilege of completing



research on human sex trafficking in North Carolina. It is very rare for students to receive funding for social science-based research, making this fellowship one of the most unique student opportunities in the Triangle. My experiences at the United Nations conference were unforgettable. I was in awe of the amazing women and men from around the world; everyone seemed so innovative, thoughtful, and passionate. It was an opportunity to connect with the world community that cares about that status of women. My experiences there will remain part of my feminist fabric for the rest of my life.

. The Student Fellowship allows students to transform from advocates for women's rights into agents for change, which is what it has done for me.

### **Abby Buchan : 2012 Fellow**

Abby: I am so grateful and humbled by the opportunity to be a WomenNC Fellow, and I wish to share this experience with other young women in North Carolina. Thank you WomenNC for the chance to present research at the United Nations and explore essential dialogue with students and activists from around the world. I would have never seen this chance to combine entrepreneurship, mobile innovation, and public health as crossroads of change without this fellowship!

## **WomenNC Testimonial –Kimmie Garner (Fellow 2011)**

### 1. What impact did the program have on your life?

Participating as a WomenNC Fellow in 2011 marked an incredible transformation in my life in regards to my comfort with public speaking, understanding of community issues and organizations within North Carolina, and larger participation in and commitment to women's rights on a global scale. Upon receiving the fellowship, I felt a mixture of genuine excitement, as well as nervousness at the magnitude of this incredible opportunity for a twenty-one year old woman. In the months leading up to CSW 55, I gained a deeper, more nuanced perspective of sexual and reproductive health education and policies in North Carolina and the United States as a result of my research and shadowing of the Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Campaign of North Carolina (APPCNC) and El Pueblo, Inc. This preparation, in addition to our presentation to donors and community members a few weeks prior to attending CSW 55, instilled me with the tools and skills to effectively address CSW attendees, participate in various conversations about women's rights at the conference, and organize a weekly Brown Bag lunch series about gender and feminism at Colgate University currently.

I am a very applied learner and truly enjoy putting theory into practice and making sense of community work through theoretical frameworks. The combination of research, writing, and direct interaction with APPCNC and El Pueblo, Inc. allowed me not only to participate in this kind of model, but also expand my abilities as a researcher, writer, public speaker, and community member. Since the majority of my community work in college had been rooted in North Carolina, participating in a transnational gathering broadened my awareness of how global issues play out at the local level and vice versa. It also facilitated in my growth as a Global Studies and Women's Studies major by allowing me to witness and participate in the very conversations we were having in our classes in North Carolina with people from all over the world in New York. Presenting my findings both in North Carolina and New York marked a major shift in my confidence with public speaking, as well, and continues to inform my comfort with public speaking today. Overall, this program deepened my understanding of how interconnected women's issues are around the world and allowed me to envision what my role would be in shifting opinions, practices, and policies that continue to place



women at a disadvantage.

### 2. What have you done since that has come from the work you did with WomenNC?

My current position in Colgate University's Center for Women's Studies as Program Assistant is very related to the work I did with WomenNC as a fellow. I organize a weekly Brown Bag lunch series that focuses on gender and feminism on a local, national, and global scale. Faculty, students, staff, and off-campus speakers address topics such as feminist parenting, disability rights, refugee and immigrant experiences in Central New York, violence prevention, and LGBTQ identities. The sessions I attended at CSW 55 informed the creation of these topical areas and ensured the content of each session was multifaceted and complex. Furthermore, the amount of public speaking I did throughout my fellowship, both in New York and North Carolina, was crucial in developing my comfort addressing both small and large groups of people at Colgate. Because we host at least 70 people per Brown Bag and I facilitate positive sexuality and violence prevention seminars, my greater ease with public speaking is extremely significant in my daily life.

Due to the transformative experience I had through my fellowship, I organized a trip to CSW 56 this past February. I created an application, advertised the opportunity through various channels on campus, read through applications and interviewed applicants, and narrowed the pool down to four participants who attended the conference for free. My supervisor, the Director of Women's Studies at Colgate, also attended the conference. I applied for funding through a Colgate grant-giving program and coordinated all travel, lodging, and food logistics. I also organized supplemental activities, such as a meeting with feminist author Amy Richards and a trip to the 9/11 Memorial. Prior to the trip, I held two preparatory sessions in which I presented about the historical context of CSW and facilitated discussions about CEDAW and opinions regarding its efficacy.

After attending the conference for two days, we hosted a Brown Bag in the Center for Women's Studies the following week titled "Reflections from the 56<sup>th</sup> Session on the Commission of the Status of Women," in which the participants discussed their insights from attending 6-8 sessions. The students also presented in one of the Introduction to Women's Studies courses a few weeks later. Evaluations from the trip were extremely positive and the students felt the amount of time at the conference, as well as the quality of the sessions leading up to and during the conference, were rich and stimulating.

### 3. Why do you think it is important to give to this organization?

It is imperative to give to WomenNC due to the innovative model it follows and demonstrates for other organizations. WomenNC possesses an applied approach to community empowerment and education. Through its fellowship program, university students receive the opportunity to research, immerse themselves in an organization's practices, and present their findings to the community all over the course of six months. The quality and intensity of this model prepares youth to actively and meaningfully participate in global dialogues at U.N. sessions that they may be learning about in the classroom, which enriches their experience at the U.N. and once they return to school. WomenNC affirms the value of youth in envisioning and participating in solutions to global problems because the knowledge and passion of participants is valued and encouraged to grow throughout the fellowship. In addition to the fellowship experience, WomenNC works tirelessly toward local, national, and global change in various ways. The staff and volunteers of WomenNC are steadily



working towards the ratification of CEDAW through education and awareness raising. By providing opportunities for students to strengthen their advocacy and activism skills in North Carolina and New York, as well as presenting research to the local community about women's issues and organizations, WomenNC is creating a long-term commitment to sustained change for women at the local, national, and global level. Their multi-pronged approach to CEDAW's ratification through community education and focus on bolstering the participation of youth at a conference primarily attended by more seasoned activists through the fellowship completely merits funding!

#### 4. What impact did WomenNC have on your campus?

While three of the four fellowship recipients were from UNC-Chapel Hill the year I participated as a fellow, I believe the program had more of an effect on me than it did on my campus. Because WomenNC was still establishing itself as an organization and the other fellows and I had extremely busy schedules, we didn't advertise as much as we should have on such a large campus. Even though our presentation was not highly attended, I definitely incorporated what I had learned at CSW 55 into my classes my final semester of college and beyond. I believe creating chapters of WomenNC at various universities in the Triangle would be successful and am certain UNC would be a great place for one!