THE DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH OF THE GENDER STUDIES PROGRAM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA, KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA

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Abstract

In Malaysia, women's studies and gender studies are new fields struggling to be accepted as legitimate academic fields equal to mainstream disciplines. The academic and intellectual validity of women's studies and gender studies was gradually recognized because of the research done by early feminists. Research and studies on women before the seventies were scarce but researchers who welcomed international changes achieved by the global women's movement were prepared to work to localize the need to elevate the position of women in society. Public universities were also urged to look into ways of contributing towards uplifting the status of women. The article outlines the history of the institutionalization of gender studies and its profile since its inception at the University of Malaya.

Keywords: institutionalization of gender studies, doing gender studies, development of gender studies

Introduction

In Malaysia, women's studies and gender studies are new fields struggling to be accepted as legitimate academic fields equal to mainstream disciplines. In the early years, women's studies were resisted because of the fear that it would breed anti-men attitudes, and it was also accused of merely imitating western feminism. Despite this resistance, the academic and intellectual validity of women's studies and gender studies was gradually recognized because of the research done by early feminists. It also challenged earlier knowledge that formed mainstream thinking. This new knowledge and awareness brought many changes. For example, amendments were made to existing laws, the government became cognizant of the importance of integrating women in the development process and the women's movements increased their efforts to sensitize society on women and gender issues. Research and studies on women before the seventies were scarce but it was these Malaysian writers and

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