

Get on the bus to March for Women's Lives

Dylan Grayson
Staff Writer

The March for Women's Lives will take place on April 25 in Washington, D.C.

The American Civil Liberties Union, Black Women's Health Imperative, Feminist Majority, National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL) Pro-Choice America, National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health, National Organization for Women and Planned Parenthood Federation of America are the march's key organizers.

Becky Cochran, a senior psychology and women's studies double-major, is

Guilford's campus organizer working with NARAL NC. She hopes to get students involved in both fundraising, such as holding bake sales, and the march itself.

"The goal of the march is to inform and stand up as a pro-choice majority who can't be ignored any longer," Cochran said. "(We hope to) show up as representatives from Guilford College, Greensboro, and North Carolina as people who support these issues."

Senior Lauren Mitchell is one student who has already paid for a bus ticket and plans to attend the march.

"I can't imagine myself not going, especially with what

[President] Bush is trying to do," Mitchell said. "There's a slowly growing governmental shift toward anti-choice legislation, and it's crucial that somebody say what's happening is not OK."

Cochran, too, is concerned about Bush's actions and how they harm women's right to choose.

"He's put forth the Unborn Victims of Violence Act to establish personhood of an unborn fetus," Cochran said. Cochran also believes Bush is trying to stack the federal courts.

For example, Bush appointed Charles Pickering even though he had been rejected

twice before as a judicial appointment. NARAL, among other groups, opposed Pickering's appointment.

"Pickering led efforts within the Republican Party to overrule Roe v. Wade by working to implement an anti-choice plank in the National Republican Convention Platform," said NARAL President Kate Michelman in a Feb. 2002 statement on naral.org. "(This) plank ... remains to this day ... (and) has injected the government into what should be a private decision between a woman and her physician."

Cochran said Bush's actions make the march especially

important and urges more people to participate.

Mitchell agreed, saying: "For anybody who cares at all about women's issues or gender equality, this is the monster event."

In late March 35 students and community members had signed up to ride the bus to D.C. for the march. As of April 12, the bus going to the March for Women's Lives was officially full.

Anyone interested in a waiting list for second bus or finding a ride to the event should e-mail Cochran at rcochran@guilford.edu.

Author to speak on female circumcision

Meredith Veto
Staff Writer

Ellen Gruenbaum, author of the book *The Female Circumcision Controversy: An Anthropological Perspective*, will present her findings April 21 at 7 p.m. in the Moon Room of Dana auditorium.

During her visit, Gruenbaum will visit classes to discuss her experiences studying culturally sensitive issues in Africa.

"Anthropologists value the goal of seeing cultural practices from the point of view of those who practice them, so we routinely suspend judgment for the sake of understanding," Gruenbaum said. "But what do you do when a cultural practice collides in your gut with deep humanitarian values?"

Sociology and anthropology professor Laban Gwako has used Gruenbaum's book in several of his classes, and has lectured on the topic of female circumcision.

"(Gruenbaum's lecture) will

give students a chance to understand the cultural roots of female circumcision, what I call a contextualized understanding of a very sensitive issue that has always been controversial when Westerners look at it," Gwako said.

Westerners tend to condemn the practice, arguing that female circumcision deprives women full realization of their sexuality and represents the continued subordination of women.

But Gwako points out that female circumcision serves multiple functions that must be considered in the context of African society.

"It is considered a rite of passage ... a ritual that marks the transition of an individual ... from a child to a fully functional member of the society," Gwako said. "The shedding of blood when circumcision is conducted is supposed to link the individual who has been circumcised to the rest of the members of the society. When it drops on the soil, it connects that individual to

ancestors who are dead and gone."

Sociology and anthropology major Leslie Essien took Gwako's African Cultures class, and understands that female circumcision is a complicated topic for anthropologists to study.

"This is a tradition of many African societies, which seems to be supported and desired by some African women," Essien said. "On the other hand, reports and evidence of how this practice is physically and psychologically harmful to women indicate that this is a practice that other African women oppose and rebel against."

"My dilemma as a student of anthropology is knowing where the respect for cultural differences end and human rights concerns begin," she said.

"It will be nice to hear our students asking about whether this is a cultural right, whether it's a violation of human rights, whether the cultural rights should be more important than the human

rights, or whether the individual rights take supremacy over cultural rights," Gwako said.

Senior Laura Myerchin took two classes with Gwako and wrote a research paper on female circumcision.

She is a family friend of Gruenbaum.

"I saw that Laban was using one of her books for Cultural Anthropology, so I mentioned that I knew her and he suggested that we try to get her to come to Guilford," Myerchin said. "I think that it's an interesting topic and it's one that

needs attention in order for the international community to get involved."

A professor of anthropology at California State University at Fresno, Gruenbaum's areas of teaching interest include cultural anthropology, gender studies, medical anthropology, and Islamic cultures in the Middle East and Africa.

She has undertaken research on beauty pageants and HIV prevention in Botswana, as well as a long-term project on female circumcision in Sudan.

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Corrections

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