

Views on the domestication of Women's Studies

The University of Michigan was a national trendsetter in establishing a program of women's studies in the early 1970s. Recent decisions by the College of Literature, Science and the Arts, however, might also make the University a national trendsetter in dismantling academic programs for the study of women's status in our society.

The College recently announced a new policy prohibiting graduate teaching assistants from teaching upper-level courses. Dean Billy Frye said that this policy will apply to the Women's Studies Program as of the end of the next academic year.

AS A YOUNG and growing field of academic inquiry, Women's Studies necessarily relies on the teaching and research of graduate students. The college's new policy would essentially eliminate an exciting innovation in contemporary scholarship and significantly reduce the breadth of educational opportunities available to University students. The college has thus threatened academic freedom; its new policies raise the specter of repression within the University community.

The Women's Studies Program underwent a standard academic review in the fall of 1979. The review testified to the program's distinction, and in fact declared that the graduate student teaching assistants are "of the highest quality," "have a sincere and significant interest in the field," and devote "time and interest perhaps unmatched elsewhere in the University."

The review nonetheless suggests that the 300-level courses taught by TAs are dispensable, that the programs should change over to faculty-taught courses, and that graduate students should be shifted to administrative duties around the program's publication series, Occasional Papers in Women's Studies, to upgrade the program's contribution to research. The review also suggested that Women's Studies might be relegated to the status of a "minor" rather than a "major."

HAVING FACULTY teach courses in

Women's Studies is fine, but we must remember that the program was created because the long-established departments showed no interest in addressing questions of women's social roles, and it has been built on graduate student participation because there were no faculty members available to teach in the program. The dearth of interested and committed scholars is a manifestation of the pervasive sexism of our society: the number of women faculty in LSA departments is pitifully small, and the denial of tenure to vigorously feminist scholars has convinced young scholars that Women's Studies is not valued by the University.

The College has indicated that the budget of

NO SHOULD THERE be any objection to enhancing research in the field of women's studies. But the college's implicit distinction between teaching and research, while generally suspect, is profoundly false in this field. Michelle Rosaldo, a noted authority in the field who served as an external consultant to the University review committee, stated that the graduate students in Women's Studies "guaranteed its calibre as a truly innovative field of endeavor, wherein successful teaching is immediately associated with new and significant research." In addition, this "either-or" choice between two essential elements of the academic enterprise is not posed to any other departmental unit.

systems"; the ways that societies determine behavior on all levels—from the most private to the most public—according to sex. In this endeavor, Women's Studies takes within its purview methods developed by history, literature, sociology, economics, art history, and psychology, among others, but cannot be subsided by any of them individually.

AGAIN, MICHELLE Rosaldo wrote, "Although I feel that Women's Studies can—and probably should—maintain strong ties with traditional disciplines, it seems to me that the 'new scholarship' has developed in ways that will best if we return to 'women in history,' 'women in sociology,' and so on. Historians interested in women (and students interested in women's history) have benefited (and will continue to benefit) from the record of questions and investigations proper to Women's Studies as a field apart."

To develop and enrich the field of women's studies, it is essential to maintain an autonomous center which will facilitate communication among young scholars at all levels: undergraduate, graduate, and faculty. Subjection to the interests of older disciplines would only inhibit growth.

This point has a significance beyond the immediate question of Michigan's Women's Studies Program. Frye has said that "the needs of the departments (rather than those of non-departmental programs) must be the final priority." But because the departments cannot easily overcome the inertia of longstanding disciplinary traditions, intellectual innovations will more likely appear in interdepartmental crevices.

FURTHERMORE, graduate students are more likely to be in touch with emerging social tendencies than are established faculty. Suppression of interdisciplinary programs and of graduate student teaching and research means the suppression of new experiments in intellec-

tual activity; it means academic stagnation. Thus, the maintenance of the Women's Studies Program is not merely an issue for the undergraduate and graduate students currently engaged in it; indeed, everyone needs Women's Studies. It has fertilized social and historical thought throughout the American academy in recent years. It has opened broad new avenues of study to undergraduates. And, as practised here at Michigan and elsewhere, it has offered students a rare opportunity to help shape their own education in a serious and intellectually stimulating way.

Any diminution of the Women's Studies Program at Michigan would constitute a profound injustice to students and to the academic endeavor as a whole. The needs of Women's Studies cited by the review committee—the need for more faculty involvement, the need for research development—call for the commitment of more resources. It is not incumbent upon the Women's Studies Program to change its orientation toward the established departments; rather, the departments must show in practice a willingness and dedication to engage in a serious discussion of scholarly issues related to women's status in our society—past, present, and future. The Women's Studies Program should be maintained and indeed expanded and enhanced.

All persons who support the Women's Studies Program should attend and take part in the Save the Women's Studies Rally tomorrow on the Diag. Also, the Committee on Academic Freedom, which has been organized to combat the denial of tenure to dissident or unconventional teachers and to protect threatened but innovative courses of study, meets each Friday at 4 p.m., at Guild House.

This article was written by Howard Brick, Heidi Gottfried, and Julie Green, members of the Committee on Academic Freedom.

'The College has threatened academic freedom; its policies raise the spectre of repression within the University community.'

the Women's Studies Program will not be increased. At the same time, the College has recommended reallocating teaching assistants' pay to new participating faculty. Since faculty salaries naturally are much higher than TA salaries, the reallocation of teaching money to pay for faculty-taught courses would provide for fewer than half of the program's current course offerings.

But it is doubtful that even a small number of new participating faculty could be found. The inbred bias of the other departments—for which the Women's Studies Program was intended to compensate—will not disappear within a year, despite the fine words of the college executive committee. Rather, with the elimination of TA teaching and in the absence of replacement faculty, the Women's Studies Program will disappear.

Finally, the review committee suggested the goal of a restructured Women's Studies Program would be to assist established departments in upgrading the study of women on the departments' own terms, in line with this, "Women's Studies" as such would constitute only a "minor" for undergraduates, attached to a department "major." Such a revision would rob the Women's Studies Program of its autonomy, converting it into a handmaiden to the conventional disciplines. Might not the prevailing sexism of our society be reinforced by treating the Women's Studies Program as a subordinate field?

Women's Studies has become more than merely "the study of women" in terms of conventional methods. It has developed a unique method; it asks its own questions. Women's Studies has begun the investigation of "gender

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Wrong road to Palestine

THERE HAVE been four declared wars over Israel's 32 years of existence, but the bloodshed and gunfire between the Jewish state and its Arab neighbors have never really stopped. The latest round in the war of attrition began last Monday, when a murderous band of five guerrillas crept through the U.N.-patrolled area in the south of Lebanon and stormed Misgav Am, an Israeli kibbutz a few miles from the border. Three Israelis, including a two-and-a-half-year-old boy, were killed in the subsequent gunfire. The terrorists perished as well.

The five terrorists were each from a different country—to show the international character of the effort, the Palestinian leadership said. It is not the first time various nations have put aside their differences to form a slaughterous alliance, and sadly, it will probably not be the last.

Two days after the gunfire had died down at Misgav Am, 350 Israeli

soldiers moved into Lebanon with tanks and armored personnel carriers. Their objective was to flush out guerrillas based in the area that the U.N. peacekeeping troops had failed to restrain.

While the Israeli incursion is a technical violation of Lebanon's sovereignty, Israel had no choice but to move into Lebanon. The peacekeeping troops simply were not doing their job.

Israel's initiative was surprisingly moderate; Israeli troops stayed in Lebanon only as long as was needed to bolster the nation's security, and left yesterday.

The Palestinian nation claims the right to statehood for itself, and its desire may be justified. But Israel ought not be compelled to bend to the Arabs' bloody methods of persuasion; if Palestinian statehood ever comes, it will come through civilized negotiation. The burden of proof is on the Palestinians to show themselves worthy to join the family of nations.

Feiffer



The LSA Executive Committee is the most powerful group in the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts. Decisions on personnel, curriculum, finances, and other matters are all made by this one body. These decisions have an immediate and powerful impact on students, faculty, and other members of the University community. Yet, despite the profound importance of the decisions it issues, it is neither answerable to the people it serves nor does it necessarily operate in consideration of their interests.

The Executive Committee is composed of six faculty members and the dean of the college, Billy Frye (soon to become academic vice-president of the University). The college's assistant deans are also included in the Executive Committee meetings.

THE SIX professors who sit on the committee are elected by LSA's governing faculty. They are, technically speaking, "not representative" of their colleagues on the faculty, according to Dean Frye. Rather, they are "given confidence" by the faculty to vote as they see fit.

NOT ONLY does the structure of the committee prevent student and general faculty from voting, but the meetings are closed to both groups. Furthermore, the minutes of the meetings, the agenda, and even some of the decisions reached are withheld from students, the press, and the public. Decisions of widespread importance are merely handed down, sometimes without explanation even to those most immediately affected by the issues. Students are kept virtually in the dark.

Of course, the Executive Committee does try to be fair and prudent in its decisions. But there is something fundamentally wrong with a system that often does not allow even the most rudimentary participation by those most affected by those decisions.

STUDENTS have the right to a voice in their education. Dean Frye and the LSA Executive Committee have consistently denied that right.

established by the Regents recommended student participation on college executive committees, the LSA Executive Committee issued this response: "in matters of duty, function, preparation, appointment, responsibility, and authority, faculty members and students occupy very different roles. Respectfully, therefore, we reject the principle that enrolled students have, by virtue of their enrollment, a right to voting par-

Powerful committee is too secretive

meetings, or, often, see the agendas. There must be a rationale behind the exclusion from Executive Committee meetings of all students and most faculty members. One reason is that the primary objective of the committee is quality control, and that only the most experienced, qualified faculty members should be entrusted with this important task.

WHILE IT IS true that important tasks ought to be given to the most able, it is also true that those represented should be able to watch, counsel, and judge the performance of their selected decision-makers. Right now, neither faculty nor students can watch, let alone counsel.

Another argument against student participation disparages the validity of students judging faculty performance. Some feel that faculty members might be intimidated by the presence of students in the decision-making process. But our faculty is of such a caliber that it should not fear the evaluations of students. Indeed, the faculty should encourage evaluation by designing a place for it in the Executive Committee structure.

To ignore the thoughts of the students is to deprive the college of a very important resource. Academia is based on a flow of information, criticism, praise, and new ideas. The present system disregards the great majority and encourages stagnation.

A somewhat more persuasive

argument concerns the Executive Committee's personal decisions. Much of the discussion in the meetings contains frank assessments of individual faculty members. Because the candor of these discussions might be impaired, the argument goes, the meetings should be kept secret, as is now the case. The Executive Committee's concern with the reputation and privacy of faculty members is to be applauded. However, the objection is not substantial enough to warrant totally closed meetings. All faculty members go through a detailed and public examination at many levels before being invited to work at the University; the faculty members are again evaluated by both students and other faculty members. Their research and class work are the frequent subjects of both formal and informal discussion. When the executive committee makes a tenure decision, there is no reason for sudden secrecy.

LSA-SG Forum

It is clear that both the students and the faculty have been unfairly denied access to and participation in the decisions of the College. This has been to the detriment of the entire College. It is time to consider changes in the structure of the committee that would make it more responsive and more open to criticism, praise, counsel, and suggestion. Specifically, we recommend that the Executive Committee begin immediately to publish its minutes and agendas, while deliberating on the best plan to allow student and faculty participation. It is my hope that direct assistance to publish its minutes and agendas will be for the open to us will lead to a better LSA Executive Committee, and to a better college.

LSA-SG Forum is a bi-weekly column covering significant issues addressed by the Literary College Student Government. This article was written by Pat Anderson, a member of the LSA administrative board and the LSA-SG Administrative Action Group.

