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On this page, we plan to print—as a new feature—your comments: on the Women's Studies Newsletter, on the National Women's Studies Association, or on any issue of concern to feminist education. You may write in the form of letters or brief essays of opinion. We will accept up to 700 words from each contributor to this page. Please send two copies of your letter or essay, along with a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

Hester Eisenstein

Women's Studies at Barnard College: Alive and Well and Living in New York

It may seem somewhat confusing to be reading an article in 1978 on the new Women's Studies Program at Barnard College. After all, people say, haven't you had women's studies there for years? The answer is, well, yes and no. Of course there have been women's studies courses at Barnard for many years.* Annette Baxter's History of American Women was one of the earliest courses in the country, first taught in the fall of 1966. Similarly, Catharine R. Stimpson introduced a course on Images of Women in Literature in the spring of 1971. The Barnard Women's Center was begun in 1971, and the annual "The Scholar and the Feminist" conference that it sponsors was first held in 1974. But it was only in May 1977 that the Barnard College faculty voted to establish a major in women's studies, for students who wish to explore the basic questions raised by the new scholarship on women. Some of the issues touched upon in this field are: sex roles, sex differences, and the concepts of femininity and masculinity; the roles of women in culture and society, past and present, and their implications for the roles of men; questions about the distribution of power, work and resources in the public and private domains; and the symbolic and religious place of feminine and masculine imagery.†

History of the Program

The Women's Studies Committee was originally established as an ad hoc subcommittee of the Committee on Instruction—the curriculum committee for the college—under the leadership of Donna Stanton. This committee met regularly over a period of three years, beginning in 1974, to design a Women's Studies Program, and to prepare the ground for its acceptance by the faculty as a whole. The committee collected information on the structure (organizational and academic) and content of women's studies programs at other campuses; it looked at other programs at Barnard, to see what elements of our program could resemble those of other programs and departments, as well as what elements would necessarily be unique to women's


women's studies; and it held a series of "hearings" with individual faculty members from a wide range of disciplines, to discuss their knowledge of women's studies, their attitudes toward the field, and their views of the place of women's studies in the Barnard curriculum.

In 1976, a women's studies "page" was introduced into the Barnard catalogue for the first time, listing the courses offered by the several departments, but noting that these were merely electives and did not constitute any kind of a program. Finally, in 1977, encouraged in part by the establishment of the National Women's Studies Association in that year, and by the sustained interest of students and faculty alike in women's studies, the committee proposed a full major to the Barnard Committee on Instruction. The proposal was approved by the committee and the faculty, as noted above, in May 1977.

Program Follows Interdisciplinary Model

The academic year 1977-78 is thus the first year of existence for the new major,
and it is too early to draw any conclusions about how the program is faring. But the structure of the program and its mode of operation are pretty much in place and can be described in a preliminary way.

In general, the program that the Women's Studies Committee designed follows the model of the other interdisciplinary programs at Barnard—for example, American Studies. That is, the program itself offers a series of four "core" courses, taken by all majors. In the junior year, a student takes the Junior Readings and the Colloquium in Women's Studies (in the fall and spring, respectively; these courses are described in detail below). Then, as a senior, she takes two semesters of a senior research seminar and writes a senior thesis. The rest of the courses in women's studies are offered through other departments and programs.

Designing the Major

Students design a major in one of two areas—either history/humanities or social science—although a student may also put together an individual major around a particular interest or theme (for example, Women and Health). The major requires a total of 14 courses (on the high side for Barnard major fields, whose requirements range from 8 to 16 courses), and it includes a concentration of five courses outside of women's studies within a departmental discipline such as anthropology, history, or psychology. Students may also avail themselves of other options open at Barnard—joint, double, or special majors—so as to create their own combinations of women's studies with other majors. (This is not automatic, but is done by means of petition to the relevant committee and in consultation with the departments concerned.)

The Junior Readings course is made up of "classics," either major writings in the history of feminist theory or important representations of female experience. The reading list includes works by Mary Wollstonecraft, Friedrich Engels, John Stuart Mill, Virginia Woolf, Zora Neale Hurston, Simone de Beauvoir, Mirra Komarovsky, and Betty Friedan, among others. (The list will of course vary from year to year, depending on the preferences of the individual instructor.)

The Colloquium is designed to give students an overview of the state of the art in women's studies. The students will thus become aware of contemporary research issues and debates in a variety of disciplines, and will be prepared to choose a research topic of their own for the senior thesis. The Colloquium this year, which I am teaching, has been looking at the current feminist critique of family history, and at the reproductive cycle as a research issue. This year's speakers are: Mary B. Parlee and Catharine R. Stimpson (Barnard); Nancy K. Miller (Columbia); Gaye Tuchman (Queens); Rayna Rapp (The New School for Social Research); Renate Bridenthal (Brooklyn); and Kathryn K. Sklar (UCLA). The Colloquium lectures are open to the public. In addition, the students meet for discussion periods with the instructor. We hope to be able to rotate the teaching of the core courses, so that everyone in the Women's Studies Program will have the opportunity to teach them (and to modify them) in the coming years.

Program Supervised by Committee

The Women's Studies Program is supervised by the Women's Studies Committee, drawn from people concerned with women's studies in the several departments and programs at Barnard and Columbia, and will be chaired next year by Mirra Komarovsky, Professor Emeritus (or Emerita) of Sociology. The committee, which includes students and representatives from the Women's Center, is a policy-making group for the program. Currently the other members of the committee are: Annette K. Baxter (History); Hester Eisenstein (Experimental College); Marianne Goldstein (student); Jane S. Gould (Women's Center); Richard Gustafson (Russian); Darline Levy (History); Sue Libow (student); Nancy K. Miller (French, Columbia); Abraham Rosman (Anthropology); Elizabeth Minnich (Associate Dean of the Faculty); Mary B. Parlee (Psychology); Abraham Rosman (Anthropology); Susan R. Sacks (Education and Psychology);
but Lively Context

A listing of the courses for next year (see below) reveals some of the richness and diversity of the offering, as well as some of its limitations. We have a relatively small group of courses, compared to some of the larger and older programs elsewhere; and we are concerned about a lack of "coverage" in some crucial fields, although one can of course view this situation, more optimistically, as room for future growth. In this respect, the program is just beginning to encourage the introduction of women's studies courses in fields where these are now lacking, and in some cases we have had interested and even enthusiastic responses about possible future courses.

Obviously the new program at Barnard confronts many of the classic problems of women's studies programs nationwide. The offering at present depends in large part on the good will and the commitment of other departments and programs for the continued availability of our courses. Funding for the program is at a minimal level and is not likely to increase rapidly in a time of stringent academic budgeting. Students, for their part, show an intense interest in the courses and in the program. Yet some are hesitant to major in women's studies, because of pressures, from within or from parents: can you make a living doing women's studies?

On the other hand, there are some benefits to establishing a program at this relatively late date. One is that the legitimacy of women's studies as an important area for research and teaching is somewhat less in question than in the pioneering days of 1969 and 1970. The Barnard program was not given a time limit by the faculty, nor was it required to schedule an evaluation, internal or external, to determine its permanency in the curriculum. And the Women's Studies Program finds itself in a very lively context. Barnard is the place where Catharine Stimpson edits Signs; where the annual "The Scholar and the Feminist" conference takes place; where the Women's Center, directed by Jane S. Gould, with its large resource collection and its myriad activities—speakers, meetings, publications—and the Women's Counseling Project, a referral center for women, create networks that increasingly connect us to the women's community on and off campus. We hope that, over the coming years, we will be able to report that the Women's Studies Program at Barnard will be, as it is now, alive, well, and even flourishing in New York.

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The List of Courses for 1978-79


Susan R. Sacks, Child-Rearing: A Survey of Alternative Practices
Ann Sheffield, Women in Antiquity
Catharine R. Stimpson, Sex, Gender and the City: The New York Example
Suzanne K. Wemple, The History of Women in the Middle Ages

Part-Time Work and Part-Time Leave

The Modern Language Association convention in December 1977 included a panel on the subject of "Women and Part-Time Work." Joanne Spencer Kantrowitz, moderator, explained that, in forming the panel at the request of the Commission on the Status of Women, her "one objective was to create a group where men and women could discuss, together (and passionately, if possible), an area where women are consistently used."

"In recent years," Kantrowitz noted, "the part-time category has become a male professional problem, too, as some institutions have seized on it as a convenient cost-cutting device which uses the surplus of Ph.D.'s as cheaply as possible. However, as a permanent position in professional life, this job category has traditionally been the lot of married women who have continued for years to be department housewives teaching at the lowest levels of the academic hierarchy for pin money."

In her opening remarks, Kantrowitz went on to quote Dr. Juanita Kreps, now Secretary of Commerce in President Carter's cabinet, as having stated (in the New York Times, May 8, 1977) that "the universities have been the worst offenders in this area because although everyone else did the same thing, the universities are dealing with highly intelligent people, highly motivated professional women, so there was no excuse." Speaking of her own career as a part-time teacher, Kreps said, "I was supposed to be a Southern gentlewoman who taught classes well, was patient