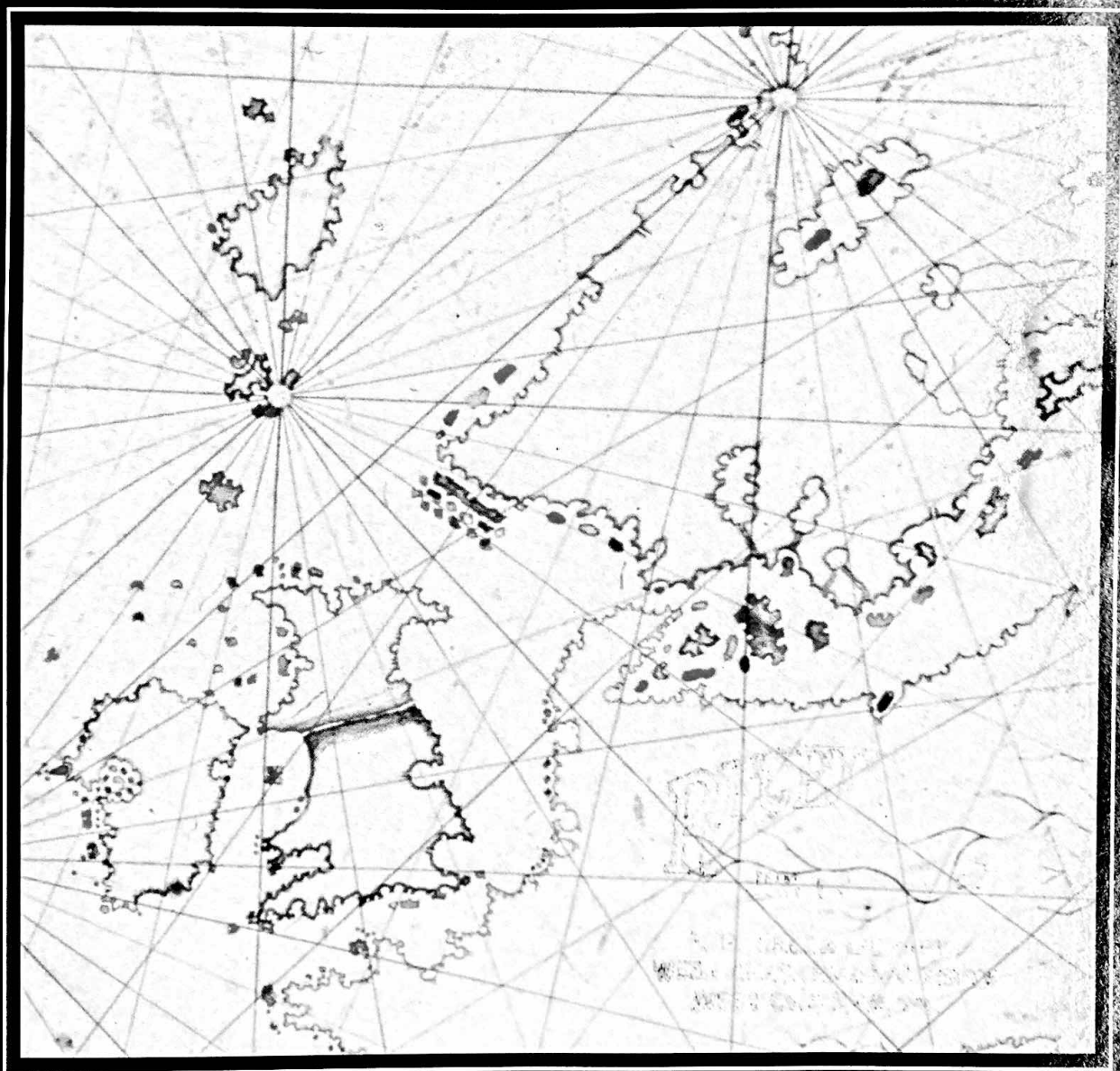


Scholars

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Cover: This sixteenth-century Ottoman map of the North Atlantic is one of several discovered by Thomas D. Goodrich at the Istanbul Archaeological Museums. The maps, along with some Goodrich discovered a little closer to home, provide interesting glimpses into Ottoman history. See Goodrich's account of his discovery on page 16.

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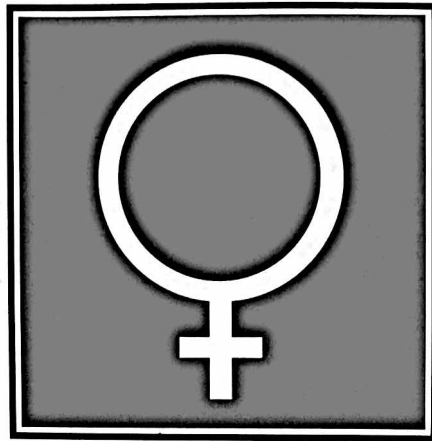
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From Margin to Center: The Development of a Women's Studies Program

Anne Dzamba, Madelyn Gutwirth, Lynette McGrath, and Stacey Schlau

Twenty years ago, fewer than 20 women's studies courses existed at colleges and universities in the United States. Today, nearly 30,000 such courses are being taught in this country.

In 1971, in the midst of rising concern for women's issues, the first women's studies course was proposed at what was then West Chester State College, now West Chester University of Pennsylvania. Few people at that time were so optimistic as to think that this innovation would flower into an academic program. Yet that is just

what occurred. Like similar trials throughout the country, that one course has yielded a movement rich in teaching and scholarship, a response to a long pent-up need on the part of women to see themselves inscribed in the culture, along with men, as subjects and objects of cultural and scientific inquiry.

We modelled our first course, one cordially supported by the Dean of Arts and Sciences, after a successful interdisciplinary course, "Integrating the Arts," in which professors from several disciplines

lectured on a literary, artistic, or musical theme. In the first women's studies course, lecturers from history, philosophy, sociology, English, psychology, and art history cooperated to teach, in one large lecture and five small discussion sections, a surprisingly large class of 100 students. The enormous interest aroused by this course was not an unmixed blessing, however.

The assigned readings and questions the lecturers raised produced intense turmoil in many students who were disturbed by

the new analysis and consciousness that challenged their preconceptions about women's roles. Since women had not previously been the subjects and objects of knowledge and analysis, it is not surprising that some students responded to women's projection into the center of scrutiny with a heated expression of prejudices. Happily, our dean was not daunted by such a controversial outcome, and his strong support underlines the positive role that administrators can play in promoting women's studies programs.

In surviving this mixed beginning during a period when teaching materials and actual data were few, a cadre of committed faculty members found each other. During the following years, we continued to add to the basic course material from history, philosophy, literature, and art and to incorporate lectures by other colleagues and outside speakers. With this foundation course established, we invited all interested faculty to join a Women's Studies Steering Committee.

Such courses as "Women in American History," "Women in Art," "The Psychology of Women," "American Women Writers," and "Women in Modern Fiction" soon followed. By 1978, we had 15 courses, including some in politics, health, and physical education. It was time to constitute ourselves as an interdisciplinary program. We set out, as our proposal stated, "To maintain a

program during a period of transition whose end we cannot foresee, that will rectify the absence of attention given in our traditional curriculum to the history and condition of women." We then instituted an 18-credit minor in women's studies which has remained essentially unchanged.

The authors of this article have been successive program coordinators of West Chester's Women's Studies Program. We have operated with few budgetary, staff, or time resources. Each of us has had a fairly swift burnout after periods

If we forget that women's studies is one of the daughters of feminism, we lose the very essence of our task.

ranging from four to six years of administering the program. Building a program in a new academic discipline, we've learned, is a complex and demanding task. To all the usual administrative chores—scheduling, student problem-solving, correspondence, record-keeping, ordering library books—are added responsibilities for course-building and supervision, for publicizing the program through a constant flow of speakers and posters, and for staying abreast of the flood of

scholarship in a field where thought and research are still in ferment, and growing rapidly.

Despite budget and administrative problems, our program has enjoyed many successes. From 1977-79, along with women from the Philadelphia School District, we received a grant under the Women's Educational Equity Act to develop modes of non-sexist teaching for surrounding school districts. A course in the university education program incorporating these techniques remains a part of our curriculum.

One of our professors initiated an innovative track for the Master of Science in Administration degree that concentrates on "Leadership for Women." We've published a successful review, *The Feminist Scholar*, as a showcase for student writing in our program. Under the aegis of the Institute for Women, established to foster research in women's studies, we've awarded the Grace Cochran prize yearly since 1980 for the most distinguished piece of student research on women. We've lobbied successfully for such policies as a presidentially endorsed statement on non-sexist language use in the university. And we sponsored a successful meeting of the National Women's Studies Association's Mid-Atlantic region in 1982.

Our basic women's studies course was the earliest among a set of interdisciplinary courses from which students are required

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to select one to satisfy West Chester's general education interdisciplinary requirement. Each semester our program offers seven or eight courses, a number rivalling that offered in many far wealthier universities.

We have tapped energies here that have taken us far beyond what our institution's initial commitment might have predicted. The intense impact of women's studies results from the special inspiration found in the women's studies classroom and in the special process and aims of our program.

The Women's Studies Classroom

Women's studies, unlike most academic disciplines, integrates, rather than separates, academic and non-academic realities by grounding its study in concrete personal experience. Instructors have little difficulty demonstrating the immediate relevance of the subject matter to students, male and female, even to those who disagree with the challenging points of view presented in the class. Perhaps no other discipline functions at once so personally and so globally.

Women's studies is critical in its insistent questioning of dominant ideas and constructive in providing new ways of thinking about the formation of knowledge. It changes our lives and the lives of our students by changing our

accepted assumptions about gender differences. These assumptions for women emphasize limitations internalized as children and sustained by institutions. Yet women's studies has shown us that the negative assumptions about the qualities of women's minds and the purposes of our bodies are products of history, politics, and culture and therefore capable of change.

We find that women's studies is risky and stressful at times, producing in students surprise, anger, puzzlement, denial, or excitement as they become involved in the scrutiny of our gendered lives. Yet, in the end it encourages self-confidence instead of self-hatred, and understanding instead of clichés about both sexes. As one former student said, "The class really opened my eyes to issues concerning women and made me think outside the classroom on my own; I know I won't see women's position in our culture in the same way anymore."

Women's studies sees women as dynamic actors on the stage of human experience, not as appendages to men or as passive victims of patriarchy. By moving women from the margin to the center of inquiry, women's studies helps to mend the fragmented picture of human endeavors evident in many academic curricula.

Like the women's movement and women's organizations, women's studies has permanently changed women's lives—and men's

lives. If we forget that women's studies is one of the daughters of feminism, we lose the very essence of our task. Without a sense of political action, women's studies would be in danger of becoming just another academic discipline—a possibility we wish to avoid.

Everyone can use women's studies, we believe, to help understand diversity, and to use diversity creatively rather than letting it divide us by color, race, class, age, sexual orientation, ethnic background, or physical ability. In the 1970s, discussions arose in the women's movement about the connections between racism and sexism. Women of color argued that white, middle-class women had relegated them to the sidelines of the struggle for equality by not emphasizing issues of concern to poor or minority women, such as access to decent housing and education.

Since then, many white women have attempted to come to terms with our internalized racism. In the process, we have learned to hear other women's voices and to include other issues—ageism, classism, homophobia, and discrimination against the differently abled—into our agenda for change. In the classroom, our incorporation of the diverse experiences of women reinforces our enterprise. If we argue that patriarchal knowledge lacks validity because it is incomplete, then we must also acknowledge the rich texture of the fabric of

Carolyn Broomall, a graduate student in psychology at West Chester University of Pennsylvania, writes about her experience with a women's studies course, "Communication, Power, and Violence":

As a woman of the 50s, I was unaware of the sexist milieu I was surrounded with all my life. I didn't think it was chauvinistic to say "man" or "mankind" when speaking of the human race. I never really noticed that advertisers were using women's bodies to sell everything from deodorant to cigarettes to computers in ways that degrade all human beings. It did not occur to me that being called "girl" carried with it subtle nuances implying that I was an immature, frivolous female who was not to be taken seriously. I didn't recognize the gender-based economic inequities of the work world. I thought that pornography was an evening's entertainment for some people, not an exploitation of women and children.

Throughout the 1980s, my sister, a woman of the 70s, and a self-proclaimed "radical feminist," spent a lot of her time trying to educate the women of our family about the Equal Rights Amendment and the women's movement—without much success. We dismissed her as a youthful extremist who would come to her senses when she grew up. In the meantime, my best friend, with whom I had attended college in the 50s (neither of us had finished; we were both looking for husbands) had returned to the university to complete her degree. She was so enthusiastic about her classes I decided to take one, just so I'd have something to talk with her about. My sister's arguments in the back of my mind, I decided to take a women's studies course to see what all the shouting was about.

I cannot begin to do justice to the life-changing effects that course had on me. I learned that I had *foremothers!* I began to realize the intellectual contributions women have made to this world. I found a "voice of authority" within myself which gave rise to a new self respect and pride in being a woman. I came to understand the insidious ways our language dehumanizes and trivializes women.

I experienced in that course an atmosphere that was stimulating and demanding yet extremely supportive and encouraging. I decided to go back and finish my degree. I graduated in August of 1989. Now I'm back for a master's degree. I fully expect to earn a Ph.D.—and then to establish a women's health center in my hometown.

human experience. The process of thinking about one form of oppression has inevitably led us to ponder on others and the ways they interact.

Feminist theory and practice lie at the heart of women's studies in our classroom and research. Our understanding of curriculum and pedagogical process is educational, political, and cultural. This means, for example, that we explore motherhood in the United States through the thoughts and words of women who have experienced it. We understand motherhood also as a social institution defined by the intricate ideology of gender-linked expectations dictated by media, religion, law, education, and other socializing forces.

Feminist pedagogy insists on an alliance between academic analysis and lived experience. We incorporate shared, open processes into our classrooms, using exercises and small group activities to bring concepts to life and to make all members of the class active participants. Sometimes self-revelations and dialogue with students, individually and in class, encourage a breakdown in the traditional hierarchy of the classroom.

We avoid forms of expression that encourage competition and hierarchies and that evoke military metaphors of battles for power. We encourage communication through open exchange, attentive listening, and clear articulation of thought. Under these conditions, the shift in students' perspectives

is profound. Male and female students arrive at the point where they can no longer look at advertisements in their favorite magazines without decrying sexist imagery, they find out for the first time that women have had significant roles in history, and they come to recognize the gender-based economic inequities of the work world.

The ethical basis of women's studies reminds us of the need to respect diverse points of view and realities, to insist on equality, to

We believe that the world in which it is expected that men act while women remain invisible is slowly passing away.

value marginalized experience, and to emphasize basic human worth and open understanding. These are all principles that we believe would make life on this planet safer, more humane, and more genuinely challenging. Practitioners of women's studies agree with poet and theorist Adrienne Rich that we ought to be interested not merely in "changing institutions" but in "human redefinition," not merely in "equal rights," but in a "new kind of being." We claim a great deal for our field of study; we think, for the most part, that it delivers.

Processes and Aims

From its inception, the women's studies program at West Chester has modelled its operation and governance, as well as its classroom practice, on principles of feminist process. We avoid "top-down" or authoritative decision-making in favor of a communal and consensual style. The coordinator of the program makes decisions about day-to-day operations of the program, but she meets regularly with the Women's Studies Steering Committee to plan policy and program changes.

The Steering Committee is the governing body of the program. The bylaws for the program specify that "all persons teaching women's studies courses are members" and that "other persons who have expressed active interest in women's studies" may also be members. The Steering Committee proposes and approves graduate and undergraduate courses and personnel in the program.

Approval of courses and faculty for the program guarantees that certain criteria agreed upon by the Committee have been met. Some of these criteria require that the subject matter of the course be by, for, or about women, that the instructor be sympathetic with the objectives of women's studies, and that current scholarship in women's studies be reflected in the readings and the framework of the course. We have made a consistent effort to maintain a

degree of pedagogical and ideological coherence and a level of academic excellence in the program. The program at West Chester has offered a challenge to other programs and departments by maintaining a high level of academic quality while addressing in an innovative manner new concerns and ancient misconceptions; it has also established a remarkable spirit of amity and concord by encouraging members to function collaboratively and cooperatively rather than combatively and competitively.

We are satisfied that we are working steadily toward the goals we have set for ourselves:

- to provide more information about women's lives and contributions than is available in traditional courses;
- to press for the revision of existing theories and attitudes that assume the male experience as central and the female as peripheral, while exploring the role of women in economic, social, religious, and educational systems;
- with other women's studies programs across the nation, to help construct an alternative feminist theory of knowledge; and

- to reevaluate the traditional disciplinary curricula—including their contents and their analytical and methodological approaches—from the perspective of gender.

The Future

New topics, programs, and pedagogies take time to become part of an academic curriculum. What, for us, began as intellectual exploration 15 or more years ago, has become full-time commitment. For new and younger faculty, the process may be somewhat less lengthy—but perhaps accompanied by a healthy skepticism or inhibited by resurgent opposition to what we have already done.

The 1988 report of the American Council on Education's Commission on Women in Higher Education proposes that higher education become a model for addressing the larger questions facing women's participation in society. One of its recommendations is the making of permanent institutional commitments to women's studies. Our program at West Chester provides a strong base for that effort. We look forward to greater recognition and provision of resources from deans and administrators to strengthen the program and to encourage

integrating the new scholarship across the curriculum. We will continue to encourage departments to recruit scholars with expertise in women's studies. We hope for an increase in support staff to help develop grant applications, so that we may seek additional outside funds to expand our work. We enjoy participating in informal study groups in various disciplines or on particular topics which exist now and which we hope will one day honeycomb the campus. Above all, our students and their learning processes and our own opportunities for research and curriculum development will provide our greatest stimulus and challenge.

We believe that the world in which it is expected that men act while women remain invisible is slowly passing away. We believe that moving the study of women and gender from the margin of our consideration to the center will demystify our culture's prevailing sex-gender system and help the university to make good its claims to truth and universality.

Anne Dzamba, Madelyn Gutwirth, and Lynette McGrath are former coordinators of the women's studies program at West Chester University of Pennsylvania. Stacey Schlau is the present coordinator.

