

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.

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### **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

additional challenge is the importance of students recognizing that they are ambassadors for program. Their actions and words reflect on how the Women's Studies Program is perceived in the region. Another concern is the potentially dangerous situations that students can face doing some types of community work, for example, by slipping on icy steps entering the community organization, or meeting violence on a picket line or in some deliberate act of violence against users of a clinic. As faculty we can control the safety of a classroom setting but we lose control over the circumstances facing our students in community placements. Finally, in the era of high unemployment, the voluntary work done by our students ought not to be in lieu of payment to someone in the workforce.

A successful placement program involves a commitment by the student, faculty member and community contact person. This commitment can be formalized by having the student draw up a contract which specifies the involvement of all three participants. Fair evaluation can be assigned by encouraging the student to contract for a grade at the beginning of the process by specifying the type and quality of work expected. I have found regular meetings with the student which are informed by reading the students's field notes/journal a useful mechanism to keep the process on rails.

Introducing experiential learning by involving students with community groups raises the spectra of involving politics in an academic program (Patai and Koertge, 1994; Wine, 1991). My inclination is to embrace social activism as one of many options of field placements. Not all students ought to feel obliged to have an activist component to their placement but those who want to participate actively in social change initiatives should be facilitated as well as monitored to ensure they are not at risk.

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Porter, Marilyn. "Cuckoo in the Nest? A Feminist in Sociology." *Limited Editions*. (Halifax: Fernwood, 1993)

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*June Corman*

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## A GOOD IDEA TAKES FORM: PRACTICING FEMINISM FOR FUN AND PROFIT

WS 450: Practising Feminism was offered for the first time at the University Of Victoria in the academic year 1996-7. While the department had for several years included practicum components in numerous courses, students reiterated their wish for the department systematically to recognise the value of activist work to feminist scholarship. Two students, Jacqueline Crummey and Naomi North, worked collaboratively under the supervision of my colleague, Michèle Pujol, to research and construct a model course as part of their graduating essay.

Michèle, always a student advocate, made it her special task to design the course on the basis of the students' draft and see it through the university curriculum process. In other words, rather than the professor deciding that students need this kind of exercise, in our case the impetus for the full-year field-based course came from activist students. Michèle taught the first term, I the second, a team-teaching arrangement that opened up many more placement possibilities and a richer understanding of the ways feminist activism works.

Nine students signed up for the course. Each was required to find, by the previous June, a feminist organisation (purposely left undefined), on or off campus -- in recognition that the university is as much a site of activism as the surrounding community -- that would agree to take them on from September to April. Students created an individual contract agreed upon by their placement supervisor, themselves, and the course instructor, specifying the knowledge, skills and responsibilities expected of the student by the organisation. Students were evaluated at the end of each term by their placement supervisor. Contracts could be revised for the second term as the need