

Establishing a Women's Studies Program in a Teacher Education Institution: The Philippine Normal University Experience

Zenaida Q. Reyes, Ph.D., Director, Linkages and International Office

Praksis A. Miranda, Ph.D., Director, University Center for Gender and Development



PHILIPPINE NORMAL UNIVERSITY
The National Center for Teacher Education

Institutional Background

- The Philippine Normal University (PNU) is a teacher training university for basic education (elementary and secondary level) with postgraduate courses for teachers.
- In recognition of its continued leadership in teacher education, PNU was designated as National Center for Teacher Education by virtue of Republic Act 9647 on June 30, 2009.
- The main campus of the University is in the City of Manila with branches in Prosperidad, Agusan del Sur; Alicia, Isabela; Cadiz City, Negros Occidental; and Lopez, Quezon.



Establishing the Women's Studies Program in Philippine Normal University

The processual establishment of a Women's Studies Program in Philippine Normal University is characterized by five stages:

- 1) Consciousness Raising on Women's Issues and Concerns
- 2) The Organization of Urduja, A Women's Group
- 3) Organization of Urduja Youth
- 4) Advocacy of Women's concerns and issues
- 5) Curricular Mainstreaming of Women Studies



First Stage: Consciousness Raising on Women's Issues and Concerns

- In 1987, a group of faculty members from the Social Science Department attended a gender sensitivity training-workshop that was conducted by the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women (now Philippine Commission on Women) at the University of the Philippines in Quezon City. From then on, these faculty members held a series of informal discussions on women's issues and concerns in the context of the university as well as in the context of the nation.



Second Stage: The Organization of URDUJA

- The series of informal group meetings led to the establishment of a women's organization in PNU. These female faculty members concentrated their efforts and decided to formalize their group with the name URDUJA in 1989. The group's name, URDUJA, was taken from that of a native woman who held a prestigious position in her tribe during the Philippine pre-Spanish period (before 1565).



Second Stage: The Organization of URDUJA

- URDUJA became a venue for faculty members to share the knowledge and experiences that they gained from attending seminars and workshops about women. These faculty members later on became the “critical mass” in pushing for the establishment of a Women’s Studies Program.



Third Stage: The Organization of Urduja Youth

- The series of symposia and fora sponsored and co-sponsored by URDUJA made students aware of the various dimensions of women's issues. These students organized themselves to become URDUJA Youth. These young women served as the support group of the faculty URDUJA, but most importantly, they were the ones who encouraged other students to study and to join the advocacy for women's rights.



Third Stage: The Organization of Urduja Youth

- Students organized study groups at least once a week. Faculty members were invited to talk about specific topics such as the national situation of Filipino women, social construction of gender, violence against women and women's rights. Exposure trips in communities and networking with other students in various universities enriched students' knowledge of women's issues. These experiences helped develop a sense of commitment among the students to fight for women's rights.



Fourth Stage: Advocacy of Women's Concerns and Issues

- Advocacy in Women's Studies took the form of symposia, rallies, training-workshops, drama presentations, group discussions, writing of modules, integrating women's studies concepts in the lessons, celebrating Women's Day with a festive atmosphere, and many other creative activities.



Fourth Stage: Advocacy of Women's Concerns and Issues

- The most important strategy in advocating for Women's Studies was the development of modules that integrated concepts and issues about women. Faculty members assigned to work on certain modules made a conscious effort to study and do research about the topic. Eventually, a pool of young faculty members specializing in certain aspects of the discipline such as Women in History, Women in Politics, Women and Society, Women in Science and Technology, among others, emerged. The modules that they created were used in actual classes or were utilized for the training of other teachers in the field.



Fourth Stage: Advocacy of Women's Concerns and Issues

- In 1999, The Center for Gender, Peace and Human Rights Education was established in PNU. This started the institutionalization of Gender Programs in the university. In order to strengthen Women's Studies Projects, The Center for Gender, Education and Development was separated from Peace and Human Rights Education Projects in 2003.



Fifth Stage: Curricular Mainstreaming of Women's Studies

- The seminar-workshops and trainings organized by URDUJA and URDUJA Youth in PNU were well-attended. Many of the participants became interested on Women's Studies and the idea of offering a course on Women's Studies emerged in one of the seminar-workshops. Based on the discussions on the content of the Women's Studies Specialization by a group of faculty members, Dr. Noemi Medina, then the President of Urduja, wrote the proposal for a Women's Studies Specialization Program in the Undergraduate Level during the first semester of school year 1994-1995. The proposal was presented to the members of Urduja for critiquing and refinement.



Fifth Stage: Curricular Mainstreaming of Women Studies

- The proposal was presented to the head of the Social Science Department who then endorsed it to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. It was later on presented to the Council of Heads of the same college. With revisions, the proposal became a majorship in the Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSE) curriculum. This was again presented to the Undergraduate Council composed of 100 faculty members. The Council suggested that it should be retained as a specialization. With few comments, the council approved the Women's Studies Program.



Fifth Stage: Curricular Mainstreaming of Women Studies

- The next step was the endorsement to the Vice President for Academic Affairs so that the said proposal will be part of the agenda of the Academic Council meeting. After a year of dialogue with the leadership, the proposal was deliberated and approved by the Academic Council.



Fifth Stage: Curricular Mainstreaming of Women Studies

- Finally, the Board of Regents, the highest policy making body of the university, issued a memorandum which states that Women's Studies is a specialization program that will be offered starting school year 1996-1997.



The PNU Women's Studies Program at present

- A recent tracer study of the program's alumni from 2003 to 2013 revealed that their Women's Studies Specialization was extremely adequate and relevant in their current teaching employment.



Conclusion

- The link between the women's movement and the academe in the Philippines is a reflection of the unity between the theory and practice (or praxis) of advocating for women's rights
- The creation of social agents among PNU faculty was crucial in initiating structural changes in PNU
- One structural change led to another: the formation of a faculty group and of a student organization that focuses on women's issues catalyzed discourses on women, which resulted to the mainstreaming of women's concerns in various university activities



Conclusion

- The integration of women's studies concepts in modules is the most important strategy in creating a Women's Studies Program because the intersection of women's issues with other societal realms (e.g. science and technology, politics, economy) was embedded in teaching and learning strategies. This emphasizes that Women's Issues are not only the concern of one sector of society (women), but the concern of society as a whole.



Major Reference

Reyes, Zenaida. n.d. “Building a Women’s Studies Program in Philippine Normal University.”



PHILIPPINE NORMAL UNIVERSITY
The National Center for Teacher Education

Maraming salamat po!
(Thank you very much!)



PHILIPPINE NORMAL UNIVERSITY
The National Center for Teacher Education