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

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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 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 begin-ning in women's studies. Its citizens are alert to the needs of women, and grassroots organizations and desires are forcing struggling private schools, eager empire builders in universities and colleges, and loyal partisans who have been there all along to pursue women's studies in their particular institutions. The male-oriented prestigious graduate schools in the state have gradually come to realize that women's studies is not simply a fad. Although there remains a lot of "catching up" and struggling for funding, women's studies in the Piedmont area of North Carolina is in its first stage. Because the course offerings are mainly in departments, on a regular or topics basis, funding is most likely to be secure. The main problem with women's studies in the area is that those who teach particular courses might leave to go on to greener pastures. Those who teach women's studies courses are not hired for that reason primarily. There are no easy answers to the problem. But the easiest question, equally hard to answer, is what to do with those in power who think of women's studies and the women's movement as an idea whose time will go away if they but wait it out. The recent failure of the Equal Rights Amendment in the state, its discriminatory position in many laws, and its continued concentration of women in inferior employment, combined, tend to convince me that women's studies will survive, precariously in some instances, to enter stage two and beyond. 

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 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 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 re-acquainted 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, 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
the personal and social change needed if women are to gain personal autonomy. Chapters from Jean Baker Miller’s *Psychoanalysis and Women* and such essays as Freud’s “Anatomy is Destiny,” “The Woman Identified Woman” from Radicalesbians, and Dana Densmore’s “Independence from the Sexual Revolution” offer relevant readings.

Two autobiographical pieces of fiction, *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath and *The Yellow Wallpaper* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, are central to “Literary Images.” The struggles and achievements of the authors, as well as the problems faced by their protagonists, reflect themes of the course. This section, subtitled “The Dynamics of Negative Identity or Why Are We Having You Read These Unhappy Stories,” is followed by “Social Images,” subtitled “It’s No Accident Women Feel the Way They Do.” The treatment and expectations of women in social institutions—the family, education, religion, law, employment, media—are probed. Students read *Sexism in School and Society* by Nancy Frazier and Myra Sadker in order to examine one institution—education—in depth. Shorter articles are used as well: e.g., Linda Gordon’s “Families” and Jo Freeman’s “The Sexual Basis of the Legal Caste System.”

By the end of the course, students are ready for “Creating New Images for Ourselves.” Here we consider in more depth relations between personal and social change, and we investigate from various perspectives the extent and nature of social transformation needed for women’s liberation. Current issues in the women’s movement are examined and concrete organizations and projects of women on campus and in the community are shared. Besides a take-home exam, we end with women’s songs and cheer, solidarity, and energy.

Throughout the course students are required to keep a journal that includes both scholarly responses to the readings and lectures and personal reflections about the meaning the material has for their lives. The journals, shared with the instructor, are often exciting chronicles of growing awareness, pain, and change. Discussion groups are the arenas for debating the academic material as well as sharing those common personal experiences evoked by the course material. These groups often provide support and solidarity.

In sum, ‘Women’s Image: Myth and Reality serves a synthesizing function. It maintains a network among women faculty. It introduces students to these women as challenging models and potential teachers. The content bridges a variety of disciplines, relating body and mind, individual and society. The journals and discussion groups integrate cognitive and affective learning. Throughout Women’s Image students and faculty seek intellectual and emotional power to effect personal/social change, and in the process begin to create new images and realities for women. □

### Facts about Women in Higher Education

The Women’s Equity Action League Educational and Legal Defense Fund, 733 15th Street, N.W., Suite 200, Washington, D.C. 20005, recently released a report (July 1977) on the progress women have and have not made toward equal rights and opportunities in American colleges and universities. What follows is the first half of that report. The second half will appear in our next issue.

Discrimination against women is alive and well on the nation’s campuses.

Some gains have been made. We document them, as well as the losses, in this fact sheet. More women than ever before are going to college and getting their degrees—some in fields like engineering and architecture, once considered for men only. Record numbers of women are going to graduate and professional schools—by 1978 an estimated 20 percent of the new lawyers and doctors will be women. With each annual commencement ceremony, the pool of qualified women expands.

But the facts reveal that, for a woman, *being qualified is not enough.*

Despite Title IX and other federal laws and regulations prohibiting sex discrimination, women are still consistently more likely than their male counterparts to be unemployed or underemployed and underpaid. For example: women who have met all the conventional criteria for rewards in higher education, who are well equipped with degrees and publications and all the rest, are the victims of the greatest salary inequity. The mean salary in 1976-77 for a male professor was $23,828; for his female colleague, $21,512. The dollar gap: $2,316.

Being qualified is not yet enough. We need vigorous enforcement of federal laws before women can be confident of equal opportunity in higher education and equal access to jobs upon graduation. We need affirmative action plans, with goals and timetables. We need to challenge discrimination in the courts and to support our colleagues who are plaintiffs.

Old myths still prevail. Institutions of higher education advertise their commitments to affirmative action and equal opportunity, but in the corridors and the lunchrooms and, of course, the groves of academe, you still hear that women are “bad risks”—they drop out, they don’t write their dissertations. There does appear to be evidence that women have a higher attrition rate in graduate school than men. But to stop there, and to intimate that women drop out because they are innately unmotivated to achieve or excel, is to be guilty of gross insensitivity to the condition of women.

An HEW study, “Barriers to Women’s Participation in Postsecondary Education,” documents the various discriminatory institutional policies and procedures that make it difficult for women to complete their degrees. For example, HEW cites a study of Harvard graduate students in 1970 which found that women did not drop out