

**Plenary Remarks  
by Meghan Salas  
Mariam K. Chamberlain Fellow 2002-2003**

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Thank you Heidi for your kind introduction, special thanks to Amy Bhatt, Jean Sinzdak and everyone else at IWPR for making this conference such a success. And thank you to Mariam K. Chamberlain for inspiring the Fellowship and for all of the valuable contributions you have made throughout your life.

Good Afternoon.

It is quite an honor to be speaking in front of all of you today and to be celebrating 15 years of IWPR.

Before starting I’d like to warn you that I haven’t spoken publicly in front of many people since my high school graduation, in which I delivered a speech talking extensively about shoes. Luckily I’ve had a few more life experiences since then...but please bear with me.

When I graduated from college in May 2002, I was one of the lucky few who had secured a job. I didn’t even realize how lucky I was at the time, because little did I know I had also secured a job that I really liked and was about to have the opportunity to work with some of the most intelligent and inspiring people I had ever met.

At IWPR, I knew that I was going to be using some of the skills I had gained in college, at a place that was well respected for its work on issues relating to women...that was about the extent of it.

Throughout my eight months at IWPR as the Mariam K. Chamberlain Fellow, I became much more knowledgeable about key policy issues, key figures and, more generally about how the system of policy-making works. Most importantly, I learned about the significant role research plays in that system.

The casual/academic environment at IWPR also contributed a great deal to my experience; each day meant that I would be stimulated intellectually and motivated personally.

As I began to feel more comfortable with the issues, I realized I could do something about these issues. I was surrounded by people who could mentor me and encourage me to develop myself as a researcher. I was particularly interested in studying teen pregnancy and educational options available to young mothers and pursued this research in my spare time. At the same time I was able to work one-on-one with study directors Avis, Vicky, Sunhwa and Stacie to help them with their research. More than anything though, my experience at IWPR peaked my interest and curiosity in things that I rarely thought about before, but I should have been thinking about a long time ago.

The people of my generation, for the most part, have been fortunate to grow up in a time of economic prosperity with plentiful employment. As young women, we have not confronted the same overt barriers that our mothers did before us. Rather, the obstacles have been more subtle, more insidious. People think that this privilege has led to apathy among members of my generation. Some say that young people today just don't care about the political process. Perhaps this is true, but I think much of the so-called 'apathy' simply stems from a lack of information....

If more young women and men were made aware of the fact that...

- One in every three women will be raped in her lifetime. And girls 16 to 19 are four times more likely than the general population to be victims of rape,
- The fact that just 5 weeks after Viagra became available it was covered by 47% of health insurance plans...roughly the same percentage of plans that cover the birth control pill which has been around in one form or another since the 1920s.
- The fact that in their reproductive years women pay 68% more in out-of-pocket medical expenses than men, largely due to the prohibitive costs of reproductive health care. Not to mention, women still only make 77 cents to every dollar a man makes and this ratio gets even more disparate for women of color.

If more women and men knew the facts, there would probably be a lot more interest in the issues, since these things DO affect young women and men in their day-to-day lives.

Protection from violence and access to reproductive services are key issues facing this generation. In addition, the issues of our mothers' generation such as abortion rights, Affirmative Action and Title IX are far-from resolved and are being challenged once again. And with the current economic climate, yesterday's sense of security is no longer the case.

Today, I realize the importance of using information based on solid social science research to educate the public. It is this information that has driven, and will continue to drive positive change no matter how the issues and priorities change from generation to generation.

Working at IWPR has changed the way I view the world and given me new inspiration to achieve the most that I possibly can in my life. With discriminatory barriers still firmly in place against women, it is infinitely important that we mentor young feminist social scientists. This is an undertaking IWPR considers fundamental to its mission and one that sets them apart.

IWPR looks at the key issues: employment benefits, childcare, unemployment, poverty and welfare, health, democracy, and aging through a completely unique lens. Without IWPR, critical parts of current policy debates would be missing and as a result society as whole would suffer.

I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to work at IWPR, and hope that this opportunity can be granted to many others so that they too can become more caring, more informed, and more motivated to effect change and to continue fighting.

Thank you and enjoy your lunch.