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AUTHOR McGowan, Marcia P.  
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ABSTRACT

The 1984-85 academic year was the first in which women's studies courses were included in the core curriculum at Eastern Connecticut State University (Willimantic). This paper examines the effects of this inclusion. In general, these courses have enjoyed increased and diversified enrollments, with more men and continuing students electing to take these courses. While classroom methodology has been affected somewhat by the altered composition of the classroom, the changes are seen as positive and can be traced to heightened awareness in society in general of women's changing roles. Besides the obvious benefit of having the chance to reach other students than liberal arts majors--students who might not otherwise be exposed to a feminist liberal arts perspective--and to encourage in these students a more pluralistic and egalitarian world view, the validation gained through core inclusion and the upsurge in enrollments have evidently led to heightened interest in women's studies among a variety of students. Since the inclusion of women's studies in the general education core, four new courses have been added to the women's studies curriculum at the University. (JB)

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A Case Study

Dr. Marcia P. McGowan  
Director of Women's Studies  
Eastern Connecticut State University  
Willimantic, Connecticut 06226

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Dr. Marcia P. McGowan  
Director of Women's Studies  
Eastern Connecticut State University  
Willimantic, Connecticut 06226

**The Effects of Core Inclusion on a Women's Studies Program:  
A Case Study**

This paper is a case study of the effects of the inclusion of women's studies in the revised General Education Core at Eastern Connecticut State University, the smallest of the four state university campuses that together constitute the Connecticut State University. ECSU presently has a full-time undergraduate enrollment of 2670 (1520 women and 1150 men) and a part-time undergraduate enrollment of 1434 (870 women and 564 men).

In a study published in the Tenth Anniversary Issue of Frontiers (8.3 [1986]: 110-113), dedicated to the Women's Studies Movement in the Academy, I argued that despite the conservative impulse of the growing curricular reform movement in higher education, core revision could afford a "new opportunity for women's studies" by offering curricular revisionists "an opportunity to validate newer courses of study that, like women's studies, broaden students' perspectives." In this article I made several predictions about the effects of core inclusion on enrollments, and after describing the highly political process of arguing for core inclusion at ECSU, I raised several questions that I would like to attempt to answer today. These questions revolve around whether the enrollments, composition, and methodology of the women's studies classroom

have, in fact, been radically altered by the offering of women's studies courses for core credit -- and if so, how, and to what end. I shall now try, on the basis of having had the opportunity of observing the effects of core inclusion for five academic years -- 1984-85, '85-86, '86-87, '87-88, and '88-89 -- to come to some conclusions about these issues.

Before I begin to deal with questions concerning enrollments, I should like to state that there are several variables to be considered in examining the enrollment patterns of any women's studies course at ECSU. The first is the size of the student body -- the population from which potential students are drawn. As all of the women's studies options included in the core were in existence for at least two years prior to its institution, an attempt to compare enrollment patterns from two years before the institution of the core to patterns five years after should cite any identifiable differences between the student body then and now. ECSU is composed of three colleges: Arts and Sciences, Business and Professional Studies, and Continuing Education. Not surprisingly, the past seven years have seen an upsurge in the enrollments of the latter two schools. In fall 1982 ECSU had a total undergraduate full-time enrollment of 2306: 899 in Arts and Sciences, 1000 in Business and Professional Studies, 407 undeclared, and a part-time enrollment of 869 in Continuing Education. In fall 1988 the University had a total undergraduate full-time enrollment of 2670: 675 in Arts and Sciences, 1199 in Business and Education,

415 in a rather amorphous category called Other Careers (public policy and government, environmental earth science, communications, and computer information science), 381 undeclared, and a part-time enrollment of 1432 in Continuing Education. It is clear that in seven years ECSU has experienced a rather radical transformation in terms of age, goals, and interests of the student body, which increasingly identifies vocational preparation as its central aim. There have, in fact, been significant drops in enrollment in many liberal arts courses, which students often perceive as highly challenging, irrelevant to vocational preparation, or "writing intensive." The fact that women's studies has more than held its own during this period is gratifying.

Another variable is that while some women's studies courses -- Psychology of Gender, Introduction to Women's Studies, and Poetry of Women -- have consistently been taught by full-time faculty on a regular basis others, despite their core status, have been offered less regularly and/or have been assigned to part-time faculty, who because of their mobility, are less likely to build up a following among the student body. In some disciplines, like sociology and English, the number of qualified feminist instructors is limited; thus, course sequencing, times, and number of sections offered are affected. Some courses have been offered only once in four semesters; others once in two. It is possible, however, to observe consistent patterns in three courses offered as core options: Psychology of Gender,

Introduction to Women's Studies, and Poetry of Women. Of these, only Psychology of Gender is offered every semester. It should also be noted that the number of majors in each of the disciplines that cross-list women's studies courses have also varied. Of the two departments cross-listing the courses to be discussed today, the number of majors in psychology has risen slightly from 150 to 152, and the number of English majors has diminished from 96 to 86. Psychology is holding its own in a time of declining numbers of liberal arts majors, but English has experienced a decline.

Before beginning to analyse patterns of enrollment in each of the courses I have mentioned, I should like to say that this case study should be especially relevant to other small public institutions, particularly in light of the recent debate about "autonomy" and "integration" as alternate strategies in higher education. (For an excellent summary of this debate, see Sandra Coyner, "The Ideas of Mainstreaming: Women's Studies and the Disciplines," Frontiers. 8.3 [1986]: 87-95.) For I would argue that the smaller state colleges and universities, which have seldom been fortunate enough to receive substantial grants or institutional support for the integration of women into the curriculum, (or gender-balancing the curriculum, or transforming the curriculum, or curriculum balancing, or mainstreaming -- whatever the rubric chosen) and have therefore been unable to accomplish the feminist education of the faculty upon which such integrative efforts should be predicated, have little choice,

whatever their ultimate goals, than to attempt to reach a broader and larger segment of the student population through women's studies. Though I believe that efforts to integrate the curriculum should coexist with offering women's studies as a core option, for those of us without sufficient financial and/or administrative support for curricular integration, and for those whose faculties are in the lower phases of Peggy McIntosh's "interactive phases of curricular revision" (for a summary, see "The Study of Women: Processes of Personal and Curricular Revision," The Forum for Liberal Education 6.5 [April 1984]: 2-4) or Marilyn Schuster and Susan Van Dyne's "stages of curriculum transformation" (see Schuster and Van Dyne, "Stages of Curriculum Transformation," Women's Place in the Academy. Totowa, N. J.: Rowman and Allanheld, 1985), core inclusion offers an excellent opportunity to begin to begin broadening student exposure to feminist scholarship and pedagogy.

The greatest success in increasing and diversifying student enrollments at ECSU has been experienced by the Psychology of Gender course. I should like to concentrate on this course, which has experienced few of the variables previously alluded to and then to return briefly to Introduction to Women's Studies, and Poetry of Women, each of which has also been taught steadily by a full-time faculty member. In 1982-83 Psychology of Gender (then entitled Psychology of Women) offered two sections to a total of 61 students -- 54 women and 7 men. In 1983-84, this course again offered two sections, with a total of 56 students

(slightly lower) 14 of them men. In the year that the general education core was introduced, 1984-85, an extra section was added, raising the total number of students for that year to 86, including 22 men. In the subsequent year, 1985-86, four sections were offered to a total student population of 113 students, 43 of whom were men. In spring of that year the course was retitled Psychology of Gender. In academic year 1986-87, 5 sections were offered to a total of 106 students, 31 of whom were men, and an additional summer course was added, raising the total number of students to 131 and the total number of male students to 33. In 1987-88, six sections were again offered; the total number of students was 162, 32 of them male. Dr. Ann Marie Orza, the course instructor, was on sabbatical in fall '88, and since returning this spring, she has offered three sections to 108 students, 29 of them male. Based on figures from the last full academic year, the number of sections has tripled, the number of students enrolled has nearly tripled, and the number of male students has more than quadrupled since the introduction of Psychology of Gender as a core option. The percentage of male students has varied, from a low of 13% to a high of 36.3%.

As previously noted, the number of psychology majors has risen only slightly from 150 in 1982 to 152 in 1986; such a miniscule increase in psych majors can hardly account for the burgeoning number of students and sections in this course, which is offered as one of thirty-one core options in social sciences.

One factor to be considered is certainly the popularity and competence of Dr. Ann Marie Orza, who instigated the course in 1978 and has taught it continuously since then, lately with added part-time help. As the other courses to which I have alluded are offered less often and have experienced more moderate gains in enrollment of both male and female students, it is to Dr. Orza that I posed most of my questions about the effects of a radically altered enrollment pattern in a women's studies core course.

According to Dr. Orza, there are a number of factors that have influenced burgeoning enrollments in Psychology of Gender. One is the demand from the School of Continuing Education. She has been asked by the Dean to offer evening and weekend sections to accommodate the schedules and demands of nontraditional students who wish to use the course either to fill a General Education or a psychology core option. If they are women, the students seem to expect the course, on the basis of its description, to address specific personal needs, such as assertiveness, self-expression, motivation, stress, and sexuality. Male students, whether traditional or nontraditional, commonly cite less specific reasons for taking the course, such as "it sounds interesting," "the books look interesting," or "I heard a friend talking about it." Generally, they state that they want to know more about women, or that, with Freud, they want to know what women want.

Another influence on enrollments since 1986-87 involves the

reason for changing the name of the course from Psychology of Women to Psychology of Gender. Dr. Orza had previously tried unsuccessfully to get Psychology of Women included as an option for the psychology core chosen by every major. A colleague suggested that if she changed the name of the course to Psychology of Gender it might seem more "inclusive" and hence, more acceptable. This strategy proved effective, and enrollments since 1986-87 undoubtedly reflect a number of psychology majors who have taken the course to fill a psychology core option.

However, as the number of male students in the course was rising dramatically before the title was altered, Dr. Orza does not attribute the trend toward a higher male enrollment to the change in name of the course, but to the option of using it for General Education Core credit and to the cumulative effect of having more male students in more sections, who, in turn, tell others about the quality and relevance of the course -- a multiplicative effect.

As I stated in the beginning, my primary interest, having established that, at least in this instance, the composition of the women's studies classroom has been radically altered, is to determine how and to what degree classroom methodology is affected. Initially, Dr. Orza, anticipating challenges by conservative male students, altered her curriculum, adding James Doyle's Male Experience and the film Men's Lives. But now she no longer requires the Doyle text; she includes it in an

extensive list of recommended reading, because she has found that her classes will readily concede that they know more about male than female psychology and that for those who don't, she can easily assign ancillary reading. Also, she now finds a higher level of awareness about gender issues which has influenced the classroom dynamic.

In addition, Dr. Orza finds that the larger number of male students seems to make the men less defensive; they don't seem to feel the need to band together (as they tend to do in smaller numbers), to take a defensive posture, and to dominate discussions. Also, female students no longer feel compelled to flock to the "defense" of a few "token men," especially in discussions of sexuality and rape; they no longer act as "protectors" of the male students. Perhaps because male students feel less threatened, they are less adversarial and more open to discussions of discrimination, sexuality, and gender roles. Such discussions, which seven years ago appeared more as polemical debates along gender lines, are now less acrimonious, more open, and not at all gender-divided. Women are less reluctant to enter into dialogue with men, and men are more willing to talk about women in the context of their own relationships. Widespread discussion in the media of women's changing roles has undoubtedly also influenced the classroom climate.

Another factor that influences classroom behavior is that, partly because of growing resistance to the word "feminist" (see

Catherine Stimpson's discussion of feminism as "the 'F' Word" in the July/August '87 edition of Ms. 16. 1&2: 80+), Dr. Orza, like many women's studies instructors, discusses "the 'F' word" thoroughly at the beginning of the course and presents the course material with the aim of keeping students' attitudes open and with the insistence that students form their own conclusions based on the evidence she presents. In this manner most of the students come to realize that they agree with feminist ideals and are less unwilling, at the end of the course, to call themselves feminists. Despite a trend of rising male enrollments, at this point in time, Dr. Orza states, "There is nothing that I don't present to these mixed groups that I would feel freer presenting to a class of all women."

At my request, in her current summer session of Psychology of Gender, (28 females, 11 males) Dr. Orza distributed a questionnaire asking students to rate, on a seven point scale, the value of her course as a general education option. The completed forms were returned directly to me, and, though anonymous, contained the name, sex, and age of each respondent. The thirty respondents range in age from 19 to 55; the median age in the class is 33. Of the thirty questionnaires returned, the average score was slightly above 6, designated as "very valuable" on the scale. Interestingly, when asked to write in more detail about why they rated the course as they did, seven students said that they felt that the course was so valuable that it should be required of all students. One female student

felt that the course should be required for all male students. There was no discernible difference in the scoring between male and female students. Of the seven students who volunteered that the course should be mandatory, two were male.

Dr. Orza believes, as do many women's studies instructors, that an influx of a greater variety of students enriches classroom instruction and that core inclusion has lent the course a broader appeal. A greater number of nontraditional students has generally upgraded the level of discourse, which has benefitted the younger students who haven't yet confronted issues of discrimination in the workplace or in the home. She has noticed, too, greater numbers of students from the sciences (particularly biology) and from business. She welcomes the chance to enlighten biology students, many of whom initially feel that sex roles are biologically determined. And in response to demand from business students, she has instituted a new course, Psychology of Women and Work. In general, Dr. Orza feels that the classroom dynamic has been greatly enhanced and that there will continue to be a demand for more sections of Psychology of Gender.

In respect to the other courses previously mentioned, enrollments have also increased, though the number of male students has not grown appreciably. Introduction to Women's Studies which in 1983-84, the year before the General Education Core was introduced, enrolled 28 female students, this year enrolled 40 female students. The enrollment in this course,

one of 31 options in the Interdisciplinary section designated as Culture, Society, and History, during the years it could be used as a core option, has averaged in the high twenties. The course has been regularly offered in the fall by a three person feminist team from different disciplines. It can be used for elective credit in education and English, as well as for core credit.

The English course to which I have alluded, Poetry of Women, is offered in a sequence of women-related literature courses and runs every other spring semester. Enrollment in this course has also increased appreciably. In the semester prior to its being offered as a core option, fall '83, Poetry of Women enrolled 17 students, 2 of them male. By spring, 1989, the same course had almost doubled in enrollment to 32 students, 3 of them male. Given the facts that the course is one of 17 options in the literature section of the core, can only be used otherwise for elective credit, and is exclusively focused on poetry, not the most popular of literary genres among students, I can only attribute the rise in course enrollment to core inclusion.

Out of the six core courses offered for credit in women's studies -- Introduction to Women's Studies, Psychology of Gender, Women (Sociology), Poetry of Women, Images of Women in Literature, and Women Writers to 1900 -- all have either held steady or increased in enrollment, some rather dramatically. In a time of decreasing liberal arts majors, this is certainly

encouraging.

Besides the obvious benefit of having the chance to reach other students than liberal arts majors -- students who might not otherwise have been exposed to a feminist liberal arts perspective -- and to encourage in these students a more pluralistic and egalitarian world view, the validation gained through core inclusion and the upsurge in enrollments have evidently led to heightened interest in women's studies among a variety of students. Since the General Education core was introduced, four new courses have been add successfully to the women's studies curriculum: Psychology of Women and Work, Dialogues for New Directions (aimed principally at nontraditional students), History of Women and Work, and Latin American Women Writers. In addition, Latin American Women Writers and History of Women have recently been approved as additional General Education options. And mini-lits in Minority Women Writers have also run successfully.

The benefits of core inclusion seem obvious. I would urge any of you who are in the process of core revision or core evaluation to begin arguing for the inclusion of your own women's studies courses in the General Education Core.