

VII. STANDING COMMITTEES

A. Academic and Student Affairs

Degree Name Change: From *Ph.D. in Women Studies* to *Ph.D. in Feminist Studies*

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

The administration recommends approval of a request from the College of Arts and Sciences to change the name of the *Ph.D. in Women Studies* to *Ph.D. in Feminist Studies*, effective immediately. This request is part of a larger plan under which the department's name was changed from *Women Studies* to *Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies*.

The degree name change, along with the department name change, has been carefully considered over time and was preceded by a number of white papers, discussions, and analyses of comparable units nationally and internationally. A survey of the department's student population showed overwhelming support for the transition. The central reason for the degree name change is that the department's doctoral research is not limited to a focus on women. The Ph.D. is grounded in theoretical and methodological preparation, not on a specific object. Current research ranges from the study of men laboring in genetically modified cottonseed production in India to transgender activism in South Africa. The unifying principle is a grounding in diverse feminist theories about the role of gender and "gendering" in social and economic life, and methodological approaches that integrate the feminist principles into the conduct of the research.

Below are the core arguments behind the departmental and degree name changes:

1. The object of study in the department is not just one pole of the masculine/feminine binary (i.e., women), but the gendering processes that produce (and undermine, critique, complicate) that binary.
2. Part of the scholarly and activist work that has furthered understanding of the masculine/feminine binary has become the field of sexuality studies, and the department has scholarly strength in this area.
3. Contemporary students find "gender" a more open, inviting, and less exclusionary term, hence its use in the departmental name. While we considered having "feminist" in the departmental name, it is clear that this would be an obstacle to many undergraduates.
4. The department carried out a national review of similar programs and found most have made similar changes.
5. The graduate program is oriented to analytic frameworks, theories and methodologies, rather than to objects of analysis. Thus the department concluded that "feminist studies" is a more appropriate and focused title for the graduate program.