

May 2, 2012

### **Dean's Response to the Program Review of the Women's Studies Program**

I appreciate the thought and effort that went into the Program Review Team's report, and into the Women's Studies Program's self-study and response to the report.

The Review Team found the Program to have many strengths, including a clear mission statement, well-designed curriculum, highly qualified faculty, excellent teaching, and satisfied students. The Team's report identified as well several areas of challenges for the Program

**Scope of the Program:** The Review Team supports the consensus among the Women's Studies Executive Council to broaden the focus of the program to Women's and Gender Studies. I agree that this would be consistent with a national trend in the field, and broaden the appeal of the program.

**A major in the program:** The Review Team sees a major as a laudable goal, but cautions, as I have, that enrollment growth, demonstrated by hard data, will be necessary to support such a proposal. The Program's response indicates interest in gathering such data.

**Curriculum:** The Review Team report expressed concern that no courses from the College of Science or the College of Applied Science and Technology were in the Women's Studies curriculum. The Program indicated that they will work to remedy this situation.

**Faculty and scheduling:** A set of related issues raised by the report relates to the fact that, like most interdisciplinary programs, Women's Studies does not have any faculty members "of its own," who are assigned primarily to it. A difficulty such programs face is that it is individual department chairs, not the Women's Studies Coordinator, who have authority to decide whether a given faculty member can teach a WOMS course in a given semester. Especially at a time like the present, of growing enrollments and, in some departments, a shortage of one or two faculty members, chairs may be understandably reluctant to "lend out" a faculty member to Women's Studies because of their desire to meet the needs of their own students. This structural situation can lead to scheduling problems, and then advising difficulties. This is the point I made in my meeting with the Review Team, and it was apparently misconstrued; I did not name any departments as being unsupportive of Women's Studies. The Program's response notes that the Coordinator will work to improve communication with departments about scheduling, which will be a positive step.

The Program will address another faculty issue identified in the report by formalizing mentoring of new faculty in the program, and regularly evaluating faculty performance.

The Review Team also recommends that a postdoctoral position be funded for a person to assist the Coordinator in managing the Program. There is currently no money in the College's budget to fund such a position; the Program's response notes that they will explore possible external funding sources for such an appointment. Along with an increase in the reassignment of the Coordinator from .25 FTE to .5 FTE recommended in the Review Team's report, the postdoctoral position would increase the recommended personpower assigned to managing Women's Studies from the current .25 FTE to 1.5 FTE, a sixfold increase for which a case is not made by the Review Team.

**Location of the Program:** The Review Team recommends that the Program be moved under the Office of the Assistant to the President for Diversity. No specific rationale is offered for this placement, except that the Program would thus have a "home and its own budget," and would no longer be an "orphan minor." I do not concur with this recommendation. The Program already has its own budget (albeit a modest one), and the issue of budget size is separate from that of where the program is placed. It also has a home, in this College. Regarding the "orphan" issue, removing this academic program entirely from the Division of Academic Affairs would only isolate it, and would not change the central fact that all of its courses are taught by faculty who are primarily assigned to other programs and departments. Nonetheless, I believe that under the present arrangement, Women's Studies has grown into a vibrant and successful program, and has potential for future growth.

**Program support:** The report recommends enhancement of the Program's budget; I will discuss this with the Coordinator to see whether some increase can be implemented, perhaps in the Travel category. I can note as well that the Program's three computers are being replaced by new ones, and we will move to fill the half-time secretarial position in the Program, recently vacated by resignation

**Other issues:** In its response, the Program indicated that suggested steps are being or will be taken in regard to the assessment plan, the student handbook, the WS internship, and enhancing internal and external partnerships. It also emphasized that, despite the concern expressed by the Review Team, Women's Studies faculty are satisfied with the library resources available to them and their students.

I believe that the Review Team has identified the considerable strengths of the Women's Studies Program, and has made some useful recommendations. The Women's Studies program has shown responsiveness to them. It is a fine program with a bright future, and I stand ready to support its continuing development.

Francis B. Harrold

Dean, College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

