

Hidden Jewels

An experiential research opportunity for students



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The Atlantic Centre of Excellence for Women's Health (ACEWH) is one of four Centres of Excellence for Women's Health across Canada. Through the Faculty of Health Professions, Dalhousie University serves as the administrative host of the Centre, which first opened in Halifax in 1996. As early as 1997, the Centre's understanding of how best to elicit new knowledge on women's health was clear. Research would require consultation with women from diverse backgrounds including women marginalized by society or at different stages of the lifecycle in order to include perspectives that were often excluded.¹

The Atlantic Centre of Excellence for Women's Health has been at the forefront of research design and policy development that embraces a gender lens, which is "a means to consider ways in which gender interacts with other health determinants in research, policy and planning, [and provides] an opportunity to bring research to decision making by broadening the scope of evidence."² Whether

in quantitative and qualitative data, during workshops and consultations, or at meetings and roundtables, the presence of ACEWH guarantees that a strong emphasis on gender-based analysis is accounted for in order to improve the health of women everywhere.

Throughout its years of operation, the ACEWH has provided training for future academic researchers, community workers, policymakers and representatives of women's health concerns. It is crucial to educate the next generation conducting quality research on women's health in order to formulate appropriate policy. The ACEWH is well positioned to offer training and mentoring opportunities for undergraduate, postgraduate and post-doctoral students who are socially conscious and committed to furthering women's causes.

Over the past 14 years, research assistantships at the ACEWH have been offered to many students interested in gaining experience in fields related to women's health, both research- and policy-oriented. Support offered by the ACEWH includes undergraduate and graduate student supervision, work placement positions, field experience, focus group facilitation, conference presentation sponsorship and co-authorship of publications. Co-hosting international youth interns with the Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa is one example of exciting opportunities,

both domestic and international, available to young researchers and future policymakers at the ACEWH.

In the past, students have come to us from a variety of disciplines including Social Work, Nursing, Health Promotion, and International Development Studies. Placement is often determined from an interview with individual students where their interests are explored to ensure a good fit with the current workplan at the Centre. When students are doing a placement to meet a course requirement, they work with their class supervisor to ensure the assignment meets the needs of their academic program.

Students have been involved in a variety of projects with ACEWH that have included working with women's centres, a contract with the Department of Community Services on social and economic inclusion, and funded research projects such as The Lone Mothers project and Healthy Balance. The tasks students engage in also cover a large range of activities, such as assisting with focus groups, literature reviews, funding proposals and ethics applications, attending community meetings, organizing workshops and conferences, and creating posters and brochures.

The Centre also has an established record of offering publically accessible presentations, workshops, and conferences that engage individuals from diverse backgrounds in a participatory

exchange of ideas and information on a wide variety of topics relevant to women's health. Such Centre activities can provide opportunities for students. Recently, building on considerable expertise in the area of sex- and gender-based analysis (SGBA), ACEWH published *Rising to the Challenge* (Clow et al., 2009), a book that describes the SGBA process and offers a collection of case studies and commentaries that illustrate SGBA in action.

After successfully offering workshops across the country last year to groups and organizations working on policy, planning and

research, the Centre is currently developing a companion workbook to complement the SGBA guide. Use of SGBA in research projects is not only best practice but is often a requirement by many funders such as CIHR. Working with ACEWH on this or other projects helps to ground students' understanding of SGBA.

While working at the Centre, students are supervised and mentored by a staff member who provides direction as needed but also encourages initiative, independence, and critical thinking. Although this adds to the Centre's workload, in our experience these relationships have been mutually beneficial. This experience provides skills that build resumes and CVs and also gives students a chance to take classroom learning into meaningful real world experiences. These experiences

also provide opportunities for placement students to come back and work with us in paid employment such as research assistantships.

Several former research assistants have gone on to doctoral studies, government positions, clinical research pathways and policy development roles at

local, regional, provincial and federal levels. It is a testament to the academic rigour and population health approach to policy demonstrated by the ACEWH that so many different sectors are seeing the benefits of

the latest in research and policy findings relevant to women's health. The Centre will continue to support and nurture all those interested in promoting women's health, and in so doing, contribute meaningfully to the spectrum of women's health in Atlantic Canada, across the country and abroad.

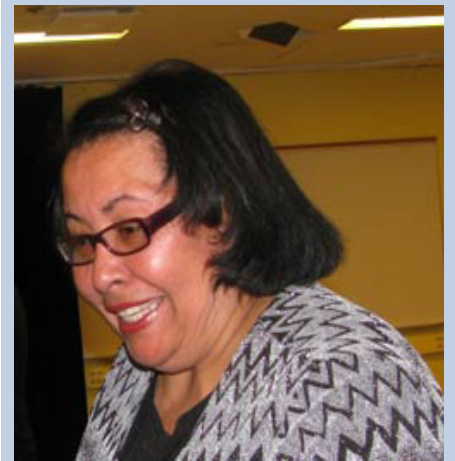
If the work of the ACEWH sounds interesting to you as a student, faculty member, or advisor, consider contacting us to find out more. We would be happy to answer any questions and explore opportunities to work together. For more information please contact: Kathy Petite, Research Coordinator, kathy.petite@dal.ca or 494-7856.

Footnotes

¹1997 Workplan. n.d.

²Saulnier, C. & J. Moloney (2007). *Gender Mainstreaming Concepts and Implications*. Health Promotion Course 1006.

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Happy Retirement, Linda!

After many years of dedicated service, Linda Oliver, the clerk for Instructional Media Services (IMS) and the Center for Learning and Teaching, retired on July 1, 2010. Linda was often the first point of contact for faculty and students coming into the IMS office and with her accommodating manner, assisted clients in the pick-up, return, and tracking of equipment.

Always willing to offer a kind word and a smile during busy class changes, Linda also assisted student assistants on departmental procedure, and was recognized as having extensive knowledge on policy matters related to the day-to-day operation of the IMS audio-visual section.

Linda also provided clerical support for the video production section of IMS. She assisted in ordering equipment and supplies and was very effective in following up on production details, as well as tracking account numbers for invoicing.

Linda will be fondly remembered by her colleagues at IMS and CLT and has the sincere wishes for future endeavors from all the staff that had the pleasure of working with her over many years of service.