Moses, Ingrid. *Barriers to Women's Participation as Postgraduate Students.* Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1990, pp. ix, 198. Reviewed by Agi Lukacs, University of Toronto.

I have liked the term "barriers" ever since I first encountered it in Paul Anisef's studies of university access.[1] It reminds me of the hurdles which were set up on the track outside my high school. The thought of sailing over the required hurdles gave me trepidation—when I thought I couldn't make it, and joy—those times I could.

Those of us who sail over the systemic barriers in high school may then encounter various obstacles in university. Gender barriers in university, the topic of Ingrid Moses' book, are not yet well understood. The better they are understood both by those who (often inadvertently) set them up, and by those whose task it is to traverse them, the less formidable they can be.

It is in this context that Moses' comprehensive study of gender barriers in Australian graduate schools is particularly welcome. There is no comparable study in Canada, although individual universities—such as The University of Western Ontario, University of Waterloo, graduate students' organizations, etc., do study the issues.[2]

The statistics for women's participation in graduate school are, however, quite similar in Canada and Australia. In both of our countries, women's participation in graduate school has been steadily increasing; but there are comparable barriers. Despite increased participation of women in fields such as economics, medicine, law, dentistry and engineering, in Australia, "the higher the level of the award, the lower the participation of the women." Although women comprise 50% of entering Bachelor's degree students, they are only 36% of those beginning postgraduate research (19). In Ontario, although women comprise 55% of students who finish their B.A., they comprise only 32% of those who emerge with doctorates[3]. "There is no doubt," writes Moses, "that many women who are qualified are not proceeding to postgraduate studies." She adds that, according to previous studies, "women students drop out in larger numbers and take longer to complete" (pp. 15, 37).

Moses and her assistants studied eight disciplines and eighteen universities, concentrating on "structure, norms and conventions within institutions which act as barriers for women students to taking up postgraduate study, or to a full and equal participation as postgraduate students" (1). The disciplines included

"the traditional male fields" of Veterinary Science, Physiology and Zoology, where women were no longer a minority; and Agriculture and Economics, where women comprised about a third of undergraduate students, but considerably fewer graduate students. Moses also studied three disciplines where women students have been the majority for some years: Social Work, Psychology and History.

Moses' thorough, well-organized and readable study—featuring general chapters and also one chapter per discipline, as well as interesting references to the Australian literature—explains what may happen along the way. The study is based on well-designed (and appended) questionnaires returned by 407 students. Two hundred of the students were in their final undergraduate year, a year which is required in order to go on to graduate school. In addition, there were in-person interviews with 122 students, and with some administrators in each programme.

The students highlight numerous, important areas of institutional process which enable or interest them in graduate work. They often cite lack of, or low levels of, financial support, as problematic, given childcare costs and other living expenses. The women are frequently compelled to work part-time outside the university, even if they have relatively supportive spouses.

Many women in their final undergraduate year explain their decision not to enrol in graduate studies by saying that they need to work, and/or that they want to have children.

> Women were very realistic about the choices they had to make. Many expressed it as a lose-lose situation, with only few able to come to grips with fitting family into academic norms. (28)

Many women who are graduate students explain their decision to study part-time as motivated by their family and financial responsibilities. In some disciplines, to which many women have returned after a hiatus, there are "mature women," of whom a majority have children. There is an articulate voice across the disciplines which suggests, as do Canadian women's voices, how torn and exhausted such women feel when they try to do it all. Part-time students also feel excluded from the academic and related social life of many departments.

Some women cite the lack of female role models among faculty as problematic. They explain that when they do encounter such role models, they tend to draw conclusions from the ways that these women handle their multiple responsibilities. They also draw conclusions regarding the practicality of their

academic and career aspirations by looking at the gender and hiring in their discipline. For example, they receive a clear message when most of the women in a science department are laboratory assistants.

Some women explain that they feel alienated in the "maleness" of their disciplines and environment. In Moses' words:

> With academic staff in the vast majority male, most senior positions held by males, the disciplinary culture stamped by male definitions of knowledge, male research conventions, male career patterns, and male interaction patterns, the presence of the many women at undergraduate, even postgraduate level, changes little (31).

Despite this overview, however, Moses found considerable variety in the specific aspects of gender barriers, or lack thereof. For example:

> Some departments considered women's diverse roles in their allocation of facilities, resources, scheduling of seminars, and suspension rules. In other departments, women felt that by virtue of being a (potential) mother or wife, their scholarship and commitment were questioned. (3)

One of the best features of this book is the variety of thoughtful suggestions for change which emerge both from those interviewed, and from the author. The suggestions are sometimes general, and sometimes specific to the disciplines studied. Among these are:

* the need to examine women's situations in each department or university;
* more generous financial arrangements for graduate students, including part-time and re-entry students: a sort of "salary for research" to be provided by main employers of graduates, as well as the usual sources (pp. 43, 108);
* hiring and promotion of significant numbers of female academics;
* "special encouragement" for female students to continue in academe, by graduate advisors, undergraduate instructors, university employers and departments from which they have received one degree;
* flexible course scheduling, which takes family and work commitments into account;
* a variety of accessible occasions for social and intellectual interaction during which women students can meet other women

students, faculty or female graduates;

* possibilities for group research, which some women prefer; and for undergraduate research;
* flexible suspension rules for women with external commitments;
* increased, affordable childcare provisions on campus.

The goal is for departments to "make their programs attractive to both their own students and others by projecting not only the department, but also the discipline, as attuned to women, their needs, values, knowledge and experience" (p. 41).

Moses' study is very practical—an important quality—but its theoretical framework is at times rickety. For example, there is frequent mention of the important issue of the "lack of self-confidence" of women graduate students, but there is little sense of how, in the individual and collective life histories and institutional interactions of women in patriarchal societies, such lack of self-confidence may have evolved. In addition, there is little theorising about curriculum content, although the degree of its relevance to women's lives, especially in disciplines like psychology, social work, history and economics, has long been thought to influence women's academic experiences and results. Similarly, although financial issues are documented, they are not seen theoretically as a barrier involving social class. Given the absence of explicit theoretical frame(s), the suggestions for change, although creative and useful, may be less convincing than they could otherwise be.

Also, none of the students appears to have mentioned sexual harassment, an issue which is now much discussed in some Canadian graduate schools. Nor is there editorial comment on the special vulnerability of female graduate students to such harassment.

The issues for women of colour who are graduate students—issues such as ethnospecific curriculum vs. the Eurocentric standard, and of community representation among faculty [4] — are similarly invisible. As a teacher and researcher of an access programme at the University of Toronto, initiated by the Black community and attended by some First Nation students, I would have been interested in the access of Australian aboriginal students to university. As a doctoral student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, where there have been some significant gains for women, but where ethnocentrism in curriculum and hiring is just now under discussion, I would have liked to hear about any comparable issues in Australia.

Despite the problems, however, this remains a very useful study for graduate school instructors, administrators and students. Moses rightly describes the issue of gender barriers as "system-wide and systemic", "a problem of social equity from the women's and the community's point of view, a community problem of wastage of intellectual resources, and poor pay-off of government investment" (p. 10). Her compendium of "suggestions and good practices" therefore is worth considering.

1 Paul Anisef and Norman Okihiro's *Loser's and Winners* (Toronto: Butterworth's, 1982) is an example.

2 Ontario seems to have studied the issue the most. For example, "The Status of Women Graduate Students" was issued by the Council of Ontario Universities (COU) Committee on the Status of Women in May 1991. Carolyn Filteau has edited a good collection entitled *Women in Graduate Studies in Ontario* (1989). The most recent report was issued in January 1992, by the University of Toronto School of Graduate Studies Gender Issues Committee.

3 "A Statistical Glance at the Changing Status of Women in the Ontario Universities", prepared by the COU Committee on the Status of Women, September 1990.

4 See, for example, Linda Carty, "Black women in academia: A statement from the periphery" in Himani Bannerji et al., *Unsettling Relations: The University as a Site of Feminist Struggles* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1991).

Smith, Stuart L. (commissioner). *Report on the Commission of Inquiry on Canadian University Education.* Ottawa: A.U.C.C., 1991, pp. 178. Price $17.95 (Can.), $18.95 (U.S.). Reviewed by R.J. Baker, University of Prince Edward Island.

The reports of commission of enquiry based on public hearings, written submissions, opinion surveys, and research reports etc., can be assessed as political documents, as responses to the dissatisfied self-interest groups who always appear at such hearings, as research, or as a set of recommendations, no matter how arrived at. In the last case, the assessment may simply be a measure of the fit between the prejudices, presuppositions and recommendations of the assessor and those of the Commission.

I would give the Smith Report an "A" as a political document, an "A+" with distinction for the degree to which this report will satisfy those who made