The poster for this weekend’s Civil Liberties and Public Policy conference at Hampshire College in Amherst.

3 QUESTIONS

THREE DECADES OF ACTIVISM: More than 1,000 national and international reproductive rights advocates, social justice leaders, students and activists are slated to meet this weekend at Hampshire College in Amherst for the 30th anniversary of the Civil Liberties and Public Policy (CLPP) conference.

Titled “From Abortion Rights to Social Justice: Building the Movement for Reproductive Freedom,” the conference, which takes place Friday, Saturday and Sunday, will present new strategies for advancing social reform and reproductive justice and confronting strong right-wing opposition.

The event will feature 180 speakers and 70 interactive workshops that will seek to educate the public about various reproductive and social justice struggles, create collaboration between different social movements, and emphasize successful strategies for activists’ efforts.

Among the event’s highlights will be the celebration of the conference’s 30th anniversary on Saturday at 7 p.m.

“We will be honoring our founders and over 30 years of supporters who have been part of building the movement for reproductive freedom,” said Lani Blechman, a Hampshire College 2008 graduate and the CLPP program and communications coordinator.

She said the event will offer a broad range of skills for those ready to take action.

“There are workshops where you can build your organizing skills: using new media and alternative media, strategies for writing pro-choice policy and increasing access to health care on many different levels,” she said.

Throughout the weekend, participants can attend up to five workshop sessions and a number of lectures and live performances. Among these events is “Breaking Silences: An Abortion Speak-Out” on Friday at 7:30 p.m., which will offer a safe space to people who would like to share their own personal experiences about what it was like to have an abortion.

The conference, which takes place entirely on the Hampshire College campus, includes meals and is free and open to the public. People can register online at www.clpp.hampshire.edu, or on arrival at the college.

Lani Blechman spoke recently with Briefing about the conference and its role in guiding and inspiring activists.

— CHELSEA FARIA

Q: How did the CLPP conference begin 30 years ago?
A: Civil Liberties and Public Policy (CLPP) was launched in 1981. Ronald Reagan had just been elected, anti-abortion influence was intensifying, and pro-choice activists were struggling with the right-wing backlash against Roe v. Wade.

A forward-thinking funder wanted to invest in new leadership to secure and expand reproductive rights and civil liberties; thus, CLPP was launched.

Q: What do you hope that those attending gain from the conference?
A: We hope that participants in the conference — attendees, speakers, performers, everyone — will be able to connect the issues that they are working on with all of the social justice issues presented.

We also have a number of different tracks where you can build your knowledge on the many issues contained within: abortion, access to health care, birthing, parenting, and creating families; comprehensive sex ed, criminalization of our communities and practicing dialogue (and many others).

Q: How does the conference serve as a guiding point for responsible activism and planning for real-world application?
A: We ground our work in bridging academic and activist work. The conference is by and for student and community activists. The speakers are all activists (some are also academics) doing work in their communities, regionally, nationally and internationally. Through sharing our stories of success and creating a broader understanding of the challenges and oppressions that we face, we build stronger movements grounded in our real lived experiences.