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The GLCA Women's Studies Program: A Consortial Approach

While programs in many large universities have taken root and are showing signs that they will continue to develop, it is still rare to find administrations of liberal arts colleges offering the support (financial and otherwise) required for a systematic development of women's studies. Even programs in large universities operate with inadequate funding and staffs; in small colleges, resources are still more scarce. In addition to budget problems, the small number of feminist scholar/teachers on the typical college faculty limits the range of available women's studies expertise. During the past two years, therefore, the Great Lakes Colleges Association (GLCA) has developed a consortial approach to women's studies.

A consortial women's studies program can be a many-faceted strategy for increasing administrative support; sharing expertise; raising the consciousness of faculty members with regard to the needs of women faculty, students, staff, and administrators; familiarizing faculty with feminist curricula, research, and teaching methodology; and developing a strong information and support network. How the consortial program should be structured and what it can do depend on how much financial support can be mustered, the number of colleges involved, geographical proximity of the institutions, and established patterns for their relating to one another.

The GLCA colleges are located in three states: DePauw, Earlham, and Wabash are in Indiana; Albion, Hope, and Kalamazoo are in Michigan; Antioch, Denison, Kenyon, Oberlin, Ohio Wesleyan, and Wooster are in Ohio. The faculties of the GLCA colleges range in size from 71 to 155 members. While almost exactly half of the more than 20,000 students are women, only 16 percent of the faculty are women and only 40 percent of these are tenured (70 percent of the male faculty are tenured). Critical problems, then, are the shortage of women faculty and their typically rapid turnover.

The twelve colleges, while similar in many ways, represent varied traditions and approaches. Oberlin, the nation's first coeducational college, regularly graduates an unusually large number of women who go on to complete doctorate degrees. Kenyon, after 130 years as a male college, is engaged in the transitional problems of becoming coeducational. Wabash is still a male institution, but the faculty now includes several women who, with a few students and male faculty members, are developing opportunities to expand knowledge about the lives and contributions of women.

GLCA colleges naturally have developed different approaches to women's studies. Denison, Oberlin, and Ohio Wesleyan have small women's studies programs that include budgets and part-time coordinators. A few of the other colleges hope to establish programs eventually, while others do not see that goal as possible or desirable and have focused instead on increasing the number of departmental offerings in women's studies and/or emphasizing the integration of such material into the curriculum. The number of courses which at least emphasize women's issues varies from two or three at some institutions to as many as 19 (not offered in the same year) at one college. A survey in the spring of 1977 revealed 15 interdisciplinary women's studies courses within the entire GLCA and approximately 70 departmentally-housed courses.

Any consortial program will differ in some basic ways from programs within institutions. Since the GLCA Women's Studies Program serves 12 colleges scattered over three states, it primarily serves and advises, yet stands outside of, the autonomous institutions. It can encourage, request, inform, train, but it cannot directly affect policy decisions of member institutions. Its strong advantages reside in its ability to pool resources; stimulate interaction among students, faculty, and administrators across institutional lines; and provide guidance, training, and information.

Several factors have thus far contributed to the growth of the GLCA Women's Studies Program, in addition to the colleges' similarities and their established pattern of consoritical cooperation. Mainly, the significant factors have been money and administrative support. Modest initial financial support was available through the GLCA Faculty Development Program (a project funded from July 1974 through June 1977 by The Lilly Endowment and matching contributions from the colleges); and the Faculty Development Board and GLCA President Jon Fuller encouraged the program's development. The recent award of a two-year grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (HEW) pushes the program toward bolder goals, including the development of a consortial women's studies major.

A Strong Need for Communication

Before March 1976, when the first GLCA Women's Studies Workshop was held, people at the various colleges knew almost nothing about what was going on in women's studies at the other institutions. Sensing a strong need for communication, several women faculty and administrators from Earlham, Oberlin, and Ohio Wesleyan proposed a two-day workshop to the GLCA Faculty Development Program. It agreed to fund the workshop and to assist in its coordination. The need for the workshop had existed. Even if the program had been poorly organized, the event could hardly have failed. People were so relieved to find one another, to break out of isolation, to come together and learn. Over and over again people commented on how energizing it was to be part of a group of so many articulate women. Before the end of the weekend, the GLCA Women's Studies Committee was formed, and plans were under way for a larger conference (to include students) in 1977 and the production of a women's studies newsletter and a handbook of consortial women's studies resources.

The 1976 workshop and the 1977 GLCA Women's Studies Conference were the
major catalysts in the program's development. The workshop established a network; the conference expanded it. Both events were sponsored by the Faculty Development Program, but in 1977 Lilly funds intended for such projects covered only planning costs. The colleges themselves paid $85 per participant for the Women's Studies Conference and most of them sent teams of eight to ten people. Only three colleges were represented by fewer than five persons. The impact of people returning to campuses as teams was dramatic. They reported to their deans, wrote articles, sponsored panel presentations, and held meetings to discuss what they had learned. Administrators, whether supportive or skeptical, became aware that many women and an increasing number of men in their institutions consider women's studies an important area of concern.

First-Year Accomplishments

The 1977 conference was the major endeavor of the Women's Studies Committee in its first year, but its other projects were extremely important in sustaining the consortial network and in increasing exchanges of expertise and information. All activities of the Committee received financial and staff support from the Faculty Development Program. In fact, my full-time staff position with that program was restructured during 1976-77 so that I could direct nearly three-fourths of my time to fostering and encouraging women's studies activities in the GLCA. These were the major first-year accomplishments:

1) The GLCA Women's Studies Newsletter was established to inform the constituency of the Committee's work; to advertise campus events of interest to GLCA women; and to report on both student and faculty activities related to women's studies, including research in progress, publications or presentations, and special awards. Editorial and typing services were contributed by Denison.

2) In the spring of 1977 the GLCA Women's Studies Resource Handbook was produced. It includes women's studies course descriptions by college; provides Title IX and Affirmative Action information; and lists special library collections, audiovisual resources, student and faculty women's organizations and publications, and available women's studies resource persons in GLCA colleges and their surrounding communities.

3) The Faculty Development Program had developed a roster of GLCA faculty members to serve as consultants to individuals or departments at all of the colleges; Lilly funds provided consultants with small honoraria and reimbursement for travel expenses. The Committee arranged for the roster to be expanded to include faculty with women's studies expertise (none were originally included) and advertised the service. The requests for consultants in women's studies exceeded all others.

In June 1977, the concluding month of the three-year Faculty Development Program, the GLCA Women's Studies Program was awarded a two-year grant from FIPSE to continue and extend its existing range of services and to take steps toward development of a consortial interdisciplinary major (or concentration) in women's studies. Establishment of the major is an important new goal because, in addition to combining resources to meet the needs of individual students, such a program can become the intellectual core of more general and pervasive women's studies activity in each college. The major will combine rigorous academic work with the development of life-planning skills and marketable competencies. Students will take most of their courses at their home colleges, but engage in one or two independent studies courses at neighboring campuses and perhaps study for a semester at another GLCA institution. A women's studies practicum will be included in the major.

Plans for the Next Two Years

In these next two years, the Women's Studies Committee will continue as the governing body of the program, and the grant provides for a full-time coordinator (my position). The coordinator is responsible for editing publications, planning conferences and workshops, advising campus programs, convening meetings of the Women's Studies Committee, and generally overseeing the program. The Women's Studies Office will house files of syllabi, establish a library of tape and film resources, and serve as a clearinghouse for information relevant to the development of women's studies in GLCA colleges. Members of the Committee will continue to represent each of the 12 colleges and be appointed for staggering two-year terms. The Committee will meet at least three times a year to shape policy and assist in planning all aspects of the program, and these meetings will be publicized and open to anyone associated with the GLCA. While in the first year the Committee planned and executed most of the projects itself, in these next two years, it will be responsible for setting up and guiding numerous subcommittees and taskforces.

Achieving Consortial Impact

The development in self-perception of the Women's Studies Committee and the successes and expanding goals of the Women's Studies Program are closely interrelated. To date, members of the Committee have been all women, mostly untenured, although administrators and tenured faculty are included. One of the most important outcomes of the Committee in its first months was the support members received from one another for their own women's studies teaching and related activity in their institutions. There was also discussion about how to achieve greater consortial impact, however, which twice raised the question of whether the Committee would be more influential if it replaced some of its untenured members with persons of greater status at those colleges. Both times the firm conclusion was that commitment and the willingness to learn should be considered the most important qualifications for membership. The success of the 1977 conference put the issue to sleep. Whatever the faculty
status of the individual members in their own institutions, the Committee knew that through collective effort it had achieved a marked success and that top administrators in the consortium and a sizable number of faculty and students had become aware that the GLCA Women's Studies Committee exists. The Committee has established a legitimate position (and self-image) of visible leadership. Whatever role a Committee member plays on her own campus, she feels enabled to participate in shaping a wider consortial action.

What might it cost to launch a consortial approach to women's studies? Money is crucial, but at the outset much can be accomplished with a modest budget. The size and spread of the consortium are naturally significant variables. In GLCA, an overnight meeting of the Women's Studies Committee costs around $500. The first workshop for 60 faculty members cost approximately $3,000, excluding planning and travel of the participants, but including food, lodging for two nights, and program. The more complex 1977 conference for 100 persons for three nights cost less than $10,000 (excluding planning and participant travel). This year's budget, in addition to salary and travel for the coordinator, part-time secretarial support, and salary for a one-semester Women's Studies Visiting Scholar, provides (in approximate figures) for the following: office and printing expenses, $5,000; travel for the Committee, $3,000; fees and travel for speakers/consultants for workshops and major conferences, $6,500; program (materials library, conference, weekend and one-day workshops, exchange of consultants within GLCA, and mini-grants to support women's studies teaching), $21,500; honoraria and travel for evaluation team, $2,400. Federal support for 1977-78 will total $53,850, and additional general support and cash outlay will be contributed by the colleges and the GLCA operating budget.

Past accomplishments and receipt of the FIPSE grant notwithstanding, some tough problems persist for women's studies within the GLCA. Administrative support on individual campuses, while increasing, is hardly adequate, and there is no indication that the number of faculty women on each campus is likely to increase radically in the foreseeable future. Untenured, vastly outnumbered faculty women, struggling to gain a secure foothold in academe, are often reluctant to assume the additional burdens and risks of promoting women's studies, and on each campus only a handful of students and an occasional male faculty member contribute regular support. Yet the base of involvement must become wider if future funding is to be gleaned from slim administrative budgets and if women's studies is to exert a dynamic influence on the mainstream curricula and the teaching and advising of all women students. Increasing this base of involvement is the most crucial challenge of the GLCA Women's Studies Committee in the next two years.

Ellen Bass

Even Our Language Is an Ever Present Indictment

The word innocent means not guilty from sin, guileless, simple, naive, and spotless, unsullied.

The dictionary example is innocent snow. They mean snow which hasn't been walked on, had car exhausts blow it gray, turned slush, been scraped to sides of Northeast streets in unmeltable piles.

Do they think this battered snow is then guilty? Has it sinned? Has the snow been asking for it? Did it have it coming to it? Was it out at night? Did it give in too easy?

Why don't little girls tell when the dentist or the neighbor or her father reaches under her skirt and splits her small opening with a shove?

Why don't they tell? Websters'll tell you—when you're no longer innocent you're guilty.

Untitled

I am writing a poem about birth and need an image for pushing through pushing out. Roget's thesaurus lists push aside, push back, push down, push forward push in, push off and upon. It also considers push the pencil, push car, pusher, and push-over.

On page one opposite a sepia portrait is Roget's biography:

"Peter Mark Roget was the only son of John Roget."

Ah. So there was no pushing out.