

# WOMEN'S STUDIES IN THE OTTAWA UNIVERSITIES: INDEPENDENCE AND COLLABORATION

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*De la collaboration inter-facultaire à la collaboration inter-universitaire: un exposé sur les risques et les avantages pédagogiques, administratifs et personnels 1) de la création d'un programme d'étude des femmes à l'Université d'Ottawa, et 2) de l'obtention conjointe en collaboration avec l'Université*

*Carleton, d'une des cinq chaires d'études des femmes financées par le Secrétariat d'Etat.*

This paper provides an overview of the Women's Studies Programmes at the University of Ottawa and Carleton University – the universities which have been jointly awarded the Chair in Women's Studies for Ontario. Since I am more famil-

iar with its evolution, I will concentrate on the University of Ottawa programme. I will then discuss the links between the two programmes, including our plans for the joint Chair. Throughout it will be evident that the development of Women's Studies has been characterised by collaborative endeavors.

## WOMEN'S STUDIES AT CARLETON

### *Content at the Undergraduate level*

Carleton University offers Directed Individual Studies (DIS) in a number of interdisciplinary areas, one of which is now Women's Studies. Students may take Women's Studies as a major or honours programme, or as a minor in combination with a discipline major or honours. Up to now, more students have taken it as minor, although there is now a shift to registering for Women's Studies as a major or honours subject.

The DIS structure predates Women's Studies, and was a convenient way to house this programme. The student presents a proposed programme which must be approved by the DIS Committee in the field. This committee ensures that individual programmes have an appropriate content, including sufficient breadth and some methodology. These programmes require more courses than most disciplinary majors or honours programmes do.

The Women's Studies programme offers a full-year introductory interdisci-

plinary course and there are in addition some thirteen courses (some full year, some half courses) offered by nine departments. Women's Studies courses have been offered, in increasing numbers, since 1971.

### *Content at the Master's Level*

Within the Institute of Canadian Studies students may do a master's in Women's Studies. At this level, also, a framework allowing an interdisciplinary programme predated the Women's Studies programme itself, and undoubtedly facilitated its introduction administratively. The programme includes one interdisciplinary seminar, and there are five other graduate courses offered by four departments. The programme, which began in 1983-84 has been very popular: there have been forty-eight students enrolled in its first two years. The Spring 1985 convocation will include the first graduates of the programme, several of whom have been accepted in discipli-

nary doctoral programmes at various universities, four with doctoral fellowships.

### *Structures: The Carleton Interfaculty Committee on Women's Studies*

The Committee was established in 1975, originally to coordinate activities in women's studies and promote research and awareness of Women's Studies. Although it continues to report to the Vice President Academic, its structure was somewhat altered in 1981 and its mandate extended to include the supervision and administration of the Women's Studies programme. It now has an executive of ten members representing a variety of disciplines, and including a coordinator, and a broader corresponding membership of Carleton Women's Studies scholars. It reports through the Deans of Arts and Social Sciences to the Vice President Academic. The joint involvement of the two faculties is symbolised by the fact that the Committee receives its budget from one Dean and its physical home and support services from the other.

## WOMEN'S STUDIES AT UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA

### *Content at the Undergraduate level*

An undergraduate programme was introduced in 1983, although courses on Women's Studies have existed in growing numbers since 1974. The interdisciplinary Women's Studies programme may be taken as a major in either the Faculty of Arts or the Faculty of Social Sciences. There was, unfortunately, no interdisciplinary structure into which Women's Studies could be slotted. The Women's Studies content is the same for all

students: courses in literature, history, sociology and a final year interdisciplinary seminar as a core, completed by Women's Studies courses in a variety of disciplines. As at Carleton, the number of courses in the major is relatively high, justified by the interdisciplinary nature of the programme. Students in Arts must also meet faculty-wide general education requirements, while those in Social Sciences must combine Women's Studies with a discipline major or honours. The programme at University of Ottawa is unique

in that it may be taken in English, in French or bilingually. It is, in fact, the *only* Women's Studies degree programme offered in French in Canada or Quebec at the moment.

Women's Studies offers the full-year interdisciplinary seminar in both English and French, and some twenty-nine additional courses are offered in twelve departments. Some are full, others half courses, and they include both French and English versions of courses in some cases.

### *Content at the Graduate Level*

There is no graduate programme as such; the absence of a pre-existing interdisciplinary structure has been an important impediment to the development of such a programme. There are, however, Women's Studies courses offered by four departments, and a number of students have developed programmes with an important Women's Studies content within a discipline degree.

### *Structures: the Women's Studies Programme Committee*

This committee, made up of four full time faculty members, one of whom serves as Women's Studies Coordinator, oversees matters directly related to the programme and the interdisciplinary

courses. In naming members to this Committee maintaining a balance between francophones and anglophones and between the two faculties is important symbolically.

Since there was no pre-existing pattern for interdisciplinary programmes which cut across the Arts and Social Sciences faculties, the Committee has had to develop its lines of communication. For example, a course modification from a department which affects the programme must also be reviewed by the Women's Studies programme committee and then approved by the curriculum committee structures of both the faculties in which Women's Studies may be taken. Although the programme has had very good co-operation from the faculty and department administrations on such matters, the fact remains that it has to deal with

two faculties and twelve departments, each with its own variants in internal decision making processes, so the process is much more complex than if all this were taking place within a single unit.

On academic matters the Committee reports to the Deans of the two faculties, who arrange a course reduction for the coordinator and finance the part-time professors hired by individual departments to replace teaching time of the two full-time professors who are responsible for the interdisciplinary seminars. The rest of the committee's budget comes from the Secretary of the University as part of a joint budget with the Women's Studies Coordinating Committee. Some parts of this budget are undifferentiated, while others have designated amounts for each committee.

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN'S STUDIES AT UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA

As in many other places, the organisation of Women's Studies has come from the grass roots. Beginning in 1974, individuals have introduced Women's Studies courses within their respective departments. Interested faculty, staff and students also got together first informally, and then with formal recognition within the Faculty of Arts in 1977, with member-

ship subsequently extended to Social Sciences. On the recommendation of this group, a university wide Women's Studies Coordinating Committee was established in 1980, composed of eleven elected members, including full-time faculty, students and staff, reporting to and with a budget and space from the Secretary of the University. Its terms of

reference were very broad: encouraging, diffusing and promoting the academic analysis of the place of women in society. Thus it included both academic concerns and the status of women in its mandate, and was complementary to the Women's Centre, also funded by the University, which focuses on socio-cultural animation.



*Ann Denis (left) with Susan Clark, Greta Hofmann Nemiroff, Vanaja Dhravarajan and Meredith Kimball*

*"At one point it was suggested facetiously that the Joint Chair in Women's Studies should be on a barge floating up and down the Rideau Canal between the two Universities."*

As a result of interest on the part of students and faculty, as one of its activities the Coordinating Committee developed a proposal for an interdisciplinary, inter-faculty major and, after consensus about the proposed content from interested faculty members, shepherded it through the university decision making processes. In order to emphasize its interfaculty nature, the proposal was initially submitted one level above the faculties, and, predictably, sent back by it to each faculty for detailed study. The colleagues who worked on this project did so with a singular degree of collegiality: the emphasis was on trying to avoid creating special interests in the programme rather than on protecting vested interests. Since the proposal built on existing courses, with the exception of the interdisciplinary seminars, it was a low cost initiative for the university, which in the current times of restraint undoubtedly helped it gain approval. The Programme Committee referred to above was the administrative

structure proposed: its members are proposed by the Coordinating Committee (thus ensuring Women's Studies control), and approved by the individual's department and faculty. The proposal went through its various stages of approval very expeditiously.

The introduction of the programme and, more recently, the awarding of the Joint Chair, have had very positive effects on Women's Studies at the University of Ottawa. Although the number of courses in the area had gradually been increasing, once the programme was in the offing, the rate of new proposals being made increased. Furthermore, the available courses are being offered on a more regular and frequent basis, the programme's existence being a justification for doing so. It is also possible to negotiate an integrated timetable, which avoids conflicts between the offerings of different departments. There now seems to be increasing awareness of Women's Studies as an area of academic study, which may make it

easier for scholars to have this recognised as a desirable field of expertise, particularly in departments where it is not yet represented. There has also been a trend in some departments to introduce Women's Studies content in "mainstream" courses, whether or not these are taught by Women's Studies scholars.

Developing the Women's Studies programme has been an exercise in collaboration, across disciplines, across faculties and across language groups – and this in a university where the disciplines and faculties have been very autonomous entities, although within all of them there is some experience with inter-linguistic group collaboration. Strengthening the programme will entail more collaboration. There are some discipline gaps to be filled, notably in economics, business administration and the sciences. There is also a need for feminist theory and methodology courses and, of course, an increasing choice of courses each year.

## COLLABORATION BETWEEN UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA AND CARLETON UNIVERSITY

The collaboration between the two universities is not peculiar to their Women's Studies programmes, but it certainly strengthens them. Students at each university may take one full year course at the other on a routine basis, and, along with faculty, have access to the libraries in both. On occasion thesis committees include faculty from the "other" university

had there are some exchanges of professors for teaching.

Since our strengths in Women's Studies differ somewhat, these institutionalised possibilities for collaboration are a great asset. Although the two Women's Studies programmes and committees have developed separately, there have been informal discussions and publicity of visiting

speakers since the early 1970's, and we now publicise each other's course information in order to facilitate students' course selection. There has also been joint sponsorship of speakers and colloquia and, of course, of the application for the joint Chair in Women's Studies.

## THE JOINT CHAIR IN WOMEN'S STUDIES

In developing our joint proposal, we had to work within the context of: differently organised undergraduate units, rather than a department-to-department situation; a graduate programme in only one, though relevant graduate courses in each; an emphasis on Canadian women's studies (since Carleton's graduate programme is in the Institute for Canadian Studies); the bilingual milieu of University of Ottawa; the geographic separation of the two institutions, yet the importance of a continuing, visible presence of the Chair at both. (At one point it was suggested facetiously that the Chair should be on a barge floating up and down the Rideau

Canal between the two Universities.)

We have decided to make relatively short-term (two to five year) appointments of visiting scholars for the Chair, so that we can draw on expertise to strengthen various parts of our Women's Studies programmes. The balance of emphasis on research, teaching and community involvement may vary with different appointments, but all will be involved in activities on both campuses, will be bilingual, and will focus their analysis on the Canadian situation during their tenure here, even if their own background or expertise is not itself Canadian. Developing first the proposal for a joint

Chair and now its implementation, with the first incumbent to be named in 1986, marks a new and exciting stage in the collaborative endeavors within Women's Studies at the two Universities in Ottawa.

*Ann Denis, who is completing her term as the first Coordinator of the Women's Studies programme at the University of Ottawa, is also a member of its Sociology Department. She has published on ethnicity, gender and education, and on ethnicity and women's labour force participation. She is currently part of an interdisciplinary team studying "La femme cadre: sa vie publique, sa vie privée" in the private and public sectors in Quebec and Ontario.*