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TO: Betty Schmitz  
Director, Center for Curriculum Transformation

FROM: Judith A. Howard  
Chair, Department of Women Studies

RE: Women Studies Diversity Report

In this report we articulate the centrality of our commitment to the many and complex issues of diversity to all the work we do, pedagogical, scholarly, and service.

Curricular Content: Women Studies emphasizes simultaneous analyses of differences between and connections across women’s experiences, apprehending these in terms of historical, social and cultural processes. At the core of this work are intersectional analyses of race, class, and gender, impelled by transformative critiques offered by women of color. These transformations have yielded effective collaborations across WS and Ethnic Studies, collaborations we have initiated and hope to deepen in the coming years. Most recently, in keeping with intellectual shifts occurring across multiple fields, WS has also begun to question traditional approaches to nations, nationalities, and states, moving from international to transnational analytic frameworks. The origins of this academic field in an arena of social activism also presage an ongoing commitment to producing knowledge that has not only an academic, but also a public, audience, with material consequences for diverse communities of women and men. WS facilitates students and scholars alike not only in understanding the importance of class, race, gender, sexuality, nationality, and other bases of social inequalities in women’s and men’s lives, but also in developing feminist theories and methods that contribute to ongoing movements for social justice.

In exit interviews we have conducted the past few years, our alumnae note the following strengths of the department, each of which pertains to questions of social diversity: our courses expose students to varied theoretical perspectives and different political viewpoints; our courses develop their skills in critical thinking and in social analyses; our courses are much more likely (than courses in other departments) to address race
and ethnicity, social class, lesbian and gay issues, and international issues; our courses introduce students to methods of interdisciplinary analysis; our course content pertains to daily life; and, one that pleases us especially, our courses motivate students to read beyond course requirements.

One other characteristic of our undergraduate major is especially relevant to promoting social and cultural diversity: internships and service learning. WS majors have gained the kind of knowledge included in service learning since the inception of our program, through a required three-credit internship. Six WS courses, including WOMEN 200, regularly include service learning components. The internship requirement is a vital part of the WS major, providing students with the opportunity for a hands-on learning experience that we see as integral to a feminist education. Many of our students extend the duration of their internship, some remaining as volunteers past their internship commitment and even after graduation. These internships provide opportunities for leadership development, as well as for establishing connections between intellectual coursework and feminist practices of citizenship. These opportunities are also vital to teaching all students about diverse communities, and especially to connecting students of color to communities that nurture their education.

Last year we published a letter in *Columns*, the UW Alumnae Magazine, in response to a comment from a letter writer who felt Women Studies was a useless degree. We quote from this letter here, since the content illustrates how the work of our graduates contributes to enhancing diversity in many broader communities outside (as well as inside) the academy:

"Each year we graduate approximately 20-25 undergraduate students. The UW should be deeply proud of these alumnae and students...among the positions our recent graduates have held we include the following: a member of the Seattle City Council, Judy Nicastro; legislative aides, both in Olympia and in Washington, D.C.; a fellowship recipient working on rural health policies with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; a detective with the Seattle Police Department; several staff at the Wing Luke Museum; a videographer with the Desmond Tutu Peace Foundation; students who have gone on to attain advanced degrees in nursing, medicine, law, public health, sociology; lawyers (in abundance), some of them working at top firms in the country; a number of employees at the UW in various research and social policy centers; and a recent recipient of the UW Distinguished Staff Award is a women studies graduate.

Our graduates include both volunteers and paid workers at crucial social service organizations, including Arad
local women’s health clinic, Lambert House, a drop-in center for lesbian and gay youth, homeless shelters, and a number of organizations that serve those affected by domestic violence. Through an internship with the Women’s National Commission, the U.K.’s independent advisory body on women, one of our recent graduates attained a permanent position and is working with the heads of all of the major women’s organizations in the U.K.

The University of Washington offers studies in a vast array of substantive areas, as it should. Some of these have immediately obvious utilitarian value. Some don’t. “If we direct our youth only to the former, we do away with history, philosophy, literature and other ‘non-vocational’ programs’”, to quote one of our doctoral students. A broader educational focus generates not only an intellectual appreciation of the liberal arts, but also an informed, committed citizenry. As one of our current majors summarizes the merits of a degree in Women Studies: “… All of my understanding about human rights, equality and the suffering of people around the world, I learned in Women Studies.” What more could we, as a department, an institution of higher learning, and a concerned citizenry, hope for?”

Demographic indicators of diversity: Women Studies has a higher proportion of racial and ethnic minorities than most units on the UW campus in each of the constituent groups – undergraduate majors, graduate students, and faculty -- with the single exception of our departmental staff (see Table 10A – we include in this report tables we put together last year in conjunction with our departmental review). Racial and ethnic minorities constitute on average 17% of our majors, 25% of our graduate students, and 45% of our faculty. Table 10B shows that our majors are also older on average than the undergraduate population of the UW, suggesting that we serve a greater proportion of returning students whose education has been disrupted. Presumably reflecting the substantive focus of Women Studies, we note as well that almost all of our majors are women; we typically have one or two majors each year who are men. We have no male graduate students yet, although we have had male applicants. We would clearly like to have more men included among our majors as well as our graduate program; achieving the broader goals of WS will not be possible until there are men as well as women who are studying these issues. Although we do not have systematic data on other dimensions of diversity, in the current AY we know of at least one major with a disability and a number of students receive disability accommodations every quarter in our classes. We estimate that the proportion of lesbian and gay students among our majors is at least equal to, and likely greater than, the proportion of these students in the university as a whole. When we establish a lesbian and gay studies
track, as we hope to do, this may attract more majors from these groups.

In terms of faculty workload, Table 9B indicates the average teaching loads of our faculty by their racial and ethnic backgrounds; the teaching responsibilities are relatively evenly distributed. Variations are due virtually entirely to responsibilities some of our faculty have to other units on campus. Table 11 indicates the distribution of faculty-led independent studies by race and ethnicity. Here there is a growing disparity; the numbers of independent studies are relatively even across racial and ethnic backgrounds in the earlier years but in the past two years our faculty of color are teaching markedly more independent studies than the remaining faculty. As I noted above, neither of our two staff are women of color; clearly when openings arise this will be one critical dimension of future hiring decisions.

How we work to create an environment that values diversity:
Compared to most, if not all, other units in the College (with the exception of American Ethnic Studies), WS has been successful in hiring and retaining a higher percentage of faculty of color, recruiting and retaining a higher percentage of graduate students of color, and attracting a higher proportion of undergraduate majors of color, than any other single department. Does this mean we regard ourselves as having achieved our diversity goals? Not at all. In keeping with the substantive and pedagogical missions and goals of WS, infusing all of our scholarly, pedagogical, and service work with attention to the many profoundly important issues of diversity is a primary concern. We are acutely aware that this is never a goal that will be, much less remain, achieved. Tensions deriving from many different aspects of diversity and the societal inequalities intimately associated with diversities are a part of contemporary societies around the globe; these are part of the core content of a WS curriculum. Many of the courses in our curriculum explicitly concern issues of racial and ethnic diversity; our majors are required to take either a course titled “Race, Class and Gender” and/or “Feminism, Racism and Anti-Racism.” We also teach regularly sets of courses that focus on specific racial and ethnic groups, e.g., “Native Women in the Americas,” “Pueblo Indian Women of the American Southwest”, “Reading Native American Women’s Lives”, “Images of Natives in the Cinema and Popular Cultures”; we also include “Asian-American Women” in our curriculum, although we have not been able to teach this regularly. Virtually all of our courses infuse thematic content about issues of racial and ethnic diversity and inequality. We seek to train both our undergraduate majors and our graduate students to incorporate these concerns into their own scholarly work and into their teaching. For example, a new course on “Critical Pedagogies of Race, Class, and Gender” was taught in Spring 2002 and Summer 2003, and our graduate course on teaching, WOMEN 504,
incorporates a critical perspective on diversity throughout the seminar. We also seek to address issues of diversity through a global framework, as evident in our courses “Feminism in an International Context”, “Gender and Globalization” and “Women and International Economic Development”, among others. “Women in China to 1800”, “Gender Histories of Modern China”, and “Latin American Women” all focus on gender dynamics in specific geographic areas.

We address other dimensions of diversity, specifically sexuality and age, through our courses on “Lesbian Lives and Cultures”, and “Women in Midlife.” We seek always to critique our own perspectives on and definitions of diversity. Our ongoing departmental curricular self-assessment has led to specific curricular changes. We conducted an intensive review of the undergraduate curriculum during the 2000-01 and 2001-02 AYs. One outcome of these changes was the introduction of two new tracks in our undergraduate major: “Globalization, Migration and Transnational Feminist Studies;” and “Nationhood, Sovereignty, and Indigenous Women Studies.” Each of these new tracks is responsive to our commitment to increasing our curricular emphasis on issues of diversity. Individual faculty are also developing new courses that speak to this concern; Shirley Yee, for example, has taught and designed a new course, “Histories of Racial Formation” in Spring 2003. Professor Yee developed this course in part through her participation in the 2002 Institute for Teaching Excellence. Kate Noble has developed a new course, “Politics of Talent Development,” that explores issues of race, class, gender, sexual orientation and geography on the recognition, development and expression of exceptional abilities. We offered a new undergraduate course on “Transnational Feminisms” in Summer 2003 and will offer it again in Spring 2004. And conversations with our students, both undergraduate and graduate, point us toward developing a track for our majors on issues of sexual diversity and linking with other initiatives on campus to establish a Queer Studies Program and a Disability Studies Program.

Access: We also seek to contribute to the diversity of the department and the UW through other non-curricular activities. Access to the university is a key issue. Many WS majors are employed at least part-time, many are parents, and our majors are older on average than the UW undergraduate population. One dimension of the department’s support for non-traditional students is our recognition and respect for their extra efforts to maintain a full course load. WOMEN 200, our primary introductory course, for instance, has for many years been offered in mid-day to allow university staff to take the course during their lunch hour. We also have attempted for many years to offer our core courses in the evening, as funding permits, and we will continue to try to do so despite the cutbacks in the Evening Degree program.
One of the more innovative of recent access programs is the Keys to Success Fair, held for the first time in Summer 2002. This program convened high school students from a wide variety of local area schools identified as having fewer opportunities for college education, bringing them to visit the UW campus and meet with representatives from departments to learn about what we have to offer and how they can maximize their chances of attaining a successful college education. We participated in this program for the two years it has been offered. We met with a number of students who spoke of their curiosity about WS; many noted that they had heard virtually nothing about this field in high school. Since the establishment of our graduate program, we have regularly participated in all of the activities of the Graduate Opportunities and Minority Achievement Program (GO-MAP), a highly successful component of the Graduate School’s efforts to achieve and maintain a diverse graduate student body. Several of our minority graduate students have won fellowships from GO-MAP and two of them serve on the GO-MAP Advisory Board. These contacts and programs are crucial to our capacity to recruit and to retain minority students.

We hope the above illustrates our deep commitment to recruitment and retention of minority students and to sustain and nurture a diverse learning environment and departmental community. There is much we can do in the department, but there are some things we cannot do. There are two issues that are particularly difficult for us to address without support from the university. First, although we have been successful in retaining our minority graduate students to date, this situation is necessarily fragile. Virtually all of the research on retention of minority students and faculty indicates that the presence of minority faculty is vital. We need to hire additional minority faculty in order to provide this dimension of mentoring. We also need to hire faculty who focus on issues of diversity in their own scholarship; these will sometimes, but not necessarily, be faculty of color and other dimensions of diversity. Second, the data on prospective graduate students’ acceptances and declines of our offers indicate that there is a disproportionate number of students of color who have declined our offer. Based on our conversations with these students, it is clear that our inability to offer substantial, and multi-year, funding packages is a major reason these students have chosen to attend other programs and schools. This is true both for international and U.S. applicants. Indeed, several of these students chose to go elsewhere through our own recommendations, since it was clear that they would have markedly better support elsewhere. Talented minority applicants often have numerous offers and most of these come with far better funding packages than we can offer. WS is clearly not alone with this problem, but it does affect the
diversity of our graduate program; a broad funding strategy from the Graduate School and the UW would be extremely helpful. We hope this university-wide diversity assessment will help provide the infrastructure necessary to make serious steps to address these problems.