April 24, 2006

Dear Attendees of the Leslie Feinberg Event:

Thank you for attending the Maggie Benston lecture given by Leslie Feinberg this past February. The Women’s Studies Department at SFU was pleased with the community turnout. We were inspired by Feinberg’s message of community and coalition building, understanding linkages in oppression and fighting against them, and also of recognizing gender variance in society. In the spirit of the lecture, we would like to share with you part of our response to Feinberg’s call for action around these issues.

We recently organized and held a workshop for members and affiliated members of our department on the topic of trans inclusion. The goal of the workshop was to identify the need for active trans inclusion in the university and to recognize situations where our department can become active in creating and maintaining a meaningfully trans inclusive environment. We also discussed working trans inclusion into our statement of values, a statement that we would use as a guide when hiring, programming courses, and designing events. We will be forming a committee on this issue at our next department meeting in May.

In addition to letting you know about our current activities, we would also like to use this opportunity to discuss the donations that were collected for the Downtown Eastside Women’s Centre the evening of Leslie Feinberg’s lecture. As you may recall, there was an allegation that the Centre was not “trans-friendly” and this certainly caused concern – both at the event and later. Since then we have had an exchange with Cynthia Low, the Administrative Coordinator of the DEWC, and this is what she had to say:

“I wanted to reassure you that we have a trans positive policy and we do have a number of trans members using the Centre on a daily basis. Of course there is lots of room for learning for our staff, board and members but we continue to challenge ourselves on issues.”

Likewise, we in the Women’s Studies Department at SFU continue to challenge ourselves on the issues Feinberg discussed during the lecture: building community and coalitions, and working toward trans inclusiveness in academia and the world at large. As such, we used the issues raised at the event as a spring-board to work toward making our department more cognizant of our own practices and their implications. We are also considering continuing the discussion by staging public discussion on trans inclusion in Women’s Studies and academia on the whole.

We hope that you will continue to join us in discussing and debating these issues. We look forward to seeing you at the next Maggie Benston lecture and also at other events in the community.

Marjorie Griffin Cohen, Chair
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