



# 40 FABULOUS Feminists & AMAZING Activists

of NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO



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Women's Studies Study Group

Women's Studies Advisory Committee

Women's Studies Department, Lakehead University

The Women's Studies Study Group, the department's precursor, came together in 1988-89 and was made up of faculty, staff and students at Lakehead University who were interested in establishing enough courses so that students could earn a minor in Women's Studies. Participants included contract lecturers Lisa Richardson (English and Classics) and Susan Tiura (English), as well as faculty members Joyce Forbes (English), Kit Minor (Social Work), Darlene Stevenson (Nursing), Peggy Tripp (Biology and Forestry), and then Director of Student Services, Joy Himmelman.

The group's initial proposal didn't get very far due to bureaucratic barriers and internal resistance. In the second year, Pam Wakewich who had some background in Women's Studies, had recently moved back to Thunder Bay from Montreal, and joined the group. She, Darlene Stevenson, Peggy Tripp, and Susan Tiura developed an expanded proposal and worked to liaise with potential supporting units. Pam remembers working with the group on the final revisions to the proposal at her home in early January of 1989, a few weeks after her daughter Maura was born, taking breaks for baby feedings and play time. The proposal had to first be approved by the Executive Committee of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, which was made up of chairs of existing departments who vetted access to Senate approvals. Some members vigorously disapproved of the proposed new program arguing that Women's Studies was 'ideological' and not 'academically rigorous enough' to be a university discipline, even though as Pam argued, it was already being offered by other prestigious universities in Canada and internationally. One nay-sayer at the Faculty Executive meeting rather infamously stated that while he was "all for women having the vote", he didn't think a program 'like this' belonged at a university."

Building connections, one by one, with colleagues from other departments across

the university, the new proposal was finally approved in principle by Senate in the winter term, but approvals for course calendar and program descriptions were delayed and debated again and again as they made their way through the various bureaucratic layers with some faculty continuing to try to prevent the program from opening.

Needless to say, the preparation and detail required at each and every step of approvals processes in the first few years well outweighed what was expected of other programs, both before and afterwards. But as the Women's Studies Study Group members opined:

It was empowering to finally get there and we had great training in how to successfully continue program growth and development for Women's Studies in the future.

Support for the establishment of WS has also come from a few unexpected and 'lofty' places. Then Chancellor, the Reverend Dr. Lois Wilson (former Moderator of the United Church of Canada), met with members of the Study Group, encouraged our work and lent her voice at the Board level. And President, Dr. Bob Rosehart, whose wife Rita had taken Pam's first course on 'Sociology of Women' (and was, according to him, "a convert and very strong advocate at the dinner table") provided support at the upper administrative level and deflected resistance from some of the less supportive faculty.

The following year, 1990, saw the opening of the Minor program at Lakehead University. Budget was miniscule; one sessional stipend was allocated to cover the teaching of Women's Studies 1100, and another for a coordinator to get the program up and running, and administer both courses and future program development.

Susan Tiura and Pam Wakewich designed the initial course to be team taught with an equal portion of Humanities and Social Sciences perspectives on women's lives and women's contributions to scholarship, borrowing on a model shared by Dr. Carol Farber from Women's Studies at the University of Western Ontario. They taught the first course together to an enthusiastic but small group of eight students. In the second year of the program, Helen Smith, who had returned to Thunder Bay after completing her doctorate at OISE in Toronto, stepped in to replace Susan Tiura who went on to further her own education. Helen helped Pam to revamp the course, drawing on her training on the history of ideas about women and they taught an enthusiastic group of students double in size to the initial cohort. While they knew from student feedback that the course had been well-received, Pam and Helen were astonished to walking into the first class in year three, and see 160 smiling faces in their WS 1100 classroom – needless to say the 25 textbooks they had optimistically ordered for that year weren't going to suffice.

The boom in popularity continued into subsequent years allowing incremental growth by creating first two, and then three sections of the intro course. Additional resources were then secured to offer upper level core courses and solidify faculty positions. The evening classes were especially pleasurable to teach as so many mature women from the community signed up for them. For a great number, it was the course that first attracted them to the university and convinced them that they had a place there.

With the establishment of the basic Minor program, the Women's Studies Study Group morphed into the Women's Studies Advisory Committee, gathering people from across campus who were interested in strengthening and promoting Women's Studies at Lakehead as well as extending feminist teaching and learning

in their home units. Peggy Tripp chaired this committee for many years, bringing great enthusiasm and institutional acuity to the task and Maureen Ford and Juanita Epp, both from Faculty of Education, Elizabeth Smythe, OISE, Josephine Tan, Psychology, and Patricia Jasen, History, were significant contributors in the committee's early days. Administrative support was often 'quietly' provided by secretaries in other units (Betty White, Karen Woychyshyn, Diane Maltby and many others) who were keen to lend a hand as needed and some of whom took WS courses themselves on a part-time basis.

Importantly, the establishment of Women's Studies was also supported by feminists off-campus. Margaret Phillips, owner of the Northern Women's Bookstore, patiently served as a community rep on the Advisory Committee for the first several years (hearing far too much about the mundane university challenges and politics) and supplied books for the program (both required texts and research materials) so students could do their research papers and enjoy additional reading on topics to which they were being newly introduced. Margaret even brought books to campus one year to help students with transportation challenges. Gwen O'Reilly from the Northwestern Ontario Women's Centre and Leni Untinen from Decade Council were always receptive to invitations to come and speak to the WS students and offered Pam and the others help in locating community resources for the classroom and keeping the WS students apprised of local and regional women's events. And the Lakehead University Gender Issues Centre and later Pride Central provided places for feminist discussion and action outside of the classroom.

In the early days of the program faculty staffing was skeletal and insecure. Administrative support had to be begged and borrowed and funding was non-existent during the summer months when the important

work of recruitment, course development and program building had to be done. Pam, Helen and the members of the committee shared out this 'volunteer' work to ensure continuity and success for the program. A very resourceful and committed part time administrative assistant Diane Maltby could be seen fundraising for the program selling Herstory calendars up and down the campus hallways to secure a computer and cover another month or two of admin costs. Pam remembers the advisory committee debating at length the most efficient way to spend a little over a hundred dollars, which they had worked to raise through various fundraising initiatives. Not the typical academic program development story! After their initial successes with the Women's Studies minor program, the advisory group began to turn to the issues involved in establishing a department and a full degree program. By this point based on the consistent demand and growth of WS both Pam and Helen had secured tenure-track joint appointments (Pam split between Sociology and Women's Studies and Helen split between History and Women's Studies).

An important growth point for the program and its long term success came in 1998-1999. With the assistance of the WS Advisory Committee, Helen Smith organized a wildly successful community literary night featuring Canadian writer Carol Shields to raise funds for the first Women's Studies Scholarship. It didn't hurt that the university's incoming President, Dr. Gilbert attended that evening (his wife Dani is a major Shield's fan) and had an opportunity to talk with the program faculty and its many supporters and get quickly brought up to speed on the staffing challenges they faced as well as WS's growth potential. The solidly sold out Valhalla ballroom event and the evident community support for Women's Studies displayed that night may well have been a factor in the new President's willingness to approve, the following spring, with the strong recommendation of

Acting Arts and Science Dean, Dave Kemp, the first dedicated (rather than cross-appointed) faculty position to WS. Pam and Helen were thrilled to hire Dr. Lori Chambers, an accomplished specialist in Women's legal history who also brought considerable experience teaching in Women's Studies. Lori developed a number of important courses on women's action for social change, women and the law from contemporary and historical perspectives, and women and sport, and took a leadership role in transitioning WS from program to departmental status (which also finally gave WS a voting seat in the University Senate) and in the expansion of our three BA and four year HBA majors and joint majors programs. She was the first official "Chair" of the WS Department.

With the solidification of departmental status and full-time staffing positions, the Women's Studies Advisory Committee structure was disbanded and the department took over its own administrative and support tasks. Pam turned her attention at this point to developing a specialization in WS at the Graduate level. And with the help of her colleagues in WS, supporting faculty in other units, and then Graduate Dean, Dr. Connie Nelson, the Collaborative Master's with Specialization in WS was approved by the Ontario Council of Graduate Studies in 2004-05.

Based on the program's success, Women's Studies was granted a second full tenure track position in 2006. Dr. Jennifer Roth who had very ably taught for us as a term appointment during a sabbatical replacement in 2005/06 was hired, bringing a very exciting focus on feminist law and literature, cyberfeminism, popular culture and fan studies, and feminist theory to the department's offerings. And in 2012 we were delighted to have one of our former students, Dr. Jane Nicholas, join Women's Studies as a full-time colleague. An accomplished historian with very strong roots in

women's studies, Jane brings strengths in gender history, popular culture and body studies, and feminist pedagogy to the department. Our students have also well supported by a strong coterie of contract lecturers: Alison Denton, Jan Oakley, Barbara Parker, Janis Cox, PhebeAnn Wolframe, Jonathan Smith, and Susan Forbes who bring a broad range of academic interests and commitment to the WS program.

Today we offer a full-range of undergraduate programs in WS as well as a highly successful Collaborative Master's with WS Specialization at the graduate level and two of our faculty, Jen and Lori, have initiated work on a free-standing Master's degree in Social Justice Studies (stay tuned for that one!). Our students pursue a wide range of careers upon graduation with many continuing to contribute to women's and social justice work both in their professional employment and their community service. And although it's hard to count exact numbers, we can proudly say that thousands and thousands have passed through our WS course doors and hopefully have been 'well served.' The coming-into-being of the Women's Studies Department at Lakehead University was a truly collective endeavour, from both within and outside of the academy. It continues today and we hope, well into the future, as a space where interdisciplinary collaboration and feminist community building and research are fostered, on campus and beyond.

And if you are interested in learning more, check us out on the Lakehead University webpage: [www.lakeheadu.ca/academics/departments/womensstudies](http://www.lakeheadu.ca/academics/departments/womensstudies)

- Written by Pam Wakewich with Lori Chambers, Jennifer Roth, and PhebeAnn Wolframe.  
Graphic designed by Pauline Sameshima.

## Women Reclaim the Night

by Maureen Shaw

"Victims of the night - Unite!!" That was the slogan which was chanted out thru the streets of Thunder Bay on the evening of Friday, September 17th. This event marked the second annual Reclaim-the-night march which was part of a national protest against sexual assault and violence. The march began at 9:00, meeting at Ogden Community School. There appeared to be approximately one hundred women participating, each of

which carried signs and sang of women's rights and freedom. The crowd of protesters attracted some attention from Thunder Bay locals along their route. As they paraded past Uncle Sam's Tavern on Simpson Street some of the customers came out to see what the excitement was all about but quickly retreated upon hearing the feminist voices, ironically avoiding the anti-sexist issues but presumably a lot safer for them all.

## Northern Women's Centre



by Maureen Shaw

whatever a woman chooses to do.

Right next door to the Hoito, at 316 Bay Street, is what appears to be a small enterprise, easily passed by unnoticed. Although somewhat lacking in advertising and public awareness, this building performs some very real functions. It is the Northern Women's Centre.

What is the Northern Women's Centre you may ask. According to one of the Centre's spokespersons Marg Kowalski, "It is a place where women may seek assistance, services, and necessary referrals." The centre offers both personal counselling and a call-in service which deals with battered women, sexual harassment, separation, divorce, birth control, and abortion. Karen Lockwood is employed with the centre as a Community Development Worker. She stresses that the Women's Centre provides information on various social problems and outlines alternatives, but always remains supportive in

In most cases the women that come to the centre looking for help usually stay on as members. The membership however, is not limited to those with problems. General meetings for the public are advertised in the Chronicle Journal and on the radio. These are open to any woman interested.

There are no limits as to the type of women that use the centre. Lockwood notes, "a woman in her eighties came in the other day wanting to know about pensions — yet we also have high school students coming in requesting information for projects they are working on."

Members of the centre are eager to address groups at Lakehead University for speaking engagements or, if you prefer a more casual meeting, why not drop by the centre for coffee.

Everyone is welcome — males included. (You can contact the centre at 345-7802.)

(September 24, 1982 clipping from the Argus, Lakehead University's campus newspaper.)