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Closeup: Sacramento Women's Studies Program

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LONG BEACH WOMEN'S STUDIES PROGRAM

The record of the Center for Women's Studies at California State University, Long Beach, is one of small, undramatic gains over a period of three years. As at other schools which have tried to develop women's studies programs, the administration has been reluctant; unlike many other schools, so has student involvement.

Cal State Long Beach is a state university of 30,000 students, on the border of conservative Orange County. Most of the students work at jobs off campus. The women's liberation movement has not produced a strong women's organization on campus. Although students have enrolled in large numbers in such early courses as Sociology of Women and Images of Women in Literature, until recently this interest has not issued in cohesive group action.

But a small group of faculty members and some students who first met in spring 1970, eventually contacted most of the other women faculty, urging the development of women's studies courses and the revision of existing courses to eliminate sexist material and include more acceptable versions of women's nature and roles. In the subsequent year and a half, we developed several new courses which drew substantial enrollments. Our other concrete gains were few.

Then in winter 1972, we had a call from the associate dean of curriculum. What, he wanted to know, was going on in Women's Studies; the president of the university wished to make a speech emphasizing such curricular innovations. Ah ha! we thought. The administration cares. It was time to press for administrative support for a program, in terms of funding, released time for a coordinator, office space, secretarial aid. We constituted ourselves the Ad Hoc Committee on Women's Studies and met regularly during the spring, this time with more student participation, to develop a program proposal.

Meanwhile we went from administrator to administrator—the dean of the School of Letters and Science, the dean of educational policy, the academic vice-president, and finally the president himself—to ask for some firm evidence of support. Little was forthcoming. They wanted courses, all right, so long as no one had to pay for them. Money was tight, we were told; and besides, look at all the other programs that had been developed by dedicated faculty with no additional outlay of funds. However, we were placed under Special Programs, a sector with departmental status which supervises the development of interdisciplinary minors and certificate programs. The Director of Special Programs has been helpful; he provided us with guidance, some secretarial aid, and a mailbox. He even attempted to find us an office, to no avail.

At this point many of the women initially involved began to wonder if the effort was worthwhile: too many women had done too much volunteer work for too long with too little compensation. It seemed ironic that the effort to develop a women's studies program should simply perpetuate this tired pattern. Besides, several of us felt that

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SACRAMENTO WOMEN'S STUDIES PROGRAM

Women's Studies at Sacramento began with two courses in the spring of 1970, "Women in the Modern World" and "Women in the Law," an extension course: today, there are twenty-six courses and eight extension courses.

That fall, 1970, history professor Joan Hoff Wilson and government professor Kirsten Amundsen sponsored a course on the women's movement, "The Liberation of the American Woman," oriented for both day and evening women students as well as for community women. To avoid the problem of alienation in large groups, Wilson and Amundsen had speakers for two hours, then broke into small groups for discussion. Speakers included Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, Florynce Kennedy, Robin Morgan, Aileen Hernandez, and many others.

The course cost $5,200, financed largely by Cultural Programs and the Continuing Education (Extension) Division. In addition to a large student enrollment of about 288, it generated two 2-unit, part-time teaching positions to handle the enrollment overload; both positions were used in discussion groups. Amundsen and Wilson agreed that 1) women with grassroots community movement experience would be hired, and 2) the part-time women would have equal status in designing and implementing the course. The Program has kept this teaching philosophy throughout.

Student excitement and interest provided the momentum to expand the Program from these initial classes to its current size and scope: Sacramento's Women's Studies now offers both a Minor and a Coordinate Major Program. The Minor includes nineteen units: one class is required, "Sociological Perspectives on the American Woman," and six units are selected from Women in Humanities (6 courses); The Ethnic Woman (2 courses); Women in the Social Sciences (12 courses); or Women in the Sciences (2 courses).

Various departments decided to participate in the Coordinate Major Program: students majoring in anthropology, psychology, sociology, government, history, or English may combine their work with their interest in women's studies. The Coordinate Major has generated considerable research on women in these fields.

Credit for our success goes to the Women's Studies Board and their firm ally, the Faculty Women's Association, and to the women who have participated in the Program. Everyone has suffered subtle harassment from the bureaucracy, and everyone has worked very hard with very little money; the Program was established only through volunteer efforts. Requests for released time to attend Board meetings have been ignored and only this spring will three units of assigned time be allocated to one faculty member on the Board. In a basic administrative sense, therefore, the Board and the Program have yet to establish their legitimacy.

The Board is elected once a year at a special meeting of the Women's Caucus, open to all women students, faculty, and staff. The Caucus is always open to all women on campus for airing grievances and discussing problems and ideas. A constant exchange of ideas, announcements, and actions be-
between the Caucus and the classes is maintained. Moreover, members of the Women's Caucus publish the bi-weekly Feminist News, and plans are underway for publishing an anthology of writings by CSUS women for use as a textbook.

The Women's Studies Board is the only group on campus where student control is a reality; determined students, faculty, and staff women finally obtained approval for student control and collective leadership. However, most of the committees and departments on campus cannot accept this and continue to try to pin down a single leader or head of the Women's Studies Board.

To date only one decision has required a formal vote, despite the fact that a variety of political factions are represented on the Board, including male-left-identified women and gay women, and both moderate and radical feminists. Feminist/socialist priorities as well as gay/straight issues have divided the Board in the past and no doubt will continue to do so.

The Women's Studies Program makes a clear distinction between the Minor and the Program itself. A minor must be approved by Chancellor Glenn Dumke, head of the Board of Trustees of the California University and College System. A program needs only the approval of the Academic Senate and the president of each individual campus. The Women's Studies Minor is purely academic, important to the academic community. The Program is more significant, special, as it serves both academic needs and movement goals. Besides classes, it provides speakers, programs, and films for the school and the larger community. Small consciousness-raising groups often evolve from Women's Studies courses, for example. The Women's Radio Collective broadcasts every Monday night from five to ten p.m. on CSUS station KERS 90.7. A Women's Self-examination Learning Clinic, held once a month in conjunction with the Program, is a constant success.

The Program is unique in that it has evolved from a grass-roots base into a collective, cooperative effort of the three groups of women on campus. It is intended to serve: staff, faculty, and students. Since the major impetus has come from the last two groups, they have provided most of the financial support. For example, the Program received $1,200 for 1972-73 from the Associated Students of California State University, Sacramento; this money is used for student-related items such as books, tapes, periodicals, and other library materials. The Program also received $500 this year, in the form of a checking account, from the School of Arts and Sciences, to pay four work-study students.

Eighteen units in Women's Studies courses (out of approximately fifty-four) are taught by women directly involved in the women's movement. As introductory courses are considered very important in terms of the women's movement, next semester "Introduction to the Women's Movement" will have a sequel, "Women's Movement: Advanced Theory and Practice." This will involve more intense movement work, including projects in the community.

At present the Women's Studies Program is allocated 1.8 faculty positions and the power to grant joint appointments with other departments. Two such joint appointments have been made: Mary Mackey in English and Betty Chmaj in Humanities. For the fall of 1973 we are requesting 1.2 additional full-time positions in Women's Studies and nine additional joint appointments.

Although basic consciousness-raising is still a part of almost all of the courses, we no longer draw so many "fighters," students who would say, "I want to find out more about 'women's lib' so I can more effectively put it down." Another change can be seen in the fact that male students no longer bait the instructors. In "Introduction to Men's Liberation," the men are now forming small groups, and they wish more men would participate. Chicano men have reacted well to the classes and would like to see a class for them taught by a Chicano.

Minority women now participate, due in part to the classes for Asian women and Chicano women; next semester we will offer classes for black and, hopefully, native American women. The minority women have a strong ethnic identity. When middle-class women discuss something generally exclusive to middle-class whites, ethnic women point this out. Their criticism keeps white movement women aware of the realities of their Third World sisters' lives.

The perennial shortage of funds, due to Governor Reagan's budget cuts, is a major problem. While funding would be easier if the Program became a major—departments with majors are given additional faculty positions more readily—becoming a major does not seem to be an urgent need. Many new courses are badly needed: more self-help courses and community offerings, an advanced self-defense course, and a biology class for women, about women. A course on women's health needs is essential, as is a psychology class for women. In general, we need to consolidate and improve current classes, rather than simply expand.

From the beginning, Women's Studies classes have faced the problem of reconciling academic "straightness and respectability" with the needs to be "sensitive to the needs of women." While this can be solved in part through an interdisciplinary approach by a sympathetic teacher, most often we need an active women's movement person to provide the latest perspective on the condition of women. So we have tried to hire teaching assistants with community movement experience, and these women always teach the required introductory class, "Sociological Perspectives on the American Woman." In the words of one Board member: "While we have not always achieved the academic balance the administration might like, we do not feel that we have sold out simply for academic respectability. In all likelihood we will continue to walk this tightrope for some time to come."

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CORRECTION:
In the Fall 1972 Newsletter we mistakenly included U California at San Francisco among the MA and BA programs in women's studies. In both cases this should have been San Francisco State University.