

needed knowledge. At the same time, the field-based learning experience reinforced for me the stress and frustration which seems to be inherent in any form of volunteer work. And it showed me how far I have to go as a committed feminist, not just to challenge traditional sources and targets of knowledge, but to acknowledge what counts as knowledge. While I knew intellectually that women's feelings count, it was the determined analysis of the field-based learning which enabled me to see that my *own* feelings were a source of knowledge. This has been a painful process, made up of anger, guilt, defensiveness, and anxiety. And yet, like the times when I was a child and could be persuaded to join in the game, there were also pleasures and rewards from participating in this process which I may never have realized had I not gone out in the field.

Joan M. Smith

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: STUDENTS WORKING IN COMMUNITY AGENCIES

I have been extremely fortunate to have had the opportunity to engage in the development, design and launching of a practicum course, WMNS 440 "Feminist Perspectives on Violence Against Women" in the Institute of Women's Studies at Queen's University. From this challenging and rewarding experience, I can offer a number of suggestions that might facilitate designing similar courses at other institutions.

The opportunity to fund the course design and launching came in the spring of 1994 when the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training (under the former NDP government) put out a call for proposals for community-based educational initiatives that had as their goal the ending of violence against women and girls. The Ministry's intention was to fund pilot projects that could serve as blueprints for other communities and institutions. Our group was one of five that was successful in gaining funding across the province. We were given about \$65,000.00 per year over three years, with a possible two year extension.

We called ourselves the Violence Intervention and Education Workgroup (VIEW) -- a collaboration of projects that included the following participants: the Institute of Women's Studies at Queen's; Magda Lewis and Glenn Eastbrook of the Queen's Faculty of Education; Julia Blackstock of the Office of University Residences; Nina Marshall of the St. Lawrence Community College Women's Studies Program; Terrie Fleming of Kingston Interval House shelter for battered women and their children; and Barbara MacDonald, Principal of Fairfield, a local public school. Pam Young, first as Dean of Women and later as Head of the Department of Religion at Queen's, has administered the project, and Tina Tom, a community activist, is our paid coordinator. This broad base in the university and community, we were told, was a major factor in our receiving funding. The Queen's Women's Studies portion of the grant has been approximately \$21,000.00 over three years, which has been used to buy faculty time to develop the course, see it through the Queen's curriculum review process, teach it for the first time in 1995-6 and, with a one-time supplemental grant from the Queen's Vice-Principal of Finance and Operations, to teach it a second time in 1997-8.

This background to the course has been important in its gaining credibility, for our model was a quite unusual one for an academic unit at Queen's. Having grant money for curriculum development is not typical, and the support of the Ministry of Education and Training, I am certain, defused a lot of potential objections. At the level of the Faculty-wide curriculum committee, we were asked only whether Queen's insurance would cover the students when they were on their placements (it would), whether male students could take the course (they can), and whether a variety of viewpoints would be presented (of course, but not uncritically).

In the Institute of Women's Studies at Queen's, we decided that the VIEW project gave us an opportunity not only to design a practicum course but also to focus it on a vital feminist concern -- violence against women. For me personally, it was a chance to counteract trends in Women's Studies that have caused me some

concern -- the increasing institutionalization and professionalization of Women's Studies within the academy accompanied by a move away from political action at the grass-roots level. This course has allowed me to integrate feminist theory and practice in the classroom, as well as to foster the connection of Women's Studies with the larger community. Violence against women is an issue that has been far better addressed by over-stressed front-line community workers than by academics. They have much to teach both us and our students. I already had first hand experience of these possibilities from my teaching in the federal Prison for Women and from my service on the Kingston Interval House Board. I wanted to share some of the quality of those life-altering, mind-opening experiences with my students, while at the same time providing them with the theoretical background they needed to contextualize those experiences.

I can offer a number of suggestions which may be helpful to others wishing to offer a similar course. I decided that I needed to define violence in the broadest, most globally systemic manner so that students could explore its many levels and facets in a wide variety of different placements. The course was limited to twelve students, who were required to be Women's Studies concentrators at the third or fourth- year level. There were a number of reasons for these requirements. One was the need not to burden community agencies with students who were immature, ill-informed or unclear about feminist issues. As ambassadors of the program and the university, it was important that they both understood the importance of this role, and be supervised very closely. In a small community like Kingston, it would not be possible to send a large number of students out into the field. In fact, for feminist organizations, a lot of poorly supervised students seeking practicums would present an intolerable burden.

Acceptance in WMNS 440 was also contingent on my ability to negotiate a placement. Although students were closely consulted, they were not permitted to negotiate their own placement. I felt that it was important that clear ground rules were established both for the benefit

of both the student and the agency, and that I would be seen as actively involved and committed. At each community group, I located an individual who would be willing to be responsible for supervising the student, and the three of us met to discuss what project might be undertaken. These were not to be like most work placements, with the student basically showing up at the workplace for a number of weeks. I did not want students to be hanging around making work for already-stressed administrators, nor did I want them to spend their days stuffing envelopes. Instead, they were to undertake clearly-defined, negotiated projects with a set time period and a conclusion. In particular, they needed to be transformable into major term papers which would be presented in class as a significant portion of the final grade. The hours to be worked and responsibilities to be assumed were spelled out. I followed up these meetings with a letter that summarized the agreement and checked back with the placement supervisor at least once during the practicum placement, and again at the end for feedback on an evaluation form. Each supervisor was provided with a copy of the essay written by the student. As part of the negotiation process, confidentiality issues were thoroughly discussed and understood, and all projects were also approved by an internal Women's Studies ethics review. All students underwent any volunteer training that an agency required.

WMNS 440 was a full-year course, with the first term spent in the classroom in a standard seminar setting reading feminist theory on violence against women and presenting book reviews and papers. During the first term, the practicum placements were negotiated and they were begun in late November. There were no seminars held for most of the second term, but students were brought back to class once for a progress report, met at least once with me personally to discuss their placements, and returned for the last four weeks of term to present their papers. This sharing of experiences in the classroom was very important, not the least because students often had issues that they needed to discuss and work through as part of the process of moving from the safe confines of the written word in the classroom to the messy realities of life.

All practicums ended around the middle of March. This was, in practice, a very demanding course for both student and professor. This was another reason for restricting it to third and fourth year students. Eight students enrolled in WMNS 440, which turned out to be an ideal number.

The titles and descriptions of the practicum projects were as follows:

1. Women and the Prison System.

This student worked in the Elizabeth Fry Society and assisted in a violence education program which met with woman inmates in Quinte Regional Detention Centre.

2. Women and Domestic Violence.

This student did regular volunteer shifts at Kingston Interval House, and assisted in analyzing their departure questionnaires.

3. Young Women and Date Rape.

Working with the Sexual Assault Crisis Centre Kingston (SACCK), this student helped to pilot test a date-rape awareness tool, an audio tape that had been recently developed by SACCK. She played it in several high school classes and reported on date-rape awareness levels and the effectiveness of the tape.

4. Sexual Assault and the Law.

Also working with SACCK, this placement involved research on Bill C-49, the new Canadian sexual assault law. The student researched the history of the development of the law, the outcome of recent court cases since its passing, then assessed its effectiveness in meeting the needs of survivors of sexual assault. She also 'translated' the law into understandable language for the use of women at SACCK.

5. Children as Victims of Domestic Violence.

The second placement at Kingston Interval House (KIH), this student worked with a child support group as well as volunteering on a regular basis with children living at KIH.

6. Young Women, Disabilities and Sexual Violence.

This student was supervised by a psychologist at a local hospital who worked with teens with disabilities. She administered a questionnaire by the Hugh Macmillan Rehabilitation Centre surveying the attitudes, behaviours and lifestyles of young people with disabilities, adding some extra questions of her own on awareness of issues of sexuality and sexual assault.

7. Violence in Education: Racism and Sexism.

This practicum placement involved work with both senior primary and secondary students. The student followed up on some previous work done by the VIEW project on awareness of violence in the media with grade seven and eight students, revisiting the issue a year after the original project to see if the experience had increased their awareness. She also organized the participation of high-school students in a conference sponsored by VIEW on violence in education, doing follow-up in the classroom.

8. Violence, Women and Homelessness.

This student worked regular shifts at DAWN House, a shelter for homeless women. She also analyzed their intake forms.

On the whole the practicum placements went very well. Most of the students had the kind of transformative experience that I had wished for them, and their supervisors were pleased with their contributions. For some students, it clarified their career goals, gave them practical experience for their résumés, and formed the basis of further academic study. Two of them continued to volunteer at the agencies long after their practicums ended. A key to the success of the practicums was the careful planning involved. The better defined the project, the more successful it was. It helps to have a lot of personal contacts in your local feminist community when organizing a course such as this, but it is also possible to put together practicums that are more like independent research projects (such as the one with SACCK and sexual assault law) than like agency placements. These eight examples only scratch the surface of what is possible.

In conclusion, although WMNS 440 is

permanently in the Queen's University Calendar, it is not clear whether it will ever be funded again after this year. Although it has received some backing from Queen's, these are harsh economic times and WMNS 440 is a labour-intensive course for a small number of students, even if it does enhance the university's profile in the community. But even without a course organized around the practicum, one can incorporate some of its elements in traditional upper year courses, independent studies or as part of an undergraduate thesis. Investigating violence in a systemic way, looking at its real life consequences for women and children, should be a part of every Women's Studies curriculum. However it is done, it can be a wonderful educational experience for all concerned. WMNS 440 "Practicum: Feminist Perspectives on Violence Against Women" was a revelation for the students, and the personal highlight of my teaching career.

After October 1, 1997, I can be reached at the Centre for Women's Studies and Feminist Research, University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, N6A 3K7; phone (519) 661-3759. Watch for the VIEW website coming soon.

Katherine M.J. McKenna

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING: FIELD PLACEMENTS AT BROCK UNIVERSITY

The curriculum in Women's Studies Programs has many objectives, some of which include: to encourage an appreciation of the contributions that women have made in areas such as musical composition, literature and visual arts; to analyze the social processes that have stilted the recognition of women's contributions; to expose oppressive structures and ideologies; to encourage women to take an equal place with men in the world; and to equip them to work to improve the situation for less fortunate people. As Marilyn Porter (1993) explained: to "understand the world in order to change it."

The focus on progressive social change is an important component of the curriculum for

Women's Studies. In our courses, we talk about strategies to empower women and men to build a society where there is zero tolerance for the old inequalities. Our curriculum makes the students angry at injustice but we do not want to leave students bitter with anger. Instead we want them to be optimistic and not only motivated but equipped to personally make a difference. Experiential learning through field placements is one mechanism to achieve this goal.

Building experiential learning for the students into Women's Studies by providing the option of participation with a community group enhances the educational experience in ways that field placements benefit students in other disciplines. At Brock University, we have field work components in Child Studies, Geography, Sociology, Recreation and Leisure, Physical Education and Education.

In the Women's Studies Program, we began very modestly by introducing an experiential learning component to a mandatory third year course. Students continued to attend classes but in lieu of more traditional assignments, they could have a placement with a community group count for 50% of their grade. Students produced a paper on their placement and gave an oral presentation in the classroom on their activities. Some students took the training program offered by agencies and then served as a volunteer (residential alcohol treatment program and the sexual assault counselling program). Others helped to organize events, such as the International Women's Day celebration or Date Rape Educational Initiatives. Others did research for groups, such as the Local Council of Women.

The success of this initiative for two successive years has propelled us to initiate a course devoted solely to experiential learning, which will have both classroom and placement components. Our Dean has allocated funding to hire a part time person to firm up the community outreach necessary to make a success of the program.

Some of the challenges of building experiential learning into an academic program are largely bureaucratic in nature and are concerned with placement, supervision and resources. An