

NOTES FROM THE CONFERENCE ORGANIZERS

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For all those who braved an untimely hail storm, the National Women's Studies Conference was an inspiring event. Held at York University on April 19th and 20th, the conference brought together feminist scholars from across Canada to discuss the newly awarded Secretary of State university chairs and to share experiences in publishing, researching and teaching Women's Studies.

The conference was developed primarily to stimulate dialogue on women's studies programmes, to identify problems and concerns, and to develop strategies for future programmes. Although researching, publishing and teaching were only a few of the many topics that could have been chosen for emphasis, the conference helped bring to light other key areas of concern. These included designing and implementing women's studies programmes for high schools and community colleges, establishing graduate programmes in women's studies, and developing resource centres.

The following will highlight what went into organizing the Women's Studies Conference, some of the problems we encountered and most importantly, some points for those ambitious enough to want to organize their own conference. Of course, conferences also require funding, and for this we would like to thank York University for a minor research grant and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for a conference grant.

The heart of any conference is its organizational committee and, to avoid a great deal of confusion, it should be set up six to eight months in advance. Our Conference Committee eventually consisted of one faculty member and three graduate students – one a research assistant, one a volunteer and one a paid assistant. Two weeks before the conference, our faculty member, the one and only official figure of

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authority, was called away on a family emergency. This left three rather terrified graduate students to deal with the university bureaucracy (a rather ominous task!).

One of the most satisfying aspects of this committee was its collective approach to distributing tasks. We soon came to appreciate the diverse skills and strengths of our members. These ranged from the mundane stapling of 2,000 papers without stabbing a thumb, to delightful phone calls from women across Canada, to dealing with the President of the university.

Communications is the first, and most important task in organizing a conference. Through this experience, we have learned that conference literature should be mailed out at least three months in advance. This provides enough time for people to plan ahead – but not so much time that the information gets tucked away and forgotten!

Because of the diverse nature of Women's Studies, we also had to try to reach as many women's groups, organizations and programmes as possible. By contacting everyone we could think of, including NAC offices, Status of Women, Secretary of State, Libraries, all Canadian Universities, friends and colleagues, we were able to come up with a mailing list of about 2,000 groups and individuals. Even then, we had a number of people wondering why they did not receive any information about the conference. (Another good strategy is to find out about organizations that are willing to include your literature in their mailing or newsletter).

It is crucial to include as much information as possible on the conference brochure. At the time of mailing, we had still not been able to secure room bookings and could not put this vital information on the brochure. This later resulted in some confusion and the necessity for a second printing.

The first day of the conference presented a busy schedule. The first session involved participants in a discussion of the new university chairs. The highlight of the next session, "Getting into Print," was Clara Thomas' animated story of the publishing trials and tribulations of Dick and Jane. The afternoon sessions saw York faculty from various disciplines conducting brief seminars on resources for women's studies. The aim of these workshops was to address integrating women's studies material into the core curriculum, as opposed to developing autonomous women's studies pro-



grammes. The informal atmosphere encouraged discussion by the participants of their own experiences and provided a break from the hectic pace of the morning sessions. (Reports on three of these workshops are printed following this article.)

The Toronto premiere screening of "Speaking Our Peace," a new National Film Board Studio D film on peace by Bonnie Klein and Terri Nash, was an exciting addition to the afternoon schedule. A panel discussion with the filmmakers themselves, and Ursula Franklin, Margaret Laurence and Deirdre McLoughlin drew an emotional response from the audience. Once again, Bonnie Klein and Terri Nash have put another important issue, viewed from a feminist perspective, on the public agenda.

One of the highlights of the conference was a celebration banquet, held Friday evening. The banquet was attended by over a hundred women (and a few brave men). This event was held in honour of Thelma McCormack, one of Canada's foremost scholars. Her keynote address,

published in this issue of *CWS/cf*, inspired not only the present generation of women's studies educators, but the future generation. Many of the students present were offered a rare glimpse into the inner world of the feminist scholar.

The Women's Studies Conference was an essential step in stimulating dialogue and developing a course of action for Women's Studies. We hope that all participants gained further understanding of the many issues related to Women's Studies and that future conferences will continue to address these concerns.

Conferences never happen on their own. We would like to thank Naomi Black (FOR EVERYTHING), Johanna Stuckey (Goddess of Good Counsel), Catherine McWhinnie (for patience, tea and advice), Catherine Lake, and all the invaluable volunteers who made the conference a success.

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