Women in the Curriculum and Women’s Studies Program

Response to Achieving Sustainability: APPWG Interim Report of March 24, 2010

The staff of the Women in the Curriculum and Women’s Studies Program of the University of Maine met with members of two of its committees on March 26 to discuss the APPWG interim report. We oppose and object to the elimination of the undergraduate major and the graduate concentrations in Women’s Studies as proposed in the report. Below we offer justification for their continuation and propose a cost-saving alternative that will return at least $75,000 to the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Included as appendices are information on offerings in Women’s Studies at other publicly funded, “flagship” universities in the country and a list of those who have earned our graduate concentrations.

Our Alternative Plan to the Proposed Cuts

An important justification for maintaining the Women’s Studies major and graduate concentrations is that they are very cost effective. Because we have only two full-time employees teaching and advising in Women’s Studies and the rest of our courses are taught by regular faculty paid overload rates or adjuncts (a very diverse and talented group at that), our cost per student credit hour is very low, one of the lowest in our college and, we expect, on the whole campus.

When asked how exactly the elimination of the Women’s Studies major and graduate concentrations would save the University money, the dean replied that whenever the director or the associate director left her position, she would not be replaced. Given their relative ages, it is more likely that the director will leave first, although she has not set a date for that action.

We propose that when that happens, instead of giving back the entire salary of the director ($81,650) and benefits ($42,376), we give back the equivalent of the associate director’s salary ($49,021) and benefits ($25,442). We also propose to end the WIC grants program, which is base budgeted at $9565. The remainder of the director’s salary added to that would make $42,194 plus the remaining benefits ($16,934). (After calls to several people in Human Resources, figures even for FY2011 don’t seem to be firm, so we used our budget figures for FY2010.)

We propose to phase in the hire of a new junior faculty member, with participation of a unit which would be her/his departmental home and which would contribute to the salary and benefits. This plan would be implemented over a couple of years as the director reduces her load. Most of the small difference in benefits is already in our base salary budget to cover the benefits for salaries in the section money line; this can be used because we will probably need at least one less section covered.
The current associate director (a professional employee on a 10.5-month appointment) would become the new director, a faculty member with a nine-month appointment plus one month of paid summer work. We are currently working on an arrangement for a departmental home for her in a unit that would contribute to her salary.

Not only will these changes mean the elimination of the WIC grants program, but also there will be changes in the public programming such as the WIC lunches and Women’s History Celebration. Either we will do them less frequently, or other faculty and staff committed to Women’s Studies will take more of a role in managing that work. This will be necessary to provide the two faculty members the time necessary to teach a course or two a year in their departmental homes.

We would put these conditions on the plan. One, when the associate director leaves her position, she will be replaced with a full-time faculty member. Two, the program will continue to employ our administrative assistant full-time in Women’s Studies.

Further Justification for Continuing the Major and Graduate Concentrations

1. Much has been made in the APPWG document and elsewhere with respect to the need for higher education in general, and the University of Maine in particular, to prepare students to work in the new economy of the 21st century. This is often interpreted as training in science and technology, especially in new and environmentally sustainable ways. It is important that more women students choose this kind of work and find it hospitable. Such emphasis has been a major focus of Women’s Studies scholars, and indeed one of our double majors (with Mathematics) is planning a career in the area of facilitating women’s employment in science and technology fields.

2. What hasn’t been much a part of UM’s discussion is where the rest of the future labor market is heading. The growing service economy relies on work that has traditionally been women’s work but is badly in need of new 21st century perspectives. These areas of employment are often focused on women and children: health care and other social services, education, human resources, and legal services. The participation in and reinterpretation of these kinds of careers have been strong points of the Women’s Studies majors we have graduated since the program was approved in 1998. (Note letters submitted by Women’s Studies alumnae.)

3. Maine is one of the least diverse states in the country, and yet even Maine is seeing changes in its demographics. In addition, Maine’s continued economic vibrancy will depend on succeeding in the global market. UM students will have to work with a wider diversity of people in this expanding global economy. The contents of our major and graduate concentrations already are widely known for their diversity of all kinds—not just gender but race, class, ethnicity, age, religion, and nationality. These issues are not only the subject of specialized
courses on topics such as women and globalization, Native American women, and Franco-American women, but they are also infused into the other courses, from the introductory course to the senior seminar. Our majors often comment on how much more common such focus on diversity is in Women’s Studies than in other courses they have taken.

4. In addition, within the last five years Women’s Studies has been approved as a concentration in the International Affairs major. Not only can IA students specialize in Women’s Studies, but all IA majors have to take WST 101, Introduction to Women’s Studies, and also one of two other globally focused Women’s Studies courses.

5. There are also other 21st century innovations in higher education in general, areas in which Women's Studies has already made a name for itself. One area is that our majors are required to demonstrate some participation in active learning related to the major—internships, campus projects, volunteer activities, and summer work. We also have a very substantial number of our courses offered online, increasing the breadth of the material offered and the number of students who can participate. (One third of the Fall 2010 courses will be online.)

6. Virtually every flagship university in the country offers an undergraduate Women’s Studies major. Without the major we would join only Alaska, Montana and S. Dakota—company we don’t want to keep. Also with the loss of the Women’s Studies major at the University of Maine, Farmington last spring, the only other major available in the UM System is at the University of Southern Maine. We can’t expect USM to meet the needs of Women’s Studies majors in the whole state. Not only is it located more than two hours away, it has a very different student body and a very different curriculum in general than we do. While we do have a significant number of online courses, they have very few, making it unreasonable to expect that our students could earn the USM Women’s Studies major. In addition, many of our students are double majors, using the Women’s Studies major to deepen their expertise in traditional majors, some of which may not be available at USM. The Women’s Studies major enables our students to deepen their programs of study and add to them dimensions of gender which are now being recognized as crucial to understanding social issues.

7. Our graduate concentration in Women’s Studies is the only one in the state, in fact the only one in northern New England. (USM has a few approved graduate courses, but their plan for a masters program has yet to become operational.) Since our campus is supposed to be the premier graduate institution in the state, we should be the campus offering a graduate certificate in Women’s Studies. A number of graduate students have come to the University specifically to take advantage of the Women’s Studies concentration; it has also enriched the work of students already working on graduate degrees here. (Again, see letters from concentrators.)

8. Our Women’s Studies Committee and the WIC Advisory Committee, which oversees all of our program components, earlier this semester has just
discussed and approved the change of our name to Women’s and Gender Studies. This is a step in the direction of further emphasizing our degree-granting programs over the curriculum transformation work started in 1980. The change is to be implemented by September, the beginning of the next academic year, and will be a further step in the direction recommended by our external review committee in 2004. (The review committee was made of three eminent scholars from institutions whose Women’s Studies departments we revere: University of Maryland, Ohio State University, and Duke University.)

9. Not only was this name change approved to highlight the Women’s Studies part of the program, but the term Gender Studies was added to recognize the further inclusion of the study of gender diversity. (We already house WST 103, Introduction to LGBT Studies, but we have also approved for credit towards our major and minor such courses as SOC 329, Sociology of Gender, CMJ 475, Sexualities in Mass Communication, and ENG 481, Literature, Gender, and Gender Theory.) The Maine Human Rights Commission recently implemented new standards with regard to gender. Their action reflects a trend toward responding to the public demand to pay attention to gender issues. Women’s Studies is the only major on our campus which includes this focus on gender.

Further Comments

While there may be some unknowns in this plan at present and it will not yield the entire director’s salary and benefits, we think we have already given back proportionately more than most units.

1. In FY 2010 we lost the equivalent of half of our administrative assistant’s salary and benefits ($14,093 + $6948), which is 7% of our base budget for salaries.

2. For FY 2011, although nothing was cut from our base budget by the dean, when the college took over the Section Project, we lost two of the four sections of WST 101 that had been funded for several years by that money (@$7,000). Other units also lost sections, but we suspect not 50% of theirs. Furthermore, the $10,000 that the Vice President for Research has given our program to fund the graduate sections since the program’s inception in 2000 will be reduced to $5000. It will be eliminated entirely in FY 2012 and beyond.

Conclusion

We think that this is a plan that can preserve the Women’s Studies major and graduate concentrations, while contributing at least our share to the budget reductions. If you have any questions, please contact Ann Schonberger, Director of the Women in the Curriculum and Women’s Studies Program (581-1228).