

HWS Student Self-Health Center

About the project

The idea for this space was inspired by the general dissatisfaction with the health center (Hubbs) on the HWS campus within the student body. Ideally the Self-Health Center would be an alternative option or a precursor to Hubbs Health Center, providing students with the opportunity and the means to act as their own healthcare practitioner when they feel it is appropriate.

The idea for a “self-health” center is based largely off of the feminist self-help movement that began in the U.S. in the 1970s, specifically as it is characterized in Michelle Murphy’s book Seizing the Means of Reproduction. Murphy frames the feminist self-help movement largely as a form of protocol feminism, effective in that it was a means of “recrafting and distribution of technosocial practices” In other words, the idea of feminist self-help as a protocol emphasizes the ability of a group to seize control of their own bodies through a set of practices and processes that are easily “standarizable and transmissible.” Murphy envisioned this as being useful to women who wished for the practice of feminist self-help to be carried across borders of space (to other states and countries). But on the HWS campus, this idea of feminist self help as protocol could be extremely useful to students who wished for the structure of self-help practices and spaces to continue functioning across borders of time; something that could remain in use and in practice after the original founders had moved on from HWS; something that could survive multiple and continuous shifts and changes in those who control, organize, and maintain it.

The Space

- Attached to or next to Hubbs, though the two would not be under the same leadership (although frequent communication is encouraged as well as instances of partnership when it suits the needs of both parties)
- Students can come and go freely (no need to make appointments)
- Extremely comfortable and cozy (plenty of comfy couches and chairs, as well as things like yoga mats and balls, etc)
- No gender segregated spaces, but instead lots of collapsible partitions so that sections of the space can be made private as needed
- Open on weekends

Impact on Campus

- Allow students to actively engage with their own and others’ bodies (just as Murphy argues the feminist self help groups did for women in the 70s) and thus become better advocates and more active agents regarding their health.
- Empower students to know that they didn’t have to depend solely on getting an appointment at Hubbs to help solve a medical problem
- Open discourse so that people would feel comfortable talking more casually about their bodies and health. This, in addition to the point above, would lead to an overall healthier and more health-conscious campus.
- Introduce the idea of how gender neutrality can function well even in spaces most people are used to having be gender segregated and thus create a more open-minded attitude about the idea of gender non-conformity on campus.

The Protocol

- The space would be staffed by a couple of awesome, open-minded medical professionals (who would maybe also work in Hubbs depending on how much traffic this space got) who we could always talk to. Students EMTs could maybe also choose to work there and receive pay for it (since they aren’t paid for their work on this campus.) All employees should only be hired after a thorough interview process so as to make sure that the values of the space are upheld (those being to create an safe, open, inspiring, community-oriented space in which students can engage in the practice of self-health care to whatever extent they wish)
- It should be run by whomever is has a passionate interest in the space’s function on campus. I imagine Women’s Collective as having a fairly steady hand in running it, some faculty. It would ideally always have both students and faculty involved in running it, as well as the awesome open-minded individuals who are hired to work there.
- There would be all kinds of books (on sex, bodies, science, natural medicine, mental health, etc.) all as open and progressive as possible. Included should be how-to kinds of books, similar to those given to EMS and/or outdoor wilderness first aid trainees; the kinds that would tell the reader how to take someone’s pulse, check for lice, care for a sprained ankle, etc. These would be useful because they tend to emphasize the kinds of treatment that can be practiced at home, and that which one should really seek professional medical attention (broken bones, frostbite, etc.)
- There should also be student-written documents there, and links to online resources, including an online space where students can post reviews and provide feedback about their experience at the center.
- There would be all kinds of medical equipment in there, too; not anything serious like scalpels, but simple stuff like stethoscopes, speculums, blood pressure cuffs, little flashlights, tongue depressors, a microscope or two; things like that.
- Every so often training sessions could be held in there for things like breast exams, CPR, massage, vaginal self exams, nutrition, lice checks, yoga, ANYTHING; it could be anything and everything.

