

Feminist Union empowers women through activism

JERRY DON BURTON

NEWS EDITOR

The Feminist Union (FemU) is a student organization whose mission is to create a positive social climate on campus and contribute to community outreach. FemU president Chris Smith said the organization focuses on activism, the promotion of equality across campus and the education of feminism itself. Smith, a junior history and communication studies double major from Cabot, Arkansas, said, "Feminism, to me, is learning and advocating for the justice of all people. Equality and equity

are things you should always strive for but justice ensures that people are respected and people will continue to be respected and if they aren't respected, the education and the actions that we take through feminism can ensure that they receive justice for that disrespect."

Smith said the FemU promotes feminism through activities like displaying posters advocating equality and handing out free condoms. The FemU also hosts meetings to discuss feminism, read literature, and propose projects. Smith said the FemU is currently focused on advocating for reproductive rights.

Kai Lawless, a first-year biology major from Westfork, Arkansas and FemU treasurer, said the FemU has worked all semester on creating posters supporting reproductive rights, educating the campus on where resources like reproductive health clinics are and advocating for abortion access laws in Arkansas.

Lynley Polsgrove, a junior psychology major from Brookland, said when she

transferred to Arkansas State University, she immediately looked for a feminist organization on campus. She approached the FemU at a table in the Student Union and has been regularly attending FemU meetings ever since.

Polsgrove said A-State having a feminist union is important because everyone involved in the FemU is working hard to promote women's rights and educate the campus on what feminism really is.

"A lot of people don't realize that feminism is helping everyone," Polsgrove said. "I've always been a feminist even when I didn't know that I was. I think most people are feminists, even if they don't know they are; they probably still have those feminist values."

The union started in 2018, but shut down during the COVID-19 pandemic. When students returned to campus, Smith said, the original members of the union did not have the "bandwidth" to continue running it, so it stayed inactive.

"After being in the Young Democrats chapter, I wanted



PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRIS SMITH

(from left, clockwise): Lynley Polsgrove, Pratiksha Thakuri, Dean MacDonald, Abby Bolton and Kai Lawless create posters during a FemU meeting to celebrate Roe v. Wade Day.

to focus on activism that was more catered to populations that I advocate for, such as women or racial minority populations," Smith said. "I decided to essentially revamp the Feminist Union. I wanted to be more collaborative compared to other activist organizations on campus."

FemU publishes the A-State Femizine, a collaborative feminist magazine, every other month. The A-State Femizine

features poetry, literature, art and photography. Smith said the FemU is looking for someone to fill the head writer position for the A-State Femizine. The FemU president said only people who were assigned female at birth or identify as a woman can join the executive board, but anyone can apply for the A-State Femizine executive team. She said anyone is also welcome to attend FemU meetings or volunteer to

promote feminism on campus. The FemU is also working with the A-State Gender and Sexuality Alliance, A-State Young Democrats, AR Liberty Now, Arkansas Abortion Support Network and Advocates for Youth. The FemU meets at 7 p.m. every other Wednesday in the Mockingbird Room in the Student Union. The organization can be contacted on Instagram @astatefeministunion.



COURTESY OF THE A-STATE FEMINIST UNION FACEBOOK
Feminist Union Logo

CELEBRATING, CONTINUED



COURTESY OF ARKANSAS STATE

Argelia Lorence, Ph.D., in the Plant Phenomics Facility.

Lorence is the only female co-director of the Wheat and Rice Center for Heat Resilience. A collaboration between A-State, Kansas State University and the University of Nebraska, the project aims to find more heat-tolerant wheat and rice varieties.

She continues her research on plant stressors as director of A-State's Plant Phenomics Facility, which uses specialized imaging tools to identify genetic characteristics that make plants more tolerant to drought, salt, insects or disease.

During her career, Lorence said she's had to outperform her male counterparts just to get the same recognition. She said she teaches her students to fight for themselves.

"I have a lot of female students of all levels, bachelor's degree, master's degree, Ph.D., and I show them they can do anything they want and that they should achieve their potential no matter what and fight for what they believe in and what they are working for," Lorence said. "I said, 'Look, this has happened to me. It's not fair. Don't let it happen to you.'"

Alandria Maddox:

Alandria Maddox made history as A-State's first Black female drum major and went viral on social media for drum majoring after being

crowned Homecoming queen. "It's starting to sink in that time, it's over," Maddox said. "But at the same time, it's not, because people are still asking me to come talk to them and talk about my experience and stuff like that. That experience of last semester has ended, but the impact, I don't think ever will."

During this year's Homecoming, Maddox was crowned queen. The video of Maddox drum majoring in her dress garnered over 20 million views on Instagram and almost 8 million on TikTok.

The senior history major said the day after Homecoming, people in her church and community were telling her she was famous on social media. She got a huge influx of requests for interviews, including "Inside Edition" asking her to be on their front cover.

"It sounds crazy, but I was trying to focus on Spanish because I was not doing well. I'm over here going viral, people are recognizing me in the gas station and stuff like that and I'm just trying to focus on my grades," Maddox said.



COURTESY OF THE JONESBORO SUN
Alandria Maddox drum majoring in the Homecoming halftime show.

Graduating in August, Maddox said she plans to take a gap year to look into graduate school options.

Maddox said she tries to use her platform to highlight

the importance and value of women on campus.



COURTESY OF CHERISSE JONES-BRANCH

Cherisse Jones-Branch, Ph.D., while serving in the Persian Gulf.

"I have to use my platform to speak for them or to remind us all of all the great resources and people that we have coexisting on this campus right now," Maddox said. "I think we underestimate the great value of people that we have because of everybody trying to live their lives and survive."

Debbie Turner Bell:

The 1990 Miss America winner, veterinarian and broadcast journalist said her accomplishments were all part of God's plan. She is the third Black woman to win Miss America.

Debbie Turner Bell, graduated from A-State in 1986 and graduated vet school at the University of Missouri in 1991.

Turner Bell said she wanted to be a veterinarian from a young age.

"We rescued and adopted every abandoned, abused, half roadkill, anything that we came across, and so I grew up with lots of animals in our home," Turner Bell said. "I would go and volunteer at (the local) clinic and that was where I decided that this is what I want to do."

During her senior year of vet school, Turner Bell was crowned Miss America. However, her journey into

the pageant world began at age 16, when she competed in the Jonesboro High School Sweetheart Pageant.

Turner Bell continued participating in pageants to pay for her college. After seven years and 11 attempts, Turner Bell was crowned Miss America.

"When Gary Collins announced me as the new Miss America, it was a feeling of relief. A feeling of immense gratitude because it truly took a village of people to get me there," she said.

After completing veterinary school, Turner Bell became the spokesperson of a pet education program for Purina. This, along with the interviewing and communication skills she learned from her pageantry years, would set her up for a 25-year career in broadcast journalism.



COURTESY OF THE HISTORYMAKERS
Debbie Turner Bell after winning Miss America 1990.

While working as a broadcast journalist, Turner Bell served as a correspondent for CBS News and later had a segment on The Early Show where she discussed pet care.

She said some of the stories she's enjoyed working on the most included her interview with then-President George W. Bush about his pets, doing a cageless SCUBA dive to feed sharks in the Bahamas, as well as doing a

profile on Aretha Franklin.

Turner Bell said throughout her extensive career, there have been many times when people doubted her abilities, whether it was because she is Black, a woman or both.

"What's more important to say to any person who's underestimated or marginalized or overlooked and that is what my mother taught me: My worth and my value is not dependent upon anybody else's perception," Turner Bell said. "I don't have to let their biases be limitations for me."

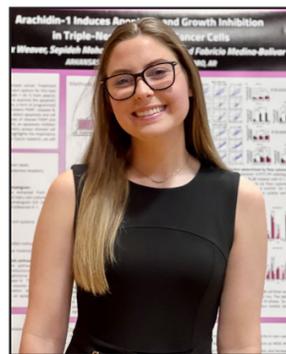
Alexx Weaver:

In addition to being just one of six Goldwater Scholars in A-State history, she is the first female Goldwater Scholar.

Alexx Weaver, a senior biotechnology and biology double major from Lonoke, Arkansas, received this honor in the spring 2023 semester.

The Goldwater Scholarship provides up to \$7,500 per year toward a recipient's undergraduate education. In 2023, an estimated 5,000 students applied. Of that number, 413 received the scholarship and only three students were from universities in Arkansas.

"I feel very honored to be the first female Goldwater Scholar from A-State. The



COURTESY OF ARKANSAS STATE
Alexx Weaver presenting her research.

field of science has been, historically, man-centric. I am proud to represent a new generation of Arkansas women in STEM," Weaver said.

Weaver said she has been conducting research as early as high school. She attended the Arkansas School for Math, Sciences and the Arts (ASMSA), where she studied the link between the nasal microbiome and the flu.

Weaver said she has been conducting research as early as high school. She attended the Arkansas School for Math, Sciences and the Arts (ASMSA), where she studied the link between the nasal microbiome and the flu.

Weaver said she has been conducting research as early as high school. She attended the Arkansas School for Math, Sciences and the Arts (ASMSA), where she studied the link between the nasal microbiome and the flu.



COURTESY OF JENNIFER BOULDIN
Jennifer Bouldin, Ph.D., after earning her doctorate.

When she arrived at A-State, Weaver began researching anticancer properties found in isolated compounds in peanut hairy roots. These compounds can be used as potential therapeutic agents for triple-negative breast cancer, a more aggressive type of breast cancer.

After graduation, Weaver plans to pursue a doctoral degree in infectious disease.

Weaver said there were many women throughout her educational career who inspired her, including her teachers at ASMSA and A-State and University of Arkansas Medical School professors.

"Without the hard work of previous generations of women scientists, I would not be where I am today," Weaver said. "I hope that I can serve as a reminder that individuals from all backgrounds can achieve success with enough determination."