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## **New Curricular Focus in Women's Studies Programs**

Florence Howe

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# Women's Studies Newsletter

Clearinghouse on Women's Studies  
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## NEW CURRICULAR FOCUS IN WOMEN'S STUDIES PROGRAMS

by Florence Howe

In a year during which we have read each week of cutbacks in some college or university system, it is heartening to be able to report that the growth of women's studies has continued at least at its previous rate. No programs have been lost. We seem to have reached no plateau—the growth is still accelerating slightly. While in the previous 18 months (from the summer of 1973 until December 1974) 37 new programs were announced, in the past 12 months, 40 new programs have appeared. Perhaps more important than the continued rise in the number of programs is their new character. Two trends are observable here: a sharp rise in the number of minor- or degree-granting programs has reversed the percentages of last year—two-thirds of programs now offer minors or degrees; and a concomitant formalizing of the curriculum has occurred within those programs. Perhaps as interesting is the fact that programs have begun to structure curriculum in terms of careers for students.

Women's studies courses and programs began, five or six years ago, in order to compensate for the male-centered and -biased curriculum. Most programs still offer courses arranged broadly, to cover as many disciplinary areas as possible, and, in addition, to open up new interdisciplinary ones. Majors in women's studies, from the beginning, saw themselves as attending a mini-college within a college. The main question became what could you do with it?

I remember feeling very hard-pressed by students who wanted to know what kinds of jobs they could get with a women's studies major. "The same kinds you'd get with an English or history major," I said, and then went on to explain the limits of a B.A. But there was a measure of discomfort in my response, not only because I thought women's studies ought to do more for students than English or history, but because I knew there was something wrong with the conception of curriculum as smorgasbord. It is not enough for students to discover that, in all areas of knowledge and life, sexism has

## THE CASE FOR A NATIONAL WOMEN'S STUDIES ASSOCIATION

by Elsa Greene

Thinking wishfully, the case for a national women's studies association is very straightforward: Most of us who are committed to the study of women are short on time, energy and money. By organizing ourselves, we could make our work easier and more effective.

Since 1973, when Catharine Stimpson first suggested the formation of a national association, there has been widespread consensus about a few basic functions that such an organization might serve. First, we clearly need a nationwide communications network. Learning administrative tactics through trial and error is expensive. We would benefit from prompt reporting on our strategic failures and successes. Not only might we sometimes avoid repeating each other's mistakes, we might also use up-to-date information about successes elsewhere to strengthen the case for funding similar—or unique—projects of our own. It is ironic that as women fighting to undo institutionalized ignorance about ourselves, we have neglected to learn thoroughly enough about each other's accomplishments.

We need to know what is happening month by month around the country, and we also need ready access to central files on curricula, existing programs and research projects—proposed and in progress. One national resource center would spare us the impersonal drudgery of form letter interchanges about our programs; it would facilitate instead less voluminous and more purposeful correspondence among us.

In addition to conserving our resources, an all-inclusive women's studies network would increase our power. We would gain informal power simply by being in touch with each other—transmitting insights, encouragement, job gossip, advice—rather than working in isolated groups. (As Elaine Reuben pointed out during a conference held last spring at Indiana University, traditional educational administrators are forever keeping each other up on recent

(continued on page 2)

(continued on page 3)

ruled; and that we will all have to work for the next hundred years to undo and restore and revise and transform knowledge and change the conditions under which we live. It is essential that they be prepared to do one specific part of this work, and that means educating them in some depth in that part, and with the necessary tools they need for that work.

For several reasons, formalizing the curriculum is now possible. First, the acceptance of women's studies as a legitimate *area of study*—as a minor or for the B.A. degree or for graduate degrees—demands focus, since it is impossible to study an entire area. Second, students have asked for more order and less repetition in the courses they are taking. Third, the work of researchers has continued to accelerate and thus to push curriculum developers (sometimes they are the same persons) to develop a series of courses in women and U.S. history, for example, not simply the introductory survey.

Right now, formalizing is clearest among programs granting the B.A. A number of programs, including the one at Old Westbury, have chosen to focus on several "streams" or "concentrations"—for example, on women and the workforce; on publishing and journalism; and on revision of the high school curriculum. The most novel new program is Ohio State University's, in which the curriculum has been organized into seven "major modules" designed around clusters of related disciplines, or, in one case, around literature as a single focus. The most complex proposal comes from one of the oldest programs—at San Francisco State University—where students have been able for four years now to construct their own B.A. programs "with a focus on women." Now the program's planners are proposing a coherent "major" with a specific vocational intent. Students will be required to organize their courses with a theme in mind—for example, Women's Health Studies. Or they may choose to combine work in women's studies with a traditional discipline, perhaps to prepare for graduate school. Vocational fields mentioned in the San Francisco document are "counseling, media, administration, public relations, public health," in addition to the more general claim that the program will prepare students for "any vocational skill, with emphasis on and expertise in women's or sex-role issues."

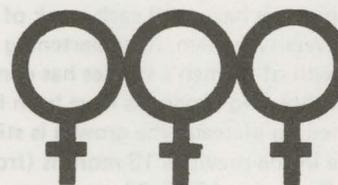
In future issues, I will discuss the structure of the minor in women's studies; the growth and focus of graduate programs; and the impact of women's studies on the rest of the curriculum.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

TRENDS IN DEVELOPING WOMEN'S STUDIES PROGRAMS

	Programs	Degree-Granting/Minors	Percentage Degree-Granting/Minors
December 1970 <sup>1</sup>	2	0	0
December 1971 <sup>2</sup>	15	5	33.0
Summer 1973 <sup>3</sup>	75	20	26.5
December 1974 <sup>4</sup>	112	40	35.7
December 1975 <sup>5</sup>	152	90	59.2

New Curricular Focus in Women's Studies Programs by <i>Florence Howe</i>	1
The Case for a National Women's Studies Association by <i>Elsa Greene</i>	1
The Future of Women's Studies	
Santa Ana College	4
University of Pennsylvania	4
University of Virginia	5
SUNY/New Paltz	6
Feminist Press Author Reveals Identity by <i>Mary Howell</i>	7
Women's Studies Programs	8
New Law in State of Washington by <i>Sally Bader Mackle</i>	11
Picture Books with Female Heroes by <i>Joanne Bernstein</i>	12
Books: New and Recommended	14
Newsbriefs	14



NEW CURRICULAR FOCUS (continued)

TRENDS IN DEGREE-GRANTING AND MINOR-GRANTING WOMEN'S STUDIES PROGRAMS

	Minor	A.A.	B.A.	M.A.	Ph.D.	Totals
December 1970 <sup>1</sup>	0	0	0	0	0	0
December 1971 <sup>2</sup>	0	0	4	1	0	5
Summer 1973 <sup>3</sup>	4	1	10	5	0	20
December 1974 <sup>4</sup>	13	2	19	5	1	40
December 1975 <sup>5</sup>	31	6	39	11	3	90

<sup>1</sup>See Florence Howe and Carol Ahlum, "Women's Studies and Social Change," in *Academic Women on the Move*, eds. Alice S. Rossi and Ann Calderwood (Russell Sage, 1973).

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>See *Women's Studies Newsletter*, Vol. I, No. 4, Summer 1973.

<sup>4</sup>See *Who's Who and Where in Women's Studies*, eds. Tamar Berkowitz, Jean Mangi, and Jane Williamson (The Feminist Press, 1974).

<sup>5</sup>See *Women's Studies Newsletter*, Vol. IV, No. 1, Winter 1975. It is important to note that the Clearinghouse on Women's Studies did not repeat in 1974 the widespread survey it administered in 1974 in order to produce *Who's Who and Where in Women's Studies*. Thus, the 1975 figures may not include *all* new programs.