

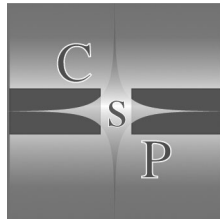
Many Floridas



# Many Floridas Women Envisioning Change

Edited by

Judy A. Hayden, Sharon Kay Masters,  
Rhonda L. S. Ovist and Kim Vaz



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## INTRODUCTION

# LINKING THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN FLORIDA TO THE STATUS OF THE ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE OF WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES

RHONDA L. S. OVIST AND KIM VAZ

The Florida Consortium for Women's and Gender Studies (FCWGS) is a strategic alliance of Women's and Gender Studies programs in the State of Florida. It consists of eighteen institutions of higher education, including public and private universities, colleges, and community colleges. The Consortium seeks to advance the discipline within the state by contributing to the dialogue of important areas within the field on research, teaching, advocacy, and activism, and increasing the resources and status of the discipline.

The papers in this volume represent a sample of the work by scholars and policy makers associated with the Florida Consortium for Women's and Gender Studies (FCWGS). In this introduction, we describe the FCWGS and its role and value in addressing the status of women in Florida and in academia. We share in this text the work we are doing in the FCWGS as an example of what Women's Studies and Gender Studies can accomplish through a decidedly feminist model of collaboration

The FCWGS arose from the efforts of Women's and Gender Studies professionals in the state who had both a need and a vision for strong networks of support and resource exchange among our existing programs. We believe that Florida's Women's and Gender Studies programs, state organizations, local activists, and scholars can better serve the needs of women when we are able to efficiently coordinate our efforts. By creating and nurturing our connections, we strengthen our individual programs. The FCWGS allows us to pool what are often scarce resources, benefiting

all of us as policy makers, researchers, teachers, and students. FCWGS also enhances the visibility and opportunities of individual colleges and organizations through the intra-state, national, and international collaborative efforts of our members.

Many of us come from small Women's and Gender Studies programs, often with little or no financial support, feeling quite alone and often under siege as we struggle to educate our students and support feminist action. Even those of us who work with larger programs or women's organizations experience a level of isolation and resistance to our work, which is made more profound in a state that has failed in so many ways to support the status of women within its borders. Individually, we are pushed to the limits even as we manage to provide a curriculum that enables thousands of students annually to engage in the critical study of women's lives and gender construction.

Members of the FCWGS share a feminist vision of equality for all women and a fundamental concern for the quality of life—locally and globally—regardless of class, race, gender, sexuality, age, or any other social category. These concerns are brought to the fore in our everyday life as residents of Florida, a state that has received a dishonorable mention (and an overall “grade” of D+) from the Washington-based Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) in 2004. Florida has particularly dismal scores in the areas of health and well-being and political participation for women. For this reason, it only made sense to focus our first annual conference on the status of women in Florida. In April, 2006, members and guests of the FCWGS gathered under the theme of *Many Floridas: Women Envisioning Change* (also the title of this volume) to examine the ways that Women's Studies pedagogy, scholarship, and activism address the needs of women in Florida. Heidi Hartmann, Ph.D., President of the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) and the conference's keynote speaker, set the tone for the conference, and her concerns are set out in section one.

The FCWGS began with an email. In mid 2005, Kim Vaz, Chair of the Department of Women's Studies at the University of South Florida, wrote to heads of other Women's Studies programs in the state, asking if there was interest in building a consortium. The initial response was quick and positive, and within months, the FCWGS program heads had put together a web page and a list serve. Members discussed themes, agendas, and concerns (via the internet and the occasional phone conference), and the planning for the first annual conference was underway. Our call for papers netted a full schedule of presenters ranging from undergraduates to professors to state officials, and the conference in April of 2006 provided

two days of engaging dialogue, dissemination of ideas, and planning for the future.

Participants were invigorated by the positive energy pulsing through our presentations, work sessions, and informal conversations. Conditioned to the isolation of our often small, always struggling programs, we were amazed at what could be accomplished together. The FCWGS's first annual conference allowed us to find each other, like so many siblings separated at birth and kept apart—not by distance or difference, but by a lack of collective awareness and a means of coming together. We found that there was great value in what we do and that our pedagogy is cutting edge and effective; we realized immediately that our scholarship is rigorous and relevant and our activism necessary. By our last session, the participants voiced an overwhelming consensus that the conference was a success, and they recognized that we all share a decided commitment to the continuation of the FCWGS; and so the work, and the possibilities, begin.

As we will discuss below, the chapters in this anthology reflect the work we are doing as scholars, policy makers, activists, and teachers. Through FCWGS we have created a structure of support sustained by cooperation and collaboration, allowing us to share our ideas, receive feedback from others on our own efforts, and further our feminist agendas.

As we strive to protect and to strengthen our programs and to work in the interests of women everywhere, we have come to see the parallels between the status of women in Florida and the subordinate status of Women's and Gender Studies programs in the state. Feminist critical theory posits that those who exist at the margins of institutions and organizations have an epistemological privilege, that their special position or location offers insights to assess critically hegemonic thinking, domination, and control. Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) notion of the *mestiza consciousness* offers an example of how knowledge that comes from inhabiting contradictory locations simultaneously is flexible, tolerant of ambiguity, and gives rise to a different perspective through which to assess the social order. Women at the margins of society and women who are struggling at the margins of academia share the potential of just such a critical insight as their existence might be viewed as "othered" and shoved to the periphery. Of course, we also recognize that, as members of academia, we are relatively privileged in comparison to many of the women in our state. As such, we are strongly motivated to utilize the resources available to us via our positions, however tenuous, to enable critical awareness and action on the part of all with an interest in the status of Florida's women.

The feminist foundations of Women's and Gender Studies provides us with a myriad of theoretical advances, conceptual tools, and methodological approaches through which we can and do fight to give voice to the experience of those at the margins and to work toward the ideals of social justice. Foremost is the conviction—one that is founded on rigorous research and theoretical development—that our society operates along the lines of a gendered social order. Society is built upon the dualism of masculinity and femininity, and constructions of gender, race, class, age, and sexuality are concretized in the very institutions that structure our daily lives. The processes and practices of our society's major sectors—work, family, politics, law, education, medicine, the military, religions, and cultures—are ordered by gendered social arrangements (Lorber, 2005), conferring power and legitimacy on those social arrangements, which then operate to give status and identity.

Contemporary feminist theory also highlights ways in which the gendered social order can be disrupted. We can begin to chip away at the frame of the gendered social order so that we might create new ways to structure our lives. Judith Butler (1999) instructs us on the performativity of gender and, thus, its inherent ambiguity, flexibility, and contradictions. We understand the intersectionality of the systems of hierarchal categories (i.e., gender, class, race, age, and sexuality) that work in concert to limit the options of people by introducing even more difference into the ways that opportunities in society are denied or conveyed and which further guarantee the reproduction of the social order (Krenshaw, 1991). Further, we recognize the necessity of attending to the level of societal discourse—historically, socially, and institutionally specific structures of statements, terms, categories, words, and beliefs—as it is contained and expressed in organizations and institutions that constitute “texts” to be read and critiqued (Scott, 1988).

Drawing on the perspective of historical materialism, Nancy Fraser (1998) writes that gender, like sexuality, represents a status differentiation in which the dual system of gender leads to pervasive cultural interpretations and evaluations that subordinate the feminine half of the dualism. She suggests that all low-status groups, such as those associated with non-dominant race, sexuality, class, age, health, beauty categories, and anything paradigmatically that becomes coded as feminine, risk being feminized and therefore depreciated and subordinated through the gendered social order that structures our society. Women's status subordination includes,

sexual assault and domestic violence, trivializing, objectifying, and demeaning stereotypical depictions in the media, harassment and

disparagement in everyday life; exclusion or marginalization in public spheres and deliberative bodies; and denial of the full rights and equal protections of citizenship. These harms are injustices of recognition. They are relatively independent of political economy and are not merely 'superstructural.' Thus they cannot be overcome by redistribution alone but require additional remedies of recognition (Fraser 1998, 77).

Changing the status of women from Fraser's view requires that the *relations of recognition* must be restructured through changes in the *institutional patterns of cultural valuations*. The revaluation of, and the conferral of respect to, women depends on the realignment of the oppositions that uphold the denigration of the female social category and the universalizing of privileges that are typically reserved for the preferred groups. Most importantly, this process must be accompanied by the redistribution of institutional resources in a more equitable manner.

Women's and Gender Studies, with its critical attention to women and other marginalized groups, has been a prime recipient of the process of feminization and its resultant cultural and economic devaluation. These programs have been "misrecognized" and thus devalued through institutional arrangements which leave them starving for the vital resources required to grow a scholarly discipline—faculty lines, conferral of department status, adequate budgets for curriculum expansion, and student recruitment. This misrecognition must be redressed with "recognition." Through the deinstitutionalization of preferences for disciplines favored and valorized by andocentric values, Women's and Gender Studies would share equal footing with other disciplines in the humanities and the social and natural sciences, which are not only reinforced with resources to help grow their programs, but enjoy a level of institutional respect unimaginable to those in Women's and Gender Studies. Linking the status of women in Florida to the status of Women's and Gender Studies in academia is the first step in comprehensively disrupting, dismantling, and replacing structural inequalities in the state. Collectively, we can build theory, create scholarship, craft policy, and lobby for institutional resources that will improve the status of all women in Florida.

Yet, the question remains: how do we do this while struggling to sustain Women's and Gender Studies itself? The FCWGS is an attempt to preserve our discipline and to fight collectively against our institutionalized subordination in academia, so that we are able to continue to apply our knowledge and skills to the issues facing women in our communities. Founded on the feminist principles of cooperation, consensus building, and practice, the FCWGS is theory put to practice,

mirroring a central theme of our individual programs and work. The FCWGS allows us to build an alliance between programs and individuals that will help us survive in the increasingly competitive academic domain where institutional support is frequently based on a “business model” of value. Our marginal position and lack of departmental status are only part of the problem. The University of South Florida, for example, is the only college in Florida with a Women’s Studies department. Other critical issues include the lack of full-time faculty, which means that most of our programs must be interdisciplinary with little or no budget, and as such are dependent on the good will of the traditional departments for faculty. Furthermore, there are huge demands on our time; even as we are marginalized, we are called upon by our colleges to diversify committees, programs, and institution-sponsored initiatives.

These difficulties mean that our “voices” are often silenced in the very mainstream academic venues that might enable us to build credibility and advance our scholarly efforts. As this volume demonstrates, the FCWGS gives us an important local venue for sharing our work, developing ties with our communities (both within and outside the academy), giving voice to ourselves and to the women whose experiences we illuminate and value, and, not least, building credentials that have become so central in academic careers.

We believe that the relevance of our conversations at the FCWGS first annual meeting extends beyond state borders. Several of the contributors to this volume examine issues that are the same or similar to issues that readers are addressing in their own communities and work. More important, our work illuminates the myriad of ways that feminist concerns in Florida are best understood within a much greater context than simply state boundaries. We are reminded that not only is the personal political, but that the local is, in fact, global. We cannot ignore the degree to which our lives are inter-connected through the people we meet in this transient world, the ideas that become part of our cultural apparatus via the growing media, the corporations that dominate our economies, or the very clothes on our backs (most likely made by the hands of an underpaid worker in another country). It is also true, that by locating ourselves and scholarship in Florida, we present yet one position in what standpoint theorist Patricia Hill-Collins (2000) would see as the social whole. It provides readers one view of the world, perhaps different from their own, but no less valid and useful in forming a more complete understanding.

Within these pages, readers will find both agreement and disagreement between the contributors and will themselves no doubt find ideas and experiences that are both similar as well as unfamiliar to their own. Truth,

ever shifting and always hypothetical, yet still necessary as the impetus for action, is best approached through free and safe dialogue. We have included multiple sides of the dialogues regarding Women's and Gender Studies, globalization, and diverse feminist approaches to service-learning.

## Overview of the Anthology

Academic Women's and Gender Studies programs provide the knowledge to see the connections between women's overall position and the fiscal and resource marginalization of Women's and Gender Studies programs at the state level. We seek to work through dialogue and in conjunction with Florida's State agencies and State officials, who are integral partners in our endeavors to recognize, redress, and empower Florida's women. In Section I, Heidi Hartmann provides an essential and highly relevant report on the various indicators of the status of women in the State of Florida and makes suggestions for policy changes that have the potential of improving the situation for women. Hartmann's paper, "The Dishonorable State: The Status of Women in Florida and How Florida's Women Can Move Up," substantiates the FCWGS mission and serves as an excellent spring board for our work as scholars, teachers, students, activists and policy makers concerned with improving the status of women in Florida.

According to Hartmann, Florida is a "perennially low-ranking state" and in 2004, was awarded a *Dishonorable Mention* by IWPR for the status of its women on measures of political participation, employment and earnings, social and economic autonomy, reproductive health, and general health and well being. On most indicators of women's well-being, Florida lags significantly behind other states in the nation. The status women of color in Florida is particularly discouraging, with data showing that African American and Hispanic women are facing serious constraints to equal opportunity in health, income, and education. Hartmann makes the argument that Florida policy-makers must work to improve the status of all women and the economic viability of the state itself through a variety of means, ranging from continued improvement in women's political and economic participation to increasing income, education, and health coverage opportunities for women.

In Section II, we consider the possibilities and limits of feminist pedagogy in our classrooms, with a particular focus on the possibilities of incorporating service-learning into our Women's Studies curricula. Each paper describes some of the positive outcomes of service-learning and contributes to the ongoing feminist dialogue concerning issues of

power/empowerment, knowledge production, authority, and the legitimacy of activism as a learning strategy. Service-learning provides us with an excellent opportunity to build reciprocal relationships between women in the academy and women in the community, so that we can work collectively towards the improvement of women's lives and disrupt those social hierarchies that affect the quality of our lives.

In "Don't Tie Me Down: Counteracting Resistance to Feminism in the College Classroom Through Civic Engagement," Amanda Irvin, lecturer in the University of Central Florida's Women's Studies program, describes her struggles in creating a feminist classroom without alienating her students, who might resist feminist perspectives. In an effort to disrupt traditional power relations in the classroom and create the intellectual space for students to "discover" their own feminisms, Irvin recommends incorporating service-learning in Women's Studies courses. Service-learning, she argues, provides opportunities for the practical application of feminist theory, encourages students to see themselves as sources of knowledge, and brings feminism home for students because they are living it.

Leandra Preston, Women's Studies instructor at the University of Central Florida, focuses on the more practical issues surrounding service-learning, sharing the wisdom of her program's various "How To" guides in "You can't Fight Violence With Silence: Practical Tools for Service-Learning and Activism to Eliminate Violence Against Women." In particular, she provides specific tools to help readers organize their own service-learning activities and campaigns related to violence against women, including advisement on how to connect these projects to Women's Studies course curricula.

In "Whose Knowledge?: Rethinking Collaboration in Service-Learning," Rhonda L. S. Ovist, Associate Professor of Sociology at Rollins College, acknowledges the many advantages to service-learning projects; however, she also argues that Women's Studies faculty should attend to, and actively engage in, the tensions arising due to gaps between the perspectives of students, teachers, community professionals, and the service recipients. She points out that many service-learning projects presume a good fit between academic knowledge and experiential/professional field-based knowledge and treats academic knowledge (as it is presented by the instructor) uncritically.

In Section III, we present a sample of research being done by the FCWGS members that specifically examines issues concerning women in Florida. The papers are striking on a number of levels: 1) all are written while the authors were Women's Studies graduate students in FCWGS

member programs; 2) they represent a sample of the important feminist research taking place in our Women's and Gender Studies programs, even as those programs struggle at the margins of the academy; and 3) they are indicative of the important types of knowledge that Women's and Gender Studies scholars are producing in partnership with the women of their communities, women whose voices are typically silenced. The papers in this section remind us of the importance of the FCWGS; without it, these students may not have had a venue for sharing their research and getting vital feedback nor the encouragement to continue developing their work for publication. Similarly, without the FCWGS, we would not have had the privilege of learning more about the lives of the women whose experiences are depicted in these papers, women whose lives are bound to our own and to whom we have a moral responsibility to support and defend.

Monica Melton, recently awarded a Ph.D. at Florida Atlantic University, begins Section III with a powerful and much needed examination of the perspectives of HIV-infected women concerning HIV prevention in their community in "Positive Perspectives on Prevention: Southern Women's Voices on HIV/AIDS." In this paper, Melton shares a sample of her interviews with HIV/AIDS infected Black women in Florida and introduces us to the narrative analysis she is developing that allows these women to speak for themselves about a subject with which they are intimately familiar. Her central argument is that traditional models of HIV prevention that focus on individual behavior rather than on structural and environmental factors tend to reinforce negative stereotypes of infected Black women (i.e., impoverished, sexually deviant, pathological) and fail to effectively reflect the actual experiences and needs of infected Black women. Melton argues that by listening to the "stories" of HIV/AIDS infected Black Women, we will come to a far better understanding of the risks of infection and the potential effectiveness of prevention measures for this vulnerable population than is provided by more conventional approaches.

Peggy Macdonald, a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of History at the University of Florida, examines the contributions of Marjorie Harris Carr in her long and successful battle to stop the construction of the Cross-Florida Barge Canal. In her chapter "Majorie Harris Carr and the Birth of the Florida Environmental Movement," Macdonald contributes to the feminist effort to rescue from marginalization the legacies of women who worked to shape environmental activism in the mid-twentieth century. Historians have often characterized their activism as an extension of the roles of wives and mothers, and hence depicted their work within the

construct of the private sphere as a desire to protect the “home.” Macdonald urges that their contributions be recognized as stemming from legitimate experiences as ecologists and environmentalists, and, thus, their contributions should be viewed through the public sphere of political and environmental activism in the same manner as their male colleagues.

The last paper in this section presents the work of Lisa Kuchta, a master’s degree student at the University of South Florida, who through her work with W.O.M.E.N., a Tampa-based abortion fund, creates a profound “blending of voices” in “From W.O.M.E.N. to Women: A Local Abortion Fund and the Pro-Choice Fight.” This dialogue, set within the context of the history of Florida and the W.O.M.E.N.’s organization, juxtaposes the words of women requesting funds for an abortion against a variety of statements by abortion opponents, bringing forward voices long lost in the political rhetoric that dominates public discourse.

In Section IV, contributors examine the debates concerning the value and consequences of globalization and postcolonial analysis for Women’s and Gender Studies programs. In the paper entitled “Think Globally, Act (and Teach) Locally,” Trysh Travis, Assistant Professor of Women’s Studies and Associate Professor of English at the University of Florida argues that the global lens should be centrally focused on the problems at the local level. Even as institutions of higher education excitedly embrace the internationalization of programs and disciplines, Travis reminds us of the importance of sustaining political and pedagogical resources so that Women’s Studies activism and teaching can continue to address the local community.

In contrast, the next two chapters, “Internationalizing Women’s Studies Programs” and “Women’s and Gender Studies across the Cultures: Internationalizing Women’s Studies at Florida International University,” provide persuasive arguments for internationalizing Women’s Studies. In former chapter, Milagros Pena, Director of the Center for Women’s Studies and Gender Research (CWSGR) and the Transnational and Global Studies Center (TGSC) at the University of Florida, looks to internationalization as a path towards transnational feminist practice. More specifically, internationalization allows Women’s Studies students to navigate the very real tensions and conflicts that inevitably arise at the national, structural and cultural boundaries that divide women of the world. Whether in person, or, when budgets are tight, via internet, students can connect with women’s organizations across the globe at the grass-roots level, pushing the Women’s Studies curriculum past the hollowness of the descriptive and into the richness of action-based analysis. In the

latter article, Aurora Morcillo, Associate Professor, Women's Studies and History and Interim Associate Director of the Women's Studies Center at the Florida International University (FIU), and Suzanna Rose, Director of the Women's Studies Center at Florida International University, Miami, and also Chair and Professor of Psychology describe the two year process leading up to the launching of the International Gender and Women's Status Consortium in 2005. Committed to ongoing collaboration and an exchange of ideas, members representing, among others, Granada, Columbia, South Africa and FIU envision the co-development of theoretical perspectives allowing for the critical examination of the global economy from a gender perspective.

Taken together, the chapters that follow reflect the title of this volume *Many Floridas: Women Envisioning Change*. Within the perspectives and experiences of the authors and the women they write about, we can glimpse the relative positions of sameness and difference; where our shared status as woman brings us together, even as it yields such divergent and unequal consequences upon our lives. Each of us write from the standpoint of various intersections of class, race, ethnicity, age, sexuality, and profession, and it is from these unique social locations that we dare to envision change. Whether we are wrestling with the theoretical dilemmas of feminist pedagogy, or presenting templates for academic activism, giving voice to those who have been silenced, or sharing procedures for developing relationships with partners in other countries, we are committed to making a better society, a more just world.



**PART I**

**WOMEN'S STATUS IN THE STATE  
OF FLORIDA**

## CHAPTER ONE

# THE DISHONORABLE STATE: THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN FLORIDA AND HOW FLORIDA'S WOMEN CAN MOVE UP

HEIDI HARTMANN AND ASHLEY ENGLISH

Women have made tremendous gains towards economic equality during the last several decades. Nonetheless, women throughout the United States still earn less, are less likely to own a business, and are more likely to live in poverty than men. Even in areas where there have been significant advances in women's status, there is still ample room for improvement. For example, at the rate of progress achieved between 1995 and 2005, it will take women nearly 50 years for wage parity with men.<sup>1</sup>

Women of color are particularly disadvantaged in the United States. In every state, racial and ethnic inequalities abound. In most states, these inequalities follow a general trend: white and Asian American women enjoy better wages and less poverty than African American, Latina, and Native American women.

Florida is no exception. On many indicators, the state's women fall below the middle, sometimes in the bottom third, and women of color generally fare worse than white women. In 2004, Florida earned a "dishonorable mention" in state-by-state rankings on the status of women produced by the Institute for Women's Policy Research. In that year, Florida ranked in the bottom half of all states in all given domains in which women's status was measured!

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<sup>1</sup> This figure was calculated by taking the average yearly percent change in the wage ratio between 1995 and 2005 and calculating how many years it would take for that percent change to bring the ratio up to 100 percent (Institute for Women's Policy Research 2006).

How women fare in one domain typically affects how they fare in others. For example, a woman's earnings and access to health insurance affect her ability to provide a decent quality of life for her family, to maintain her and her family's health, or to move out of a violent or abusive relationship. A woman's access to a good paying job that is family friendly and offers benefits will also affect her economic standing in old age by increasing her Social Security benefits and her ability to save and invest for retirement.

In addition, the status of women plays a critical part in the success and growth of every state and the entire national economy. When women can contribute as full and equal participants in society, they enable cities, states, and the nation as a whole to achieve their full social and economic potential.

This chapter uses the *Status of Women in the States* reports, which have been released by the Institute for Women's Policy Research every two years since 1996, to assess women's status in Florida. We draw comparisons with women in other states and women across the nation to highlight what is most promising and disappointing about women's status in Florida. The paper also provides recommendations for how Florida, a perennial low-ranking state, can improve the status of its women.

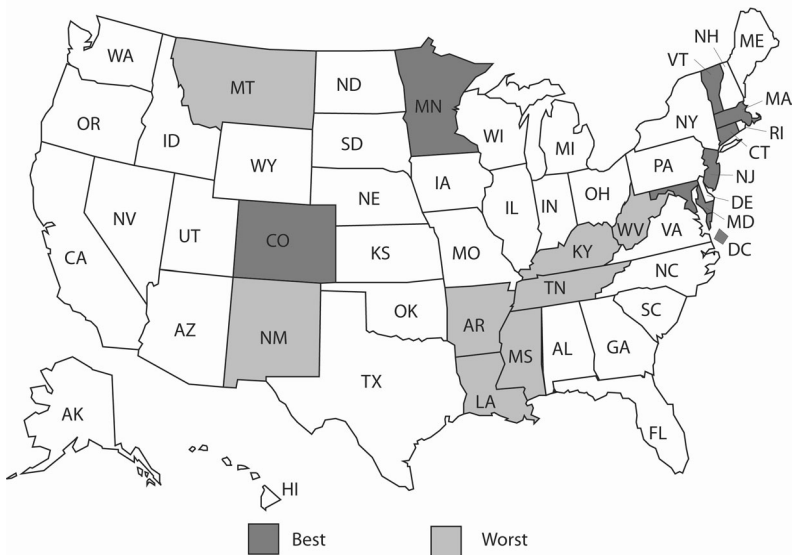
What's Promising?	What's Disappointing?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Florida is tied for first on the number of institutional resources available to women in politics in the state because it has a commission on women and bipartisan caucuses of women in both houses of the state legislature.</li> <li>▪ Florida ranks 16<sup>th</sup> in percentage of businesses that are women-owned.</li> <li>▪ Florida's Latinas and Native American women have greater access to college education than their counterparts nationwide.</li> <li>▪ Eighty-one percent of Florida's women live in a county with an abortion provider (compared with an average of 57 percent for the nation as a whole).</li> <li>▪ Florida women rank 10<sup>th</sup> on breast cancer mortality.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Florida ranks 35<sup>th</sup> on the Employment and Earnings composite and 31<sup>st</sup> on the Social and Economic Autonomy composite, earning the state a D+ on both composites.</li> <li>▪ Florida ranks 36<sup>th</sup> on the percentage of women in professional or managerial occupations.</li> <li>▪ African American, Latina, and Native American women have lower wages, lower educational levels, and more poverty than White and Asian American women.</li> <li>▪ Florida consistently ranks in the bottom ten (45<sup>th</sup>, 44<sup>th</sup>, and 48<sup>th</sup>) states on the Health and Well-Being composite.</li> <li>▪ Florida does not provide public funding for abortions.</li> <li>▪ Florida ranks in the bottom ten states for women with health insurance.</li> </ul>

## **Overview of the *Status of Women in the States* Project**

The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) began the *Status of Women in the States* project in 1995 to produce reliable state level data about issues affecting women, and as response to the devolution of policy to the states, the biennial reports use data from the federal government and other sources to measure women's progress on a variety of indicators. The reports provide national and regional rankings for each state on 30 total indicators in 5 issue areas: Political Participation, Employment and Earnings, Economic and Social Autonomy, Reproductive Rights, and Health and Well-Being. For each of these five issue areas, composite indices are calculated to provide an overall assessment of the status of women in each area. The indices are also used to determine a letter grade

from A to F for each state. In 2006, the best state economies (considering the Employment and Earnings and, the Social and Economic Autonomy, or Economic Policy Environment, composites) for women were found in the District of Columbia, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Vermont, Connecticut, New Jersey, and Colorado (see Map 1). The worst state economies for women were in Arkansas, Louisiana, West Virginia, Mississippi, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Texas (Hartmann et al. 2006).

**Map 1: Best and Worst State Economies for Women (2006)**



How did Florida fare? Florida ranked 35<sup>th</sup>, in the bottom third, on the Employment and Earnings composite in 2006, and just above the bottom third, at 31<sup>st</sup>, on the Social and Economic Autonomy composite. Florida's letter grade was D+ for both composites. In 2004, the best states taking all five composite indices under consideration were Vermont, Connecticut, Minnesota, and Washington. These states scored within the top half of all states on all the composite indices and in the top ten of states on at least one composite. The worst states were Mississippi, South Carolina, Kentucky, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Texas. These states scored in the bottom half of all states on all five indices and in the bottom ten on at least one (Werschkul and Williams 2004). Florida was awarded

“dishonorable mention” because, while it did not fall into the bottom ten on any composite, it was in the bottom half on all five.

### **A Closer Look at Florida**

While Florida’s women, like all women in the United States, have witnessed some real improvements in their status, many barriers to equality remain. In fact, Florida is a perennially low-ranking state on all of the composite indicators. The state rarely ranks in the top half on any composite index (only in 1998 was Florida in the top half on a composite index—for reproductive rights; since then Florida has fallen to 28<sup>th</sup>). Florida’s most recent rankings on the five indicators were: 32<sup>nd</sup> on Political Participation in 2004 (C-); 35<sup>th</sup> on Employment and Earnings in 2006 (D+); 31<sup>st</sup> on Social and Economic Autonomy in 2006 (D+); 28<sup>th</sup> on Reproductive Rights in 2004 (C-); and 38<sup>th</sup> on Health and Well-Being in 2004 (D+) (Werschkul and Williams 2004; Hartmann et al. 2006). With such low-rankings, it is clear that Florida does not ensure equal rights and opportunities for women. The problems facing Florida’s women demand significant attention from policymakers, women’s advocates, and researchers concerned with women’s status.

### **Political Participation**

In 2004, women in Florida ranked 32<sup>nd</sup> nationally on Political Participation, earning the state a grade of C- on this composite measure of women’s status and placing it just barely in the middle third of all states on this indicator (and in the bottom half). Florida ranked in the bottom third on two of the four indicators in this area: percent of women registered to vote (44<sup>th</sup>) and percent of women who voted (40<sup>th</sup>). Florida ranked 32<sup>nd</sup> on women in elected office. On a more positive note, Florida tied for first with 15 other states on the number of institutional resources available to women in the state since in Florida there is both a commission on women and bipartisan caucuses of women in both houses of the state legislature (Werschkul and Williams 2004).

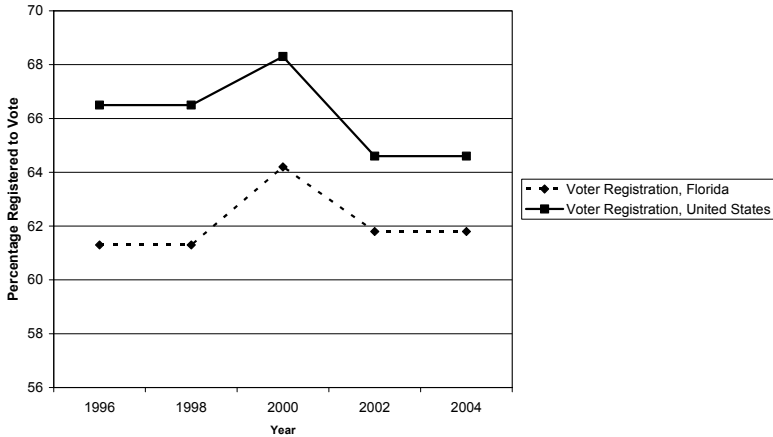
As can be seen in Table 1, Florida’s women have consistently ranked in the bottom half of states nationally on political participation.

**Table 1: Trends in Women's Political Participation in Florida, 1996-2004**

	<b>1996</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2004</b>
<b>Political Participation Composite Index (Rank)</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Women in Elected Office (Rank and Score)</b>	32 1.42	30 1.47	33 1.52	33 1.52	29 1.86
<b>Percent of Women Registered to Vote (Rank and % Registered)</b>	45 61.3%	45 61.3%	47 64.2%	44 61.8%	44 61.8%
<b>Percent of Women Who Voted (Rank and % Registered)</b>	42 50.2%	44 54.7%	44 54.7%	40 46.9%	40 46.9%
<b>Number of Institutional Resources Available to Women (Rank and Score)</b>	10 2.0	1 3.0	1 2.0	1 2.0	1 2.0

Source: Institute for Women's Policy Research 1996; 1998; Caiazza 2000; 2002; Werschkul and Williams 2004

In Florida, voter registration during the past 10 years rose and fell at about the same rates as it did nationally. However, as Chart 1 shows, women in Florida have consistently registered to vote in lower numbers than their peers nationwide.

**Chart 1:****Percentage of Women Registered to Vote in Florida and the United States, 1996-2004**

Source: Institute for Women's Policy Research 1996; 1998; Caiazza 2000; 2002; Werschkul and Williams 2004

## Employment and Earnings

In 2006, women in Florida ranked 35<sup>th</sup> nationally on Employment and Earnings, placing it in the bottom third of all states and earning the state a grade of D+ on this composite measure of women's status (see Map 2). As shown in Table 2, Florida ranked in the bottom half on three of the four indicators in this area: median annual earnings for full-year, full-time women workers (29<sup>th</sup>); percent of women employed in managerial or professional occupations (36<sup>th</sup>); and percent of women in the labor force (47<sup>th</sup>). Florida's low ranking on women's labor force participation is likely due at least partially to Florida's relatively older population (the indicator used is the percent of all women 16 or older in the labor force, who are working or looking for work).