

VICTORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF  
WELLINGTON  
*Te Whare Wananga  
o te Upoko o te Ika a Maui*



*Greetings from the  
Career Development &  
Employment Service of  
Victoria University*

*Career View is published by  
Career Development and  
Employment to provide information  
on careers and employment to  
students, graduates and friends in  
the community.*

*Topics cover a wide range of areas  
from information on how degrees  
and courses relate to employment  
opportunities, to life/work planning,  
graduate destination information and  
current issues or material relevant to  
the employment scene.*

*In this issue of Career View we look  
at Women's Studies, an area of study  
many people are unfamiliar with, and  
which initially may not appear to lead  
to a 'real career'. Research proves,  
however, that graduates of Women's  
Studies have gone into a wide, diverse  
range of exciting employment  
opportunities. Here we follow the  
paths of four recent graduates.*

# Career View

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## Women's Studies

**The world over, the lives of women are different from the lives of men. In New Zealand:**

- Women outlive men*
- Women are leaving school with higher qualifications than men*
- Women's incomes are, on average, lower than men's*
- Unemployment is higher for women than men*
- More women than men have disabilities*
- Most women live in large urban centres*
- Women's self-rated health is worse than men's*
- Cancer is the leading cause of death among females. (Statistics NZ)*

**Recent decades have brought considerable change in the economic and social circumstances of women in New Zealand. Changing demographic characteristics of the female population, changes in the pattern of family formation and dissolution, changes in living arrangements and increasing participation in education and paid employment have had significant consequences for everyone. These trends and the changes they bring are not limited to New Zealand, they are global concerns and they will affect everyone, eventually. Women's Studies examines these issues, and more.**

### **What in the world is Women's Studies?**

Women's Studies is an internationally recognised, multidisciplinary field of teaching and research that seeks to understand the social construction of gender, and the historical and contemporary mechanisms that promote or limit women's development as full participants in society.

It aims to

- challenge and critique the conventional male-generated constructions of knowledge,
- understand the unique experience of women of all ethnicities, races, sexual orientations and socio-economic classes, and
- evaluate their contributions to the intellectual, social, political, economic, spiritual and artistic achievements that make up human culture

It encourages people

- to understand the subjective, gender and culture specific nature of their own values, beliefs and customs, as

well as those of others, and ultimately

- takes a global perspective in promoting the equitable treatment of all members of human society

### **How does Women's Studies relate to the job market?**

Women's Studies is an intellectually challenging area of study that develops, in particular, the skills of critical thinking and analysis that are considered essential for the 'knowledge economy.' Women's Studies graduates can offer employers:

- Knowledge of social, economic and cultural structures
- An understanding of the experience of Maori women
- An understanding of the dynamics of power
- An understanding of the processes which link policy and practice
- The ability to conceptualise an abstract process
- The ability to find common ground in apparently conflicting ideas

- An enthusiasm for thinking beyond the obvious and conventional
- The confidence to propose new insights from old facts
- The vision to project long term consequences from short term answers
- The ability to construct and articulate a logical argument
- A desire to connect together new ideas and devise alternative outcomes
- A belief that innovative strategies can break down stalemate situations
- A sense of the impact of personal commitment on the process of change
- Well-developed written and oral communication skills
- Research and information finding skills
- Problem-solving skills

### Where do Women's Studies graduates work?

Women's Studies graduates enter a variety of work environments and find different ways to apply their knowledge. In some cases their work is a direct extension of their formal study. In other cases their work role is not so obviously connected with Women's Studies, but their knowledge underpins all they do and adds extra skills and understanding. Another group again choose to express their knowledge in creative work or activities which may not constitute a formal job, but which contributes to the broader vision of gender equity.

*Job areas where understanding of women's issues complement other qualifications or experience and so add value, focus or enhance opportunities for career development.*

- Some organisations offer goods or services, or operate from a value system and philosophical structure, that is compatible with the principles of Women's Studies, but the job tasks and titles, such as finance officer, are that of any organisation. Such work environments, can, in themselves, offer a satisfying means of applying Women's Studies knowledge.
- Most professional roles, such as nursing, initially require specialised, self-contained training. Beyond that, professional advancement and career development often depends on additional learning. Women's Studies can 'add value' to many professional qualifications and increase the

likelihood of being a preferred applicant. For example, in the police force, Women's Studies papers can be cross-credited to the courses of formal study that police officers undertake.

This is taken into favourable account when officers are being considered for promotion and is valued for the insight and understanding it brings to front line policing situations, as well as providing a useful framework for focus group discussions on the need to retain women in the police force.

- It is useful to be aware of issues whose time has come. For example, the idea that family-friendly workplaces are economically advantageous is increasingly being recognised and politically supported. Such shifts in thinking can provide opportunities for those who have the right knowledge (Women's Studies graduates) to be in the right place at the right time with the right ideas.

- Entry-level policy advisers in government departments can be recruited for their analytical and conceptual skills and overall academic performance, as much as for specific subject knowledge.

Genuine interest in a subject often results in good grades. Women's Studies graduates tend to have made a real commitment to their area of study, particularly if they have continued to post-graduate levels, which can enhance their academic achievement and give a competitive edge in Government recruitment.

- Women's Studies particularly complements; Development Studies, Law, Economics, Public Policy and Political Science.

- Job areas where Women's Studies can be more or less relevant depending on circumstances include; law practices (particularly family law), public relations, human resources, journalism, social work, counselling, health services, market research, career services, teaching, sales and marketing, immigration services, property management, environmental science, website design, community planning, tourism, architecture, and financial planning.

Organisations in this group include:

- Ministry of Women's Affairs
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade
- Te Puni Kokiri (Ministry of Maori Development)
- Police Force
- Department of Labour
- Ministry of Health
- Ministry of Justice

- The Department for Courts
- Equal Employment Opportunities Trust
- Department of Corrections
- Child Youth and Family
- Presbyterian Support
- New Zealand Aids Foundation
- Relationship Services
- Volunteer Service Abroad (VSA)
- Office of Film and Literature Classification
- Broadcasting Standards Authority
- Employment Relations Service
- Office of the Health and Disability Commissioner
- Schools
- Local Authorities

*Jobs and organisations where the primary focus is around issues of justice and discrimination, gender issues, and may involve education or intervention strategies.*

- Many of these are social and Government agencies and many of the social agencies are community based Incorporated Societies and Trusts.

- The policies and activities of these agencies will differ according to the aims of the agency and/or the special needs of their client group, but in general Women's Studies graduates have a body of knowledge that is readily transferable to such organisations, although some specialised roles will require experience or qualifications in addition to Women's Studies.

- Many social agencies have networks of volunteers who provide support for aspects of the agency's day-to-day activities. Experience as a volunteer can be a helpful stepping-stone for those wishing to enter paid employment, as academic qualifications on their own may not make an applicant competitive.

- Written communication skills are important for agencies that put forward submissions and proposals, for example to funding bodies or Government committees, and those who produce information and training resources. The ability to write well and in a style appropriate to the people who will be reading it can be critical to the credibility of the organisation.

- Agencies which focus on the issue of domestic and family violence may also have links with the Justice system, as their clients may, as victims or offenders, be involved with criminal proceedings.

# WOMEN'S STUDIES

## career opportunities

[www.vuw.ac.nz/wisc/](http://www.vuw.ac.nz/wisc/)

[www.vuw.ac.nz/st\\_services/careers/](http://www.vuw.ac.nz/st_services/careers/)

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### education/social research

Education Adviser, Special Education Teacher, ESOL / ESL Teacher, University Lecturer / Tutor, Sociologist, Anthropologist, Historian, Teacher Primary / Secondary



### public policy

Policy Analyst, Policy Adviser, Parliamentary Speech Writer, Press Secretary, Government Researcher



### finance

Financial Adviser, Fundraiser, Financial Dealer, Insurance Representative, Accountant, Credit Controller, Bank Manager, Fund Manager



### business/computing

Economist, Operations Manager, Information Services Administrator, Market Research Analyst, Hotel Manager, Systems/Analyst, Advertising Executive, Public Relations Officer, Human Resources Manager, Recruitment Consultant, Training and Development Officer, Conference/Function Organiser



### building/property/environment

Conservation Officer, Landscape Architect, Property Manager, Real Estate Agent, Valuer, Resource Management Planner, Housing Officer, Architect



### security services

Police Officer, Home Security Systems Adviser, Customs Officer, Private Investigator, Prison Officer



### law

Barrister/Solicitor, Legal Executive, Consumer Rights Adviser, Mediator, Family Court Co-ordinator, Union Official, Probation Officer, Immigration Officer, Marriage Celebrant



### sport and recreation

Sports Coach, Personal Trainer, Sports Marketer, Sports Nutritionist, Tourist Operator



### arts and culture

Actor, Editor, Artistic Director, Fashion Designer, Copywriter, Archivist, Photographer, Industrial Designer, Museum Curator, Art / Theatre / Television Critic



### community

Journalist, Social Agency Worker, Social Policy Analyst, Women's Refuge Worker, International Aid Organiser, Employment Adviser, Social Worker



### health

Psychologist, Counsellor, Dietitian, Physiotherapist, Naturopath, Occupational Health Nurse, Registered Nurse, Medical Radiation Technologist



### science and technology

Geneticist, Statistician, Chemical Engineer, Environmental Scientist, Mathematician

■ For research positions, a post-graduate qualification in social research or a Master's degree demonstrating independent research is often desirable, and sometimes a requirement.

■ Universities positions typically require a PhD and a good record of publication.

■ Jobs in these organisations include; policy analysts, policy advisers, researchers, trainers, education advisers, administration staff, development coordinators, information line advisers, union organisers, client advocacy and client support staff, service development staff, youth workers, educators, victim advisers, project officers, teachers and lecturers, fundraisers, media and communication officers.

Organisations in this group include:

- The Human Rights Commission
- The Family Planning Association
- The National Collection of Independent Women's Refuges
- Universities
- The Domestic Violence Centre
- National Network of Stopping Violence Services
- The Women's Health Action Trust
- Rape Crisis
- Unions
- Victim Support
- Women's Centres
- Sexual Health Service

*Self-directed work that is driven and inspired by personal beliefs and social values, including ideals of feminism and social equity.*

■ This work can include membership of women's professional and work associations, or representation on Government committees, which focus on issues specific to women. The work can demand time and personal commitment, is usually unpaid and may be an extension of an established professional or work role. In some circumstances, active involvement can raise an individual's profile and become, in itself, a form of career advancement.

■ International organisations, such as the International Centre for Research on Women, Women's Environment and Development Organisation, or the Association for Women in Development, communicate on a worldwide basis particularly through the Internet. Building up a network of international contacts can open opportunities for involvement and recognition that can be helpful when searching for paid employment.

■ Those working in the creative arts in a freelance or self-employed capacity often find their income levels fluctuate considerably and may need to apply for grants in order to undertake or complete a particular project.

■ Work in this area includes; film-making, dance and theatre productions, painting, scriptwriting, musical composition and performance, sculpture, fiction and non-fiction writing, photography, poetry, performance comedy, cartooning, radio and television production, and so on.

Organisations in this group include:

- Women in Film and Television
- NZ Federation of Business and Professional Women
- Association for Women in the Sciences
- NZ Federation of Graduate Women
- Women into Self-Employment (WISE)
- Springboard Women's Development Programme
- National Council of Women
- Maori Women's Business Resource and Employment Information Centre
- National Advisory Council on the Employment of Women
- Coalition for Equal Value Equal Pay
- Webgrrrls Aotearoa – for women who are working with or using the web
- Magdalena Aotearoa – women performance artists
- Association for Women in Engineering
- Wellington Women's Lawyers Association
- Women Accountants' Group
- Society for Research on Women in New Zealand
- Association of Women Artists
- National Association of Women in Construction

## Graduate Profiles

### **Vanessa Riddiford** *Analyst (Public Health Legislation Review Team), Department of Health*

A friend recommended Women's Studies to me in my first year of university. She was passionate about a course she was doing called 'Images of Women,' and I was



intrigued. Three years later I had completed almost every Women's Studies paper offered at Victoria University! What I enjoyed most about the courses is that they never bored me. I left each lecture and tutorial feeling inspired and challenged – literally buzzing! Looking back I think it was because I had a strong emotional connection to what I was learning. I was investigating issues related to my life.

People often ask what can be done with Women's Studies in the 'real world' but my experience has been that employers are more interested in the quality of a degree rather than the choice of subjects. Nevertheless, I believe Women's Studies provides students with a valuable range of 'sellable' skills and strengths including verbal and written communication skills, conceptual thinking and analytical and problem-solving skills. Women's Studies encourages students to develop their own thinking and experiment with different ideas. It can give you the strength to stand up for what you believe in, give you confidence in challenging assumptions and the status quo, while giving, at the same time, an openness to being challenged by others. Two of the most valuable qualities I attribute to my Women's Studies training are the appreciation of diversity and the ability to look at the world from a variety of perspectives.

I had a strong interest in health issues while studying at university, so when given the opportunity, I leaped at the chance to work at the Ministry of Health. I have worked at various positions within the organisation, but now work alongside a team of analysts in the Public Health Directorate. Some of the issues I am involved in span privacy and health information, consent in child health and a variety of human rights issues. If I boil it down, the work I do now basically involves planning, researching, writing, discussing, assessing and communication information under (often very tight) deadlines. You need a capacity to cut through the 'mish-mash' and see the heart of the problem. You also need to be able to identify and develop a range of possible solutions – this also means a willingness to explore alternative options. Women's Studies, just like many Arts and Social Science subjects gives you a good grounding for this. However, what is different about Women's Studies is the underlying commitment to creating change. I found

Women's Studies inspired me to not only think critically, but also proactively. I am passionate about making a difference in Health and I know that this is partly a result of my Women's Studies education.

I also found the Women's Studies Department staff had a great sense of community. Staff were willing to help on any issue, answer your questions, assist with extra reading and so forth. Being a small Department, it also meant there was an opportunity to speak in class (if you wished!), participate, ask questions and generally feel part of the learning process.

Women's Studies courses cover a wide range of areas and thus complement a number of other university courses such as social work, philosophy, law, science, linguistics, education, art history and classics. So it is not surprising that you will find graduates who have taken Women's Studies in a variety of professions – in fact they tend to be the ones who have the most interesting jobs. I would certainly suggest if you are interested in Women's Studies that you give it a go! Women's Studies will add a special quality to your degree.

### **Andrew Barron** *Community Worker*

Returning to tertiary study after fifteen years absence working in the community sector, I initially returned to the BA majors I had started with all those years before, History and Anthropology.



However, as a community worker I had worked in and around structural disadvantage and found that those subjects only dealt with gender and sexual issues as they specifically applied within History and Anthropology. Because I was hoping to apply the knowledge and theoretical models learned during university study in ways that would enhance my practical application of them in community work and development, I was pleased to discover that Women's Studies gave me the chance to make the links I wanted - between the theory and the practical, the personal and the political, between structure and effect.

I would strongly argue that Women's Studies provides humanities graduates with a balanced understanding of the issues facing societies. It would be remiss of anyone interested in social development to ignore half of the society they're studying. It would also be remiss not to study gender and sexuality issues from feminist perspectives as this incorporates analysis with specific development from those sectors. For men this is even more so. While many women take the courses for self-affirmation, for men, Women's Studies should lead to empathy for the issues facing women and challenge our understanding of our own place in society.

For many, a man completing a Women's Studies major would be a curiosity. This is not the reception I have had from Victoria's Women's Studies Department staff or its students. Despite a widespread and unsubstantiated belief that feminist perspectives mean a kind of bitter, man-hating resentment, Victoria's Women's Studies Department is the most supportive study environment that I have encountered in tertiary education. All the men I have met in the Department have said the same thing. I see this as an example of feminist theory proactively applied to an institution in order to improve the levels of support and humanism within the wider organisation. I have subsequently returned to some community-based work and the lessons I've learned through my Women's Studies courses have been invaluable. Not only have I absorbed the supportive approach, I have also learned to work within diversity and challenge structural disempowerment. The analytical framework offered through feminist theory is one that is not limited to understanding women in society, but is also applicable to issues of ethnicity, sexuality and class.

For anyone contemplating career options in the public or community sectors, especially if involved in service delivery or planning, not only do I believe that Women's Studies will enhance someone's ability to do the work, but I would argue that it is essential if the work or the worker demands a dedicated commitment to all sectors of society.

### **Jo Larsen-Harris** *Organisational Development Adviser, Human Resources, Accident Compensation Corporation*

I'm a feminist and am not afraid to say it. I am passionate about women being independent and able to make positive choices about their lives. I grew up with positive strong and independent female role models in my life. My mother was a solo parent and is very strong and independent and a fabulous role model for my sister and myself.



After a year and a half travelling, I returned to Victoria University to finish my BA. One of my last stops before returning home was India, where I travelled alone for a month and a half. I was fascinated with the women I met, and with finding out about their lives and the differences in Indian culture and tradition, compared with my own life and experiences. From this experience I decided to learn more about women's issues and the history and the perceptions of women.

As with any BA my degree didn't train me for a specific type of career but it showed potential employers that I could research issues, write reports, and, through my many presentations and seminars, I could present and sell ideas and concepts. This also gave me the confidence to become a director on the YWCA Board where I learned to utilise these skills.

After graduating, I knew I wanted to work in people development, particularly working with women. I got my first training job at the YMCA where I was working with young people, assisting them to develop skills and confidence and get jobs. After eighteen months I moved on to work as a training consultant for a small international company called the Productivity Increase Group. I am now at ACC as an Organisational Development Adviser in the Human Resources Strategy Team and I specialise in performance. I have recently been to a conference for women in management and business, from which I learnt a lot and met many successful and inspiring women. I have been asked to present a paper at the next conference, which is really exciting.

I am continuing my education and am completing my Masters in Adult Education with a strong focus on women in management and leadership. Currently my business partner and I are setting up a course for women, which focuses on motivation, goal setting, confidence, positive thinking and life coaching.

I would recommend studying Women's Studies to all women. It is fascinating and gives you many skills that can be applied in the real world. The Women's Studies Department has a very supportive learning environment. The lecturers assisted me to further my interest in women's issues, which has now motivated me to become a life coach for women.

**Douglas Jenkin**  
*Community Education Worker,  
New Zealand AIDS Foundation*

After working as a journalist for eighteen years, Douglas Jenkin changed careers and was employed by the New Zealand AIDS



Foundation as a Community Education Worker in Wellington. His work involves health promotion for gay and bisexual men as well as running workshops about sexuality for other agencies. After four years in this work Douglas returned to Victoria University (where he had completed a BA in Sociology in the 1980s) to do some post-graduate papers in Women's Studies and begin an MA thesis.

"All of the papers I took were very relevant to my work and expanded ideas I was already formulating. My employers helped with fees as part of my professional development and what I studied has influenced the work I have done since. Staff at the Women's Studies Department were very welcoming and there were quite a few other mature students, which was encouraging. It can be daunting returning to study when you're older and also very busy with a demanding job."

A recent project that Douglas has worked on was based on the ideas he had first considered while he was studying. The *Who Are You Hurting? / He Aha Te Utu?* campaign and workshops were about raising awareness, challenging prejudice and providing

solutions to counter homophobic attitudes. Many of the different threads that make up Women's, Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Studies were woven into the campaign. Specifically, the workshop emphasised the negative health outcomes for young men and women who suffered homophobic prejudice and discrimination, such as social isolation and broken relationships with friends and family.

"Helping to write the workshop and being closely involved with the design of three posters that accompanied it was very satisfying work," Douglas says. "Recently one of the posters was nominated for a design award, which is also gratifying. Most important, though, are the reactions we've had to the campaign and workshop. So many people could relate to the themes and had a fuller understanding of the issues after they'd attended a workshop or identified with one of the young men in the posters."

Although he has an inner-city base at the New Zealand AIDS Foundation's Awhina Centre, Douglas says his work is anything but a desk job. "The work is very demanding in terms of time and energy but it's never boring. I spend quite a lot of time travelling to other cities and towns in the region and tour with specific workshops. I'm also fortunate in that I'm involved with projects from their inception to their delivery, staying closely involved through every part of the process." My job involves a lot of writing, public speaking, teamwork and good understanding of different minority cultures. Add to this health promotion and social marketing skills and you have some idea of the diversity and challenges involved. I never worry that a day at work will be just like the one before – each project offers new insights and makes different demands on me.'

**Women's Studies at Victoria**

Women's Studies offers a range of papers at 100-, 200- and 300-level as well as advanced study in postgraduate degrees. It is available to all students at Victoria and can be taken as a non-majoring subject for other degrees. Among relevant subjects to take with Women's Studies are Sociology, Anthropology, Political Science, Education, English, Film, Maori Studies, Media Studies, Pacific Studies and Sexuality Studies. Women's Studies provide a revealing perspective on areas such as science, law and commerce.

The requirements for a major in Women's Studies make up a third of the degree – you can take Women's Studies as one of two majors for a degree. WISC 101 – Introduction to Women's Studies is the normal entry for Women's Studies papers, however, some students may be admitted on the basis of other approved points. 200-level papers include areas such as Women, Work and Welfare (WISC 201); Images of Women (WISC 202); Feminist Theory (WISC 217) and Maori Women's Studies (WISC 209). 300-level papers cover issues such as Gender Analysis of Economic and Social Policy (WISC 301); Feminist Writing (WISC 302); Women, Power and Knowledge (WISC 305).

For advice on possible overall course structures and subjects which fit well with Women's Studies, students are encouraged to speak to Women's Studies staff who are available to give such advice for both first year study and beyond. Students are also encouraged to seek advice from university careers advisers.

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