

A PROGRESS REPORT ON THE MINNESOTA PLAN FOR
WOMEN'S CONTINUING EDUCATION
Virginia L. Senders

She's thirty five years old and her youngest child is in first grade. She's a grade mother, a PTAer, and an active participant in civic organizations. She loves her engineer husband and delights in being with her youngsters. But she's discontented. She doesn't know quite what she ought to be doing with her life, but she knows that all she has and all she does doesn't add up to a whole that really uses her abilities or her education. With the expectation of forty years of ~~healthy~~ life ahead, she wants to find a pattern into which the present pieces -- and perhaps some new ones -- will fit.

Do you know her? Of course you do! You know her both personally and by reputation. She was your advisee as an undergraduate fifteen years ago. She sits in the front row of the women's groups you address. She is the lady next door. She is also the woman about whom so many books and articles have been written and for whom so many different and conflicting solutions have been proposed. She is the woman for whom the Minnesota Plan for Women's Continuing Education was designed -- she and the girl of eighteen who will be this woman tomorrow.

Underlying the Minnesota Plan is the recognition of the fact that this woman's life pattern, so far, has been typical. Like 90 per cent of all women, she is married, and like 90 per cent of those who marry, she has borne children. Her home, her husband, and her children have filled most of her life during the fourteen years since she graduated from college. But now, with all of the children in school, she can expect four more decades of life before her, with an increasing amount of free time each year. She can keep busy -- but too often she feels, quite realistically, that her busyness is without goal or unity, full of bustle and activity adding up to very little.

The magazine writers tell us she is frustrated. The manpower experts tell us she is needed. In almost all the technical and professional occupations, manpower increases are needed in the years to come. Nursing, and some branches of teaching, two major occupations of women, are professions where shortages are foreseen into the indefinite future, and the same is true of many fields that are less traditionally feminine. Community and political organizations need her too, not as a pair of willing hands, but as an unpaid professional -- intelligent, up-to-date in science, humanities, and world affairs, bringing breadth of understanding and specialized skill, along with a breadwinner's sense of responsibility, to her volunteer job.

She is likely to enter the labor market in a year or two on a part-time or full-time basis. But can she, with her college education fourteen years behind her, find a job where her intelligence and education will really be utilized? Probably she cannot, and thus, though employed, she remains an underutilized resource.

The Minnesota Plan was formally established in June, 1960, with the receipt of a grant of \$110,000 from the Carnegie Corporation of New York for its first three years of operation. Its objectives are twofold: first, to return to the nation's (paid or unpaid) manpower pool at appropriate levels a group of intelligent, educated women whose abilities would otherwise be underused during their mature years; and second, to increase the personal happiness of many women by exposing them to new interests, by helping them to find new objectives, and by making the goals of the more distant future an integral part of their present lives. These two aims, though sometimes requiring differences in emphasis, are complementary in nature.

Attainment of these objectives is sought through a three-phase strategy. For the undergraduate woman, the Plan provides orientation to the multiple roles of later *life* so that realistic preparation can be made for them. For the young mother and homemaker, deeply immersed in family

responsibilities, the Plan will provide specially tailored opportunities for continuing education -- curricular offerings that can form the base of an intellectual "rust-proofing" program. For the mature woman whose formal education is already far behind her, guidance and help will be given in using existing university resources, ^{and} ~~plus~~ ^{will be} special courses developed to meet her particular needs.

This is the strategy. What of the tactics? Consider first the undergraduate -- that is, the "regular" undergraduate -- the unmarried student seventeen to twenty-two years old who is regularly enrolled in one of the degree programs of the University.

One of the first aims of the program is widespread change of attitudes and expectations about women's lives and roles. Though our primary interest is in the change of women's attitudes, the men these women are to marry must be ready to appreciate their new thinking, so they too must be reached. In the main, the approach is through group discussion. Including a few that took place before the program was formally under way, ^{there will be seventeen such discussions} with sororities, ^{groups} residence halls, honorary societies, and special dean's retreats for high ability students. Originally the lecture method was used. The students were given information about the sources of women's dilemmas, a proposed solution was offered, and the session was then opened for questions and answers. For the most part, the result of this intellectual approach was an intellectual response: the students listened attentively, approved the logical relationship between problem and solution, commended the ingenuity of the program and went away informed but not personally affected. There were exceptions, of course: one honor student wrote the author a letter, expressing gratitude for the new meaning her college work had acquired, now that she was able to see over the top of the diaper stack into the more distant future. Another reported, two years after the first discussion meeting, that she and her fiancé, both of whom had been in the group, had mapped out their own

program of post-marital continuing education. He was an engineer and she a major in elementary education. They had decided that over their years of married life, he would take more courses in the social sciences and she in the physical sciences so that their self-chosen curricula would bring them closer together in interest and understanding as the years progressed.

Nevertheless, most students saw the program as a great thing for others, but not for themselves. "I don't need it, you see, because I'm in education and I'll just go right back to teaching after my children are grown," was a typical response. So the whole approach was changed in order to start with student's present motives and problems and bring the discussion around later to planning for the multiple roles of the future. With a freshman-sophomore group, one fruitful line of attack has been built around the question: "Why are you in college? What do you expect to be doing two years after your graduation? Ten years after? Twenty years after?" At appropriate intervals during the discussion, the leader interrupts for three or four minutes of informational material and interpretation. Near the close of the meeting, the leader describes the Plan in brief and distributes written material on it. Another kind of discussion involves first, a challenge to women's right to higher education, leading the students to an impassioned defense of their own education, including frequent reference to their future careers. The discussion leader finally capitulates and then changes the subject to the role of the mother in raising children. Students respond with eloquent panegyrics on mother love and ^{the} sanctity of the mother role. At this point, the discussion leader points out possible conflict. For many of the students, this is the first time their two parallel views of their future lives have been brought into direct opposition. Somewhat shaken, they try to think out their own solutions. Mother substitutes and part-time jobs are frequently mentioned. Someone usually points out that a major difficulty is the long gap of years that must be spanned with-

out intellectual progress or maintenance. The discussion leader asks how intellectual deterioration can be prevented during these years and the students then proceed to work out for themselves the outlines of a Minnesota Plan. Told that now the University is prepared to help them in their continuing education programs, they are enthusiastic and receptive.

With groups of men and women, the un verbalized theme of the discussion has been "The wife we save may be your own," or "What will your wife be like fifteen years after you marry her?" Men are of course, less involved than women, and more resistant to ready made solutions. Nevertheless, interest has run high, and one discussion with a group composed predominately of male agriculture students continued from 8:10 p.m. until the leader finally extricated herself at 10:30.

In addition to discussion groups, other methods of attitude change have been used. Every bit of publicity about the program is, itself, an instrument of this change. Articles in the staff, alumni, and student magazines have reached some faculty members and students. Letters have been sent to faculty advisers, as well as to students themselves. The visibility of the third phase of the program has helped also. Every faculty member who participates in the program becomes, to a greater or lesser extent, a propagandist for it. The Student Counseling Bureau and the Student Activities Bureau have been enthusiastic supporters from the beginning. New approaches, such as the use of films, are being considered for larger groups of students.

Meanwhile, the student who has been brought to a more realistic view of her future may need personal help in planning for it. For her, the Minnesota Plan counselor, ~~Dr. Cornelia D. McCune~~, who is a regular member of the Student Counseling Bureau, is available. Actually, her case load of undergraduates has been discouragingly light -- less than ten have thus far sought her help. The kind of problem brought to her is exemplified by one senior woman, a physical science major with an A-average. This woman

had long planned on graduate training leading to the PhD degree, followed by a career in research. In the fall quarter of her senior year, she fell in love with a bright young graduate student. Her grades fell off alarmingly, and her whole role concept seemed threatened. She was referred to the Minnesota Plan counselor, who worked with her in planning for full-time study through the master's degree, followed by part-time study and intellectual maintenance through the anticipated family years, with a return to graduate work later. The planning was partly educational, partly vocational, and partly concerned with such practical matters as the time consumed in housekeeping and the emotional needs of young children. The young woman was married in December, and started the second quarter of her senior year with renewed vigor and enthusiasm.

Not only does she have new enthusiasm, however, she also has a new role concept for herself. She now accepts the fact that, as a woman, she will lead a life which has a different temporal pattern from that which she had always anticipated. Her earlier plans for steady progress in a career had made no allowance for the fact that she was a woman. When she found herself in love and engaged, she felt that all her past planning and hopes were useless and saw only the single domestic ^{role} for herself. The counselor helped her to visualize the different stages of her future life, including the long post-parental career period. She is now ready to plan for a life which accepts her femininity but is not limited by it. This change has raised many questions in her mind. For the first time she has become intellectually interested in women -- their lives, their roles, their opportunities, their problems. She wants information, and she wants it in depth.

To meet this need, exemplified particularly strongly in this woman but present also in many others, a seminar on The Educated Woman in the United States is being offered in the Family Life Department. Preference

is given to junior and senior women with a B or better average, and enrollment is limited to twenty-five. The course is administered by a coordinator, with actual class meetings being taught by guest lecturers who are specialists in their particular fields. The topics to be covered include manpower needs and educational resources, psychological factors in the determination of women's roles, the economic choices of women as consumers and investors, family roles, including both husband-wife relations and parent-child relations, the roles of women in community activities, vocational planning, and a historical and cross-cultural survey of women's roles. Top-ranking talent, both within and outside the university community, is represented among the speakers, who include specialists in manpower, higher education, psychiatry, family sociology, child development, community activities, and vocational counseling. These lecturers specify their own reading assignments, which include readings from such sources as Women's Two Roles by Myrdal and Klein, Work in the Lives of Married Women, Mead's *Male and Female*, Deutsch's *The Psychology of Women*, and Cohen's The Citizen Volunteer. In addition to the regular reading assignments, each student writes a term paper on a vocation of special interest to her, including consideration of how competence can be maintained during the family years, and the possible integration of familial and professional roles.

In summary, ~~then~~, the first phase of the program operates in three ways, aiming at widespread attitude change, individual life planning, and an intellectual understanding of the changing roles of women in the social order.

The second, or intellectual maintenance phase of the program is not yet fully under way. The women who are undergraduates today will be the clientele of this part of the program tomorrow. Exactly how it will work cannot be foreseen in detail; we can only list possibilities that will be explored.

First, it must be understood that the Minnesota Plan is not a curriculum, nor a college, nor a super-institution. Rather it is a facilitating agency.

One of its functions is to encourage and facilitate the use of existing educational resources. There are many such resources, both within the University itself and outside of it. Making their existence known, and encouraging women to use them in a planned and effective way will be one of the functions of the Plan. Thus, graduating seniors will be helped in their plans to take evening courses in the Extension Division, to take correspondence courses, to register for day classes as adult special students, to make use of television courses for credit or otherwise, and in general to exploit the offerings of community and of University.

In some cases, the Minnesota Plan has served as a stimulus to the development of new types of courses available to women using the Plan but not restricted to them. In the Correspondence Department of the Extension Division, for example, independent advanced study through correspondence is being tested. The advanced student with a well developed idea of an academic project may apply to the Correspondence Department for help in setting up a planning conference with a faculty member, after which the student will proceed on his own, corresponding with the professor as problems develop or as the work nears completion. Projects carried out in this way could either duplicate work of advanced courses not offered through regular correspondence study, or could be individually conceived and quite unlike any existing course offering.

In the years to come, it may also be possible to expand special curricular offerings designed to meet the needs of the recent graduate who is not currently employed professionally. A quarterly colloquium, annual weekend institutes, monthly seminars -- all pitched at an appropriate level and with realistically demanding preparatory assignments -- might be suitable media. In some cases, these may be technical in nature, while in other instances they may be broadly conceived liberal arts offerings. Ordinarily, no credit will be offered.

Credit, in fact, is a minor concern of the woman who seeks mainly to keep her competence current. Graduate credits in The Master's Degree Program expire at the end of seven years, and undergraduate credits are of no value to the woman who has already earned the Baccalaureate degree. However, it will become important to her to have evidence of her continuing education program, and for this purpose the Minnesota Plan is inaugurating a record keeping system. For each woman who requests it, a cumulative record will be maintained, collecting in one place evidence of her academic and relevant non-academic accomplishments through the years. When she is ready, at a later date, to seek admission to graduate school or to the labor market, the record will be there to show that she has not allowed deterioration to set in throughout the homemaking years.

Although the second phase program has no certified clientele, in the sense of women who were exposed to our discussions, counseling, or seminar as undergraduates, we do have a number of fairly young women who are requesting the services we think of as belonging to the third phase. In fact, about sixty of our 270 applicants are mothers of pre-school children. Some of these women have lured us into a function we never expected to become involved in -- baby-sitting. "Build us an on-campus baby-sitting service," they said, and we have tried. At the present moment, things stand this way: a student religious foundation has offered the use of its Sunday school rooms on a trial basis; a commercial baby-sitting agency has signified its ability to provide sitters for the hours of the day when most of the women would be attending classes, and a group of Minnesota Plan mothers has met and agreed to take over problems of organization from this point on. Whether such a service will actually materialize remains to be seen. We think it will. And we suspect that if it does, its existence may stimulate the return to school of many women who would never otherwise have considered such a step.

Twenty years from now, if all our dreams come true, there will be no rusty women in the state of Minnesota (except, of course, some recent emigrants from other states.) But right now the Minnesota Plan has been in operation for ~~six months~~^{less than a year}, and the community is full of women who need, not rust-proofing but rust-removal. There are at present about 270 such women whose needs the third phase of our strategic program is attempting to meet.

They are a heterogeneous group. Their ages range from eighteen to sixty-two. Their educational backgrounds range from the completion of the eighth grade, through high school, college,^{and} master's degrees to one with the doctorate. Their ambitions are equally varied: -- personal enrichment, vocational upgrading, bachelor's degrees, higher degrees, and career shifts are all fairly frequently mentioned. ~~Three~~^{Four} women want to work for the MD, and several want the PhD. Some are single, while one has a husband and seven children.

For many of these women, the most important thing the Minnesota Plan has done is to exist. The fact that educators have formally recognized that there is a problem and a need has encouraged and motivated them -- has, in fact, energized them into action. Publicity about the plan has been an integral part of its operation, not mere frosting on the cake. Every newspaper and magazine article that describes the plan, every meeting at which it is the subject for a lecture or discussion, brings new applicants. Perhaps even more important than the applicants we see are the affected women we hear about indirectly but never see in person. "Mrs. J. kept hearing about your plan, and she used to be something of a mathematician, you know. Well, she's gone back to the University and is taking refresher work in math. I understand that she's thinking of preparing for work in computer programming a little later." Of course we have no way of knowing how many such women there are, but we do have evidence that they exist. In the future they may be in the majority, and this is, perhaps, the ideal situation.

Most of the women we hear about need more than a push, however. They need information or counseling or both. Their problems range from simple ones that can be solved merely by giving some vital bit of information, to those so complex and demanding that they are insoluble. The first kind of problem is exemplified by the woman who is trying to obtain a bachelor's degree through evening classes. She would like to move faster, but says that she cannot attend day classes because "My children are still in school and I can't go full-time." She needs to know that she can attend day classes on a part-time basis, and once she has this information she may be able to proceed on her own for some time. Because we found that university bulletins left many questions unanswered (including the question of which bulletins to ask for) we mimeographed and distributed our own booklet on Adult Education Resources at the University of Minnesota. This ¹⁵ ~~14~~ forwarded routinely to every woman who requests application blanks for the Plan.

There are counseling problems that are difficult but soluble. The forty-five year old woman with a bachelor's degree but no vocational preparation who must prepare to help support her family in the years ahead presents a real challenge to the counselor. So does the woman with a twenty-year old degree in a pre-social work curriculum, who refuses to take graduate study because she claims she is already a social worker. So do many others with diverse non-vocational problems. But for these problems there are solutions, and client and counselor work them out together, sometimes with a referral elsewhere in the university or to an outside agency.

Some problems are virtually insoluble. A woman from a remote rural area writes to ask how she can obtain a bachelor's degree. She is already doing correspondence study, but because of family responsibilities she cannot complete more than one course per year. There is no state, private, or community college within commuting distance of her home. She correctly concludes that at her present rate of progress she will not be able to

complete her degree for many years and requests that we speed the process up somehow. Since her basic need seems to be for extra hours in the day, we can only counsel patience and remind her that children do grow up. A single woman, employed during the day and entirely dependent upon her own rather meager earnings has completed through evening classes some of the requirements for a degree in education. She now needs those courses requiring observation and practice teaching, which, of course, are available only in the daytime hours. Obviously, the requirements of her job and of the degree are unalterably incompatible, although at some future time ^{a loan or} scholarship assistance might enable her to take time off from her job to complete her courses.

Fortunately, enough problems are soluble to make our counselor feel that she is being of real help, and enough are simple to enable her to help many women rather than a troubled few. Interestingly enough, the number of obvious dilettantes has been very small. Perhaps even more surprisingly, the number of those whose real need is for psychotherapy rather than vocational and educational counseling has also been small. For the most part, the counselor's services have been appropriately and effectively utilized.

The need for intellectual rust-removal has stimulated the development of a new type of curricular offering in the Extension Division. In 1957, Mrs. Elizabeth Cless, now co-director of the Minnesota Plan, as assistant for liberal arts programs to the Dean of the Extension Division, was given the assignment of building new and imaginative liberal arts programs for that division. Believing that the most effective programs are those directed to a particular audience, she selected educated women as the audience which she knew well and whose need for such programs was not being met. The first special seminar for this group started one year in advance of the Minnesota Plan as a whole.

The students were seventeen women whose ages ranged from thirty-five to sixty. They were a hand-picked group, chosen for a variety of reasons including civic responsibilities, and known intellectual vigor. All but three held baccalaureate degrees, and three held masters degrees. A few were single career women but most were primarily mothers, and two were grandmothers. Professor Ralph Ross, chairman of the University's humanities program, was faculty adviser for the course, which was taught by many distinguished members of the university faculty. Topics ranged through the physical and biological sciences, the humanities, sociology, psychology, and economics, with a unifying emphasis on method. An aim throughout was to bring the students up-to-date in the development of these fields since their *college graduations* ~~graduates~~ fifteen to thirty years before.

The mechanics of scheduling were decided upon by the students themselves. They agreed to meet every two weeks throughout the year, for a full three-hour session each time. At the end of each session they continued their discussion through lunch at the faculty club. In addition, three residential meetings were held. These were intensive day-and-a-half meetings at the Center for Continuation Study, designed to sum up what had gone before in the lectures on each of three areas -- the natural sciences, the social sciences, and the arts. The 3 a.m. discussions on Newton's Laws, free will and determinism, and James Joyce's Ulysses, recaptured much of the flavor of vigorous college bull-sessions.

Reading assignments were carefully chosen. Eschewing both standard textbooks and sensational and over-simplified lay presentations, faculty members combed the book lists for high quality non-fiction books directed toward the serious, intelligent and educated non-specialist. One such book per month was considered a stiff but manageable assignment, and the students found themselves immersed in The ABC of Relativity, The Birth and Death of the Sun, Heredity Race and Society, and others of similar quality. In addition, each student was expected to write a term paper, though not all of them

accomplished this. Ordinarily, credit is not given, but if a student matriculates in a college of the university, she can obtain credit by petition.

Classes were of the seminar-type, and discussion was sometimes so vigorous as to startle professors accustomed to undergraduate deference and reticence. Furthermore, the discussion continued when the students met (as they frequently did) at social gatherings and elsewhere. Husbands of the students, some of whom originally regarded the project as more well-directed busy work, became more and more involved with their wives' assignments and often ended up frankly envious at the opportunity the women were enjoying.

In short, New Worlds of Knowledge, as the seminar has since been titled, was an unalloyed success. When the Minnesota Plan came into being, this seminar was incorporated into the program, and a second one, entitled The Arts of Reading and taught primarily by Professor Ross, was developed. Many of its students are among the graduates of New Worlds. In all, 44 women are enrolled in these two classes this year, but the first third of the new seminar was recorded on video tape and broadcast over the city's educational television channel, so it actually reached many more. Two new seminars, one on the sciences and one on anthropology, are being developed for 1961-62.

There are some needs of the returnees that we cannot meet now but hope to be able to meet in the future. One of these is for financial assistance. Next year, our budget includes \$500 allocated for scholarship aid, and for the following year, \$1000. These are small sums, and we do not know how they will be distributed. The fact that we have them, however, means that we must solicit applications, and thus we will soon be in possession of objective evidence about the extent of the need for scholarship support.

A second such need is for placement assistance. One of the objectives of the program is the full utilization of the state's resources of educated

womanpower. Obviously, the final step in the achievement of this aim is going to be placement in appropriate paid or volunteer jobs. Next year, a placement worker will assume the responsibility of developing or discovering parttime jobs and at-home jobs for women, as well as for providing the conventional type of liason between employers and those seeking employment. It seems to us in prospect that this service will offer a unique opportunity for coordination among counseling, educational and placement functions. Among our applicants are many women who sincerely want to plan for paid employment at a professional level starting perhaps five years from now. In the meantime, they are willing to obtain whatever education and training is necessary. With a placement worker to explore the community's needs, working in close conjunction with the counselor, it should be possible to channel the energies of the women with flexible plans into the most valuable and needed vocations.

So much for the Plan itself. Let us examine briefly the administrative structure under which the Plan is organized. We have two guiding principles, and the details of administration follow naturally from these. First, this is an all-university program, not to be identified with any one college or division of the university. Policy decisions are made by a six-member administrative committee, including four deans and the co-directors of the Plan. The day-to-day implementation of policy is in the hands of the directors.

Our second principle is that, forseeing the day when there will be no foundation grant to support the Plan, we are building into, rather than ontó, existing agencies. This means, in effect, that we are not setting up new facilities, but are using our funds to supplement the offerings already available, whether these be in the counseling bureau, the placement bureau, or the academic curriculum. Thus we are infiltrating, with the eventual goal that, like a successful public health program, we may put ourselves out of business by making our aims and our methods everybody's aims and methods.

A final word -- when we talk about the program, we are usually quite

concrete about our objectives. But we are dreamers too, and we can see beyond the goals to which we officially aspire. Other dreamers may be stimulated by a mere mention of the aspects of American life which could be affected by the widespread development of programs such as this -- undergraduate motivation, mental health, the happiness and productivity of our aging population, and the further development of education as a truly continuing process. We can see our program as one small step toward the broad goal of the full and appropriate utilization of human talents and resources.