

Rude Story 6

11/13

The Jean Monnet Center of Excellence “EU in the News Forum” was held Nov. 13. Understanding Gender Inequality: Views from the EU, US and UK featured three prominent speakers to discuss this topic. This was the first collaboration forum between the University of Florida Department of Gender, Sexuality and Women’s Studies and the UF Center for European Studies.

Held every semester, this forum was the second in-person event part of the current Jean Monnet Center of Excellence grant. The last in-person forum was held in February 2023, while others have been held virtually.

Corinne Tomasi, the academic programs coordinator for the Center for European Studies, said the goal of the forum is to expand current conversations on gender inequality to an international level.

“The idea is to try to bring contemporary topics that we’re seeing in the news and talk about how the EU, the US and in this particular case the UK are really approaching these topics,” Tomasi said. “The idea is to try to take the issues that are touching the lives of students here on campus, faculty and community and provide a forum to discuss not just the U.S. and EU, but how these are really important issues.”

Three experts in the field headlined the event. Holly Dustin was the Cultural Transformation Projects Lead for the House of Commons in the UK, which strives to have an inclusive culture within the House of Commons.

Janet Veitch, the gender associate of the British Council and chair of the UK Women's Budget Group, has more than 30 years of experience in the Westminster Parliament and the UK government.

The third speaker was Danaya Wright, UF faculty senate chair and the T. Terrell Sessums and Gerald Sohn professor in constitutional law. She also serves on the UF Board of Trustees.

Throughout the public forum, Dustin, Veitch and Wright discussed policy on gender inequality and approaches being made from each side of the Atlantic.

Bella Weisheimer, a student in attendance at the event, said that prior to the forum, she did not realize the correlation between violence against women and gender inequality.

"I've always thought about those things as separate, and hearing that in the conversation really has made me look at it in a different way," Weisheimer said.

Wright noted that she believes many female students are aware of gender violence on UF's campus.

"A lot of what faculty are trying to do in this climate right now is to promote dialogue and promote learning," Wright said.

Public forums like this are a way for students to increase their knowledge about gender violence and gender inequality, Tomasi said.

"We hear more stories and understand how countries, regions and populations are dealing with this," Tomasi said. "Knowledge is power, and to understand how other people and how other countries are trying to contend with these same issues that are affecting our society, the better I think we can be as a community both as a U.S. community and even down to the local UF community."

Xiao Sun, a PhD student at UF who attended the forum, believes that gender violence issues impact UF directly.

“I feel most female students at least are fully aware of this kind of gender violence,” said Sun.

Sun noted that an increase in safe and reliable public transportation on UF’s campus at night will help combat this issue of gender violence.

The biggest thing students can do to help this issue is report it if it happens to them, Wright said.

“The problem is a lot of the culture won’t change unless there is enough of a voice, people speaking out about it,” said Wright. “If we don’t know as an institution, we can’t do anything about it.”

Morgan Rich said students are also able to have a direct impact on the topics discussed at future forums.

“The Center for European Studies has an events page and ability for anybody to make a comment or suggest a speaker or topic,” said Rich, the assistant director of the Center for European Studies. “Those suggestions can be driven by students, not just people with specialized interests.”

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