

Women's Studies degree established at U of A

by Ken Hui

An interdisciplinary undergraduate degree program in Women's Studies will be housed in the Faculty of Arts. The program proposal has been considered in turn by the Academic Development Committee and the Planning and Priorities Committee. The General Faculties Council endorsed the proposal "...subject to the availability of an appropriate level of funding."

Although there has been shown to be demand for such a program and there is wide support for it, some individuals are concerned that it may not be the right move. Professor Jenkins of the Department of Economics raised the point of imbalanced emphasis. Jenkins said that to go to the other extremes and teach courses where the role of women was given the sole emphasis would not be a solution to the existing problem of male-oriented perspective in academics.

In a phone interview, Jenkins said that he definitely mentions well known economic figures, regardless of sex, when he finds it academically necessary in his classes. Jenkins pointed out that there are in fact more male leading figures in economics than females, and to stress only one of those would be misleading.

Dean White of the Faculty of Arts does not agree. "I think the tendency in many academic disciplines has been to underplay the female perspective. Rather than causing an imbalance, the Women's Studies program will provide an opportunity to create a more balanced perspective."

A persistent student demand for these courses has been exemplified by the large enrolment in existing courses. For instance, Sociology 301, Sociology of Sex Roles is perhaps one of the best known courses in the department. "I think it will fill a need in our offerings and enable us to better coordinate the courses in Women's Studies that have already been offered by various departments in the Faculty," remarked Dean White. Some credit courses on women offered at the university are Christian Theology 318 - Feminist Theology, Political Science 350 - Women and Politics, and Anthropology 410 - Sex and Status in Comparative Perspective.

For the present, the Advisory Committee envisages the development of the following courses: WST 300 - Introduction to Women's

Studies, WST 301 - History of Feminist Thought, WST 302 - Feminist Research and Methodologies, WST 400 - Interdisciplinary Women's Studies Seminar, and WST 401 - Senior Project in Women's Studies. Other courses will be developed at a later date when a coordinator is hired.

Dean White explained the administrative structure of the Women's Studies program. The Women's Studies committee will be operating in the same way as the previous Canadian Studies committee did. Because the program assumes an interdisciplinary approach, membership on the committee is extended to different departments. A program coordinator will be selected to act as a department head. The coordinator will work with the Women's Studies committee to develop new courses. The committee will develop policy for the program and the coordinator will look after the day to day operations and assume some teaching responsibilities.

Besides the coordinator, the program will require secretarial assistance, office space, and involves relatively low cost according to Dean White. "The government is interested in equality issues and I think they will have a positive response," he said. "If the government does not fund it, the central administration may have ways to fund the program."

The concept of Women's Studies has emerged in Canada in the last decade. The most established and visible degree programs are those at Simon Fraser University, University of Toronto, Concordia University, and Mount Saint Vincent. The Universities of Carleton, Guelph, York, and Calgary have recently approved respective undergraduate degree programs. Note that the federal government has recently endowed chairs in Women's Studies in major regions. At present, Women's Studies programs are developed in special courses, specialist degree and/or graduate work levels across the country. The Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women and Canadian Women's Studies Association are the two leading institutes in the field.

A broad rationale has been generated for academic attention to Women's Studies as the subject is defined by the Advisory Committee to be "an intellectual and educational movement that is irrevocably altering what we know about women and gender."

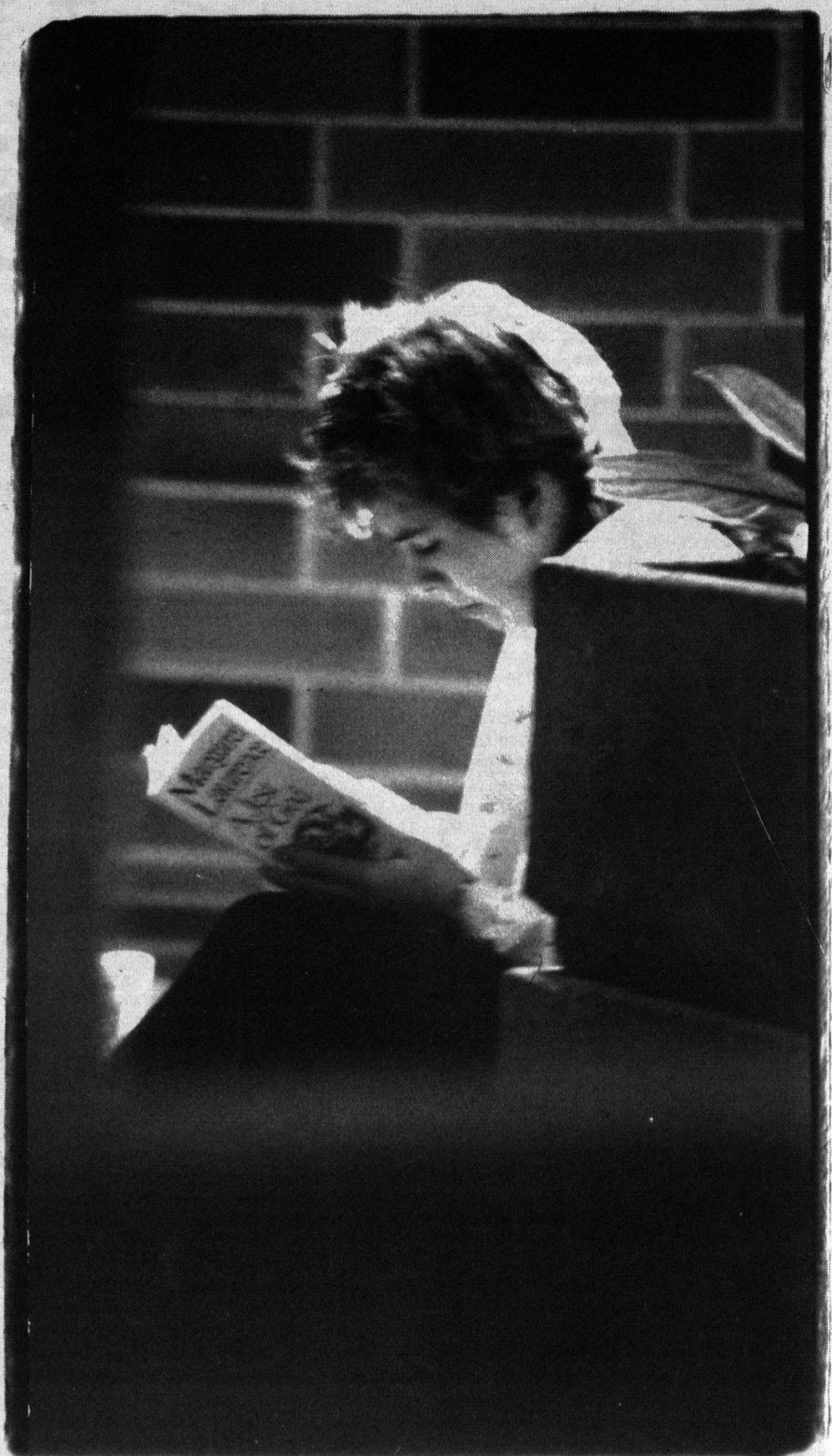


photo Ron Checora

Centre gives hope to immigrant women

by Sherri Ritchie

Canada's immigrant women fight for more than equal pay for equal work. They fight just to be an active, functioning part of their environment.

Immigrant women are routinely overlooked in the discussion of women's rights. Not only do these women combat sexism, they also face racism as well as the Herculean task of integrating into a completely new culture.

There are many obstacles they have to face as these women strive for equality. The primary problems they must overcome are the language and cultural barriers. Anything from filling out forms to catching a transit bus can be very intimidating and frustrating when speech and customs are alien. One of three workshops held in the Tory Lecture Theatres this past Saturday addressed these issues.

Five agencies for Canadian immigrants in Edmonton offer orientation programs targeting these types of problems. "But these orientation programs center around the men's needs," points out Sushila Fernando of the Centre for Immigrant Women. "Last year I was involved in another orientation agency and the man arranging it refused to have women in the sessions." This concern prompted the creation of Changing Together - A Centre for Immigrant Women, in 1984.

Immigrant orientation focuses on the men because a primary concern of immigrant families is income. The men are seen as the bread winners and are given assistance to get into the work force. This same vicious circle has tightened the apron strings of immigrant women. Not only are the women confined to the house-

hold, but they are isolated from their new surroundings. "Men integrate much easier than women," pointed out Pappiya Das, social worker at Edmonton General Hospital. "Not only do they have the useful orientation, they immediately become part of the culture. They work every day in direct contact with it while the women are separated from it."

This is a common trend among professionally trained women as well as the housewife. "The women are not given the chance to get into the profession they are trained for," said Helen Rebalin, nurse at Edmonton General. "Working for the hospital I encounter many immigrant housewives who are professional women." The women involved in the workshop observed that many people assume there is a lack of intelligence in someone who doesn't speak the language - another hinderance for these women to face.

After conducting a study, Dr. Hosainni of the U of A created the centre. She found that the needs of immigrant women were not being met by other women's groups or immigrant groups. Employment, language, childcare, and transportation are all problems the centre provides help for. It is a resource centre for integration, but also a support group and a forum for immigrant women to share common concerns.

The centre offers free English language courses and orientation for women, and will soon be starting the "New Friends" program in Mill Woods. "You can't just say they've come to Canada - we're going to make them Canadian," pointed out one participant in the workshop. "You have to understand their culture to help integrate them."

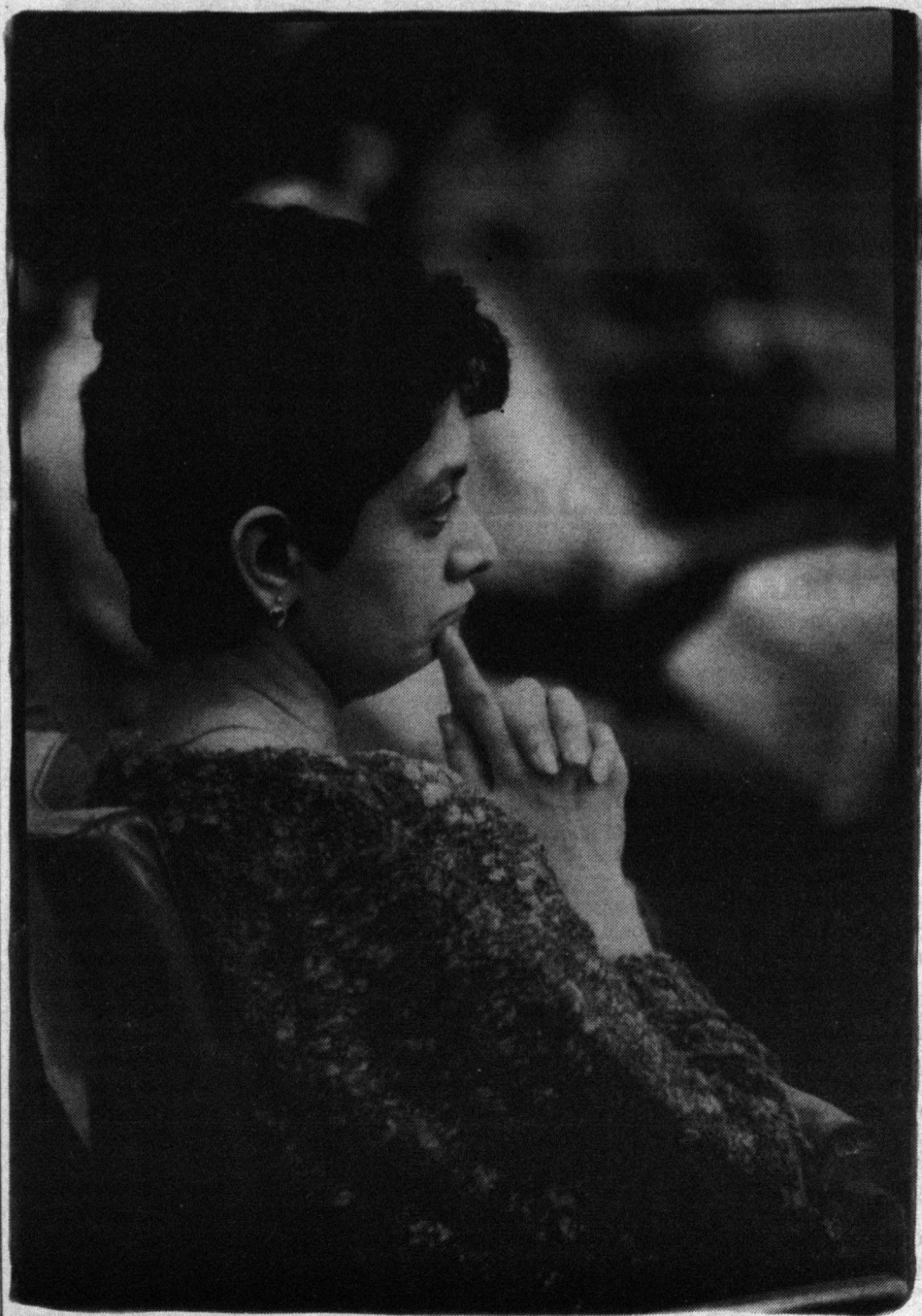


photo Ron Checora