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Grass Roots Women's Studies: The Nashua, New Hampshire Area

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PLANNING CONTINUES FOR
THE NATIONAL FOUNDING CONVENTION
by Sybil Weir

On June 9, and intermittently throughout the Berkshire Conference at Bryn Mawr College, a Continuations Committee met to plan further aspects of the Founding Convention of the National Women's Studies Association. Each of the regions was represented by at least one person, and in a few cases, two. Despite a heat wave and everybody's end-of-the-semester exhaustion, the good feelings generated at Philadelphia in March continued to sustain us as we realized that the convention and the National Association were indeed becoming a reality.

Date of the Convention. In response to requests from regions for more time to organize themselves and to arrange for inexpensive plane fares, the Committee decided to move the convention date from November to January. Circle the dates on your calendar: January 13 through 16, 1977—the Founding Convention of the National Women's Studies Association will take place in San Francisco, California.

Feminist Travel Fund. A working sub-committee of the Continuations Committee has proposed the following scheme: each delegate will pay a sliding registration fee, depending on her or his proximity to San Francisco. For those within a 750-mile radius, the fee would be $35; for those who live 750-1500 miles away, the fee would be $25; for those 1500-2500 miles away, the fee would be $15; for anyone further away, the fee would be $5. The total sum of registration fees collected—about $10,000—would be used exclusively to grant travel stipends to delegates who could not otherwise attend the meeting. The San Jose conference committee would decide, on the basis of equitable and clearly enunciated guidelines, who qualifies for travel stipends.

In addition, each region is expected to raise funds to help send its delegates to the convention. Every effort should be made by regional chairpersons to reduce travel costs through group fares and charter flights. Free housing will be available at San Francisco for those who request it.

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an amendment to its state constitution (1974) guaranteeing equal rights regardless of sex. But its present Governor, Meldrim Thompson, has become a focal point of controversy for many of the state's feminists (see below).

Many people in New Hampshire are interested in and concerned about women's problems and issues; most of them live in southern New Hampshire, many in the Nashua area. They work through established institutions, agencies and clubs, or have formed groups which provide special services for women. All of the people I contacted during my research for this report were eager to talk about their projects and to guide me to other resources. The most valuable of the resources I found in the Nashua area were:

Rivier College. A fully-accredited, private college conducted by the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary, which offers associate's, bachelor's and master's degrees, Rivier recently decided to remain a women's college. This decision applies to its full-time undergraduate program, which enrolls approximately 500 students. Its graduate program (500 students) and its continuing education program (500 students) will remain open to men. In general the full-time faculty—mainly nuns—have, I was told, "a high level of consciousness regarding women's issues." Although there is no women's studies degree, a number of courses concerning women are offered. A seminar on the Southern Renaissance: Welty, O'Connor, McCullers is on the summer agenda. Women in History and Literature, Women and the Law, Women in Sociology have been offered. Feminism: Religious Implications will be taught next spring. In addition, plans are underway to develop seminars in leadership and other areas as a result of Rivier's reaffirmation of its commitment to women's education. Rivier's Affirmative Action/Public Relations officer, Tracy Shiers, was instrumental in organizing an International Women's Year series. Women's organizations in the area were invited to cosponsor with Rivier such events as a film on the history of women and a lecture on women's roles; over 15 organizations (as diverse as NOW and Garden Club) responded.

New England Aeronautical Institute and Daniel Webster Junior College function under separate corporate structures but share faculty and facilities. Aided by Title I funds, NEAI sees its role as "helping businesses fill minority quotas" and, concomittantly, "promoting nontraditional work roles." Minorities other than women are few in New Hampshire. Thirty percent of NEAI's student population is female. The Institute trains all New England air traffic controllers, and many of their women students are being schooled for those jobs. The Institute has also developed a Management for Women course, designed in part to help women already employed in industry move up into management level positions. Its secretarial degree might also be called nontraditional in that its four-year program includes shorthand and typing skills in a foreign language as preparation for careers in import/export businesses.

The Nashua Public School System (17 schools, 12,298 students, 647 teachers) has just completed a self-evaluation and is proud of its compliance with Title IX guidelines. It has a Career Awareness/Exploration program which introduces nontraditional careers to both sexes at both the elementary and secondary levels. It has a person assigned to look for alternative, nonsexist texts. It has recommended, as part of the Title IX report, a teachers' workshop on inadvertant sexism.

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It is trying to develop equal opportunities in areas other than contact sports for its girls' athletic programs. (Nashua High School developed a girls' football team, which disbanded when it found it had no one to play against.) The Nashua School System's Vocational Education program supports students who wish to enroll in traditionally opposite-sex courses. Girls are expressing interest in Graphic Arts; there are one or two girls in the Automotive Program. Five or six boys take Home Ec while 20 to 25 girls are in Industrial Arts. When I asked why more girls than boys are crossing the sex lines in these courses there is no hostility on the part of the major­ity against the minority. "Kids are mature enough to handle it, but it's the stereotyping of roles that has held it back," the Vocational Education Director said. Two women administra­tors I interviewed blamed stereotyping of roles on the media.

Nashua Public Library. The main library offers little of special interest or help to women. Florence Shepherd, a reference librarian, did prepare a short, selected bibliography called "Women Thinking/Being/Doing," which lists a variety of good titles by and about women. The Library Director told me he tries to see that the children's resources are "balanced." If the three-month schedule of children's films he gave me is any indi­cation, his efforts are not very successful. Of the 22 films listed, with the exception of "Free to Be You and Me," only "Sleeping Beauty" and two animal films featured female char

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