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CHAPTER TEN

WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES ACROSS CULTURES: INTERNATIONALIZING WOMEN'S STUDIES AT FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

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On 3 December 2005, representatives of the Gender and Women's Studies programs at Florida International University (FIU) in Miami; Universidad Nacional de Colombia in Bogotá, Colombia; the University of Western Cape, South Africa; and the University of Granada, Spain signed a Memorandum of understanding that declared:

The four institutions hereby agree in this Memorandum of Understanding to launch the International Gender and Women's Studies Consortium to develop mutual goals concerning research, teaching, and outreach in Women's Studies and women's issues internationally. The interdisciplinary programs of the universities involved commit themselves to the responsible and continued collaboration and exchange of knowledge.¹

¹ "Declaración de Intenciones/ Memorandum of Understanding," Miami December 3, 2005 The document drafted both in Spanish and English read:

En Miami, 3 de diciembre de 2005, reunidos los centros de Estudios de las Mujeres y de Género de las universidades de Florida International University (EEUU), Universidad Nacional de Colombia en Bogotá, University of Western Cape (Sud-Africa) y Universidad de Granada (España), acordaron iniciar el proceso de constitución de un consorcio de universidades con el objetivo de impulsar proyectos comunes de

Two years earlier Suzanna Rose and Aurora Morcillo, director and associate director of the Women's Studies Center respectively, had traveled to Spain to visit the recently opened Florida International University Center in Madrid, a major endeavor on the part of Florida International University's effort to internationalize its programs across the board. Our visit included as well a meeting with colleagues at the Instituto de Estudios de la Mujer at the University of Granada. This first contact in late June 2003 was most productive. As a result, both universities committed themselves to sign an agreement of understanding between Florida International University and the University of Granada to initiate an international cooperation and exchange program between our Women's Studies Centers.

The Agreement for Mutual Co-operation between Florida International University and the University of Granada was signed by the President of the University of Granada on 17 June 2003, paving the way for Florida International University to consider it and sign it. On 27 June 2003, Drs. Rose and Morcillo met with Drs. María Eugenia Fernández Fraile, Margarita Birriel, and Ana María Muñoz Muñoz of the Instituto de Estudios de la Mujer (IEM) at the University of Granada and drafted a specific agreement between the Women's Studies Center at FIU and the Instituto de Estudios de la Mujer at the Universidad de Granada under which we established that the general agreement was sufficient to immediately initiate the co-operation for the academic year 2003-2004. In a "specific agreement" between the two Women's Studies Centers, we agreed that a joint committee should be named to establish details of

investigación, docencia y de extensión de los Estudios de las Mujeres y de Género, facilitando el intercambio internacional de los conocimientos producidos en este campo. Así mismo estos centros interdisciplinarios de las universidades aquí representadas, se comprometen a un seguimiento continuado y responsable de estos objetivos.

On 3 December 2005, in Miami, Florida, U.S.A., representatives of the Gender and Women's Studies programs of the following universities convened: Florida International University (USA), Universidad Nacional de Colombia in Bogotá (Colombia), University of Western Cape (South Africa) and University of Granada (Spain). The four institutions hereby agree in this Memorandum of Understanding to launch the International Gender and Women's Studies Consortium to develop mutual goals concerning research, teaching, and outreach in Women's Studies and women's issues internationally. The interdisciplinary programs of the universities involved commit themselves to the responsible and continued collaboration and exchange of knowledge.

specific programs in accordance to the statutes and economic constraints of each institution. The joint committee would consist of four faculty members, two from each center, who would oversee the implementation and possible improvement of the agreement.

The long term goal was to establish a Master of Arts degree in Women's Studies at FIU with an international component. Students from our program and the University of Granada would enroll and be able to take classes at both institutions. Additionally, we proposed a requirement that students fulfill an internship either in Spain or Florida with a non-government organization (NGO) or other agency or firm interested in the program. The advantage of this practical training would be to prepare our students for the job market and to raise awareness about gender discrimination in the workplace and the community at large. For this purpose, we planned a meeting with political officials in Madrid.

The General de Estudios y Cooperación, of the Instituto de la Mujer within the Spain's Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, was established in the early 1980s to attend politically to the needs of women. Major legislation and reforms that favor women's rights have taken place in Spain since Franco's dictatorship ended in 1975. In a country where women's legal status was as minors under the tutelage of a guardian, they now enjoy access to contraception, to abortion, to divorce, and to all levels of education and performance of all professions. The goal of our meeting was to inquire about funding opportunities and the possibility of facilitating practical training or internships for our students in NGOs and other similar agencies.

Two potential sources of funding exist. First, financial support to fund small meetings and seminars would be possible, and second, financial support would also be available for research projects that require from one to three years to complete, although little funding is available for publication. Professor Margarita Birriel, of the University of Granada, traveled to Miami in November 2004 to finalize the signing of our specific cooperation agreement.²

What was the rationale behind our commitment to internationalize Women's Studies? The extraordinary significance of Gender and Women's Studies in the global economy is most evident in our program at FIU, a predominantly minority-serving institution where Women's Studies has experienced a tremendous growth as a result of student and

² She also lectured on "Women and Property in Early Modern Spain" to a diverse group of graduate students and faculty not only from Women's Studies but also history and Modern Languages. See Women's Studies Center Events spring-fall 2004 archive <http://www.fiu.edu/~wstudies/archive0405.htm>

community demand.³ Second, the location of FIU presents an opportunity to take the lead in a transnational approach to women and development research. Miami offers the advantage of being able to both nurture new communities and to act as a bridge between existing communities across the Atlantic, utilizing the lens of gender.

At first glance, the Florida International University's Women's Studies Center appears to resemble many Women's Studies programs around the country. However, what is unique about our program is its collaborative partnership with Latin American, African, and European Women's Studies programs. This is made possible by our location in Miami, a point of encounter of cultures where this collaboration brings together scholars from such diverse nationalities and disciplines as Psychology, History, Classics, Biblical Studies, Architecture, Art History, Architecture, and English.

Nevertheless, in order to achieve a true internationalization of our program, funding became critical for several reasons. First, funding was necessary to build a stable mass of outstanding core faculty in Women's Studies. Funding was important as well to enhance interdisciplinary research and to increase the visibility of Women's Studies within the university as well as in the broader academic community. In order to maximize our possibilities of funding, the Women's Studies Center (WSC), in partnership with the Center of Transnational Studies at FIU, organized the International Gender and Women's Studies Consortium Meeting in 2005 under the theme "Outreach, Research, Teaching For The Twenty-First Century." The Women's Studies Center hosted a workshop in December 2005, entitled "Gender and Women's Studies across Cultures" to further the aims of the 2003 Memo of Understanding between Women's Studies Center at FIU and the Instituto de Estudios de la Mujer at the Universidad de Granada in Spain.

Moreover, this workshop included the Escuela de Estudios de Género at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia and the University of the Western Cape in South Africa. Members drafted a Declaration of Intention to develop an International Gender and Women's Studies Consortium to facilitate the development of an exchange program among selected Women's Studies centers and universities. Faculty from both sides of the

³ Seventy percent of the 38,000 student body is Hispanic and 65 percent women. At present, the WSC (<http://www.fiu.edu/~wstudies>) only has 1.75 core faculty allocations and 60 affiliated faculty from different departments across campus who cross-list their classes with us. The WSC offers a BA and an undergraduate certificate (We have 110 certificate earners and 100 majors) as well as a graduate certificate which we expect soon to become a MA in Women's Studies.

Atlantic shared their research and renewed their commitment to collaborate to establish a true international Women's Studies model of exchange.⁴ FIU hosted delegates from the University of Granada Women's Studies faculty as well as the Universidad Nacional de Colombia and Cape Town University in South Africa. We also invited FIU Women's Studies faculty, donors, and students to participate. The objectives we proposed for the consortium included a number of important components.

- To host an annual research meeting with delegations of Women's Studies faculty from the member universities to build a long term exchange program between faculty and students;⁵
- To launch a scholarly bi-lingual publication of the proceedings;⁶
- To facilitate the international exchange of knowledge in the area of Gender and Women's Studies;
- To educate FIU Women's Studies donors about the collaboration between FIU and international Universities and cultivate their interest in supporting international programs in Women's Studies.

On 2 December 2005, we hosted the "Gender and Women's Studies across Cultures Public Forum," a two-hour session to present to the public the different centers involved in this venture. Participants came from all of the universities involved in the agreement, including Granada, Colombia, South Africa, and FIU. Members shared information about the academic and administrative structure of their centers and proposed different ideas for mutual collaboration.

The following day, the delegates met to discuss strategies of collaboration. During the retreat, we drafted a statement of purpose to develop an International Gender and Women's Studies Consortium. At the meeting, each delegate brought to the table information on current outreach, research, and teaching endeavors at their respective programs.

⁴ As a result of our interest in diversifying the participants involved in the consortium, we secured the enthusiastic participation of the Center for Studies and Research on Women at the University of Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah, Fez, Morocco.

⁵ The exchange followed the guidelines of the general agreement FIU already had signed with University of Granada and Universidad Nacional de Colombia. The agreement indicates that the universities will pursue joint faculty projects, faculty and student exchanges, and a dual degree M.A. program.

⁶ The publication should carry each year a particular theme, such as migration, sexuality, international relations, historical gender analysis, and so forth.

The meeting clarified the major areas of collaboration and made clear the common interest in developing a Masters Degree in International Women's Studies with an emphasis on global feminism and practical training. Our research interest highlighted areas that include migration citizenship and the shaping of global identities through gender, class, and race. Common areas of research emphasis included gender violence, sexuality, embodiment, and globalization. With regard to outreach, we agreed to create a multi-lingual publication series to open the flow of knowledge from those cultures not typically represented in English.⁷ Also, to promote the exchange of knowledge, we renewed our interest in annual meetings and workshops. As a result of our discussions, we drafted the Declaration of Intention and each delegate present signed it. The resolutions of the first meeting were the following:

1. To host an annual research meeting with delegations from Women's Studies faculty and students;
2. To build a long term exchange program between faculty and students;
3. The universities will pursue joint faculty projects, faculty and student exchanges, and a dual degree M.A. program;
4. To launch a scholarly multi-lingual publication of the proceedings;
5. To facilitate the international exchange of knowledge in the area of Gender and Women's Studies;
6. To meet in Colombia the following year.

On 14 December 2006, delegates from Florida International University and the Universidad Nacional de Colombia met in Bogota to finalize the legal documents and goals of the consortium. The resolutions were:

1. To sign the consortium legal agreement in Granada, Spain in 2007;
2. To create Feminist International Consortium based on a solidarity or comparative feminist studies model;
3. To seek funding; and
4. To open the consortium to other programs interested in participating as full members.

⁷ Three of the programs already have journals and the University of Granada has a prestigious monograph series.

Additionally, we identified two major sources of funding. The first is the National Endowment for the Humanities Challenge Grant, which will help support the consortium's humanities activities in education, public programming, scholarly research, and preservation. A second source is the Ford Foundation/Peace and Social Justice Program. These grants, according to the Ford Foundation,

focus on rights of women, migrants, refugees, marginalized racial and ethnic groups and international human rights efforts. The unit also funds work on reproductive rights and the reduction of the stigma and discrimination against people with HIV/AIDS.⁸

Officials from each university will attend a formal ceremony of induction in October 2007 in Granada to sign the agreement that will officially—and legally—establish the consortium. In addition to the legal launching of the consortium, we plan to gather under the maxim "Feminism without Borders." We plan to read, reflect and discuss theoretical and curricular endeavors following the latest work of Dr. Chandra Talpade Mohanty,⁹ who will be our keynote speaker, along with Dr. Fatima Sadiqi, University Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah Fez, Morocco, founder of the first Women's Studies program at the University level in Morocco.

We envision the consortium will enable us to create transnational interpretive and critical frameworks for analyzing the global economy from a gender perspective by facilitating the exchange of knowledge across cultures. Such an effort brings the interdisciplinary research in

⁸ Information on the Ford Foundation program may be found at <http://www.fordfound.org>. The above-noted quote is from www.fordfound.org/publications/recent_articles/docs/current_interests06.pdf page 5.

⁹ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders. Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. (Duke University Press, 2003); of particular interest is chapter nine, "'Under Western Eyes' Revisited: Feminist Solidarity Through Anticapitalist Struggles," 221-253.

women and development into fruitful conversation with each other to facilitate policy implementation inspired in solidarity and cooperation.