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Grass Roots
Women's Studies: Piedmont, North Carolina

North Carolina is a state in nervous transition as it moves rapidly from a predominantly rural to an urban character. Its values and its peoples are in cultural conflict and perhaps have been since the end of World War II when agricultural mechanization, industrialization, improved communication, and racial integration effected substantial changes in this vastly diverse state. The old ways are certainly under attack. Stress accompanies rapid change, especially when values clash and when traditional patterns of life and land use are dramatically altered.

The status of women and grass-roots women's studies is inextricably tied up with the historical background and the increased nervousness in the state. Throughout the state's history, women, children, minorities, and laborers have been relatively powerless and have long been the scapegoats in any conflict over values, however defined and for whatever purpose. The ruling class still mainly adheres to adages such as "Children should be seen and not heard," "Blacks have a certain place," "Labor unions are communist," and "Woman's place is in the home." These attitudes pervade the city as well as the countryside and were evident in legislative action that has defeated the Equal Rights Amendment three times, most recently in 1977. (The suffrage amendment was only ratified in 1971.)

An important factor affecting women and women's studies is the state's ambiguous attitude toward education. Although most "Tarheels" are proud of the state's educational facilities, the legislature remains stingy, the people as a whole have a high illiteracy rate, and the majority are anti-intellectual in general. (There are many exceptions. Grass-roots organization is necessary, along with essential community and academic support. Grass-roots pressure from students, particularly reentry women, has been instrumental in the initiation of experimental courses and in regular curriculum courses. Community support systems have been crucial, as has been the sympathy of those instructors who work to overcome the opposition of curriculum committees and administrations. As is customary across the nation, the first courses offered are in the broad surveys of various disciplines, such as Women in Sociology or Women in History. Most courses offered in the state are in this category. Specialized courses are offered in some instances, particularly in the universities, and others are in the planning stages. A popular method of circumventing obstacles is to offer courses under the rubric of topics courses, directed study, and interim (January term) courses, and to hope for eventual sanction.

Women's studies in North Carolina, however various, has made a strong beginning and seems directly in correlation to the status of women in the area. As such, women's studies is a natural outgrowth of the women's movement. Local awareness organizations such as NOW and the Women's Political Caucuses have made progress; local study groups have been immensely helpful. There is a support system for almost every type of woman and the process itself is educational. The latest group, one that is elitist and therefore should have some clout, is the Women's Forum of North Carolina, a support group of seventy-five women who have banded together in what is to be a counter to the "old boys' network." Membership is by invitation only to this group of women who include Secretary of Commerce Juanita Krep, North Carolina Secretary of Cultural Resources Sara Hodgkins, many female state legislators, ministers, artists, lawyers, and businesswomen. This organization and the others all indirectly influence the development of women's studies.

A Strong Beginning

Across the state women's studies is in an early stage of development, with a few exceptions. Grass-roots organization is necessary, along with essential community and academic support. Grass-roots pressure from students, particularly reentry women, has been instrumental in the initiation of experimental courses and in regular curriculum courses. Community support systems have been crucial, as has been the sympathy of those instructors who work to overcome the opposition of curriculum committees and administrations. As is customary across the nation, the first courses offered are in the broad surveys of various disciplines, such as Women in Sociology or Women in History. Most courses offered in the state are in this category. Specialized courses are offered

The Piedmont Area

The rapidly industrializing Piedmont area is a region in transition, "uptight" because it seems to lack the political power proportionate to its population. Women are active in political circles in this area and are on the rise in management. The Piedmont has the largest cluster of urban population in the state and contains the largest concentrated number of schools, colleges, and universities. There are three "metro" areas in the Piedmont: (1) the six-county Greensboro-Winston Salem-High Point

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area, called the Piedmont Triad in official jargon; (2) the three-county Charlotte metro area; and (3) the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill grouping, called unofficially the Research Triangle. Two additional, rapidly growing areas are the Burlington and Concord-Salisbury-Kannapolis areas.

There is also an unofficial grouping, beloved by the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce, called Metrolina, a twelve-county grouping surrounding Charlotte in Mecklenburg County and including part of South Carolina. (Because Leslie Todd covered this South Carolina area in the Summer 1976 issue of the Women's Studies Newsletter, I am omitting discussion of it. The Charlotte area, however, has lagged behind its Carolina sister in the Metrolina area; indeed, the South Carolina programs have perhaps “egged on” the Charlotte-Metrolina area.)

The Research Triangle area is, of the three metro areas in the Piedmont, the best equipped for research in women's studies and, as would be expected, has the most prestigious library facilities and established academic courses. The graduate libraries at Duke University, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and the Archives of the State, located in Raleigh, abound with material on women. North Carolina State also has research opportunities, as does Meredith College, a women's liberal arts college in Raleigh. A variety of women's studies courses are taught. Among those in the regular curriculum at Chapel Hill are Women in American History, taught by Peter Filene and Jacqueline Hall, and History of Women in Western Europe, taught by Joan Scott. North Carolina State also offers history courses on both American and European women. At Duke University Anne Firor Scott offers a sequential course entitled The Search for the American Woman: A New Approach to Social History. A popular interdisciplinary course, The Contemporary Woman: History and Prospects, is offered as well. Other departments, such as English and sociology, offer courses. Meredith College permits a major in women's studies through its Special Study process, with various departments intermittently offering courses.

The metro area of Greensboro-Winston Salem-High Point has a number of institutions that offer opportunities in women's studies, credit and noncredit. By far the best equipped for research in undergraduate and graduate training is the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, formerly a women's college. Through its regular departments UNCG offers a variety of courses; for years it has held seminars and programs in Continuing Education that focus on women. Jane Mathews, a specialist in recent United States cultural history, and others offer students guidance in the field of women's studies. Seminars and Continuing Education programs also are offered through the auspices of Salem College, a liberal arts college for women, and High Point College. Salem offers undergraduate topics courses. Frequently the communities become instigators. For example, last year the city of High Point focused one of a series of community forums on women; Elon College did much the same.

The metro area of Charlotte, while lacking in research facilities except through the Public Library (which offers much for original research), has ample undergraduate opportunities in women's studies and perhaps leads the state in community involvement. In 1974-75 the County Commissioners created a Commission on the Status of Women, charged to research and identify the status of women in the Charlotte community and to make recommendations for improving and enhancing that status. Essential support services were provided, with professional and volunteer groups working long and diligently to present a report in 1975. This report verified that appalling discrimination was evident in the area; it made recommendations that no doubt provided support for course offerings in various colleges and universities in the area. The report showed that for women in Mecklenburg County (Charlotte) opportunities for advancement beyond sex-stereotyped positions were few. Despite claims that progress was being made, the report found few women in middle or top management positions, and publicized the fact that no Affirmative Action Plan had been presented to the Board of Education as late as the spring of 1975. The guidance and career counselors of the area almost always failed to make women aware of opportunities; while appearing themselves to be aware of the problems of women, they were as a whole “reluctant to take any positive steps toward changing traditional career expectations.” This bleak and discouraging report acted as a stimulus to grass roots organizations and encouraged cooperation among various faculty, reentry and regular students, and interested administration and staff.

At the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, great strides have been made in women's studies during the last two years. Credit courses originally offered under topics courses have now received legitimate status. Among these courses are
Women in Politics, taught by Patt Kyle; Women in History, taught by Mary Kelly; Changing Sex Roles, taught by Tom Forrest through the sociology department; and a most interesting and promising course offered currently through the English department, Surviving Female. Anne Carver, the instructor, describes it as an interdisciplinary course; she hopes to have it listed under Humanities next year. Covering a wide range of subjects, the instructor uses the methodology of autobiography as well as oral history. This course offers practical self-help for women and is best described as a core course in a program of women's studies, not yet legitimate in the university (but possibly soon to be). UNC-C and especially Anne Carver were also instrumental in the formation of the Women's Studies Committee, an official committee charged by the Chancellor to investigate the needs of the students, personnel, and administration of the university and to develop a program for women. This committee, which includes representatives of various colleges in the area, has already established an Awareness Resource Center (ARC) which acts as a clearinghouse for the Charlotte community, informing women of resources they need to survive in the area and publicizing local women's studies courses offered in the Charlotte Area Educational Consortium (students may take courses through their home school in any of the participating colleges and universities).

UNC-C also has a plan for reentering students, mostly female, a group that has formed the nucleus of the support network to urge administrations and faculty to offer counseling and assistance with academic readjustment and career plans. In addition, the Continuing Education division at UNC-C is active in women's studies and offers a variety of noncredit courses on women— for example, a course recently taught on Assertive Behavior for Women. But ARC seems the most promising development at UNC-C and will probably be instrumental in gaining for that university a minor in women's studies.

Central Piedmont Community College, located in the heart of Charlotte, is the area's largest community college, with over 14,000 regular students. Its variety of free and noncredit courses is rich. Regular academic courses offered through the Social Sciences include courses on Women in History, Psychology of Women, Women in Society, and Women in Health. Despite its community college status, courses in women's studies are alive and well. Mary Beth Collins, who teaches Women in Society, is an active participant in ARC.

Queens College, a liberal arts college for women located in the city's Myers Park district, pioneered in women's studies by having the first regular catalog courses in the area. Its Women in History course, first offered in 1971 on an experimental basis, became a regular course in 1972. Later followed courses in sociology, philosophy, literature, and special topics courses. Advanced courses are offered through topics courses and Honors Seminars such as Women and the Law or Women in Politics. The college uses its internship program to advance women's practical experience in professional fields and offers a self-structured major, similar to that of Meredith College, for those who opt to minor in women's studies or to concentrate. So far, no student has so opted. The most eager students at Queens College (in terms of women's studies) are reentry students, the missing generation of women who are now returning to college. The college plans to have a Women's Center, the first in the Charlotte area, to provide counseling and testing facilities and to include career and life planning.

Davidson College, a coeducational liberal arts college, formerly male, continues to be male-oriented and offers little for its female students in the area of women's studies. Through independent studies enterprising students can advance their knowledge. The college has offered a course on Medieval Literature of Women in the past but
Metrolina is emerging from a slow beginning. Claims that interest is lacking at present.

Sacred Heart College in Belmont, North Carolina, near Charlotte, is a junior college with strong inclinations to provide opportunities for women's advancement. Although no bona fide women's studies courses are offered currently, the college offers career counseling, and a variety of programs and seminars on women are held annually. Next year a series is to be offered on Traditional and Non-Traditional Roles of Women: A New Career Assessment, a series of discussions "devoted to exploring and perhaps defining the more subtle aspects of the women's movement and the social and public policies related to that movement." Topics and seminars to be included are Role Models and Women; The Changing Role of Women: Past, Present, and Future; Women and the Law; Social and Individual Perceptions of Women's Roles; and Women: Some Social and Personal Options.

Among other colleges in the Charlotte area that offer seminars, Continuing Education courses, and programs are Pfeiffer College in Misenheimer, North Carolina, and Gaston College, a community college in Gastonia. The only university in the area that offers nothing in the way of courses or programs on women's studies is the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, a community college in Gastonia. The only university in the area that offers nothing in the way of courses or programs on women's studies is Johnson C. Smith University, a Black university. Officials at the college assured me that women do receive special attention through a dormitory-sponsored Women's Week, held each spring, during which attention is drawn to women, and speakers, programs, and workshops are provided that focus on women and their needs. None of this, however, is academic. I strongly suspect that this church-related institution has had to expend time and energy on making Black history and culture a part of the regular curriculum.

Women's Studies Will Survive

In summary, the Charlotte portion of Metrolina is emerging from a slow beginning. It encourages students to reflect on their personal experiences as they study the images of women in society.

Women's Image was developed collectively by a group of women faculty who wanted to help students understand the sources and consequences of myths about women. Further, it was designed to encourage students to examine their capacities to grow and change. Three instructors, working as a team, take primary responsibility for the course each semester. In addition to lectures, each week the three teaching team members maintain continuity with groups of twenty-five students in discussion. Lectures are given by many women from a wide variety of academic departments on campus or sometimes from the local community. In this way students can quickly become acquainted with women faculty and with the resources of the community. In the course of a single semester, students observe a spectrum of competent articulate women as role models. In addition, members of the teaching team who attend lectures become acquainted or reacquainted with the pursuits and perspectives of their colleagues.

The course is divided into five sections: "Physical Images," "Psychological Images," "Literary Images," "Social Images," and "Creating New Images for Ourselves." In the first section, practical information about physiology and anatomy, birth control, abortion, vaginitis, and women's health care is integrated into an examination of social norms and practices that deny women the right to control their own bodies. Readings include Our Bodies, Ourselves, and Vaginal Politics by Ellen Frankfort.

"Psychological Images" begins with an examination of Freud's views on women and the subsequent effect those beliefs have had on women's "place" and potential. Feminist critiques of Freud are reviewed, with emphasis on alternative theories of female sexuality. The section concludes by inquiring into the nature of

Nancy Schniedewind

Closeup on Women's Studies Courses: Women's Image: An Interdisciplinary Introductory Course

Women's Image: Myth and Reality, the introductory course in the Women's Studies Program at the State University College, New Paltz, provides an experience that concurrently maintains a network among women faculty on campus and exposes students to women's studies. It