

# GUIDELINES FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF WOMEN'S ACCESS PROGRAMMES IN BC

Women's Access Programmes are established with the express goal of **reducing institutional barriers to women's education**. Such a goal must be addressed in at least two fashions:

1. to **assist women to gain access** to the services and resources of the institution and its community,
2. to **assist the institution to modify any practice or policy which presents a barrier to women as adult learners**.

Implicit in the work for women's access is the assumption that the traditional delivery systems of education have not met women's educational needs, nor has the educational system taken adequate notice of the volume and seriousness of its shortcomings with regard to including mature women in the policy and plans of each institution.

The Women's Access Association would like to offer for consideration a number of guidelines concerning the establishment of Women's Access Programmes. We draw on the experiences of faculty, staff, and administrators involved in such programming in BC colleges and institutes over the last decade and particularly over the last two years of Ministerial commitment to the area. The points contained in this paper adhere to the principles laid out by the Zimmerman-Trew Discussion Paper 02/79, "A Report on Non-Traditional Learning Programs for Women at BC Post-Secondary Institutions".

In setting out these guidelines we have attempted to **recognize the autonomy of post-secondary institutions**, and to **allow for diversity of resources, administrative structures and clientele**. In some cases, the preliminary work will have been done by previous Women's Access projects or by other college personnel in formal or informal preparation for anticipated assistance by the Ministry. In any event, we recommend that the **groundwork be done before extensive services are established**, so that **actual needs are addressed in the most cost-efficient and effective manner**. After all, increasing Women's Access to education is a task requiring long-term adjustment by the college and community and cannot be successfully approached with superficial and shoddy projects, no matter how impressive in the short term they may be.

Sound principles of Adult Educational programme development must be observed. We suggest that an institution wishing to establish a Women's Access Programme would ensure that the following procedures be followed:

## 1. Startup Phase

- a. Establish a **Women's Access Advisory Committee** composed of women representing **faculty, students, staff, members of the community, and the College Board**. The Committee's function would be advisory to all aspects of the programme including participation in hiring a programme coordinator, reporting to the College Board, liaising with the Provincial Programme Review Committee, and in the formation of programme goals and objectives.
- b. Employ a **coordinator** (fulltime attention is optimum for both credibility and effectiveness; less than half time would be counterproductive), whose tasks would be to:
  - i. conduct an **assessment both of community women's needs and of institutional**

- practices (e.g. admissions policies, student services, financial aid, curriculum, timetabling),
- ii. review the institution's organization to recommend how a Women's Access Programme can best be included in the administrative structure,
  - iii. conduct a review of similar programmes in BC and abroad, in order to have a wide range of models for creation of an appropriate programme to meet the needs of local women.
- c. **Allocate resources** adequate to begin a programme (i.e. to conduct a needs assessment and formulate goals and objectives), including:
- i. a budget for **operating and capital costs**, including appropriate physical facilities and 'startup costs',
  - ii. adequate **clerical and reception support**,
  - iii. adequate funds for **professional development and travel**
- d. Establish a **temporary administrative structure** including:
- i. a coordinator who reports to the chief executive officer and meets regularly with the Women's Access Advisory Committee,
  - ii. a Women's Access Advisory Committee that offers advice to the coordinator.

## 2. Hiring Criteria

The position of Coordinator is central to the success of the programme. Although there is a wide variety of specific duties this person may be required to carry out, certain basic competencies have been found necessary regardless of the Access model adopted:

- a. extensive experience with **women's concerns**
- b. **familiarity with an adult learning setting**
- c. **minimum of a Bachelor's degree**; preferably with graduate degree in a related field
- d. a knowledge of **local concerns** of the college, or experience in a comparable community
- e. **good organizational skills**
- f. good skills in **instruction, public speaking, and informal counselling**

We recommend a broad assignment of duties for this position, in order to activate changes in both community and college responses to women's educational needs. Long range planning, rather than narrow provision of direct service, should be the priority of the Women's Access Programme coordinator.

## 3. Essential Programme Components

An effective Women's Access Programme will require a certain amount of **planning time** to get itself established in the **most appropriate model**.

- a. the objectives and priorities assigned to the goals of increasing women's access to the institution and of reducing institutional barriers should be the product of a **needs assessment** conducted early in the project. Assistance with research, evaluation and program development may be available through the local college faculty, Education faculty at UBC, Access coordinators in other colleges, and the Ministry of Education's Program Research and Development Office.
- b. the programme coordinator, in consultation with her Advisory Committee, should develop **planning strategies for meeting long and short range objectives**. A **formative evaluation plan** should also be developed, with assistance from the Provincial Programme Review Committee.

the way in which a Women's Access Programme is integrated into an institution will have an enormous effect on the functions and priorities that evolve, and should be carefully evaluated as to long and short term consequences to the programme. The organization of the programme itself should be complemented by its place in the institution.

- i. a Women's Programme Division (comparable to a Counselling Division), directed by a coordinator, and housed in an Instructional or Student Services Division.
- ii. a Women's Resource Center (comparable to a Career Resources Center or Learning Assistance Center), directed by a coordinator, and housed in an Instructional or Student Services Division. Location could be on campus or storefront in the community.
- iii. a Director of Women's Access Programmes (comparable to a Director of Planning, Continuing Education, or Career Training).

#### Programme Functioning

Once the coordinator, Advisory Committee, organizational structure, and objectives of the Women's Access Programme have been established, work may begin to meet the two primary goals of the Programme--increasing access and modifying policies and practices. The Zimmerman-Trew paper gives excellent descriptions of the options in service and delivery systems addressing these goals:

##### a. Goal: Access

###### Service Area: Information

- i. Information on **educational opportunities** (e.g. academic, career/vocational programs) should be readily available. Information could be in the form of a workshop, an openhouse, brochures, media presentations, and/or meeting and speaking to community groups.
- ii. Information for development of **self reliance**, i.e. those skills most women do not traditionally acquire (e.g. assertiveness training, small group discussion, public speaking, leadership training, basic auto mechanics, small appliance repair, financial management, budgeting). Educational delivery could include workshops, short courses, formal courses and library materials.
- iii. Information for **personal development** (e.g. how to deal with stress, building self-confidence, risk taking, supervisory skills, management skills, and citizen advocacy skills). Information could be in the form of workshops, short courses, formal courses and library materials.
- iv. Information on **decision-making and life-planning** (e.g. how to formulate goals, prioritizing objectives, construct a plan to meet these goals, and locate the necessary resources). These may be delivered by using workshops conducted on a large scale, small group workshops, media presentations, and library resources.
- v. Information of **educational re-entry** (e.g. how to do it, what is required, what to expect, and how to persist). Relevant delivery systems may include workshops, short courses, media presentations, and library materials.

###### Service Area: Specialized Counselling

- i. **Personal Counselling**. The need for specialized counselling in this area is well documented. This is one of the most crucial services to women adult learners. Counsellors offering this service should have expertise, specialized training, and/or be familiar with the growing amount of research and theory development in this area.
- ii. **Emotional support** to assist women in resolving role conflicts, home-study conflicts, familial stress, and anxiety associated with returning

to and competing in a school environment. This service may be delivered by counsellors (with special training and experience) in a one-to-one situation or in small groups.

- iii. Career development which assists women to select non-traditional educational programs and careers. Women must be informed that career choice should be based on interest and ability, not on sex-stereotyped occupations. Delivery of this service may be one-to-one counselling, group counselling, media presentation, and workshops.

b. Goal: Policies and Practices

Reduction of internal barriers should be based on the results of the assessment of institutional practices. Suggested areas of potential concern:

- i. actively encouraging women to consider wider educational and career options (especially non-traditional career and vocational programs)
- ii. flexible hours for programs (e.g. part-time programs during the day)
- iii. financial aid for part-time students (e.g. active intervention for women to obtain support from other agencies, and bursary assistance)
- iv. child-minding offered on a drop-in basis
- v. flexible admission requirements for career programs (e.g. part-time students)
- vi. availability of credit for life experience
- vii. provision of study skills, learning assistance, refresher and reentry programs
- viii. recruitment and publicity to include adult women.