

March 13, 2020

**Memorandum**

To: Thomas Holyoke  
Chair, Academic Senate

From: Larissa M. Mercado-Lopez,  
Associate Professor, Women's Studies Program

Subject: Request for Department Status

I am writing this memo to submit a request for reclassification and a name change. Beginning in Fall 2020, the Women's Studies Program seeks to be classified as a department under the name Department of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. Enclosed is our rationale and a memo of support from Dean Michelle DenBeste

## **Request for Reclassification and Name Change**

This request is twofold: 1) to request that the Women's Studies Program (from here forward, "the Program") be reclassified as a department and 2) to change the Program's name from Women's Studies Program to Department of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. According to APM 113, potential departments must demonstrate that the projected full-time equivalent faculty in the proposed department will be at least seven of whom at least five will be full-time probationary and tenured faculty. In 2017, the Program made two tenure-track hires, which raised the Program faculty to that threshold. Additionally, the Program satisfies all criteria for establishing department status as outlined in APM 113. The Program moves forward on seeking reclassification with the approval and support of all core and affiliated faculty within the program, other departments within the College of Social Sciences (COSS), and the COSS Dean and Associate Dean.

### **Rationale**

The Program currently operates as a department, with a program coordinator, faculty, major and minor degree programs, administrative assistant, and annual budget. Thus, this will be a cost-neutral change with no interruption to faculty workload or student degree progress. A change from program to department more accurately reflects both the structure and function of the Program as it stands today. Moreover, the name change will also more accurately reflect the breadth of expertise in the department and aligns with how many Women's Studies programs are named within and outside the California State University (CSU) system.

### **Background**

Women's Studies began offering courses at Fresno State in 1971, making it one of the oldest Women's Studies programs in the country. In 1980s, students had the opportunity to become Women's Studies minors, and the major was then approved in 1998. Since its inception in the 1970s, the Program has undergone significant growth, offering courses throughout the GE pattern, cross-listing courses with departments across campus, providing critical and substantial service to both the university and community, and contributing meaningfully to Women's and Gender studies and other interdisciplinary fields. The tenure/tenure-track faculty in Women's Studies have expertise in feminist methods and theory grounded within a number of areas of expertise, including American Indian Studies, Anthropology, Chicana Studies, English, Ethnic Studies, History, Legal Studies, Political Science, and Queer Studies.

Currently, the Program houses a major and a minor, both of which have undergone significant revision to move students into non-GE Women's Studies courses that reflect the current scholarly and professional fields associated with WGS, and to more strongly reflect the faculty's areas of expertise. New WS courses continue to be added to both the WS and GE course offerings.

Additionally, Women's Studies courses count toward electives in a number of majors, including Sociology, Chicano and Latin American Studies, American Indian Studies, Business, English, Political Science, Social Work, and Public Health. WS courses also fulfill requirements for certificate programs, including Alcohol/Drug Studies, Cross-Cultural Competency, Global Awareness, Legal Studies, Racial Understanding, Social Justice and Social Change, and Victim Services.

The Program has enjoyed healthy, stable numbers these past five years in terms of majors, minors, and course offerings. Clearly, the Program contributes a great service to the university and students by offering 15+ GE and M/I courses per semester, supporting students' degree progress. The change to department status should help to continue elevating these numbers.

Term	# of TT faculty	# of majors	# of minors	# GE sections offered	#M/I sections offered	# other sections	total # of sections offered
Spring 2015	4	39	7	11	5	3	19
Fall 2015	4	47	9	12	5	8	25
Spring 2016	4	46	9	12	5	9	26
Fall 2016	4	45	14	15	4	9	28
Spring 2017	4	42	14	12	5	9	26
Fall 2017	5	45	15	12	7	9	28
Spring 2018	5	44	16	12	7	8	27
Fall 2018	5	42	15	11	8	7	26
Spring 2019	5	39	15	11	4	10	25
Fall 2019	5	34	12	10	7	4	21

### Visibility and Contribution

The Program's visibility in the CSU system and contribution to the field is evident in some of the Program's more recent student-centered accomplishments, including organizing the first annual CSU-wide Gender, Race, and Sexuality Conference and the inaugural Native American Women's Leadership Summit. The Program faculty also mentor dozens of students through successful applications for the McNair Scholars Program, the Sally Casanova Pre-Doctoral Award, the Moore Undergraduate Research Apprentice Program (MURAP) at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, the Michigan Humanities Emerging Research Scholars (MICHHERS) program, the UN Commission on the Status of Women Practicum in Advocacy, and doctoral program fellowships. The creation of the conference is of particular significance, as it has been instrumental in positioning Women's Studies at Fresno State as a leading program among WS programs in the CSU. Women's Studies also engages critically across the broad spectrum of WGS fields. The Native American Women's Leadership Summit (NAWLS) exemplifies the Transnational reach of the faculty and the incorporation of Native American feminism in the curriculum and events.

Additionally, the Program has engaged students in community-transforming work through opportunities to intern and learn research and advocacy skills through Planned Parenthood, Rape Counseling Services of Fresno, and Faith in the Valley, as well as through faculty-supervised projects on queer oral narratives and LGBTQ health. A larger number of students have also been able to create change in their communities through the Program's two service-learning courses, where students created a transgender housing report and helped launch the Lil Bulldog Boutique, a children's clothing closet.

## **Faculty Contributions**

As part of our commitment to the growth and development of the field, our faculty continues to publish and engage with professional and activist organizations.

Assistant Professor Dr. Katherine Fobear's work in queer studies is published in *The Journal of Homosexuality* (2012), *Women's Studies International Forum* (2017), *Journal of Human Rights Practice* (2016), and *Refuge* (2016). She serves on the board of Trans-E-Motion and Qistory. She is currently undertaking a community-based LGBTQ+ Health Assessment project with the Fresno's EOC LGBTQ+ Resource Center to document barriers to healthcare access.

Professor Dr. Kathryn Forbes's prior research explores the articulations of gender, race, and class in US public policy and law with particular attention to employment, education, policing, and urban renewal. Her publications appear in *NWSA Journal*, *Feminist Formations*, *Feminism and Philosophy*, *Human Organization*, as well as in a variety of popular media sources. She has served as the Faculty Rights Chair for the California Faculty Association. She has been awarded the Provost's Medal of Service, a Fulbright Fellowship, and she served as co-investigator on grants

from Housing and Urban Development and as principal investigator on numerous institutional grants. She serves on the boards of the National Lawyers Guild and Fresno Barrios Unidos.

Professor Loretta Kensinger's academic interests are in Feminist political theory, activism and history. Dr. Kensinger is co-editor, with Dr. Penny Weiss, of *Feminist Interpretations of Emma Goldman* (Penn State University Press). Her articles have appeared in *Feminist Teacher*, *The Journal of International Women's Studies*, and *Hypatia*. She has taken an active role in campus leadership, including coordinating the Fresno State Women's Studies Program (2004-2011) as well as serving in a number of roles for the Fresno Chapter of the California Faculty Association and on the Fresno State Faculty Senate. Dr. Kensinger's academic passion is in the undergraduate classroom and she has been honored with the College of Social Science *Outstanding Teacher Award*.

Assistant Professor Dr. Leece Lee-Oliver's work intersects the fields of Women, Gender, and Critical Race Theory, with expertise in American Indian and Transnational Feminisms. Her recent work is published in *Recasting the Disney Princess* (Lexington, 2020), *Queer Migrations* (Univ. Illinois, 2020), as co-editor of and author in the acclaimed *Ethnic Studies Review Fifty Years of Ethnic Studies: Foundations, Challenges, and Opportunities* (UC Press, December 2019), and in *Global Raciality: Empire, Postcoloniality, Decoloniality* (Routledge, 2018). Leece is currently the lead research advisor to the Dunlap Band of Mono Indians, on the federal recognition petition, and organizer of the DBMI oral history project. She created and operates a mentorship/retention program for American Indian students, and serves as Fresno State and CSU Chancellor's representative on the Chancellor's Native American Initiative, a Graduation 2025 initiative. Leece also serves as Vice President on the Board of Directors for the Fresno American Indian Health Project.

Associate Professor Dr. Larissa Mercado-Lopez's work is published in journals within Chicana/Latina Studies and Higher Education Studies, and she is co-editor of seven anthologies within Chicana and literary studies. Additionally, she is Book Review Editor for *Chicana/Latina Studies Journal* and is a Senior Editor for the National Center for Institutional Diversity's Public Scholarship Initiative. She is currently collaborating with faculty across the CSU to collect data on students with dependents. Dr. Mercado-Lopez's honors include the Provost's Award for Promising New Faculty and 2018 Emerging Scholar (Diverse Education Magazine).

## **APM Criteria and Evidence of Satisfaction**

According to APM 113, in order to establish and maintain an academic department, it shall be demonstrated that the new department fulfill specific criteria. Below are the criteria as outlined in the APM and evidence of how the Program satisfies the criteria.

A. The academic scope of the department represents a discrete and clearly defined discipline wherein

1. There exists a substantial body of knowledge unique to the area concerned

**Since the 1960s, Women's Studies has existed as an academic discipline. Interdisciplinary in nature, WS draws from multiple academic traditions, employing a variety of methods and methodologies, but is grounded in principles of social justice, anti-oppression, and gender equity.**

2. There exists recognized national, professional, academic, or occupational societies and/or organizations related to the academic scope of the department

**The National Women's Studies Association is the primary Women's Studies professional organization with a membership of over 350 institutional members and 3,000 individual members, including the Program's faculty, most of whom present regularly at the annual meeting. Additionally, Women's and Feminist Studies constituent groups exist within most academic professional organizations across disciplines. Professional organizations that work alongside and build off the work of Women's Studies include the National Organization for Women (NOW), Feminist Majority Foundation, American Association of University Women, National Women's History Project, and the Institute for Women's Policy Research, to name a few.**

3. Accreditation (if appropriate) is in force or in the process of being established.  
**Does not apply.**

B. The department will better provide proper and adequate nurturing for the academic scope than the structure under which it presently functions.

**Departmental status will help Fresno State maintain its national leadership in the field of Women's Studies, allowing it to keep up with trends of programs moving into departmental status within the CSU. Further, departmental status may help both advisors and students better recognize the potential for majoring in the field, helping us sell the major to a wider audience by giving it a recognizable departmental form within the the university structure. Additionally, department status will help maintain the Program's ability to recruit top faculty from around the country by signaling to potential faculty the long-term university wide commitment to Women's Studies within the CSU.**

C. The program of the proposed department will make an integral and significant contribution to the university's academic mission; it offers a viable degree; and that it advances the programmatic needs of the college/school and university.

**The Women's Studies Program strongly supports the university's academic mission "To boldly educate and empower students for success" as well as supports its mission to promote diversity and inclusion which includes "broadening students' intellectual horizons, fostering lifelong learning skills, developing the leaders of tomorrow, promoting community involvement, and instilling an appreciation of world cultures," as well as "nurtur[ing] cultural competency." Through an array of courses that focus on the law, labor, health, sexuality, racialized communities, policy, domestic violence, etc., our students are equipped with the tools to be critical thinkers, advocates for equity and safety, transformational leaders, and culturally competent citizens. These courses are also vital to the programmatic needs of the college, as evidenced by our strong collaboration with departments and programs within our college. The faculty also provides research advising and mentorship to undergraduate and graduate students across numerous disciplines across campus. Additionally, our courses are vital to the programmatic needs of the university, as we provide 15+ GE and M/I courses each semester to support students' degree completion. Relatedly, Women's Studies has one of the highest retention rates in the university**

D. There exists strong evidence for the department's potential growth, vitality, and educational value.

**The department will continue to exhibit demonstrable growth, vitality, and educational value of the current program. Plans for the next five years include a hire in the fields of environmental studies and black feminist studies, which will attend to a curriculum gap and bring expertise in an area that is of particular importance to the Central Valley. The department will continue to build upon the more recently developed momentum related to student research and community advocacy, which is expected to result in positive recruitment trends. Additionally, faculty within the program are currently growing programs in American Indian Studies and Queer Studies which have positive growth implications for Women's Studies. Women's Studies has one of the highest rates of College and University awardees, and has demonstrated high success in undergraduate promotion to graduate school. Department status will support the recognition of our students in future graduate school applications.**

E. The projected full-time equivalent faculty in the proposed department will be at least seven of whom at least five will be full-time probationary and tenured faculty.

**Currently, the Program faculty includes 5 probationary and tenured faculty and full-time and part-time lecturers whose FTE's combine for a total of two full-time equivalent faculty. Further, the Program has successfully moved faculty through all professorial ranks, (Assistant to Associate; Associate to Full) showing recognition of our faculty contributions by the university, and the long term commitment of WS faculty to Fresno State. Current faculty exist at all tenuring levels (Full, Associate, Assistant) showing the potential for long-term stability of the faculty in the program.**