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The Future of Women's Studies

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THE FUTURE OF WOMEN’S STUDIES
from the UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON, SEATTLE

Because the degree which our students receive reads, “B.A. General Studies,” students have asked for some means to show on their transcript the women-oriented courses they have taken in their Women Studies concentration. Thus, beginning in summer 1975, many of the courses that would have been listed under General and Interdisciplinary Studies (GIS) will now be listed under Women 290 or Women 490. These new numbers are for special topics in Women Studies and augment our three (only) permanently numbered courses: Women 200 (Introduction to Women Studies), Women 310 (Women and the Law) and Women 499 (Special Problems—Independent Study). In addition, there are new and upper division courses being developed by faculty in various departments, and some of these will be given permanent status in those departments. Thus, “majors” in women studies will have not only an increase in women-numbered courses to choose from, but they also will be able to select a wider range of women-focused courses offered in traditional departments. Students who want to develop a specific “disciplinary” approach to the study of women will have an opportunity to do so beginning autumn 1975.

In spite of our low budget, and with slim chances for substantial increases, we have been able to restructure the program in order to promote this growth in course offerings. This has been accomplished by intensive and frequent meetings of students, staff and faculty, and because of increased support from various departments. During the past three months, we have met in small groups as often as three times a week to work out the details of change. There have been two weekend planning retreats (one for “students only;” during which time the Women Studies Student Union was formed). Even though we are able to report these accomplishments, we must add that we see these as being the minimum needed to maintain our program in its current status. There are other things we need to be able to do if we are to reach goals we have set. Our goals are essentially of two types: 1) those concerned with local specific desires, and 2) those concerned with broader global objectives. In the first, we expect to be able to offer more upper division and some graduate courses in the near future. Whether or not we seek to move to degree-granting status (at the undergraduate or graduate level) is going to depend on 1) the results of the feasibility studies we are currently conducting, and 2) the administration’s willingness (or ability) to provide us with a substantial increase in funding. We have many students asking for both a degree in women studies per se and a graduate program in women studies. In the latter case, we are now considering how we might function as a coordinating center for graduate students who want/need support in using a feminist approach to the study of women. Again, we are just beginning to formulate ways we might accomplish this, but our concern for graduate studies has high priority.

Woven into the above concerns are others which are intended to allow us to be more responsive to both university and local community needs. In this we are seeking ways to establish better working relationships with other campus divisions concerned with women’s issues, as well as departments whose members have expressed strong interest in helping us further develop our program (e.g., Psychology, Social Work, and the Department of Psychiatry), or those who wish to have more involvement in our program (e.g., international women, Third World women, staff women). We are also attempting to close the distance

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STRUCTURE AND STAFFING (continued)

I have had, it seems clear that some feminists are simply tired. Perhaps, therefore, we need to remind ourselves of several old lessons: no one can sustain the energy movements require without periods of rest—or at least distance—from them; and the corollary—when people inside movements grow tired, they stop extending themselves to other people. Thus, tiredness may cause the network to tighten or harden into a clique. Programs should have sufficient leadership among their constituency so that organized periods of rest and study are possible for them. A second piece of advice follows in part from the first. Some feminists find that more restorative than a holiday is a visit to another campus or to a women’s studies conference. What we need often are opportunities to exchange views and experiences with other feminists. Women’s studies faculty and students have had relatively few opportunities to discuss such institutional problems as I have noted here. We have not had enough of such meetings locally or regionally, and we have had none nationally, at least in part because we’ve been too busy with our own campus concerns.

I think that we need the support now of a national network of women’s studies programs, perhaps joined together in an association capable of organizing such conferences and effecting rapid communication among us. For example, we need to talk about strategies for dealing with the question of tenure for women’s studies faculty. If traditional departmental tenure is impossible, and if we do not want to turn women’s studies into a separate department, what other structures might possibly meet our needs? We need to talk about funding, about curriculum and about other matters of concern not only to women’s studies but to a developing body of scholars engaged in interdisciplinary study, scholarship and teaching.

1See The Conspiracy of the Young by Paul Lauter and Florence Howe (World, 1970).
THE FUTURE OF WOMEN'S STUDIES (continued)

between local, non-campus groups and ourselves by co-sponsoring programs in the community for dialogues on women in society.

Some of our broader objectives may be stated as follows: While we strive for the above, we want greater interaction with other women's studies programs and feminist organizations in this country and abroad. There is a strong desire among us to share our research findings and to share in the growth opportunities for women throughout the world (thanks again to the Clearing- house for providing the forum for exchange on these issues).

Chris Bose, Chairperson Women's Studies Advisory Committee
Sue-Ellen Jacobs, Director
Deirdre O'Neill, Advisor
Mary Reeves, Program Assistant
Beryl Richards, Researcher

from the UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI

The University of Cincinnati opened an Office of Women's Studies September 1, 1974 to provide coordination for existing women's studies courses and stimulation for the development of new ones. A half-time director and half-time secretary were hired. The director established an advisory council of faculty and students. The office and the council have begun by structuring their work under three major emphases: research, curriculum, and community outreach. These respectively reflect the purposes of generating data and theory concerning women, disseminating that in the academic community, and contributing to increased awareness about the status of women. Next year the University of Cincinnati will offer at least 18 women's studies courses, and other member colleges of the Greater Cincinnati Consortium of Colleges and Universities will offer 24 more. Full-time students in any of the consortium colleges may register and receive credit for courses at other institutions in the consortium. A proposal for offering a Women's Studies Certificate (minor) will be submitted to U.C.'s College of Arts and Sciences next year. The consortium is attempting to develop a degree-granting program.

What is the future of women's studies here and across the nation? Women's studies had its strongest beginning in the humanities such as history and the language arts. Scholars in these fields generated considerable new information and attention to a new feminist perspective. Now an awareness demands change-oriented action programs, and this has put emphasis on the need for data. Scholars in the social sciences are increasingly focusing on the issues raised by the women's movement in an effort to address unanswered questions. Three directions seem apparent: emphasis on data-based research, increased activity in the social sciences, and the design of change-oriented action programs.

Introducing a feminist perspective to students is especially important in an urban university like the University of Cincinnati where the student body is predominantly local and from very diverse backgrounds. Women's studies units in universities must continue to connect with the wider community for their own benefit and growth as well as for disseminating services. Offering courses, workshops and special events through continuing education or extension divisions carries out an implicit assumption of women's studies: that significant change can and will occur in society through the education of individuals.

Undoubtedly a good modus operandi for interdisciplinary programs in university settings, where the disciplines have control of resources and personnel, is needed in many places. In order to change or add to the traditional perspectives of the disciplines, women's studies has to be of them, in them, and about them. However, not having departmental status and power has its disadvantages: one example is the inability to hire faculty directly. The major lever for all interdisciplinary programs is enrollment. In the final analysis the market will determine the future of women's studies. Obviously, then, influencing the market is an essential activity. Reports suggest women's studies enrollment is strong and growing across the country, especially in academic colleges and especially on campuses catering to cosmopolitan student bodies. We think a quality program will also thrive at the University of Cincinnati.

Dana V. Hiller, Director

from the UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT

The Women's Studies Program at the University of Connecticut has really only been in business since November of 1974. Before that we had four courses that focused on women—two in English, one in sociology, and a graduate seminar in anthropology. Some freshman English courses dealt with women's issues but were not a stable part of the curriculum. Since that time we have put together a new interdepartmental course called "Introduction to Women's Studies," and we have the possibility of offerings for the fall that include psychology, history, business, allied health, child development and family relations, political science, romance languages, philosophy, and education.

In addition to course work, we have asked for a 1975-76 Women Scholar Lecture Series and have been instrumental in securing a woman for our annual Brian McMann Lecture. Our library is collecting material for a bibliography on women's studies, and a campus research periodical is devoting part of an issue to women's studies. We have established a Women of Achievement Radio Series which interviews academic and professional women on campus, and we are setting up small resource centers in the School of Education and School of Business. This will give you some idea of the projects we have gotten underway in the past few months.

Naturally, a great deal remains to be done. We do not yet know the size of our budget for the coming year, and half of our program depends on money to free faculty from existing courses so they may teach women's studies offerings.

My feeling about the future, especially for those of us on campuses with few women faculty and little hope of permanently hiring more, is that we must devise a means to make our programs part of the fundamental structure of our schools. It seems to me that the way to do this is not, as some have proposed, to concentrate on securing tenure for the coordinator of a program but to make sure that women's studies courses are among the basic degree requirements of the university. By becoming part of what are known here as the distribution requirements, we will increase not only the stability of women's studies but the number of lives we touch in the university community.

Joan Geetter, Acting Director

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from PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY—IN THREE VOICES

Nancy: "When first we came to the isle of women's studies we were petted and made much of. That past—of Female Studies VI—seems almost a fiction."

Nancy's Mother: "Perhaps the immediate past with its explosion of sensitizing, of sisterhood, the rage, the openness, the hopeful revisioning must now be succeeded by a period when we must think of the movement three years later in a different economic environment, a period of some disillusion, of rapid change, of realism—which forces us to try to understand where we are in the long struggle. The question may be now in 1975, 'How do we retain the best of the past and maintain continuity in a time of recession and readjustment?'"

Julie: "I just came to the program last year. I didn't even know about Female Studies VI. I agree we need continuity and understanding, and I want futures, not just maintenance."

We remain funded as a student activity, still close to the ground. Our bid for legitimacy, a Certificate Proposal (equivalent to a minor), has taken all the hurdles up to the State Board. Approval there will be contingent, at least in part, upon assurance of academic funding from within the university (a modest prospect). Two great compromises: specification of a part-time faculty director (we still insist coordinator) made the proposal acceptable to the new university president (who has given the proposal much needed backing), and designation of part-time wage sections rather than any full-time equivalent women's studies faculty bought departmental acquiescence. Buckets of blood were shed over the issue of a coordinator. A number of students split off when the compromise was made. A number stayed, arguing that having the program funded as an academic part of the university was important for survival. In all the energetic to enervating debate of theory and strategy, few envisaged a time when we might need a coordinator to maintain continuity, to counter the attrition of regularly appointed faculty concerned (or happy) to teach women's classes, to rekindle student interest in collectivity, to negotiate with administration and budget people, to create new jobs in a no-growth time, to find new women to revitalize women's studies. The above, undisguisedly, is Nancy sounding like a coordinator, unpaid, with a lot of responsibility and very little authority.

I was on leave during the coordinator crisis. Julie, Kathy, the various women who carried the program through are still fearful of a paid faculty coordinator, of what that could do to our collective sense of responsibility. Undergraduates and graduate students are vitally concerned with political organization. I am concerned to secure some positions for new people who will help us extend our offerings, expand, reassess, continue to build a program, an enclave in the university. Julie, a graduate student, and Kathy, an undergraduate, have offered this term a course called "Why Women's Studies?"—the first major rethinking of our introductory course since its inception. The class represents, I believe, one way the resources of the University can be used to meet a metropolitan community's needs. The class has drawn a heavier enrollment than any of our introductory courses in the past two years.

Julie: "I really tire of the rhetorical approach. Kathy and I are eclectic. Two women who work in affirmative action in the county and in the Forestry Service asked us to explore with them practical issues of power and autonomy in their assignment with women. We see the reality of individual lives, of survival, of the problem of women being pitted against each other for survival, the problem of a collective enclave in a competitive society, and the necessity of using competitive means for collective ends, with the effects second guessing have on the second guessers."

Nancy: "Do you think our 'constituency' has changed? Are there fewer of us now who tend to see women's studies as coextensive with our own egos?"

Julie: "Not really, and that's not a good way to put it. We're pretty diverse in our needs and uses for the program. Somehow, though, we're all getting older."

And, I hope, wiser. Personally, I have felt over-identified with the program. Given the administration's predilection for dealing with one faculty member who represents continuity and commitment to the university, however, I have not honestly felt I had much choice, if we want the program to continue. The struggle for recognition and funding has taken its toll on all of us; but those of us who survive agree a new era may be dawning. It is difficult sometimes not to sound like Anne Moody at the end of Coming of Age in Mississippi.

Nancy Porter with Julie Allen and Jean Maxwell

from the SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY

The Women's Studies Program at San Jose State University has evolved by establishing permanent courses on women within the traditional disciplines; to date, approximately 20 schools or departments offer courses on women. In addition, we have established our own courses (listed under Social Science) on such topics as Theories of Feminism, Feminism and Social Change, as well as the introductory Study of Women course. Students can minor in women's studies, concentrate in women's studies within the American Studies, Liberal Studies or Social Science major, and, on the graduate level, can emphasize women's studies within the Social Science M.A.

Our enrollments are increasing steadily: both sections of our introductory course this spring have 50 students. Women's courses in the established disciplines also draw well. For example, the Psychology of Women course enrolled 140 students in two sections last fall. Even in departments where enrollment is declining, such as English and history, the courses on women draw much better than the regular courses. Thus we have an incentive to present to department chairpeople when we try to get a course established: in this age of declining enrollments, our courses will help increase your faculty/student ratio. It's crass, but it works.

Our biggest problem is budgetary. Women's studies is housed in the School of Social Sciences which, due to declining student enrollment, was cut back 32 positions from fall 1974 to fall 1975. Women's studies lost .80 out of its total allocation of 1.8. This means that whereas this spring we offered six courses of our own, next fall we can only offer three. Ironically, the success of our program has proven its undoing; we are told that we simply have to "jawbone" harder to convince other departments to fund our courses! While on the one hand, women's

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studies is offered as a model for other ethnic studies programs at San Jose State, on the other hand, we will suffer because we have not lobbied to set up our own department with tenure track positions.

As for the future, I don’t think we will disappear totally. Our Master’s program seems to be one area of growth; we have approximately 25 students on the M.A. level and I receive inquiries weekly about the program. As far as course content is concerned, our students, like others, are particularly interested in practical skills, so next fall we have convinced the Business School to set up a course titled “Administrative Skills for Women”; this semester we offered a “Seminar in Career Alternatives,” placing students as interns in practical situations where a feminist perspective is needed. We have also decided that one course each semester will be taught totally by graduate students in the M.A. program.

Human sexuality is the other area in which students continue to express an interest. Next fall we will have courses on Human Sexual Evolution, on Women in an Evolutionary Perspective, and on Lesbianism and Feminism (euphemistically entitled Feminism and Psycho-Sexual Orientation). Other new courses include a creative writing course for women, a course on La Chicana, a course on suburbia and women; all these courses are funded by the appropriate departments.

I suppose, then, that my message is: find a saleswoman and set her to the task of convincing departments that courses on women are academically crucial to their program.

Sybil Weir, Coordinator

from STEPHENS COLLEGE

At the end of our first year and a half, the Women’s Studies Program at Stephens College can look forward to having its own budget in 1975-76 and so to expansions that have not been possible before. At this point our program is similar to many others. We offer a freshman-level interdisciplinary course as an introduction to women’s studies. On a second level we have begun to offer short courses under the title “Current Issues in Feminism.” Other courses are those offered within various departments where instructors were willing either to re-cast material to give it a feminist perspective or to work up feminist courses new to our curriculum. We have offered about a dozen such courses this year.

Two developments may be of interest to others. This year we have begun a three-year program funded by the Monticello Foundation to bring women writers to our campus for periods of from three days to seven weeks (seven because that is the length of our academic term). The program is sponsored jointly by the Creative Writing Program, the Residence Counseling Program and Women’s Studies. This year we have brought three poets and three fiction writers to campus—Mona Van Duyn, Maxine Kumin, Toni Cade Bambara, Toni Morrison, Tillie Olsen and Carolyn Stoloff. Five of these women were here for four days, during which time they met with students both individually and in small groups, spoke to classes, led general discussions and gave readings. The emphases were writing and women. Toni Cade Bambara was here for a month, during which time she taught a course in black women writers.

The other program (planned for a weekend this spring) is a seminar for male faculty to introduce them to women’s studies and to discuss sexism in the classroom and curriculum here at our college. We have planned a student panel on sexist assumptions students encounter in classrooms pretty much as a matter of course. (Students have volunteered to tell men faculty what it is like.) Two instructors in the introductory women’s studies course will give somewhat condensed versions of their presentations for that course. And we have arranged to bring a speaker, Marc Fasteau, who has recently published a book on masculine stereotypes, to talk with the men and to give a lecture which will be open to men and women faculty alike.

Our brief experience with women’s studies has testified to the need for such a program. Stephens is a woman’s college, but it is far from feminist. High enrollments in our introductory course suggest to us that students want and need the kind of instruction and contact with other women they find there. We want to involve men in our program both as students and teachers. We want to involve more women from the community. We need to expand our offerings within the various disciplines, and we need to expand in other directions. We are fairly optimistic about being able to do these things and more within the next year or two.

Betty Littleton, Director

CORRECTIONS/CLARIFICATION

The article on the closing of the Women’s History Library in the Fall/Winter 1974-75 issue of the Women’s Studies Newsletter contained a few errors and some misleading information. To clarify: the microfilm record of women’s serials (1968-1974) is called HERSTORY. These are not “history films.” Neither these, nor the Health/Mental Health or Law microfilms are movies, but rather 35mm, silver halide microfilm to be read on a library reader. The Law series, made up of eight reels, is $30. a reel; Health/Mental Health, consisting of 13 reels is $30. a reel and the Women’s Serials (HERSTORY) is a total of 93 reels which sell for $24. a reel. Standing orders are needed for the remaining 32 reels on law. These orders will help to raise the $30,000 that is necessary for the Library to receive an emergency matching grant from the Alameda County Board of Supervisors. The remaining microfilming cannot be completed without this grant, so orders and donations must be forthcoming. Many libraries will consider ordering the films only if faculty and students put pressure on them to do so. Finally, the correct address is Women’s History Research Center, 2325 Oak St., Berkeley, CA 94708, not 94618 as printed in the Fall/Winter issue.

In the Media section of Newsbriefs in the Fall/Winter 1974-75 issue, the address of the Feminist History Research Project was printed incorrectly. It is F.H.R.P., P. O. Box 1156, Topanga, CA 90290.