April 2, 2007

TO: Richard Sigurdson, Dean, Faculty of Arts

FROM: Janice Ristock, on behalf of the Women’s Studies Program

SUBJECT: PROGRAM NAME CHANGE

I am writing to seek your approval for officially changing the name of the Women’s Studies Program to the Women’s and Gender Studies Program. This change in name has been approved by a strong majority of the Women’s Studies Program Committee. (Further, the one dissenting member indicated that she would not stand in the way of allowing us to move forward with this change). In this letter I provide a rationale for making this program name change.

RATIONALE:

Introduction

Changing the name of the Women’s Studies Program (WSP) at the University of Manitoba is justified on two principal grounds. First, the WSP has undergone many changes in recent years due to the growth and development of its faculty and curriculum that has resulted from the participation of the Margaret Laurence Post-Doctoral fellows (held by Mona Okawa and then Liz Millward) and the recent appointment of a new tenure-track position (Liz Millward). The title “Women’s Studies Program” no longer accurately reflects the orientation of the program or the direction of the core curriculum taught by WSP faculty. The proposed new title, “Women’s and Gender Studies Program,” is more consistent with the orientation of the faculty and the evolving curriculum in the program which includes new special topics courses such as “Masculinities” and “Sex and Gender, Space and Place”. Further the name change better reflects several courses recently introduced by other Departments that have been cross-listed with the program such as, “Sex, Gender and Cultural Politics in the German Speaking world”, “Gender and Politics in Canada”, “Sociological Perspectives on Gender and Sexuality” and “Cultural Constructions of Gender in Canadian Aboriginal Societies”. Second, the title “Women’s and
Gender Studies Program" more accurately reflects the development in the field nationally and internationally in programs and departments at other accredited institutions. Changing the name, then, more correctly reflects both the specifics of our program and the general development of scholarship and research in the field.

The Women's Studies Program at the University of Manitoba

The University of Manitoba has offered a major in Women's Studies since 1987, (although it has been offering courses since approximately 1979). The program expanded in 1998 to offer an honours degree and an advanced major degree. While we do not have a graduate program we do offer directed reading courses at the graduate level. The Women's Studies Program is interdisciplinary in focus and has a core curriculum consisting of 24 core courses. The core faculty members include: Dr. Janice Dodd (.3 in WSP and .7 in Physiology), Dr. Cindy Donatelli, Dr. Susan Heald, Dr. Liz Millward and Dr. Janice Ristock. Currently Dr. Linda Wilson (Psychology) is the Acting-Coordinator. Through funding provided by the Margaret Laurence Endowment Fund we appoint a Post-Doctoral Fellow for a two year term every four years. The Women's Studies Program is also multidisciplinary and brings together studies of women, feminism and gender by specialists in different disciplines. Presently the WSP has 36 cross-listed courses offered by 12 Departments and by 3 Faculties outside of the Faculty of Arts.

The Field of Women's Studies

Women's Studies developed as a field of study in the late 1960s and early 1970s with the emergence of women's liberation movement(s) and feminism(s). Women's Studies is concerned with the feminist movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation and all forms of oppression based not only on sex/gender but ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, age, ability and class. Thus, the discipline of Women’s Studies is centred on the knowledge, experiences and theorizing of women about their lived realities and their analysis of the world around them. Further in the field of Women’s Studies gender is established as a fundamental category of social, cultural, and historical analysis. Studying the way that gender is socially constructed, then, is a project that is central to the area.

The field of Women's Studies has always had to be responsive to social, cultural and historical changes that affect women, gendered relations and the production of academic knowledge. In order to address the insights and shifts in feminist analysis over the last 25 years, the curriculum as well as the titles of Women’s Studies Departments, Centres and Programs are slowly changing to include new developments. Across Canada, for instance a number of Universities are offering gender studies courses and reflecting this growth in the titles of their degrees. Based on information from the Canadian Women’s Studies Association eight programs are changing their names to include Gender Studies. Dalhousie University, for instance, is in the process of modifying its undergraduate degree to include Gender Studies. Nipissing University, the University of British Columbia, Brandon University and the University of Winnipeg have
changed their undergraduate degree titles to reflect this shift, while graduate programs at the University of Northern British Columbia, the University of British Columbia and University of Toronto are offering graduate degrees in Women's Studies and Gender Studies. A number of Universities in the U.S. are also reflecting similar changes. For example Yale University's program has been renamed the Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies Program, the University of Berkeley has the Gender and Women's Studies Program, University of Minnesota the Gender, Women and Sexuality Studies Program and Cornell University has the Feminist, Gender and Sexuality studies program.

**Conclusion**

The title “Women's Studies Program” no longer reflects the ongoing direction of our developing curriculum, the interests of many of our students, and national and international trends in feminist scholarship and naming of academic units. Therefore the Women’s Studies Program Committee recommends that the Women’s Studies Program be renamed “Women’s and Gender Studies Program”. This change more accurately reflects the curriculum of our program and latest developments in the field and will allow us to continue to grow with our field of study. We would ideally like the new title to be effective as soon as possible and published in the next calendar (web-based and print). We therefore ask for your approval and advice on how to best proceed.