Proposal to Extend the Reinstatement or Elimination Date for the Women’s Studies Undergraduate Major and Graduate Specializations (Formerly Called Concentrations)

The current suspension proposal states: "The program will be considered for reinstatement or elimination by June 30, 2012." We propose the extension of the date for elimination of the above program components to Dec. 31, 2012. This will give us more time after our upcoming program evaluation to plan a way to retain program components while still returning centrally a significant sum of salary money now in our base budget. We advocate strongly for the retention of these components based on their importance to education for the 21st century and their cost effectiveness.

Importance of the Undergraduate Major: Much is made of making higher education relevant to the 21st century. The changing roles of women are central to those societal changes. Women’s Studies as a discipline has been central to increasing the numbers of women in science and technology, with its research on barriers to that participation, but more work is needed. The growth in the service economy, traditionally women’s work such as health care and social services, education, human resources, and legal services, has benefited from the participation in and reinterpretation of these careers by our Women’s Studies majors. Another feature of the U.S. in the 21st century is its diversity. We are the only major on campus that focuses on globalization and underrepresented groups; besides offering separate courses on Native American women, Franco-American women, and the LGBT community, we integrate diversity perspectives into all of our courses, a feature often remarked on in student evaluations of the courses and the major. Only three flagship campuses in the U.S. do not have a Women’s Studies major.

Cost Effectiveness of the Women’s Studies Undergraduate Major: Currently the Women’s Studies Program has only two full-time teaching staff; the remaining courses (from a long list) are faculty from departments or adjuncts at overload pay rates, a significant savings. This is not our choice, but we have built an amazing program from their expertise and commitment. Women’s Studies has a wonderful library and an extensive media collection, but otherwise no expensive equipment is required by the program. In addition, many of our total of 88 majors (67%) have graduated with a second major; together they have paid for 280 extra credit hours beyond the required 120.

Importance of the Graduate Specializations: Besides the features noted above, there are additional reasons to maintain these programs, offered to enhance both masters and doctoral degrees offered by other units. A number of these graduates have noted that they were hired over others because they could bring women’s perspectives to whatever the job required. Our graduate program is the only one in northern New England.

Cost Effectiveness of the Women’s Studies Graduate Specializations: The core of our graduate specializations is three 500-level courses. Several other units now use them for their students. Through August of this year 23 students have earned the specializations (8 doctoral and 15 masters). As for the undergraduate major, the faculty for this program are either Women’s Studies faculty or very qualified adjuncts.
Further information and development of these arguments are found in the attachments.