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## WOMEN'S STUDIES IN THE SOUTH CENTRAL REGION: A CONFERENCE

On October 19, 1974, 150 women and men, students and faculty, gathered at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas for a women's studies conference. Representatives from four states (Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana and Arkansas) and over 25 schools exchanged tales of triumph and frustration along with their course syllabi. One year of good intentions and another year of actual planning by the S.M.U. Women's Studies Council preceded the event itself. The conference was a product of an odd combination of zeal, obligation and curiosity.

The conference was a great idea, we acknowledged, but how could the S.M.U. Women's Studies Council teach others to run when it was still only in the crawling stage itself? To present our council as experienced authorities on women's studies would be, at the least, presumptuous. The conference, then, would have to be designed not as a training center but as a trade center: we'd all trade whatever useful information and skills we'd gained from our experience, however minimal. We, at least, were eager to contact people involved in other programs at a similarly elementary level—we assumed that many schools in the area were developing courses and programs. And if they hadn't begun offering courses, there might still be feminists who would like to do so, and who would welcome support and information from others who had.

Equally pressing was our obligation to fulfill the terms of a grant. In 1972, we had received a seed grant of \$2,100. from the Board of Missions of the United Methodist Church to plan a women's studies program and to sponsor a conference "to stimulate interest on the part of colleges, universities and churches in the South and Southwest, in academic and informal programs in women's studies, and to provide tools and working models with which these institutions may develop programs suited to their particular needs." Between the time of that proposal and the beginning of concrete plans, we had suffered a continuity crisis. A new president, a new provost and a departing coordinator had left the Women's Studies Council with an unexpected hiatus in its history. Finally, after being reappointed and restructured, the Council was consoled for the six month delay by a \$4,600. budget for the year, part of which was to help finance the conference.

Because we intended the conference to be more practical than theoretical in nature, we divided the day into two groups of workshops. The morning group focused on the administrative problems of funding and strategy for setting up a general women's studies program at a college or university. The afternoon workshops were divided by disciplines to allow instructors of women's studies courses to exchange ideas, booklists and syllabi.

The conference opened with a panel assembled to raise the question, "Why Women's Studies?" Among the panelists were a sociologist, Nora Scott Kinzer of Purdue, and a literary scholar, Dawson Gaillard of Loyola. Instead of addressing the academic issues considered by these two speakers, the audience poured out its frustrations about affirmative action plans on Eileen Lehmann, a panelist representing the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, whom we had included as a source of information about Title IX. Judging from the discussion, women faculty and students in the Texas region still face reactionary attitudes in their departments and administrations. Questions of hiring, firing and basic inequities replaced the discussion of curricular topics the S.M.U. Council had

hoped to arouse. The opening of the conference, then, was dominated by the excitement of shared indignation and mutual support. We were reluctant to suppress this energy, but felt it necessary to redirect it toward practical curricular matters.

J. J. Wilson, the main speaker of the afternoon, successfully turned this wave of frustration to enthusiasm for women's studies in her inspiring account of programs elsewhere, particularly in California. By the afternoon workshops, the participants were prepared to discuss books, courses and teaching techniques more specifically.

In evaluating the conference later, we felt that a two day conference would have allowed the time necessary to release and deal with the anger on the first day and to move into issues of content and strategy the next. The problems which sparked the show of anger and frustration at the morning session are problems that we at S.M.U. had been struggling with for years before learning how common they are to other colleges and universities in the region. Because faculty members here tend to be more liberal than either the administration or the student body, aspiring women's studies instructors must not only press for administrative approval (not to mention funds), but they must do so without the reassurance of large enrollments from a clamoring student body. Nevertheless, the range of previous success in initiating courses and establishing programs was wider than we had expected. The University of Arkansas (Little Rock) women were asking how to develop their first course, for example, whereas the Richland Community College faculty were explaining their fairly complete program for women in the community. Judging from the information shared at this conference, the University of Texas at Arlington, Richland College and S.M.U. have developed the only coordinated sets of courses in the region, but other schools are prepared to follow their lead.

*Victoria Jacoby*

### THE FUTURE OF WOMEN'S STUDIES (continued)

men) in other interdisciplinary programs have offered courses in Women's Studies listed both in their own programs and in ours. This term, for example, two Women's Studies courses are being offered in the Biological Sciences Program—Sex in Humans, and Women and Health Systems; and faculty members in Comparative History, Ideas and Cultures are offering Women in the Middle Ages and The Black Woman.

The American Studies Program currently has upwards of 11.2 percent of the majors at Old Westbury—approximately 140 to 160 students. Approximately one-third are Women's Studies majors. The program serves women (and men) engaged in majors in all areas of the college. Our course enrollments are, in general, very high, ranging from upwards of 60 each term in the introductory courses to 20 to 30 in all other courses.

Most women's studies programs in the country offer a smorgasbord of curricular offerings, usually with an introductory (and interdisciplinary) course to begin and a seminar and/or action project to conclude. Old Westbury's program is not any different, but we have had faculty/student discussion aimed at focusing the program in particular areas of curricular strength. While such discussions are still in their preliminary stages, three areas under special consideration are 1) Women, work and the economy; 2) Women, teaching and curricular reform; 3) Women and publishing.

*Florence Howe*