

1990

10th Anniversary Notes from Lisa Ransdell 1990

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Recommended Citation

Ransdell, Lisa, "10th Anniversary Notes from Lisa Ransdell 1990" (1990). *Looking Back, Looking Forward*. 1.
<http://digitalcommons.denison.edu/lookingback/1>

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This has been an enormously important year for Women's Studies and Black Studies at Denison. In celebrating the pioneering achievement of curriculum reform represented by passage of the Minority Studies/Women's Studies General Education Requirement ten years ago, Denison has both affirmed its commitment to diversity and recognized the contributions made by both programs to the institution overall. We can be justifiably proud in having been the first institution of higher education in the nation to pass such a requirement -- prouder still of the enormously successful model of cooperation that it represents.

The wide range of events scheduled this academic year in observance of the anniversary enriched the campus community immeasurably. From the opening convocation by Shirley Chisholm in September to the breathtaking performance in March by Sweet Honey in the Rock and everything in between, the intellectual, social and cultural contributions of women and African Americans were richly observed. Made possible by a grant from Acting President Sam Thios in 1988-89, the celebration featured an array of major speakers and performers as well as department-hosted colloquia. One event, however, stands out for its deep personal significance to many on campus. On March 8th, former faculty, administrators and students who were instrumental in the passage of the requirement returned to campus for the Founders' Day celebration. The day featured a Common Hour program by alumni Women's Studies and Black Studies students and leaders of the movement to pass the requirement. Lisa Pittenger, '85, Cathleen Shine, '80, Luther Tyson, '84, Deveonne Tyree, '79, and James Bell, '81, spoke movingly of their experiences ten years ago and reflected on how those experiences have been carried forward into their personal and professional lives today.

At a dinner later in the day other speakers like Tona Dickerson, '80, and Naomi Garrett greeted the assembled group, and former Women's Studies Director Margot Duley, always an eloquent and impassioned speaker, surpassed her greatest oratorical achievements as she lauded the great success of Denison's requirement. Director of Black Studies John Jackson and Acting Director of Women's Studies Lyn Robertson recognized the contributions of the many individuals who helped to pass the requirement and screened a slide show that recaptured some of the spirit of the time. The culminating event of the day was an All-College Convocation with former faculty members Ann Fitzgerald, Chuck Henry, Joan Straumanis, and former Provost Lou Brakeman. Currently enrolled Denison students were deeply affected by the Founder's Day programs as these journal excerpts from Lyn Robertson's students show:

"I was interested as soon as I sat down in my seat and watched the speakers (former Denison students) and present Denison professors rejoice with one another. They all looked so happy to see each other and it made me realize actually how proud Denison should be, being the first school who had this requirement."

"Hearing the stories of these faculty members made me proud of Denison for being open to change. With the students and the faculty backing each other important changes can be made for the betterment of Denison as a whole."

"I am looking forward to taking a Women's Studies course and/or a Minority Studies course. Who knows, maybe someday when I am long gone I can be invited back to Denison to speak about something that I was involved in, and be as proud of it as our speakers were."

"These people really got me excited about taking one of these courses. ...I am so thankful that there are such committed people in the field of education."

"Joan Straumanis inspired me to go out and be courageous, stand up for something I believe in, because more often than not, there are others who believe in the same things. ...They have definitely inspired me to take a Women's Studies course even if it wasn't required."

"This hour meant a lot to me. It really got me thinking how such a small requirement can really open the eyes of so many and make such a difference. Learning that the students played a major role in the beginning of this requirement shows that anyone can create changes. Denison has made such an imprint in the lives of so many not only the graduates and professors, but also the many other lives that the graduates interact with and help."

"Their interest and concern for their own education and the actions they took to enrich that education was inspirational. They made me proud of Denison."

"I now realize that education, when utilized properly, can bring about powerful and positive change even beyond the sphere of the institution itself."

This newsletter is a special joint issue of the Denison Women's Studies Newsletter and Amandla, a publication of the Center for Black

Studies. The featured histories of the Black Studies and Women's Studies programs were painstakingly researched and written by History Department faculty member Jack Kirby and University Historian Wallace Chessman. Both accounts also review the events leading up to and following passage of the requirement from the perspective of leaders in both programs. In addition, the text of the keynote address for the anniversary celebration given by Spelman College President Johnnetta Cole in February is also included. I hope you enjoy the newsletter and that the message it contains continues to be a big part of what makes our institution Distinctly Denison!

Lisa Ransdell
Women's Coordinator, April 24, 1990