

Ruth Wynn Woodward Endowed Professorship 2007-08
Final Report

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Introduction

My tenure as Ruth Wynn Woodward Endowed Professor (RWWP) in the Women's Studies Department at Simon Fraser University has been one of the highlights of my career thus far. As an independent scholar who has worked primarily in transgender studies, an emerging interdisciplinary field at the margins of the academy, holding the Woodward Professorship heightened the academic legitimacy not only to my own work, but also of the field that I have worked to promote. I believe that holding the RWWP was instrumental in my success in the academic job market this year, both in the offer of a visiting faculty position at Harvard University's Committee on Degrees in Women, Gender and Sexuality, as well as in the offer of a permanent Associate Professorship in Gender Studies at Indiana University-Bloomington.

I therefore extend my hearty thanks to the department for inviting me to spend a year in its ranks, and particularly to Asst. Professor Helen Leung for encouraging me to apply for the position in the first place, which would not have occurred to me otherwise. My own thinking and writing have been strengthened and enriched by stimulating conversation with colleagues, co-workers, students, and new friends, and I found Vancouver to be a physically beautiful place to live and work. I will always appreciate the time I have spent here.

The RWWP is a unique resource for feminist research, teaching, and activism—not only for the person who holds it, but also for the department that hosts it. In my concluding remarks, I offer some thoughts on how this resource might be more effectively utilized at this present difficult moment in the institutional history of the Women's Studies Department, after first detailing the work I undertook to satisfy my responsibilities for teaching, research, and public outreach during my year as RWWP.

Public Outreach: TransSomatechnics Conference

The major component of the public outreach portion of my RWWP tenure was organizing an international academic transgender studies conference, "TransSomatechnics: Theories and Practices of Transgender Embodiment," which was held May 1-3 at SFU's Harbour Centre Campus. The conference drew 194 registered conference attendees from North America, Europe, Australia, and Asia, in addition to dozens more local residents for a free public reception, and more than a hundred additional attendees at the performance night and closing party. We reached a total audience of approximately 300-350 people. The conference received coverage in local print and broadcast media; it included members of local transgender communities and organizations both as audience members and as presenters; and it provided significant educational and networking experiences to Canadian students (who were admitted free of charge), undergraduate as well as graduate, who not only presented work but also actively participated in organizing and administering the conference. At the professional

level, more than 100 transgender studies scholars from around the world engaged in 3 days of stimulating intellectual exchange that will undoubtedly advance and inform the burgeoning scholarship in this field.

Plenary Presentations

Plenary sessions included a special musical performance by Antony Hegarty of the acclaimed avant-garde band Antony and the Johnsons, a panel of indigenous speakers who discussed two-spirit traditions, and a panel of students from my “Sex Change City” class who presented on local history and helped contextualize remarks from three local transgender community activists.

Papers Presented

There were approximately 110 papers presented in breakout sessions. See appended program.

Publicity

We received local press coverage in *Xtra West* and on UBC radio. We received Internet radio coverage on the Sirius network. Antony Hegarty’s performance was covered by a reporter from *Rolling Stone* and a subsequent interview was conducted for AOL’s music channel.

Staffing/Volunteers

SFU Women’s Studies departmental assistant Roberta Rogers offered stellar all-around administrative support for the conference—our success would not have been possible without her involvement. RWWP Assistant Esther Harrison, once she came on board late in the conference process, also contributed vital support, particularly in maintaining the conference database and in coordinating onsite registration. Graduate student assistant Mary Shearman went above and beyond the call of duty in organizing the program with the assistance of fellow SFU Women’s Studies Ph.D. candidate Trish Garner and recent UBC Ph.D. M. Sean Saunders, as well as by coordinating volunteers and providing general logistical support during the conference. Trish Gardner coordinated keynote hospitality and outreach for the public reception. Sarah Sparks did a truly outstanding job recruiting local drag and burlesque performers (in addition to several conference attendees) for the performance night/after-party, the “Gender Bender Blender Cabaret;” this closing event was a tremendous, standing-room-only success thanks to her efforts. On the whole, even though there was considerable pre-conference chaos due to unanticipated staffing changes in the midst of planning, and some panic-inducing last-minute catastrophes with keynote speakers, the event itself went off beautifully.

Funding

The conference attracted significant funding for an event of this type. We received the following grant and fiscal sponsorship support, for a total of \$46,675:

\$27,000	SSHRC Conference Support Grant
\$10,000	Ruth Wynn Woodward Endowment
\$ 4,500	Macquarie University

\$ 1,500	SFU Department of English
\$ 1,000	SFU VP Academic
\$ 500	California College of the Arts
\$ 500	University of British Columbia
\$ 500	National Sexuality Resource Center (NSRC)
\$ 400	Women's Health Research Network
\$ 300	Accidental Community Project
\$ 200	SFU Department of Sociology and Anthropology
\$ 150	Indiana University, Gender Studies
\$ 125	Individual Donor

We also had earned income of \$14,550 from conference registration, beverage sales, and admission charges for the performance night.

Budget

Our projected conference budget was \$62,475, and our actual revenue was \$62,225. We had lower-than-expected registration income due to a higher than anticipated proportion of low-income and student registrations relative to full-fee registrations, but made more than expected on beverage and admission revenue. The unexpected cancellation of two keynote speakers reduced airfare expenses, which were offset by miscellaneous other expenses that were higher than budgeted. With one significant exception, noted immediately below, our budget projections and actual expenses reconciled to within a few dollars.

The major financial issue regarding the conference is the bill at Delta Suites Hotel. Amidst the administrative confusion in fall 2007, a contract with Delta was signed by staff without my knowledge, obligating Women's Studies to a significant financial responsibility for a block of rooms. Although through negotiation we were able to reduce the initial obligation, due to cancellations and no-shows on the part of conference registrants, Delta Suites ultimately presented the department with an invoice for \$7105. Since I was not party to incurring this obligation, I leave it to the department to offer guidance on how best to resolve this unfortunate situation.

Concluding Remarks and Observations

In closing, I have a few observations on the relationship between the RWWP and the SFU Department of Women's Studies.

Staff Support

Although the person hired to replace my initial assistant worked out very well for the remainder of my stay, I nevertheless feel the department might re-evaluate how best to provide administrative support to the RWWP, and what level of support it can reliably sustain. In many respects, an advanced graduate student who understands the demands of academic work, and who could benefit from a mentor/mentee relationship with the RWWP, would be entirely sufficient, and certainly less costly to the department than a permanent staff member. One disadvantage of using a graduate student, however, would

be the increased likelihood of greater unfamiliarity with office administrative procedures and software.

Integration of RWWP into Departmental Strategic Planning

As personally beneficial as my time as RWWP proved to be, and as much as I tried to make a point of offering service to the department and students, my feeling is that the RWWP is a strategic resource not effectively utilized by Women's Studies. Given the dire economic circumstances facing the university, including the prospect of vertical cuts in which the Women's Studies Department might be disbanded and its faculty reassigned, I would recommend that the RWWP be more advantageously integrated into the department's plan to address the current crisis. This seems especially relevant given the simultaneous problems caused by pending retirements of senior faculty in the department, and the need to recruit a departmental chair. Rather than being a one-year non-continuing appointment, which does contribute to the year-to-year development of the department, the RWWP could serve (at least during this period of crisis) as a multi-year non-continuing position with greater administrative responsibilities, and thus function as one bridge between unsustainable circumstances in the present and a more viable future. The RWWP, for example, could serve as an interim chair, or cover core courses in such a manner that it freed regular faculty for more administrative roles. In a fiscal environment where staffing is stretched to the limit, having a highly flexible endowed position such as the RWWP is a tremendous asset. The department should not feel constrained by precedent, but, rather, should feel free to grasp the possibility of using the RWWP in a creative new fashion.

Thank you again for a wonderful year, and best wishes for the department's future success.

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