How It Works out: The Women's Studies Graduate

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WOMEN'S PROJECT
AT UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Women's Studies happened at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities in the spring of 1973. It was an event, a process, a pedagogy, politics and academic research. Originating from a confrontation with the twelve man faculty by members of the seminary community consciousness-raising group in the spring of 1972, the seminary Women's Project was funded by the United Church of Christ Committee on Theological Education after a proposal was submitted by Professor Lance Barker. The project was to consist of a consultation on women, a class on women taught by a woman, and support of a woman student intern to coordinate the project. The seminary Self Study Committee submitted that, in addition to studying about women, the institution should examine manifestations of sexism in its own structures. Kristina Pearson, an active feminist in the middler class, was hired as coordinator of the Women's Project; and I, who am completing a doctorate in American Studies at the University of Minnesota with a dissertation on contemporary feminism, was employed as Visiting Instructor.

The class and the consultation, as they happened, were integrally related. The class, turning out to be the most popular elective offered in the spring term, attracted both sexes, a wide range of students in age, in points on the political continuum and in phases of their own feminism. I prepared a broad topical outline for the class and requirements for the course in a meeting with some women students; and, in the class, students developed focus and emphasis in topics through which they chose to offer leadership to the class. The outline was broad—half the term to be spent in looking at "Women in American Culture" through such subtopics as "The Feminist Movement," "Women in American History," "Women in American Art," "Female Psychology and Sexuality," etc.; half the term to be spent on theological and ecclesiastical feminism and the treatment of women. Students created some marvelous projects, which were not "handed in," but were presented to the class and were often given in addition to groups outside the class. One student prepared a very practical and profound manual for conducting sexism seminars and offered herself to churches to conduct such seminars. One student developed an utterly brilliant feminist constructive theology in which he presented a 200 point matrix of theological categories and feminist categories derived from Shulamith Firestone's Dialectic of Sex. One student made a slide-tape show on women in American history for her district's United Methodist women's group. One student's topic was "My People are Crying," in which, through her experience and her correspondence with women, she gave guidelines to ministers for counseling them.

The consultation was ten days' worth of intense activity for the whole seminary community. Theologian Peggy Way opened the event with two lectures. Chaplain Lynne Fitch of Vanderbilt held a Communion Service. Psychologist Anne Wilson Schaef of Denver conducted two workshops on sexism, one with the faculty and one with the middler class. There were workshops on child care, on career motivation among women, on women's liberation in the high school. Kate Millett's film, "Three Lives," was shown.

As a result of the class and the consultation, the discussion and action that they have engendered, feminist ferment is high in the seminary. But not everybody is happy about it. One male seminarian suggested that workshops like Anne Wilson Schaef's should be a requirement for all seminarians.

HOW IT WORKS OUT:
THE WOMEN'S STUDIES GRADUATE

We're all so busy developing our own women's studies programs, creating new curriculum, hassling over funding, over internal governance and community-related programs, that most of us rarely have time to ask how women's studies affects the work lives of students once they leave the university for full-time participation in the real anti-feminist world. But a program that has been functioning for several years produces graduates: what are they up to? Historically, women in America have been the temporaries in the labor force—though one can be temporary 40 hours a week, for 40 years of one's life. Has women's studies begun to bring to center stage the shadowy figure of the woman worker? Are women beginning to choose deliberately the shape of their work lives, to create strong identities?

Women's studies is in its third year at Portland State University and many women have now left their demanding, but satisfying lives as women's studies planners and students to find themselves loose in the male-dominated world we jokingly called "the real world." I liked what I saw of students' choices about their lives in the real world. I could make clear connections between women's studies experience, and the confidence and realism of graduates in carving relatively satisfying lives for themselves, and with others. In planning a women's curriculum, can we make sense of the healthy choices of PSU women's studies graduates, isolate the elements of their education that seem to be helping them survive, and translate these elements to other settings, perhaps with tougher racial and economic problems?

To ask the question—how has women's studies affected the work lives of students—is to come at evaluation of women's studies from an oblique angle. I cannot simply ask how well courses teach their proposed subject matter. Most graduates do not go on to teach courses in nineteenth century feminist movements or seminars in Doris Lessing. Nor do significant numbers of women graduates go on to be full-time women's movement organizers. Thus to judge a women's studies program by how well most students know Lessing or how articulate they are about socialist thought seems less fruitful than to examine the range of feminist values put to use after graduation as women continue their work lives.

I by no means want to undervalue the explicit curriculum of women's studies (Lessing, feminism)—its content is the first to make sense in my education or career. But I do think that women learn equally as much from the implicit curriculum of women's studies, from creation of and participation in a specific style of meeting one's own needs and the needs of other women.

(continued on page 4)

and another male student proposed in the Assembly that the course on women become a regular part of the curriculum. But some male students are saying that the women are "laying on" too much. The Women's Project has been "successful" by many criteria; but at this point there has been no official move to continue it for another year or to fund the class for another term. We learned a great deal, and we did a great deal; some feminist change has occurred in all of us, even in the institution.

Gayle Graham Yates
GRADUATES (continued)

We have paid little attention to the implicit curriculum of women's studies, have named it "governance" or "funding," seeing all that is not course work as sets of problems for solution, rather than as crucial aspects of women's learning process. For example, we need to answer questions like: what do women learn about authority—their own and others—in a women's studies program. How do they handle authority in the real world? What do women learn about their own intellectual power? Do they become explicit and strong about their own values? Particularly, we need to answer the question: do women leave women's studies programs having had positive experience of collective work, and having made a commitment to continue to work with others? What is the value of the implicit curriculum at Portland State, for example, which now moves along quite consistently as new classes are generated, the women's union grows, and final decisions are made about a formal certificate program in women's studies?

Let me describe the lives of several Portland women's studiers who graduated last June in light of the questions I've raised about implicit curriculum.

Judy—in her thirties, mother of four. Last year she wrote a story, her first, which indicated that she had spoken out against her family's belief in the Jewish-Communist conspiracy; they consider her an atheist who is both dangerous and mad. She first appeared in a Renaissance literature class I taught, then in a Virginia Woolf seminar where she read her first short story aloud; by third term she had started a women's writing group for rural women, and had described a high school women's curriculum on the oral for her teaching credential. When she came to say hello this spring, I discovered that she, with three other teachers, had signed a statement saying they believed in the separation of church and state. School assemblies consist of Fundamentalist Revival meetings, and Judy had protested forced attendance after a Jewish child had been pushed into the auditorium by the athletic coaches. The ACLU was taking Judy's case. She was philosophical. "We're sticking together," she said.

Carolyn—Reed College dropout, mountain climber, car mechanic, cook, and our first women's studies co-ordinator. She's now in the creative writing graduate program at the University of Washington, finally a successful student, writing poetry after years of silence. She and another woman taught a course on Adrienne Rich and Denise Levertov in the U of W experimental college. "The women came to every class," she said to me with a tone of surprise; then added, "I still can't believe it; when I speak at meetings people listen. I seem to be an organizer."

Marcie—living in a commune with her husband and two-year-old son, a child who has never lived in a nuclear family. She has her first professional job, she told me, doing a study of Portland's Day Care needs. From dance and philosophy at Reed College, into sociology and psychology at PSU, then finally a decision that despite her talent for abstract thinking, social work would give her contact with groups of women.

Janet—the arch skeptic of our first group of women's studies students, now in a small graduate school at the University of California Medical School in San Francisco; "I'm really learning something," she says incredulously. She has begun work on a project in "discovery sociology"—reproducing analytically the situation of women alone in everyday life, answering such questions as: why do women choose to hitchhike alone, thus subjecting themselves to rape, and harassment? How do women experience walking alone on a street at night?

Helen and Amy—now both graduate students at Portland State, are at present running seminars concurrently with introductory American history classes. After asking the faculty of the course to introduce their feminist curriculum, and meeting with refusal, they simply recruited students—a hundred or so, on the first day of class to meet outside of class.

And Paeaina—a Hawaiian woman, mother of four, who now works in the PSU child care center, having finally completed her teaching credential. No longer the timid woman she was before women's studies, she has been fighting for the center's survival, has been tough on parents who dump their kids at the center, and on teachers who don't care. In short, has become a child advocate. She has also begun to encourage childless people to help at the center, feeling that they also will benefit from sharing some responsibility for "little people." In addition, Paeaina provides a kind of spiritual home for PSU women, helping women not to lose touch with each other after they've left school; she uses her gregariousness intentionally to help the community cohere.

And predictably, the younger women's studies students—freswomen last year, with no aspirations of commitments they then could describe, have become serious students with their sights set on law school and medical school.

Not extraordinary for women with a few years at a state university, but far different from what I would have predicted about these women several years earlier when they would have disappeared into typing pools, factories, slots in the bureaucracy of the public sector, or motherhood and marriage; different from being scared and security-seeking, different from leaving school as one leaves the anonymity of the license bureau—credentialed, and sealed against further input from any similar institution, and cut off from all relationships there. Different also from the perspective of commitments and values, for these women are working in groups, or helping women to form groups with specific goals; they are unafraid of their own authority, and continuing to assert themselves as they had earlier in the supportive atmosphere of Portland State. I think that much of their strength comes from the total experience of PSU women's studies—course work, certainly, but also participation in the creation and perpetuation of the women's community.

The implicit curriculum, as I read it, is an American do-it-yourself-ism, but not the usual individualistic, boredom-assuaging version. It is rather a version which depends on several firm beliefs: first, women students can best define and meet their own needs—as opposed to having their needs met by women faculty or kindly administrators, no matter how enlightened. Second, from the point of view of pedagogy, maximum participation, doing rather than hearing, or even reading, means maximum learning. And third, if lack of confidence and fear of engagement accompanied by fear of judging or being judged are particular women's problems, then women's studies must create and perpetuate situations in which each woman student, with the support of other women, is encouraged to act, to try out power, to be alternatively recipient and provider of skills and knowledge, to participate in the definition of collective needs and goals.

(continued on page 9)
This spring one of our discussion sessions became public. Students began to attend faculty meetings, first in an attempt to understand the courses themselves. In the spring of 1973, however, we found that in our struggle to bring all our disciplines to bear on a single issue we made important connections that not only defined crises in women's political movements, but served to reveal new aspects of issues problematical in our various fields of interests. This forum and another conducted by the sculptor and art historian, focusing on women as innovative artists, were celebrations. Our commitment is more usually tested by our capacity to endure and to keep working under great stress.

In general, student participation is most closely linked to the courses themselves. In the spring of 1973, however, students began to attend faculty meetings, first in an attempt to coordinate efforts to save the program and then to participate regularly in the discussions.

In the fall of 1972 it became possible for students to obtain a B.A. degree through Liberal Studies. Qualified undergraduates construct their own multidisciplinary curriculum to meet university and college requirements, planned around an emphasis in Women's Studies. Recommended for the major are the basics of an academic discipline (art, anthropology, biology, history, literature, political science, psychology, sociology, statistics, or the like) which will provide students with skills, content, and techniques to apply to the study of topics and issues relating to women. The core courses are primarily concerned with (1) a critical exploration and analysis of the methodology and assumptions of traditional disciplines, and (2) content in areas relating specifically to women. Students have defined the emphasis of the Women's Studies Program into a single, compelling question: *How do we know what we know?*

Partly because of our lack of funds and partly because we lack a secure base from which to operate, the Women's Studies Program has been less closely connected with the community than we would like. On an individual basis, faculty members have been invited to lecture to various local groups. Students who wish to become politically active go out into the community to organize and join women's groups such as a self-help clinic, a rape collective, a court monitoring project (all organized at the university YWCA) and to join branches of the YWCA, NOW, WEAL, women's liberation, or other groups. On campus, students organized a Women's Fair, a Women's Week of symposia, and a women's crusade to save the university from budget cuts. A few faculty members and students have participated in three lively discussions via satellite with women in trade unions and the labor government in New Zealand, sharing information and opinions on women in the work force, paid housework, child care, education, family law, and the goals of women in socialist and feminist movements.

In our relative isolation and poverty we have come to depend on books, each other, and our students to stimulate and support us in the task of making women's studies a serious intellectual enterprise here in Hawaii.

Doris M. Ladd, Dorothy Stein, Marilyn Harman, Judith Gething, Anne Kauka, Mirella Belshe, Donna Haraway, Joan Abramson

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**GRADUATES (continued)**

Utopian rhetoric? I think not. And the proof is that PSU is no Utopia. Of the women I described, each hassled with the women's studies program. Carolyn cried over her selection to be a paid WS coordinator; we had two jobs and at least twenty qualified people; students had to interview each other and make choices on the basis of competence and personality with the inevitable results. Janet left angry that no one would keep the Women's Union going, and then had to return, realizing that if she wanted it to work, she'd have to do it herself. At the moment, Helen and Amy are arguing the position that the proposal for a certificate program in WS ought to be abandoned if there must be a faculty administrator.

But these hassles, nerve-racking, dispiriting as they are, are vital. No program organized and funded by a beneficent administration, structured by willing feminist faculty members, and populated by eager learners could ever teach women what Portland State teaches, or prepare them so thoroughly to know what they think and why, to defend values which involve sticking in there and struggling, instead of sitting out storms, to get together with other women who share a common idea or perspective. This kind of experience and especially practice at recognizing when authority should be challenged—we discovered that not every authority needed to be—I think helps women graduates of PSU WS make space for themselves and other women in the worlds in which they move.

This very sense of progress, of being able to chart the journey—"I heard about the program; I was scared to death in my first WS class; I wrote a story; I organized a work group on American history curriculum; I'm out and getting women together in the high school where I teach,"—that journey is the crucial one.

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