

September 29, 2009

Dear President Botman and Provost Forhan:

Members of the Women and Gender Studies faculty recognize the significant challenges facing the University of Southern Maine and the University of Maine System. We welcome efforts to begin a conversation on strategies to address those challenges. We are disturbed, however, that the scenarios outlined in the recent Deans' White Paper all involve significant changes to the Women and Gender Studies Program, although no one from the program was consulted or invited to participate. This omission not only contradicts requirements specified in USM's governance documents¹ but also fails to serve President Botman's call for greater interdisciplinarity at USM.

WGS is an Independent Degree Program reporting to the Provost for important reasons. Locating WGS solely within the College of Arts and Science (or Arts and Letters), as the White Paper proposes, does not reflect its role within the institution. WGS is a University-wide interdisciplinary faculty open to members of all the University's colleges. We have had faculty on council not only from many CAS departments, but also from the Law School, Lewiston-Auburn College, and, in the recent past, from the Colleges of Education and Nursing. One problem with the proposals to move Women and Gender Studies into CAS (or CAL) would be that some members of the WGS faculty (for example those in LAC or in Social Work) would not belong to the College in which the program would be located.

More importantly, since its inception in 1980, WGS (formerly Women's Studies) was given, by the president, a broadly defined mission. The interdisciplinary program was specifically designed not only to attract and educate students majoring in the field but also to support and develop initiatives that would infuse diversity in courses throughout the USM curriculum. The mission and structure of WGS explicitly serves the educational mission of the entire university.

This university-wide outreach includes a curriculum drawn from across the university, extensive co-curricular programming, and faculty development activities. In 2001, for example, WGS brought to campus USM's first Fulbright Scholar in Residence, Dr. Amy Tsanga. Dr. Tsanga, a feminist scholar from Zimbabwe, taught courses and led a university-wide faculty development seminar on internationalizing the curriculum. Similarly, in 2003, the program offered a faculty development seminar, led by visiting scholar Dr. Chinyere Okafor of Nigeria, on integrating race, class and gender perspectives in the USM curriculum. In 2004, WGS arranged for Dr. Perween Hasan to

come to USM as a Fulbright Visiting Specialist to enrich the curriculum through discussions of Islamic history and culture.²

Most recently, in 2009, the Women and Gender Studies program secured a major multi-year (2009 - 2012) grant from the US State Department to develop a partnership with faculty at Zayed University in the UAE to engage in faculty development and curricular change on both campuses. In receiving this grant, WGS has become the first Women's Studies program in the country to formally partner with a university in the Muslim Middle East.

In addition to these curricular development projects, and as part of its charge, Women and Gender Studies distinguishes itself through extensive co-curricular programming. Events organized throughout the year (including annual Women's History Month programs) have featured nationally and internationally prominent scholars, writers and performers and have drawn audiences from across the campus and from the surrounding community. Because these activities are directly linked to academic offerings in many departments and disciplines, they serve to enhance the educational experience of USM's students well beyond those enrolled in Women and Gender Studies courses.³

Women and Gender Studies also contributes in important ways to campus-wide initiatives such as the new \$300,000 federally funded grant -- secured by Social Work/Women and Gender Studies faculty member Susan Fineran -- to "Reduce Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, Sexual Assault, and Stalking on Campus." The grant, which will establish a "Campus Interpersonal Violence Safety Program," includes substantial involvement by the Women and Gender Studies program in creating relevant programming and developing a website for prevention education/information focused on sexual assault prevention. These new resources will contribute to public awareness and fostering of a supportive campus culture.

Significantly, WGS is a campus leader in co-curricular, curricular, and faculty development—and offers an intellectually demanding major and minor—with only modest institutional support: the program has just **one** faculty line divided between two joint appointments. In the past three years, as the University has encouraged small programs to increase majors, Women and Gender Studies has grown without the addition of any new faculty lines. In 2006, the program had 11 majors; as of this semester, we have 21 majors currently enrolled in courses. We are pleased by the initial success of our efforts to expand the program and intend to continue actively recruiting majors and minors and improve graduation rates. It is important to stress, however, that the number of majors and minors is not the only, or even the most significant, measure of the program's success. Women and Gender Studies serves large numbers of students from across the university through our many service courses in both the "old core" and the new General Education curriculum.⁴

In each of these respects—our University-wide interdisciplinarity, our exceptional co-curricular programming, our community outreach, and our fundamental mission to provide faculty development across the institution—WGS is distinct from departments in

any College. Subsuming us within a college would neither fit our constitutionally established structure nor serve our mission. It would hinder broad faculty and student recruitment from across the university, which is necessary to sustain a genuinely interdisciplinary program; it would create significant obstacles to new institution-wide Women and Gender Studies curricular and co-curricular initiatives; and, given the very modest financial resources currently invested in the program, it would produce little, if any, institutional savings to balance these substantial programmatic losses.

We recognize that the university is operating in a rapidly changing context, and we are committed to making constructive contributions for the university's change and development. To do this, however, the Women and Gender Studies Director and faculty, in accordance with governance documents, must work with the Provost and President, and be included in any future conversations about restructuring, rather than being acted upon as the object of proposals made by others.

Sincerely yours,

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Cc: Administrative Restructuring Task Force (Dr. John Wright, Dr. Susan Campbell, Dr. Brian Toy, Dr. Betty Lou Whitford)

¹ Governance Issues

The USM University Governance Constitution, as well as the Women and Gender Studies governance structure formally approved by the administration with the affirmation of the Trustees, includes and defines, as a formal university unit, the "Independent Degree Program." As an Independent Degree Program, Women and Gender Studies' personnel, curriculum, and procedures are administered by its director and faculty (Part V, USM University Governance Constitution).

In these documents, authority is delegated to the Director and WGS faculty appointed by the Provost. No authority for work or structure is delegated to any dean (Part I, Section 3). As the Governance Constitution states, "The president, vice presidents, and deans shall refer to the bodies established by this constitution all matters appropriate to these bodies for formal policy recommendations and, where appropriate, decisions; shall counsel directly with appropriate bodies established by this constitution before making major decisions; shall respect decisions on matters reserved or delegated to governance bodies, and shall give due weight to the recommendations of those bodies when decisions are reserved to the administration. (Part I, Section 3, A). Under "Shared Government," the administration and those to whom authority is delegated must make every reasonable effort to assure the members of the university community an opportunity to exercise their governance responsibilities. No effort—reasonable or otherwise—was made to assure that either the director or the faculty were provided the opportunity to exercise their governance responsibilities. To the contrary, WGS was specifically excluded and not consulted or even notified.

² International scholars hosted by Women and Gender Studies have included the following:

Elena Stishova (1996 - 1997) - Stishova is one of the most important Russian researchers in the areas of feminist film studies; she is an Associate Professor at the Institute of Cinematography, Moscow, Russia.

Vesna Kesic (2000 - 2001) - Kesic is Research Coordinator of the Centre for Women War Victims, Croatia, and founder of several major Croatian NGOs including The Center for Women War Victims and the Women's Network of Croatia.

Amy Tsanga (2001 - 2002) - Dr. Tsanga was USM's first Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence and was located within the USM Women and Gender Studies program. Tsanga is on the Faculty of Law and serves as the Deputy Director of the Women's Law Center at the University of Zimbabwe.

Chinyere Okafor (2002 - 2003) - Okafor is a Nigerian poet, playwright, novelist, and former Vice President of the Association of African Women Scholars (AWWS). In 2002 and 2003, she was a visiting professor in the USM Women's Studies' Program.

Jackie Kay (2002 - 2003) - Kay, a Scottish poet and novelist, has received numerous awards for her work including the Forward Prize, a Saltire Award, a Scottish Arts Council Book Award, the Somerset Maugham Award, the Signal Award, and the Guardian Fiction Prize.

Nawal El Saadawi (2003 - 2004) - El Saadawi is a psychiatrist, a former candidate for the presidency of Egypt, and an award winning novelist. She has served as chair of the Arab Women's Solidarity Organization and editor-in-chief of its magazine *Noon*.

Marcia Freedman (2003 - 2004) - Freedman was one of the founders and leaders of the feminist movement in Israel in the early 1970s. In 1973 she was elected to the Knesset and, in 1977, co-founded the Women's Party. She has also been an active member of the Israeli peace movement. Freedman is the author of an acclaimed memoir, *Exile in the Promised Land*.

Perween Hasan (2004 - 2005) - Hasan, a Fulbright Visiting Specialist brought to USM by the Women and Gender Studies program, is a professor of Islamic History and Culture at the University of Dhaka, Bangladesh. Her research focuses on Islamic art and architecture, the art and architecture of South Asia, and the art of Bengal.

Anita Nyberg (2006 - 2007) - Nyberg is an internationally recognized expert on family and work policy and is a Professor at the National Institute for Working Life in Stockholm, Sweden. She visited USM on a grant from the American Scandinavian Foundation and taught "Gender Perspectives on Welfare State Policies: Comparing the U.S. and Scandinavia," for USM's Women and Gender Studies Program.

³ The number of speakers the program has brought to campus over its 30 year history is far too extensive to enumerate. Some of our speakers have included **Ellen Goodman, Mary Berry, Betty Friedan, Maya Angelou, Sonia Sanchez, Lucy Lippard, Joanne Meyerowitz, bell hooks, Julia Butterfly Hill, Yanar Mohammed, and Kate Bornstein**. These co-curricular events produced by WGS have not only been linked to academic programs across the university but also to other campus units including the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs, the Center for Sexualities and Gender Diversity, and the Women's Resource Center. All have drawn large audiences from across the University.

⁴ Women and Gender Studies faculty teach about 200 students each semester (averaging 147 students every Fall and 256 students every Spring); those students are equally divided between introductory courses (75 to 100 students in four or five sections of Introduction to Women & Gender Studies) and advanced courses (75 to 100 students in 5 or 6 upper division WST courses and related electives).