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Women's Studies at a State College

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WOMEN'S STUDIES AT A STATE COLLEGE

The number of requests received at Towson State College (Maryland) for information on our Women's Studies Program suggests that the growth and expansion of women's studies is creating an as yet unfulfilled need for descriptions of how programs came into being, how they operate, survive, and, hopefully, flourish. What follows is an abbreviated version of our experience as faculty at Towson, with emphasis on our nature as a public, specifically a state, institution, and on the ways in which we have both accommodated ourselves to and profited from that public status.

Towson is the largest of the state colleges in the Maryland system, with some 7300 students in the day school, 5200 in the evening school and 6300 in the summer school. Women comprise over half the student body and roughly one-third of the regular day school faculty of 427 full-time and 120 part-time teachers. Most students commute, and leave for jobs as soon as classes are over; faculty are isolated from each other, according to disciplines, in more than half a dozen buildings. While our Baltimore location enables us to avoid provincialism and frequently to join with women at the dozen or more other institutions of higher learning in the area (as for instance at a number of state-wide conferences on women, several of them held on the Towson campus), the city also acts to draw people and their energies away from the campus. (One reason for the growth of women's studies in some small towns and cities is that the campus is one of the few, if not the only, locus of intellectual activity for women.)

It was in 1971 that efforts began, simultaneously on many fronts, to explore the situation of women at Towson. Official and unofficial groups of students and faculty formed to investigate the establishment of day care facilities and of a Women's Center, and to work in the areas of faculty salaries, library holdings and curriculum. By the fall of 1974, we have established the day care facilities and the Women's Center, our own library budget and impressive holdings, equity adjustments in salaries and a feminist Affirmative Action Officer, and both women's studies courses and a program. In this article I am concerned only with the academic curriculum and how we have influenced it, but it is important to appreciate that work was going forward in all these other areas and that, typically, the same faculty members were actively involved in several areas at once. In this way a network of communications was early established, groups learned from each other, and the several thrusts of our work made it more difficult for the college as a whole to ignore us.

Our first women's studies course, in the fall of 1971, was Biographies of Women, offered under an existing course title in the history department, Studies in Biography. We have since used other umbrella titles (e.g., Topics in American Literature, Special Topics in Sociology, Directed Readings), where course content changes according to the instructor, to offer other women's studies courses with a minimum of strain and delay. The bulk of our courses, however, both departmental and interdisciplinary, are new and permanent additions to the curriculum, which went through the regular procedures of examination and approval by departmental and/or college curriculum committees. By now we have courses in English, modern languages, art, philosophy, history, psychology, sociology and physical education, with course work in business administration scheduled for the coming year and a course in education to go to committee this fall. We also have three team-taught, non-departmental, interdisciplinary courses. All women's studies courses have been organized into a program in which students can concentrate under a General Studies Arts and Sciences major.

At the core of the program are the three, program-centered interdisciplinary courses, one introductory, the other two upper-level courses in the humanities and the social sciences respectively. Students take 18 to 24 credit hours of upper-level work in women's studies, including the two senior interdisciplinary courses, plus lower-level work in women's studies, including the introductory course, in addition to other relevant courses on both levels in the Arts and Sciences.

That within little more than two years, by the fall of 1973, we were able to move from a single course to a coherent program is testimony to the work of a core group of faculty, and to early student support and a steadily growing student response. Specifically, the following procedures proved useful in our work.

1. In 1971 two faculty members designed a grant proposal in women's studies. Although twice unsuccessfully submitted to the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), the proposal led many faculty—beyond the few who were pioneering courses on their own—to identify themselves and commit themselves to women's studies, and gave them a sense of group effort and support. When funds were not forthcoming from NEH, we had at least an entering wedge for negotiations with the administration, since the College Office of Corporate and Foundation Programs had helped with the drafting of the proposal, and some department chairs had been involved in its planning. Thus, we had achieved institutional visibility. Most important, we had a program ready to put into operation, since we had worked out procedures for offering the essential interdisciplinary courses.

It is important to recognize that we were dealing with an administration which, while male, was comparatively new (appointed in 1969), young (both President and Vice-President in their early thirties), and ambitious. The college had, in 1963, changed its designation from teachers' college to liberal arts college and was still redefining itself. The new administration saw the college as the pace setter for the whole Maryland system. And by 1971 it had experienced and responded positively to the pressures of the black student movement. In addition the administration had accepted that higher education in the future will not be confined to the pursuit of a standard curriculum for four years by 18 to 22 year olds, but will be an increasingly diverse set of educational opportunities and experiences offered to a student population of equally diverse ages, backgrounds and needs. It was within this comparatively open framework of expectations that we were able to operate.

In 1972, then, we succeeded in having the administration appoint a women's studies faculty-student committee, with released time for two codirectors of the program and a budget to cover salaries for student assistants, travel funds, books and supplies. The Committee was mandated both to develop new women's studies courses and to explore methods whereby women could be more adequately represented in the existing curriculum. It was also to continue to pursue the possibility of funding through grants.

2. The work of the committee, and especially of the codirectors, was simultaneously facilitated by the establishment of a Committee on Minorities and Women in one division of the college—the brainchild of our sole woman Academic Dean. Its purpose was to explore the representation accorded women and minorities in regular departmental offerings. Under its aegis the women's studies codirectors began visiting departments, asking for and receiving time at official department meetings to present the case for women's studies. We prepared carefully, describing the history and purpose of women's studies, offering sample syllabi of relevant courses at other schools culled from *Female Studies* volumes, and volunteering to work with individual faculty members both in revising existing courses and in creating new ones. We found that because we had institutional "legitimacy" we were more able to overcome some conventional resistance of timid, conservative, skeptical, or suspicious faculty. And individual faculty within departments were strengthened in their efforts to work for women's studies despite the occasional opposition of senior colleagues.

3. Because there was an official policy of encouraging good and innovative teaching on campus, we were able to apply successfully for college "mini-grants" of up to $500 to provide incentive to faculty to devote summer time to creating new courses in women's studies.

4. Although no longer a teacher's college, Towson still graduates large numbers of students in education who in turn staff the city

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and county public schools. Because the Baltimore city public school student body is 70 percent black and also rich in ethnic groups, while the college still graduates a preponderance of white middle and lower-middle class students, there has been a growing interest on campus in what is called "Human Relations." Pragmatically speaking, it is an effort to bridge the gaps and create greater understanding among races and classes. Although, significantly enough, Human Relations work was initiated without any explicit inclusion of women as an oppressed group, we have since had the various committees, projects and institutes concerned expand the definition of their work. A committee on which we are represented is now designing a Human Relations course which, if approved, will be required of all students for graduation. Thus, some exposure to women's studies may become a basic and necessary part of every student's college education.

This author does not intend to be overly optimistic. Faculty opposition to women's studies certainly still exists, but given our official imprimatur that opposition is muted. We must still yearly renegotiate our position with the administration in such areas as released time for directing the program, and we must negotiate with departments as to how frequently a given women's studies course is to be offered. We do not have any direct control over departmental hiring since we are not ourselves a department, and in some departments our resources are thin. However, department chairs in many cases are beginning to recognize that hiring a women's studies person is a priority, and the latest appointment in sociology, for example, is such a person. And we have meanwhile established a precedent in hiring one woman, part-time, for one of the interdisciplinary courses, with an appointment specifically in women's studies. At the same time, we must continue to "prove" ourselves by drawing large student enrollments. We plan to continue to increase the number of courses and the number of faculty teaching them, as well as to work to change existing courses and provide more courses in the summer and evening schools. We will also do much more work in the area of continuing education for women. Finally, reduction of a four course per semester teaching load to three courses scarcely provides the co-directors with enough time, and faculty with full teaching loads are already overburdened. But we are cautiously pleased with what we have accomplished: a fairly solid base on which to continue to expand. We have formed a strong coalition, which cuts across departmental lines, and one in which from the beginning the presence of senior, tenured faculty gave support to the untenured. We have learned how the budget of the institution operates and thus how to argue for funding, what the sources of power and authority within the institution are and how to negotiate with them, and how to use institutional precedents (such as the prior existence of committees for International Relations and American Studies) to facilitate our work. Our courses have justified themselves intellectually and academically, but the negotiating, we know, will have to continue.

1 A much expanded version of this article, covering all aspects of our work at Towson—day care, Women's Center, faculty status and salaries, library, continuing education for women, in addition to the regular Women's Studies Program—will be available as a booklet after November 1, 1974. For copies please write to Elaine Hedges and Sara Coulter, Codirectors of Women's Studies, enclosing 50¢ to cover postage and printing costs.

2 We have been successful in receiving grant support from Title I of the Higher Education Act of 1965, which is specifically concerned with supporting projects between higher education and the community and has a priority for women. We doubt that we might have better luck with private foundations than we have had with NEH because of the local, institutional and community nature of much of our work. The local community (businesses, clubs, philanthropists, etc.) can be a source of modest funds for specific projects. State Departments of Education have money for curriculum and career development programs that affect public schools. The new Educational Equity Act may also provide possibilities.

WOMEN'S STUDIES AT A STATE COLLEGE (continued)

MAKING THE MOST OUT OF SCARCITY: ROLE MODELS IN MOTION

Women psychologists in the South are doing something about the problem of minority status in their profession. Less than 20 percent of all psychologists are female. Worse yet, even a smaller number are employed in academic institutions where they might serve as role models for women students who are in the process of choosing a career. In fact, only nine percent of the faculty of Southern psychology departments are female. Since jobs in psychology usually require a doctorate, young women must prepare for such careers much as they would for law or medicine. But what if women students attend institutions which have no women psychologists or perhaps few women faculty members in general? In a field that encompasses diverse areas—from computers to anxiety-syndromes—women in psychology tend to cluster in certain "feminine" ones: child or clinical psychology, for example, hardly representative of psychology's range of possibilities.

For these reasons, the Status of Women Commission of the Southeastern Psychological Association (SEPA) decided to identify and "pool" the existing female role models in psychology in order to "distribute" them throughout the geographic region. Seventy women psychologists, including many non-traditional specialists, volunteered to serve as "Visiting Role Model Women." Their names, along with topics in psychology about which they would be willing to speak, were listed in a brochure distributed to more than 500 college campuses in the South. Departments of Psychology were encouraged to invite women listed in the brochure to participate in their colloquium series.

Since last year, women have received invitations to talk about a wide range of research topics and, thus far, student and faculty reactions have been positive. In addition, the participants have found the experience exhilarating. Each visit includes an informal meeting with women undergraduate and graduate students to discuss and encourage the pursuit of careers in psychology. This aspect of the visit is critical, providing a chance to recruit and, at a different level, an opportunity to demonstrate that the field of psychology is receptive to women. The goal of this project is to keep the Role Models in motion until the graduate student population is 50 percent female. For more information, write to the author at the University of South Florida, FAO 296, Tampa, Florida 33620.

Ellen Kimmel