Introduction

This paper is based on the first results of a research project coordinated by the National Association of Feminist Studies (ANEF) in France. I have been employed on the project as Research assistant. Most of the data I will be referring to in this paper is drawn from the intermediary and final reports of the ANEF project, which were written collectively by the research team members1 (see ANEF, 2003).

The National Survey on the Institutionalisation of Women's Studies and Research within French Higher Education and Research

In 2001, the French Ministry of education and its direction of Higher Education acknowledged the lack of information concerning women's studies and their expansion in the French Academia. To cover this deficiency, the national Ministry of Education with the Secretary of State for Women's Rights and Professional Training created a working party responsible for analysing the institutionalisation process of teaching and research on women's issues in universities and public research institutions.

The working party, in collaboration with several feminist studies' experts (mainly female academics), initiated the first national survey by questionnaire on the theme of development of Women's Studies in France. The Ministry of Education survey had three main objectives; (1) to get a clear and detailed picture about the current situation of women's studies within the French higher education and research sector, (2) to analyse the structural barriers to institutionalisation process of this field within the academic community and (3) to suggest recommendations with a view to further developing feminist teaching and research activities.

The questionnaire was sent in two successive phases, at the end of 2001 and at the beginning of 2002, to the Vice-Chancellor of each French higher education institution; to the Directors of most public research bodies. The higher education institutions concerned by the study were universities (providing higher education training in the Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences, Law, Medicine, Pharmacy, etc.), Institutes of Technology and Higher Technical Sections, Grandes Ecoles as well as Teacher Training Institutes (IUFM).

Each head of the institution was asked to nominate, within their organization, a “reference person” to be put in charge of distributing the questionnaire to all of the institution’s departments and institutes. This person was also responsible for ensuring the collection of the completed questionnaires and for their centralised transfer back to the Ministry of Education. The gathered documents were then passed over to the national Women’s Studies network (Association Nationale des Etudes Féministes – ANEF) whose working party, composed of four feminist academics and of four doctoral students, were given the task of analysing the results.

1 Muriel Andriocci, Jules Falquet, Michèle Ferrand, Annik Houel, Emmanuelle Latour, Nicky Le Feuvre, Milka Metso and Françoise Picq.
We will start by giving some background information about the development of Women’s Studies in France. By the same occasion, we will briefly present some of the earlier studies on the institutionalisation of gender teaching and research activities in France. We will then move to illustrate the current French situation: first by showing the development of Women studies in the different Universities and regions; then by portraying their significance in the different levels of education (undergraduate and postgraduate studies) and finally by describing their distribution among the different disciplines. Special attention is drawn to the situations where the development of the women’s studies has been relatively successful. We will then offer some explanations for the relatively slow and difficult institutionalisation process of Women’s/Gender studies in the French academia. Finally, we will suggest some possible directions for the further development of Women studies in the French academic system.

First Steps towards the Institutionalisation of Women’s Studies in France

As in most European or Western countries, Women’s studies activities developed in France in the early 1970’s as legacy of the women’s movement. The first informal feminist study groups were set up in a handful of universities across the country (Marseille in 1972, Paris VII in 1975, Lyon 1976 etc.) in the middle of the decade and they were closely followed by the first feminist conferences held in Marseille in 1975 (“Les femmes en sciences humaines”) and in Paris in 1978 (“Les femmes et la classe ouvrière”) and in 1980 (“Les femmes et la question du travail”). Thus, as Judith Ezekiel has stressed: “Women’s studies existed within the French higher education system well before taking the contours of a recognizable field” (Ezekiel, 1992: 75).

The Development of the First Women’s Studies Teaching Activities

The early 1970’s also saw the creation of several Women’s studies courses. The very first Women’s studies seminar was set up at the university of Paris VIII in the 1970 (Le Feuvre & Andriocci, 2002) and other similar initiatives appeared, for example in Aix-en-Provence, Lyon or Toulouse. These teaching activities were often the result of personal initiatives by feminist academics who fought to introduce aspects of gender analysis, inspired by their activism in the Women’s movement, within their own academic courses. They also corresponded to a strong demand from students to develop teaching and research programs on women’s issues and took frequently place outside the French academic institutions’ rigid disciplinary boundaries.

At the end of the 1970’s Women’s studies courses existed in several French universities, but their almost clandestine existence was usually “hidden” behind neutral course titles (ANEF, 1995). Furthermore, these courses were integrated into traditional discipline-based teaching activities. Indeed, to this day, Women’s studies is not recognised as an autonomous discipline within the French academic community.

Research and Women’s Issues

The first signs of official Women’s studies recognition were more related to research than to teaching. Thus, in 1982, in the aftermath of a successful national symposium on “Femmes, feminism et recherche” organised in Toulouse by several regionally-based collectives of Women’s studies groups (with financial support from the Ministry of research and Technology, the newly created Ministry of Women’s Rights and the CNRS – Centre national de la recherche), “there was a flurry of academic activity and clear evidence of the research potential within the Women’s studies field in France” (Le Feuvre & Andriocci, 2002: 266-267). Following this national conference the CNRS initiated two thematic research programmes (Action thématique programme – ATP) in 1984-1987 and in 1986-1989, that started out a quite spectacular development of research on women’s issues. 68 different four-year research projects were selected and financed by the CNRS and all these programmes gave rise to numerous workshops and publications (books, articles and research reports). With regard to its European neighbours, French feminist research played an active role in the development of the
Women’s studies field, although it remained far behind most of them in the institutionalisation of gender studies teaching.

**European Politics and the Institutionalisation of Women’s Studies: Creation of a National Network and New Job Opportunities within Higher Education Bodies**

In September 1988, the European Parliament made a resolution on women and research encouraging the State members to create full lectureships and professorships in women’s studies and to organise specialized teaching on women’s issues. As a French response to this European initiative, a national Women’s studies network –ANEF- was set up in 1989. It brought the existing, regionally based Women’s studies groups under a single national organization whose main objective was — and still is — to promote Women’s studies within higher education and research institutions. Furthermore, the European pressure offered some indirect support to gender studies in French universities given that it led to the “Action Plan for Equality in Education” signed by four ministries in February 2002 (Le Feuvre & Andriocci, 2002: 271) and to the creation, in June 2001, of a “Parity in Science and Technology” delegation within the Ministry of Research, as well as to setting up advisory boards on gender equality in many of public research organizations (CNRS, for example, has a committee on “the place of women within the CNRS”). The recent Ministry of Education survey on the institutionalisation of Women’s studies, presented in this paper, is one of the activities launched by the Action Plan for Equality.

At the beginning of the 1990’s, there were only five senior lectureships and three full professorships in women’s or gender studies in France - out of total of 50 000 academic posts of which 12 000 are in the Humanities and Social Sciences (Ezekiel, Judith, 1992). As Nicky Le Feuvre and Muriel Andriocci point out, the existing posts are allocated to disciplinary departments in several French universities: one “etudes féministes” lectureship in Sociology at the University of Paris VII, one “etudes féministes” lectureship in Law at the University of Rennes II, one “etudes féministes” lectureship in Contemporary History at the University of Toulouse II, one lectureship in “Histoire des femmes” at the University of Paris VIII and one “études féminines” lectureship in Sociology at the University of Toulouse II. (Le Feuvre & Andriocci, 2002: 262). The first three positions exist since 1985 and the latter two since 1991. The three full professorships are in History (“Histoire des femmes”) at the University of Paris VII, in History at the IUFM (teacher training Institute) of Lyon and in Sociology (“Genre et société”) at the University of Paris VII.

Today, only two of the five specialized lectureships in gender studies remain: the lectureship in “Histoire des femmes” at the University of Paris VIII and the “études féminines” lectureship in Sociology at the University of Toulouse II. However, all of the full professorships have survived over time. - They are all very recent, that’s probably why! Despite these very discouraging figures, it should be noted that most of the teaching in the women’s or gender studies is given in universities where there are no specialized lectureships and that this work is carried out by academics who occupy lectureships or professorships in the traditional disciplines. It is therefore very difficult to get a clear picture of the field’s development and to know the exact quantity of teaching programmes focusing on gender available on the academic curriculum in France.

**Previous Studies on the Women’s Studies Institutionalisation Process in France: Partial Pictures of an Alarming Situation**

Although this recent Ministry of Education survey is the first national and institutional attempt to evaluate the institutionalisation process on Women’s studies, some previous studies on the subject exist. These former surveys all point to the same direction: French women’s studies are underdeveloped in comparison with other European Union member states and they desperately lack recognition from the wider academic community.

In 1989, the national Women’s Studies network ANEF produced a considerable study on the institutionalisation of women’s studies in France (ANEF, 1989). This document describes clearly the slow development of Women’s studies teaching at that time. It also emphasizes the existing gap between feminist research activities, well developed with the thematic research programmes initiated
In 1995, during the preparations for the Peking conference, the ANEF prepared another similar document relating to the development of women’s studies in France. The conclusions of this study were as alarming and discouraging as those of the 1989 report. Between these two dates, France had come to lag behind countries like Spain, Portugal and Belgium, that had previously faced similar problems to those of France (Delhez, Braidotti & Rammath, 1998).

In order to publicise these alarming conclusions, the ANEF organised the first national Round Table on Women’s Studies in France in 1993 and published at the same occasion a guide to the available higher education courses and research centres. The second Round Table on this theme was held in 1996 and its conclusions highlighted the urgent need for a national coordination of the university based Women’s studies activities. The third Round Table, held in 1997, aimed to measure the career prospects and job opportunities available to students who had attended Women’s studies courses (ANEF, 1998). Its conclusions stressed the lack of gender teaching in the lower levels of French educational system (secondary school).

National Survey on Institutionalisation of Women’s / Gender Studies: methodological remarks

As explained in the introductory part of this paper, the data collected by the Ministry of Education survey was handed on to the ANEF working party in charge of the analysis. It became clear, as soon as we started to examine the material, that the survey had been quite difficult to carry out. The difficulties appeared (1) in the distribution of the questionnaire, (2) in the systematic collection of data, (3) in the interpretation of the very notion of “gender studies” or, to put it another way, in the identification of Women’s Studies courses, (4) in the interpretation of some of the definitions included in the questionnaire itself and (5) in the definition of the status of different courses. As we shall see below, this last point is mainly due to the nature of the French higher education structure.

Difficulties Related to the Distribution, Completion and Collection of the Questionnaires

In the light of the responses obtained, it seems obvious that once the questionnaires had arrived in the HE or research institutions they often also stayed there or were poorly distributed to all the departments. In some cases, the questionnaire was simply filled in by the “reference person”, who was not necessarily aware of all of his or her own institution’s Women’s studies activities, and it therefore returned frequently with the short (and incorrect) answer “our institution has no Gender Studies activities”. We were able to identify the erroneous nature of these responses by comparing the questionnaires with other existing data sources, like the ANEF guide to Women’s Studies courses, published in the three-yearly “Bulletin”. This difficulty was probably due to the “top-down” nature of the study, which unlike the previous ANEF studies did not focus on some key-persons in the field, but rather tried to reach the whole academic community through a large postal survey.

In addition, most of the time the questionnaires were not systematically distributed to all the of the university’s departments or to all of the research institution’s units, nor were the responses centralised by the reference person, as requested by the Ministry. We therefore collected a wide range of questionnaires sent by different members of the same institution and had to put this “puzzle” together ad hoc in order to have a clearer picture of the institution’s situation as regards to its Women’s studies activities. Since the questionnaires did not systematically circulate within the institutions and since the persons who filled them in did not necessarily know about all the Women’s studies teaching and research activities that existed in their respective institutions, we have to analyse the results of the survey with some caution, given that they are unlikely to provide a true picture of all Women’s studies activities.

The Ambiguities Associated with the Notion of “Gender Studies” in France

The questionnaire included a fairly broad definition of what was meant by the term “gender studies”, which covered existing courses and research activities on “women” (“sur les femmes”), on “Feminism"
or "feminists" ("féministes"), on gender relations ("sur les rapports sociaux de sexes"), on gender ("sur le genre") or on the feminine ("féminines"). This diversity of the definitions demonstrates the unfamiliarity of the academic community with this term in a country where Women’s Studies are not recognised as a discipline and where these teaching and research activities are always integrated into traditional disciplines. Thus, the lack of clarity surrounding the very notion of "gender studies" probably reinforced the under-estimation of the existing activities.

The invisibility of Women’s studies is also due to its interdisciplinary nature, which is incompatible with the institutional context of French higher education which is totally structured along disciplinary lines. The Women’s studies courses are therefore often shared between several disciplines and their intermediary position increases the lack of recognition of the field.

Difficulties Related to the Interpretation of the Questionnaire Terminology

The questionnaire was rather long and complicated to fill in. The major difficulty was due to the fact that the questionnaire included a distinction between specialized gender or Women’s studies courses and non-specialized courses ("spécifique" and "contenant"). This differentiation between the teaching and research activities focusing exclusively on gender and the other activities only introducing some aspects of gender analysis, although worth mentioning, was quite difficult to operate in practice and our results indicate that individual interpretations varied a lot from one institution to another or even within the same organization. Obviously, these difficulties were directly related to the ones mentioned before. In other words, they emerged because "gender" is not a well-known concept among the French academic community and because there are no such things as autonomous gender studies qualifications or officially recognized specialized courses on gender. Under these conditions, a twenty-five hour course, entitled "Women’s Work in the 20th Century" could either be considered as a specialized Women’s Studies course or as Sociology course merely referring to gender. In the latter case, it will have been categorised as a non-specialized course.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the word "course" as used in the French context does not refer to a specific degree or diploma. This fact raised another problem with the survey data. In effect, most of the answers did not indicate the precise duration of a given course, although this was systematically asked for. For example, the different "courses" declared in the Academy of Bordeaux included a single (two hour) session focusing on gender issues in a Sociology course and a fifty-two hour-long Master’s degree seminar on Women’s studies.

Both of these teaching practises were accounted for as one "course" in our analysis. In reality, there are only two one-year post-graduate vocational degrees (DESS) specialized in Women’s studies in France, one at the University of Toulouse II and one at the University of Reims, that could really claim to be a "course" in the standard understanding of this term in other European countries. Only a very small minority of the "courses" identified in the survey in France exceed annual fifty hours of teaching and therefore our study gives more of an idea of the chance that a French student has of coming into contact with gender or women’s studies issues during his or her studies than it provides reliable elements for comparison with the situation in other European Union member states.

The last difficulty, also related to the structure of French higher education and research, is related to the fact that the majority of French research groups integrated to the umbrella organization CNRS are also attached to a University. Since these two sectors were separated in the questionnaire we incurred the risk of calculating the declared research activities twice. To resolve this problem we decided to concentrate our current analysis mainly on the teaching practises and to carry out an additional investigation on research activities in Women’s studies.

Presentation of the Study Sample and the Rates of Obtained Responses

Despite the above-mentioned difficulties, the final response rate to the questionnaire survey was quite satisfactory: 69% of the Universities and 67% of the Teacher training Institutes answered the questionnaire at least at some extent. This means that we calculated as a response the complete institutional answers, including the whole university or research organisation, but also the responses from a single department or research group. We were not able to calculate the exact rate of response for the research institutions because we did not have the complete list of organisations to which the
questionnaire was sent to. However, these institutes' rate of return was much lower than other higher education bodies' rate, and we grossly estimated it to be less than 20%.

The rates of return differ strongly from one French region or from one Academy\(^2\) to another: ten academies (including Dijon, Limoges and Nantes) had a 100% rate of response, for six other academies (for example Paris and Lyon) the rate of return varied from 60% to 80%, eight academies (including Bordeaux and Toulouse) had a 40 to 50% rate of return and the Academy of Montpellier answered to the rate of 25%. Finally, none of the questionnaires came back to the Ministry from the academies of Besançon, Corse, Limoges and Poitiers.

In fine, this survey, despite the numerous obstacles for the analysis of its results, offers the most complete national data on the institutionalisation of Women's studies that has ever been available in France. However, it is an instant photo that provides quite good general picture but becomes easily confused when looked at in a more detailed manner (at the level of the courses' contents and length for example).

Existing Gender and/or Women's studies teaching activities in France: Main Results of the Survey

We present the existing Women's studies courses in increasing order of precision, moving from the general figures towards a more detailed level of analysis. We will first describe the distribution of the gender and Women's studies courses on offer and show how this distribution is related to the quantity of students enrolled in a given Academy or at a specific level of study (undergraduate / postgraduate for example). We will then focus on the French universities and demonstrate the existing activities at undergraduate and post-graduate level within each Academy and within the principal disciplines that have allowed the development of Women's and gender studies. Finally, we will try to identify the institutions that offer Women's studies courses in at least one discipline and at all levels of study.

Distribution of Students and Available Women's Studies Courses

To date, there are some 1 400 000 students in France, including all the disciplines and all the levels of higher education (undergraduate and post-graduate). Students are quite unevenly distributed between the different Academies, given that the Academy of Paris accounts for 200 000 students while there are less than 3 600 students in the Academy of Corse. Between these two extremities, the situation seems to be more homogeneous: twelve academies (almost the half of the French academies) have between 20 000 and 50 000 students and twelve others from 50 000 to 100 000 students. Besides Paris that concentrates 14% of all the students and 25% if we include the Paris Region, Lille, Lyon, Toulouse and Aix-Marseille are the most important French academies with a student population exceeding 70 000 persons.

Regional Distribution of Students and Women's Studies Courses

The available Women's studies courses are also centralized in a very high degree to the Academy of Paris. 64 modules or courses in women's or gender studies are available to Parisian students out of a total of 358 existing courses in France. This “privilege” is even more significant if we look at the

\(^2\) The French Higher Education system is divided into XX different administrative regions, called “Academies”. It is usually for students to begin their undergraduate studies in the Academy where their parents live and / or where they passed their Baccalaureate. All Academies include several different Higher Education institutions. French universities are organised on a disciplinary basis, so it is quite usual for large cities to have several different universities, each offering courses and qualifications in different disciplinary fields. In theory, there is no competition for students who want to take a particular course between institutions located in the same Academy. Indeed, given the centralised nature of the Higher Education system in France, there is relatively little variation in the course content of disciplinary-based degrees from one Academy to another, at least at undergraduate level and so competition for students is limited, even between institutions located within different Academies.
Parisian region as a whole: in addition to these 64 courses there are 100 courses available in the Academy of Versailles and 120 in the Academy of Creteil, 284 courses in total that correspond to almost 80% of French Women’s studies teaching activities! The other important Women’s studies centres are Lyon (with 38 courses), Rennes (27 courses), Lille (24 courses), Bordeaux (22 courses) and Toulouse (18 courses) but they all lie far behind Paris and its Region. The rest of the country is poorly served in Women’s studies teaching: seven academies offer between ten and twenty courses and eight Academies have fewer than ten Women’s studies courses available. If we keep in mind that these figures include all the disciplines and all the levels of study within one Academy, we get a very clear picture of the underdevelopment of Women’s studies in France.

In other words, the proportion of French students potentially in contact with the field is very low, or seen from another angle, the proportion of students deprived of the opportunity to follow a Women’s studies course is very high. If we analyse the number of enrolled students together with the number of declared Women’s studies courses within one Academy, we observe that there are on average 3932 students for each declared course. Even in the best case (the Academy of Rouen) there are 1855 students for each women’s studies course, not to mention the worst case where there are almost 25 000 enrolled students for one module on women’s issues (the Academy of Caen). Fourteen academies offer more than one course for 5000 students.

However, these general figures need to be nuanced a little. In effect, they do not tell us whether these teaching activities are given at the undergraduate level, where the number of students attending university is quite important, or at the post-graduate level where there are fewer students. They do not show if the courses are specialized in Women’s studies subjects or only include some aspects of gender analysis. Finally, the large number of gender studies courses is not necessarily the best indicator for measuring the relative importance of the field within one Academy. The academy might have many isolated courses in different disciplines, but offer no opportunity for students to follow through an interest in the field from one year to another.

In short, the availability of Women’s studies courses is very weak in France and the existing teaching programmes are concentrated in a handful of Academies, leaving a large number of students without contact with the field. The biggest academies (Paris and its Region, Lille, Lyon and Toulouse) are also the ones where the Women’s studies courses are most widely available.

Distribution of Students and Women’s Studies Teaching Activities at Undergraduate and Post-graduate level

The French Higher education system is characterized by three levels of instruction: the first (two-year foundation degree) and the second levels (Bachelor and Masters qualifications) correspond to the undergraduate degrees and the third level (doctoral programme foundation diploma DEA and PhD diploma) to post-graduate degrees. There are more than 700 000 students enrolled on first cycle courses, almost 500 000 students in the second cycle and little more than 200 000 post-graduate students in France. The majority of students are women at all levels but their pre-eminence decreases with the duration of study.

The Women’s studies courses are distributed unequally between the three levels of instruction. Their presence is the most significant among the Bachelor & Masters degree courses with 195 modules available at this level out of the total of 358. At the foundation degree level, where the number of students is the most important, there are only 63 Women’s studies courses available and at the post-graduate level there are 100 courses on Women’s issues.

The prominence of the Bachelor & Masters degree courses (in absolute number) is probably due to the fact that almost all Women’s studies courses on offer in France at the moment are optional. This level of study is the phase where the student has the possibility to specialize on narrower subject areas and therefore the offer of diverse options, including approaches in term of gender, is also the strongest at this level. The foundation degree courses tend to focus on “general issues” and leave little space for gender analysis, which is seen as a “specific” or “specialized” approach to general themes.

Specialized and Non-specialized Women’s Studies Courses by the Type of Institution
This section focuses on different types of Higher education Institutions, categorised according to their dominant subject matters by the French Ministry of education. 

The Teacher Training Institutes (IUFM) offer seventeen courses on Women’s studies and six of them were declared as “specialized in gender”. The Institutes of Political Studies (“Institute d’Etudes Politiques-IEP”) declared only six Women’s studies courses, but the questionnaire’s rate of return was extremely weak for this category of institution.

For the other institutions the results are quite clear; the Higher education institutions in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (“Lettres et Sciences Humaines”) have the biggest offer in Women’s studies courses, 170 modules of which 60 are specialized on gender. The pluri-disciplinary, including training in Medicine and Pharmacy (“pluridisciplinaire avec santé”), offer 90 Women’s studies courses with 29 specialized Gender studies modules and the science-based universities (“Science et Santé”) offer 65 courses, of which 28 are specialized. The interdisciplinary institutions without Medicine and Pharmaceutical studies (“pluridisciplinaire hors santé”) have the lowest offer in Women’s studies with only 49 courses available, of which 11 are specialized courses.

Law and Economics institutions (“Droit et économie”) have the worst result with only 22 modules on women’s issues including just 2 specialized courses. The lack of gender analysis within these disciplines is an alarming observation, since they are particularly suitable fields of study for developing for example less discriminatory public policies.

Specialized and Non-specialized Women’s Studies Courses’ Distribution by Academy and by Level of Instruction

Regional Distribution of Specialized and Non-specialized Women’s Studies Courses

Most of the French academies offer more non-specialized than specialized Women’s studies teaching activities. Furthermore, the gap between these two courses is often relatively strong; for example in the Academy of Montpellier there are nine non-specialized courses and only one specialized module on gender, in Strasbourg the corresponding figures are 13 and 2 and in Paris they are 37 and 26.

There are, however, eight academies where the offer on specialized courses exceeds the non-specialized courses number (Reims, Dijon, Grenoble etc.). Only the academy of Lille has a homogenous offer between these two categories of courses.

There are three possible explications to the pre-eminence of non-specialized courses in the French academic curricula. First of all it is “easier” to introduce gender dimensions to existing disciplinary-based courses than to propose specialized Women’s studies teaching modules. The latter case demands more decisional power from the individual lecturers within the institution and stronger support from their heads of the departments, whereas the non-specialized courses can be set up without heavy administrative procedures. In other words, they can develop from individual initiatives, but in this case they often lack of visibility and official recognition.

It is also possible that the specialized courses act as the “foundation” upon which the non-specialized courses are built. Specialized courses are “the centre”, and therefore fewer in absolute number, and they initiate the institutionalisation process and the development of teaching practices which include gender analysis.

Finally, the numerical pre-eminence of non-specialized courses can also be related to the absence of specialized courses within the institution. We have observed that institutions offering specialized courses on Women’s studies reported less systematically the existing non-specialized teaching programmes (this is the case for the University of Toulouse II for example). Therefore we think that the opposite is also possible and the institutions lacking specialized courses might have been more meticulous in their collect of data, reporting even the slightest gender studies teaching activities.

Specialized and Non-specialized Women’s Studies Courses at Undergraduate and Post-graduate level

From the total of 358 declared courses 222, corresponding to 62%, are non-specialized in Women’s studies. As mentioned beforehand, the large majority of these teaching activities are concentrated in a few universities, that are mainly found in the region of Paris (including Versailles and Créteil) and in some smaller towns such as Lyon, Lille, Toulouse or Rennes.
Over one third (35%) of the Women’s studies courses are non-specialised modules of Batchelor and Masters level qualifications. The specialized courses of this same level correspond to 19% of all the available courses. They are almost in equal position with the post-graduate non-specialized courses, accounting for 17% of French Women’s studies offer.

The Batchelor and Masters degree courses form the most important group of teaching activities (with 69 specialized and 128 non-specialized modules at this level), but these courses are actually clustered almost exclusively in five academies; Lille (10 specialized and 9 non-specialized courses), Lyon (11 specialized and 8 non-specialized courses), Versailles (6 specialized and 16 non-specialized courses), Rennes (2 specialized but 16 non-specialized courses) and Paris (3 specialized and 14 non-specialized courses).

The situation is the most alarming at the foundation degree level (DEUG degree) with only 63 courses of which 29 are specialized in gender issues. This means that there are on average less than three Women’s studies courses at the first level of instruction in each academy. However, this figure has to be nuanced given that twelve academies do not offer any gender studies courses at the foundation degree level where as for example the Academy of Lyon has an offer of nine courses and the academy of Paris an offer of five modules.

Specialized and Non-specialized Women’s Studies Courses and Disciplines

Women’s studies options have mostly been developed in disciplines such as sociology, history, psychology, literature and Anglo-American literature and civilization.

The Women’s studies courses linked to the department of sociology (including also ethnology and anthropology) account for almost 20% of French gender studies teaching activities. Anglo-American literature and civilization, which accounts for 13% of all declared courses, appears to be the second most “Women’s studies friendly” disciplinary field. The solid tradition of the field in the English spoken countries as well as the women’s strong influence on Anglo-American literature are probably some of the explaining factors to this relatively strong position. The other important disciplines for the development of Women’s studies courses are psychology (10% of the declared modules), literature (also 10%), history (9%) and political science (also 9%). On the contrary, the unfriendliest disciplines for gender analysis in France are for example law, medicine, philosophy, linguistics, modern languages (with the exception of English) and economics.

Furthermore, some of these disciplines offer only non-specialized Women’s studies courses. This is the case for medicine, law and linguistics. Philosophy follows close behind, with only one specialized course at the foundation degree level, same as the foreign languages with only four specialized courses all at Batchelor & Masters degree level. The disciplines containing the most specialized courses are the same that have the top-positions at the general classification: sociology, psychology, Anglo-American literature and civilization (with approximately 20% of specialized courses each). History and political science are following this leading group from a distance with 10% of specialized Women’s studies courses each.

The non-specialized courses are distributed more evenly across the disciplines, although the four most welcoming disciplines to the Women’s studies development (sociology, Anglo-American literature and civilization, political science and history) also predominate here. It is interesting to note that literature, with 13% of non-specialized courses, is replacing the psychology (4,5% of non-specialized courses) in the head of the classification.

The specialized courses are rare among the foundation degree courses and only sociology and psychology can be said to offer a “significant” number of specialized Women’s studies teaching modules at this level (respectively 8 and 5 out of a total of 29). However, only two disciplines do not offer any non-specialized courses at the foundation degree level (law and medicine). The main part of these courses is found again in sociology with 10 non-specialized courses at first level out of the total of 34 courses.

Continuing Teaching Practises in Women’s Studies

The academies where the students have the greatest possibility to study gender issues from the undergraduate level to the doctoral degree within one chosen discipline - although not necessarily
within the same university— are not surprisingly, the academy of Paris and the academy of Lyon (each
offer a continuity of women’s studies courses in three different disciplines). To date, there are only
seven French academies, out of the total of 27, which offer a continuing Women’s studies instruction
stretching from the foundation degree level to the post-graduate level within at least one discipline
(once again these teaching activities can be distributed among different institutions or universities
within the Academy).
If we look even more closely at the data, we can see that only three universities have declared
relatively strong continuing teaching practises in Women’s studies, the University of Lyon II (in
Anglo-American literature and civilization, in literature and in psychology), the University of Paris
VII (in sociology and in history) and the University of Toulouse II (in sociology). As opposite to other
institutions with continuing teaching programmes, these three universities offer several courses within
the given discipline at each level of instruction.
The continuing Women’s studies teachings are the most frequent in sociology (with four Universities–
Toulouse II, Bordeaux II, Paris VII and Paris IX), followed closely by history (two Universities–Paris
VII and Paris XIII). The other important disciplines are again Anglo-American literature and
civilization, literature and psychology. The surprise comes from disciplines such as Sports studies
(STAPS) with continuing Women’s studies teaching practises in two universities (University of
Strasbourg II and University of Nancy I) and geography (University of Bordeaux III). These practises
are, however, very limited with only one or two courses on gender issues at each level of study.
As we have mentioned already, these few continuing teaching programmes do not lead to an official
and autonomous gender studies qualification since the degrees in Women’s or gender studies do not
exist in France. Moreover, it is not possible to include details about chosen options in the traditional
discipline-based diplomas.
**Possible Explanations to the Underdevelopment of Women’s Studies in France**

Our results show that Women’s studies still suffer from the “lack of recognition” within French
academia and they are underdeveloped in comparison to other European Union member states.
One of the reasons for this slow and difficult expansion of Women’s studies can be found in the
historical development of French women’s movement. This movement had strong informal, collective
and non-hierarchical values that lead to “heated debates about the legitimacy of Women’s studies
activities within formal institutions” (Le Feuvre & Andriocci, 2002: 259) and these quite radical
standpoints probably hindered the development of Women’s studies structures within French
universities. However, difficult relationships between feminist academics and institutions alone do not
provide a sufficient explanation of the “French case”, nor of the continuing marginalisation of this
field inside French universities (Andriocci, 2001).
As Nicky Le Feuvre and Muriel Andriocci point out “the interdisciplinary nature of the women studies
does not fit well with the strong disciplinary structure of the French higher education institutions” (Le
Feuvre & Andriocci, 2002: 258) and this is probably another reason explaining the relatively slow
process of institutionalisation of Women studies in France. Furthermore, the introduction of Women’s
studies into traditional disciplines has not been easy, given that the feminist teaching and research
have negative connotation throughout the French scientific community (as they do outside of
academic circles).
The lack of full-time lectureships and professorships explicitly in Women’s studies connected to the
continuing lack of institutional support or even basic administrative assistance “have combined to
produce a situation where the minimal conditions for the transmission of feminist knowledge to future
generations have been difficult to obtain and even harder to maintain over time” (Le Feuvre &
Andriocci, 2002: 266). Furthermore, many of the leading feminist theorists are employed in the
research bodies, like the CNRS, physically and statutorily separated from the universities and,
consequently, from the majority of undergraduate students.
In short, none of the structural barriers to institutionalisation and clearly identifiable gender studies
degree courses have so far been lifted within French universities. Nonetheless, some political
initiatives like the “Action Plan for Equality in Education” have drawn attention to the need of
systematic research on women in all areas of the society, “thus potentially placing existing research
centres at the heart of a new era of gender research funding” (Le Feuvre & Andriocci, 2002: 272) and
supporting the further development of the field. It seems that one possible solution to the underdevelopment of French Women's studies might come from the combined effects of gender mainstreaming in national public policies and the recent drive to encourage applied vocational degrees within the French universities. The need for professionals capable to administrate the new equality policy initiatives may well represent the most promising route to the development of gender studies degrees in France in the near future (Le Feuvre & Andriocci, 2002: 273).

**Recommendations for Further Development of Women’s Studies as Concluding Remarks**

There are several reasons for supporting the development of Women’s studies teaching and research activities in France. First of all it is high time for the French public policies to recognise and to put an end to the insufficient nature of its investment in the extension of Women’s studies institutionalisation process. This is vital if the French scientific community wants to attain the same level of development of Women’s studies as its European neighbours and consequently ensure the high quality of its scientific production.

Furthermore, there are currently signs of an increased students’ interest on Women’s studies, which continue to attract large numbers of students. The impact of this growing Women’s studies public is also visible through the improvements on the academic feminist publishing front.

Finally, the gender analysis and the interdisciplinary nature of Women’s studies are powerful sources of innovation to the traditional disciplines and to their research methods and they can only be beneficial elements to the rigid structure of French academic institutions.

Women’s studies teaching activities should therefore be supported by diverse strategies at all educational levels. Courses need to be introduced systematically to all undergraduate courses in all disciplines, starting with social sciences, and to be made obligatory. At Batchelor & Masters degree level, it is important to create specific Women’s studies degrees (for example Masters Degrees) or at least degrees that include details on chosen gender studies options. In addition, the already existing post-graduate courses should be reinforced and new courses created.

The French higher education also needs crucially new full-time lectureships and professorships explicitly in Women’s studies and more financial and human resources supporting feminist research activities. The mainstream commercial publishers and university presses should also be included in the efforts to improve the visibility of Women’s studies research.

The gender mainstreaming policies adopted by the French government and the new equality policy initiatives may offer the necessary conditions to catch up the slow development of Women’s studies in France and to put an end to the “French case” at last.

**References:**


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