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Big Ten Forms Women's Studies Permanent Consortium

By Gayle Graham Yates

A permanent standing panel on women's studies was established early in 1978 within the Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC), the consortium of chief academic officers of the Big Ten universities* plus the University of Chicago. This action has considerable symbolic significance, for it means the official recognition of women's studies as an emerging academic field by the constituent universities of the CIC, which has regular meetings of various academic officers—academic vice presidents, liberal arts deans, etc.—of the member universities. The practical significance of this action is that now twice-yearly meetings of coordinators or representatives of women's studies in that group of universities will be held with the official sponsorship of the CIC. At once the women's studies representatives are legitimated as academic officers in their universities and are provided with opportunities to meet, make cooperative plans, and take action as a body.

It was not always so with this group. Like any new organization, it has a history. The first meeting of the panel on women's studies was called by a male CIC staff officer in September 1976 at, it is my distinct impression, the suggestion of his undergraduate daughter. The meeting was held in an airport restaurant in Chicago, and it was called a "conference group on women's studies." Those who attended felt it had a rather mysterious intent and purpose, but we nevertheless went, glad to meet with other women's studies people with our expenses paid by our universities and the CIC. Delegates were "sent" to that first meeting, designated by their academic vice presidents, which resulted in a somewhat peculiar gathering of persons, all good-willed, but varied: an affirmative action officer who confessed to not knowing what women's studies was; an angry feminist scholar who thought she had been sent because she lived nearby; three or four who taught courses on women; and four who were coordinators of Women's Studies Programs. Even so, that meeting was valuable for exchanging information about courses on women and about the universities' apparent intent to develop—or exclude—women's studies. The group agreed to meet again in the spring.

A second meeting was held in April 1977, this time with all participants firmly connected to women's studies. Again at that meeting, the most valuable agenda item was women telling each other face to face about women's studies on their campuses. That group agreed to work toward establishing a permanent panel and a regular meeting time. The effort to accomplish this was spearheaded by Louise Tilly, then Coordinator of Women's Studies at the University of Michigan, and Mary Irene Moffitt, Director of Women's Studies at Ohio State University.

Thus, the panel was established in a CIC meeting early in 1978. I was asked to convene the April 1978 meeting, which was again held in an airport restaurant in Chicago. One sex difference all of us in the meeting admitted to feeling was that

*These universities are Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Michigan State, Minnesota, Northwestern, Ohio State, Purdue, and Wisconsin.

we women simply could not be as casual as our male companions in the airplanes about "flying down/up to Chicago for the day." In that day, we did a great deal of good women's studies business. Beyond communicating our woes and joys, which is in itself always of enough value for such a meeting, we began plans for an exchange program of women's studies scholars among CIC institutions; proposed the possibility of adopting the *Michigan Papers on Women's Studies* as a consortium-wide journal with funds and staff from several participating universities; agreed to investigate ways of seeking grants corporately; and, most importantly, established a work group to write a model for a Women's Studies Program for a large major university. The model is to include the areas of philosophy of women's studies, core curriculum, faculty and staffing, and budgeting. Patricia d'Itri of Michigan State University is to chair the model writing group, with others from Minnesota, Indiana, and Wisconsin joining in the writing. The CIC agreed to fund a two-day draft-writing session for that group. Susan Weisskopf from the University of Michigan and Mary Irene Moffitt from Ohio State University are following up the possibilities for the journal's publication. Jean Robinson of Indiana University is coordinator for the panel as a whole for 1978-79.

Gayle Graham Yates is Coordinator of Women's Studies at the University of Minnesota.

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