Closeup: Women's Studies Department at San Diego

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Marcia Guttentag: We Will Miss You

On November 4, 1977, Marcia Guttentag died of a heart attack in a hotel room in Chicago. She was in transit on one of the innumerable assignments that she undertook—evaluating projects, consulting, lecturing. We know the life she led. It was like the one many of us are leading, overcommitted, extended physically beyond the limits of human physiology at 45, she rarely said no to a request.

I knew her only casually, had seen her only once or twice since a memorable weekend at Wesleyan University in the fall of 1972, when she had introduced a group of women’s studies practitioners to the tools of evaluation. I remember my first impression: she was a mother, I thought (and I was not being literal); she was talking with sweet seriousness and in language as comfortable to us as to her. She was clear, she separated the questions as though they were strands to be tidied. She encouraged us to ask more difficult questions. We laughed a lot, partly with the self-consciousness of adult learners, partly with the pleasure of understanding.

For those who did not know her at all, perhaps it is important to tell more about Marcia Guttentag. She held official posts, for example, in the American Psychological Association and she had been president of the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues. She had also been “the first woman to serve” on various committees. She was a mother. She had been Visiting Professor of Social Ethics at Harvard and director of the Harlem Research Center. As described by Robert Perloff in a memorial tribute to her published in the Volume 4, 1977, issue of Evaluations: A Forum for Human Service Decision-Makers (501 South Park Avenue, Minneapolis, MN 55415), her “books, articles, monographs, chapters, and edited volumes show how she put her brains and training where her heart was,” writing about such diverse topics as “demonstration for social change, evaluating mental health, poverty, undoing sex stereotypes, women and sanity, the social psychology of community control, issues in the treatment of addiction, the study and teaching of values,” and so forth.

I remember in particular, in her presentation on evaluation, one illustration she used—about the evaluation of Head Start programs that had used standardized procedures to gather cognitive information. Yet Head Start programs, Marcia explained, were never aimed—either in the legislation that established them or in their actual day-to-day operations—to effect cognitive change. Measured by their own goals, Head Start programs might have been seen as successful; measured by the goals of the investigator interested in cognition, they were “failures.”

To evaluate women’s studies courses or programs, I remember her emphasis, you have to know what questions to ask. And to know what questions to ask, you have to know what the courses and programs want to accomplish in the first place. We may all regret that Marcia did not go on, after that meeting, to organize an evaluation project for women’s studies. She was recommending to us, even then, the decision-theoretic approach, described in an interview conducted shortly before her death and published in the issue of Evaluation mentioned above.

For all of us in women’s studies, she has left a book, Undoing Sex Stereotypes: Research and Resources for Educators (McGraw-Hill, 1976). I am sorry that we never wrote to thank her (and those who worked with her) for it. The book describes—in language that all of us can read—an “intervention project” in three public school systems in the Boston area. For kindergarten teachers and for teachers of fifth- and ninth-grade classrooms, the researchers provided nonsexist curricular materials and an atmosphere of support and trust. The results are described and the materials included—in the hope that other teachers and school systems will be interested in replicating the project’s successes and avoiding its failures."
for women's studies, therefore, means that the resources generated by strong student interest are available for building the Women's Studies "Department." With a faculty allocation at present of 6.8 positions (plus .6 for administration), approximately 1000 students enrolled each semester (in Spring 1978, 1100), one full-time secretary, two half-time student assistants, eight offices, supplies and services expenses of over $2000, and the usual departmental share in audiovisual and library purchases and services, the women's studies annual budget approaches $150,000.

It is not only the size of the budget which distinguishes us. It is the fact that faculty are appointed to tenure-track positions designated as women's studies positions. We are evaluated for retention, tenure, and promotion solely on the quality of our research, teaching, and service in women's studies. Although at present such personnel decisions are made by an advisory committee of faculty tenured in other departments, as soon as three of us achieve tenure, Women's Studies will function as autonomously as any other department in the college.

The current tenure-track faculty include Pat Huckle in public policy and the law; Elyce Rotella in economics*; and Barbara Watson in anthropology. I came as chairperson on a one-year appointment in 1974, and was given early tenure in 1977. I teach one course per term in history. In addition, eight positions are filled by temporary faculty, both full-time and part-time. Pamela Freund serves as a full-time lecturer in psychology; Sandy Dijkstra, part-time, in literature; Renee Anspach and Sue Fisher, part-time, in sociology. Linda Mackey, Joyce Nower, and Carol Perkins, also part-time, regularly teach the introductory course.

In addition to the core curriculum taught by women's studies faculty, courses in specialized areas are occasionally offered by faculty in other departments. For example, a member of the Health Science Department has taught our course in Women's Sexuality approximately once every third semester. Next semester, a member of the Literature Department will teach a seminar on Doris Lessing. All such courses must be paid for out of the women's studies budget.

History of the Program

Women's Studies at SDSU, the first Women's Studies Program in the nation, has undergone a number of metamorphoses. At the urging of a committee of students, faculty, and community women, it was founded in 1970 by vote of the assembled faculty of the College of Arts and Letters. From the beginning the program was troubled by conflicts between campus and community and by deep divisions over political issues. Reflecting successive shifts in political orientation, the faculty and community persons involved also shifted several times. During the academic year 1973-74, and coincident with the beginning of a new university administration, the women's studies faculty decided to leave the campus and to concentrate their energies on community work.

Sensitive to the possible charges of an administrative takeover, the Women's Studies Faculty Advisory Committee then developed criteria for employment designed to recruit new faculty with professional training and academic credentials; with strong feminist commitments to students and the community; and with the ability to establish a stable program. After extensive recruitment, several new faculty were hired in the fall of 1974.

The shift from the primarily political emphasis of the early years to the strongly academic program of today reflects not only a revision in administrative policy and a turnover in faculty, but also a notable change in women's studies students. Unlike the students who agitated for women's studies courses and filled the first classes in the early 1970s, the majority today do not, at least initially, identify themselves as feminists. Only a minority of deeply committed radical feminist activists, and a very small group who identify themselves as socialist feminists, enter women's studies classes ready for advanced feminist analysis. Most, including some antifeminists, are just curious or looking for something new. Often, however, they emerge with a new consciousness, asserting on class evaluation forms that "this course has changed my life."

In the fall of 1974, 378 students enrolled in 12 women's studies classes; in the spring of 1978, 1100 registered in 28. While many of the courses are discipline-oriented (e.g., Women in American History, Women Writers, Psychology of Women), others, such as the Introduction to Women's Studies, or Contemporary Issues in the Liberation of Women, transcend the usual disciplinary boundaries. Our most innovative cross-disciplinary course, Sexism and the Social Sciences, was developed as a group project and uses the entire core faculty as guest lecturers and resource persons.

An 18-unit minor, developed in the fall of 1974, but available to students only since 1976-77, now enrolls about 80 students. Women's studies minors must take one of the overview courses, plus one course from each of the following groups: (1) the experiences of women in cultures or eras distinct from our own (historical and anthropological perspectives; (2) biological and sociological determinants of women's personality and behavior (psychology, sociology, sexuality); (3) artistic expressions by and about women (literature and the arts); and (4) the role of women in political and economic processes and the impact of public policies on women's lives (political science, public administration, economics, and education).

Students can take selected women's studies courses for credit for their majors in history, political science, public administration, American studies, European studies, and linguistics, or they may include a women's studies component of several courses in their interdisciplinary liberal studies and social science majors. After a

*Rotella does hold a joint appointment but it is an unusual one: 60 percent women's studies, 40 percent economics, with Women's Studies designated her "home department" for purposes of committee service and personnel decisions.
year-long battle about the definition of women's studies as a "discipline," students can now include up to 24 units of women's studies as part of an individualized liberal studies major in three disciplines. We are thus able to serve those students whose educational goals and personal quests demand extensive involvement in our program; a smaller number whose vocational aims require some understanding of women; and an increasing population who choose a women's studies course out of curiosity about or frustration with sexism, because they need 3 units at 10 A.M. on MWF, or—as the majority report—because a friend recommended it as a meaningful learning experience.

Our success at satisfying student needs is demonstrated in college and university enrollment figures. Since Spring 1975 we have maintained the highest student-faculty ratio (SFR) in our college, and figures for the Fall 1977 term show us with an SFR of 28.9, far above the university-budgeted figure of 18.3 or our college average of 20.9, and the highest among 65 departments on the entire campus. Each time the college dean has increased our staffing, dozens of students have flocked to the new classes. While not happy about our overload—in an institution which assigns all full-time faculty four courses per semester—we recognize that strong enrollments remain our insurance in the face of the uncommitted and unconvinced powers which control the university system.

Profile of Women's Studies Students

Ninety percent of women's studies students are women, their ages ranging from 17 to 58. Surveys taken during the past three academic years show consistently that women's studies students are older than the average undergraduate: currently 39 percent are older than 22, and 12 percent are over 30. Fifteen percent of women's studies students are members of minority groups, slightly above the percentage of minority students (12 percent) in the student body population as a whole.

Like other students at this urban university, which draws heavily from working-class families, most women's studies students are employed. Typically, they work about 20 hours per week, though almost 15 percent work a full 40 hours. The four largest categories of employment are office clerk, sales clerk, waitress, and teaching assistant. More students enroll as seniors than in any earlier year, followed in diminishing order by juniors, sophomores, and freshmen, perhaps reflecting the desire to take courses for personal interest after completing graduation requirements. Students come to us from every part of the campus, integrating women's studies with majors which range from ethnic studies to physics. The largest groups are concentrating in liberal studies (for the elementary education credential)—reflecting female students' propensity, despite the job market, to seek traditional women's work—and in psychology and business administration, the two most popular majors at SDSU.

In addition to academic courses, Women's Studies sponsors extracurricular activities that encourage a critical approach to both personal and vocational choices. Last November, with a $10,000 grant from the National Science Foundation, we organized a Workshop on Careers for Women in Science and Engineering, which gave two hundred students an opportunity to explore job options, training programs, problems, rewards, and lifestyles with forty successful women scientists and engineers. During "Women's Week" in 1975 and 1977, working with students and community groups, we focused on "resocialization" and "women's work."

Spurred by such activities in 1975, students formed the Feminist Union, choosing to open membership to students, staff, or faculty—women or men—who support feminist goals. Active in sponsoring such programs as a Susan B. Anthony birthday party and a reading by Tillie Olsen; Feminist Union members have in turn formed other groups: Sisters on Stage, a feminist guerrilla theater group now in its second extraordinarily successful year, and Science and Math Oriented Women. Other students, with Women's Studies advisors and support,
have formed an Abortion Rights Coalition, Rape Task Force, Women's Resource Center, and, most recently, a Women's Studies Minors Association. Feminist students are now actively monitoring the student newspaper for sexist journalism, lobbying the campus security forces for better rape prevention measures, fighting the statewide administration over health service surcharges for gynecological care, publishing a newsletter, and somehow finding time to attend women's studies classes.

Women's Studies and General Education

Despite steady growth, our 1100 students represent only six percent of the student body, for the most part taking women's studies courses for elective credit. During the past three years, however, a new pattern of requirements for graduation has been devised which offers women's studies at SDSU a role in General Education (G.E.) for the first time. Our mission may now be expanded to include part of every student's education. While the new program imposes new limitations on students by requiring them to select 40 units from a relatively short list of mostly traditional courses, the list also includes as options eight women's studies courses.

In the second category of a three-stage G.E. program, students must select two from among thirteen social science courses designated "Foundations of Learning." Along with such courses as Principles of Economics, Introduction to Political Science, and Introductory Sociology, students may select the women's studies course, Sexism and the Social Sciences, "a feminist critique of conventional, biased concepts and modes of thought in disciplines dealing with human interactions," will, we hope, prepare students to challenge traditional interpretations and sexist instructors in subsequent courses.

Other women's studies courses accepted for the huge list of third-stage G.E. electives termed "Human Experience" include Women in Comparative Cultures, Socialization of Women, Psychology of Women, Women in History, Women in American History, Women Writers, Women and the Law, and Contemporary Issues in the Liberation of Women. Thus, while the re-definition of G.E. has in one regard proven reactionary, requiring a large concentration of ethnocentric studies in American and Western civilizations, it has provided women's studies with an opportunity to be included in a previously male-focused curriculum.

For the past two years we have focused our curriculum work on the development of General Education courses. Although 22 percent of our students indicated in a recent survey that they want a women's studies major, the faculty have been reluctant to undertake the enormous effort required to plan a major and guide it through the California State University system. We have two reservations. First, we question whether, given limited resources, we can serve student interests well with the highly specialized curriculum required for a major—as opposed to concentrating on survey courses of broad interest. Secondly, we worry also that the investment of time and energy in the development of the major would overburden our small faculty, most of whom face tenure decisions in the near future. At a recent meeting, we voted to delay proposal of a major until at least three of our faculty have been tenured. Women's studies faculty must publish or the program will perish.

Marilyn J. Boxer has been Coordinator of Women's Studies at SDSU since Fall 1974.