

MOTIVATION TO DO GENDER STUDIES AND ITS IMPACT ON EMPLOYMENT AND GRADUATE STUDIES: A STUDY OF THE GRADUATES OF THE GENDER STUDIES PROGRAM, UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA

Ruhana Padzil*, Shanthi Thambiah, Pauline I Erera & Maimuna Hamid Merican

Abstract

This article discusses the impact of students' participation in Gender Studies Programme, University of Malaya on work and career choices and on graduate studies. We surveyed all those students that we could locate from the Dean's Office Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences database and focusing on graduates who minored in Gender Studies Program since the session 1996/97 when the programme was established, to the 2006/07 academic session. The graduates were given 73 item questionnaires that incorporated elements of several widely used and validated research instruments. We asked them about the impact of the programme on their work and career choices, their personal lives and relationships, and on their contributions to civil society. We also asked their reasons for choosing Gender Studies. Of the 87 graduates of the Programme that we were able to locate 43 returned completed questionnaires for a response rate of 49.4 percent. In this article we decided to focus on the impact on employment and graduate studies amongst the students of the Gender Studies Program. Almost all the graduates (93%) were employed full time. Over half (53.5%) had jobs that were related to gender studies. Just under half (46.5) reported that the Gender Studies Program had opened up job possibilities for them. Close to one third (28%) had pursued graduate studies since graduating from the University of Malaya.

Keywords: doing gender studies, employment, career choices, graduate studies, motivation to do gender studies

Introduction

This study is a contribution to the discussions at the national level on knowledge, skills and employability of our graduates. It is important to determine the correlation between the knowledge and skills acquired and the employment patterns of graduates of the Gender Studies Program. The study seeks to learn how students of the Gender

* Ruhana Padzil is a lecturer at the Gender Studies Program, University of Malaya

Studies Program have benefited in terms of increasing their employability from the knowledge and skills they acquired. From a broader perspective, this research is in keeping with the Government's commitment to looking at national policies from a gender perspective and promoting gender mainstreaming for the human development of the country.

The Gender Studies Program has not previously conducted a systematic evaluation of the impact of the Program on its graduates. Anecdotal evidence suggested that the Gender Studies Program significantly impacts its graduates' employment. The present study is the first systematic assessment of the impact of the Gender Studies Program on its students.

The research was inspired by a research project on "Employment and Women's Studies: The Impact of Women's Studies Training on Women's Employment in Europe", conducted between 2001 and 2003 and financed by the Directorate General XII (Research) of the European Union. Their study examined 11 gender studies programs in nine countries within the European Union. The findings were published in several books, articles, and monographs (See for example, Griffin, 2002; 2004; Griffin & Hammer, 2005).

Motivations to Enroll in Gender Studies

The literature identified four main reasons why students take Gender Studies courses (Griffin & Hammer, 2005):

1. **Chance.** When the gender studies program / department is located exclusively within traditional disciplines, most of the students, especially the undergraduates, enter the gender studies by chance rather than by plan. The students tend to discover the courses rather than have an articulated conscious agenda (Griffin & Hammer, 2005; Jackson, 2000).
2. **Choice.** This usually happens when gender studies as a discipline is visible and there is a specific undergraduate program in gender studies. These students make more proactive choices and are mostly graduate students (Griffin & Hammer, 2005, p. 141).
3. **Political / activist background.** These students are committed to gender studies due to a prior history of activism or educational exposure (Griffin & Hammer, 2005; Jackson, 2000).
4. **Personal history** (Griffin & Hammer, 2005, p. 142; Jackson, 2000). These students choose gender studies due to particular events, most often a negative experience of social exclusion. Choosing gender studies may reflect a reaction to family background, and a desire to transcend these experiences (e.g., inequality in parental relationship; sexual identity).

Impact of Gender Studies on Students' Employment

Issues examined in relation to gender studies programs are its impact on students' employment following their graduation from gender studies (Griffin, 2002; 2004; Macalister, 1999). Gender studies have been found to impact their students' sense of commitment and responsibility (Macalister, 1999); and both job motivation and job certainty (Macalister, 1999). Other job-related skills acquired in gender studies include critical thinking (Griffin & Hammer, 2005; Macalister, 1999); empowerment (Macalister, 1999); assertiveness and persistence (Griffin & Hammer, 2005); adaptability and entrepreneurship (Griffin & Hammer, 2005). Gender Studies training was also found to provide its students with the following knowledge and skills for the labor market: gender awareness; knowledge of equal opportunities; ability to establish and sustain complex arguments; ability to work in a communicative open style; and competence in dealing with diversity (Griffin & Hammer, 2005).

Gender studies students are more willing to go into less established, innovative work environments where work cultures are less entrenched. Gender studies students also reported a willingness to 'invent' their own jobs - that is to think creatively about making employment for themselves.

Gender studies training facilitates students' understanding of the gendered power asymmetries they routinely encounter in their working lives, enabling them to make sense of those experiences. Further, gender studies training changes the graduates' understanding of equal opportunity issues and equips them to address a variety of issues at work: refusal to put up with sexist behavior at work; introduction of gender issues into the workplace; working in a non-sexist manner; fighting discrimination at work; feeling more confident in making applications for promotion; being more sensitive to issues of diversity; being more supportive of female colleagues (Griffin & Hammer, 2005).

Method

This study used the survey method. We focused on the quantitative assessment, constructing a questionnaire that was administered to all graduates of the Gender Studies Program, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Malaya.

Sample

The questionnaire was administered to all the graduates of the Gender Studies Program, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Malaya that we could locate from the academic sessions 1996/1997 to 2006/2007. The sample consisted of 43 graduates who graduated between 1999/2000 – 2006/2007.

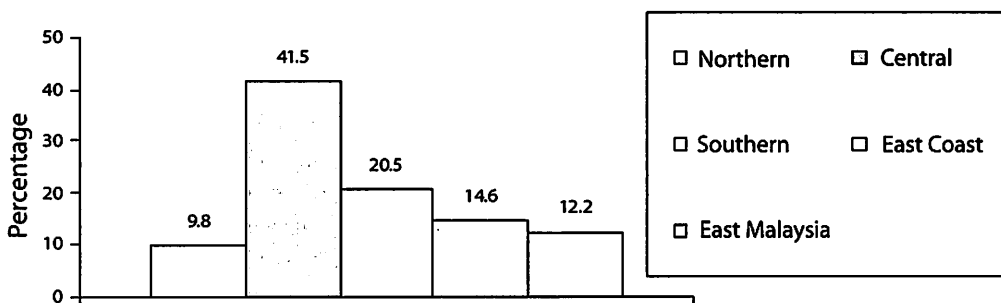
97% of the respondents were female (N = 41), and 3% were males (N=2). Their age range was between 20-40 with a mean age of 26. 37.2% of the respondents were between the ages of 20-25; 55.8% were between the ages of 26-30; 4.7% were between

the ages of 31-35; and 2.3% were between the ages of 36-40. The enrollment trend of male students in Gender Studies Program from the year 1996/1997 to 2006/2007 has always been small with an average of 5 male students. Therefore, the total number of 2 male respondents is representative and reflects the enrollment trend of male students in Gender Studies Program.

In terms of ethnicity, 20% of the respondents were Malay, 62.9% Chinese, 8.6% Indian and 8.6% Pribumi. It was also reported that 86% of the respondents were single while 14% were married. Also, only 2 respondents reported to have a child.

The sample was recruited from the 14 states in Malaysia. The state of Selangor had the highest respondents (23.8%), followed by Johor (11.9%), then Kuala Lumpur (9.5%). This represents a more urban population as a whole. The distribution of respondents throughout Peninsular Malaysia and East Malaysia are illustrated in Figure 1 (Northern: 9.8%, Central: 41.5%, Southern: 20.5%, East Coast: 14.6%, and East Malaysia: 12.2%)

Figure 1 Distribution of respondents' location



Majority of the graduates enrolled in the year 2004/2005 (23.3%), followed by the year 1999/2000 & year 2002/2003 (18.6% respectively). Refer to Table 1 for more details.

Table 1 Respondents' year of enrolment

Year of enrolment	Frequency	Percent
1997/98	1	2.3
1998/99	2	4.7
1999/00	8	18.6
2000/01	2	4.7
2001/02	7	16.3
2002/03	8	18.6
2003/04	5	11.6
2004/05	10	23.3
Total	43	100.0

Majority of respondents therefore graduated in the year 2003/2004 & 2005/2006 (23.3% respectively), followed by the year 2004/2005 (18.6%). For more details refer to Table 2.

Table 2 Respondents' year of graduation

Year of graduation	Frequency	Percent
99/00	1	2.3
00/01	2	4.7
01/02	3	7.0
02/03	4	9.3
03/04	10	23.3
04/05	8	18.6
05/06	10	23.3
06/07	5	11.6
Total	43	100.0

In terms of respondents' major & minors, majority of respondents (50%) majored in Media, Languages or Literature while 100 % of respondents minored in Gender Studies.

Scales

The questionnaire we constructed includes items addressing the respondents' planned and actual employment and their assessment of courses taught by the Gender Studies Program. For this purpose, we used several items from Griffin et al. who conducted a very large comparative study assessing eleven gender studies program in nine European countries (Griffin 2002; 2004; Griffin & Hammer, 2005).

The instruments employed for this study are listed as they apply to the study's objectives, as follows:

Objective 1: Motivations and Visibility of the Gender Studies Program

Motivations for Studying Gender Studies

The 2-item measure, designed by Griffin and colleagues (Griffin, 2002; Griffin, 2004; Griffin & Hammer, 2005), addressed the time the respondent decided to enroll in gender studies (e.g., before entering the University; while at the University; while working; or whether they "did not purposefully choose it - it just happened"). The motivations measure also included a question asking the respondents to identify which factors influenced their decision to enroll in the Gender Studies Program. This item listed 11 factors including interest in gender issues; technical considerations (e.g., convenience, time-table constraints); professional considerations; and peers' influence.

Visibility of Gender Studies Program

The 1-item measure, designed by Griffin and colleagues (Griffin, 2002; Griffin, 2004; Griffin & Hammer, 2005), examined how the respondents found out about the Gender

Studies Program. This measure listed the following 5 factors: orientation week at the University; faculty course book; friends; relatives, and family members; and academic advisor.

Objective 2: Impact of the Gender Studies Program on graduates' work and Career

Impact of gender studies on employment

The 15 items measure, designed by Griffin and colleagues (Griffin, 2002; Griffin, 2004; Griffin & Hammer, 2005), addresses types of employment; satisfaction with employment; reasons for not being employed; level of income; and how the employment is related to gender studies.

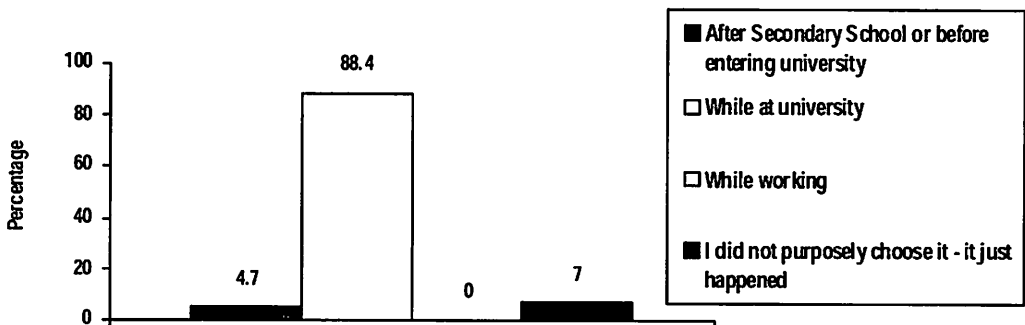
Findings

The findings show that participation in the Gender Studies Program had a major positive impact on the lives of the students. Below, the findings are presented in relation to each of the study's objectives.

Objective 1: Motivations and Visibility of the Gender Studies Program

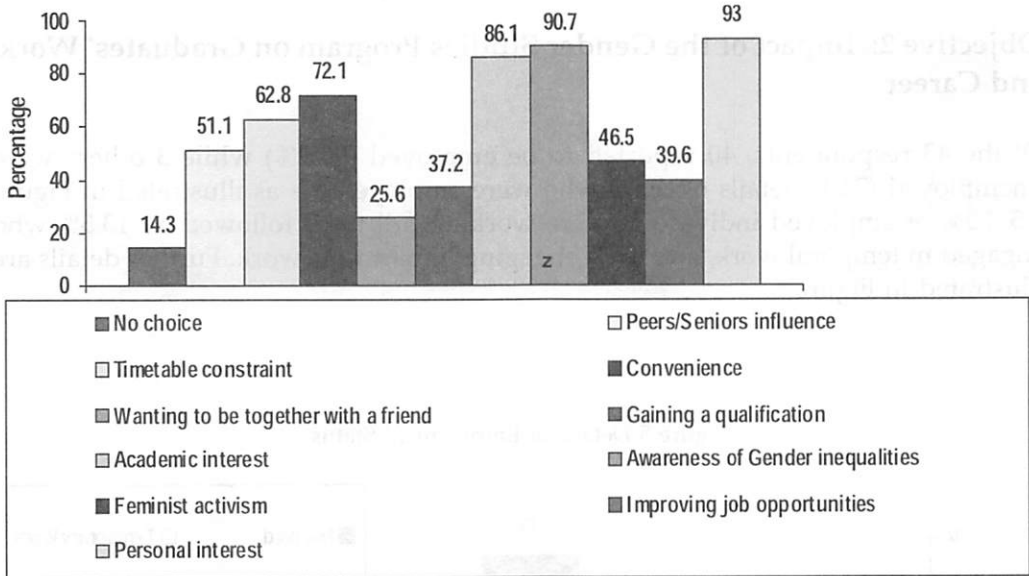
Findings from this segment revealed that majority of Gender Studies graduates only decided to take up the course while in university (88.4%), followed by 7% who ended up doing the course by accident, and lastly 4.7% chose the course prior to entering university. See Figure 2.

Figure 2 When did respondents decide to take Gender Studies



Respondents were also asked what factors determined their choice in selecting Gender Studies. The top 3 factors are as follow: personal interest (93%), awareness of gender inequalities (90.7%), and academic interest (86.1%). The 3 lowest factors were: no choice (14.3%), wanting to be together with a friend “25.6%” and gaining a qualification (37.2%) – see Figure 3. These findings suggest that individuals in the Gender Studies Program were more often than not enrolled in the course because of their personal interest, awareness of gender equalities and academic interest despite the fact that many of them indicate it had low job prospects.

Figure 3 Factors determining respondents' decision to take Gender Studies



Visibility of Gender Studies Program at the University of Malaya

Figure 4 How respondents found out about Gender Studies course they took

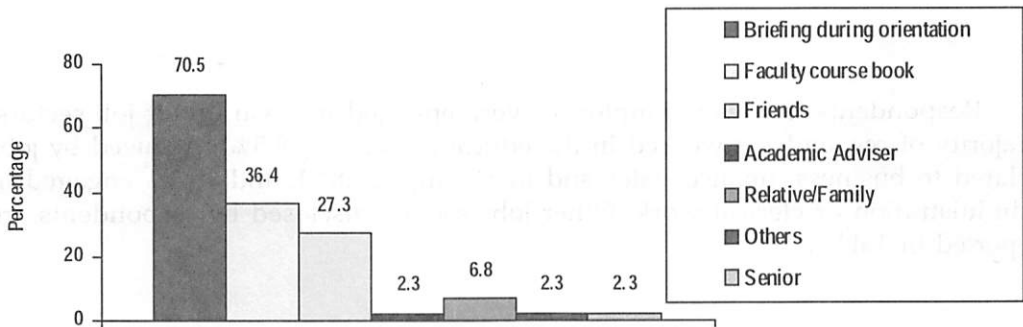
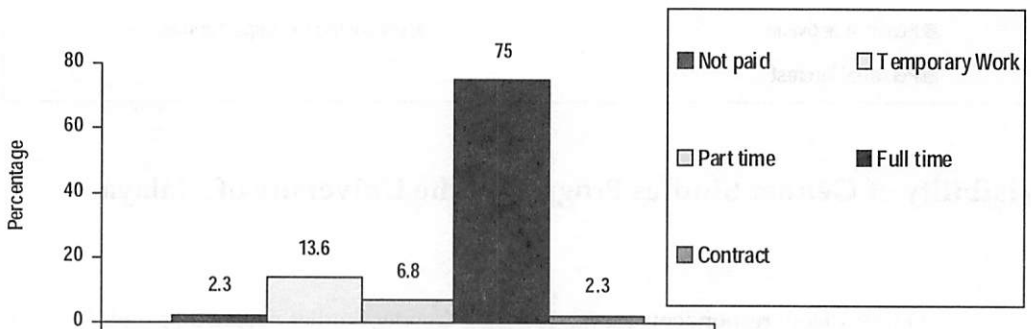


Figure 4 illustrates how respondents' found out about the course. Majority of the graduates found out about Gender Studies via the orientation program (70.5%), followed by the Faculty's course book (36.4%) and thirdly friends (27.3%). Findings suggest that the academic advisors did not play a significant role in introducing Gender Studies as a choice of study (2.3%) as compared to the orientation program given by Gender Studies Program academic staff (70.5%) conducted by the Faculty. This is worthy of further research should the Gender Studies Program feel that the lack of enrolment in the program or lack of involvement in activism can perhaps be inferred to the ineffectiveness of the relevant parties in communicating the availability of the course.

Objective 2: Impact of the Gender Studies Program on Graduates' Work and Career

Of the 43 respondents, 40 reported to be employed (90.9%) while 3 others were unemployed (7%). Details of those who were employed are as illustrated in Figure 1.5. 75% of employed individuals were working full time, followed by 13.5% who engaged in temporal work, and 6.8% engaging in part time work. Further details are illustrated in Figure 5.

Figure 5 Details of Employment Status



Respondents that were employed were engaged in a variety of job sectors. Majority of respondents worked in the education sector (38.5%), followed by jobs related to business, finance, sales and marketing (12.8%), and 10.3% engaged in administration or clerical work. Other jobs sectors disclosed by respondents are reported in Table 3.

Table 3 Kind of paid employments

Job sector	Frequency	Valid Percent
Health Services	1	2.6
Administration and Diplomatic Officer	1	2.6
Education	15	38.5
Law	2	5.1
Business, Finance, Sales and Marketing	5	12.8
Administration and Clerical	4	10.3
Social work and NGO	2	5.1
Agriculture and related industries	1	2.6
Media, Entertainment and Sports	2	5.1
Others	1	2.6
Customer Services	1	2.6
Publisher	1	2.6
Social	1	2.6
Logistic	1	2.6
Photographer	1	2.6
Total	39	100.0

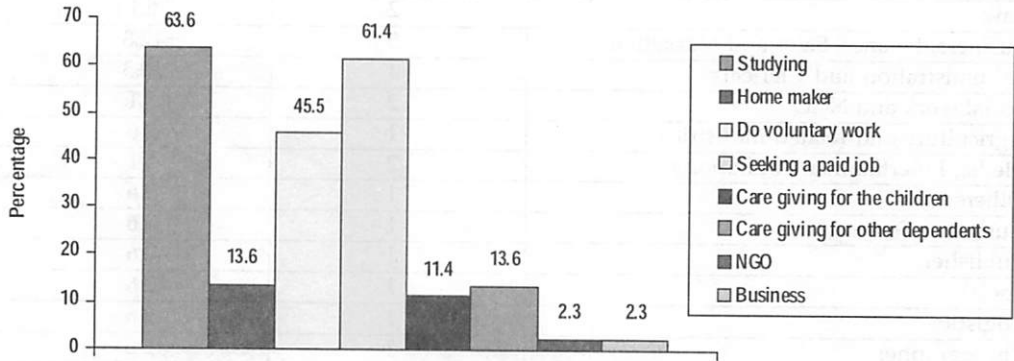
The income of working respondents were mainly in the range of RM1000 - RM 1999 (40%), followed by RM2000 - RM2999 (35%) and >RM1000 (10.0%). Table 4 provides additional details on employed respondents' income level.

Table 4 Income levels of employed respondents

Income Level	Frequency	Valid Percent
>1000	4	10.0
1000-1999	16	40.0
2000-2999	14	35.0
3000-3999	3	7.5
4000-4999	1	2.5
5000-5999	2	5.0
Total	40	100.0

Further analysis revealed that those who were unemployed engaged in activities as illustrated in Figure 6 as follow.

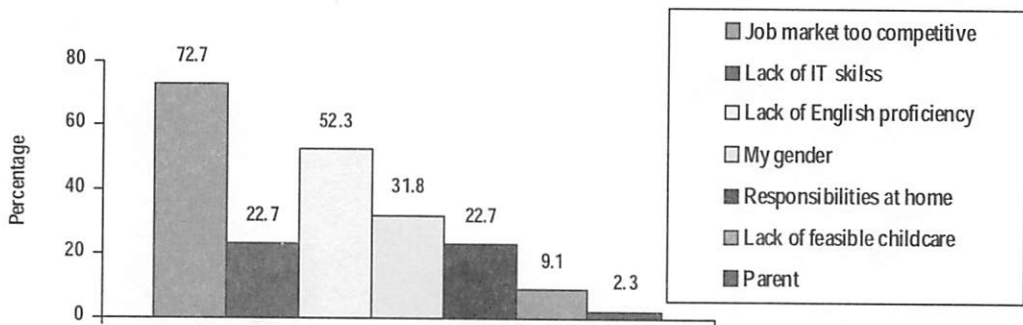
Figure 6 Activities unemployed respondents engaged in



Of the 61.4% unemployed respondents seeking paid employment, majority of them associated their unemployed status with the competition in the job market (72.7%), followed by the lack of English proficiency (52.3%) and their gender (31.8%). These findings suggest that the competition in the job market is the primary reason why they were unemployed.

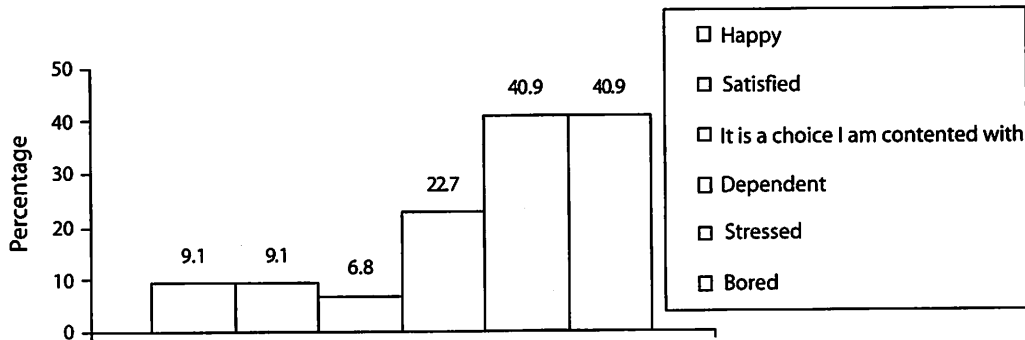
It is interesting to note that since 97% of the respondents are female, these findings suggest that there seem to be either some form of gender discrimination in the employment arena, or that the recruited sample perceived their gender as a disadvantage when seeking employment. Figure 7 elaborates on other reasons why respondents seeking paid employment have failed thus far.

Figure 7 Reasons why respondents seeking paid employment remained unemployed



Unemployed individuals displayed mixed emotions about their employment status. 40.9% of respondents felt stressed and bored, 22.7% felt they were dependent on others, while 9.1% felt happy and satisfied with their employment status as illustrated in Figure 8.

Figure 8 How participant felt about being unemployed



Further investigation on the impact and relevance of Gender Studies to and individuals' work and career revealed that 53.5% of respondents felt what they have learnt was relevant to their work while 46.5% felt otherwise.

When asked whether Gender Studies opened up job possibilities, 46.5% responded "Yes" while 53.5% checked "No". Respondents were also asked whether they considered work as career, regardless of whether it was paid, unpaid or voluntary work. 88.1% of respondents replied "Yes" while 11.9% indicated "No".

In summary, findings from this segment suggest that although, 90.9% of respondents were employed only half of the respondents thought Gender Studies were relevant to their work. Furthermore, majority of the respondents worked in the educational field (38.5%) (perhaps the most closely related to gender studies of all the job sectors respondents were employed in) while in the other fields respondents were employed in were non gender studies related. Nonetheless, unemployed individuals, did not specifically indicate their degree (minor in Gender Studies) as a reason why they were unemployed, one can only infer that the competitive nature of the job market, which 72.7% of respondents indicate as the cause of unemployment is linked to the fact that their qualifications are less sought after therefore implying a lack of relevance in the job arena (apart from the educational sector).

Conclusion

The Gender Studies Program has had a significant impact on its graduates. Most of the graduates were employed; most worked full-time; and although the majority earned below 3,000 per month, most considered their work as a career. Over half of the respondents found their jobs to be related to Gender Studies; slightly less than

half reported that the Gender Studies Program opened up job possibilities for them; and nearly a third said that the Program influenced the type of jobs they were seeking. Nearly a third of the respondents continued studying for a graduate degree following their graduation from Gender Studies.

While most of the graduates found out about the Gender Studies Program at the briefing during orientation week, most of them reported enrolling in the Gender Studies Program because they were interested in gender and inequality issues.

REFERENCES

- Griffin, Gabriele. ed. 2002. *Women's Employment, Women's Studies, and Equal Opportunities 1945-2001*. Hull: The University of Hull.
- Griffin, Gabriele. 2004. *Employment and Women's Studies: The Impact of Women's Studies Training on Women's Employment in Europe*. University of York, UK. Available at: <http://docs.tetalap.hu/eng/thinkandact/griffin.pdf>
- Griffin, Gabriele. ed. 2004. *Employment, Equal Opportunities and Women's Studies in Cross-European Perspective*. London: Zed Books.
- Griffin, Gabriele & Hammer, Jalna 2005. The Impact of Women's Studies on its Students' Relationships and Everyday Practices, in Griffin, Gabriele (ed), *Doing Women's Studies: Employment Opportunities, Personal Impacts and Social Consequences* (pp. 141-167). London, New York: Zed Books, in association with University of Hull.
- Jackson, Sue. 2000. To Be or Not to Be? The Place of Women's Studies in the Lives of its Students'. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 9(2), 189-197.
- Macalister, Heather. E. 1999. Women's Studies Classes and their Influence on Student Development. *Adolescence*, 34(134), 283-292.