



University of Pittsburgh

Women's Studies Program

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Dear Dean Cooper:

At its meeting on 26 April 2013, the Women's Studies Steering Committee discussed the possibility of a program name change and voted unanimously to request changing the current name to "Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies." A quorum of SC members was present at this meeting, and all members not present who requested absentee ballots received them and voted for this name.

A program name change should not be undertaken lightly. This vote followed on name change discussions held at three separate steering committee meetings over the course of the previous two years, and a multi-part consultative process in Spring 2013 designed to maximize inclusivity, transparency, and consensus-building.

In March and April, Professor Jean Ferguson Carr, the Program Director at that time, conducted a survey of opinions of five possible names (Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies; Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies; Gender and Women's Studies; Gender and Sexuality Studies; Gender Studies). The survey was sent to graduate and undergraduate students enrolled in our certificate programs and to all affiliated faculty. Results of the survey—including numerical rankings of these names as well as comments—were presented and discussed at the April Steering Committee meeting. As is always the case, this Steering Committee meeting was open to any interested party.

The Steering Committee believes that the proposed name reflects the current state of research at Pitt and in the academy better than the current name "Women's Studies."

There is a very large body of published work that falls under the umbrella term "gender studies," including cultural and historical definitions of how men and women are defined, and the relations between men and women ("the gender system"). The burgeoning areas of Masculinity and Men's Studies are also included under this term.

The inclusion of "sexuality" in the proposed name would reflect the very visible field of sexuality studies, including LGBTQ studies as well as studies of heterosexuality. In the past two decades, this area of inquiry has become its own identifiable discipline, often quite distinct from "gender studies."

Given the rich and lengthy history of "Women's Studies" at Pitt and in the academy, the Steering Committee believes that the phrase "Women's" should be maintained in the

program name. In addition, research on women and in feminist studies continues to be a crucial wing of gender studies.

The proposed name better reflects the content of our undergraduate and graduate curriculum as it already stands and as we envision it in coming years. Our undergraduate introductory course (for which we are also requesting a name change to match a new program name) includes sections on women/feminism, men/masculinity, sexuality, and the gender system. Our graduate core course ("Theories of Gender and Sexuality"), offered each year, also includes units on each of these topics. The remainder of our courses, as well as courses cross-listed in the program, cover these topics.

We believe that the proposed name change would send the message to all undergraduate and graduate students that the program is here to serve them.

For these same reasons, the names of our undergraduate and graduate certificates were changed in 2006 to include the same three terms (albeit in a slightly different order). Please note that we are simultaneously submitting a request to change the names of our undergraduate and graduate certificates to match the proposed program name (to A&S Undergraduate Council and to A&S Graduate Council).

If this request is approved, we would immediately notify all students enrolled in the program and all affiliated faculty of the new name.

Peer institutions with similar or identical names of programs or departments include: The Ohio State University (Dept. of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies), the University of Minnesota (Dept. of Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies), and the University of Pennsylvania (Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies Program).

We hope that this request can be considered in a timely manner as we are anxious to move forward with a new name.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns.

Respectfully submitted,



Todd W. Reeser
Professor of French and Director, Women's Studies Program

cc: Carol Mullen; A&S Associate Deans Blee, Knapp, and Twyning