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## **Rethinking the Women's Studies Ph.D. in Canadian Universities**

**Katherine Side<sup>1</sup>**

### Introduction

This paper considers the future of the Ph.D. in women's studies in Canada. It argues that it is important to continue to develop and to offer the existing doctorate in women's studies in Canada because it contributes in significant ways to the scholarly environment for students and faculty in universities. However, it cautions against developing and offering additional Ph.D. programmes in women's studies without simultaneously considering and challenging the current, lean fiscal climate, for post-secondary education and the implications of this context for women's studies. After briefly mapping out this climate, this paper offers, for the explicit purpose of further discussion and debate, some recommendations to advance women's studies as a vibrant, scholarly discipline. It makes specific recommendations to strengthen the institutional bases of women's studies. These include bolstering institutional structures and a sustained commitment to strengthen women's studies from outside the walls of any single institution. It argues that women's studies needs what Howe has termed a "long-term, strategic institutional imagination" with which to approach the future (Howe 1997, 416). Responsibility for these recommendations rests primarily with those who teach and who hold administrative positions in Canadian universities, and also includes those who hold decision-making positions in research bodies such as the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). It is within a framework of a more clearly articulated vision for women's studies, one that is solid enough on which to build, and yet flexible enough to respond to changing needs and circumstances, that the Ph. D. in women's studies will thrive.

### The Growth and Impact of Women's Studies in Canadian Universities

The growth of women's studies in Canadian universities is undisputed. When precisely this growth began is difficult to pinpoint because the first courses were not referred to courses in 'women's studies,' although they usually included 'women' somewhere in the course title. Tancred credits Descarriers with having taught the first course at Concordia University in 1968 (114, 22). Adamson, Briskin and McPhail suggest that the first course in women's studies was taught at the University of Toronto in 1970 (1988, 229), while Crow and Gottell state that the first women's studies course was taught at McGill University, the year not specified (2000). The fact that this first course was taught at all directly challenged the exclusion of women in university curricula and as members of university communities. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s the number of undergraduate courses about women (some referred to as women's studies courses and some not) grew, as did the number of universities that offered such courses. This growth occurred alongside, and was largely made possible by the public presence commanded by activists

in the women's liberation movement and the rapid expansion in feminist scholarship and publishing in Canada.<sup>2</sup>

Researchers on the Canadian Women's Studies Project reported, in 1987-88, a total of twenty-nine universities which "offer[ed] or proposed to offer either a minor, major or diploma in women's studies or have some special institute" (Eichler and Tite 1990, 8). Three decades later, courses in women's studies are offered at most Canadian universities. The Canadian Women's Studies On-Line Database, in the year 2000, lists seven universities that offer a concentration or specialization in women's studies, six universities that offer certificates, and three universities that offer diplomas in women's studies.<sup>3</sup> Thirty-one universities offer a minor in women's studies.<sup>4</sup> Twenty-seven universities offer women's studies as an undergraduate major.<sup>5</sup> In total fifteen universities offer honours degrees in undergraduate women's studies.<sup>6</sup>

Growth in women's studies programmes has also occurred at the graduate level. In 1994, when Tancred examined the state of women's studies in its third decade for a national report in *Women's Studies Quarterly*, she noted that there were three Masters level programmes. Just seven years later, that number has more than doubled. There are presently eight universities that offer women's studies as part of the title of a Master of Arts programme.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, four Masters of Arts programmes offer women's studies as a collaborative, graduate level programme with another discipline.<sup>8</sup>

The development of undergraduate and Masters level programmes has, not surprisingly, been followed by the development of programmes at the doctoral level. Shteir argues that there has been no single institutional prescription for the development of the women's studies Ph. D. in North America (Shteir 1997, 388). She identifies six models that have emerged: "(1) an independent free study program, (2) freestanding programs in women's studies, (3) interdepartmental and collaborative programs, (4) consortium arrangements, (5) graduate minors in conjunction with main field for Ph.D. work, and (6) certificate links" (Shteir 1997, 388,9). To date, two of these models have been adopted in Canadian universities. York University began offering the only free standing Ph. D. in women's studies, not offered in combination with another academic discipline, in 1992 (Shteir 1996). The University of Toronto began offering the Graduate Collaborative Program in Women's Studies, a doctorate in collaboration with another discipline with "a specialization in women's studies" in 1994 (Armatage 1997).<sup>9</sup> Currently there are plans for a third doctorate programme in women's studies and third model. Under consortium arrangements Simon Fraser University and The University of British Columbia will, pending approval, offer a Ph. D. in women's studies (Personal communication, Raoul 2000).

The impact and the influence of women's studies in Canadian universities extend beyond the already noted growth in programmes. In addition to attending to the exclusion of women in university curricula and as university community members, women's studies also engages with important discussions about the shifting terrain in universities. These discussions include, but are not limited to what it means to produce scholarship that is cross disciplinary, multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary (Romero

2000, 159),<sup>10</sup> discussions about research methodologies and pedagogy, and about intersections with gender studies, queer studies, ethnic studies, development studies, global studies and traditional disciplines.

If, as Tancred states, Canadian women's studies has posed "the greatest challenge to established knowledge that the academy has ever experienced" then one could argue that there is every reason to continue its development through the level of the doctorate (1994, 12). A fundamental reason to offer a doctorate in women's studies is clearly articulated by Allen. She states,

[T]o offer a doctorate is perceiving and representing one's field as a critical, enduring, generative field of knowledge, invaluable for the progress and improvement of human cultural understanding, whether with or without practical or policy ramifications (1997, 367).

While practical or policy ramifications need not emerge from the women's studies Ph.D., there is little reason to close these down as possibilities. However, practical or policy ramifications of the women's studies Ph.D. will face significant challenges in the current climate in Canadian universities.

### The Lean Climate and Women's Studies in Canadian Universities

The expansion of women's studies, including the development of doctoral level studies has occurred concurrently with the trend in Canadian universities toward a leaner, fiscal climate under which learning, teaching and research are expected to occur. To date, considerations of women's studies and reports from the field in women's studies have not fully accounted for the possible effects of this climate for women's studies.

There has been an established practice in Canada of state assistance to various sectors including education. The presence of the state, particularly in terms of federal funding for post-secondary education, is assumed to assist in providing high quality, open and accessible higher education to Canadians. While this support has resulted in a strong network of almost entirely public, and publicly funded, universities, there has been a noticeable shift away from state support resulting in a lean climate for Canadian universities. This lean climate is a result of intention in focus and purpose, not the result of externally determined economic forces. It represents concerted effort over time on the part of the state to reduce its financial commitment to fund post-secondary education. Despite consecutive federal budgetary surpluses, federal funding for post-secondary institutions continues to be steadily eroded. Cohen argues that this erosion began in earnest with Mulroney's Progressive Conservative government (1997, 49), although there is little doubt that subsequently elected Liberal governments have continued it with a vengeance. While the complexity of changes to funding structures make it difficult to determine precisely the cuts to post-secondary institutions, the Canadian Association of University Teachers calculates that federal cash transfers, as a share of GDP, have fallen

approximately 44% between 1992 and 1999 (CAUT 1999). The largest cut occurred as a result of federal programme changes in the 1995 federal budget. Cuts that accompanied the programme change from the Canada Assistance Plan to the Canada Health and Social Transfer, and the move from cost-shared programmes to block transfers, were deepened even further by the fact that funds were not indexed to keep up with inflation (CAUT 1999). As a percentage of GDP, federal funding for post secondary educational institutions is at its lowest level in fifty years (Graham 1999). In their commentary on the 2000 federal budget CAUT notes that there is little change. While a supplement has been added to the Canada Health and Social Transfer, “there is no permanent increase in the CHST cash floor,” there are no incentives for provinces to direct federal transfers toward post-secondary education and the amounts are not indexed to inflation and anticipated university population growth (CAUT 2000). Indeed, the future of post secondary funding is a bleak one.

As a consequence of decreased state funding, the costs for post-secondary education are shifting. They are also shifting, in the form of tuition increases, onto individuals. They are also shifting toward private, non-state sources of funding, including public-private partnerships and corporate sponsorship. Since 1990, tuition fees at Canadian universities have increased 125% and levels of individual student-debt have increased over 100% (CAUT 1999b). One observed consequence of this shift is an overall decrease in household spending on education-related expenditures (CAUT 1999b). This shift onto individuals has occurred during a time when women have become the majority university population at the undergraduate level.<sup>11</sup> Cumulatively, the effects of this lean fiscal climate undermine the institutional space that women’s studies, has been able to carve out. The widespread inclusion of women’s studies in university curricula, its recognition as a generative field of knowledge across the disciplines and its future development in universities will not continue to have an impact if fewer women, and men, are able to access women’s studies courses, and if there are no significant changes to funding structures. Without fundamental changes to core funding for post-secondary institutions, precious time, energy and resources will be expended in trying to hold onto what women’s studies has already achieved.

To date, the strategies of many women’s studies units, programmes and departments, to absorb these deep cuts, have been fragmented and understandably focused on short-term survival. For instance, some women’s studies units have not replaced faculty members who are on sabbatical or leave, relying more heavily on part-time and adjunct faculty. While this appears a viable strategy, part-time and adjunct faculty cannot, in the long run replace the contributions of full-time faculty members. While they may be available for teaching, and in some instances may teach an extraordinary number and range of women’s studies courses, their contributions to university service are limited by the nature of their contractual relationship and their research, however valuable, tends to be poorly supported.

Other women’s studies units have looked to the services of professional recruiters hired by universities to increase enrolment. The recruitment of overseas students who typically pay higher tuition fees than resident, Canadian students is seldom accompanied by the

system of supports required by overseas students. Focussing energies on increasing student enrolments in response to fiscal pressures may, in fact, be an option in women's studies. Women's studies has a strong and valued tradition of attracting older students who are new, or newly returned, to universities. Many of these students attend university on a part-time basis and remain outside of the realm of traditional recruiters. Also, in fiscally conservative times, and at a time when household expenditures on education are low, this particular group of students are less able to access university education altogether, and therefore cannot reasonably be relied upon to fill seats in classrooms.

Private-public partnerships have been explored, some with more success than others. The Endowment Assistance Programme was responsible for the creation, in 1983, of five regional Chairs in Women's Studies. These Chairs have enhanced the profile of women's studies on and off university campuses (Conrad 1997). Financed from a combination of federal funding and private donations, the responsibilities of the Chairs include establishing links to the communities in which they are located, research and some teaching. However, in spite of the generous contributions in the establishment of the Chairs, at least one previous Chair holder has noted inadequacies in the funds intended to cover salaries, travel and administrative costs, to the extent that it has been necessary to leave some Chairs vacant until accumulated interest makes it possible to fill them (Conrad 1997, 8). Women's studies units ought to weigh very carefully the badly needed revenue that is generated and received from corporations. Corporations that already fund women's studies teaching and research, such as the \$1.5 million Scotiabank Professor at the University of Western Ontario, and the Bank of Montreal Visiting Scholar in Women's Studies at the University of Ottawa, raise potentially serious questions about academic freedom and intellectual property. They risk setting dangerous precedents in terms of who sets research agendas and determines research priorities, and foster private, as opposed to public ownership, of research findings.

One of the effects of this lean climate is that academic programmes, including women's studies, are increasingly being asked to justify their continued inclusion in post-secondary education based on economic decisions, as opposed to decisions about what a well-rounded, liberal arts education should include. Programmes in the liberal arts and the humanities, where women's studies is situated in many universities, that do not offer professional accreditation, and that do not translate into employment opportunities in immediately transparent ways are at greater risk of being deemed 'cost inefficient' when held against the prevailing paradigm of the cost-benefits analysis in a market-driven environment. As such, programmes based in the liberal arts will be less able to generate widespread, institutional support. The directive of the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities provides an example of the relationship between post-secondary education and employment as a priority. In Ontario, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities recently announced that half of all annual operating grants to universities will be tied to the ability of individual universities to educate students who hold down permanent jobs, measured six months and two years after graduation (Ibbitson 2000). Ontario universities, as institutions of higher learning, are being held directly accountable for fluctuations in the labour market and regional disparities in labour market opportunities, for substantial portions of their operating expenses.

The move toward a market driven basis for decision making in universities has recently drawn criticism from an unlikely source, the Chief Executive Officers of more than thirty corporations, the majority of them technology-related industries. The group of thirty CEOs have called for “a more balanced approach to the issue” and argued that, for their employees with liberal arts educations, “[t]his time was well spent, not squandered. They have increased their value to our companies, our economy, our culture and themselves by acquiring the level of cultural and civic literacy that the humanities offers” (Partridge 2000). While encouraging, this call alone is not likely to halt the general move away publicly supported post-secondary institutions. Alongside strategies to challenge the privatization of university education, there also must be long-range, multiple pronged approaches to strengthening institutional structures to sustain women’s studies.

### Building A Foundation for the House of Cards, or Strengthening Institutional Structures in Women’s Studies

For all of its growth, and recognition of its importance, women’s studies is still “firmly established on the margins of academe” (Hamilton 1996, 61). To flourish, and to move forward, women’s studies in Canadian universities has to continue building solid institutional structures within universities. The more deeply women’s studies is embedded in institutional structures, the more solid its foundation and the more protected it may be, although never entirely, from the neo-liberal, economic forces that are driving the lean climate. Tancred notes “such structures would be more difficult to phase out than the present coordinating arrangements” (1994, 18). The expansion of the women’s studies Ph.D. must carefully consider its institutional bases, and may be best placed where women’s studies already exists as a university department and not as a programme.

Presently, women’s studies exists as a programme, as opposed to a department, in most Canadian universities. This distinction is not simply a linguistic one. The structure of university programmes and departments varies considerably from university to university. In women’s studies the programme model usually allows an introductory course in women’s studies, at the first or second year level, to be taught. Typically, faculty members from other university departments, sometimes with course relief and sometimes on course overload, teach the introductory level women’s studies course. Sometimes it is taught by part-time and/or adjunct faculty, and in some cases the introductory level course may be team-taught. In addition to this introductory course, the programme model allows a cluster of courses to be offered across a wide range of disciplines, and taught by a range of faculty from across the university. Some of these courses may be cross-listed as women’s studies courses while other courses, not cross-listed, may be recognized as courses toward a specialization or minor in women’s studies. This programme model of women’s studies has supported, in principle, interdisciplinarity as a still highly contested, but nonetheless valued, basic tenet of women’s studies. While there still may be hope that the programme model can further the integration of feminist perspectives and scholarship into existing curricula, a significant body of literature

suggests that this has yet to happen as expected (Gorham 1996; Spender and Kramarae 1992; Warne 1998).

The consequences of this programme model, for women's studies, have been mixed. This model is credited with exposing many undergraduate students to women's studies, including those who might not otherwise have set out to take courses in women's studies. It has permitted faculty doing feminist research to be involved in teaching and in shaping women's studies curricula, no matter where their appointment is in the university. But, in the face of the lean climate, it is important to acknowledge that this model has also served women's studies poorly. In the long-term, it has embedded women's studies in fragile institutional structures. It has been fueled almost entirely by the goodwill, energy, enthusiasm and unpaid labour of women's studies faculty. Bauer likens this additional workload to Arlie Hochschild's "second shift" (1996). She states,

Unconsciously or not, academic administrations, I contend, expect women – and particularly women's studies professors to follow out...models [of unpaid work] that they generally don't for male faculty members. The result is that women's studies teachers do the 'second shift' of academia. Perhaps it is not at all surprising that the same expectation often holds true within women's studies programs or departments, particularly for those joint-appointed in a traditional department and an interdisciplinary one. That means a double shift of committee appointments, often a double load of meetings and assignments in women's studies, to be fulfilled on top of the "regular" hours of one's home department (1996, 19).

Equally important, the programme model of women's studies has allowed university administrators to inadequately support women's studies and to justify this inadequate level of support. This lack of support can take many forms, from not acknowledging and recognizing of the "double shift" in women's studies programmes, to not adequately recognizing women's studies as a part of liberal arts education in Canadian universities. The effects of this lack of support are further exacerbated by the fact that programmes, as opposed to departments, tend to have small budgets and are often sidelined in terms of their ability to participate in university decision-making bodies such as university Senates.

The programme model, over the past three decades, has also served to perpetuate the problem of too few faculty appointments to teach, plan curricula, advise and supervise students and fulfill administrative roles in women's studies. Programme models of women's studies, in that they are unlikely to secure their own separate tenure lines, encourage the continued use of part-time and adjunct faculty. The problem of too few faculty appointments in women's studies is a problem with the potential to spiral in on itself in a way that can further jeopardize the status of women's studies in universities. Too few faculty in women's studies can be one of the reasons that students select courses in better supported, discipline based departments. When enrolments in women's studies courses decrease, the appointment of women's studies faculty, either jointly or as full



appointments, is regarded by university administrations as unwarranted and women's studies becomes even less visible and its status more tenuous (Allen 1997, 346,7).

The answer is not necessarily for all institutions to move toward the department model of women's studies. In small universities this is simply not attainable; nor may it be desirable. However, the future development of graduate women's studies, particularly at the graduate level, may be best served where women's studies already exists as a university department. The women's studies Ph.D. will likely be best served where there are already sufficient faculty for the purposes of curricula and programme planning, teaching, advising and supervision and where women's studies has an already established presence. Currently seven Canadian universities include women's studies among their university departments.<sup>12</sup> Four out of these seven of these departments currently offer graduate programmes at the Masters level, and one of them, York University, also offers the freestanding doctorate.<sup>13</sup>

Without trying to make the case for women's studies departmental status appear uncomplicated, there are concerns expressed about the development of graduate programmes in women's studies generally (Friedman 1998; Gorham 1996). Among these are concerns about: (1) institutionalization within universities, (2) co-optation and, (3) interdisciplinarity. These are serious concerns, and they are also concerns that are acknowledged by those who have been instrumental in and who continue to support the development of the doctorate in women's studies in Canada (Shteir 1996, 4).

Reservations about institutionalization suggest that departmental status will create women's studies refuges within the university where women's studies will exist isolated from and unconnected to other programmes and departments. It is important, however, to recognize that "all disciplines, including traditional ones, are founded upon boundaries and structures that are products of history," and that no single discipline in the university is static and unchanging (Friedman 1998, 319). Concern expressed about institutionalization within the university environment may be somewhat premature, as it presumes more autonomous bases for women's studies than exist in almost all, if not all, universities. Departments of women's studies, at the undergraduate and graduate levels, do not exist as completely autonomous units. Rather, women's studies programmes and departments draw on courses that are cross-listed with other departments, as well as courses that are taught by faculty members appointed to other departments, and thus they necessitate various levels of cooperation across the university. A possible alternative to concerns about the creation of an institutional canon in women's studies may be to also recognize the potential for graduates of the women's studies Ph.D. to fill academic appointments in interdisciplinary studies, understood as the ability to integrate knowledge across disciplinary perspectives.

Gorham states that, "[t]he danger of the co-optation of feminism has been present since the beginning of the movement for feminist scholarship...In some ways, the establishment of Women's Studies degree programmes has increased the danger of co-optation (Gorham 1996, 65, 66). By this, she understands co-optation to signify a move away from grassroots and/or political organizations and toward a concentration on

university structures and environments. The issue of co-optation in terms of women's studies and its placement in universities is far from straightforward, or even unique to women's studies. Lenton notes "[m]ost analyses of radicalism in the 1960s and 1970s contain some variant of the 'Jerry-Rubin-turns-stockbroker' thesis" (1990, 57). Lenton, as part of the Canadian Women's Studies Project (1990), did find that those in Canadian universities who began teaching women's studies courses later (1985 to 1988) than its earliest teachers (before 1975) identified weaker ties to grassroots and/or political organizations (1990, 58). However, this finding is not straightforward. It may reflect the opportunities for feminist scholarship that were available to early teachers of women's studies, and/or the political and/or grassroots activities that were similarly available to women's studies scholars in the conservative 1980s (Bashevkin 1998; Lenton 1990, 63). Rarely does the presumption that there is a large rift between feminist activism and feminist scholarship account for diversities of feminist political activism (Lenton 1990, 60), and too often, it fails to define political and/or grassroots activism and examine critically by whom it is being defined (1990, 60). There has been a tendency to romanticize 'the community' as a monolithic entity and to downplay and ignore the institutional structures that constrain community activism (Lee 1996). Questions asked about activist and/or political activities may be fraught with assumptions that these are already separate and distinct activities from feminist scholarship and theorizing. It is also the case that the department model of women's studies, over the programme model, could strengthen university resources and put women's studies in a position where it is better able to work with community groups and organizations, as might be the case if co-operative learning opportunities and practical-based learning opportunities are integrated with women's studies department curricula.

Friedman expresses reservations about the lack of a base of knowledge that results from interdisciplinarity in women's studies, what she terms "potential superficiality" in knowledge (1998, 312). She argues that this translates directly into a lack of a disciplinary home and disadvantages women's studies Ph.D. graduates in the academic job market.

The extent to which interdisciplinarity, as the ability to integrate various disciplinary perspectives into a recognized epistemology, has occurred in women's studies has been considered by an array of scholars, among them Allen and Kitch (1998), Boxer (1998) and Hedges (1997). They agree that while present models of graduate women's studies aims for interdisciplinarity, they have yet to fully achieve it. Hedges finds curricula in graduate women's studies to be a combination of both discipline based courses and free standing interdisciplinary courses (1997, 8). Allen and Kitch, in their examination of six periodicals<sup>14</sup> in women's studies that claim interdisciplinarity, conclude that all are comprised by a variety of discipline based authors and that "it [is] the reader who must perform the creative acts of integration" (1998, 283). Responsibility to establish interdisciplinarity, however, does not rest with women's studies units alone; it also rests with the larger settings in which women's studies programmes and departments are located. Using interdisciplinarity as a 'buzzword' in university catalogues and on university websites, to demonstrate knowledge of and engagement with current trends in the academy, cannot replace the supports that need to be in place in order for it to occur.

It is likely that there is still too far little institutional space to explore how interdisciplinarity can translate into teaching and research. For instance, women's studies programmes forced to address their inadequate resources by borrowing faculty members from other departments to teach core courses in women's studies, should not be surprised that faculty remain principally attached, in their teaching and research, to their home discipline in which tenure and promotion are almost always located. Similarly, university administrators should not be surprised when the list of faculty who are available to teach women's studies courses appears long, but there are too few faculty to undertake the integration that interdisciplinarity requires.

The future for women's studies doctorates in the academic job market, to date, has not received extensive consideration, perhaps because of the relatively small number of women's studies doctorates to date. In future, this topic will have to be considered. There needs to be discussion about whether or not graduates of the women's studies Ph.D. are among those best qualified to teach in women's studies programmes and departments. If it is determined that they are not, the doctorate itself comes under question. Until this debate is taken up, hiring committees in women's studies might more carefully consider what interdisciplinarity means. This may mean moving beyond listing 'a familiarity with interdisciplinarity approach' as one of the key qualifications for almost all women's studies positions, at that same time that some committees express strong preferences for candidates who most closely replicate their own discipline based methods and interests and could be strengthen their own departmental resources. The ability of doctorates in women's studies to be hired in women's studies units in universities may depend, in part, on the willingness of their colleagues to question certainties about their own disciplinary approaches and practices as the most appropriate ones with which to explore areas of inquiry (Wissoker 2000).

The lack of an institutionally recognized discipline in the academic job market, as noted by Friedman, is a serious consideration. Although it is unlikely that all graduates of the women's studies doctorate will want to work in universities, it is equally unlikely that all of those with completed doctorates in women's studies, in the next decade, will be hired by existing or even expanding undergraduate and graduate women's studies programmes and departments.<sup>15</sup> This presents a dilemma, but not one that is necessarily unique to women's studies. Graduates of English departments, for example, face a similar predicament in an academic job market that has for many years, been saturated for those with doctorates. The Ph.D. has, at least by some been fitted into the paradigm of labour market flexibility that is presumed to shape the 'new economy'. A 1995 report from the Committee on Science, Engineering and Public Policy in the United States argued that in the likelihood that there are not enough jobs, Ph.D.s will have to be able to shift and change jobs and, or change specialties (Honan 1995).<sup>16</sup> Discussions about the responsibility of training doctoral students for future academic positions in the current lean climate, need to be university-wide discussions involving graduate students, faculty and university administrators.

In the end, building institutional structures alone will not insulate women's studies programmes and departments from the forces of lean climate that is actively shaping

Canadian universities. Rather, this strategy has to happen alongside sustained resistance to the neo-liberal agenda and efforts to strengthen in ways that will benefit all programmes and departments in women's studies.

### Shifting to Vision Building

Short-term, reactive strategies can shift to vision building in many different ways. Timing for this shift is pressing as the continued expansion of graduate women's studies makes it possible for students to be educated, from the level of the B.A. through to the doctorate, in women's studies.<sup>17</sup> Strengthening women's studies outside of the walls of any one, single institution can be one strategy that leads to wider recognition of and support for women's studies as an essential part of the larger, scholarly community. It can also strengthen women's studies programmes and departments at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Possible strategies for vision building include, but are not limited to, increased support for Canadian women's studies journals and the Canadian Women's Studies Association and lobbying for full recognition by SSHRC as the national research body. Finally, a clear articulation that addresses women's studies as an important field of knowledge, perhaps modeled on documentation that already exists in the United States and in some European contexts should be considered. Additional strategies are also desirable.

Women's studies can be strengthened through the continued support of scholarly journals in women's studies. As well as serving as an important resource to report and share scholarly research findings, academic journals are one of the channels through which to communicate among programmes and departments across a large expanse. They serve as one possible forum for debate and discussion specific to women's studies in Canadian universities, among university women's studies departments and women's communities and as possible sites for collective action. Which topics are considered in women's studies journals is also important. Ainley notes that, since research findings from the 1990 Canadian Women's Studies Project were published, women's studies has tended not to regard itself as a central topic of investigation in Canadian scholarly journals.<sup>18</sup> As a result, women's studies in Canada lacks the kinds of information that may be essential for future planning. For instance, there is little information on which to document, in a sustained way, the effects of the current lean fiscal climate on women's studies programmes and departments. Little information is available about undergraduate and graduate enrollments in women's studies programmes and departments since 1990. Furthermore, there are no current data compiled that provide information about how many professors in Canadian universities presently hold tenure-track, full appointments to women's studies, how many faculty hold appointments that are cross-listed with women's studies and how many faculty teach women's studies courses in other capacities. In the absence of these kinds of data, determining how women's studies programmes and departments might be shaped, if at all, by graduates of the women's studies doctorate is a formidable task.

Strengthening women's studies must also occur through continued support for the Canadian Women's Studies Association, as the national governing organization for

women's studies in Canada. Meetings of the Canadian Women's Studies Association, in comparison to other academic societies and despite some growth in graduate programmes, remain small and are not always well supported and attended. The emphasis on interdisciplinarity can translate in the annual conference programme into a wide range of topics, and can bring scholars working in other disciplines to Canadian Women's Studies Association meetings. It also can, and does, disperse existing support. Ainley notes "many women's studies faculty do not belong to CWSA" (1999). And for many of the same reasons already noted, many women's studies graduate students and women's studies programmes and departments are also not members of the Canadian Women's Studies Association. It is not yet clear whether or not the growth in women's studies programmes at the graduate level has translated positively, or will translate in the future, into growth and increased support for the Canadian Women's Studies Association.

An active lobby by the CWSA and its members has consistently pressed the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada, as the national research granting body, to recognize women's studies as a legitimate area of inquiry. To date, almost eight years after the first students entered the freestanding Ph.D. in women's studies, and seven doctorates in hand later, SSHRC has failed in this regard. SSHRC has yet to fully recognize women's studies in the adjudication of research applications. In the area of strategic themes, the only theme specific to women has been discontinued. The onus to make changes that would fully recognize women's studies should not rest solely on women's studies graduate students, those who hold post-doctoral fellowships and faculty, who continue to toil in a "double shift" of another kind, in this case, conducting their own research and lobbying SSHRC to have this research recognized. To a large extent the onus rests on administrators at SSHRC to respond to the research community whom they are appointed to serve.

Heald, as the current CWSA President, summarizes the current status of women's studies within SSHRC in her article, "Women's Studies, Who Is She? The Discipline According to SSHRC" (Heald 2001) Until 2000, women's studies scholars were required to submit applications to SSHRC for peer-reviewed adjudication under either traditional discipline based codes, which have sub-discipline codes or under the broad code of "interdisciplinary studies" which has no sub-discipline codes. Those who chose traditional discipline based codes had their research proposals adjudicated by a peer based, discipline specific committee, although there was no guarantee that committee members were necessarily knowledgeable about or receptive to feminist research perspectives. Those who chose the interdisciplinary category were required to provide an additional letter of explanation, outlining their theoretical approach and/or research methodology and the contributions of their research to interdisciplinarity (Heald 2001). In the interdisciplinary peer review committee, there was, again, no guarantee that reviewers were necessarily knowledgeable about or receptive to feminist research perspectives.

As of 2000, women's studies is included as a discipline code.<sup>19</sup> However, the composition of the committee that will adjudicate these applications still makes the situation less than satisfactory. The peer review, adjudication committee includes members appointed from the broad areas of "health studies, social work and women's

studies”.<sup>20</sup> Under this arrangement initiated by SSHRC, some scholars, particularly those who do multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary research that is humanities based, are at a distinct disadvantage. Heald also contends that lumping these three areas together “pathologizes women, situating us as objects of “help” rather than subjects of our own lives and actors in the social, cultural, economic, psychological and historical contexts within which those lives are framed and changed” (Heald 2001). This arrangement serves to render invisible a substantial portion of the women’s studies research community and fails to fully acknowledge, in principle, interdisciplinarity in relation to women’s studies.

Members of CWSA continue to express concern about this situation, while SSHRC continues to duck the issue. In January 2001, Marc Renaud, SSHRC President, while visiting Brock University informed CWSA member Roberta Robb, that there were an “insufficient” number of applications to warrant a separate adjudication committee for women’s studies (CWSA 2001).<sup>21</sup> Yet, in a letter on Renaud’s behalf and sent to Heald and seventy-eight CWSA members, Ned Ellis, Director General, Programs Branch, cites an altogether different reason for SSHRC’s failure to establish a separate adjudication committee for women’s studies. His letter states,

The Council is aware that much scholarship in Women’s Studies is interdisciplinary and is often more grounded in the humanities than the social science [sic]. We accordingly made an effort over the summer to include humanist scholars on the new Committee 20 [the discipline code], but, unfortunately, with limited success. The qualifications required for committee membership, including a high level of research achievement, language skills sufficient to read documents and follow discussions in both languages and representational factors of region, university, gender, discipline, schools of thought plus the need to avoid real or apparent conflicts of interest all combined to limit the field of potential members (Ellis 2001).

Ellis, in his letter, asks the CWSA and already overworked women’s studies faculty to “assist us in promoting research on Women’s Studies,” to determine and submit “pertinent sub-discipline codes and to apply as individuals to serve as adjudicators” (2001). SSHRC’s claim that there are not enough scholars that meet the qualifications to serve on this committee is unconvincing. Eichler and Tite, in the Canadian Women’s Studies Project, found women’s studies professors at Canadian universities to be more heavily concentrated in senior ranks and in more secure positions in that they were more likely to be tenured, than female Canadian university professors on average (1990, 13). They note that this finding is not a result of age, as their median age is no higher than the average of their counterparts (1990, 13). Presumably some of those who are further advanced in career stage can demonstrate the necessary high level of research achievement. Representational factors are designed to include those who have been systematically excluded by virtue of the region in which they live or the size of their university. However, gender as one consideration of committee membership stipulated to

ensure that the traditional under representation of women is corrected, should hardly present a problem for SSHRC in constituting a women's studies adjudication committee.

SSHRC's concerns, about the ability of women's studies faculty to work in both official languages, are also likely to pertain to academic disciplines other than women's studies. However, this remains an important point to consider in terms of the development of current Ph. D. programmes in women's studies and for possible further expansion in future. Strengthening women's studies requires that opportunities to the level of completion of the terminal degree should be available to both English speaking (Anglophone) and French-speaking (Francophone) populations. The 'two solitudes' model that persists between English speaking and French speaking feminist communities in Canada, particularly as it has related to the Quebec movement for independence, has not been addressed within women's studies at the graduate level (Adamson et al. 1988, 8). The possibilities for completing Ph.D. level studies in women's studies, in the French language, remain limited. While the only collaborative Ph.D. in women's studies offers an opportunity to combine women's studies with French language studies, both the freestanding Ph.D. programme and the proposed Ph.D. programme consider this issue only to the extent that faculty who teach and do research in French may also be available as programme faculty, advisors and administrators. The future for women's studies at Francophone universities stands to be slowed by a possible dearth of women's studies scholars educated to the level of Ph.D. completion in women's studies.

SSHRC's commitment to women's studies is further contraindicated by their abrupt announcement, in July 2000, of an end to the Women and Change Strategic Research Grant initiative, thereby ending a seventeen-year commitment to fund research specific to women. The Council notes that at this time, "it would be premature...to consider launching a new strategic programme on women" (SSHRC 2000).

Women's studies is receiving a clear indication from SSHRC that as a research-granting body, they are less interested in and supportive of research on women than they once were and that they are less interested in and supportive of humanities based research.<sup>22</sup> The possible connection between this sea change in direction and the lean climate is evident in SSHRC's responses to the concerns expressed by the Canadian Women's Studies Association. The Canadian Women's Studies Association is being encouraged by SSHRC to "get onboard with government plans for the new economy" and to be "inventive" in their approach toward research (CWSA 2001), and SSHRC is actively encouraging researchers, including those in women's studies, to conduct "interdisciplinary team research done in collaboration with partners" both private and public (SSHRC 2000). If SSHRC remains unclear about how to define women's studies in a research capacity, then women's studies must also grapple with this issue and take the lead on it.

A clearer articulation of women's studies as a knowledge base can help to make transparent how women's studies is already being defined at the level of the doctorate. Women's studies in the context of the Ph. D. is being defined every day. It is being defined as it is decided which courses will be taught, who will teach them, which courses

will be required and which courses will not be required, and who is qualified by virtue of admissions at the doctoral level to enroll in those courses.<sup>23</sup> A clearer articulation of this definition is particularly crucial in relation to the development of the women's studies doctorate because what is deemed to be important at the Ph.D. level will have a substantial impact on future directions of women's studies. Canadian women's studies can begin by looking to two examples that articulate a vision for this, directly and indirectly. The National Women's Studies Association in the United States articulates a vision for women's studies in their document "Defining Women's Studies Scholarship: A Statement of the National Women's Studies Association Task Force on Faculty Roles and Rewards." The document serves multiple purposes. It provides guidelines "for scholarly recognition of feminist and women's studies scholarly and professional work" (Pryce 1999, 2), it identifies current, national initiatives in women's studies, and it documents the significance and the contributions of women's studies and serves as a tool for assessment purposes (Pryce 1999). Likewise, the Women's Studies Evaluation Guidelines, originating from the Dutch Women's Studies Association, provides evaluation guidelines for women's studies programmes that, in part, determine what women's studies is in universities in the Netherlands (Brouds, Tijdens, Zwinkels 1994). Both of these documents may be contested in that not all of those who administer and/or teach in women's studies will agree with their content. While there may not be agreement about what is spelled out in these documents, they nevertheless serve as a crucial basis on which to initiate and sustain larger discussions and debates about what a long-term, strategic institutional approach at the level of the women's studies doctorate might be, or might not be (Howe 1997, 416). In the end, a long-term vision for the doctorate in women's studies is unlikely to move beyond the stage of written documentation unless there some levels of institutional support and institutional will to implement it.

### Conclusion

The Ph. D. in women's studies, as it has already been developed and as it exists in two Canadian universities to date, faces significant future challenges under the present conditions. Considering these challenges, and the tendency of women's studies toward critical self-reflection, it is appropriate to question at this time, how best to proceed with the women's studies Ph.D. Gorham cautions that "unless we think carefully,...all universities in Canada will be forced to establish such programmes, simply because institution building of this kind tends inevitably to reproduce itself" (1996, 65). Material conditions at present may not warrant this as a concern; however, she is correct to suggest that we think carefully about the expansion of the women's studies doctorate in Canadian universities. To sustain women's studies it is essential to have a clearer, long-term vision for what exists at present, if indeed one exists at all.

It is important to ask whether or not this is the most appropriate time to be developing additional Ph.D. programmes in women's studies in Canadian universities, beyond those that already exist. Important questions arise. For example, should time energy and resources be directed toward grappling with critical issues that already exist for graduate



women's studies? Can the development of additional Ph. D. programmes in women's studies, at this particular time, be supported in the ways necessary to ensure high standards of teaching, research and scholarship? Can additional programmes provide the intellectual environment that faculty and students require and deserve? If not, what are the possible future consequences for women's studies in universities, for women's studies faculty and for future women's studies Ph.D. graduates? On the other hand, will the development of future Ph.D. programmes help in some way to address some of present concerns? For example, will SHHRC be persuaded to fully acknowledge women's studies in terms of the adjudication of applications for research if there are more women's studies doctoral students and if there are more women's studies doctoral level programmes? And would women's studies be perceived and as "a critical, enduring, generative field of knowledge, invaluable for the progress and improvement of human cultural understanding" (Allen, 1997) if there were only very few programmes offered at the level of the doctorate in women's studies?

It is also important to consider the extent to which the lean fiscal climate that is facing Canadian universities, and women's studies units in Canadian universities, might also exist elsewhere. Allen states that in the United States a combination of weaker state legislation and the move toward business oriented practices in universities has already led to downsizing and streamlining in some women's studies units (1997, 358). Likewise, a lack of resources and a single faculty retirement resulted in the temporary suspension of an undergraduate course and master's degree in women's studies at the University of Natal-Durban, South Africa, "at this point no other staff member is prepared to take on the large, unpaid task of coordinating the programme" (Bonnin 1997, 353). Might similar forces be responsible for the closure, or threatened closure, of women's studies programmes elsewhere, such as in France and New Zealand? What lessons might be learned from these experiences, by a country such as Israel that is currently in the process of establishing Ph.D. programmes in women's studies? What is the potential for international cooperation to strengthen women's studies?

The recommendation made here, that additional Ph.D. programmes in women's studies to those that already exist in Canada, should proceed with caution, is not intended to be read as a capitulation to the neo-liberal economic agenda. Rather, it is an acknowledgement that women's studies at the Ph.D. level in Canada, and perhaps elsewhere, cannot sufficiently thrive without strong bases at the undergraduate and the Masters levels and within a larger research and scholarly community more broadly. With seven graduates of the women's studies Ph. D. degree in Canada to date, and forty-six students currently enrolled, on a full-time and part-time basis in the freestanding Ph. D. programme in women's studies, this is no time to be complacent about the situation of the women's studies Ph. D. in Canadian universities, and nor is this a time to be complacent about the lean climate that faces Canadian universities.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Women's Studies, Mount Saint Vincent University

<sup>2</sup> Crow and Gottell note "the proliferation of Canadian feminist journals and presses has proven essential for the creation of research and theory" (2000, xv). The list they provide includes the following Canadian, feminist journals: *Resources for Feminist Research* (1972), *Atlantis* (1974), *Canadian Woman Studies* (1978), *Fireweed* (1979), *Tessera* (1983) and *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law* (1985). They also note that the following Canadian, feminist presses have made an important contribution: Press Gang (1970), The Toronto Women's Press (1972), Eden Press (1977), gynergy books (1987) and Sister Vision Press (1984) (2000, xv).

<sup>3</sup> According to the Canadian Women's Studies On-Line Data Base (December, 2000) the following universities offer concentrations and/or specializations in women's studies: Athabasca University, University of Ottawa, University of Western Ontario, Laurentian University, Queen's University, University de Quebec a Montreal, and University of Regina. There is, unfortunately, no census about what comprises a specialization in women's studies. Additionally, Simon Fraser University, York University, University of Windsor, Concordia University, Universite de Sherbrooke and University of Saskatchewan offer a certificate in women's studies. Simon Fraser University, Bishop's University and the Waterloo University all offer a women's studies diploma.

<sup>4</sup> According to the Canadian Women's Studies On-Line Data Base (December 2000) the following universities offer a minor in women's studies: University of Alberta, University of Calgary, Simon Fraser University, University of British Columbia, University of Northern British Columbia, University of

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Victoria, University of Saskatchewan, University of Regina, Brandon University, University of Manitoba, University of New Brunswick, Memorial University, Acadia University, Dalhousie University, Mount Saint Vincent University, St. Mary's University, Brock University, University of Guelph, McMaster University, University of Toronto, Trent University, Waterloo University, Wilfred Laurier University (Combined), University of Windsor, York University, Queen's University, University of Prince Edward Island, Bishop's University, Concordia University, Universite de Sherbrooke and McGill University. Where combined is indicated, the minor, major and/or honours is offered in combination with another academic discipline.

<sup>5</sup> The following universities, according to the same source above, offer an undergraduate major in women's studies: University of Alberta, Athabasca University, University of Calgary, Simon Fraser University, University of British Columbia, University of Northern British Columbia, University of Victoria, University of Saskatchewan, University of Regina (Individualized Programme), University of Winnipeg, Acadia University (Combined), Dalhousie University, Mount Saint Vincent University, St. Mary's University, Brock (Combined), University of Guelph, Concordia University, McGill University, Nipissing University, University of Ottawa, University of Toronto, Trent University, Waterloo University, Wilfred Laurier University, University of Windsor (Combined), York University and Universite de Sherbrooke.

<sup>6</sup> Among those universities that offer honours degrees in women's studies are: University of Victoria, University of Winnipeg, University of New Brunswick (Combined), Dalhousie (Advanced Honours), Mount Saint Vincent University, Carleton University (Combined), University of Guelph, McMaster University (Combined), Nipissing University, Trent University, Waterloo University (Combined), University of Western Ontario, Wilfred Laurier University (Combined), York University (Specialized Honours), and Queen's University (Canadian Women's Studies Data Base On-Line, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> Universities that offer a Master of Arts degree in Women's Studies include: Simon Fraser University, York University, Memorial University, and the collaborative programme among Dalhousie University, Mount Saint Vincent University and Saint Mary's University. The University of British Columbia offers a Master of Arts degree in Women's Studies and Gender Relations, while the University of Saskatchewan offers a Masters degree in Women's Studies and Gender Studies (Canadian Women's Studies Data Base On-Line, 2000).

<sup>8</sup> According the Canadian On-Line Data Base, the following universities offer a Master of Arts in Women's Studies in collaboration with another discipline: Lakehead University and the University of Toronto, Carleton University, University of Ottawa (2000).

<sup>9</sup> At the University of Toronto, admission into the Ph. D. programme is only through another discipline. Therefore, it is not possible for students with a Master of Arts degree in Women's Studies to be admitted unless they qualify for admission through another discipline-based background other than women's studies. There is also second collaborative model at the University of Toronto. The once separate institution, Ontario Institute in Studies for Education, has amalgamated with the University of Toronto and it is possible to obtain a doctorate in education in the area of gender and equity studies.

<sup>10</sup> Romero cites Bowles' (1980) definitions: "cross-disciplinary, viewing one discipline from the perspective of another...; multidisciplinary, presenting the way a number of different disciplines view a single problem; interdisciplinary, which suggests an integration of disciplinary perspectives, and transdisciplinary, beyond the disciplines (2000, 160-1).

<sup>11</sup> Data from Statistics Canada show women constitute fifty-five percent of students enrolled in university on a full-time basis in 1998-1999; this percentage has increased steadily since 1994. While women constitute sixty percent of all part-time students enrolled in university in 1998-1999, this percentage has declined steadily since 1994 (Statistics Canada 1999).

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<sup>12</sup> Women's studies has departmental status at: Athabasca University, Simon Fraser University, University of Northern British Columbia, Queen's University, York University, Mount Saint Vincent University and the University of Saskatchewan.

<sup>13</sup> Shteir (1996, 5) notes that at York University other institutional features were important for developing a doctorate in women's studies. These included: (1) support for interdisciplinary graduate level programmes, (2) a campus environment that was supportive of women's studies (including the presence of library resources, a research centre and a women's centre), and (3) "a critical mass of feminist faculty." Briskin notes, in an unpublished study at York University, that in 1990, eighty-eight percent (132 of 150) of York University faculty who responded to a questionnaire, identified themselves as feminist" (1999, 116).

<sup>14</sup> Allen & Kitch (1998) examined: *differences, Feminist Studies, Frontiers, NWSA Journal, Signs* and *Women's Studies Quarterly*.

<sup>15</sup> Since 1997, there have been seven graduates from the freestanding women's studies Ph.D. programme. Two of the seven graduates hold employment outside of the university; one of these two graduates also teaches on an adjunct basis in a women's studies department. One graduate is presently on maternity leave and will be seeking future employment. Three graduates of the doctorate in women's studies hold academic appointments in women's studies, all of them tenure-track or tenured. One graduate held a full-time, tenure-track appointment to a women's studies programme, prior to entering the doctorate programme, and upon completion she was granted tenure. Another graduate was initially hired in a tenure-track, joint-appointment in labour studies and political science, but will move, in 2001, to a Tier II Research Chair in the area of feminism and political economy (Personal Communication, Couchman, 2000). Another graduate holds a full-time, tenure track appointment in a department of women's studies, at a university with a mission statement for the education of women, and the last graduate just recently completed her doctorate, is teaching part-time and is seeking a research position.

<sup>16</sup> Thanks to Emily Martin for pointing me in the direction of this report.

<sup>17</sup> I am not aware that there is an instance in which this has already been the case. If not, it is expected that it will be the case in the near future.

<sup>18</sup> See reports of the Canadian Women's Studies Project in *Atlantis* 16 (1) (199) and critiques of this project, Brodribb, Pujol and Carty in *Resources for Feminist Research* (1991). Also, see Lenton's response (1992). Two articles that have been published about women's studies in Canadian universities, since 1990 (Shteir 1997; Tancred 1994) have both been published in *Women's Studies Quarterly*, an American scholarly journal.

<sup>19</sup> The following motion was passed unanimously at the CWSA Annual Meeting, in Edmonton, Alberta on 28, May 2000: "That Women's Studies/etudes feministes be recognized as a discipline by SSHRC and have a place among the discipline committees." This motion was also passed at a symposium on "Women, Research and Strategies" in October 1991 and the symposium "Women in the Academy" in 2000, and was supported by the executive of SSHRC and the Canadian Federation for the Humanities (PAR-L 2000).

<sup>20</sup> Current committee members include those from the disciplines of education, nursing, philosophy, social work, sociology and women's studies (Ellis 2001).

<sup>21</sup> This is contradicted by information provided by SSHRC. In applications for Standard Research Grants, over the past two years, SSHRC received 264 applications with "women" specified as a research field (SSHRC 2000). However, in the letter from Ellis to Heald (2001) it is noted that "proposals pertaining to women" have a success rate of slightly below that the average success rate for all applications" (Ellis 2001). Yet, in a meeting with Dr. Marc Renaud, SHHRC President, at Mount Saint Vincent University, in April 2001, he reiterated that there were an insufficient number of research applications to warrant a separate women's studies adjudication committee. One strategic way to address this would be to encourage all women's studies scholars to submit their research applications to the SHHRC Committee 20 category,

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regardless of the relevance of the committee configuration to their women's studies research. Such a move might eventually force SHRC to recognize and reconfigure the committee to respond to the multidisciplinary approaches of women's studies research. Of course, such a move might also be at the expense of career and career trajectory, a possible cost that those in other disciplines are not expected to incur.

<sup>22</sup> While I have characterized the implications of their actions this way, I expect that SSHRC might disagree with my characterization.

<sup>23</sup> My thanks to Susannah Luhmann made this point in a conversation we had about the women's studies Ph.D.