Editorial: "But What "IS" a Women's Studies Program?"

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"But What IS a Women's Studies Program?"

In several respects a Women's Studies Program is more difficult to define today than it was eight or nine years ago, when there were two of them—at San Diego State University and Cornell. Those two programs had a couple of characteristics in common: They were campus-based, academic programs that offered courses for credit to undergraduates. They had been begun by faculty and students conscious of the "political" statement inherent in announcing that a group of courses had become a "program."

Even a glance at the same two programs in 1978 suggests the current complexities. San Diego's program thinks of itself as a "department," and, in the university's terms, is moving to become one (see the Women's Studies Newsletter, Vol. VI, No. 2). It is also one of the 92 programs across the country that offer a minor or a certificate/minor to undergraduates. Cornell's program now offers not only the equally ubiquitous major, but also a unique minor that supplements a broad variety of graduate degrees (see this issue, p. 21).

Thus the original definition has been augmented by the presence of graduate programs, and, even more dramatically, by the rapid emergence of degree-granting programs. For the first time this year, more than half (163 or 54 percent) of the 301 Women's Studies Programs offer either minors, majors, or graduate degrees. And 40 of these programs offer two or more combinations of these degrees. A new program at Case Western Reserve, for example, offers the B.A., the M.A., and the Ph.D. in women's studies through American studies.

Especially to students in degree-granting programs (80 offer the B.A.; 21 the M.A.; and 5 the Ph.D. or equivalent) a Women's Studies Program says, here is a coherent body of knowledge that will prepare you to do the world's work, including scholarly work. The breadth and depth of that new body of knowledge, as we know in 1978, are not easily controllable or even definable. Degree-granting programs have begun to shape their courses around disciplines (women's history, for example) or professions (counseling and therapy) or themes and institutions (marriage and the family; employment policies and technology).

Even while qualifying specialists for the working world, the women's studies curriculum still has the quality of the eclectic smorgasbord, a sip and a taste here and there of refreshment sturdy enough to help students survive in and even right the intellectual imbalance of a mainstream diet. And of course most of the remaining 138 (or 46 percent) of Women's Studies Programs offer a body of "electives," supplementing the male-focused curriculum.

In addition to degree-granting and non-degree-granting programs, the Women's Studies Program list, making its fifth appearance in these pages, now includes four consortial programs: the Claremont Colleges (in southern California); the Five Colleges (in western Massachusetts); the Graduate Theological Union (in the Bay Area); and the Great Lakes Colleges Association (in Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan). Another, the Associated Colleges of the Midwest, is in formation. Probably these should be listed separately in the future, since they may offer no courses for credit directly, and, like some graduate programs, they may not be campus-based.

In our next issue, we plan to list separately the score of new Women's Studies Programs, and, even more dramatically, by the rapid emergence of degree-granting programs. For the first time this year, more than half (163 or 54 percent) of the 301 Women's Studies Programs offer either minors, majors, or graduate degrees. And 40 of these programs offer two or more combinations of these degrees. A new program at Case Western Reserve, for example, offers the B.A., the M.A., and the Ph.D. in women's studies through American studies.

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