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Report:

The First Summer Institute in Women's Studies

Concordia University, 1974

Traditionally, Summer Institutes at Concordia University (Sir George Williams) have been organized to offer courses which are not part of the regular Winter program, and which would otherwise not be available. Over the past few years a number of departments, such as English, Education, Sociology, and History, have invited renowned scholars, writers, and academics to give six week intensive courses in the Summer (July and August) during the day.

The Summer Institute in Women's Studies followed this general format and also served to introduce a new program in Women's Studies which was to begin in the Fall. Under this new program, it is now possible to follow a joint-major at Concordia by taking five courses in various disciplines including an introductory, interdisciplinary course on "The Nature of Woman — Historic Attitudes and Present Approaches." The program is based on the recognition that the systematic study of the role and contribution of women has been hitherto neglected by all academic disciplines.

The Summer Institute aimed, among other things, to stimulate interest in the new joint-major program, to further develop the concept of interdisciplinary education, and to provide concentrated, short-term courses in the summer when people in the community, teachers and other personnel in the educational field, social services, and business as well as regular students could attend. The Institute courses were fully integrated into the regular university program, and with the exception of the one interdisciplinary course, individual departments approved and gave credit for these courses.

The first course in Women's Studies at Concordia was "The Nature of Woman — Historic Attitudes and Present Approaches," which has been taught for the past five years by a team of two instructors,* one in Philosophy and one in Literature. This has always been very popular and has been over-enrolled every year. One hundred students have been admitted each year and this large en-

rolment and student interest has been an indication of a real and growing need for a Women's Studies program.

The courses offered during the summer of '74 were "Political Economy of Women's Work," "Images of Women in Antiquity and the Jewish and Christian Traditions," "The Changing Image of Women in Modern Ideologies," "Women and Psychology," and "Mental Health — Mental Illness."

The Institute was attended mostly by students living in the Montreal area. An analysis revealed that approximately 80% were Sir George Williams students, 9% were drawn from other Montreal institutions, and 11% came from out-of-town — the largest out-of-town percentage of any of Concordia Summer Institutes. The majority of students were women but there were a few men in each class. Ages ranged from roughly twenty to sixty.

A questionnaire was distributed asking students to evaluate the Summer Institute and seeking their comments and suggestions regarding teaching methods, content, and methods of evaluation. Although there was some initial disappointment regarding the last-minute replacement of one of our instructors, response was generally very favorable. Students seemed to appreciate the variety of approaches and teaching methods as an enriching experience. Team teaching was especially popular as was the lecture series given by Rosemary Ruether in Religion.

Most found the work intensive and heavy for a three or six week period, but enjoyable and valuable. Some examples of students' comments:

"I received a double input both intellectually and emotionally. . . ."

"The best learning experience, the most integrated learning experience I have ever had — combined the personal, political, and intellectual. . . ."

Encouraged by the enthusiastic response to the first Institute, we plan to offer a similar program in 1975. To create a balance with this year's program, we propose to offer courses in the following areas of study: Literature, Classics, History, Sociology. We will make a special effort to engage Canadian instructors living and working in Canada and hope that the Summer Institute will become an integral and dynamic part of a steadily evolving Women's Studies program at Concordia.

*For a full description of this course, see Christine Garside's paper, "Conceptual History as a Methodology for Women's Studies," in this *Journal*. — Ed.