



April 4, 2015

To: David Eaton, Vice Provost and Dean, The Graduate School

From: Priti Ramamurthy, Professor and Chair, Department of Gender, Women and Sexuality Studies,

Re: Response to the GWSS Academic Program Review Committee Report, 2015

The department of Gender, Women and Sexuality Studies gratefully acknowledges the exceptionally thorough, judicious, and helpful report by the APR committee members: Victoria Lawson and Lynn Thomas, University of Washington, Eileen Boris, University of California, Santa Barbara, and Jigna Desai, University of Minnesota. We are delighted to be recognized as a "gem" and to be commended for "dynamic and substantial impacts far beyond its size."

The report begins by reviewing the field of Gender, Women and Sexuality Studies and place UW's GWSS department as "one of the best." We note that in comparison to the 18 other PhD granting institutions, we are "one of the smallest" in terms of FTE. We agree with the characterization of our overall scholarly strengths in transnational and woman of color, primarily Chicana and Indigenous feminisms. We are also gratified that the review recognized our department's unique ability to link teaching, research, and community engagement seamlessly and well. Similarly, the report recognizes GWSS' success at increasing undergraduate enrollments, even though we are, what the review characterizes as a "discovery department", one that students find after a longer time. We appreciate the review report's commendation of our excellent teaching and curriculum at both the undergraduate and graduate level.

The review evaluates our graduate program as "a leader in and model" in the field. It bases this assessment on our capacity to recruit top students, to anticipate research trends, and to train students to meet curricular needs at a wide range of institutions. "Superb mentoring" and the yearly annual review process, as well as the change to a four year package of funding support are also deemed responsible for graduate student success. The review acknowledges our successful placement record for PhDs in Feminist Studies. It makes the very important observation that GWSS is "a rarity" where "demand for doctoral students exceeds supply." It notes that the Graduate Certificate Programs in Feminist Studies and Sexuality and Queer Studies serve students across the university.

The department is gratified by the evaluation of the GWSS core faculty as "distinguished, diverse and internationally renowned." The report notes that scholarly impact of the faculty is "shaping and transforming the field." It pays particular attention to the "cutting-edge" scholarship of our faculty in sexuality studies and in public scholarship.

The review committee's assessment of our impact across the university and field documents how GWSS serves as "a center for interdisciplinarity," "a strong recruiter for faculty and graduate students

in other disciplines,” and “an on-going hub for mentoring, leadership and intellectual engagement for the college and university as a whole.” “Most significantly,” the reviewers note, “GWSS is a center of diversity.”

To maintain our growth and dynamism, the review report identifies five challenges and makes recommendations to address them. Each is discussed below.

#### 1. Undergraduate Program:

1a. To “more fully integrate sexuality studies throughout the curriculum and add new lecture courses” we have already taken the following steps: A planning committee has been formed of faculty with expertise in Sexuality Studies, Amanda Swarr and Chandan Reddy, who are considering holding a series of faculty workshops in 2015-16. We will be redesigning the Certificate in Sexuality and Queer Studies. Our plans to revise the undergraduate and graduate core curriculum will take up this recommendation as well. New faculty members at the Assistant Professor level with expertise in the area of Sexuality Studies will be necessary to more fully meet this demand since Sexuality and Trans\* Studies is where the field has moved in the past ten years, during which time, as the APR notes, the department has not been authorized for any national searches for tenure-line Assistant Professors.

1b. We agree with the recommendation to expand career counseling and alumni relations by increasing the current 50% undergraduate adviser position. We contend that our request of a 100 % position is justified given the expanded need for dedicated career counselling and to build fuller relations with alumni, donors, and communities. We have initiated developing closer links with UW career services, which already runs “non-profit job fairs” from time to time. We will continue to work with them, Undergraduate Academic Affairs, OMAD, and other units whose students are interested in non-profit and social justice career options. We note that we already offer an Internship course every quarter for students to discuss their experiences; this will be revisited as part of our undergraduate curriculum revision. With more time, our undergraduate adviser will be able to update our internship options.

#### 2. Graduate Program:

2a. We agree with the APR recommendation for the College “to raise the number of quarters of TA/RA support from 19 to 27 quarters” but contend that our request of 36 quarters is fully justified given our aim of admitting a cohort of at least three students a year, with the promise of 12 quarters of funding. Given the reports’ assessment that demand for PhDs in Feminist Studies exceeds supply, graduating at least three doctorates a year and placing them well seems very feasible. Further, highly popular courses like *Gender and Sports* and *Gender and Popular Culture* cannot meet student demand without the infusion of more TA support. Lastly, while GWSS has been successful in increasing enrollments at the introductory undergraduate level, to meet our pedagogical goals of teaching diversity and doing so well, students need to be able to discuss complex and contentious issues in sections. For these reasons, our request for College support for 36 TA positions is justified.

2b. We agree that we need “to rethink the core sequence of graduate classes” and are planning to hold a retreat and a series of discussions in 2015-16 to do so. In addition, Amanda Swarr, will be joining two review committee members, Eileen Boris and Jigna Desai, at the National Women’s Studies Association to lead a national conversation on the topic.

2c. As mentioned in 1a, we are taking the recommendation to “develop and offer more courses on sexuality” seriously. We are applying for a Mellon funded grant to pursue this work across the university’s global and area studies programs. We reiterate the necessity for new hires at the Assistant Professor level to implement this important recommendation.

2d. In response to the report’s advice that GWSS increase the “collective professional development opportunities for graduate students” we are pleased to report that we already have three courses specifically focused on professionalization and skill-building: GWSS 504: *Philosophies and Techniques of Teaching* helps students develop their pedagogical skills and syllabi. GWSS 593: *Feminist Doctoral Research Workshop* focuses on fellowship and job applications and dissertation writing skills. Both of these courses were offered in the 2014-2015 academic year. We hope to offer GWSS 505: *Feminist Publishing* next year; this course, which helps students develop articles and understand the publishing process, will be co-taught by Divisional Dean Judy Howard (former editor of *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*) and Larin McLaughlin (Editor in Chief of the UW Press). Additionally, GWSS offers a Wednesday colloquium for students to develop intellectual community by both observing and presenting work, and each quarter at least one of these sessions is focused on professionalization.

2e. The report recommends GWSS “apply to the Student Technology Fee Committee for funds to develop a computer lab for editing and producing digital media and documentary films.” We note departments are not eligible to apply for these funds but this is an option that GWSS graduate students have already pursued twice. The first time was in the 2012 with a proposal that included the necessary equipment to begin building a digital media lab. Their initial request was for \$18,917. They were granted an award of \$7,611. Graduate students submitted a second proposal in 2014 to supplement the equipment they could not get with the first proposal. The request totaled \$12,294 and STF decided not to provide funds for any of their requests. GWSS graduate students and faculty have also worked with UW Libraries and other entities as suggested by the review; these collaborations have been extremely fruitful and we will continue to pursue them. However, we have found that the libraries do not have the equipment or resources for the kinds of archival projects our faculty and students are engaged in; for example, storage space for large video files and scanners. Funds for a lab within the department, therefore, continue to be needed.

### 3. Faculty Hiring and Development

3a. We agree with the review that “the most significant challenges facing the GWSS faculty are the lack of any junior faculty at the Assistant Professor rank.” Their recommendation that GWSS be authorized for “two searches at the rank of tenure-track of Assistant Professor in the broad areas of black feminisms and the African diaspora with thematic focus in theory, queer/ trans\* studies, and/or science, health, technology and medicine studies” is welcome. However, our case for a third search in the area of Feminist Digital Humanities, who will bring technological competencies, and familiarity with networked feminist learning communities is critical and warranted, given the directions that the field is moving in and UW’s international reputation in these fields.

3b. We appreciate the APR report pointing out the need for GWSS and UW to “adjust its research and tenure and promotion culture to meet the shifting nature of research and knowledge production.” The adoption of the NWSA Guidelines is an excellent suggestion that we endorse fully.

3c. We welcome the recommendation that GWSS faculty “who take on leadership roles within and beyond the department” be provided with summer salary. Most immediately, we are eager to appoint a Director of the Graduate Certificate in Feminist Studies and in Queer and Sexuality Studies, who will take responsibility for redesigning and implementing it.

#### 4. Adjunct faculty

4a. We look forward to working with our Adjuncts to collectively brainstorm on productive collaborations.

4b. On the basis of these conversations with our Adjuncts, we will consider encouraging more “to cross list courses, especially graduate courses.” This is a larger conversation and we value the review reports encouragement of “the College and University to recognize such adverse consequences of ABB and introduce counter-measures.”

5. We are grateful to the review committee for recognizing how GWSS’ educational mission and its proven record of working on issues of social justice and diversity are at the heart of the University of Washington’s capital campaign. With the review committee we, too, hope staff in Advancement highlights GWSS’s work as exemplary.

Finally, we would like to respond to the report submitted by GPSS based on the results of a Catalyst survey conducted among our graduate students. On the most important issues of (i) academic standards, (ii) quality of faculty, (iii) program support for professional goals, (iv) encouragement of teamwork, and (v) research training, there is a high degree of consensus among our students that the program is “excellent” or “very good.” This is also true of our students’ assessment of (vi) career counselling, (vii) academic advising and the department’s (viii) nurturing a sense of community. Graduate students would like more than 12 quarters of funding but also feel the department does its best to help students find alternative sources of funding. Students expressed concerns about lack of adequate physical space and facilities. Of the eleven students who responded, one appeared dissatisfied with academic advising and the foreign language requirement. The one other concern that the GPSS report has is that some respondents felt that faculty were not open to receiving student concerns and questions. We would like to point out that we go to great lengths to ensure an open and collaborative culture, especially with our graduate students. The Chair and Director Graduate Studies hold quarterly meeting with graduate students to discuss their concerns; all students are encouraged to attend. Many activities, like the research colloquia and professional development courses and sessions were specifically designed in direct response to student’s expressions of their needs. Overall, the GPSS report does conclude GWSS graduates rated their academic experience very highly.

In conclusion, the department of Gender, Women and Sexuality Studies has learned a great deal from the Academic Program review process. The review committee’s questions, requests for additional materials, and their report have been exceptionally illuminating. We have already begun planning, and implementing several of the initiatives we identified or the report suggested. We hope the College will see fit to support us in the ways outlined above. Over the next ten years, we will continue to build on our strengths and further improve our instructional programs.