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## I: Women's Studies at Concordia: The Simone de Beauvoir Institute

In 1910 Millicent Garrett Fawcett, referring to acrimonious discussion of a bone of contention between different women's groups, remarked, "Perpetual protesting is, in my opinion, not only unnecessary, but would be a sign of weakness rather than of strength . . . Let us affirm our own principles, and put our best strength into making them prevail." In the same forward-looking spirit, I am glad to have the opportunity to report that the Simone de Beauvoir Institute and the Women's Studies Programme at Concordia University are very much alive, healthy, and growing.

The Department of Women's Studies and the Simone de Beauvoir Institute are not identical, but are admittedly hard to distinguish. Concordia (with an enrolment of over 20,000) has made provision for the creation of collegiate institutions, one function of which is to provide a smaller unit within the whole to which students can relate, and where enrichment of the academic programme may be sought. Hence, in addition to administering the Women's Studies programme, the Simone de Beauvoir Institute is able to offer a number of co-curricular workshops, lectures and special events. It also houses the Women's Studies Student Association, has a Reading Room with a growing selection of Women's Studies books and documents and has lounge space for the use of students, members and fellows. A resource centre is maintained on the Loyola Campus. Occasional major projects are undertaken, the outstanding example being the International Conference on Teaching and Research Related to Women, in the summer of 1982, a trilingual 10-day event to which came over 350 women from 80 countries. Follow-up work on this still continues, and there will shortly be available the whole proceedings on microfiche, a printed theme summary and abstracts in Spanish, French and English, and a directory of researchers and teachers world-wide.

Some of the members of the Simone de Beauvoir Institute have taken a keen interest, from the beginning, in the formation of the Canadian Women's Studies Association; I myself participated in the 1982 founding meeting, despite the imminence of our own international conference at that time. I had, as it happened, already been party to earlier discussions. The Institute continues to take an active interest in the CWSA's development. Institute faculty and Fellows are generally well-represented at conferences of all Canadian and many other women's organizations.

The Institute maintains contacts with women's groups, universities, action centres, and organizations in Montreal, and offers facilities or co-sponsorship for meetings, and other assistance as far as resources allow. Book signings, a students' art display, self-defense workshops, an exercise program, and the regular meetings of an anti-pornography association are all recent uses to which the lounge has lent itself, in addition to the more traditional evening or lunchtime lectures. Another exciting form of outreach is provided through the off-campus programme. The introductory course and others, given from time to time in one or other Montreal suburbs, reach a hungry and interested audience.

The Faculty of the Simone de Beauvoir Institute consists of the Principal, an Associate Principal and a full-time Women's Studies professor, all of whose offices are located in the

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\*This is in part a reply to V. Strong-Boag's recent comments regarding the Institute in her essay on Women's Studies in Canada, August Special Issue, 1983.

Institute itself. There are also an office staff and part-time documentalist. Approximately 20 other full-time Concordia faculty and librarians are Fellows of the Institute; some, but by no means all, of these teach courses recognized for credit in the Women's Studies programme. The support and interest of the Fellows are a great enrichment to the Institute, making possible the very wide range of academic and complementary activities undertaken.

All Women's Studies certificate, major (presently 48 in number) and minor students are members of the Institute, as is any student who enrolls in a Women's Studies course intending to complete at least nine credits. There are also a number of friends of the Institute who pay a small fee to be on the mailing list and take part in Institute activities. Two or three times a year occasion is found — without too much difficulty — to have a good party.

Members and fellows make up the Institute Council which meets two or three times a term to receive reports, plan activities, discuss policies and (annually) to elect members of committees. Some places on committees are reserved for members of the Women's Studies Student Association, which holds its own elections.

Students enrolling in Women's Studies may take a major (39 credits, 6½ courses), minor (27 credits) or a certificate programme (30 credits). A diploma program may also be offered shortly, and several students who are doing graduate work in the independent studies program are in fact working on research related to women's studies, drawing at least one of their advisors from the Simone de Beauvoir Institute.

For the major, minor and certificate concentration, students take a substantial core program. The first part of the Introductory course (offered in both English and French) provides an historical introduction focussed on women's lives and emerging feminism in the 19th and early 20th Century; the second part concerns itself mainly with North America and with on-going issues, including those currently attracting media attention. Also part of the obligatory core courses are a six-credit advanced seminar (focussing this year on Canadian women writers), a choice from two or three Fellows' Seminars on special topics, and a further core course on women in modern society. Specific content of some upper-level courses is flexible, enabling faculty to make use of their particular research interests and expertise, and offering students a wide range of feminist material, theory and methodology. Courses being offered this year and last, for instance, include *Black Women in Canada*, *Women and Peace*, *Les Femmes et les mots*, *Women and Utopias*, *You and Government*, *Simone de Beauvoir*, *Women Working*, *Canadian Women Composers*, and *Feminism: 1880-1920*. Majors, minors and certificate students all take at least 18 credits in this women's studies core programme. The balance of credits required is chosen from a wide range of offerings in other departments. Women's studies courses are offered by many departments throughout the university and almost all the departments in the Faculty of Arts. Women's Studies courses — particularly the Introductory course — are also very popular as electives for students majoring in other areas.

Concordia University's medium of instruction is officially English, but several of the Women's Studies courses are offered in French, and a considerable number of francophone students enrol, partly because the programme offered is the most extensive available in the province (perhaps, in fact, the most extensive undergraduate programme in Canada).

The Institute encourages research related to Women's Studies, whether this is rooted in a particular discipline or in the interdisciplinary matter of Women's Studies itself. Research

interests of faculty include an early 20th Century British suffragist and pacifist leader, comparative studies of Muslim, Christian and Jewish attitudes to family and sexual ethics, images of women in literature, stereotypes of menopause, Canadian women writers and decision-making in two-career families. So far, funding has not been available to do much more than give moral support, but we are looking to ways of greatly expanding this side of the Institute's activities.

Concordia is a two-campus university with full day-time and evening programs. The downtown campus, in particular, serves a vast number of part-time students. Without examining the statistical evidence, I would hazard a guess that the student population is the most diverse in Canada, with respect to age, linguistic and ethnic background, and possibly in previous educational experience. This makes it a most exciting, challenging and worthwhile environment for a Women's Studies programme. A conscious effort is made, by means of small group discussions and assignments which take students out into the community, as well as by the varied course offerings and extra-curricular program, to make use of the richness of this diversity and the unique Montréal setting.

Viki Monkman

## II: A Student's View

I enrolled in Women's Studies at Concordia University in 1980 full-time to find out about myself as a woman. Of course, I had a sophisticated cover story to do with professional development and "integration" of women into traditional curricula. I chose my courses very rationally with the aid of a tutor at the Simone de Beauvoir Institute and set off on what I thought would be a solely intellectual endeavour.

The first surprise was the course readings: Euphoria. Confirmation. Affirmation. The analysis of the systematic exclusion/denigration of women in a wide variety of traditional disciplines spoke to my personal, as yet unspoken perceptions. Gradually references from one discipline fitted with readings from another. I read insatiably.

Then I began to voice my questions in class. This was the stage at which I had blocked in my undergraduate years. But not now! These people listen. These people know what I am talking about. These women make sense. These women are interested in *all* of us. These women don't put us down.

The understanding and respect for each student's life experience and personal integrity were empowering. I had living evidence of the integration of feminist theory and praxis. However, five minutes before or after class did not satisfy my need to share my ideas, to talk about Emma Goldman's "Tragedy of Women's Emancipation", to understand the feelings provoked by the material, to be with "others". I believe that if I had not found the

Institute then, I would not be continuing my studies now. Because it is there that I found women working together in an atmosphere I had always hoped was possible: non-hierarchical, supportive, affirming. I have found friends who believe that women's scholarship is essentially a revolutionary re-thinking of human reality. On the "safe ground" of the Institute I have met women who enrich my life - artists, activists, scholars. We talk, we argue, we drink coffee, we eat, we organize international conferences, and "women's spaces", we write, we edit, we laugh, we party.

I love these women because they gave me life.

**ERRATA:** Vol. 17, No. 2 (August 1983). Transposition of last paragraph pp. 159-160 to sub-section above. It should read: "Over the years of tutor-training, Claire-Louise has found that most students are very glad to abandon an authoritarian style of teaching; but they do have to feel confident with what will replace the familiar."

Editor's Note: The Auckland Tutors' principles are entirely towards the *non-structured* and *non-hierarchical*.

P. 114, 13th line should read "This energetic and largely successful attempt is reflected in NSW's constitution . . ."