



Women's studies celebrates 30 years

BY DIANE LUCKOW

IT WAS A DARK AND STORMY NIGHT ON July 7, 1975 when former professors Andrea Lebowitz and Maggie Benston appeared at senate to present a proposal for a program in women's studies.

Amidst claps of thunder outside, Benston and Lebowitz fielded rumblings inside as university senators questioned their intentions. One senator claimed they had no research to back them up – a point they seized on, explaining that such a program would foster just such research.

Another senator suggested that giving them a women's studies program was tantamount to allowing prisoners to create a prison education program.

Luckily for Lebowitz and Benston, Pauline Jewett had recently been appointed president of SFU and she was clear about her support for the program.

The vote passed and in January 1976, they introduced the first course, introduction to women's studies, with 40 students enrolled.

Today, as women's studies celebrates its 30th anniversary, there are about 800 students enrolled in approximately 25 different courses in

this nationally recognized program.

The department offers a minor in gender studies, a minor and a major in women's studies, and several joint majors as well as a master of arts and a PhD. A unique aspect of SFU's program is its interdisciplinary and comprehensive nature. It covers not only the social sciences and humanities, but also the contemporary arts and sciences.

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– MARJORIE GRIFFIN COHEN

Marjorie Griffin Cohen, a professor who splits her time between women's studies and political science, is chair of the department.

She says the program, like others across the country, grew out of the tremendous interest women had in understanding more about themselves and their contributions in the world.

"There was relatively little that was researched or printed about women at that time," says Cohen. "This academic feminism was a crucial part of the feminist movement."

Over the years, SFU women's studies has had a significant impact on women in B.C.

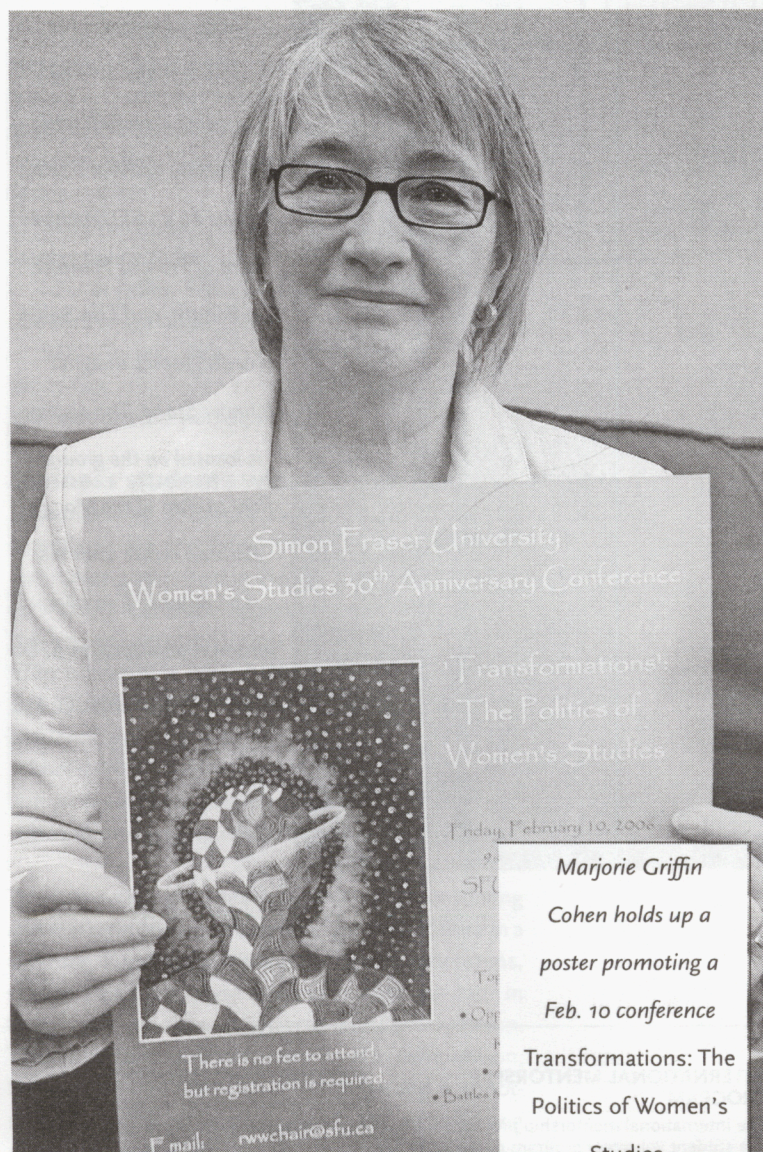
"We've trained a large number of women who have gone into community work, government work, industry and services and they do take a women's studies' perspective with them," says Cohen.

"Over the years, we have had a significant impact on public policy programs and community activities."

The department's goal, she says, is to place women at the centre of interdisciplinary teaching and research about power relations and to foster knowledge to actively transform these relations to the benefit of women.

The department will celebrate its anniversary on Feb. 10 with a one-day conference, *Transformations: The Politics of Women's Studies*, which examines how women's studies constantly changes in response to the needs of women as they analyse their world.

The conference is free, but registration is required. For more information visit www.sfu.ca/womens-studies/events.htm/ •



Marjorie Griffin Cohen holds up a poster promoting a Feb. 10 conference

Transformations: The Politics of Women's Studies.