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## Closet Feminists: Women at University Branch Campuses

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**177: “Closet Feminists: Women at University Branch Campuses”  
Christine Wilson and Hope Jennings, Wright State University—Lake  
Campus**

Female faculty members at university branch campuses face unique challenges when it comes to leadership opportunities and the ability to lead successfully in the realm of higher education. Branch campuses, sometimes called regional campuses, are locations of a university that is geographically apart from the main campus and, at least theoretically, operate somewhat independently of the main campus. Numerous four-year universities have branch campuses; in Ohio, for example, there are 24 regional campuses that are affiliated with 8 four-year universities (Ohio Board of Regents, 2008). In the past two years, admissions to and enrollment at branch campuses has been increasing at a surprising rate, as many non-traditional students find themselves back at college due to changed economic circumstances.

Though branch campuses are associated with main campuses, the working environment remains quite different from that of a typical four-year university. To begin with, they are generally much smaller than their parent-institutions. Secondly, they are often located in rural, conservative communities in which traditional gender roles predominate. These two factors alone present female faculty members with a number of challenges: There are proportionately less female faculty members at regional campuses, which means that new female scholars find themselves without the possibility of female mentorship and feel obligated to take on leadership roles even at the beginning of their careers. In addition, regional campuses often do not offer the resources that larger campuses offer such as women’s centers, mentoring programs, or faculty writing groups.

Our paper emerges from our personal experiences at an Ohio branch campus as the lone tenure-track female faculty member and as a non-tenure track female faculty member. Since beginning our time here, we’ve made a number of efforts to increase the awareness of gender and gender issues, such as beginning a women’s mentoring program and partnering with our main campus Women’s Center to try to bring programming to our campus. These efforts have met with varying degrees of success, and our paper will address what has and has not worked on our campus and the challenge of being feminists on a campus where even addressing any issues of gender is viewed by fellow faculty and staff members, as well as students and community members, as unnecessary, threatening, and subversive. We ask questions about how we can best reach feminist goals for ourselves and for our students in an unfamiliar, and sometimes unwelcoming, environment.