

WOMEN'S STUDIES AT SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

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Le programme d'études de la femme de l'Université Simon Fraser prévoit, tout au moins pour les quelques années à venir, une série de nominations pour une durée limitée pour remplir la chaire disponible. L'avantage principal de cette stratégie est que cette série de nominations provisoires permettra, lors de la désignation définitive du titulaire, de s'assurer que la personne choisie et son domaine de compétence constitueront un atout, à long terme, pour le programme. Du moment qu'il y a un grand nombre de domaines de compétence exigés, il nous sera possible de cette façon de tester les personnes intéressées dans plusieurs champs, et de voir comment ces domaines différents peuvent se révéler utiles à notre programme ainsi que, si possible, à d'autres programmes de l'Université Simon Fraser.

Dans cette série de nominations préliminaires nous sommes particulièrement conscients de la nécessité de prêter attention aux besoins des femmes de Colombie Britannique. Nous comprenons que les termes de référence du Secrétariat d'Etat exigent que ce poste soit en rapport étroit avec les besoins de la communauté, et nous nous trouvons en parfait accord avec cette exigence. Une des fonctions spécifiques de la chaire à l'Université Simon Fraser sera de favoriser l'attribution de bourses d'études, soit à l'intérieur ou à l'extérieur du contexte universitaire. Il est également possible en considérant notre décision d'inaugurer la chaire par une série de nominations de durée limitée, que l'occasion se présente d'offrir un ou plusieurs de ces postes à des spécialistes indépendants établis dans la communauté.

HISTORY AND STRUCTURE

In 1973 a group of women faculty, staff, and students began the planning and implementation of a Women's Studies program at Simon Fraser University. Because of the existence of the Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies it was possible to set up an independent program. Thus throughout the history of the program at

SFU we have offered our own courses, had our own budget, and maintained control over faculty appointments: the program has not had to rely on course offerings in other departments. We have from time to time designated courses in other departments (mainly English, Criminology, and Sociology/Anthropology), but since we have control of this process we can ensure that sufficient content on women's issues and a women's studies focus is present each time the course is offered before designating it.

In January 1976 the first Women's Studies course was offered for credit. The program was and remains a minor program. Students take ten credits at the lower level and fifteen at the upper level for a minor. The program was originally designed as a minor mainly for financial, but also for pedagogical reasons. By offering an independent Women's Studies minor, students are afforded the opportunity to explore an interdisciplinary women's studies perspective as well as to integrate what they are learning into a critique of the more traditional discipline in which they are majoring.

Since the program began we have made six tenure track joint appointments (two with History, and one each with Computing Science, Fine and Performing Arts, Philosophy, and Psychology). The positions that were filled depended not only on our priorities for necessary academic areas, but also on the availability of candidates who were acceptable to both Women's Studies and the other departments – and the willingness of the department to be involved with the program. In addition to tenure track faculty, we have had money each year to hire a few women from the community to teach courses on a sessional basis; occasionally there has been enough money to hire someone on a limited term or ongoing part time appointment. These temporary appointments have allowed us to teach a broader range of courses and to involve women with special areas of expertise from the wider

feminist community as instructors.

In 1980 we began the development of a Master's program in Women's Studies. At this point it was obvious that the resources to develop a major at the undergraduate level would not be available. It was also felt that, in addition to being able to mount an M. A. program with existing resources, an M.A. program would support and enrich the existing research programs of the faculty. In January 1985 the first two M.A. students were admitted to the program.

Our students are one of the strongest aspects of our program. They are clearly among the most motivated, dedicated, and exciting students at the university. The demand for Women's Studies has remained steady over the past eight years. As of the 1984 graduation, twenty-six students had received degrees in Women's Studies; nineteen were currently enrolled in the minor program; and over 2,500 had taken one or more courses in Women's Studies at SFU. There is an active Women's Studies Student Union and many Women's Studies students are actively involved in the organization and staffing of the Women's Centre on campus.

The strength of the SFU program has been that it has managed to be both an independent program and to make connections with more traditional departments. The tenure track joint appointments have been crucial in accomplishing this. These appointments have allowed the faculty members to pursue feminist research and teaching within our traditional disciplines, as well as interdisciplinary work in the program. The structure of the program allows us an independent existence while at the same time minimizing the risks of ghettoization. It also means that most of the faculty are overworked most of the time. More work per individual is required to run a small program and all of us are active in committee work in both our departments and on a wider university level.

RECENT CHANGES IN UNIVERSITY STRUCTURE

In December 1984 the Senate voted to implement a major reorganization at SFU. A primary part of this plan was the dissolution of the Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies. Under pressure from the B.C. government's anti-university policies, this plan was a university response to government demands for restraint and rationalization. The programs in the Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies were moved either to the Faculty of Arts or to the newly-established Faculty of Applied Sciences. The Women's Studies program moved to the Faculty of Arts, where it will be one of five programs forming the Division of Interdisciplinary Studies within the Faculty of Arts. The environment within Arts is much less supportive of interdisciplinary work in general and of women's studies in particular. Thus, although there are no immediate threats to the program, the long-term view is one of life in a more conservative and problematic setting. Already we have fought, and are still fighting battles for individual program representation on the Faculty of Arts Curriculum Committee and the Dean's Advisory Committee.

THE CHAIR

The Secretary of State program establishing the Endowed Chairs in Women's Studies and the awarding of one of these chairs to SFU could not have come at a better time. We are facing in the university and in the province a prolonged period of greater conservatism and fewer resources. The existence of the chair at SFU strengthens the program in the eyes of the university and provides resources that facilitate our increased service to the research enterprise, our students, and the wider community.

We plan for at least the first few years to make a series of short-term appointments to fill the chair. The main advantage of this strategy is that we will be able to ensure that, when a permanent appointment is made, the area of expertise and the person appointed will be of greatest long-term usefulness to the program. Since this is more than likely the last appointment we will be making for some time, it is particularly important that we be confident in our



Meredith Kimball (left) with other workshop participants.

selection of a permanent appointment. Also, since there is a wide range of areas in which we require expertise, we will be able to try people in different areas and assess how these areas complement both our own programs and, possibly, other programs at SFU. Thus we have advertised for candidates in the following areas: social policy, anthropology, sociology, the visual arts, engineering, education, and comparative literature. The possibility of having someone in engineering is a particularly good example of the usefulness of short-term appointments. While it is unlikely we would make a permanent appointment in this area, a one or two year appointment is a very exciting possibility, given the recent establishment of an Engineering program at SFU which is interested in what factors keep women out of the field and sympathetic to changes that would increase the participation of women at both the faculty and student levels.

In making the initial series of appointments, we are particularly concerned that we be responsive to the needs of British Columbia women. We understand that the terms of reference of the Secretary of State require that the position be community-oriented: we fully agree with this requirement. Given the present situation in B.C., it is crucial that there be strong links between the university and the community. One specific function of the chair

at SFU will be to foster scholarship both within and outside the university context. Both the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIA) have worked to foster research in a non-university context, as well as collaboration between university based and independent scholars. It is also possible, because of our decision to begin the chair with a series of short-term appointments, that we may be able to offer one or more of these appointments to community-based independent scholars.

The value of the chairs to the women's studies community in Canada is immense. We in the community owe a debt of gratitude to Margaret Fulton and the other women at Mount Saint Vincent University who first envisioned, and then worked to convince the government of the wisdom and necessity of the chairs. Clearly the chairs will strengthen the programs that receive them. It is also to be hoped that they will benefit other Women's Studies programs through contact with the chairs and through the political value that comes from the existence of such a program.

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