

Establishing Women's Studies Minors  
and Majors in Conservative Communities

Women's Studies at a High Tech University in the Heart of Dixie

**Handouts:**

proposal outline  
FWS and WS brochures  
spring newsletters

**Plan of Presentation:**

Rose: Intro and Getting Stronger  
Nancy: Getting Started and Getting Legitimated  
(also Conclusion/Lessons Learned)

**Introduction**

*NO* **Intro school** In fall 1990, a group of interested faculty and staff formed a "Women's Studies Interest Group" to promote Women's Studies at UAH, a "high-tech" university founded in the Sputnik-era primarily to support NASA. UAH is now considered a "comprehensive" research university, and has 8000 students, most of them from the area and over half of them working full or part time. From the beginning, it has emphasized programs in engineering and physics, especially programs related to NASA, which has a large facility in Huntsville, "Rocket City." It is an environment in which even Liberal Arts has to fight for its place at the academic table, and of course, it is Alabama. We have had freezes on hirings and cutbacks in budgets. We have a governor who is looking to downsize higher education and cut educational programs across the state. Every major is under a mandate to prove its "viability."

**Background/History**

- In fall 1990, we got together just for ourselves, to get some women's studies activities going that we would enjoy
- By fall 1995, we had an approved WS program established, offering a minor.

**Purpose of Talk** What we want to talk about today is the process by which we got approval for a program in a school where people are still astonished to learn that we have a WS program (the only WS program in North Alabama). *Not most profound / most useful (difficult by schools)*

- Nancy*
1. **Getting Started** - We'll talk first about how to started in a place which really has no roots for such a program (NO other area studies programs, e.g.). *so I's seminar group - minimal nec. of L.A.*
  2. From there, we have some advice about getting legitimacy and official recognition for your efforts, and finally
  3. notes on how to get stronger and keep going when there is little support, especially financial support.



## I. Getting Started

(Overview: A. Identify what you already have, B. Organize it and C. Make it visible,

### A. Identify what you already have (surprising how much interest might be secretly there)

#### 1. Network faculty and staff (don't forget staff)

(All you have to have is a core, but get a wide base of involved

even if they don't want to be part of organizing.

a. We sent out mailing for a preliminary meeting to faculty just to discuss in interest in women's studies. Many showed that were only peripherally involved but felt part of it from the beginning. Make it easy to be involved in simple ways. Don't wait for only people that are going to be totally devoted to it.

you'll scare a lot of help away. (INCLUDE STAFF - this may include

librarians, administrative assistants, and others who can be EXTREMELY useful)

b. email out to be an easy way to communicate with them.

(keep a regular email distribution list and update it)

### 2. Identify courses on books already

Identify courses with WS component (we cross-listed WS courses before we every had a minor in place). This alone had value.

### 3. Educate as you go

a. "What is WS" speaker series

Get respected people to speak, though they might not be involved in other ways

Consider educating colleagues to be part of WS mission

(They really don't know what it is; they aren't just being difficult;

treat them like sons, not fathers) - Don't get mad

- Concrete examples of reading

B →



## After Identifying...

### Some type of interest group B. Create organization from that (WSIG)

#### a. Working Committees:

program, curriculum, resource center committees

"Just do it" (acted like we were legitimate)

• Ask for things that cost nothing. File cabinet, it gives you presence.

• Then start asking for more support after established. — Key Point

• Ask from the highest level possible. So we could say - "the Provost supported this."

(Interdisciplinary)

• Co-sponsor things with orgs. who have money (Honors, Multicultural, ACE)

#### b. newsletter

1. start a small newsletter, even if to 10 faculty. It then gives a sense of presence and once it is going you can ask for support for it. Put things on it that are useful (get from web, conferences etc.)

### C. Make it visible (create perception that you exist long before anything is really there—many volunteer organizations are much smaller than they are perceived—habits become reality.

People were used to us before we asked for anything substantial..)

a. brochure, — not fancy

b. room used for some other purpose

c. name on doors, stationery, flyers of courses, listed in course listings, club listings, contest

d. Set up committees that have university wide status. (Formed Steering Committee-- Wrote Deans and asked them to appoint a member from each college. There is such a thing...how will you participate?)

### B. Newsletter — small

### F. Non-threatening activities

- give scouts
- high school essay contest
- women's history Savageness hunt
- proclamations mayor, gov.



## II. Gaining Legitimacy (Getting official recognition)

We had to send our proposal through channels TWICE over two years. People will appease you as long as you aren't asking for much, but once we went for formal recognition, there were roadblocks. However, we had a three-year history of accomplishments behind us, and we kept at it.

So our main advice here concerns

laying the groundwork

writing the proposal

not getting discouraged along the way

### A. Laying the groundwork for successful proposal acceptance

1. Talk individually to people on key committees BEFORE it goes to committee (Curriculum committees. Ask their advice about what their committee needs; Makes it harder for them to resist if they have had a part.)

2. Go to dept. chairs (ideally get a chair involved)

Talk to them BEFORE it comes up in a meeting so they're ready and informed, and have their concerns already addressed.

Convince them it will enhance their enrollments (not a zero sum)

3. Put people on planning committees that you see might be stumbling blocks (Ambivalent people in important positions)

4. Volunteer for comm. that approve programs.



B. Writing the proposal (HANDOUT final outline here)

We rewrote this a lot. Important to anticipate their questions. Some key items:

1. Letters from students
2. Letters from other WS directors in state
3. Show how much is already in place
4. Add a lot of courses in a small elective category to maximize faculty involved
5. Survey (students then enrolled in courses we would count as WS)
6. Comparison to other institutions (used the ones they are compared to for SACS): *accounting*
7. Link to the mission of the university

\**Set out the organization of the program*

*END*

C. Keeping from getting discouraged

1. In the beginning, avoid spending energy in conflict

Don't take the role of radical weirdos; don't get mad; help them understand.

As conservative as our area is, we found them mostly uneducated about WS or with a very narrow view of it. Be prepared to *convince* provide examples, explain it over and over.

2. Not being threatening

a. Emphasize Similarities before Differences

Be Interdisciplinary

Realistically, individual will be identified as the program; who are those individuals

b. Do things that every one can support:

Women's History Month Essay Contest *High School*

Girl Scouts/Girls Inc. on Women's Equality Day

Proclamations, etc. (Women's Equality Day had proclamations signed by mayor, state governor, as well as our UAH President, who read it at the event).



Rose

### III. Staying Strong (Getting Resources)

#### A. Traditional University Channels

1. ask for \$\$ at as high a level as possible (we went to provost)
2. get an account

#### B. Community fundraising

##### 1. Coordinate with University Development (VP)

Make sure they know what you're doing and get their advice.

##### 2. FWS

###### a. start a board, including key people from community/univ. organizations

AAUW, WEDC, Church Women United - our most active board members

University Relations and/or University Development

People new in a position/eager to succeed at something

###### b. get them committed by making obligations clear and setting out specific criteria for meeting obligations; i.e., give them something to do:

- donate \$ or time
- sign up to work on an event or fundraiser during year (essay contest, theatre

event, speaker's bureau, grant-writing committee)

###### c. ~~Kinds of People to Help You?~~

~~Cultural interest (e.g., dinner theatre "Room of One's Own")~~

~~Faculty who like theory~~

~~Women who don't want to get involved in other orgs~~

~~Faculty wives~~

~~Librarians~~

##### 3. Thank People

Whenever anyone gives you anything (e.g., donates a book to Resource Center), write a personal thank-you and tell what's going on, how they can get involved, what else is needed. (Development Office writes thank-you's too, but these don't update people about WS activities or invite them to participate.)

##### 4. Set up a gift account (separate from regular account—money carries over after end of fiscal year; use whatever channels appropriate)



5. Set goals and publicize what the program needs (e.g., computer, cataloging software)

6. Coordinate appeals for money with events (booth: "Are you a Friend of WS?")

**CONCLUSION: Lessons Learned/ Do's and Don'ts**

1. Don't ask for support to get stuff started

Do stuff (using personal or departmental resources), then ask for support to keep doing it

2. Use the language people understand; emphasize similarities before letting in differences (what you agree on before what you disagree on)

**Staying Energetic**

Prevent Burnout by letting people focus on what they want to do