Administering a Women's Studies Program

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Administering a Women's Studies Program

The essay that follows answers some of the questions posed in last issue's Editorial. It was first read at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association in August 1973. Comments in the form of correspondence or essays will be welcome.

The Women's Studies Program at the University of South Florida completed its first full year of operation in August 1973; and concomitantly, I concluded my first year as an administrator of the Program. Is administering a women's studies program any different from administering a history or an economics department? In some respects not. All department chairpersons and program directors share some of the same problems and concerns. Looking back, I feel I have spent an inordinate amount of time on such matters as budget, scheduling classes, enrollment, and other details, partly because I had a lot to learn, and partly because of the requirements of a new program which became operational all at once, with no precedents for guidance, or history of gradual growth and development.

Our program began in September 1972, with eleven courses in the curriculum. The program is housed in the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences and is autonomous; that is, it is independent organizationally from other departments and programs in the college. It does not grant a degree, but is an area of concentration in the interdisciplinary college major. Each quarter we offer six or seven courses, each enrolling from 40 to 125 students. The full-time faculty of three persons is supplemented by adjuncts hired each quarter and by persons from other departments who come on loan or teach as an overload. Consistent with experiences at other universities, the courses have been quite popular, and are over-subscribed each quarter.

In general, the purposes and activities of women's studies courses and programs seem to be fairly well defined and agreed upon by most participants, though the emphases differ from one institution to another. (Robinson, 1973). Courses about women intend to discover and to present existing knowledge, hitherto unnoticed or ignored, in order to inform and to develop awareness of the roles, contributions, and indeed the very existence of women in social history. Some participants, particularly those with strong identification with a discipline, feel it very important to attempt to develop new knowledge through research on women, and to make new theories or revise old ones that are more adequate to explain and conceptualize the data. To this purpose, all kinds of scholarship are being subjected to scrutiny from a new feminist perspective. And third, there is the widespread observation (Hoffman et al., 1972) that, through explicit design or felicitous event, remarkable...

NEWS FROM THE CAMPUS

The list of official women's studies programs is still growing (see additions below), and so is the number of innovative college courses and facilities offered for women. Here are a few examples we found especially interesting:

Women and the Psychology of Management will be initiated this fall by Elaine Klein, director of general studies at Iona College (New Rochelle, N.Y. 10801). An introduction to the principles of management and their specific application to women in industry, this course provides a practical approach to working effectively within the industrial organization.

Trade Union Women's Studies is the title of a series of short courses first offered in Spring 1974 by Cornell University's School of Industrial & Labor Relations (7 E. 43rd St., New York, N.Y. 10017).

NEW PROGRAMS AND COORDINATORS

Additions to the list of women's studies programs:

Cincinnati, U of, Cincinnati, O 45221—Women's Studies, Dana Heller, Dir.
C W Post C, Greenvale, N Y 11548—Women's Studies, Alice Scurby (sociology, anthropology), Dir: program offers a minor.
Regis C, 235 Wellesley St, Weston, Mass 02193—Women's Studies, Mary Bryan (English), Sr Catherine Mary Meade (history), Dirs.
San Francisco, City C of, 50 Phelan Ave, San Francisco, Calif 94112—Women's Studies, E Rossi, Coord.
Santa Ana C, Santa Ana, Calif 92706—Women's Studies, Joanne G McKim, Coord.

Trenton S C, Trenton, N J 08625—Women's Studies, Cecile Hanley (English), Coord: program offers a minor.

New Coordinators:

Alabama, U of, Tuscaloosa 35486—Martha W Tack, Coord.
California S U, Hayward, 25800 Hillary Rd, Hayward 94542—Marilyn J Blawie (political science), Chairperson.
Delaware, U of, Newark 19711—Women's Studies, Ellen Morgan (English), Coord.
Sangamon S U, Springfield, Ill 62703—L Everson (speech), Coord.
Any Change in Sexist Texts (continued)

the climate at Random House set by management seems to have become more receptive to changing the sexist content of textbooks. This change in attitude can be traced directly to pressures from the marketplace. However, the editors we talked with felt that the changes which have taken place in Random House books are for the most part superficial.

* * *

Evan Morley is the editor we interviewed at American Book Company. (She is the in-house editor of a series of nonsexist science texts for the elementary grades.) This firm publishes elementary and high school texts, audiovisual and related materials comprising complete educational systems.

Ms. Morley was pessimistic about the changes taking place in educational publishing. She feels that the attempts publishers are making—pronoun changes and head counts of males per female in illustrations—reflect a superficial approach and a lack of commitment. In her opinion, publishers have not initiated the original research that is needed to improve the textbooks, nor have they tackled controversial political issues such as crime, birth control, and abortion. She believes that educational publishing companies are dealing with feminist issues within a traditional, rigid, narrow frame of reference, which precludes progressive thinking and creative, significant change.

* * *

It should be emphasized that the comments of the individuals interviewed obviously represent a public stance taken by officials in the presence of acknowledged feminists. To learn the full story of sexism in educational publishing, one would need to interview privately everyone in the company—including secretaries, bookkeepers, and mailclerks—in order to examine the possible connections between discriminatory attitudes in the office and bias in the books. The need for a more extensive investigation of this sort is now apparent. No doubt it could most effectively be undertaken by concerned individuals within the industry, and if any publishing people who happen to read this report are interested, The Feminist Press would certainly encourage them to pursue the project within their respective companies.

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SLIDE PROTEST

Never thought of myself as a feminist
til I was 7
I went to the Typical Red School House
and during recess I hung by my knees
from the 6th graders slide
in protest that us younger kids
couldn’t use it

No one seemed to care
about the fact that I wanted
to take the heights and coming down
off the huge curved slide—the crowd yelled,
"Your underpants are showing!"

My upside down mouth yelled
"You’re lucky I’ve got some on."
but I promptly tried to hold my skirt up
around my butt—
lost balance and fell

Lallo
Denver, Colorado

Administering a Women’s Studies Program (continued)

changes in attitudes and behavior occur in many students and faculty as a result of participation in these courses. This effects a radicalization of individuals, a strengthening of the women’s movement through broadening the population base of supporters, a greater willingness to accept the political nature of feminism, and often profound changes in life styles and goals. Women’s studies are concerned with a directional social change; they have a point of view, and thus are political. This last point and its ramifications probably cause more problems for women’s studies within the academic community than any other aspect of their existence. When courses and programs are suggested or proposed in hitherto naive institutions, it is not uncommon for administrators and male faculty to become suddenly sensitized to the possibility of bias and discrimination in such courses. In one instance, when a male student complained of a grade in a Women’s Studies course, claiming that it was discriminatory, the academic vice president of the university made a public statement that he was “glad to see” a complaint of this nature, since it showed that this type of program was not exempt from the kinds of charges that had been brought by women against other practices of the university.

Discussing the role of the administrator in women’s studies is necessary; it implies that a major decision has already been made, namely, that a program or department has been established which houses a collection of courses that are identified as Women’s Studies. The establishment of a separate program, as contrasted to the offering of courses about women in existing traditional departments such as sociology or history, is and probably will continue to be an important administrative and fateful issue, one that will not be resolved soon, and perhaps never. The reason for this, as I see it, is that women’s studies, more than any other part of the curriculum at the present time, are emerging in idiosyncratic ways on campuses; the forms that their establishment take are a function of the beliefs, energies, and personalities of the women promoting them, and of the character of the institution and the supporting community. Consequently, among the variety of existing women’s studies programs, one finds strong proponents both for separate departments and for the development of new courses within existing departments. I am persuaded of the sanguinity of arguments on both sides. Although I have cast my lot as administrator of an autonomous program, I am not unhappy when someone in another department wants to develop a course about women. Under certain conditions, our Women’s Studies Program will even cross-list such courses. Later, I will discuss the implications of cross-listing.

For those who are still considering the pros and cons of a separate program, I will briefly summarize the arguments. A separate program serves as a focus for attention to existing knowledge and concern about women, their unique experience and roles in society; it gathers students and faculty who are interested in the various aspects of such an identification, and thus generates research and a continuing structure for scholarly enterprise in the area; it signifies an institutional commitment to recognition of women faculty, students, and the identity of women in general, as well as a compensation for past neglect and discrimination; it provides an administrative entity which can promote all of the above, can act as the manifest identity of the women’s movement on campus, can interact with the institution and the community as an educational agent, and can, by its very existence, promote awareness and implement institutional and social change.

Arguments against the establishment of separate programs are mostly based upon a fear of segregation, isolation, and the creation of second-class faculties and educational experiences for students.

(continued on page 12)
For example, Catherine Stimpson warns of a “women’s ghetto” (Stimpson, 1973). Freeman is even more explicit (Freeman, 1971):

Women’s Studies are not the answer to the gap in our knowledge that we would like them to be. They have been tried before and the last time they failed. Once before there were women scholars demanding a place to demonstrate their value and their insights, and departments of Women’s Studies were created to meet these demands. They are now called Home Economics Departments. They originally provided rigorous academic training and did research, but over the years these departments became isolated from the mainstream of scholarly inquiry.

No doubt in some institutions such calamitous outcomes could occur, but this has not been our experience. We are full-time faculty whose department is Women’s Studies instead of Psychology or History. We sit on college and university committees; we are invited to sponsor visiting lecturers; we receive frequent requests to be on television, radio, and other university public relations programs; we have direct access to the president through the Status of Women Committee; we are frequently asked by faculty of other departments to make presentations to their classes; we are, in fact, spread so thin that a little occasional isolation would be welcome at times.

In general, women’s studies programs are less hierarchical than are traditional departments. Some programs, Portland State University and California State University at Sacramento, for example, are organized as collectives with no one person at the head. Students, faculty, and staff share in the decision-making process. These programs are so new that one cannot yet evaluate the feasibility of this egalitarian structure. Other schools function with a committee or advisory board, with one or two persons acting as head, or “coordinator.” More conservative, probably, is an arrangement such as ours, where the program director handles all administrative work, and interfaces for the program with the University. Decisions about hiring new faculty, developing courses, and scheduling, however, are made jointly with the faculty. Again, it seems to me that a program’s form will evolve from the persons developing it and the institutional context. At our school, a program must have a designated director who is the signatory for the program, responsible for the budget and other matters. There is nothing to prevent the director, however, from soliciting assistance, advice, and opinion from a wide range of students and other interested persons.

Traditional departments want faculty with the highest possible academic credentials, especially in today’s market. In women’s studies, however, the nature of some of the courses is such that persons with widely varying backgrounds and levels of preparation can be very valuable in the development of an exciting and relevant curriculum. But the paradox is that women who might make fine contributions to the program may diminish its status in the institution if they are non-Ph.D. holders; such individuals will also be appointed to the lowest faculty ranks, if at all. My tendency is to encourage women who are affiliated with our program to prepare themselves with the terminal degree in their fields if they plan to make a career in academe. To do anything else, in my opinion, is unrealistic and unfair to the individual.

Other problems which an administrator in women’s studies confronts are funding, degree status, and relations with other departments. Many women’s studies programs, including our own, are under-funded and under-staffed; but so are other departments in the university. I have refused to seek sources of outside funding on the grounds that the university has approved the Program and should now demonstrate its commitment with adequate funding. I am not, of course, speaking of grant money for research.

A dozen programs offer bachelor’s degrees in women’s studies, and a few offer master’s degrees. Ours is an area of concentration in the interdisciplinary college major. It is more difficult to get approval for a degree-granting program, and it may be that the offering of a degree is not important. More important, it seems to me, are a wide range of electives of both disciplinary and interdisciplinary courses. The former can be cross-listed with the appropriate department, which brings me to the subject of relations with other departments.

If a course is cross-listed, a student can register for it in either department, Women’s Studies, for example, or Psychology. As a rule, the department which is teaching the course gets credit for the enrollment. One disadvantage of cross-listing is that if a course is in the curricula of two departments, then either can offer it. For example, my course, Psychology of Women, is cross-listed with Psychology. Presumably, the Psychology Department, which has no women in it, could elect to offer the course themselves if they wish. While they are not likely to do that, it is a risk one should consider when making the decision to cross-list. Cross-listing has several advantages: it gives the student the option of registering for the course either way she/he wishes; it increases the number of possible courses, and gives more latitude in staffing; and it enriches the curriculum of the disciplinary department. We find that university faculty are interested in teaching our courses, or in developing courses about women and teaching them in their own departments, cross-listing with us. Our policy is that we will allow such a course to be offered as Women’s Studies only if we have the right of approval of the syllabus and the instructor.

In conclusion, I would like to comment on the integration of Women’s Studies into the fabric of the University. Even though our interests and our purposes are not traditional, we are still part of the University and in my opinion we should participate fully in its life and its activities. We are not adversaries, nor are we apologists. I feel that Women’s Studies add an exciting dimension to the University, and that the courses are among the most important for both men and women. I do not know where the Women’s Studies Program will be ten years from now. Perhaps the time will come when women and knowledge about them and their experience will not need the advocacy of a separate program. In the meantime, I think we are good for students, good for the university, and good for the society.

References

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