

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 413 856

HE 030 768

AUTHOR Musil, Caryn McTighe, Ed.
 TITLE National Assessment Study of Women's Studies Classes.
 INSTITUTION National Women's Studies Association.; Association of American Colleges, Washington, DC.
 SPONS AGENCY Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (ED), Washington, DC.
 PUB DATE 1992-11-14
 NOTE 28p.; For related documents, see ED 347 890 and ED 353 883.
 CONTRACT P116B90375
 PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143)
 EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
 DESCRIPTORS *College Curriculum; Critical Thinking; Cross Cultural Training; Cultural Awareness; *Curriculum Evaluation; Diversity (Institutional); Feminism; Higher Education; Instructional Materials; Lifelong Learning; Program Descriptions; Student Centered Curriculum; Teaching Models; Womens Education; *Womens Studies
 IDENTIFIERS Learning Communities

ABSTRACT

This final report on a national assessment study of what and how students learn in women's studies classes uses data from a three-year project that sought answers to key questions about women's studies curricula, feminist pedagogy, integrated and critical thinking, multiculturalism, what fosters learning communities, and how students integrate learning into their personal lives. Data were gathered from seven women's studies programs located at diverse educational institutions, whose faculty were trained in assessment methods by a national assessment team that functioned throughout the project as campus consultants. The study found that students felt that women's studies engaged them intellectually, made education a way of life, reestablished the centrality of teaching and student-centered learning, and helped them discover their own voices, engaged them in robust debate, and developed critical perspectives. Data also revealed that women's studies helped students understand different viewpoints and diverse people, and promoted the notion that they could and should actively shape their society. Three publications resulted from the project: "The Courage to Question: Women's Studies and Student Learning," "The Executive Summary of The Courage to Question," and "Students at the Center: Feminist Assessment." Appended to the report are further comments on the findings. (Author/JLS)

 * Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
 * from the original document. *

ED 413 856

Cover Sheet

[National Assessment Study of Women's Studies Classes]

Grantee Organization:

National Women's Studies Association
University of Maryland
College Park, MD 20742-1325

Grant Number:

P116B90375

Project Dates:

Starting Date: August 15, 1989
Ending Date: November 14, 1992
Number of Months: 36 plus a three month extension

Project Director:

Caryn McTighe Musil
Senior Research Associate
Association of American Colleges
1818 R Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20009
Telephone: (202) 387-3760

FIPSE Program Officer: Helene Scher

Grant Award:	Year 1:	\$ 74,089
	Year 2:	\$ 46,931
	Year 3:	\$ 73,057 (plus \$4,050 in unobligated funds)
	Total:	\$198,127

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

- This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
- Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

AE 030 768

Summary

As part of a national assessment study of what and how students learn in women's studies classes, seven women's studies programs located at diverse educational institutions gathered data in a three-year project that answered key questions about the women's studies curriculum, feminist pedagogy, integrated and critical thinking, multiculturalism, what fosters learning communities, and how students integrate learning into their personal lives. The faculty were trained in assessment methods by a National Assessment Team who functioned throughout the project as campus consultants. According to evidence from students, women's studies engages them intellectually and makes education a way of life; it re-establishes the centrality of teaching and student-centered learning; it helps students discover their own voices, engage in robust debate, and develop critical perspectives. Importantly, too, our data revealed that women's studies helped students understand different viewpoints and diverse people as well as promoting the notion that they can and should actively shape their society. Three publications resulted from the grant activities.

Caryn McTighe Musil
Senior Research Associate
Association of American Colleges
1818 R Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20009
(202) 387-3760

Title of publications:

The Courage to Question: Women's Studies and Student Learning
(released June, 1992)

The Executive Summary of The Courage to Question
(released August, 1992, and funded by the Association of
American Colleges)

Students at the Center: Feminist Assessment
(released January, 1993)

Executive Summary

As part of a national assessment study of what and how students learn in women's studies classes, seven women's studies programs located at deliberately diverse educational institutions gathered data in a three-year project that answered key questions about the women's studies curriculum, feminist pedagogy, integrated and critical thinking, multiculturalism, what fosters learning communities, and how students integrate learning into their personal lives. The faculty were trained in assessment methods by a National Assessment Team who functioned throughout the project as campus consultants. What surprised us most about our three-year research project was the discovery that women's studies already has been doing what the vast majority of educational reform reports are now recommending. Instead of being at the periphery of academia justifying its legitimacy to skeptics, women's studies, our study suggests, should be at the center as one model of a genuine learning community whose success in motivating student learning is irrefutable.

Students tell us through data in our study that women's studies engages them intellectually and makes education a way of life--not merely a collection of course credits. It re-establishes the centrality of teaching and student-centered learning. Students talk of finding their own voices and being empowered through the process as learners. Instead of stifling debate, our study showed that there is more robust debate both in and as a result of women's studies classes than is reported by students in non-women's studies classes. Repeatedly students talked of how women's studies helped teach them to be questioners, to develop critical perspectives, and to learn how to make discriminating judgments. They also say women's studies has helped them understand different viewpoints and diverse people, many commenting on how much more attention there is in women's studies to multiculturalism than in non-women's studies courses. Men who take women's studies are not subjected to the "male-bashing" that women's studies is sometimes accused of, but instead make more women friends in women's studies classes than they do in non-women's studies classes and report a heightened awareness of gender as a defining category. Finally, women's studies promotes the notion that students can and should become active citizens engaged in shaping the kind of society they live in at both the macro-level and the micro-level. Research on women's studies graduates suggests that is exactly what they do.

The project design for "The Courage to Question" included two representatives from each of the participating women's studies programs joining in a series of national workshops on assessment during the first year of the grant. At each of these meetings, the National Assessment Team worked one on one with the different sites and made formal presentations about assessment, introducing quantitative and qualitative methodologies, the wide variety of

approaches to assessment, and some guidelines for creating instruments.

During the first year, each site was to consult widely on their campuses to articulate the educational goals of their women's studies programs. They were to include in their conversations and their eventual program goals consideration of at least four areas: the knowledge base, critical thinking, personal growth, and pedagogy. On the basis of the formulated, consensual program goals, each campus was then to choose what we came to call "passionate questions," questions that were compelling for their communities to answer at this point in their development. While there was much discussion at the national level of common areas of concern, each campus determined its own set of questions, defined a campus-specific assessment plan to gather data, and eventually wrote up the results and accompanying analysis in the form of a case study which became a chapter in The Courage to Question: Women's Studies and Student Learning. The cumulative effect of these seven discrete and context specific studies is to offer a textured national profile of student learning.

The second year was spent gathering data on each campus through the variety of assessment instruments developed in the first year. At the end of that period each site wrote its preliminary draft of its findings which were read and commented on by others in the project. The third year for the sites involved collecting additional data in some cases, refining their analyses, and writing a final manuscript to be included in The Courage to Question. Within their programs, they also began to make changes based on evidence from their assessment project and all except one campus integrated assessment into their yearly programmatic goals. All seven campuses praised the project for helping them to articulate educational goals for their programs, leading to more cohesive communities on their campuses, and providing them with more evidence than they had ever had before about just what their program was achieving for students.

During the life of the project, a parallel story was unfolding. In addition to the story about student learning was the equally compelling story of how we went about answering our own most passionate questions in the project. The narrative describing the process during which a model of feminist assessment emerged is the heart of the last publication, Students at the Center: Feminist Assessment, which was written not by the site representative but by the National Assessment Team and the Project Director. At the initial planning meeting of the National Assessment Team, they decided to be attentive to that complementary narrative throughout the first two years, periodically writing about our observations and always making it a centerpiece of our work time together.

While we ultimately found many things in common between our assessment model and that of many assessment models advocated by the American Association of Higher Education, our model was distinguished, Pat Hutchings argues, by "the way these principles

have been arrived at. Whereas many campus programs have been shaped largely by pragmatic concerns, feminist assessment is shaped by a coherent system of values and by feminist theory." In elucidating what the guiding principles are of feminist assessment, Joan Shapiro describes feminist assessment being guided by the following principles: questioning almost everything related to evaluation; being student-centered, participatory, and deeply affected by its context or institutional culture; integrating an assessment approach compatible with feminist activist beliefs; being decentered; being heavily shaped by the power of feminist pedagogy; basing its assessment on a body of feminist scholarship and feminist research methodology; and finally appreciating values.

Jill Mattock Tarule and Mary Kay Thompson Tetreault suggest in their chapter in Students at the Center that the resistance to traditional externally imposed assessment methods produced a model that ultimately provided much more information about student learning. Referring to "the narrative-rich dialogues" that characterized the project, they argue that such a model is built on the notion of exploring relationships between people, between people and ideas, and between systems. As such it reveals rich information about the developmental stages in learning and about the kind of communities we create for that learning to take root.

The authors of Educating the Majority: Women Challenge Tradition in Higher Education claim that the age of simple adjustments to accommodate women is over. It is time, they argue, for major intellectual and institutional paradigm shifts. Robert Hughes' Time magazine article on multicultural paradigm shifts warns, "In the world that is coming, if you can't navigate differences, you've had it." Those paradigm shifts and differences will necessitate crossing the boundaries of gender and race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, religion and culture, language and class. To reconstruct our educational institutions, we will need to abandon defensive postures and summon our collective powers to envision and implement a new way of thinking and learning. We hope "The Courage to Question" and the publications emerging from it help stimulate conversation and commitment to that end.

Body of Report

A. Project Overview

The project started as an assessment grant with ten participating institutions representing a spectrum of institutional diversity in higher education. A National Assessment Team was attached to the project to train women's studies faculty in assessment and to function as consultants to the campuses for the life of the project and as advisors to the Project Director. Ultimately they authored the final publication on feminist assessment.

Through a series of national workshops followed up by extensive campus conversations, each program articulated on paper its program goals, defined a set of questions growing out of those goals a program wanted to explore, and created an assessment design to gather the necessary information. One campus dropped out after the first workshop because it was clear to them the project would involve a serious time commitment and they had other more pressing priorities. A second never actually participated in anything beyond attending one half of the first workshop and dropped out by the end of the first year. A third dropped out after being actively engaged the first year, but when no graduate research associate was available the second year to continue coordinating the work, they dropped out. The other seven, however, remained deeply involved in the three-year project. The research each discovered in their program assessments are best expressed in the case studies that each one wrote for The Courage to Question.

Along side the story of what we found out about student learning was the equally compelling story of how we went about answering our own most passionate questions in the project. The narrative describing the process during which a model of feminist assessment emerged is the heart of the last publication, Students at the Center: Feminist Assessment, which was written not by the site representatives but by the National Assessment Team and the Project Director.

Except for losing some of our sites, the project was a great success. It generated far more new data on student learning and on women's studies than had ever before been available. In doing so, it shattered unfounded stereotypes about women's studies and revealed the discipline as possessing insights, theories, and a pedagogy that suggest non-women's studies faculty have valuable lessons they might learn from women's studies practitioners. The project also trained significant numbers of people in an assessment model that can be used as a genuine tool for improving teaching, refining educational goals, and implementing educational reforms.

B. Purpose

The grant sought to find out just what students were learning in women's studies classes. This was an important investigation for

several reasons. Many who taught women's studies had experienced a very different student response to women's studies classes than the national profile of the disenchanting, passive, less intellectual and more materialistic student that was so popularized in the eighties. Our students seemed intellectually engaged, personally transformed, and socially committed to being change agents to improve their society. We wanted to see if our impressions were borne out by systematic examination and if those examinations could uncover more about what exactly produces such engaged student learning.

We wanted to find that out because we in women's studies, like the larger higher education community, wanted to be part of efforts to improve the quality of undergraduate education. We believed that we might be doing something in women's studies that could be of use to our colleagues in other departments. The student-centered, participatory pedagogy in women's studies had long distinguished the field. What effect did it have on students and how important was it that the pedagogy was applied to the particular subject matter of women's studies?

The last half of the eighties also spawned a pointed attack on women's studies specifically which sought to present the discipline as "soft," "touchy-feely," "ideological propaganda," "man-hating," and without serious intellectual merit. Women's studies was, along with others, seen as responsible for politicizing what had always been, according to some, the "apolitical, neutral world of academia." It was also seen by some critics as weakening the intellectual fiber of the university, catering as it did to "mere special interests." We wanted to look behind those facile phrases and familiar stereotyped characterizations to see if there was any merit to such accusations.

Finally, the project sought to focus the attention of women's studies programs on articulating just what their program goals were at this juncture in the development of this young but vibrant and expanding field. Was there a knowledge base in women's studies and if so, what was it and how would you know if students were absorbing its most vital concepts? In what ways was women's studies developing critical skills in their students and what were the conditions before such critical skills could be achieved? What were some of the educational goals for students' personal growth in women's studies? What kind of model of intellectual and personal developmental did women's studies encourage? What kind of links between the personal and the intellectual did women's studies foster? Finally, we wanted to figure out what the teaching goals were that guided classroom dynamics and determined how to structure courses and assignments. What was feminist pedagogy anyway and did it make a difference in how students learned?

Some answers to these questions are found in all three publications. The shortest response is that research showed that women's studies classes were already doing what many educational reformers in the eighties said higher education had to do. Instead

of being at the periphery justifying its legitimacy to skeptics, women's studies should be at the center as one model of a genuine learning community whose success with students is irrefutable.

C. Background and Origins

Because women's studies is such a young field whose emergence was rarely viewed neutrally either by its supporters or its detractors, exploring its impact on students, faculty, or institutional life has been part and parcel of women's studies short history. Such inquiries have helped answer questions from a curious public as well as guide the intellectual and programmatic development of the field. It was not until the end of the eighties, however, that it became possible to do the kind of focused assessment study of student learning represented by "The Courage to Question" project.

The first decade of the discipline, from say 1969-1979, was consumed almost entirely by the whirl of demands typical when a new intellectual area of inquiry is defined. Attention turned primarily to developing new courses, creating academic programs of study, establishing the validity of the field by producing scholarship, establishing journals and presses, creating a market for feminist scholarship in university presses, or organizing within professional disciplinary associations. On campuses in that decade, women's studies faculty also invested a great deal of energy in meeting the needs of students, especially women students who often found the campus climate unwelcoming. Most of the explanation, evaluation, and defense of the field's legitimacy was made either at a local institutional level by departments evaluating new courses and committees evaluating promotion and tenure level; or it was made at an organizational level such as the MLA when it created the study of women as one of its association's divisions. Some of the earliest research assessment of women's studies in the seventies looked at attitudinal changes in students toward sex stereotyping, though these studies were few in number.

Although the second decade of women's studies continued to develop feminist scholarship, expand the number of women's studies programs, and increase the programmatic offerings, it was also a decade characterized by a new investment in curriculum transformation. Realizing the importance not only of having an academic locus to generate and teach women's studies, we also recognized the importance of integrating the new scholarship on women and gender into regular non-women's studies courses. Most of the early studies from the eighties looked at the changes that occurred in faculty as they themselves were exposed to the critiques of knowledge posed by feminist scholarship or interrogated unexamined assumptions of traditional disciplines in the light of feminist scholarship. The work of Mary Kay Thompson Tetreault, Susan Van Dyne, Marilyn Schuster, and Peggy McIntosh led to the articulation of what came to be called feminist phase theory. The focus of such articles, while giving a profile of the intellectual progression of a person being introduced to feminist

scholarship, was principally on the faculty.

By the end of the eighties, the legitimacy and even the intellectual leadership of feminist scholarship was firmly established, though still insistently called into question by a vocal minority. The national highly publicized attacks on the field by such figures as then Secretary of Education William Bennett kept women's studies people in a defensive posture despite our hard-won academic credibility by most of our peers. By then, it was also clear that women's studies programs were not a passing fad in academia but had grown in the numbers, while also increasing in terms of majors and minors. Women's studies was also an important player in the larger curriculum reform of the eighties that re-examined the traditional curriculum in terms of its omissions, inaccuracies, and incompleteness. It was the very success of the curriculum transformation movement that spurred intense attacks from people such as Mr. Bennett. Although the focus was on the undergraduate curriculum, graduate programs in women's studies began to appear in increasing numbers as the demands for training was fed from below by students exposed to women's studies at the undergraduate level and from an external academic market that needed faculty with credentials in this burgeoning area of scholarship.

In such a climate of academic success and stability for women's studies that was nonetheless punctuated by renewed, pointed critiques by some traditionalists, it was the appropriate historical moment for women's studies to examine in a systematic way what and how students were learning in women's studies courses. By doing so, we could answer many of our own questions about our field and adapt our programs accordingly. On the basis of what we discovered, we could also present to the public an accurate picture of what was really happening in women's studies classes. Underneath our inquiry was the sense that our students were deeply, personally and intellectually engaged in the subject matter, that classes were taught in an interactive way thus involving students in debate and critical thinking, and that students took what they were learning in class and applied it outside of class. Our assessment project would help us see if our perceptions were accurate.

The organization to which the grant was awarded, the National Women's Studies Association, was the logical place at the time to locate the grant. It had the staff, the resources, and the mission that meant the grant would be a centerpiece for NWSA and a primary focus of its attention as the national organization representing women's studies. At the seven participating institutions, which were deliberately chosen for their variation in size, location, student populations served, many programs did have to make adjustments to accommodate the demands of doing a three-year assessment grant on campus. It was an enormous help if the administration of the specific campus gave additional support to the women's studies program in the assessment effort. Not all did. Some, however, attached a research associate who was a graduate

student to the women's studies program, others attached work study or expanded clerical support in terms of personnel or computers. For those who did not receive additional support in-house, the task was much more difficult for the individuals coordinating it and consumed more of their professional time.

Halfway through the grant, the Project Director resigned as Executive Director of NWSA but contractually agreed to everyone's satisfaction to continue as Project Director through to the grant's completion. Her full expectation was that she would do so with the full support of NWSA's National Office and national board. Six months later, however, the financial situation at NWSA grew grim, the staff was reduced to two full time people with no clerical support experienced either in women's studies, publishing, or production, and the new Executive Director had inappropriately been using NWSA's credit card for personal purchases which in June, 1991, affected the administrative support the grant was to receive from the National Office for one of our national workshops. Other administrative inefficiencies during that period occurred which made it more difficult to administer the grant through the National Office. Little if any oversight of the administrative and financial mismanagement was exercised by NWSA's Executive Committee or its national board, despite requests from a variety of sources both within the FIPSE project and without.

When July financial reports indicated that NWSA would be in debt by the end of the summer, the Project Director feared the completion of the grant would be jeopardized if it remained in NWSA. She therefore approached the Association of American Colleges with whom NWSA had previously collaborated on a national study of the major which had led to several joint publications. The Project Director and AAC explored the possibility of making AAC the fiscal agent while still defining NWSA as a collaborative partner. Ultimately that solution was not possible because NWSA refused to agree. NWSA did, however, agree to a compromise worked out by the Project Director. NWSA agreed to the collaborative publishing arrangement with AAC, to housing the project offices at AAC, and to reallocating money for support staff so a part-time project associate could be attached to the project at AAC.

As the Project Director feared, before the end of the third year, all NWSA staff except an Office Manager had been laid off and the Association was in serious debt. Had the Project Director not restructured the terms of the grant, housed it within a stable organization with the necessary publication expertise, and reallocated staffing so the project could sustain itself largely independent of NWSA, the three publications produced in the grant's last year would not have been completed. It is important for Project Directors to reassess every year of the grant the kind of external and internal support they need in order to be sure they can meet their grant obligations.

NWSA's new director who had mismanaged both the administration of the National Office and its funds also repeatedly intervened

inappropriately in "The Courage to Question" to create obstacles which hampered the administration of the grant. This involved everything from budgetary matters to computer support to her refusal to cooperate with publicizing The Courage to Question at NWSA's national conference where the project's first publication was released. Rather than being a source of support, NWSA's Director, as the Association's key representative, caused problems rather than solving them, added impediments rather than eliminating them. NWSA's national board ignored all requests from the Project Director for assistance. As a result, it was an almost intolerable working situation for the Project Director, and it slowed down the progress of the grant. While FIPSE cannot and should not take responsibility for resolving personnel difficulties within projects, when the completion of the project is threatened because FIPSE's own administrative guidelines for grants are not adhered to, it is crucial that FIPSE use its powers to help resolve issues to ensure the completion of grants it awards. There were two points during the difficult third year of the grant in which the intervention of FIPSE Program Staff was absolutely essential. The first helped create a climate that made NWSA's Director more inclined to compromise about collaborating with AAC; the second helped resolve a budgetary logjam and inappropriate administrative interference in the project from NWSA's Director.

D. Project Description:

The project was designed to involve ten different campuses in campus-specific assessment projects to examine student learning in women's studies classes. To guarantee the expertise women's studies people would need to assess their programs, the project had as part of its design a National Assessment Team that functioned as consultants throughout the three years.

There were three national meetings for the ten campuses and their representatives in Year #1. At each of the three meetings, the National Assessment Team made formal presentations about assessment, introducing women's studies faculty to quantitative and qualitative methodologies, the wide variety of approaches to assessment, and some guidelines for creating instruments. During the first half of the first year, the focus of discussion in the women's studies community on campuses was on defining specific program goals at each campus, largely focusing on at least four areas: the knowledge base, critical thinking, personal growth, and pedagogy. Once the program goals had been agreed upon at each of the campuses, they then turned to deciding what three questions were the most urgent to pose about those goals. Once those questions had been determined, each campus could then decide how to answer them. By the end of the first year, each campus had designed its own campus specific assessment plan.

During the second year, most of the activity was campus-based. This was the year when the bulk of the data was gathered that

provided the basis for the case studies that eventually appeared in The Courage to Question: Women's Studies and Student Learning. The National Assessment Team members who were each assigned to pair up with two campuses as special consultants, provided both written and phone consultations. Most campuses chose to take advantage of the opportunity to have a member of the assessment team do a site visit and consultation. There was only one national workshop in June of the second year at which campuses presented their preliminary case study in writing. At least one and usually two assessment consultants gave written responses to each report and the Project Director wrote extensive comments about each of the reports.

The third year was largely devoted to writing up the results of the assessment efforts. Some campuses used the fall semester to gather one more semester of data. A few brought in one of the assessment experts for a site consultation. All the sites were to hand in their final reports in January for a June publication date. Again the Project Director who was functioning as the editor of the volume read each of the reports, now called chapters, and asked for final revisions. The Project Director and Project Associate worked closely with the campuses giving whatever support, encouragement, and gentle nudging it could to be sure all seven were included in the final report.

Assumptions: As Project Director, I assumed that women's studies faculty did not possess the assessment expertise they needed to do an assessment project. But I assumed that they were smart enough to learn how to do it if they were taught. Using the women's studies model that suggests we are all learners, the faculty involved became the students to the National Assessment Team. I also assumed that to be effective, the National Assessment Team needed to know not simply assessment, but something about women's studies and feminist theory. It led to an immediate sophistication and depth in the rich dialogues that took place during national workshops together. And it saved a lot of time. No one had to pause to explain how women's studies programs were structured, what feminist pedagogy was, or the often hostile or neutral environment in which women's studies faculty did their work.

I also assumed that there could not be any single instrument or single assessment design that we would impose on all ten participating sites. Instead, we opted for campus-specific questions, campus-specific assessment designs, and case studies in the published version. We all had some concern, especially the National Assessment Team, that we might not have enough comparative data that would result in our ability to suggest a national profile of student learning. The deeper we all got into the project, however, the more certain we became of the importance of context in determining both the kind and the meaning of each assessment project. Just as there were no universal students, there were no universal women's studies programs.

Through the very specificity of each report, nonetheless, we could form a more accurate and textured understanding of some of the

learning patterns that came to characterize women's studies programs across the country. Having done the case studies, I have also found it is possible to go back into them and reconfigure their findings to reveal all sorts of information. While The Courage to Question is organized as a series of case studies, The Executive Summary is organized by key questions typically posed of women's studies programs. It reshuffles the organizational pattern and compares the responses of several campuses' data to specific common questions.

We assumed that there would be a certain messiness about our process. This wasn't a project that would attempt to be neat, box all the questions within secure borders, and end with a sense of finality. Quite the contrast. The feminist assessment model we developed has become but an initial phase in a long-range commitment to on-going assessment. On almost every one of our participating campuses, it set into motion structures and commitments that promise to yield vital new information on student learning, teaching, and campus climates.

We also were convinced that each program needed to claim ownership of the assessment model. We didn't believe externally imposed assessment plans were either long lasting, or especially penetrating in the kind of information they generate. Our method for guaranteeing that ownership was to opt for campus-specific assessment designs, which meant each campus decided what it wanted to investigate and how it planned to go about investigating it. The result was an unusually rich variety of assessment instruments, approaches, and methods. We also built into the design the imperative to go back to each campus and have extensive conversations among their own academic communities. Before they could create program goals, they needed to have had the input from a wide group of people. In the process, people began to realize it was indeed "their" assessment plan, "their" questions, "their" program.

Connected to the notion that campuses needed to claim and take responsibility for their individual assessment plans was the importance of broad based involvement of a spectrum of people throughout the life of the project. It meant they needed to involve not simply the two representatives from each of the campuses but other women's studies faculty. And not just faculty but students and staff. And not just current students but alums. And not just women's studies people, but non-women's studies faculty and students.

Finally, I assumed as Project Director that just as the project's title suggested, everything about the grant would probably be called into question. And it was. And that was healthy. The first meeting was largely spent answering a series of questions about the grant, questions that raised issues about the structure, the audience, the political consequences, the political use made of the evidence, the context of the current assessment movement and renewed attacks on women's studies and feminist scholarship, the

methodology--almost everything. That critical questioning remained throughout the grant and ultimately gave it the sharper focus I think it developed over the course of the three years. It also mirrored the kind of critical engagement found in most women's studies classes.

E. Project Results

The project had many kinds of learners: students, faculty, the assessment team consultants, the larger public. All benefitted from involvement in "The Courage to Question;" all enlarged their understanding of what it was that students were learning when they took women's studies courses; and all gained greater appreciation for how valuable women's studies could be for larger educational goals we are striving for in our efforts to improve the quality of undergraduate liberal education.

Students were engaged in the project in a variety of ways. Several became primary researchers in campus-based projects. One graduate student, for instance, did the ethnographic study comparing women's studies and non-women's studies classrooms at the University of Colorado. She will be using her research as a central piece in her dissertation. An undergraduate student at Hunter College organized a series of focus groups of both current students and alums. Her interviews provided a rich source of data for the Hunter report and so inspired the student that she plans to go on to graduate school. Both of these students were invited as participants to our national workshops which provided them with an even broader mentoring experience. Many women's studies majors at Oberlin participated in their peer interview data collection and at Lewis and Clark students were part of the campus-based research team that oversaw and analyzed data collections there.

Students were also very involved as on site consultants, participating in the very important series of conversations during the first year that led to the formulation of women's studies program goals. Alums found themselves, in many cases for the first time, being sought after by their undergraduate school for their reflections on their learning as an undergraduates. This was done through phone interviews, questionnaires, and focus groups. All campuses who contacted alums now have a data base to continue communication and intend to do so regularly in a variety of forms. Many are looking to create more longitudinal information on the life choices of their graduates.

What students were actually learning in and as a result of women's studies classes was, of course, the heart of the research in The Courage to Question. Thousands of students described what their educational experiences were through questionnaires, telephone interviews, focus groups, peer interviews. The nature of their intellectual journeys were revealed by close readings of student journals, student papers, examinations, and portfolios. In the case studies in The Courage to Question, those student voices speak

with a clarity and eloquence that undoubtedly will affect those who read the volume.

Faculty who participated in the project became learners as well. All of us women's studies faculty certainly became more conversant about assessment and many among us confident assessors. One of the most fruitful by-products of the project is the way programs have integrated assessment into the overall plan for program and faculty development.

The Assessment Team learned from the women's studies faculty and from each other, playing off each other's expertise and gaining deeper understandings about the intersection of feminist theory with assessment theory.

Under the terms of the agreement between NWSA and AAC, each organization will be responsible for disseminating information about the project and its publications. NWSA has advertised the books in some regional newsletters and their national newsletter and intends to do some publicity at their June conference. I have been invited to do two presentations at AAHE's Assessment Forum in June: one a workshop focusing on the student-centered mode of gathering data; the other a panel looking at how an assessment designed for a specific discipline can be useful both within the discipline and without. In January, I participated in two sessions in which I drew material from The Courage to Question to examine the relation of women's studies to diversity. Our research findings echo those of Sandy Astin's in What Matters in College in which he found that students who had taken women's studies were more tolerant, believed that racial problems had not yet been solved, and were more committed to the notion of social justice.

Several of the National Assessment Team members have made presentations based on the project and especially on their book, Students at the Center: Feminist Assessment. I suspect that the same will be true of faculty at the various participating campuses.

AAC is working with me to do additional publicity in the form of press releases, targeted mailings, review copies to academic journals, op ed pieces, and an effort to place some articles in mainstream rather than scholarly journals: Seventeen, Ms., Working Women, Essence, etc. We also will make an effort to encourage cooperation of the Public Affairs Offices at the participating campuses. Carolyn Mooney of The Chronicle of Higher Education has called saying she wants to review the publications we have sent her and we plan to send copies to columnists like Judy Mann and Ellen Goodman. Many of us in the project also have connections with some prominent women media figures whom we would like to send our publications to in hopes that the results of our work might receive attention in a more public arena. The difficulty in following through on these plans is when there is no longer any paid staff. I am confident some of these ambitious plans will be implemented, but it is not clear all of them will be.

F. Summary and Conclusions:

To coordinate a multiple campus project like this one was challenging, but its national impact broader and the diversity of institutions and students gave the project a cumulative power and incisiveness beyond what any one campus could have possibly revealed. It was very important to keep in regular contact with the different sites through national meetings, site visits, memos, phone calls. Having the National Assessment Team members choose two campuses apiece to which they acted as a mentor was beneficial, especially for the campuses having difficulties along the way.

If it were possible, before the longer proposal was submitted to FIPSE, it would have been better to have gotten firm commitments from participating institutions to provide serious in-kind support for the work of the project. Although we had secured the interest of each of the women's studies programs, I did not try to negotiate specific promises from the administration for support. Too much of that had to be negotiated after the fact and by that time, some women's studies programs no longer had anything to barter with and therefore got very positive verbal support for the project and an enthusiastic approval--as long as it didn't cost the institution any money.

G. Appendices

1. How FIPSE was helpful and could be more helpful.

The pre-proposal advice and consultation from my FIPSE Program Officer, Connie Cook, was invaluable. She was especially helpful in the time between the invitation to submit a formal proposal in February and the final award of the grant in August. She helped me focus with sharper attention on a single issue, refine and simplify an overambitious initial project design, and lead me through the period in May during which I had to answer additional questions about the grant, some of which represented the very kind of misconception about women's studies that the grant ultimately dispelled.

Throughout the period of the grant the FIPSE Program Officers were very supportive of the work of the grant, returning calls immediately, giving advice over the phone, problem solving and clarifying grant requirements when necessary. In my case where there was such administrative difficulty during the third year with the original fiscal agent for the grant, the intervention of the FIPSE Program Officer and ultimately of FIPSE's Deputy Director was absolutely crucial to the eventual success of the grant. Had not such an intervention occurred, I might be mired still in the administrative chaos that was such an impediment to the smooth running of the grant and so unnecessarily time consuming to the Project Director.

The Directors Meetings were an important networking opportunity although there were no other women's studies grants which limited networking within subject areas. Still, there were such interesting educational innovations and such a commitment to students in so many of the projects that it was inspiring.

It was difficult that I had four different Program Officers in three years. Those personnel changes are unavoidable, but it did create some difficulties in orienting each new Program Officer to the project and giving continuity in overall support. Happily the last Program Officer had read the original grant when it had been proposed in 1989 so the cohesiveness between Program Officer #1 and Program Officer #4 was strong even though they were separated by two intervening Program Officers.

Sometimes it slowed the project down when FIPSE's Office and the Grants Office moved at such different speeds, yet we were not to move on program items without approval from the Grants Office. Every year the final approval for an August 14 grant didn't come until sometime in September. Requests for reallocation of funds or funds for disseminating information about the project took as long as four months with the approval coming after the requested conference had already taken place. All my interactions with my Grants Officers (I had two of those) were cordial and I always felt the Grants Officer was being cooperative. I also had the feeling,

however, that each one was woefully overburdened with more grants than were possible to administer in a timely fashion.

2. Recommendations about what should the FIPSE staff consider in reviewing future proposals in women's studies or women's studies assessment projects?

STUDENT LEARNING:

Relationships between late adolescent student identity development and gender:

How will the differences between adolescent identity formation in young women versus that in young men affect learning strategies in the classroom? What difference does it make when such a development of the self occurs in all-female or predominantly female classes? What is the relation between the development of the self and the emerging notion of community? How does peer pressure affect student learning? What is the relationship between peer pressure and the numbers of women who go into the fields of science and engineering? How can insights from women's studies encourage women and girls to pursue those fields, and others, from which they have long been discouraged?

Further study on the new evidence that indicates a significant percentage of women's studies students (as compared to non-women's studies students) discuss course content outside the classroom:

What are the implications of this regarding student learning? How has such intellectual ferment expanded the boundaries of the classroom and established ongoing learning communities? How can we understand more about how such communities function to clarify ideas, enhance critical thinking, and develop voice? If students are taking the conversations outside the classroom structure and into their relationship (for example, with family, friends, and coworkers), what effects do these conversations have on those relationships? How do the conversations encourage learning in others? In particular communities where there may be greater reluctance to be part of the educational community, can these conversations bridge the gulf between the two?

RETENTION:

Women's studies students say their classes enhance their friendships and give them a sense of community. Evidence also suggests that students stay in school when they feel connected, are committed to their learning community, and share a sense of values. What is the correlation between retention and women's studies? Will future research verify preliminary evidence that there is a positive relationship between students who take women's studies classes and retention rates, especially for populations more at risk? Are there certain populations within institutions that are more likely to benefit from women's studies?

REMEDIAL WORK AND WOMEN'S STUDIES:

Research on the possibility that women's studies would be a productive bridge course for remedial students because of women's studies encouragement of voice and development of critical thinking and self-esteem.

How could an institution best structure a remedial program that uses women's studies courses to encourage students intellectually and enhance their sense of personal worth? How can women's studies form new collaborative partnerships with other disciplines to meet the goals of liberal arts education in student populations that need remedial work? Are there important insights from women's studies about voice, critical thinking, and self-esteem that should be incorporated into courses designed for remedial students?

COMMUTING STUDENTS:

The implications to our educational communities of our research indicating that women's studies students develop a greater number of--and closer friendships than students in other classes.

In a period of increasingly mobile populations, the majority of whom are older and have families and additional outside demands, how can women's studies help foster positive learning communities? Can the development of such communities help break down the isolation of commuting students? How can these friendships be sustained over a period of time to include group study, mentoring, and community development? How can the development of such learning communities help provide a source of support and reinforcement to commuting students who may encounter some resistance at home to the new ways of thinking inspired by a liberal education.

Relationship between women's studies students and their sense of social responsibility and citizen involvement.

Can we follow women's studies students in a longitudinal manner to examine the extent of their work in areas of social change? What kinds of curricular activities--internships, community-based research projects, or issue-oriented assignments--can enhance students' sense of greater responsibility for the society at large? What kinds of co-curricular programming--health fairs, community-wide symposiums, community-campus partnership projects--can do the same? How important is the larger institutional culture to instilling the notion of social responsibility?

PEDAGOGY:

Impact of women's studies pedagogical methods.

What are the best ways to create strategies for optimal learning experiences? How can women's studies strengthen its own pedagogy while motivating other disciplines to adopt a pedagogy that creates a similar sense of engaged learning? What does feminist pedagogy have in common with other student-centered, participatory pedagogies?

Relation of pedagogy to emotionally charged exchanges?

Has women's studies discovered effective ways of handling emotionally charged issues in the classroom? What is the role of

a professor in educating such exchanges? How can other disciplines both benefit from and contribute to that growing body of research in classroom dynamics? How can student become participants in exploring the story over time of their own resistance to knowledge inconvenient for them to know? How can we understand better the benefits and constraints of disclosure both for faculty and students in women's studies classes? How does the very subject of women's studies--and its link to an emotion/affective style of learning--affect what students actually remember about their courses?

Relation of feminist pedagogy to discussions of difference and multiculturalism.

With an increasingly diverse student body nationally, what has women's studies learned about different cultural learning styles and how to capitalize on those difference to improve student learning? How can it and other areas such as ethnic studies, anthropology, or international studies combine insights to forge a pedagogy of diversity for the future? Are certain voices privileged in the classroom? What do silences actually mean in the classroom, and how can we best measure the meaning of talk?

WOMEN'S STUDIES CURRICULUM:

Projects exploring the differences between the interdisciplinary core curriculum in women's studies and that of cross-listed courses.

What are the correlations between interdisciplinary core courses in women's studies and cross-listed courses offered through traditional departments? What are their intellectual and pedagogical differences? Do they accomplish separate but complementary functions in the curriculum? Are courses in the core curriculum primarily responsible for creating a women's studies student culture that sustains personalized learning, or do cross-listed courses serve the same purpose? Do most students come initially to women's studies through the core courses or through cross-listed courses?



TO: Caryn McTighe Musil
FROM: Pat Hutchings
RE: FIPSE project evaluation
DATE: February 1, 1993

Board of Directors

Chair
Blenda J. Wilson
California State University,
Northridge

Chair-Elect
Carol A. Cartwright
Kent State University

Vice Chair
Helen S. Astin
University of California,
Los Angeles

Past Chair
Norman C. Francis
Xavier University of
Louisiana

Lisa E. Baker
Western Michigan University

John N. Gardner
University of South Carolina,
Columbia

Beverly Guy-Sheftall
Spelman College

Judith E. Lanier
Michigan State University

Dan M. Martin
The John D. and Catherine T.
MacArthur Foundation

Laura I. Rendon
Arizona State University

James C. Renick
George Mason University

David A. Sanchez
Los Alamos National
Laboratory

Arnold R. Shore
Council for Aid to Education

Shirley H. Showalter
Goshen College

Tessa (Martinez) Tagle
Miami-Dade Community College,
Medical Center Campus

P. Michael Timpane
Teachers College,
Columbia University

Sheila Tobias
Tucson, Arizona

Philip Uri Treisman
University of Texas at Austin

President
Russell Edgerton

Let me begin this final report, Caryn, by recalling my response to your original invitation (was it three years ago?) to be part of your FIPSE project team. I was eager to sign on, as you note in your opening chapter in Students at the Center, because I saw the project as a chance to develop principles and practices that would be effective not only in women's studies but in other contexts as well; because the kind of assessment devised by women's studies programs would likely be the very kinds that many of us who had been watching the assessment movement thought likely to be most useful. That is indeed what has happened.

What I'd like to do in this final report is to comment on the effectiveness and the effects of the project, both in its substance and its mechanisms. You are my first audience, Caryn (you and your colleagues), but I have in mind readers at FIPSE as well, especially in my final point.

I. The Character of Project Evaluation

It seems appropriate to begin with a brief account of my role in the project and of how we (I suppose I mean the National Assessment Team) thought about project evaluation. A central insight about evaluation in the last decade is the relative uselessness of the "man-in-the-white-coat" model. The idea of evaluation done externally, scientifically, by a disinterested, objective observer is pretty well behind us, the sense being that 1) it's not really possible and 2) it doesn't accomplish much.

The "new model" is rather of participatory evaluation, of consultation with "stakeholders," of explicit attention to context and politics, of negotiation.... These are points, not at all incidentally, that overlap very clearly with those in Joan Shapiro's chapter in Students at the Center, where she lays out the principles of feminist assessment. They are also the principles by which we conducted the evaluation of this project. The role I could most usefully serve, I think we learned, was not to sit back and quietly observe but to enter into discussion, to consult with campus participants, to work with everyone involved in whatever ways I could in order to contribute to the goals of the project.

That said, I would also say that I saw my particular (and more distinctive) contribution in terms of context setting and "outside" perspective. I'm not a complete stranger to women's studies, but it's notable that I've never been part of a women's studies program; more importantly, I have been involved in monitoring and studying the assessment movement in its broadest possible manifestations, from state house to campus, from the music department to the general education program.

Thus I was perhaps more struck than most of the NATs with the similarities between the methods and insights of this project and those that were emerging in other settings: the reliance on multiple methods, the resolve to involve students and really listen to them, the valuing of "messy" qualitative data, the need to be clear (and become yet more clear) about goals....But I was also, increasingly, struck by some differences between feminist assessment (as we eventually began calling it) and assessment in other arenas. For, as I indicate in my chapter in Students at the Center, I believe that feminist assessment is more consistently and persistently driven by values--social and educational--than is typically the case in most fields on most campuses, and that women's studies has, in this way (as well as in its particulars),

something to teach the rest of the disciplines. My chapter elaborates this point and says much of what I would otherwise say in this evaluation report. I assume there's no need to repeat it here.

To conclude this point: my role as evaluator was a participatory one. I took it to be my job to pass along lessons from the larger assessment movement and to examine insights from this project in the light of insights gained beyond. I would also say that the entire NATs team served an evaluative function: keeping track of project progress and, importantly, drawing out the principles emerging across campus contexts, making what was learned in this project a matter of public conversation through the work that comprises Students at the Center.

II. The Impact of the Project

The work of this project is very well documented already, in the several volumes that have now been produced out of it. It's quite clear to anyone reading those reports that the campuses that stayed with the project (as most of them did of course) took up the questions and methods of assessment in a serious, thoughtful way, got important things done, data gathered, conversations started....I would,

however, like to comment on the impact of work done in this project on the larger world of higher education. Three things strike me in this regard.

1) So far as I know, women's studies was the first discipline/field to produce a public report on its activities in and recommendations for assessment. Sociology followed shortly thereafter, with a volume put out by the American Sociological Society just a month or so ago. (MLA has been arguing about a similar volume focused on writing assessment for three years now, with so far nothing to show for it). I note this fact up against another, which is that the AAHE Assessment Forum has gone to some lengths over the last few years to get disciplinary associations involved in our conference, and to feature work at the department level. But it's a difficult road. There are interesting campus-level instances of assessment in chemistry, or philosophy, or psychology, but little organized effort across campuses, under the (influential) auspices of the discipline. Women's studies is out in front here. Students at the Center and The Courage to Question (and now the sociology volume as well) are now "out there" as examples and prods to other disciplines. It's too early to talk about effects here but the opportunity, the likelihood

of larger impact is considerably increased by these publications.

2) A second point related to impact is the wonderful job you have done, Caryn, of getting this project platforms where its work can be made known widely and to those who are in that learning-susceptible state of needing to know. I'm thinking first, here, of AAHE's own assessment conference, where your program has had prime-time slots for the last three years, and where I know that you had overflow crowds and lots of follow up traffic with audience members wanting to know more. But the project has also been featured at AAC, AAHE's national conference, the National Council for Research on Women, and NWSA's own gatherings. In addition, individuals from participating campuses made presentations in a variety of settings, including campuses that were themselves trying to get started with assessment.

3) A third area of impact is through people, the individuals who sat around the table at our various project gatherings, centrally and on the participating campuses, listening to each other, having to sharpen their own thinking, evolving in their views. Where

three years ago, the mention of assessment caused you considerable neck cramping, Caryn (as you recount in your wonderful opening chapter of Students...), it now can conjure up much different reactions, and in a considerable cadre of leaders in women's studies. Influential figures in the field have now not only heard of assessment but struggled with it, done it, benefited from it. I'm not talking about a conversion experience--assessment doesn't come as an epiphany but as a lot of hard work--but I am talking about a shift in the way people think and talk that is bound to have a ripple effect across women's studies programs and beyond.

III. Project Design and Management

Getting ten programs on ten very different campuses to sign on to a project that's inherently problematic is a big order. I know that you had your hair-pulling days, Caryn, and that keeping track of what was going on where, who needed a nudge, who needed a consultant, etc., etc., must have felt like more than a full-time job a lot of weeks (especially as the situation was compounded by politics and turnover at NWSA). But an important point to make here is about the value and impact of a project



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)



NOTICE

REPRODUCTION BASIS



This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket)" form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.



This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").