



UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

WOMEN STUDIES

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TO: Marsha Landolt
Dean and Vice Provost, The Graduate School

George Bridges
Dean, Office of Undergraduate Education

David Hodge
Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

FROM: Judith A. Howard
Chair, Department of Women Studies

RE: Response to the Ten-Year Review Report of the Department of Women
Studies

We begin by expressing our deep appreciation to the entire review committee for their thorough and thoughtful review of our department. In every respect, from the advance questions through the intensive site visit to the final report, the committee has conducted this review with rigor and with sensitivity. They have made many insightful suggestions that, together with our own intensive self-study, will guide our work for the future. In this response we focus primarily on the recommendations offered by the committee, although we also clarify some points and describe some of the efforts and initiatives we have already undertaken that bear on issues raised in the report.

We appreciate the accolades the committee has directed at both our graduate and undergraduate programs and their observation of our "prestigious position in the field of Women and Gender Studies." The report notes quite accurately that many of the challenges facing our department are a direct consequence of our strengths, and point to the costs of sustaining our excellence with a small group of faculty, several of whom have significant responsibilities to other units on campus. The committee also notes that our situation is not dissimilar from many other Women Studies departments in the U.S. We appreciate the committee's recognition that the challenges facing us are primarily structural; long-term responses to these challenges will require not only internal ingenuity but also institutional commitments.

The committee frames its recommendations in terms of the overall challenge of sustainability: how can we "continue to balance all we are doing, maintaining our high standards for teaching, advising, service, mentoring; developing new initiatives for research and scholarly publication; continuing our contributions to the leadership of the College, the University, and our broad and diverse communities; and maintaining our cutting edge interdisciplinary graduate and undergraduate programs?" Sustainability is also a key theme in our own self-study. We are confident that we can not only sustain our excellence in these

key areas of any academic department, but indeed that we can grow in creative ways through adopting many of the suggestions offered in this report as well as pursuing some of our own ideas for our future growth. On that positive note, we are delighted to report our recent news that Women Studies has won the GPSS "Gold Star Department Award." The announcement lauds the department as "a small department that has truly learned to 'do more with less'" and commends our program for our "efforts to create an environment where their graduate students will thrive academically and emotionally" and our "intensive student-professor collaboration at all levels, decision-making processes that allow for a meaningful student voice" and as being a "department in which our academic work and our community activism are very closely intertwined."

Cultivating our research culture: The committee has observed that some of the faculty are frustrated by lack of time for scholarship in terms of ongoing research, time for developing new research projects, and writing the grants that will support new research directions. The committee correctly identifies that the causes of this dilemma are common to Women Studies (as well as to other new and interdisciplinary fields): the first generation of scholars has devoted exceptional energy to creating a new department, a new field of inquiry, a new national organization, a new community of scholars. We concur about the causes and recognize that it is time for creative response.

The committee recommends more aggressive use of research quarters and sabbaticals and suggests the deans should grant discretionary authority to the Department Chair to urge productive use of research quarters by all WS faculty. We endorse this suggestion and have already scheduled several faculty for research quarters in the coming academic year. With such a small number of faculty, it can be challenging to balance our curricular needs with the clear need for research time; continuing support from the Dean's Office to allow us to use PTLs to supplement our course offerings will continue to be critical. In terms of sabbaticals, the report implies that faculty have not been using sabbaticals for which they are eligible. Our records suggest that with one or two exceptions, all of the department faculty have successfully applied for and taken sabbaticals when they have become eligible for them; we will, of course, continue this practice, recognizing how critical sabbaticals are for our research productivity. The report also urges faculty to support each other's research and scholarly publication through the formation of writing groups; in fact, a number of the faculty already participate in such groups and intend to continue their participation. The graduate program itself is also serving as a stimulus for faculty scholarship. One of our associate professors has recently submitted two grants for seed funding for collaborations with two of our graduate students. There is other recent grant activity as well: another associate professor has applied for external grant support to focus on her book in progress; two others of our faculty are part of a collaborative research team that has applied for an NEH grant; a third associate professor has received external funding to continue her work with programs to facilitate access to college among first-generation students.

The committee also recommends the initiation of research colloquia focusing on faculty research. We have already begun significant efforts in this direction. During the current year, for example, we have sponsored on average one colloquium every week, including the inauguration of a new feminist lectureship; the inaugural lecture was given by Dr. Rosemarie Garland Thomson, one of the most prominent scholars in feminist disability studies. Several of these colloquia have featured not only the research of our faculty, but also collaborations between our faculty members and our graduate students. We also co-sponsored a Danz Lecturer this year (Trinh Minh-ha), and recently learned that our two nominations of Walker-Ames Lecturers for the coming two years were approved (Evelynn Hammonds and Linda Tuhiwai Smith), as were two co-sponsored Walker-Ames nominees (Michael Schudson and Joy James). In addition, Rayna Green has just accepted an invitation to come to the UW campus next year as a Stice Lecturer sponsored by Women Studies. We recognize the value of such colloquia and lectureships for both the invigoration of our faculty and the training of our graduate students.

The committee also points to what it perceived to be a less than fully equitable distribution of service, advising, teaching, and mentoring work and connected (at least indirectly) the distribution of such activities to the differential progress toward promotion among the associate professors in the department. This is a complex dynamic. As we articulated in our self-study, almost half our faculty have responsibilities to other units on campus. This leaves extremely few degrees of freedom with which to meet basic departmental needs. There are, to be sure, differential levels of participation in department business. The basic teaching load, however, is identical for all of our faculty. Because of the differential circumstances of their various appointments, they do not all teach the same numbers of courses in Women Studies, but the overall course loads (or administrative loads in some cases) reflect the same workload expectations. And, some of the faculty's courses are cross-listed with other departments, further complicating the assessment of contributions to Women Studies. Similarly, the basic service expectation is similar across the faculty; for the most part, variations in how much service/committee work is devoted to the department are accounted for by commitments to other UW units. We have begun to systematize our expectations, instituting a systematic rotation among required and other key courses in our curriculum, such that all faculty are expected to teach these courses on a regular basis.

We do want to clarify several related points raised in the report that seemed to us misleading. The report suggests we have a two-tier teaching system in which the introductory course is "taught only by a senior lecturer, part-time lecturers, or graduate students, but never by the tenured or tenure-track faculty." Tenured and tenure-track faculty have taught this course in past years, but it is quite true that the course is now regularly taught by our senior lecturer. We want to be very clear that this is by her choice; our senior lecturer is skilled at and enjoys teaching large classes and seeks to expand the size of her courses when possible. She was nominated for the Distinguished Teaching Award this year and has frequently consulted in teaching workshops on working with large classes. This is her forte and both she and we, and most importantly, our students, profit from this. The report also suggests that "the heaviest advising of students falls disproportionately on the shoulders of an assistant professor." Again this is not accurate. In terms of overall numbers of both graduate and undergraduate students (not to mention our advising work with students in other departments, which virtually all of our faculty also do on a regular basis), the numbers of students per faculty member are more broadly distributed than this statement implies. It is definitely true that a disproportionate number of new graduate students seek to work with this faculty member, one of a number of indicators of our need for another faculty line in transnational feminisms.

We agree completely that equitable distribution of workload is critical for a healthy and humane department. Recognizing that advising and mentoring loads are not entirely equally distributed, we may want to devise some broader system of workload distribution, so for example, if one is doing less advising, that would imply more committee work and vice versa. Because most of the apparent inequities are due to the responsibilities some of our faculty owe to other units, this points to just how critical it is that future lines be devoted in their entirety to our department, rather than to divide faculty time among multiple units.

The committee also observes that losses of faculty lines over the past five years or so have had serious effects and that the addition of new faculty will help sustain and intensify the research culture of the department. We could not agree more. While recognizing the policy of the current Dean's office that lines do not "belong" to departments, we also experience on a daily basis the detrimental effects of lost lines that are not replaced. These effects are felt in our scholarship, our teaching, our advising, our committee service. We have lost two of four lines in one of our core scholarly areas, transnational feminisms, and will lose another to retirement in June 2004. In a small department, these losses are felt especially keenly. Thus we concur heartily with the committee's recommendation that the college devote a minimum of one, and preferably two, faculty lines to Women Studies. We recognize fully the current budgetary constraints; these will not last forever, however, and some degree of hiring will continue even in these difficult times.

Increasing graduate student funding: Again, we are in complete agreement that increasing financial support for our graduate students is extremely important. The committee offers three suggestions, one focusing on the addition of TA quarters, one on the generation of RA support, and a third is to regulate graduate admissions.

We see two distinct issues here, one of which concerns competitiveness for graduate recruitment and a second concerns funding for current students. Being able to offer multiple year funding packages will be increasingly critical to sustaining our competitive edge in attracting new graduate students. We have done extremely well to date, losing relatively few of the students we have admitted to larger funding packages offered from other institutions. However, we do lose such students and those numbers are increasing each year as more Ph.D. programs in Women Studies are established. (Some of the students we lose decide to join disciplinary departments, rather than Women Studies departments elsewhere; their decision frames include not only financial concerns but also issues about disciplinarity.) We apply for all the UW Fellowships and Research Assistantships offered by the Graduate School, but these are woefully inadequate to our needs (and the needs of many other departments on campus). We do recognize that the Graduate School is doing all it can to expand this type of support, and we encourage them to continue their efforts.

In terms of funding our current students, it is important to note that with one exception (an exception based on academic, rather than financial, credentials), all of our students have successfully secured funding every quarter they have been in our graduate program. As the program grows, the pressure intensifies, but to date, no one judged to be academically meritorious has gone without funding. Some of this funding is through the department, primarily with TA support, and occasionally with RA support. We have just shifted our 50% GSA Advisor position to go to one of our own graduate students, which will provide two years of funding for the student in this position. Some of our students' funding is through TA support from other departments, most often American Ethnic Studies and the CHID program, as well as the IWP program. Some of the funding comes from RA positions our students have found either in Women Studies or in other units. The Women Studies faculty do all we can to make sure our students know about such opportunities and are competitive for them. We also note that our students are progressing successfully through the program; as of the current quarter, four of our 15 students will have completed their exams and become doctoral candidates. As we note in the self-study, we have only lost to attrition a single student of the 16 admitted to the graduate program. Given that typical attrition rates in doctoral programs approach 50%, this is a strikingly successful record.

There are both advantages and disadvantages to these funding patterns. It is very important for their professional futures that our students gain teaching experience in Women Studies. Indeed, virtually all of them do have this experience, both as TAs and, as their skills develop, as instructors of their own classes. (Our standard first year funding package includes two quarters of TA support and one quarter of RA support.) The report hints that our students may not have access to this experience, but with the one exception mentioned above, they all have had and will have Women Studies teaching experience. Moreover, as our graduate program grows, the percentage of our summer curriculum taught by WS graduate students has grown steadily; summer offers an ideal opportunity for our students to try teaching on their own. There are also advantages to our students gaining experiences in other departments and research groups, especially given the interdisciplinary character of Women Studies. Serving as a TA in American Ethnic Studies, for example, has provided invaluable depth to one of our students whose scholarly interests are in African American women's history. The challenge is in ensuring a coherence to our students' overall professional training. One of our plans for the coming biennium is to establish a professional development training course that will run throughout the academic year; such a program would help ensure this coherence.

The committee suggests that we consider approaching other units on campus to ask them to commit fixed allocations of TA quarters to Women Studies students on a regular basis. We are certainly willing to do this, but our sense is that the departments mentioned in the

report do not have unfilled TA positions. In conjunction with preparation of our self study we have tried to identify the rationales for the numbers of TA quarters regularly allotted to various social science departments. The responses underscore that Women Studies has not enjoyed similar advantages in central funding for TA quarters that longstanding departments have enjoyed. (The committee characterizes these patterns as "somewhat discriminatory against Women Studies"; we do not read this as deliberate discrimination so much as the accretions of history that are often difficult to dislodge.) In any event, increasing the allocation of TA quarters to our own department, rather than opening TA positions in other departments for our own graduate students, would be more consistent with the committee's observation that our own WS students are better served acting as TAs in WS courses than in courses in other departments. The committee also suggests that faculty consider increasing undergraduate course enrollments to justify allocation of more TA positions. We have several faculty very willing to do this; indeed we intend to do just this in the coming AY. At the same time, we need to be certain that there will be TA positions allotted to us for these larger course enrollments. If those positions are forthcoming, we do have faculty willing to increase their course sizes.

We agree with the committee that generating RA support through grants is also highly desirable, and our faculty are taking steps to increase the number of such positions. Several of the grants mentioned above include RA quarters in their budgets, and we are optimistic that these grants will be funded. In the longer term, establishment of a comprehensive feminist research center would allow us the infrastructure with which to routinely apply for grant support and sustain a broad research culture.

The third recommendation is that we consider regulating admissions, perhaps admitting new students every other year rather than annually. This is an idea we have considered as well; indeed, some of our faculty have argued for several years that we should grow more slowly until such time as graduate student funding packages are more substantial. This is an ongoing debate that we have not yet resolved. The committee suggests that this would stretch existing resources further, which implies we could offer our core graduate courses every other year rather than annually. The loss here would be to the College, since the majority of students in these graduate courses are from other departments; some of them are earning Graduate Certificates in Women Studies, others are simply taking advantage of our feminist curriculum. We are also concerned that moving to a biennial admissions plan would slow prematurely the momentum of our graduate program; there may be an optimal size to the graduate program that will stabilize once we begin to graduate students with their PhDs. Our initial conception was that the graduate program would have approximately 20-25 students; at 18 this coming fall, we are beginning to approach this size. In any event, we take this suggestion seriously and will continue to debate this possibility. To some extent this is an empirical question; if in the future our students are no longer able to find sufficient funding, and/or we are unable to fill the upcoming faculty losses, we need to consider very seriously limiting the size of the program.

Rethink existing structures and resources: The committee suggests that we develop official "articulations" with other departments and units on campus. We are in the process of doing just this, which is one institutionalized way of taking advantage of our stellar adjunct faculty. As one example, we have six adjunct faculty in the Department of Anthropology; we are working closely with them to write an agreement of reciprocal exchange of resources. We note that we have long collaborated with our adjunct faculty and relevant social science departments, cross-listing many of our courses, encouraging our students to take courses taught by our adjunct faculty, even having several of our adjuncts regularly teach courses in our own curriculum. Given the increasing demands placed on all departments and faculty, however, it is now useful to formalize and expand these relationships.

Last year we conducted an in-depth survey of our adjunct faculty in conjunction with the kind of efforts suggested here; we sought to identify their current courses and research, in order to make sure our own faculty and students have up to date information about the depth and breadth of the UW feminist academic community. We have considered asking

adjuncts to make a more explicit commitment to advise one senior thesis per year, if asked, to admit a percentage of our students into their classes, and so forth. We have also been more active in inviting our adjunct faculty to share their research with us; as one example, we convened a panel last fall at which a variety of our adjunct faculty talked about research centers with which they are affiliated. Similar efforts are underway to identify and share information about relevant qualitative methods courses available on campus.

The committee speculates about the possibility of asking some WS adjunct faculty to move part or all of their lines into WS; they comment also on having current WS faculty shift joint positions to full-time lines in the department. In fact there is only one joint appointment in the department; although we have discussed this possibility, there are advantages to joint appointments, both for the faculty member in question and for both departments. These are complex and, as the committee report acknowledges, sensitive courses of action. We recognize that in some circumstances this could be a positive way of enhancing our resources and we are open to this possibility, but at the same time, we do not want to take steps that could be viewed as "cannibalizing" other departments. If we identify faculty who are enthusiastic about such a move and whose presence in WS would be consistent with our own missions and goals, we will certainly consider such arrangements. In addition, we would be interested in participating with other departments in cluster hires of appropriate faculty as such opportunities arise. The kinds of articulations we are pursuing with other units and continuation of the arrangements we already have with some of our adjuncts who teach WS courses and/or regularly admit WS students to their classes, are ways to connect with our adjunct faculty without transfer of institutional lines. The report suggests that we more aggressively pursue collaborative grant writing opportunities and/or working specific funding requests into larger grants by other area programs and centers, and we concur that this would be a very positive direction.

In thinking about the directions of our future growth, the committee alludes to some concerns among our faculty about the respective strengths of and growth in the department in terms of U.S. diversity studies and studies of transnational feminisms. We would be remiss to not acknowledge tension about these issues; this tension is found in virtually every Women Studies Department in existence, and certainly in those with Ph.D. programs. Because we do have substantial strength in both arenas, we see ourselves as uniquely positioned to bridge these fields, conceptualizing analytic and political connections across international and intranational indigenous communities and movements. We note that the hiring needs we identify throughout our self-study include both critical race theory and transnational feminisms; the tension the committee observes, and our capacity to develop these kinds of analytic connections, will be best served by hiring scholars in both of these fields. At our planning retreat for preparation of the self-study we agreed to hold annual retreats to assess our goals for each coming year. Discussion of this issue will be one of the key themes at our 2003 fall retreat.

The committee also recommends that the department "recognize the National Women Studies Association" as a resource for the graduate program, and for other departmental programs. We have had a very active relationship with the NWSA; our faculty have regularly attended and presented their work at the NWSA annual meetings. At the coming NWSA meeting this June our students are presenting two panels on department projects in collaboration with each other and with several of our faculty, and others are doing individual presentations. The Chair and Graduate Program Coordinator will also be meeting with representatives from the other Ph.D.-granting Women Studies departments to discuss our progress and challenges for the future. We have sponsored the attendance of our undergraduate students at NWSA conferences as well. NWSA is itself in the process of professionalizing; we have been and intend to remain central in these conversations.

Reorganization of staff: The committee recommends that the existing Program Assistant position be converted into a Program Coordinator (the classified equivalent of a professional Graduate Program Assistant) who would focus on the graduate program. They suggest that work-study students could cover some of the duties currently performed by this PA. We

would endorse this move, if and only if we are given at least a 50% additional staff line for an Office Assistant position. The (newly hired) person who now holds the PA position is exceptional; she has already begun to take on responsibilities we have not heretofore assigned to this position. A work-study student would not be an appropriate replacement for much of what the current PA does for the department. Clearly the PA could do much more to support the graduate program if her time allowed, and we would very much like to expand the support she gives to the graduate program. As the graduate (at least) Office Assistant position. The report notes that our Administrator has creatively upgraded and professionalized the physical space of the department, which is entirely true. She is also a critical contributor to the welcoming social space and culture of the department. She is continually reworking the allocation of tasks to staff, both to take full advantage of the talents of our new PA and also in response to the ever-changing administrative tasks and demands of the university. We feel very fortunate to have both of our full-time staff, both of whom are remarkably dedicated and conscientious individuals. Indeed, we have nominated our Administrator for the Distinguished Staff Award in recognition of her many talents.

Space: We cannot do more than enthusiastically endorse the recommendation that we need additional space. We now crowd 15 graduate students into a single office with four desks and in the fall the numbers will grow even more crowded, with 18 graduate students. Our conference room is small at best, and is used virtually constantly for committee meetings, faculty meetings, colloquia, research working groups, a writing center, and even for office hours for those of our faculty who do not have offices in Padelford. We do note with much appreciation that the College has recently provided us with funds to refurnish our conference room; and we have been able to completely retool both our undergraduate and graduate student computer networks with funding from the Student Technology Fee competition.

Other miscellaneous points:

- The committee suggests we have senior thesis students work in small groups organized according to shared research interests (or more likely, methodologies), to maximize the use of faculty time in advising theses. We have been engaged in an analysis and rethinking of the organization of the senior thesis requirement this year, and using small groups is one of the likely aspects of this reorganization.
- Although the committee does not make explicit recommendations about the training in methods our students need, we do want to comment briefly on this. We and the committee identify the need for more extensive methodological training. In the short term, we have identified several lower-level social science courses that we hope will provide a reasonable alternative. We have also identified a PTL who is contributing excellent training in this area, although our capacity to continue to provide this will depend on continued funding. At the graduate level we have incorporated advanced methodology courses in the interdepartmental articulations we are currently designing. These are stop-gap measures; in the long term, we seek to hire a scholar who can contribute not only to substantive areas such as critical race theory and transnational feminisms, but also to methodological training. We appreciate the committee's conviction that "issues of methods, feminist methodology, and feminist interdisciplinarity require both local and national attention within the field of Women Studies, for which the University of Washington could become a leader."
- The committee notes both pros and cons to having an Executive Committee. The review committee was clearly looking for any possible areas in which departmental work could be scaled back, and we appreciate that endeavor. At the same time, the Executive Committee is one of the less time-demanding committees in the department. Although its initial establishment was indeed for the purpose of transparency, the Chair has found the advice of this group to be exceedingly useful and is loathe to disband it. We note that when the review committee asked during

the site visit whether the Executive Committee was needed, all parties, graduate and undergraduate students, staff, and faculty representatives spoke to the value of the committee (the students noted that this is a valuable training activity). We take the larger point to be a continual search for streamlining our daily work, and we endorse that recommendation.

- The report indicates that the list of courses offered in other departments needs to be streamlined and brought up to date. This is inaccurate; we think the committee may have based this misperception on one of the appendices we included in our self-study that was intended to be illustrative, not an empirical listing. That appendix included a list of possible courses that could be included in the two new tracks for our undergraduate major; the illustrative list had been put together by a subcommittee of undergraduates working on the curricular revision committee. The full list of tracks and supporting courses is updated continually and is completely accurate, so far as we know.
- And finally, the committee suggests we should give up for the moment plans for time-consuming projects such as the applied MA option and the distance-learning plan. We agree. We recognize that we are stretched too thin at the moment to be able to undertake a time-consuming new curricular program that would be supplementary, not part of our core work. We will save these plans for a more resource-rich time in the future, so that we can concentrate our efforts on our core programs.

In concluding, the report notes that planning and goal-setting are required to "maintain and improve one of the top Women Studies programs in the country." This is the purpose of the fall departmental retreats we have agreed to hold each year. The committee has given us many excellent ideas to take up, in addition to the themes that are already under discussion. We deeply appreciate the committee's intensive work on our review, and we look forward to continuing that work well into the future.