
THE ACADEMY

Who Is Pete Schaub?

by Nicholas Davidson

When Pete Schaub, a business major in his senior year at the University of Washington at Seattle, couldn't get into an overenrolled business course for the first quarter of 1988, he signed up for "Women 200: Introduction to Women Studies" instead. He was expecting to learn about "the history of women and the contributions that they have made," as the course book described it. Instead, Schaub would be harassed, expelled from class, and publicly defamed.

Schaub's mother was a rebel in the 60's who divorced his father when she was 21 and moved to rural Washington to live close to the land. There Schaub grew up among the farms of the Skagit Valley, where he acquired the mild drawl of its inhabitants, and a strong sense of justice defending his black stepbrothers (his aunt's children) against local bullies. Today, at six foot one, Schaub is a bodybuilder, a teetotaler, has run a construction crew to support himself in college, and drives a Porsche 924 which he recently repainted red. Not your standard 80's Wimp. Schaub is also smart, articulate, and very upset.

"Introduction to Women Studies" was taught by two women in their 20's, Donna Langston and DanaMichele, who had taught the course nine and three times before, respectively. (Born Dana Brown, DanaMichele discarded her last name as a protest against "patriarchy.")

Several of the 14 teachers' aides (including Schaub's) were freshmen, whose only academic credential was to have taken the course in the previous quarter. The students report that these freshmen were responsible for grading papers by seniors.

Many outside friends of the instructors and the TA's stopped by to participate in the course. "They had anywhere between 30 and 40 people acting as crowd control," says Schaub. "Anyone who did finally get the nerve up to ask a question or raise a point," wrote student Greg Adams in a letter to the



A senior last year at the University of Washington, Schaub was pilloried for asking questions in a women's studies course.

University of Washington Daily, "was immediately verbally mobbed by the instructor and 'facilitators.'"

As an example of the prevailing atmosphere, says Shirley Hamblin, a student who took verbatim notes of much of the course for a visually-impaired student, instructor DanaMichele alleged in one class that "the traditional American family represents a dysfunctional family unit." Students who protested that their own families were functional were assailed by TA's shouting "Denial, denial!" in unison.

The textbook, *Changing Our Power*, consisted of a set of writings by the

instructors, such as the following poem by Donna Langston:

I just love the smell of me
 closest thing I got to
 the taste of you
 now that you've left
 at first I searched my
 cupboards far and wide
 was it Pringles or Mr. Chips
 or would Haagen Dazs eaten
 along with tortilla chips
 provide the proper
 salty sweet combination of you
 little did I know I'd
 find the flavor so close to home.

"One of their guest speakers came and taught women how to masturbate," says Schaub. "They said that you do not need a man. They proceeded to show them how to masturbate with a feather duster, and they did have a dildo right there." At the end of the lecture, according to several of those present, including TA Sarah Hirsh, the lecturer held up the dildo and said, "This one has my name on it." The talk was illustrated with a closeup of female genitalia, projected onto a 12-foot screen at the front of the classroom.

Schaub got off to a bad start with the course instructors by calling one of them "ma'am" at an early course meeting; she stingingly rebuked him for this "sexist" remark.

Schaub says—and those present, including Sarah Hirsh, agree—that he only asked a total of four or five questions during the six weeks he was in the course. Schaub insists that his few questions were "meek"—"requests for clarification only." Although he was later accused of "disruptive behavior" and "shouting obscenities," most students were apparently not even aware of his presence in the class. For example, Shirley Hamblin reports that when Schaub's demeanor became an issue, the reaction of many students was bewilderment. "Who is Pete Schaub?" they asked.

As an example of the tenor of his questions, Schaub describes an incident

that occurred after a class in which DanaMichele asserted that US government statistics showed that lesbians could raise children better than married couples could. Schaub says that he simply asked her if he could have the source.

"I asked after class, even," he says. "I didn't want to look like I was challenging her. I just said, 'I couldn't write quick enough—I'm wondering if you could tell me where you got that, so I can go look it up and get the information.'"

"She wouldn't hear of it. She told me, 'Why are you challenging me? Get away from me! Just leave me alone!'"

"Right there," he continues, "one of her friends who was in the class came down and called me 'a f-----g male chauvinist goddamn bastard.'" The student, Elizabeth Dougherty, denies she said this, according to an account in the *Seattle Weekly*. Shirley Hamblin, though, who was also present, reports that Dougherty "was shrieking" and that "her mouth was in Pete's ear."

When Schaub showed up for class the next morning, he was informed by Donna Langston that she was "banning him from class." To make her point, she had two campus police officers waiting at the back of the hall, who escorted Schaub away.

"What was his crime?" Hamblin asked in a letter to the *UW Daily*. "He asked questions. He challenged instructors to support their claims."

Schaub was not the only student to be harassed for showing some independence of mind. Mary Seward is 38, married with three children, stands five foot one-and-a-half inches tall, weighs 110 pounds, and is legally blind. Seward says that after she politely questioned one particularly implausible statement by a guest lecturer (to wit, that Mexicans have large families to compensate for Spanish genocide in the 16th century), she was dressed down for an hour and a half after class by DanaMichele, who told her, "Your body language is hostile and threatening."

When Hamblin made an announcement on behalf of Schaub on March 1, DanaMichele came over to her and said, "I really think you should start being concerned about your personal safety." When Hamblin demanded to know exactly what she

meant, DanaMichele quickly denied that she had made a threat, and said, "You have to be concerned about your personal safety from Pete Schaub"—thus replacing a threat with slander. (The women's studies forces later accused Schaub of threatening them. But when pressed on this point by local reporters, the only examples of threats they could produce were along the lines of, "It's not a safe world for women, and people were afraid to walk home because of someone like Pete Schaub. He's big and he's hostile. It doesn't have to be more specific than that." "If that is threatening," responds Schaub, "I have been threatened many times. I've seen many big people.")

Schaub protested his banning to the university administration. Administrators declined to hold an open investigation to clear him, as he requested. (Indeed, Schaub says campus authorities have never asked him for his version of events.) The dean of students did, however, reinstate Schaub in the course after several weeks—with the suggestion that he not attend further class meetings. (Repeated phone calls to UW Vice President for Student Affairs Stephen Nord were not returned.)

Schaub's technical reinstatement was still too much for local feminists, who organized a series of demonstrations against him in March and April 1988. "He's just a beer-drinking arrogant guy," they told reporters. (As noted, Schaub is a teetotaler.)

To further undermine Schaub's credibility, the Women Studies Department took out a full-page ad in the *UW Daily*. Transparently referring to Schaub as "one of the disruptive students" who had been quoted in "articles in local newspapers," the ad accused "several students" of "obscene and abusive language in the classroom" (no details or evidence were provided). The ad was paid for with taxpayer-supplied university funds.

The first demonstration against Schaub, according to students who witnessed it, was assembled right outside the classroom. One of its leaders, Annette Sacksteder, was allowed into the classroom by Donna Langston, DanaMichele, and the acting director of the Women Studies Department, Sue Ellen Jacobs. Annette Sacksteder and a TA addressed the room, urging

the students to leave class and join the demonstration. Donna Langston then announced that any student wishing to leave the classroom that day would be excused without penalty. About 20 students actually left at that point, some to participate in the demonstration and others to watch it. The demonstrators, with reporters and TV cameras following, marched over to the dean's office to protest Schaub's reinstatement. When they found the office deserted and locked, they pounded on the door and tried unsuccessfully to break it open. When Schaub showed up and was identified, the crowd encircled him and chanted, "Stop sexual harassment!"

A second demonstration was held a few days later to protest the alleged "unfair media coverage" of the first one. At the third demonstration, though, on April 6, the crowd was behind Schaub. "We support Pete! We support Pete!" they chanted.

The women studies forces at UW are being, to put it mildly, less than forthcoming about the Schaub affair. Messages for Langston left with the Womens Studies Department elicited no response. DanaMichele's telephone number has been disconnected. After failing to return a phone message, the head of the department, Sue Ellen Jacobs, objected strongly to being called at home. Jacobs said she could suggest no one to present the women's studies side of the case. A woman at the UW Women's Information Center declined to recommend any sources and refused to give her name. The local women's studies forces seem to have realized that the tide has turned against them, and to be hoping that the whole matter will be forgotten if they just keep quiet. Jacobs says that the Pete Schaub affair "has gone on too damn long."

But Schaub has been telling his

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story on national television shows and is planning legal action, though it is not yet clear where he will find the necessary funding. (The Women Studies Department will automatically be defended in any lawsuit by the state attorney general's office, with access to public funds.)

Was the way "Introduction to Women Studies" was taught last year unusual? Greg Adams, who took the course in the fall of 1986, says that "there was one different instructor, but it was the same approach." Both the teaching methods, such as the use of the TA's for crowd control, and the themes covered, as in the masturbation lecture, were the same in all significant aspects. Indeed, Adams says that students who took the course "ten years ago say it was just the same then."

Is the course "an aberration" within the Women Studies Department? Sue Ellen Jacobs rejects this notion and strongly defends the course as it exists. The course, she says, is entirely consistent with other courses offered by the department. She emphasizes that "it is still one of our most popular courses" and insists that "we will not change the substance of it." Both she personally, and the department in general, stand behind the course "absolutely."

Is women's studies at the University of Washington different from women's studies nationwide? Michael Levin, a philosophy professor at City College in New York, has examined women's studies as a general phenomenon, attending the classes, reading the texts assigned, and talking with women's studies scholars. He reports on his inquiries in *Feminism and Freedom* (Transaction Books, 1987). According to Levin, the field is characterized by its "wholly political character." Three of the texts most widely used in women's studies courses focus on "lesbianism, masturbation, and rape," on "the author's dissatisfaction with male lovemaking," and some even promote the "advocacy of incest."

"Women's studies course materials," Levin writes, "ignore customary features of instruction at the university level," notably "the presentation of both sides of disputed issues." Even "the most objective texts balance twenty or thirty selections by feminists with one or two short selections by critics."

In addition, "[w]omen's studies instructors are notorious for penalizing students critical of feminism."

We may well ask: who is Pete Schaub?

Nicholas Davidson is author of The Failure of Feminism (Prometheus Books, 1988) and editor of Gender Sanity, an anthology of critics of feminism (forthcoming from University Press of America).

STAGE

The Passion of Patsy

by Jeffrey Essmann

The lights come up on an old woman holding a candle. It is Auntie Rula.

RULA

Do you hear a child crying in the cellar? Yes, yes, it is you, Patsy! Back again to haunt your old Auntie Rula. But why are you crying, child? Or are you laughing? Crying, laughing—with you, they always sounded the same. Ah yes, to you, to the world, she is Nadia Mulvenya Porochnjik, the great Croat poetess. The name Nadia has so many diminutives: Nadi, Nadj, Dadi, Didi, Dina, Dani, Nana, Donna, Dodo. But me, I always called her Patsy. And before she ever sang to you, she sang to goats.

She turns and, through a slight adjustment of her shawl, becomes a girl of 16, reciting a poem to a goat.

PATSY

Walking along the road of life,
I hadn't journeyed very far
When someone pulled over,
his name was Death.
I didn't know he had a car.

She looks to the goat, hopefully.

Oh, you always say the same thing about my poems: Nya-a-a-a-a-h! But you shan't upset me today; it's my birthday!

She curtsies.

Why, thank you. Mama is having a party for me! Uncle Nathan's going to be there, and Auntie Rula and cousin

Irena. Mama said I could even invite my own friends. I wanted to invite you. "Oh, he'll just stink up the house," Mama said. Isn't love supposed to smell?

She turns again.

The dining room table is covered with Grandma Porochnjik's good lace tablecloth and on top of it are the candles we use only on Croatian holidays. There's a huge tureen of blood sausage and beets; there's pickled onions, and cabbage pudding and turnips carved to look like roses! I'm just about to pick one when from behind me I hear a voice:

Imitating Uncle Nathan's gravelly baritone:

"Now there's a young lady I could eat!" It's Uncle Nathan! He's wearing his new leg and wants to dance.

She curtsies coquettishly and begins to dance—a waltz interposed with limp hops.

While we're dancing, Gregor, the gardener, comes in and asks if cousin Irena would like to see his bush. Irena laughs and goes out with him—and suddenly I smell goats.

Her arms transform from holding a dance partner to holding a box.

A present!

She tears it open furiously.

A dress! A dress with a zipper!

She spins with glee, but when she is forward again we see that it is years later. She takes up a pen, dips it in an inkwell and begins to write.

October 30, 1912. I never wore that dress. Just as I opened the box Mama began to hiccup and couldn't stop. We thought it funny at first, but then it went on all night and by morning she had to be taken to the sanatorium at Zlatny.

She bounces as if in a train.

Auntie Rula and Uncle Nathan have invited me to come live with them in Zagreb.

She disembarks and steps onto the street.

I'm excited by the big city with its electric lights and sausage stands.