

events and feedback told us that people finally understood by the end of the day why it was so important to all of us to put aside such a day.

Another very positive result was that it helped women in the group to develop organizational skills in the school and also in their interfacing with the community at large beyond the school. They learned about communications, planning, dealing with nervous anxiety and offering mutual support, managing their time, and taking responsibility for their ideas and plans in a highly visible way. Indeed, these skills have extended themselves long beyond the day itself to the writing of this article in May. Members of the original group have come together to tape their impressions and share their memories, even though school has been over for a few weeks. Then two members of the group have worked together constructing this article. Some members of the group are now considering having another such event at the school one evening over the summer. This will give people the opportunity to get together over the holidays and share their experiences. Finally, one of the very interesting factors that we

had not expected was the participation in the celebration of people outside school. Some women who heard about it came and spent the whole day with us. We were intrigued that women who had only marginal dealings with the school should want to come and spend so long in our midst. While we certainly welcomed them and were glad that they were there, we also realized that they were with us because they had a need to celebrate their womanhood with other women on that day. There was little going on in the city at large that would provide them with this opportunity to share their experience of being women. Next year, perhaps, we should think of opening our day more fully to the public, to that unknown number of women who would like to drop in, to share these special moments with others. Our conclusion, of course, is that the whole world should celebrate International Women's Day. Look at it this way: if educational institutions can provide paper napkins and Christmas trees, pretty eggs for Easter, and pumpkins and UNICEF boxes for Halloween, they should also give full space, time and creativity to celebrating the existence of fifty-two per cent of the world's population.

## An Institute for Women's Studies

Mair Verthuy, July, 1978.



As if to commemorate International Women's Day, the Board of Governors of Concordia University, Montreal, gave its approval on 8 March 1978 to the setting up of the Simone de Beauvoir Institute for Women's Studies.

The university was already a pioneer in Women's Studies in Canada. After the introduction in 1970 of the first interdisciplinary course on the Nature of Woman, a program was steadily built up, covering a wide area of subjects, both disciplinary and interdisciplinary. Courses in Sociology, History, Political Science, Economics, Psychology, literatures of the French- and English-speaking worlds, Religion, etc., are completed by seminars on special topics, such as the problems specific to Amerindian and Inuit women or a comparative history of feminist movements in French- and English-speaking Canada. Students may already register for a Minor or Major\* in the field, and it is hoped that we shall soon be able to add a B.A. with Specialization.\*

Why then a special Institute? After merging the Faculties and departments of Arts and Science on the Loyola and Sir George Williams campuses in 1977, the Administration recommended that the student need for a greater degree of personalization in their education be met by the creation of 'smaller units such as colleges'. Each of these 'colleges', membership in which would be optional, would have a single unifying theme or philosophy. Students would register simultaneously for the degree of their choice and within one 'college', if they so chose. While these smaller units would not necessarily offer their own courses, it was expected that they would respond to student demands in various co-curricular areas at least.

It was a heaven-sent opportunity, and forty women — faculty, professional and support staff, students — immediately began the long and demanding task of justifying the need for a 'college' organized round the theme of Women's Studies, of defining its goals and structures. It was the first of the smaller units to be approved.

What is its function and how does it tie in with the already existing program? To answer the last question first, it was decided that, in the immediate future, the program itself should remain housed in the Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies. This arrangement, it was felt, would give us a triple base: in the Centre, in the departments, and in the Institute. It was further decided that membership should not be limited to students registered in the program. On the contrary, it seemed and seems that the work of the Institute would have greater impact on a larger number of people if it were accessible to students in traditional degree programs, such as Biology, Mathematics, French, etc. The minimum academic requirement has then been set at nine credits (one and a half courses) in Women's Studies during membership. Infiltration is the order of the day!

The function of the Institute is to promote the understanding of the historical and contemporary situation of women; to develop the intellectual, personal, and social potential of women; ultimately to transform the society in which we live. The first goal is met by the program. The second goal will be met by the structures and activities of the Institute which is intended to provide a supportive framework for such self-realisation. The structures are entirely democratic; decisions will be generated at the base, and involvement in the decision-making process is mandatory, whether it be through committee work or through attendance at Assemblies. The students will be encouraged to define their own degree of involvement.

The activities of the Institute will also be defined by the membership. These may vary from workshops on such subjects as consciousness-raising, self-defence, career and marriage conflicts, effective lobbying, to joint research projects with external women's groups on, perhaps, violence against women, professional career patterns, special educational problems. Other specific projects are under study: courses in French and English as second languages, using material by Canadian/Québec women writers and avoiding sex stereotypes; demystifying mathematics and economics for women. The possibilities are endless. What is clear, however, is that if the Institute succeeds, transformations in our environment will eventually take place.

The concept of such an Institute is new. Women's colleges exist. Indeed, some of the Seven Sisters in the United States have reaffirmed their non-coeducational vocation. None, to our knowledge, have Women's Studies as their academic base or planned such a variety of activities with the specific goal of encouraging women to take charge of their own lives. Our Institute is, moreover, open to men. They have a lot to learn.

The success of the Institute clearly remains problematic, however. To date, the Administration has supported us. We must hope that this support will continue. In the Université du Québec à Montréal, where a small number of courses in this field are offered, the organizers have preferred to remain outside the traditional university structures, feeling that they will have more freedom of action by so doing. It will be interesting to see which is the better choice.

The name of the Institute has generated a certain amount of discussion. Several of the initiators were in favour of recognizing a Canadian/Québec woman. A democratic vote was taken and a majority decision reached to call it after Simone de Beauvoir. Her own interdisciplinarity (existential thinker, political activist, novelist, essayist, playwright), plus the catalysing effect of *The Second Sex* made her seem particularly appropriate. It was also felt by many that the problems involved transcend the national boundaries to which women have so often been sacrificed.

We welcome your queries. These should be addressed to the Simone de Beauvoir Institute, Annex MU (Yes, we have a house!), Concordia University, Sir George Williams Campus, 1455 ouest boulevard de Maisonneuve, Montréal, Que. We may even have a newsletter for you.

*\*Minor:* an approved sequence of at least thirty credits;

*Major:* an approved sequence of at least forty-two credits;

*Specialization:* an approved sequence of at least sixty credits.

Ninety credits are required to complete a B.A. or a B.Sc. A course which runs for three hours a week from September to April carries six credits; one which runs for the same number of hours from September to December or January to April carries three credits. Various permutations on this basic arrangement exist.

