

### **Past Chair's Report from Mary Lynn Stewart (2008-2009)**

As I prepared to leave the office of Chair of Women's Studies, I tried to put my three-year term (2006-2009) into perspective. Starting with an unexpected remark by the former Vice President Academic John Waterhouse just as I became Chair, to the effect that small departments (like Women's Studies) would likely be merged into larger ones, the experience has been challenging. I think, however, that we rose to the challenge, with positive achievement such as the expansion of the number of faculty associates, our thorough Self Study, the glowing External Review Report and our subsequent decision to merge GDST and WS. However, my term was bracketed by unsettling news. In the final weeks of my tenure, I learned that the Dean would end the University's contribution, in the form of a Continuing Faculty Line, toward the Ruth Wynn Woodward Chair. Due to vacations in the Administration, I could do no more than protest before leaving office. I think that we have assured the merger but I left office without any resolution of the funding for the RWWP. At least I have the consolation of knowing that the department has an excellent new chair and, I hope, a sense of purpose with which to address this latest blow.

Initially, I did not share the prospect of a merger with anyone but the previous Chair, who was also surprised. Instead, I attended and asked pertinent questions at all meetings of chairs, administrators and mixed groups, to learn if the possibility of merging was pending or even (such was my astonishment) plausible. I learned that the threat was not imminent but was credible. In my second semester, I told the Department about the possibility of a merger and after members of the department absorbed the disturbing news, we began to plan how to ensure our continued existence as a department. In this context we held annual "Advances" to discuss issues devolving from the University's initiatives and in 2008 a "Revisioning" exercise, complete with a professional facilitator. Although we did not pursue many of the recommendations from these endeavours, I believe that these meetings prepared the way for the external review that dominated my last year as Chair and that has resulted in major changes such as the merger and accompanying name change to Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies Department and major curriculum revisions detailed in Lara Campbell's report. I want to thank everyone for going through this time-consuming process with good grace. My special thanks to Helen Leung and Lara Campbell for their creative work on undergraduate (and to a lesser degree, graduate) curricular reform.

In the first year of my term, I tried to identify a research topic that might result in a collaborative research project in the Department. As an interim gesture, and as a way of bringing in faculty from other departments, we held the colloquium, "Regulating Bodies," in January 2008. The papers were excellent and interdisciplinary as well as multidisciplinary in approach; the attendance was good. Although many of the faculty and graduate students outside the department wanted to continue and apply for a SSHRCC workshop, no one else in Women's Studies was interested in doing so. Accordingly, and regretfully, I did not pursue the project. Perhaps faculty should think about another project, since I can report, on the basis of my experience with the Board of Governors of the Canadian Federation of the Humanities and Social Sciences, that

collaborative research will be emphasized in research funding. The first year and a half was also busy because our new DA, Roberta Rogers (now Neilson), had to learn the job without an up-to-date Chair to guide her. Together, we learned about budgeting under the new financial regime, but Roberta mastered the new system (FINS), not to mention the still-problematic Student Information System (SIMS) on her own. I am extremely grateful for her competence and good-natured attitude to every task and individual faculty member and student—personal qualities that have made the past three years significantly smoother for me and everyone in the Department.

Staffing posed problems in the first year and a half of my term. Roberta and I conducted no fewer than four searches and hires (all of our positions are set at starting grade, which is one reason we have turnover). Every hiring took time and every new hire required instruction, which Roberta handled ably and without complaint. If I can pass on one insight gained in the long period of staff turnover, it is that staff stability is much better. Shortly after I began, our long-time Secretary retired. Thankfully, Kathryn Hunter joined us early in 2007 and adapted quickly to the multifaceted job. She has eased the workload for Roberta, Marilyn MacDonald as Graduate Chair and me as Chair, and has maintained a high level of information flow and personal contact with graduate students. I am especially pleased that she helped with my filing, a task that I dislike and as everyone will have noticed, avoid. In the first year and a half, two people held the position of Ruth Wynn Woodward Assistant, but in January of 2008, Esther Harrison took the position and has remained with us since then. Esther has taken on added responsibilities for the Newsletter and website and made Roberta's and my job easier. I know that the past three RWW Chairs have found her assistance invaluable.

During the first year of my term, the University started an enrollment drive, the first stage of which prioritized recruitment, especially from high school. Accordingly, I proposed and supervised a survey of our recruitment efforts and the University's (as it turned out, virtual non-) representation of WS in high school visits, as well as the creation of a more attractive brochure to be distributed at the high school recruitment meetings and at our own on-campus displays. My thanks go to our Undergraduate Major Robin Gilker and to Roberta Neilson for their efforts on behalf of this initiative. I also authorized more advertising of new or special topic courses, notably by ads in *The Peak*.

By 2008, FASS put more emphasis on retention than on recruitment. Already, I had begun sending encouraging letters to students who did well in our introductory courses, informing them of the next semester's course offerings. Lara has suggested writing similar letters to good students in all our courses. Roberta identifies the students with good grades and makes an email list, so the instructor or Chair merely writes a brief message. For the future (though not necessarily next year, when there are so few faculty present), I recommend the resumption of the departmental orientation for potential Minors and Majors, albeit in a more engaging manner than in the past—less detailed information, more mention of interesting upcoming courses and “success stories” about majors and minors who went on to interesting work. There are some engaging examples of success stories in the surveys of students conducted for our Self Study.

In my second year as Chair (2007-2008), the financial crisis was the big news story, so I continued going to the meetings mentioned above and added the special sessions on the crisis (where we learned more about the extent of the crisis than about how we managed to get into such a pickle). One sobering exercise was the FASS Taskforce on the Budget, which gathered information on enrollments and FTEs that, as another department chair publicly noted, targeted small departments. As I inquired into the figures on WS in the Taskforce Report, I noted that the WS figures omitted the GDST figures (which were not mentioned anywhere in the Report) and that our FTEs (Full Time Equivalents) were inaccurate. After corresponding with and visiting faculty financial and university analytical studies personnel, I managed to get the two sets of enrollments counted together and to get (I hope) our RWWP counted only for half time teaching (as other Chairs are counted). The name change should ensure that our full enrollment is counted in future; how the RWWP is counted will need constant oversight. We need to think carefully in future about taking on any faculty who do not teach for us as a courtesy to another department, or for any other reason, since they (and their fictive four-course teaching loads) are included in the calculation of our departmental FTES, and depress them. Low FTEs are serious obstacles to getting new CFLs and sessional money. Even now, when positions and money are so scarce, we have to ensure better FTES to expect to get any resources.

In one of many ironies of these times, we had three quite wonderful incumbents in and conferences/exhibitions put on by the Ruth Wynn Woodward Endowed Chairs, were able to fund many graduate students through research assistantships, and were able to provide a Limited Term Appointment for next year by saving during high-interest years—yet were recently told that the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences would no longer fund the CFL that has constituted the University's contribution to the Endowed Chair, citing our ability to hire a Limited Term instructor. This funding, which replaced an earlier arrangement for \$60,000 annually from the Vice President Academic, had been promised by the VPA in the late 1990s but, I learned in the course of my term, had been handed over to FASS in 2001 (along with other CFLs). Only while contesting the ending of the University's contribution to the Chair, did I learn that FASS had placed the CFL monies in the TI/TA (Teaching Instructor/Teaching Assistant) budget line, a line that is now being drastically cut. I have expressed my outrage about the treatment of the RWWP as a TI. I have noted that Analytical Studies—and the Board of Directors—treat the appointment as a Chair appointment. Whatever the Dean intends to do to compensate (and she has reminded us she has no money), is up to negotiations between the Department and the Dean.

During my three years, I have also been contesting the designation of the RWWP as a Visiting Professor, something that began just before my term. I am now told that it is now and will in future be treated at the upper echelons of the Administration as a Chair. Much of the problem devolves from the fact that the RWWP was the first Endowed Chair at SFU, and, as a President at that time said, not the Chair that the University would have preferred as its first. Either because the University was new at Endowed Chairs, or because of their less than enthusiastic reception of this particular million dollar endowment, or possibly because of the massive changeover in the VPA's office in recent

years, the paperwork on the University's obligations to the RWWP is scanty. I have gathered what documentation we have (we lost some documentation in an archiving misadventure a decade ago) into a file in the Chair's office. I can only repeat the recommendation above to maintain constant vigilance on this subject.

*Mary Lynn Stewart*