

To: Richard Back, Interim Dean, College of Liberal Arts & Science

From: Mary McCune, Director, Women's Studies Program

Re: Program Name Change

Date: September 4, 2013

Last June the Advisory Board of the Women's Studies Program voted to change the name of the program to Gender and Women's Studies. This emerged from the Program's Self Study conducted in the 2009-2010 academic year. There are a number of reasons to change the name of the program, some of which were addressed by the outside evaluator for the Program, Marilyn L. Mumford, Professor Emerita of English, Bucknell University. Dr. Mumford noted that "the so-called 'third stage' of feminism and/or women's studies dates from the social and political revolution of the 1960's, and in some circles is believed to continue to the present. But in many current theoretical discussions in the Women's (and Gender) Studies discipline, phrases like 'post-feminist' are often heard. Whatever terminology is used, it's clear that Women's Studies as an academic discipline is at least forty years old." Her recommendation to change the name of the program centered on updating the curriculum to reflect the advances made in the fields associated with gender questions and to, potentially, attract more students interested in gender and sexuality studies. Of the four-year SUNY colleges, eleven have made the change to include Gender and/or Sexuality in the name of their Women's Studies Programs and Departments.

Indeed, much of the work in the field of women's studies no longer focuses solely on "women". Gender and Women's Studies scholars interrogate the creation of gendered systems, the way gender is constructed and the ways in which people negotiate these gendered terrains. No longer focusing on "men" and "women," gender and queer theorists throughout the academy challenge the very notions that such distinct and immutable differences exist. They delve into how biologically-sexed bodies have been gendered throughout time, across cultures, and even within cultures. They explore the impact that gendered systems have on human society and the ways in which systems of gender intersect with other systems of dominance such as classism, racism, imperialism, heterosexism and cisgenderism. They de-center and question the very idea of what constitutes "normal" and "deviant" behaviors and identities. While often perceived as being an interdisciplinary field grounded primarily in the humanities and social sciences, scholars focusing on science and gender are also raising new questions, recreating paradigms of thought related to their fields, and re-formulating the very questions we ask of science.

Changing the name of the program will allow us to reflect the exciting new theories and scholarship that have emerged since the program's inception. It will also allow us to engage scholars on campus who are teaching from a gendered perspective but do not, perhaps, consider their courses as fitting into a "women's studies" program. This includes such people as Dr. Kenneth Marshall of the History Department who teaches courses on the Black Power Movement and Black Manhood, both of which deal centrally and critically with issues of race and masculinity, and Dr. Patrick Murphy of the English Department who has for many years offered a course on Theories of Diverse Sexuality which has been deviated to fit into students' programs but has not been formally submitted for approval. These particular courses are quite popular with students. Indeed, students have approached me questioning why these, as well as other, courses are not officially listed among those approved for the Women's Studies Program. Other students have told me they were not drawn to the program as currently constituted because they did not see courses that reflected their interests or that the current courses seemed too narrowly focused on "women" alone. These students were specifically interested in courses dealing with LGBTQ issues and queer theory. As Dr. Mumford stated in her report: "One of the reasons why I support a change in the name of the discipline at SUNY-Oswego to 'Women's and Gender Studies' is not only potentially to raise enrollments in courses and to increase numbers of majors and minors, but also because the name change acknowledges real differences in what 'Women's Studies' now constitute, both theoretically and in practice. The discipline now embraces more of 'us' than it embraced in earlier days." While we have opted to change the name to the more grammatically pleasing Gender and Women's Studies, it is our hope that changing the name of the Women's Studies Program will lead to curricular change that will reflect the most recent trends in the field, breathe new life into the program, and reverse the decline in enrollment that the program has seen over the past several years.