International Women's Day
March 8th

Just a couple of weeks before St. Patrick's Day and Spring Break is International Women's Day. Although this holiday is celebrated in many areas of the world, you may never have noticed this day because March 8th in the United States often passes by without much fanfare. In many other countries, however, it is designated as a national holiday.

International Women's Day has been in existence for approximately the past ninety years and has typically been used as a time for reviewing the accomplishments of women (socially, politically, and otherwise) and/or for celebration. The roots of this holiday can be traced back to 1910, when women in many industrial, developing countries began entering the workplace. Subjected to poor working conditions, unequal wages, and general workplace segregation from men, women began to protest. Also at that time, women were fighting for the right to vote. These two causes became unified and one of the first successful protest rallies was held in Manhattan on March 8th in 1908. The momentum provided by this rally continued to fuel further protests and rallies for the next couple of years. In 1910, International Women's Day was first heralded as an international event by working women's clubs, unions, and socialist parties across the world. In 1911, several European countries held the first International Women's Day celebrations with great success. For many women, the day represented the fruits of the work they engaged in year round for the betterment of women's conditions.

Today, International Women's Day is usually seen as a general celebration of women. Women's groups frequently sponsor events such as film festivals or lectures highlighting women's history. In some countries, it is tradition for women to be given a "day off" from all responsibilities and presented with small gifts such as flowers or meals cooked by the men in their lives.

How can you celebrate International Women's Day? Although March 8th is not a national holiday in the United States, we can use the day as a time for reflection and for developing an increased awareness of the roles of women throughout history. Although conditions for women have greatly improved, there are still many issues with which females continue to grapple. For example, in today's society women can have problems with issues such as self-esteem/assertiveness and the necessity of filling multiple roles. It is easy to fall into the belief that we must be "all things to all people," given some of the messages promulgated by society and the media.