DRAFT PROPOSAL: UNI Women’s & Gender Studies Program Structural Reorganization

As the previous two APRs of the Women’s and Gender Studies program have indicated (2005 and 2017), the present reporting structure of the program to the Provost is not working as effectively as it could be for guaranteeing its smooth operation and success. Currently, the structure for Women’s and Gender Studies requires reporting to the Deans of two colleges, CHAS and CSBS, while the budget oversight remains with the Provost, with whom the WGS Director rarely meets. We understand from previous inquiries that the reason Women’s and Gender Studies does not follow the traditional model of being housed in one college is historical rather than logical. The justification for continuing to place Women’s and Gender Studies in two colleges appears to be its interdisciplinary curriculum drawn from multiple colleges. It is clear, however, that all other interdisciplinary programs at UNI are placed under a single college, and they also draw their courses from multiple colleges; therefore, this reporting structure makes WGS unique in this regard, and not to its overall benefit. Indeed, it is a cumbersome and time-consuming arrangement that actually inhibits effective communication between the WGS Director and the department heads of the two main colleges from which the program draws its affiliate faculty. Despite the fact that the current Interim Director attends the heads meetings for both colleges, it is difficult for the Director to address program-specific concerns with individual department heads in this milieu. While this arrangement would seem to allow the Director to maintain positive relationships with the administrators from the two colleges, the current structure is ineffective for providing strong advocacy for the program within the University. More importantly, because we report to two Deans, it is not entirely clear which Dean needs to take responsibility for the program in certain situations, such as the allocation of adjunct funding on which the program relies heavily to staff courses which are essential to its minor and graduate program. The ideal model would place WGS within one college, which would also eliminate some administrative costs for the Deans by reducing the amount of oversight required to coordinate budget and allocations where the program is concerned. Changing the reporting structure would not necessarily change the budget sharing of the two colleges; monetary resources (i.e., for adjunct funds, release time, etc.) could still be shared. In the long run, this reassignment will reduce costs and identify stewardship of the program, thus officially granting the WGS program the status it deserves.

On January 22, 2018, the WGS Advisory Board voted unanimously to request that the Women’s and Gender Studies Program be housed in CSBS, after several semesters of discussing the potential benefits and pitfalls of such a move. Justifications for the move included the fact that the majority of our most active affiliate faculty come from CSBS; most of our current graduate students, especially those on the Applied Track, are working closely with them and the Center for Violence Prevention; and CSBS already houses several interdisciplinary programs and is primed to accommodate the unique needs of WGS. There are many other reasons for this request; the primary concern, however, is that we would like lines of communication and decision-making to be clearer and be in a better position to develop a good working relationship with one administrator who would advocate more strongly for the program. We hope that a plan can be worked out where the Director would report to the Dean of CSBS yet monetary resources could still be shared among the colleges, as mentioned above. The Program Director would continue to attend the heads meetings (ExCo meetings) for CSBS and regularly meet one-on-one with the Deans of both colleges from which the program draws the majority of its affiliate faculty (CHAS and CSBS), as is currently the case. In this way, they would be able to advocate for the program, solve problems, brainstorm, etc. with the Dean of CSBS and other department heads on a regular basis. One change, however, would be that the WGS Director would also attend a separate, semi-regular meeting (at least twice a semester) with the CHAS Dean and the heads of the departments in CHAS from which WGS draws its affiliate faculty, which would be scheduled by the Dean of CHAS. The purpose for this would be to inform the CHAS heads about WGS and to discuss faculty rotation for the core courses and cross listing of courses. This would also increase the program’s visibility to, and the Director’s rapport with, department heads, as well as keep the heads updated on the Women’s and Gender Studies program.

A fundamental need of the Women’s and Gender Studies program is to support a critical number of faculty who teach core WGS-related courses on a regular and predictable basis. Otherwise, the program’s curriculum has been—and remains—vulnerable to the willingness of the heads of other academic units to “lend” their faculty to teach WGS courses. Clearly UNI, like other universities, is facing budgetary constraints and has little extra funding to address some long term needs of the WGS program. Nevertheless, at the very least the program should be restructured to allow the directors of WGS to advocate for the program in a more efficient manner.