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To: David Thorud
Acting Provost
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From: Marsha Landolt
Dean and Vice Provost

Re: Department of Women Studies 5-Year Review

Summary and Recommended Action

At its meeting of Thursday, October 23, 2003, the Graduate School Council met with members of the team reviewing the Department of Women Studies; with members of the department, including Chair Judy Howard; and with Divisional Dean Susan Jeffords. At that time, the Council unanimously recommended continuation of the Department of Women Studies degree programs, including the BA, MA, and Ph.D., with the next review in 10 years.

I concur with the Council's comments and recommendations.

The Council echoed the review team's findings of a strong department whose faculty are deeply dedicated to student learning. Women Studies' recent GPSS award as a Gold Star Department also recognizes it as an exemplary environment for graduate education at the University of Washington. Reviewers and Council were impressed with the quality of the students, the commitment of the faculty to fostering a positive learning environment, the initial success of new academic initiatives, particularly the doctoral program, and well as the responsiveness of the unit to the review committee's comments. The review also acknowledged Judy Howard's able leadership of the Department since her appointment in 2001; garnering high praise for her dedication and skill, Judy Howard was deemed by faculty, students, and staff alike to be "an extraordinary administrator."

In total, the review offered high praise for the Department of Women Studies and commended it as a source of intellectual vigor, clear commitment to the implementation of promising pedagogical practices in both undergraduate and graduate education, and as a department that has established a remarkable number of productive connections with faculty and units spread throughout the University.

Faculty losses, recent and pending, have left some critical gaps in areas of departmental emphasis (Transnational Studies and US Studies) that remain unfilled in the current budget climate but which merit careful attention. The Council encouraged the Department to explore revenue generating strategies through the development of self-sustaining programs or events attractive to non-matriculated students and members of the wider community. The Department is only in the initial stages of constructing a fundraising plan that will take some time to implement. The potential donor base of Women Studies is likely not as fiscally deep as that of many other academic fields; development efforts are critical, but these will likely not be sufficient to address some of the departmental challenges, at least not until far in the future. While the Department's future leadership is not an immediate issue, some consideration might be devoted to the question of how to lay the groundwork for drawing future leaders from among the unit's full-time faculty, particularly when there are a sufficient pool of senior faculty to call upon in that capacity. Perhaps the most critical question for internal consideration is the appropriate balance between faculty attention to teaching, its historic strength, versus research, which is critical to its future as a doctoral degree offering unit. Reviewers encouraged the Department to reassess its commitments to ensure optimum balance in light of its future direction.

Background

Established in 1970, the Department of Women Studies has grown to include 10 tenure-line faculty positions, one senior lecturer, several part-time lecturers, over 90 adjunct and affiliate faculty members, and 75 courses, a configuration that gives a relatively small unit an enormous reach across the University of Washington. Faculty education and expertise is concentrated in social science disciplines including History, Psychology, Anthropology, International Development, Criminology, among other fields; though these areas of expertise converge by virtue of a shared concern with social relations of gender, a multi-ethnic and multi-racial approach to studying the lives of women, and a common body of feminist theory and methodology that provides a basis for inquiry in the multidisciplinary field of Women Studies. Women Studies offers the Bachelor's of Arts, Master of Arts, and Ph.D. degrees, along with a minor and Graduate Certificate. The M.A. and Ph.D. are the most recently established degrees, having been launched in 1997. The current review served as the mandated five year review for the M.A. and Ph.D. programs. Holistic in nature,

however, the review included all aspects of Women Studies' operation, including the undergraduate degree program.

The review committee included five members, three internal and two from peer institutions. The committee was chaired by Miriam Kahn, Professor and Chair of Anthropology, and included as the other internal members Mary Gilmore, Professor of Social Work, and Michael McCann, Professor of Political Science. The external member of the committee included Ellen Lewin, Professor of Women Studies at the University of Iowa and Jacquelyn Zita, Professor of Women Studies at the University of Minnesota. They carried out the review during winter quarter 2003, including a review of the self-study and a two day site visit scheduled March 11-12. They met with a wide array of constituencies and received comments via email from the only individual who could not meet in person.

Observations

Women Studies has established a distinctive identity in a field of 800 competitors nationally by virtue of its early establishment, social science orientation, and its advantageous position as one of only ten doctoral degree offering programs nationally. Beyond those factors, the Department enjoys a positive reputation nationally due to the quality of teaching, mentoring, and research that is carried out by its faculty.

Both the review committee and the Graduate School Council commended the Department's educational programs as exemplary of the values of the larger institution. According to the review committee, the undergraduate curriculum has upheld high standards for academic rigor, cultivated critical thinking, provided opportunities for individualized experiential instruction, and set an expectation that each undergraduate major will have a substantial research experience. In the words of the review committee, "We think it may, indeed, be one of the best undergraduate programs at the UW."

At the graduate level, Women Studies has created an educational environment that combines rigorous intellectual training with attention to the professional mentoring of its students. The fact that the Department is home to three winners of university-wide teaching/mentoring awards accounts in part for the care that has been devoted to establishing a positive learning environment, though these qualities were found throughout the program. While an assessment of the placement of doctoral students lies ahead, given the recent establishment of the program, preliminary signs indicate a robust job market for Ph.D.s in Women Studies.

Findings

Reviewers identified faculty strengths in nurturing and mentoring students as the source of a potential challenge when it comes to attending to their own research and scholarly productivity. Faculty vitae include significant publications, in the form of books, edited collections, and articles in peer reviewed journals, and senior faculty are highly visible both in their disciplines as well as in the interdisciplinary field of Women Studies. Nevertheless, the relative balance between teaching and research efforts was identified as an issue ripe for reexamination at the five year mark in the launch of Women Studies' graduate programs, particularly in light of the demands for student funding that attend the doctoral program.

Gaps in the ability of Women Studies to develop multi-year funding packages to recruit new doctoral students were noted in the self-study. This has not hindered recruitment efforts to date. It is, however, predicted to become a growing problem as the emergence of new Women Studies doctoral programs creates a more competitive environment for the recruitment of top doctoral students.

Recommendations:

Some of the funding gaps might be filled through arrangements with social science units that currently lack an adequate supply of Teaching Assistants, such as Sociology, Economics, and Political Science. The review committee observed that Women Studies has not enjoyed the advantages in central funding for TA quarters that longstanding departments have enjoyed. Rationales for the baseline numbers of TA quarters regularly allotted to various social science departments are not clear, increasing the baseline allocation of TA quarters to Women Studies, rather than opening TA positions in other departments for Women Studies graduate students (and it is not clear that other departments currently have extra positions), would be consistent with the committee's observation that Women Studies' students are better served acting as TAs in their own department. We do recognize and appreciate that Women Studies is moving to increase undergraduate course enrollments to justify allocation of (temporary) TA positions. In addition, reviewers also identified greater development of funded research projects as a potential source of support for doctoral students and as a potentially important component of their education.

A key recommendation of the review is to encourage the Chair to make use of all available tools to foster both research productivity and funded research proposals to generate new internal capacity in the coming years. In the event that new hires become authorized, some attention might be given to the capacity of future faculty to generate funded research, as well as to fill gaps in areas of emphasis within the Department.

Having successfully tenured and promoted its first generation of faculty, the Department is justifiably concerned about the absence of junior faculty at this time, particularly covering the key areas of global and US feminisms, as well as methodology. Given the current budget constraints, alternative strategies for filling these gaps might be explored by securing commitments from Women Studies adjunct faculty, part-time lecturers, or post-doctoral appointments. Clearly, however, it is in the interest of the Department of Women Studies, and the College of Arts and Sciences more generally, to hire a new generation of entry level tenure-track faculty when the opportunity next arises.

Given the high praise that the Department has won from all quarters in the review process, new investments have a high probability of earning positive returns.

- c: Lee L. Huntsman, Interim President, Office of the President
- David C. Hodge, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
- Susan Jeffords, Divisional Dean for Social Sciences, College of Arts and Sciences
- George S. Bridges, Vice Provost, Office of Undergraduate Education
- Judith A. Howard, Professor and Chair, Department of Women Studies
- Members of the Women Studies Review Committee
- Members of the Graduate School Council
- Augustine McCaffery, Assistant to the Dean, Academic Programs, The Graduate School
- Gail Dubrow, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, College of Architecture and Urban Planning, and ACE Fellow