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CLOSEUP:

WASHINGTON WOMEN'S STUDIES PROGRAM

Women Studies started at the University of Washington in 1970, the year of expansion of the war into Cambodia, the Kent State killings, and national demonstrations. In Washington, 1970 was also the year of the successful campaign for liberal abortion reforms, and at UW the beginning of agitation for university-sponsored child care facilities. Women had grown increasingly aware of the university's discrimination against them in employment and curriculum.

Three women initiated the first course. Innocently titled "Women 101," it surveyed the role of women in social history, psychology, literature, art, public media, work, sexuality, race, law. The course helped build interest in additional classes.

By fall 1970 the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences convened a faculty and student advisory committee to investigate creation of a course of study. The committee chose the name "Women Studies," documented the nationwide growth of feminist studies, the extent of student interest at UW, and, supporting the evidence with excerpts from the Newman Report on Higher Education, proposed a plan for an undergraduate degree within General Studies, a flexible, interdisciplinary division of the College. The strength of the advisory committee's report lies in its vision for, in Gerda Lerner's words, making men *and* women the measure of human experience.

The College of Arts and Sciences has supported the Women Studies Program financially. Since spring 1972 we have had a half-time advisor, and since July, a half-time faculty director. Course instructors are paid through either departmental budgets or the General Studies budget, and we have had some funds for guest speakers. This year about thirty courses were offered with total enrollment varying between 150-350 per quarter. The undergraduate major requires at least five courses in Women Studies, 35 credits in a relevant department, and a senior thesis. Although no graduate programs are planned at present, some students can shape their work in graduate departments to fit their feminist interests.

Organizationally, Women Studies resembles several ethnic studies programs at UW. The committee warned against divisive competition between ethnic and women studies programs, for, while there is inevitable competition among such programs for funds from the university budget, there are also common interests, which Women Studies tries to emphasize. Although not every class in Women Studies is or will be relevant to Third World interests, the program as a whole must include wide cultural and historical perspectives.

Affirmative action, consciousness raising, career counseling, political action, academic change—how should the many feminist concerns be organized and where do women's studies fit? The answer developed at the University of Washington reflects the city and the university setting. Seattle has an active feminist community with a great variety of organizations ranging from official bodies to caucuses and coalitions. These include programs for political action, health care, abortion and birth control, rape relief, arts and crafts, educational reform, auto mechanics, affirmative action, child care, and legal services; lesbian groups; a feminist newspaper; and a feminist bookstore. Several feminist groups and women's caucuses meet at the university. The student government group, ASUW Women's Commission, prepared the thorough *Report on the Status of Women: Faculty, Staff and Students*, published in 1970. Since then they have filed class action suits, run consciousness raising groups for administrators, organized caucuses and survival classes from *pro se* law to physical self-defense. In 1971 a coalition of campus women's groups pressed for and won an Office of Equal Opportunity for Women. Black Women's Forum, Third World Women, and Las Chicanas are also active. The Division of Continuing Education operates a guidance center serving primarily older,

out-of-college women and offers noncredit courses on issues relating to women and feminism. Finally, informal caucuses meet in some departments and academic areas.

In order not to duplicate work being done by others, people in the Women Studies Program have chosen to concentrate on developing the academic program of teaching and research on women. While this task cannot be accomplished in isolation from other feminist interests, neither can it be accomplished in subordination to them. This fact was recognized this winter when the interim advisory committee decided upon a permanent governing body of students, faculty, and staff chosen for their interest in the academic program.

Another conscious choice was to be an interdepartmental program rather than an independent department. This choice grew from committee members' conviction that the quality of teaching and research is better if faculty are clearly identified with and part of a regular department representing a cohesive discipline. The creation of an independent department could lead to isolation of its members from developments within their fields and also to isolation of the academic world from women's studies. Women's studies is a field of research which should contribute to the improvement of fundamental theory and methods of individual disciplines, and the results of this research should be available not only in specialized courses, but also in the regular courses of each discipline. The interdepartmental choice has worked well so far; it is not without problems for the future.

We recognize that we must look beyond the problems of immediate growth to the problems of long-range stability and survival, and that one key to success is for students to accept women's studies as a viable field. Many are genuinely motivated by stimulating, well-taught classes, but are diffident about choosing women's studies over a departmental major. Raising women's expectations and self-confidence can lead to new jobs, new research, and newly awakened courage to battle sexism in society, but traditional pressures for admission to graduate and professional schools, stereotypes of postgraduate work, and marriage still loom large on individuals' horizons.

Also important is that departments accept women's studies as a significant area of interest. Most of the faculty involved in women's studies are assistant professors whose promotion and tenure will depend on recommendations from their departments. How will predominantly male colleagues evaluate research and publications in women's studies? Will they be able to recognize quality, or will sexist prejudice bias their perceptions? Will they dismiss work on women as unimportant to the discipline? Will they take such work by its very subject to be evidence of the incompetence of the author? The past record of academe and the results of recent research on sexist bias in the identification of quality prohibit sanguine answers to these questions.

In addition to retaining faculty, the Women Studies Program needs new faculty members to balance the prevalence of graduate assistants' teaching. Will the hiring departments seriously examine job candidates able to contribute to women's studies or will they put traditional departmental needs first? In this era of budget cuts will women's studies courses be the first to go, or will high enrollments and student enthusiasm overcome the burden of tradition? Finally, where individual departments are reluctant to undertake these tasks, will the college administration allow departmental independence or put financial teeth into its commitment to an interdisciplinary program? Such problems are not unique to Women Studies; they explain the short life span of many interdisciplinary programs. Clearly, if we wish to age at all, much less age gracefully, we must make sure we win the right answers to these questions.

Julie E. Coryell and Mary L. Eysenbach