

17/11/87  
10/11/87  
Mair  
hickson

Work Notes: Meeting of Dec 14 1987.

Do a copy  
note: Rebecca  
will use

1. Housing and Space; Rosemary will talk to Wayne Hanson (I replied to his phone call this morning, Wednesday, but said Rosemary had better detail our space needs to him).
2. Letter to Meekison
- \* 3. Rewrite proposal for January meeting, to go out in advance - *copy the final list for*
4. Keep in mind research funds, such as those for day-care research (Rebecca)
5. Talk to Bridget about history, relations.
6. Call Sharon Jamison about computer networking, meeting in January (Mair also to come).
7. Get modem to Mair
8. Do detailed budget
9. Meet with Leslie re: work; get research work going
10. Graduate student's workshop on feminist research, feminist work in the university... but not to separate graduate student research from other meetings.
11. Funding decision, will need interpretation to Shirley... re: discussion of procedures by a subcommittee before beginning to fund raise.
12. Work for Women in Philosophy Group
13. Main agenda items next month... proposal again and Jamison on networking
14. Notes on own research project, notes on process to date and insights (for me).
15. Me to write letter of support to Graduate student's association; express our concern for interdisciplinary studies etc.

Sign  
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- Rosemary → 2

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Proposals to PPC

Structuring of proposal

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These women would carry ordinary memberships, so they could participate in the annual meeting and election of the board, and research scholar memberships so they could participate in the daily research activity of the centre. Some of these members may be paid research assistants within the centre, either working for one project or for a number of projects.

The staffing of the centre would consist of a coordinator and secretarial/ clerical assistance. The co-ordinator's work would be to ensure that information flowed amongst members of the centre, that an annual meeting of members was called and a board elected, that a budget was in place and accounts were kept, and that research meetings and seminars were organized for the presentation of research and the development of further research. In the case of women working in the community, she would also facilitate the meeting of women who had clear research problems with women who might be willing and able to do the required research.

Space requirements for such a centre would be offices for the coordinator and the secretarial assistance, offices for visiting researchers, and a reasonably large seminar and meeting room. These offices would need telephones, desks, chairs, and bookcases; the co-ordinator and secretaries office would require a filing cabinet, and the seminar room would require appropriate tables and chairs. The centre would also need one micro-computer for administrative work, one or more micro-computers with a mainframe connection for researchers, and a photocopying machine. Although some other resource material would be kept at the centre, in general centre members would use and support the resource centre of the Faculty of Extension Women's Programme or the Library system of the University of Alberta.

## 5. Structure of the Institute

### 5.1. Administrative and Working Organization

Given the above description of the work of the institute, what organizational structure would be most able to accomplish this work? We would suggest two major components to that structure, one which might be called the purely administrative structure and the other the working structure for researchers. The first is envisioned as an administrative support structure for the researchers and a formal line of command or authority within the university, the second as the decision making and intellectual facilitative structure of the institute.

*only?*

In the first structure we would propose a board or committee with minimal terms of reference. Its primary tasks would be to ensure that the institute as a physical plant was kept operating, that an adequate budget was developed and followed, that additional funds (both from within and outside the university) were sought to ensure the work of the institute, and generally to oversee the research institute as a functioning administrative unit. Such an administrative committee could be quite small, consisting of three or four people within the university who were committed to the institute and who had some competence to address the above terms of reference. This committee would report both to the researchers (or more accurately, keep them informed of the situation vis a vis finances and so on) and to the vice-president academic or research. The only employee of the committee would be an administrative assistant who would carry out the day to day work related to the above terms of reference; she would also have responsibility to the researchers.

This committee would initially be created as a fund-raising committee, and in that capacity it would have slightly different membership than in its final form, for it would need more community membership if its primary task was to raise funds. Attached to this committee should be a number of honorary members who would be women recognized in the community and willing to associate their name with the institute. This could include women like Doris Anderson (an alumna), Helen Hunley, Mary LeMessier, Betty Hewes, Jan Reimer, Jeanne Sauve, Rosemary Brown, Jenny Margetts and so on. It is partly accidental that I have identified mostly women in politics in this list, and partly not accidental in that the intention would be to identify high profile women and women in politics are more likely to fit into this category.

The second structure would be the working structure for the researchers involved with the institute. Although it is anticipated that most of the work itself would develop individually and in informally structured groupings (as described above), and that a minimum of time would be spent on decision-making for the institute as a whole, there would need to be a structure for that decision-making and for exchanging information with the above-named board. If in fact the energy of the institute members is to go into research, it is again important that this structure also be perceived as "minimalist", and the terms of reference assigned to it be quite limited.

We would propose that this structure, the Research Coordinating Committee, have as its terms of reference the acceptance of applications for membership in the institute (as Resident Research Associates or Research Scholars, as Visiting Research Associates or Research Scholars, or as supporting members) and the acceptance of research projects. They would also arrange for dissemination of research results, and further other objectives of the institute not clearly covered by these two tasks.

Research Scholars would be those researchers with a long-term commitment to the institute, indicated by their willingness to locate all of their major research within the institute for a period of a year or more. Visiting Scholars would be distinguished from Resident Scholars only by the fact they are visitors to the University from other Universities or research structures. Resident Scholars would be primarily "resident" in the University community but could include researchers based in local women's groups and women's structures within the government, or independent feminist researchers. Whether or not we were in a partnership relationship with Athabasca University women scholars from there could be designated "resident scholars".

Adjunct Researchers would be those researchers who wish to base one or two small or large projects in the institute, but do not wish to make a major commitment to the institute. They too would likely be academics, but could be students working on thesis or other projects or community researchers or researchers based in government.

Supporting members would pay a fee (graduated, depending on ability to pay) for membership and would receive publications(if any) and newsletters from the Institute. They would be kept informed of Institute activities and would be welcome to participate in a number of them. A category of Research Assistants could be added to this over-all structure, but most such assistants would be

working with researchers rather than for the institute; some may be designated as working for the institute.

The Research Co-ordinating Committee would be made up of eight members, six selected from the Research Scholars and two from Adjunct Researchers. There would be a structure of selection imposed to ensure that some women from each of the interest groups sat on this committee, but 6 of the 8 would be Resident Scholars. They would sit for a maximum of three years, on a rotating basis so that the total committee did not change in any one year.

This committee would have two employees, the administrative assistant identified earlier and an institute director. The administrative assistant's task would be to ensure that the paperwork needed for the institute itself was done, and to act as a primary liason between the administrative board and the co-ordinating committee. The institute director's task would be to provide leadership to the institute members, and to assist in developing research teams and increasing the flow of communication among researchers. She would attend meetings of the administrative board, and would describe the work of the institute to that board as necessary, but she would not be expected to play a major role in the work of that board. She would also provide the formal link between the Associate Dean of Research or the Associate Dean Academic, as provided for in the GFC guidelines for research institutes.

## **5.2. Space and facilities**

Dr. Meekison has suggested two possible spaces for us, and he would be open to other possibilities if we saw something specific. He has excluded the possibility of us obtaining Emily Murphy house as it has been designated for residential use only. I don't mean to sound imperialistic with this proposal, but if the institute becomes as large as it might well become, we might request that Emily Murphy house become the accommodation for visiting women scholars.

The suggested spaces are the current International Students' House, which would be available in 1988-89, or the East Asian Language and Literature House which would be available after the Arts renovation is completed, in the 87/88 university year. I really like the International Students' House, partly because of its proximity to the Faculty of Extension Building and I think a number of resources could be shared and workers in each area could simply support each other by their proximity. It has five office size rooms upstairs, a fairly open space (an old living and dining room) which could be used for meetings and seminars downstairs, and a



kitchen. The living/dining room might have a divider added which could be open or closed, to make it accommodate small or largish groups. It has a more or less usable basement, (it is dry), but it is not really space for working in. That space would be adequate for storage. It would need quite a lot of decorating creativity to make it warm and pleasant, but I think it is a good potential work space for us. I think the year 88/89 might also be about right for us to be ready to occupy space, based on the development of work to that point.

We should consider carefully what facilities we would include within that space, to maximize it as a working location. Having looked at the Boreal Institute I would suggest we learn a couple of lessons from them; one would be not to attempt to develop a library collection of our own in the Institute. We should keep copies of all research done within the institute, perhaps on disk and in hard-copy format, and make these copies available to interested people, but we should rely on the University library system and the Women's Resource Centre for maintaining books and documents. We may find ways to add to those collections, and if so we should do so, but the Institute should not attempt to hold a collection.

I think what we then need are microcomputers with micro to mainframe communications. These would be both word-processing and financial aids for the administrative functions of the unit, and they would be research tools for the researchers. They would need access to Dobas and to MTS to search the library collections (main library as well as those on SPIRES), and they should become communications nodes for researchers in the university and the community. They should have a dot-matrix printer and a laser printer attached. I think a copying machine would not be necessary, but if it is it might be possible to negotiate some arrangements with the Women's Program House next door. I think we would want a microcomputer in every functioning research office, but we might begin with two and add as the offices become occupied on a regular basis.

I will not detail office furniture needs, but only remind us that setting up the meeting rooms so that they are comfortable and functional is very important. They should be the location for at least monthly seminars of one sort or another, as well as the meetings of the administrative and co-ordinating committees.

## **6. Finances**

I would like to comment here on both the organizational structure of the institute as it affects finances, and a proposal for financing itself. I would suggest that we become a research institute within the university with a reporting line to the Vice-President Research. That is, I would not suggest that we go the route of

Societies Act, because the benefits are not clear and the dangers are too serious at the moment. If at some date it looks like the Institute should be structured under the Societies Act or the not-for-profit section of the Companies Act, I believe that could be done. The only argument I could see for either of those directions would be that some structure of "ownership" was desired for some reason (such as shares held by Athabasca University, University of Alberta, and/or Community Research groups), or that the Division of Research Services became so oppressive in their dealings in relation to research funds that we simply felt we could not work with them. At present I do not think either of those situations apply.

The implications of such a recommendation are, as noted, that the reporting line of the institute would be to the Vice-President Research, once it was created by the Vice-President Academic. If there were funds generated within the Universities operating budget (at the moment extremely unlikely) they would be held in an operating account with the comptroller's office. Other funds would be held in a research trust account, such as each of us have when we obtain research funds. If these funds were derived from contracts with outside agencies, such as the Women's Secretariat for example, they would be subject to a university "tax" of up to 35% of the salary budget. Some of those "tax" dollars (I think 1/3) are then directed to the institute for administrative overhead. If funds flow into the institute as grants, no such tax is collected. ?

I would suggest that we try to develop an Endowment Fund as the major stable source of funding for the Institute. This proposal is closely related to the discussion above of the "fund-raising board", for one of its initial tasks would be to assist in the generation of that endowment fund. The Fund Development office would, we think, be willing to be very active in this money raising venture, and would take on the task of setting up the legal framework for the fund as it was being developed. I think we should move on this as quickly as possible, and we should plan to raise funds only within the province of Alberta (is anyone else getting pleas from Manitoba and British Columbia chair committees? If they are fund-raising widely within the province I think we should also be fund-raising for an intra-provincial structure). I would suggest a fund of approximately 1.2 millions dollars, which would generate revenue of about \$100,000.00 per year. This would pay the salary of a director and an administrative officer, and perhaps leave some money for other operating costs. It would not be a lucrative economic base, but would be a reasonable one.

We should also ask the alumni association to consider making funds earmarked for women's studies and research available to the three structures which would then exist within the University, the Faculty of Extension Program, the Women's Studies Program in Arts, and the Women's Research Institute. We might request those funds go to one of us every third year or something like that, but we could encourage alumnae to give through that route.

We should also develop within the embryonic institution mechanisms for assisting scholars to obtain research funds for proposed research. There are different funding structures available to academics and to community workers; there would be no reason why researchers working in the institute should not be able to draw from either source, depending on the exact focus of their research.

We would ask the University to provide us with space, telephone, heat, power and water, and that should be all. As noted in the space discussion, there would be a need to redecorate and furnish whatever space we obtain, and we might be able to negotiate to have that work done by the university. We would always be free to go after line budget items, but we should not anticipate great success at least for the next few years.

## **7. Phase-In**

Phase-In requires most of all the recognition of a starting point. We would recommend that the current Coordinating Committee on Women's Studies identify members of that committee (and possibly others on and off the campus) who would be Research Scholars and Adjunct researchers in the institute. This group should immediately form the working committee to develop the institute.

They should establish a subcommittee to develop the space and facilities of the institute. This could be a subcommittee of one or two, but it will require considerable energy. It could also include community members of the coordinating committee.

They should next recommend people to form the administrative board to begin to address the funding of the institute. Initially, this board would likely be volunteer without an administrative assistant, but they should quickly identify funds to assist them in this regard. They would also expect to receive from the Research Co-ordinating Committee a clear vision of the research institute and its work, but they could begin with this document or a somewhat shorter version of this document.

The Research Co-ordinating Committee should then take two steps simultaneously. It should designate a director whose task would be to facilitate the work of the committee and the work of the institute, and it should begin to identify Research Scholars and Adjunct Researchers. In fact, that process involves identifying research projects which the Institute would place its name on. Costs here are variable. It might be possible to proceed with this part of the work on a largely volunteer basis, with a minimum of immediate costs to the university. That is, the assumption would be that a number of researchers are currently working on projects or planning them and would be willing to house them in the institute, and as such there would not be a change in their work-load.

However, volunteerism can exhaust us all, and there should at least be release time for the Director as soon as possible. In the long term this should be a fully funded position. Other funded positions would probably be minimal, except possibly clerical workers, but the institute may seek funding to provide research assistants to Research Scholars and Associates, and it may seek funds to purchase teaching time off for academic staff so they could be free to do a period of concentrated research. However, we would not recommend that the Institute become a funding body in any significant way; the purpose is to create a stimulating and facilitating environment for feminist researchers, not a pot of money for which researchers would perhaps be vying.

Evaluation would of course occur in five years, as is routinely done within the University. It would be important that the objectives of the Institute were clearly understood before that evaluation began so that measures of success and productivity were appropriate. It would also be important that the expectations of success did not far exceed the resources available to the Institute, but beyond that it should simply be included as one element in the planning done by the Research Co-ordinating Committee.

## **B. And What Shall We Call It?**

We have entered into this debate two or three times, and so far not been able to resolve it. I said that I would suggest a small number of alternatives to at least open up the discussion. I think that something quite generic sounding is possible, like the Women's Research Centre: an Institute for Feminist Research. There might be another adjective added such as Alberta, or University of Alberta, or Alberta/Athabasca, depending on what kind of inter-university structure we decide to adopt. There are possible confusions with that name, like the Alberta Women's Institute and the Women's Program and Resource Centre. But that kind of

name is reasonably safe and I think would pose few problems. It might also be called a bit boring.

Another possibility would be naming it after some woman who is held to represent at least some of the ideals of the institute. I think that if we did that it should be a woman with some historical attachment to Alberta, and probably not a woman currently active in the province. Emily Murphy's name has been mentioned, and everywhere I mention her name The Black Candle comes up, so that I think it would just be too big a burden for us to carry. (This is especially the case given the current challenge to women's movement work as "racist (white) and middle-class"). I think Nellie McClung is a better possibility, as the next best known member of the famous five. We could emphasize her incredible sense of humour, as well as her political acumen and writing skills. Manitoba might lay a stronger claim, but she is a possibility. Irene Parlby is the next "best known" of the famous five which is to say not very well known at all. She has stronger roots in Alberta, sat as a cabinet minister in the Farmer's Government, is from rural Alberta (Alix) and has few flaws of which I am aware. We would have to explain her more than the others, but that would contribute to a stronger historical memory for the women of Alberta and that would be useful I think. There may be other women you can think of, but if we went in the direction of a historical person we would need to contact the family and ensure that it was acceptable to them.

Rebecca has suggested that there might be some person who is even more erased from the historical record who we could honour and use as a guiding image. It is possible there is an Indian or Metis woman, for example, who would provide the image we would like. I do not know of anyone, but that does not mean they did not exist. (Phyllis Cardinal mentioned her mother as a possibility, as the first woman Indian teacher in Alberta; she won Governor-General's Awards in grade 9 and grade 12 in the 1930's and in both cases was denied the award because she was Indian and therefore "not a citizen of the province." When she obtained teaching certification she was required to give up Indian status; she lived her life and taught school in Edmonton until the 1970's. She is now deceased). Someone like Mamie Simpson would also be a possibility, but it perhaps would be a bit parochial if we want others in Alberta to recognize us. We could, by the way, name rooms of the building after particular women also to recognize a wider variety of women and Mamie Simpson's name might fit well be used that way. That might also enable us to recognize women from specific language or immigrant communities in Alberta, or from labour and conservative politics for example.

*very interesting*

## 9. Concluding Comments

I think it is obvious from this discussion that there is most of all a great deal of work and planning to make the idea of a Women's Research Institute a reality. There is good support from the administration, but little in the way of funds. There is, I think, some problem in attempting to define it further, as the researchers who involve themselves with the institute will, in the long run, define it through their work. We should ensure that those initial researchers include women from enough different positions in women's work that the institute would take an appropriate form, and then we should let it be born and become its own creation. I think the image of the potluck supper that Ursula Franklin gave to us is not an inappropriate one, as all who participate in the institute would be seen as women contributing their unique and diverse tidbit to the celebration of knowledge shared by all.

If this set of ideas looks like an adequate beginning specification of the institute, I would suggest that we discuss it with Shirley Neuman and Cathy Bray in a somewhat formal way. There may be other specific people or groups we should also consider, but I think those two (and their respective committees) are the most important ones in fact. We should then present the document to Dr. Meekison for his initial approval and advice, and identification of other administrative steps that need to be taken. For any further distribution of the proposal, I think an "executive summary" should replace this rather lengthy description, as it will be more likely to be read. This full-length document, modified so as not to be quite so chatty to the committee itself, could then provide the back-up documentation for that executive summary.

We should then make changes which flow from those consultations, and proceed. The first part of proceeding will be establishing the subcommittees and setting out a time-line for decisions and planning. I would suggest that we constitute ourselves as the research institute coordinating committee for some of our meetings, and begin the work through that structure. Eventually, the two committees will have separate memberships and structures, but the initial creation will happen as soon as we act as the Institute.

I have two immediate concerns. One is the "overload" we all suffer from, and my feeling that we are adding to that as we get this Institute underway. I can think of no immediate solution to that problem, except that we must continue to develop a network of women working in these areas so that work and tasks can be turned over among us.

The second is that we define or develop an institute which suffers from one of two faults. The first fault would be that the tasks we set for it are so narrow that few women want to participate, or worse yet those who want to participate feel excluded from such possibility. The second would be that we set our mandate so broadly that anyone and everyone doing anything vaguely related to women feels they can somehow claim the institute: I would argue this is one of the problems of the Boreal Institute. We need to be sufficiently focussed that researcher's intellectually and in other ways support each other... to be all things to all women could be to be nothing at all.

#### **Addendum, November 1987.**

1. We have agreed to name ourselves The Women's Research Centre: an Institute for Feminist Research. We will consider adding an individual woman's name at some time in the future, with some preference for Irene Parlbj at present.

2. Meetings have been held with Shirley Neuman and Cathy Bray, and initial discussions with the Fund-raising personnel at the U of A.

3. The first research meeting of the centre was held on Thursday Oct 22 in the Women's Resource Centre of the Faculty of Extension. About 25 women attended, and following a pot-luck supper three projects were presented for discussion. It was generally thought to be a very successful evening, and it has been agreed to hold another such meeting on Thursday December 10.

4. Further contacts will now be made with the University administration and the department responsibility for allocating space on the campus.

→ how would this assist Fr groups more  
differently than does the widely  
distributed CACSW research for instance





**Proposal for a Women's Research Centre  
at the University of Alberta**

COORDINATING COMMITTEE ON  
WOMEN'S STUDIES  
THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA  
EDMONTON, ALBERTA

NOVEMBER 20, 1987

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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Purpose of this Document**

This document will present a proposal for the establishment of a Feminist Research Institute at the University of Alberta. It is written as a discussion document for the Coordinating Committee on Women's Studies, but the intention is that the final draft will first of all function as a proposal to the administration, and secondly as a guiding document for the scholars who become involved directly in the institute. It may also function as a background document for fund-raising.

As a discussion document, it should be recognized that all aspects of the proposal are tentative, being presented here for further exploration and development. But the underlying principles of the proposed institute are believed to be consistent with a feminist research institute, and a feminist research institute is assumed to be something somewhat different than an institute doing research on women or gender. Although we will define feminism for the purposes of this document and the institute, we will not further emphasize "the differences" among the various research models. Rather, the attempt here will be to spell out a vision of a research institute by describing what it might be and what it might do, not those things it will not be and will not do.

### **1.2. Definition of Feminist Research**

We would argue that the most basic definition of Feminist Research is that it is research for women, rather than research on women or by women. This implies a clear recognition of a value orientation, an orientation to improving the situation of women in our society and in the world community. However, it does not necessarily imply only applied research. Much of the feminist research which challenges existing models of knowledge in the university and proposes alternatives to those models is clearly research "for women" even though it occurs in philosophy or literature or theology or other fields of primary knowledge.

Further, in that it is research "for" women rather than "on" women, feminist research may include analyses of political institutions, economic structures, ecological relations, or dozens of other phenomena which impact upon women. It differs from other research in these same areas by the constant question, how does this phenomenon or current knowledge about it affect women? Or how is this phenomenon experienced by women?

There is, however, I think one other assumption which underlies feminist research which should be made explicit, and that is that as such research develops it will benefit women, men, and children, not "just" women. Thus, the current focus on the experience of women which underlies feminist research assumes an existing male-bias in knowledge systems which will eventually be transformed. That male-bias cannot be transformed by pretending it does not exist, but will only be transformed by the long-term development of female-centered knowledge systems.

Margarit Eichler's description of feminist approaches could provide a more detailed definition of feminist research:

"AT THE MOST FUNDAMENTAL LEVEL, FEMINIST SCHOLARSHIP IS COMMITTED TO UNDERSTANDING AND IMPROVING THE SITUATION OF WOMEN. IT STARTS FROM THE PREMISE THAT ALL SCHOLARSHIP IS NECESSARILY VALUE-ORIENTED AND THAT MORE OFTEN THAN NOT A LACK OF FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS RESULTS IN SEXIST THEORIES AND DESCRIPTIONS. IDENTIFYING AND CRITICIZING SEXIST ELEMENTS IN THE EXISTING LITERATURE IS THEREFORE AN IMPORTANT PART OF FEMINIST WORK. ONCE A CRITIQUE HAS BEEN ACHIEVED, AND BASIC DATA HAVE BEEN COLLECTED, NEW CONCEPTS AND MODELS ARE CREATED, EITHER TO EXPRESS FEMALE EXPERIENCES, OR TO ENCOMPASS THE EXPERIENCES OF BOTH SEXES. THE LATTER CAN ONLY BE ACHIEVED AFTER THE FORMER HAS BEEN PARTIALLY DONE. IN EITHER CASE, FEMINIST WORK EVENTUALLY GROPEs TOWARDS A NEW EPISTEMOLOGY WHICH ALLOWS FOR THE ADEQUATE UNDERSTANDING OF FEMALE AND MALE LIFE" (1985:624).

Eichler here refers primarily to her own discipline in this description but feminist research and analysis not only critiques knowledge within disciplines but transcends the boundaries of disciplines. Eichler argues that this is so because feminist research by necessity blurs disciplinary and sub-disciplinary boundaries. This happens because such research is typically issue-oriented, its problems derive from the experiences of women rather than from the problematics of the disciplines. Eventually discussion around several critical issues influences various disciplines, even though the impetus for the intellectual work does not originate within them. We consider this notion also, the notion of interdisciplinary research grounded in women's issues and experiences, to be an essential aspect of feminist research.

Given this understanding of feminist research, there are no discipline boundaries to the work nor limitations to doing collaborative research with feminist oriented women's groups in the community or with other universities. The limitations relate to the overall orientation defined above, a methodological stance which is appropriate to that orientation, and a genuine research problem. A genuine research problem is defined as a problem which can be addressed by the development or clarification of knowledge. The methodological issue will be addressed in somewhat more detail in the section below entitled Research Agenda.

### **1.3. Outline of the Document**

This will be a lengthy document, because it is necessary not only to develop a detailed picture of the institute and the research that would be done under its auspices, but also to describe the administrative and financial structure of the institute. The next three sections will discuss the rationale for such an institute; specific research objectives which flow from the rationale and the definition of feminist research; and a possible research agenda and implied research methodologies.

The following four sections will describe in some detail the institute as a formal organization which utilizes space within the university. These sections will address the nature of boards and decision-making structures within the institute, the kind of space and facilities which are needed to ensure the work of the institute can be done, and possible ways of financing the institute within the University.

The final three sections will address a number of miscellaneous points. A possible time-line and procedures for phase-in will be identified, there will be a proposal for naming the institute, and some concluding remarks will be made about the possibilities of transforming the image of a research institute into a reality. In this section we will try to confront realistically the problems which might arise, and hopefully in discussion we will see if these imply modifying the overall proposal in any way.

## **2. Rationale for a Feminist Research Institute**

Feminist research and research in the general area of women's studies has developed rapidly in the last fifteen years, but academics at the University of Alberta have not made the contribution of which they are capable. There are a number of women scholars here with an interest in the area of study, indicated by their willingness to teach graduate and undergraduate courses even when such

courses constitute extra loads, by supervision of graduate theses in which the work is primarily feminist, and by a few publications, but on the whole our contribution to the literature is not significant.

In this same time period, feminist research and knowledge has expanded at an exponential rate. Margrit Eichler's (1985) analysis of feminism and sociology points to an impact of feminist researchers on the analysis of housework, the analysis of paid and unpaid labour, and on the analysis of the labour market itself. She also notes a reconceptualization of the phenomenon of rape, a reorientation in our understanding of incest and wife battering, a shifting in our understanding of the variables of sex and gender and an associated reconceptualization of the reproductive functions of men and women. From this beginning she proceeds to list a number of other areas of sociological knowledge which have been influenced by feminist research.

Eichler's analysis is particularly interesting, because she herself has made a major contribution to these changes in sociology (along with Dorothy Smith and Mary O'Brien). We would argue that one reason this has been possible is that these three scholars work out of the same institutional structure (the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education), that this institution which provides only graduate education is in fact a major centre for research, and that the divergent methodologies and theoretical orientations of these three scholars is brought together in a way which greatly enriches the contribution of each of them because of a specific institutional structure and a shared commitment to feminist research. We believe that a research institute at the University of Alberta could similarly motivate and support ground-breaking research in women's studies, but could go beyond the model of OISE by drawing on the potential for interdisciplinary work at this University.

Because of the need to develop interdisciplinary research in women's studies, such an institute would be based on ecological relations somewhat different from most research/collegial social relationships. That is, in traditional discipline and problem-oriented research, a scholar selected a very small area of study and is likely to be the only scholar within her university doing that work. Consequently she builds relationships nationally and internationally with those few women and men who are doing work related to her own, and she has few academic or intellectual relationships with others in the university.

The ecology of an interdisciplinary women's research institute should reverse that pattern. The diversity would be based not on geography but on topic, and the unifying factors would be spatial proximity and an overall shared orientation to research which will be done on behalf of women. It is believed that a well-planned institute could create the same atmosphere for intellectual support in interdisciplinary work that the traditional pattern creates within narrowly defined intradisciplinary work.

### **3. Research Objectives of the Institute**

We propose then that the University of Alberta establish a Feminist Research Institute to enrich and facilitate the work of scholars in women's studies on this campus and to facilitate collaboration between academic women and community-based women in the development of knowledge. The institute would have the following detailed objectives:

- a) To provide a base for interdisciplinary feminist research.
- b) To contribute to the building of an interdisciplinary knowledge base in women's studies, especially on topics particularly pertinent to women of Alberta or Western Canada.
- b) To provide a home for visitors engaged in women's studies research (for example, academics on sabbatical or study leaves, independent researchers on research grants, researchers involved in large-scale projects for community groups)
- c) To provide a locale for academics and women's groups in the community to be mutually supportive in relation to women's research.
- d) To make available research results, especially to those involved in university teaching and to community women's groups.
- e) To provide a structure for receiving funds for women's research.

#### 4. Research Agenda

Although the exact program by which these objectives might be achieved will vary, depending on the funding and the researchers who become involved in the institute, we would like to describe here some possible ways in which a research program could evolve. A specific research agenda (in the sense of topics for research) would not be set out in advance for the institute; rather associates of the institute would bring their individual and existing women's studies research interests into the institute.

An initial project might begin with any researcher, so it could be in medicine, nursing, law, science, literature, psychology, or in applied concerns related to rape crisis centres, battered women's shelters, women and pensions and so on, but a formal process which encouraged other researchers to become engaged in the topic would be institutionalized. There are a number of possible ways to accomplish this.

One procedure would be to share research topics and progress in an internal institute seminar, perhaps weekly or bimonthly. As individual projects were completed and new ones being developed, associates would be encouraged to discuss them with colleagues, to search out possible interdisciplinary cooperation and/or to seek collaboration with women's groups in the community. The "critical mass" for intellectual work can be extremely small, two or three scholars rather than many, but an institutional structure which makes it possible for those two or three scholars to find each other within the University can make the difference between little research and publication and a great deal of research and publication.

*community region?*

A second procedure would be to have researchers discuss with other associates why this subject or topic was a women's studies topic, rather than one which could be carried out more effectively strictly within the researcher's academic discipline. It is in such discussions that the definition of feminist research would be constantly elaborated and refined, to provide a guiding framework for work done within the institute whilst avoiding a dogmatic monolithic perspective. Within such discussions the researchers might decide that the work raises no issues pertinent to feminist analysis per se and would be better located within an academic department, or that the issues raised seemed to be central and strategic for feminist analysis and the institute would be willing to put its name on the work. Some pattern such as this would make it possible for the institute to make distinctions between research done on women on the one hand and feminist



feminist research

research on the other, and between being simply a support group for women academics and developing a set of intellectual relations which facilitate feminist research.

✓ But it would also inevitably raise questions of the relationship of the research to the field of women's studies and to related research questions which might be addressed by others working in the institute. For example, Michelle Harrison discusses PMS as a complex of symptoms related to women's menstrual cycle, but in her discussion she makes it quite clear that we do not know the relationship of PMS to social structure, for cross-cultural studies on menstrual cycles are extremely rare. That recognition which pervades her work, the recognition that physiological phenomena may well be deeply embedded in the gender structure of societies characterizes her research as feminist. It does not characterize it as interdisciplinary, for she herself focuses only on the medical aspects of the syndrome. In an interdisciplinary women's research institute we could work to bring her insight together with the research of sociologists and anthropologists into gender structuring and its impact on physiological phenomena. Such work does not necessarily require international research, for it can be done by research with women from religious enclaves such as Hutterites, women from various classes, and with women from minority cultural groups, to suggest but a few examples.

This is only one example, but medical examples abound (the psychological impacts of being a DES mother or daughter, the resistance of the medical profession to the recognition of the candida albicans syndrome until long after it was recognized by women's health collectives). Other examples are implied in the discussion of Margrit Eichler's work above, the literary criticism done by Professor Spivak, and the psychological analysis of women's cognitive and moral development done by Jean Baker Miller and Carol Gilligan.

Overall, it would be desirable for research done in the institute to be research not easily done elsewhere in the university. The two examples here, of interdisciplinary and community-based research, are both good examples of such research. However, I would like to propose three slightly more detailed examples to indicate what such research might look like.

a) This past year Shirley Neuman has run a series of feminist seminars called "reading texts" in the English Department. Although her intention was, I think, to address that as an English or Literature topic, I would like to suggest that the title could in fact refer to much more widespread feminist work. (I have not asked Shirley's permission to borrow this idea, but I don't think she would object). That

is, within every discipline, be it Zoology, or Sociology, or English, or Law, or Engineering, one of the first levels of feminist criticism is directed towards existing written material. I think it might be possible to develop a long term series of papers which would discuss "reading" within all the disciplines of the university, and from that to develop generalizations which would be truly interdisciplinary.<sup>1</sup>

b) I would suggest that at present we might add to this a "learning from experience" research project, the notion of action-research that is reasonably well-developed in CRIAW, as a means of having a second major project that would involve community women. It would be particularly easy to develop this around health phenomena or political action.

c) We should add at least one project which clearly displays certain types of social relations as a natural part of the research. For example, I will be doing work on native women, schooling, and employment throughout my sabbatical year. As I begin that work I expect to include four or five Indian women doing graduate work in native education as part of the research team. They may be advisers, or a monthly forum for discussing the research as it progresses, or they may become more active. The intention is that they will be "collaborators" and as such potentially change the methods, the data-collection, and the interpretation of results.

d) I still rather like the idea of a women and politics in Alberta research focus. I think it would be a good idea to look seriously at the "famous five", but many other types of political involvement could be considered. It may well be that treating this as learning from experience might be useful. It would be difficult to do the suffragette movement in Alberta without taking into account the three prairie provinces, and that might be another direction to go with that work.

e) In a meeting which I was at recently women in community groups almost pleaded with me to see that a research institute such as this could be an information gathering resource for them. They constantly find themselves writing briefs, analyzing women's issues, responding to media statements, and so on, and they at times feel a desperate need for resources in this area. I would suggest that we consider some function like this, not as a resource centre which already

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<sup>1</sup> We could extend this type of work to "interpreting experience", perhaps to "understanding what you hear" and maybe "reading images". The first would imply incorporating praxis or social action into a developing knowledge system, and the second might relate more to conversational analysis and oral media, and the third to the visual arts and image-based media.

exists in the Faculty of Extension Women's Program, but as a possible way of introducing undergraduates to research. Related work could also be done as graduate students' papers, and academics doing research may find at times that simple information documents flow out of their presumably much larger projects.

The point is not to argue here for any specific research direction, but only to indicate that feminist research which (by definition) orients to understanding the social location of women with the purpose of changing that location, can easily incorporate a wide variety of research topics and enrich them through interdisciplinary work. For that reason it is possible to begin with the interests of existing feminist scholars and students on the campus, and the concerns of women in the local community, and build a research agenda through enhancing their work.

#### **4.1. Research Methodologies**

Ursula Franklin argued while she was here that the most essential aspect of feminist research is that it continually takes context into account. That is, it is unlike analytical research, or the standard model of science, in which phenomena can be understood in terms of models which consist of ideal or logical relations. Although I think this set of ideas is not unique to feminist work, I believe that Franklin is correct in that observation, and the implication is that methodologies must continually make it possible to address context.

She further remarked that, given the well-developed nature of quantitative methodologies in the sciences, and their basis within rigid disciplinary boundaries, alternative methodologies based in multi-disciplinary work will initially seem inadequate to many people. She suggested some of our most important work may well be in clarifying and developing those methodologies as we do our work. For example, when we begin a project the methodology might not always be clear, but it would then be essential to bring the methodology into focus before the work was completed and to make that a major topic for discussion.

Finally, the notion of action-research has been referred to above, as has the concept of collaborative research. Each of these need to be spelled out in more detail, but I would suggest that both of them are integral to feminist research. Beyond that, many of the methodologies available to other researchers are available to feminist researchers. However, there is a much sharper view of the "subject" of the research as also a participant or collaborator in the research, an epistemology which denies that "doing research on women" is acceptable work.

Marilyn I. Assheton-Smith,  
11005-University Ave.  
Edmonton, Alberta T6G 1Y4  
Thursday, November 19, 1987

Frances;

This is the document on the research centre which we are currently working with. You will see that it is directed to the university administration, although it is also in a chatty style as it written initially as a discussion document within our committee. It would now be possible to formalize it somewhat and change the "I's" to "we's" as the committee has discussed it in some detail and the few changes they recommended have been incorporated.

I have not made any changes in it with Sec/State in mind. I think our interest in bringing together university/community research is clear in the document, although we have struggled to find a language which would not dichotomize women within and women outside the university. We have not been fully successful, but we have tried. The objective I mentioned to you, about impacting on knowledge so that university/community knowledge is more closely related is not stated here and I think it might be worth adding to our list. Most of the other objectives I mentioned are here I think (I had not actually read the document since August and I was having trouble recalling it when we spoke, even though I had written it!).

I hope I will get this to you Friday sometime. If you think there should be changes in it before it goes to Ottawa could you let me know? There could be a restructuring of emphasis I think, and there will need to be something written for the general public which does not address the university administration concerns as much as this document does... so if you think it should be modified somewhat, I do not mind doing it.

Thanks....

  
Marilyn.



10045 - 111th Street  
Room 101, Harley Court  
Edmonton, Alberta  
T5K 1K4

December 14, 1987

Ms. Marilyn Assheton-Smith  
Coordinating Committee on  
Women's Studies  
c/o Department of Educational Foundations  
Faculty of Education  
University of Alberta  
Edmonton, Alberta  
T6G 2R6

Dear Marilyn:

I have read your "Proposal for a Women's Research Centre at the University of Alberta" and have made some notes which are attached. I am, of course, very pleased to see a concrete proposal emerge from what I know has been years in the realm of ideas and hope.

We will consider assisting in the initial development of the Institute as per our discussion. I will circulate the proposal within our Department and pass any additional comments and feedback along to you.

I hope to see you before Christmas.

Sincerely,



Frances Adams  
Social Development Officer

FA: fcp

Comments on the Proposal for a Women's Research Centre at the  
**University of Alberta**

**Definition**

- . The philosophy of the centre/definition of feminist research is very clear.

**Rationale**

- . The rationale for the centre focusses exclusively on academics at the University of Alberta. It could be strengthened by including the needs & benefits of collaborative work with community women and, if desired, the needs and benefits of work with academics at other Alberta institutions. It is very important to include all intended participants in this section.

**Objectives**

- . The research objectives are good. I especially like (b).

**Agenda**

- . Reference is made here (p. 6 & 7) to "the University" and "academics". Again it is important that terms are inclusive of other participants.
- . The examples are great. For our benefit, more information on CRIAW'S action-research would be beneficial, perhaps as an addendum.
- . Information as to how OISE and/or the Vancouver Women's Research Centre set their research agendas would be useful.

**Structure**

- . Is the relationship with the University a given? Is it the most desirable structure? Have others been considered and to what end?
- . Again, in terms of membership categories in the Institute and therefore decision-making, it would be beneficial to have examples of other feminist research centres.

**Other comments**

How would the Institute and the research differ in its benefit to community groups from CACSW/CRIAW/Vancouver Women's Research Centre or other feminist material. Would the difference lie in its proximity to this area & therefore the groups can participate more fully in choosing topics and participating in the research.

I would see another conference <sup>or</sup> a major meeting of University academics and community women. (I realize they aren't two distinct groups) as useful and perhaps critical. Has the committee considered holding one, perhaps in the spring?

PPC  
Early February

Sharon Capel; University  
(Committee) Nov 5

### Coordinating Committee on Women's Studies

#### Agenda

Wednesday, January 13  
9:30 - 11:30 a.m.

1. Minute

1. Major discussion will be the Proposal for a Women's Research Centre. A copy of the proposal will go out to committee members via campus mail Monday morning, January 11.
2. Sharon Jamieson will talk for about half an hour on improving the flow of information on campus using computers.
3. Space: The committee has been given a house on 90th Ave. (at least until May) for the Research Centre.
4. Women in Philosophy conference.
5. Other business.

More  
SP  
St. Johns

Tommy  
Chris / Heart → Chair  
Jan 21

Research center up  
eg. child care  
(Foreign research center) \*  
Feb 8 → Vague  
→ Commit ok

Pos / Definitive  
Be less  
will not