

**The History of Women's Studies at the University of Minnesota  
1973-2013**

By Lauren Bedosky

Acknowledgments

This project hardly would have been possible if it had not been for the assistance of many individuals. I must credit the following people for helping me in researching and writing the history of Women's Studies at the University of Minnesota: Judith Katz, for keeping me in mind when she heard about the opportunity to conduct this research project; Regina Kunzel, for overseeing the project from start to finish; Kimberly Clarke, for providing advice and support; Lisa Disch, Sara Evans, Ruth-Ellen Joeres, Amy Kaminsky, Toni McNaron, Jennifer Pierce, and Naomi Scheman, for meeting with and/or corresponding with me over phone/email for the purposes of answering questions related to various aspects of Women's Studies/CAFS; special thanks to Toni McNaron for answering my multiple emails with follow-up questions regarding Women's Studies, and Naomi Scheman for also answering multiple emails as well as providing feedback on an early draft; the staff of the University of Minnesota Archives, for being flexible and accommodating about having materials ready for me; the Department of American Studies at the University of Minnesota, for finding and making a copy of the syllabus for the experimental Women's Studies course offered through their department in 1972-73.

Introduction

It has been nearly forty years since Women's Studies appeared on the scene at the University of Minnesota. The story of its history and evolution is one of immense struggle, debate, and accomplishment. When the program officially began in the fall of 1973, it had no core faculty, no regular budget, and drew on faculty from other departments for its administration. It began as an experiment, and relied on the support of dedicated students, faculty, and staff. In short, the program

depended on its allies for survival. There were plenty of people within the College of Liberal Arts (CLA) and the University who either did not want the program to survive, or felt the field of women's studies was simply a fad that would pass with time. Whether one viewed women's studies with hostility or tolerance, many doubted its merits as an intellectual field of study. This sentiment was true of colleges and universities across the nation, and indeed, it is true even today.

Despite the many critics, Women's Studies (now known as Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies) at the University of Minnesota has proven itself a legitimate and valuable field of study time and time again. Those involved in the Program (later, Department) sought to be constantly self-reflexive, to remain attentive to what Women's Studies was or was not doing, and who was or was not represented. Women's Studies was not only intent upon evolving as a field of inquiry, but of transforming other fields to become more cognizant of gender, race, sex, class, and sexuality, among other aspects of identity. Though there had previously existed classes on women in other departments\* prior to the arrival of the Women's Studies Program, the course offerings were limited, and did nothing to revolutionize the field in question. Gayle Graham Yates, the coordinator of the Women's Studies Programs in 1976, stated, "There is a difference between adding something about women to the existing curriculum and really reorienting a course – or a field – so that it is considered from women's perspective to the same degree that it is considered from men's perspective."<sup>1</sup> The presence of Women's Studies and the participation of faculty from within traditional departments made the study of women, gender, etc. of increasing importance for many such departments. Women's Studies' faculty and staff not only *made do* with limited funding, space, and personnel; they created an exciting and *thriving* interdisciplinary field that had

---

\* Among the courses previously offered were Afro-American Studies 5-401 "Black Women," and 3-061 "The Black Family" (Proposal for the Women's Studies Program).

<sup>1</sup> "Developing a new area of academic study: a profile of the Women's Studies Program," *Comment* 43, Center for Educational Development, University of Minnesota (February 1980): 2, found in the Department of Women's Studies papers, 1975-2002, University Archives, Collection Number 2000-10.

meaning for other departments and disciplines. The program consistently garnered glowing reviews from internal and external reviewers, and continues to impress today.

During the early years of its operation, Women's Studies at the University aimed to uncover the hidden contributions of women throughout history, and to challenge false assumptions about women. In her book, *When Women Ask the Questions*, Marilyn Jacoby Boxer states that the initial message behind women's studies was, "women and women's issues are important. They are important enough to constitute the subject of serious scholarly study, of research, and of the inquiry that forms the basis for courses, curricula, and degree programs."<sup>2</sup> However, even the category of 'women' was understood to be limiting from the very first. What it meant to be labeled a 'woman,' that is, how gender and masculinity were constructed and enforced, was of great concern for budding women's studies scholars. In fact, when the University of Minnesota's Women's Studies Department decided to change its name to Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies in 2007, it was due to the general consensus among scholars, faculty, students, and staff, that "Women's Studies" no longer adequately represented the field.

Throughout its evolution, Women's Studies at the University has remained dedicated to linking theory with praxis. The discipline emerged out of concern for social justice, and what women's studies should be doing not only for people inside the academy, but for people *outside* the academy. When the University of Minnesota hosted the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) Annual Conference for the first time in 1988, the main issue of concern that organizers and participants sought to address was how to link academic feminist work to activist work beyond the academy. More broadly speaking, the conference addressed forging alliances among women, which suggests that enacting social change is one of the integral goals of women's studies. In writing on his entry into feminist politics, and later, the PhD Program in Feminist Studies at the University of Minnesota, Sam Bullington reflects, "Perhaps because of my contentious relationship to gender, for me

---

<sup>2</sup> Marilyn Jacoby Boxer, *When Women Ask the Questions: Creating Women's Studies in America* (Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998): 16.

feminism was never entirely, nor even primarily, about gender. Instead, after reading authors like Audre Lorde, Alice Walker, and Adrienne Rich, I thought feminism was about radical social change, about power and oppression, and about justice.”<sup>3</sup> Bullington’s sentiment echoes one of the major concerns of the field of women’s studies. That is, recognizing that women’s studies as an intellectual endeavor not only serves to satisfy scholarly inquiry into specialized areas of concern such as international and transnational feminisms, women and the law, postcolonial theory, bioethics, etc., but it also has the ability to bring about social change. According to Caryn McTighe Musil, the NWSA National Director at the time of the Annual Conference at the University of Minnesota in 1988, “women’s studies is the bridge between gathering information and setting public policy – linking knowledge and action in an effort to change the world we live in.”<sup>4</sup>

It is within this environment of activism and academia that I, like so many before me, found reasons to get excited about higher education. When I officially declared Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies (GWSS) my second major in the summer of 2009 (my first major being English), I only had an inkling of what was in store for me. My reasons for declaring the second major were a bit vague. All I knew was that women’s issues were a great concern for me, and the idea of studying women and gender sounded far more appealing than simply studying Shakespeare (little did I know that the English Department had a history of incorporating women and gender into its curriculum, thanks in large part to Women’s Studies). When I took my first GWSS classes in Spring 2010, I felt like I was on a foreign planet. A handful of the topics we learned about concerned sexism in biology discourse, environmental racism, eugenics, and the prison industrial complex. The assigned readings were theory-laden, and unlike anything I’d previously encountered. Those

---

<sup>3</sup> Sam Bullington and Amanda Lock Swarr, “Negotiating Feminist Futures: Transgender Challenges and Contradictions of a PhD in Feminist Studies,” *Feminist Waves, Feminist Generations: Life Stories from the Academy* ed. Hokulani K. Aikau, Karla A. Erickson, and Jennifer L. Pierce (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2007): 295.

<sup>4</sup> Jane Lansing, “Conference emphasized alliances, social change,” Department of Women’s Studies papers, 1975-2002, University Archives, Collection Number 2000-10.

who say that GWSS/Women's Studies is not a legitimate field of study, or that students, staff, and faculty involved in the department are simply man-haters, have obviously never taken a course in feminist theory.

The classroom environment of GWSS/Women's Studies courses is unique, and reflects the nature of the field. In the Introduction to *The Evolution of American Women's Studies*, Alice E. Ginsberg writes,

I was drawn to the discipline not only because it connected theory with practice, but because it challenged us to ask questions and explore each other's experiences and points of view, rather than to simply memorize information and reiterate it. In short, we functioned as a community of learners rather than as a group of students who just happened to sit next to each other.<sup>5</sup>

Like Ginsberg, I found that my GWSS classes challenged me in ways my other classes hadn't. My GWSS classes fostered new ways of thinking and asking questions, and encouraged learning as a group of students; learning not only *with* one another, but also *from* one another. Unlike those disciplines in which individuals were rewarded for identifying the *right* answer, GWSS/Women's Studies students were encouraged to come up with their own answers.

When I undertook the project of researching and writing the forty-year history of Women's Studies at the University of Minnesota, I had no idea how incredible it was that I was able to take the quality and mere presence of the GWSS Department for granted, given the many curveballs that had been thrown its way over the years. I am grateful to all the people who devoted so much time and energy to create, sustain, and expand the interdisciplinary field of study that I have so complacently enjoyed. Had these individuals decided to let the challenge get the best of them, allow their many critics to dissuade them, and settle with a "safe" position in another department, the University landscape would likely have remained exclusive and uninviting for a majority of the population. The following pages

---

<sup>5</sup> Alice E. Ginsberg, "Introduction," *The Evolution of American Women's Studies: Reflections on Triumphs, Controversies, and Change* ed. Alice E. Ginsberg (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008): 4.

describe the remarkable evolution of a department that has had a significant impact on my life, as well as the lives of countless other academics and activists.

I have attempted to use a variety of sources, from archive materials, to essays and books, to firsthand accounts, though it was impossible to include all the voices I initially wanted. Given the short amount of time allotted for this project (one semester), I had to pick and choose the people and experiences to be represented in this narrative based off information I could gather in the limited time frame.

### Pre-history

Prior to women's studies' entrance into the academy, the environment was such that higher education catered to the interests of white, male heterosexuals, and assumed the universality of that category. Though increasing numbers of women and other marginalized groups were entering institutions of higher learning, these groups remained unrepresented in the disciplines. The literary canon was dominated by the works of white men, women's roles and accomplishments were omitted from history books, and ideas/concerns presented as "universal" proved to in fact reflect only the interests of a percentage of "mankind." In the editorial of the first ever issue of *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* – one of the premier feminist academic journals – the editors made a statement that reflects the motivation behind women's studies:

Scholarship about women is not new. They have long been subject to investigation. Some of it has been serious or sympathetic; some, trivial or hostile. What is novel is the amount of intellectual energy men and women are now spending on such scholarship and the consciousness that often frames their efforts. That charged, restless consciousness respects many of the concepts, tools, and techniques of modern study.... It also tends to question the social, political, economic, cultural, and psychological arrangements that have governed relations between females and males, that have defined femininity and masculinity. It even suspects that those arrangements have been a source of the errors that must be corrected.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Catharine R. Stimpson, Joan N. Burstyn, Domna C. Stanton and Sandra M. Whisler, "Editorial," *Signs* 1.1 (Autumn, 1975): v.

One pervasive instance of the ways in which women and men have been polarized is that of biology. For centuries, female biology has been explained in ways that serve to justify women's exclusion from politics, military duty, sports, law, education, and virtually every male-dominated sphere of society. From the construction of women as susceptible to hysteria, in which a woman's womb may wander around inside the body in search of moisture<sup>7</sup>, the notion that women's bodies are much too fragile to run marathons, and the modern day depiction of the crazed, irrational, and overly emotional menstruating female, women's lives have been dictated by inaccuracy. It was not until quite recently in the history of the world that the category of "gender" has been separated from the category of "sex." Women's studies led to the questioning of not only relationships between women and men, but to the questioning of those gendered categories themselves. Thus, women's studies provided an avenue for women (categorically speaking) to define themselves, and to challenge the basis for their exclusion from traditionally male-dominated positions of power.

Thanks to the influence of feminism on women's consciousness, the desire of women to reclaim their history, examine their social and familial roles, and understand why they have been relegated to positions subordinate to males throughout the centuries, was profound and widespread. In the first chapter of her book, Marilyn Jacoby Boxer writes, "Women's studies in higher education grew out of advocacy for and inquiry about women, and the experiences of the women who collectively built a new academic field. It began spontaneously in many places and continues today – for, about and of women around the world."<sup>8</sup> It was during this era of academic curiosity about women as a subject of study, and women's desire to reclaim their place among masculinist understandings of various disciplines that the University of Minnesota gained a foothold within the national community as one of the leaders in women's advocacy within the academy.

---

<sup>7</sup> Marilyn B. Skinner, *Sexuality in Greek and Roman Culture* (Maryland: Blackwell Publishing, 2005): 32.

<sup>8</sup> Boxer, *When Women Ask the Questions*, 7.

By the time University of Minnesota students and faculty were considering the possibility of implementing a women's studies program in the early 1970s, the University had already become a national leader, "in innovative educational programs for women."<sup>9</sup> The University established the first continuing education program in the nation to assist women returning to the university, and formed one of the first university-based action groups, the Council on University Women's Progress (CUWP).<sup>10</sup> It was only fitting that the University of Minnesota would initiate its program in Women's Studies at a time when only a handful of other such programs existed in the U.S.

In 1970-71, graduate students Elsa Greene (English), Andrea Hinding (American Studies), and Susan Phipps-Sanger (Psychology) approached Toni McNaron as well as Anne Truax\*, the director of the Women's Center at the University, for help in implementing a Women's Studies Program at the University of Minnesota.<sup>11</sup> The graduate students had attended a conference at the University of Pennsylvania that summer, where there had been a conference featuring existing programs in women's studies.<sup>12</sup> According to McNaron, the graduate students returned from the conference, "all excited about bringing feminism into the academy."<sup>13</sup> Though McNaron and Truax played a huge role in getting women's studies into the University, they emphasize that women's studies was really started

---

<sup>9</sup> Proposal for Women's Studies Program, Department of Women's Studies papers, 1975-2002, University Archives, Collection Number 2000-10, Box 1 of 17.

<sup>10</sup> "Women's Center 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Exhibit Archive," <http://blog.lib.umn.edu/sspp/womenscenter/the-1960s---part-4.html>

\* At the time of writing, Anne Truax passed away. Unfortunately, I was unable to speak with her about the introduction of Women's Studies at the University, so I had to rely on written materials as well as the personal recollections of other faculty members.

<sup>11</sup> Interview (10/04/2012) and email correspondence (11/08/2012) with Toni McNaron.

<sup>12</sup> Email correspondence with McNaron (11/08/2012).

<sup>13</sup> *English @ Minnesota*, Department of English, College of Liberal Arts, University of Minnesota (Summer 2008): 4, found in Toni McNaron's papers, Tretter Collection, Special Collections and Rare Books, University of Minnesota Archives.

and shepherded along by student activism.<sup>14</sup> In fact, it was graduate student Elsa Greene who coordinated the two-quarter experimental women's studies course that was first offered within the American Studies Program in 1972. The purpose of that course was to introduce undergraduate students to women's studies, and to gauge student demand for more such courses.

Some people might wonder why American Studies was chosen to host that experimental course. This choice made sense for two reasons. First, the director of American Studies at the time, Mary C. Turpie, was very supportive of the graduate students who sought to bring Women's Studies to the University. One of those students was located within American Studies, and quite naturally would have had regular contact with Turpie. When the graduate students were gathering faculty allies for their endeavor, Turpie was one such ally. It helped that she was the director of the American Studies Program, so she was in a better position than others to shepherd along the course proposal. Second, the American Studies Program at the University of Minnesota was lauded as progressive, feminist, anti-racist, queer-friendly, and multicultural.<sup>15</sup> It has been championed as a long-time supporter of the Women's Studies Program throughout its history. Thus, it is unsurprising that American Studies hosted the experimental course in 1972-73.

Toni McNaron signed on as the professor of that first course, which was titled, "Feminism and American Intellectual Life." The course featured a variety of successful women in the Twin Cities area, which included noted scholars such as Anne Firor Scott, Carroll Smith Rosenberg, Carolyn Kizer, among others, who would come and give guest lectures on what it meant to be a woman in their particular field.<sup>16</sup> Students would attend a lecture given by one of these women, and then read her materials and work in small groups, formulating feminist questions that fit each

---

<sup>14</sup> *English @ Minnesota*, page 4; Clarke A. Chambers and Anne Truax, "Interview with Anne Truax" *University of Minnesota Digital Conservancy*, <http://purl.umn.edu/50781>, pages 19-20.

<sup>15</sup> Jennifer L. Pierce, "Traveling from Feminism to Mainstream Sociology and Back: One Woman's Tale of Tenure and the Politics of Backlash," *Feminist Waves, Feminist Generations: Life Stories from the Academy*, 133.

<sup>16</sup> Email correspondence with McNaron, (12/10/2012).

scholar's field of work.<sup>17</sup> Thus, students were exposed to various works of local feminist scholars, and discussed topics such as psychohistory – specifically in relation to Freud and feminism – hysteria, sex roles, and the Black woman. The course was designed to be broad and interdisciplinary, a “mish-mash”<sup>18</sup> of culture and political theory. This way, students were introduced to a range of feminist theory arising out of American intellectual life. America in the mid-1960s to early 1970s witnessed an explosion in the field of feminist scholarship, and it was only fitting that the presentation of this scholarship would launch the introduction of women's studies at the University of Minnesota. Moreover, McNaron recalls that the student response was so positive, that, “it was quite clear that the campus was a place that needed this [women's studies].”<sup>19</sup> And so, the next step was to write and submit a formal proposal for a program in Women's Studies to the College of Liberal Arts (CLA), a process that involved a great many people. This group included graduate students Nancy Betz, Louise Douce, Elsa Greene, Andrea Hinding, Judy Wanjala, and Susan Phipps-Sanger, along with supportive faculty such as Anne Truax, Joanne Arnaud, Clarke Chambers, Toni McNaron, Carolyn Rose, and others.<sup>20</sup>

Based on notes taken during a Women's Studies Task Force meeting on Wednesday, December 6, 1972, it is evident that attempting to launch a Women's Studies department was not yet feasible. Due to the difficulties inherent in seeking departmental status, particularly given the University's financial situation at the time, the Task Force decided that students, faculty, and administrators would all benefit by a less formal introduction of women's studies at the University.<sup>21</sup> According to the program proposal that was submitted to CLA, “for both academic and practical reasons, we conceive of the Women's Studies program as being an area concentration, subsumed into a regular major in an existing department or

---

<sup>17</sup> Email correspondence with McNaron (12/10/2012).

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Toni McNaron (10/04/2012).

<sup>19</sup> Interview with McNaron.

<sup>20</sup> Hokulani K. Aikau, Karla A. Erickson, and Jennifer L. Pierce, “Introduction,” *Feminist Waves, Feminist Generations*, 11-12.

<sup>21</sup> Women's Studies Task Force Meeting Minutes, December 6, 1972, University Archives.

program.”<sup>22</sup> Thus, the tentative Women’s Studies Program would not offer a degree during the initial phase of its implementation. Rather, students could get an undergraduate degree in History, English, Sociology, etc., and take a ‘concentration’ of Women’s Studies courses.

Though the Task Force deemed it premature to seek a Women’s Studies department or degree during the initial stages of the field’s development at the University, the program was seen as a crucial first step. The program would pave the way for the evolution of an extensive curriculum in women’s studies, and in the meantime, provide an intellectual environment for students who felt disconnected from the standard curriculum. The benefits of a women’s studies program were explained in the proposal thus:

In the process of examining women’s lives within an academic setting, students and faculty will contribute to the sum of human knowledge. As a consequence, women’s studies will provide an opportunity for the whole scholarly community to examine myths and unquestioned assumptions which have characterized generalizations about women.... For the 39 percent of the student body who are women, furthermore, women’s studies may also provide one classic joy of a liberal education: within a disciplined context they will be free to seek self-knowledge.<sup>23</sup>

Therefore, not only would women’s studies offer female students the opportunity to uncover their own history and redefine narrow perceptions of their own gender, but also the knowledge and methodologies inherent in such gendered analyses would inform new ways of thinking about how knowledge itself is created and utilized. The field of women’s studies not only asserts the importance of studying women, but of studying the very construction of “woman” as a gendered category. By extension, “man” as a gendered category becomes an important point of analysis, and calls into question the supposed universality of all former knowledge about the world. Thanks to the influence of feminism and women’s studies, there now exists an abundance of scholarship that considers issues, academic disciplines, state policies, etc., from a

---

<sup>22</sup> Proposal for Women’s Studies Program.

<sup>23</sup> Proposal for Women’s Studies Program.

gendered perspective, thus bringing to light a whole range of limitations that had previously gone unidentified. For example, many feminist scholars have critiqued common definitions of the term “peace” in relation to nations entering the stage of post-conflict reconstruction following inter- or intra-state conflict, as women’s security is often overlooked. “Peace,” in the general sense of the term, entails a cease-fire, or, an absence of organized violence. Yet, violence continues to be an everyday lived reality for scores of women and girls throughout the world, regardless of a nation’s conflict status. Examining so-called “universal” terms such as “peace” from a gendered perspective allows other norms and structures to be questioned, including traditional academic disciplines. According to the 2007 Self-Study Report for the Department of Gender, Women, and Sexuality (GWSS), the department’s curriculum has, since its inception as the Women’s Studies Program in 1973, been dedicated to critiquing, “the traditional disciplines that produced knowledges as objective and ignored their investments in projects of colonialism/empire, capitalism, heteronormativity, racism, and/or sexism. This approach suggests that at the heart of GWSS are critiques of how we understand and operate in the worlds around us.”<sup>24</sup> As categories of identity are inherent in every facet of human existence, the study of those categories and the ways in which they have been represented in traditional disciplines have implications for how future knowledge should be produced and delivered. The proposed program in Women’s Studies would undertake this mission to generate new ways of knowing, giving students the opportunity to challenge commonly-held assumptions that have led to structural inequalities.

E.W. Ziebarth, the Dean of CLA, approved the proposal for the new Women’s Studies Program in the spring of 1973, and appointed Toni McNaron to be the coordinator soon thereafter. In addition, a twenty-one-member governing Women’s Studies Program Committee was established to assist in the implementation of the new program, which featured Andrea Hinding as the first chair, and numerous faculty and graduate students including Anne Truax, Harlan Smith (Economics), Jim

---

<sup>24</sup> “Introduction,” The Department of Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies, University of Minnesota, Self-Study Report (Spring 2007): 3.

Werntz (Academic Affairs), among others.<sup>25</sup> McNaron and the Committee spent the summer of 1973 developing courses for the coming year, which included courses on “Courtly Love,” (taught by professors from English, Art History, French, and History) “Women and Politics,” and “Women in Society.”<sup>26</sup> When classes were finally offered under the auspices of the Women’s Studies Program, many students and faculty responded enthusiastically.

## History

### **Women’s Studies is an Experimental Program**

In the fall of 1973, the Women’s Studies Program was officially underway. It was created as an experimental program, which meant that it was given light funding and a specified amount of time to “try out” courses.<sup>27</sup> At the end of the experimental period, internal and external review committees would evaluate the program, and it would either be dropped from the College’s offerings or given permanent status.<sup>28</sup> The Women’s Studies Program existed under the administrative umbrella of what was then called Cross-Disciplinary Studies, which housed a number of other experimental programs such as Religious Studies and Ethnic Studies.

As coordinator of the Program, Toni McNaron was charged with the task of finding faculty from other departments who could teach Women’s Studies courses, requesting funding from the College of Liberal Arts, compiling course descriptions, advising students who wanted to take a concentration in Women’s Studies, among many other duties in addition to her position as an associate professor in the

---

<sup>25</sup> Clarke A. Chambers, and Anne Truax, “Interview with Anne Truax,” *University of Minnesota Digital Conservancy*, page 25; Stanford Lehmberg and Ann M. Pflaum, *The University of Minnesota: 1945-2000*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001): 144.

<sup>26</sup> Email correspondence with McNaron (12/10/2012).

<sup>27</sup> Email correspondence (12/10/2012).

<sup>28</sup> Email correspondence (12/10/2012).

English Department. McNaron was released from one of her English courses to allow her to do the administrative work as the coordinator of Women's Studies. She recalls that this, "obviously that was not enough, but I did the work anyway because it was important."<sup>29</sup> Had she let up on her dedication and allowed herself to become lax with her duties, the Program most likely would have floundered. Or, if it had survived, it would not be the expansive, thoroughly interdisciplinary department it is today. Though McNaron had a Committee and others helping with the administration of the Program, the amount of work that it took to run the Program made it so resources and human power were stretched very thin. Thus, the participation of faculty members from other departments was critical to the Program's success.

Due to the Program's ambiguous status in the early years, there were no core faculty members, no degrees or certifications available to students, and no regular budget. Students who were interested in Women's Studies could complete a concentration. Students who wanted more would have to wait a couple of years before the option to complete a major would become available. Meanwhile, faculty members who were interested in teaching courses in Women's Studies had to get the chair of their own department to 'release' them from their teaching commitments in their home departments. Toni McNaron describes the way in which the curriculum was built up in the early days of the Program, "it all depended on whether Professor X in Political Science could get her chair to release her from one of her Political Science courses, I mean, it was just so labor-intensive and wasteful, but we did it, we kept *doing* it, and getting more and more courses, because the faculty *wanted* to teach."<sup>30</sup> For roughly half of Women's Studies' forty-year history at the University, most of the faculty had their tenure home in other departments. For many such faculty members splitting their time between the Program and their own departments, Women's Studies provided the type of exciting intellectual energy and

---

<sup>29</sup> Email correspondence with McNaron (11/08/2012).

<sup>30</sup> Interview with McNaron.

community that their home departments lacked.\* This energy and community would continue to draw faculty and outside scholars to Women's Studies throughout the Program's history, but during the early years, the first step was to gather interested faculty members from throughout the University. Professors such as Barbara Laslett (Sociology), Sara Evans (History), Shirley Garner (English), Madelon Sprengnether (English), and Janet Spector (Anthropology), among others, were some of the early faculty members involved in Women's Studies. It was these faculty members, those that regularly split their time between Women's Studies and their home departments, that helped the Program succeed when it was most fragile. They were deeply committed to seeing the Program grow, and saw Women's Studies as a place of refuge from departments that were still primarily male-centered.

One such faculty member was Janet Spector, who began her career at the University of Minnesota in 1973 as an assistant professor in the Department of Anthropology. She was involved with Women's Studies from the very beginning, and recalls\* how important this involvement was for her, as Women's Studies encouraged her research in feminist archaeology in a way that her home department simply did not. Spector wanted to see change in the more traditional departments such as Anthropology, and viewed her work with Women's Studies as a way to encourage that change. She writes, "In today's academic world, some people seem to think of my generation's women's studies teaching, committee service, and advising as unpaid labor since we were doing the same work in our home departments. I did this work willingly because I knew we were building something together that could transform the institution."<sup>31</sup> Spector's sentiment is fairly common of Women's Studies faculty, especially during the early years when this

---

\* For instance, during a September 26, 2012 interview, Naomi Scheman, who continues to divide her time between Philosophy and Women's Studies, stated that although her tenure line is located within the Philosophy department, her heart and soul really belong in Women's Studies.

\* Unfortunately, Janet Spector recently passed away. I was unable to interview her for this project, and had to rely on written materials as well as the personal recollections of Toni McNaron, who worked very closely with her.

<sup>31</sup> Janet D. Spector, "Feminist Archaeology: What This All Means (After All These Years)," *Feminist Waves, Feminist Generations*, 51.

“unpaid labor” was critical for the Program’s survival. If Spector did not believe that Women’s Studies was a worthwhile endeavor, she would not have invested so much time and effort ensuring its success. According to McNaron, Spector was a key figure in helping the Program succeed on many levels, “[Spector] was a major strategist in moving us to be a department and then in moving us into graduate education.”<sup>32</sup> In addition, Spector played an active role on the governing body of the Program, and continued to participate when Women’s Studies became a Department, even serving as chair at one time.<sup>33</sup> McNaron emphasizes that Spector was also instrumental in forming the Center for Advanced Feminist Studies (CAFS), and later, the PhD Program.<sup>34</sup> From the moment she began her career at the University in 1973, to the time she negotiated early, phased retirement in 1994,<sup>35</sup> Janet Spector was deeply committed to seeing Women’s Studies expand and evolve in exciting ways.

McNaron recalls the major supporting roles that other individuals played, particularly during the early years of Women’s Studies. She credits the women in the CLA Class Scheduling Office\* as having played a huge part in helping the Program thrive during the first few years,

We [those of us in charge of running the Program] of course didn’t know anything about deadlines, we had to get stuff in a year ahead of time to have it in the bulletin, and so those women simply bent every single rule. I mean, I remember one person calling and saying, ‘If you can get me the course description for spring, by lunch, I can hold up the copy from the place it’s going.’ So, we turned it out. And we got it in, and then we began to register more and more students.<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> Email correspondence with McNaron (12/29/12).

<sup>33</sup> Email correspondence with McNaron (01/08/13).

<sup>34</sup> Email correspondence with McNaron (01/08/13).

<sup>35</sup> Spector, “Feminist Archaeology: What This All Means (After All These Years),” *Feminist Waves, Feminist Generations*, 46.

\* McNaron believes that this Office likely does not exist within any given college anymore, but rather that class scheduling is probably done centrally now.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with McNaron.

In addition, McNaron emphasizes that while the Program was trivialized and marginalized, there were several men who, “really didn’t need to be persuaded.”<sup>37</sup> A handful of really great men lent their support to Women’s Studies, showing up at meetings to act as allies, and approaching those most hostile to the Program to talk about its progress. McNaron states, “it’s like, now how important allies are for GLBT people, those, mostly male, allies, were absolutely helpful to us at crucial moments in our history, and so they need to be remembered as well.”<sup>38</sup> She recalls that Clarke Chambers (History), Jim Werntz, and Harlan Smith were a few such men who played an essential role in helping the Program succeed in the midst of hostility.

Despite the immense hurdles that had to be overcome, the widespread student interest during the first couple years showed that it was the right time and the right place for a Women’s Studies Program, that the faculty’s efforts were not in vain. Moreover, faculty began to create their own community outside of the University setting in which they were learners as well as teachers. Because women’s studies was relatively new, and incorporated aspects of multiple disciplines, the faculty involved in the field did not have a good grasp of teaching feminism in an interdisciplinary manner. In order to develop their own knowledge with regards to the potential for applying feminist thought to various disciplines, faculty members organized regular seminars. The faculty would all meet at a professor’s house, even bringing their children along, and one or more professors in any given discipline would lecture on how to do feminist literary criticism, or how to do feminist political science, etc. This gave other faculty the opportunity to learn from their peers, so that they could then go on and apply that knowledge to their own teaching. These types of faculty seminars happened at various times throughout the history of the Program, and helped to bring the faculty closer together. As the Program came to be more successful over the years, and the faculty diversified, these seminars no longer became crucial for the survival of the Program. This also meant that faculty became more independent, loosening ties between one another. McNaron laments that the tightness among faculty members slackened as Women’s Studies flourished,

---

<sup>37</sup> Interview with McNaron.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with McNaron.

yet understands it to be a predictable phenomenon, indicative of the great strides made over the years.<sup>39</sup>

Between 1973-75, when the Program was still finding its footing, it was enough that courses were always over-enrolled, and faculty wanted to become involved. In addition, the presence of Women's Studies at the University had inspired other departments to create their own courses on women. In only a couple of years, Women's Studies made significant gains in creating a field that would have far-reaching impacts.

### **Implementation of the Bachelor of Arts Degree in Women's Studies**

About a year after the Women's Studies Program began offering courses at the University, those involved felt the time was right to create the option of a Bachelor's degree (B.A.), and began drafting a proposal. In the proposal for the B.A. that was submitted to CLA in 1975, student demand was cited as one of the major reasons why a degree option was needed, as although the administrative staff missed the deadline to submit course descriptions to be advertised in the course catalog during the 1973-74 year, "our courses closed, had waiting lists, and we taught during that year, some 700 students.... waiting lists indicate that with more funds for additional sections of a course or for additional courses, we could have reached an even greater number of students."<sup>40</sup> In addition, there were students delaying graduation in the hopes of attaining a degree in Women's Studies. It was apparent that plenty of University students were interested in doing more than just taking a handful of Women's Studies courses, though it had always been understood among the cohort of faculty and staff that a Bachelor's degree had to be offered in Women's Studies at some point.

Offering a formal Bachelor's degree, as opposed to simply offering the option to do a 'concentration,' was a crucial development for the Women's Studies Program. Scholars who were teaching, researching, and writing in Women's Studies

---

<sup>39</sup> Interview with McNaron.

<sup>40</sup> Proposal for B.A. in Women's Studies, University Archives.

understood the intellectual and practical merits of the field, and wanted to give future scholars the opportunity to specialize in a field of study that they helped build from the ground up. During the time that the Program had been in operation, women's studies courses and programs began to spring up at various colleges and universities across the country. In addition, more and more research was being done on women, resulting in a proliferation of scholarly books and articles. This national growth in women's studies-related materials and institutional presence signaled that the time was right to offer students at the University of Minnesota a degree option.

Furthermore, many feminist scholars, and certainly the faculty in the Women's Studies Program at the University, felt that graduates with a Bachelor's degree in Women's Studies would make positive contributions to society beyond that of research and pedagogy. In the proposal for the B.A., it was explained that Program graduates would have a fuller understanding of women's contributions, elaborating that, "In this way, they would be able to be even more valuable members of their work situations and certainly more sensitive citizens of families and communities within this and other states."<sup>41</sup> This idea is critical for understanding the merits of Women's Studies. A common critique of the Program (now Department) manifests itself in the question, 'What are you supposed to do with a degree in Women's Studies?' Due to the fact that Women's Studies is not a trade-specific field, in which a graduate goes from college to factory, so to speak, many have wondered just what it is a person is supposed to do as a graduate in Women's Studies. The beauty of it is that one can do just about anything. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of the field, Women's Studies graduates have been/are exposed to a wide range of methodologies, theories, experiences, etc. This exposure serves not only to give students the ability to think far more creatively, but also opens up their eyes to the lived realities of those less privileged than themselves. The ability to empathize with others, along with the deeply intellectual component

---

<sup>41</sup> Proposal for B.A.

of the field, helps create a citizen who will contribute far more to society than simply profit.

Of course, academic and community responses to feminist methods and theories vary greatly. There have been many instances in which scholars with a feminist focus have been penalized in some form or another. Women's Studies graduates nowadays likely experience more acceptance and support for their interest in feminist scholarship than their predecessors, but this is not guaranteed. Naomi Scheman, a Professor in both Philosophy and Women's Studies who started teaching at the University in 1979, describes how graduate students were often dissuaded from doing feminist research, "It used to be that even if you talked to a feminist faculty member, you'd be told, 'don't do a feminist dissertation, it's the kiss of death, you'll never get a job, wait until you get a job, or wait until you get tenure.'"<sup>42</sup> Similarly, Jennifer L. Pierce, a professor in American Studies at the University, recounts her horrific experiences with harassment and her struggle for tenure when she taught in the department of Sociology between 1993 and 1998.<sup>43</sup> As a queer feminist ethnographer, her research methods and expertise – not to mention her self-identification as 'queer' and outspoken personality – were by turns threatening, confusing, and irritating to the other departmental faculty, most of whom were white male associate or full professors. Her involvement in Women's Studies and The Center for Advanced Feminist Studies (to be introduced later) only further ostracized her in the eyes of her colleagues. As a result, the battle for tenure was a long, frustrating, and hostile process. Ultimately, Jennifer L. Pierce achieved tenure, despite sincere attempts by her peers to ruin her promotion.

However, even in a campus environment that could be unfriendly towards Women's Studies and more broadly, feminist scholarship, the request for a B.A. option was successful. The B.A. program began as an experimental curriculum that would come under the CLA review process in 1978-79. At that time it would be

---

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Naomi Scheman (09/26/2012).

<sup>43</sup> Pierce, "Traveling from Feminism to Mainstream Sociology and Back: One Woman's Tale of Tenure and the Politics of Backlash," *Feminist Waves, Feminist Generations: Life Stories from the Academy*, pp. 109-139.

determined whether or not Women's Studies would be formally integrated into CLA, or simply dissolved.

### **Women's Studies Becomes Permanent Fixture**

When the Women's Studies' experimental B.A. Program was reviewed in 1978-79, both the Internal and External Review Committees reported the immense strength and national influence of the Program, and recommended that it be given a permanent place within CLA with the majority of the faculty appointments and tenure lines within Women's Studies.

The Internal Review Committee wrote,

We reviewed the Program, initially, with differing degrees of skepticism. We came away from this review unanimous on the following points: that Women's Studies has demonstrated that it is a respectable and important academic discipline; that Minnesota's Women's Studies Program has done an outstanding job under very difficult circumstances; and that the Program provides unique, valuable, and future-oriented services for this University, the community, state and nation. Further, we were deeply impressed with the enthusiasm and dedication of the faculty and students. Finally, we are convinced that the Program will surely die... if it is not provided with financial support in the form of permanent funding and a core faculty in the very near future"<sup>44</sup>

Indeed, lack of funding created ongoing struggles for Women's Studies, especially in the very beginning. Women's Studies easily could have folded as a newer program with a small community of dedicated faculty, staff, and graduate students, and it is remarkable that it has been able to regularly inspire support not only within the University, but also outside of it. Toni McNaron applies the metaphor of being "starved to death"<sup>45</sup> to the Women's Studies Program. Budgetary constraints have long plagued the University, but some departments have certainly felt the effects of those constraints more than others, and Women's Studies is no exception. Yet,

---

<sup>44</sup> Internal Review Report (1979): pp. 4-5, University Archives.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with McNaron.

despite the lack of funds, faculty, administrative assistance, etc., the Women's Studies Program garnered very positive reviews in its first years, and has since been heralded as one of the top departments in the country.

Following the review process, the College had to decide how to proceed with regards to the recommendations outlined by the reviewers. Structuring the Women's Studies Program in the same manner as American Studies had always been considered an option. This would have entailed faculty members being located within different departments, and coordinated by one person.\* Many of those involved in the Program debated whether or not it would be better if Women's Studies focused its attention on getting women added to curriculums throughout the University as opposed to developing its own autonomous degree program. However, the External Review Committee advised against this as being the Program's primary mission. The Committee conceded that getting departments to add courses that centered on women was certainly an important part of what Women's Studies did and should do, but they emphasized that Women's Studies was a legitimate field of study on its own, stating, "we believe that Women's Studies is only partly the accumulation of discrete courses in traditional disciplines that attempt to add the study of women to the traditional curriculum. Women's Studies is also a growing interdisciplinary body of knowledge that can be studied in a coherent fashion, and that should be studied by those wishing to become trained intellectuals in sectors of that area."<sup>46</sup> Thus, it was recommended that the Program be given its own place within the College of Liberal Arts, with core faculty members on tenure-track lines within Women's Studies, as well as a regular budget and administrative positions.

The College abided by most of the recommendations outlined in the reports submitted by the Internal and the External Review Committees. However, Gayle Graham Yates, who was coordinator at the time, recalls the frustrating process of defending the reviews to the College, "The way I remember that spring [1979] is we spent the entire spring... going to the CLA council meetings, the CLA assembly, and

---

\* It is worth noting that American Studies now has its own core faculty.

<sup>46</sup> External Review (1978): 5, University Archives.

the various councils of CLA with the dean defending the program,” and later goes on to explain, “There were probably no more than six meetings but most other things like that take one.”<sup>47</sup> Despite glowing reviews and a sophisticated undergraduate program, Women’s Studies faculty and staff had to defend the Program’s existence to the College every step of the way. This lengthy process of self-justification was fairly typical throughout the Program’s history, as both the College and the University constantly marginalized Women’s Studies, and treated it as though it were not a serious intellectual field.

Ultimately, the Program was removed from the administrative umbrella of Cross-Disciplinary Studies to become what Naomi Scheman describes as a “free-standing... ‘department-like program.’”<sup>48</sup> This structure will be explained later in greater detail, but for the moment, it is enough to say that Women’s Studies became its own entity within CLA. The granting of permanent status meant that the Program’s budget was more stable, hired and tenured its own faculty, and set its own curriculum, which were all very important breakthroughs for a Program that wanted to gain widespread recognition as a respected intellectual field of study. The next steps towards this goal entailed the establishment of a graduate curriculum, the undertaking of scholarly research projects, and transitioning from ‘program’ to ‘department.’

### **The Center for Advanced Feminist Studies (CAFS) and the Graduate Minor**

In 1982, plans were underway for the establishment of a center devoted to feminist studies research, as well as graduate-level courses for graduate students interested in completing a minor in addition to their degree work in their home departments. By this time, graduate students had been approaching faculty like McNaron, wondering when they were going to be able to take graduate courses and

---

<sup>47</sup> Clarke A. Chambers and Gayle Graham Yates, “Interview with Gayle Graham Yates,” *University of Minnesota Digital Conservancy*, <http://purl.umn.edu/50863>, page 25.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Scheman.

seminars in Women's Studies. However, according to Amy Kaminsky, a Professor in Women's Studies who arrived in 1984, "they [Women's Studies faculty] were told that we could not have a graduate program, and in order to make a run-around that we created this center."<sup>49</sup> Naomi Scheman explains that centers were easy to start at the time, because, "the dean that was around then really liked centers. 'Center' was a good word. Start a new graduate program, not so much. Center, good."<sup>50</sup> In order to allow graduate students to pursue work in Women's Studies, faculty gathered professors from other departments who wanted a feminist research center at the University and collectively drew up plans for its creation. They came up with the name, The Center for Advanced Feminist Studies (CAFS), and submitted a formal proposal to the College of Liberal Arts. Rationale for creating CAFS is outlined in the proposal thus: "We believe the time has come to regularize and focus what is already present into The Center for Advanced Feminist Studies. Students are already here and waiting. Faculty are already here and willing. We now seek approval of a structure which will allow us to proceed."<sup>51</sup> The proposal further emphasizes that CAFS would strengthen the national profile of the University of Minnesota, attracting feminist scholars from all over, bringing in much-needed research funds from outside sources, and further cementing Minnesota as a leader in feminist scholarship and activity.

Moreover, the proposal reiterates the dedication of Women's Studies faculty to training the next generation of feminist scholars, stating, "We understood such work as our commitment to training generations of future scholars who would carry out studies which would contribute a fresh look at many disciplines, issues, assumptions and concepts."<sup>52</sup> This claim is consistent with the notion that, as a field, Women's Studies would inspire the development of new perspectives; even radically alter traditional disciplines and ideals. Preparing future scholars to teach, research, and contribute to the field of Women's Studies was crucial to the

---

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Amy Kaminsky (09/24/2012).

<sup>50</sup> Interview with Scheman.

<sup>51</sup> Proposal for The Center for Advanced Feminist Studies, University Archives.

<sup>52</sup> Proposal for CAFS.

Program's mission. Thus, as Women's Studies' request for a formal graduate program had previously been denied, the proposal for CAFS also outlined a graduate curriculum. The Program created the opportunity for interested graduate students to take a concentration of graduate-level courses through CAFS as part of their graduate program in another department. According to Scheman, graduate students had been required to do either a minor or a supporting program outside of their home department.<sup>53</sup> Upon completion, students would receive a certificate from CAFS in addition to their formal graduate degree. In this sense, the implementation of the initial graduate 'program' in Feminist Studies was similar to the way in which the undergraduate program in Women's Studies began a decade earlier. It would be a few years before CAFS would offer a formal graduate minor in Feminist Studies, and another decade or so before the PhD program would come into being.

The proposal was approved, and the Center for Advanced Feminist Studies officially opened in 1983. Prior to its launch, the CAFS and the Women's Studies Program held a graduate student reception in November 1982 to introduce current as well as prospective graduate students to the activities of the CAFS. From the start, it was understood that graduate training would be an essential function of the CAFS. Research and scholarship were certainly important functions as well, but the faculty was dedicated to creating future scholars whose focus was on feminist studies. It is one thing to major in Women's Studies, and quite another to do the focused, in-depth research and pedagogy required at the graduate level. Graduate students in Feminist Studies would make up a new generation of scholars, who would not only reap the benefits of their predecessors' hard work, but would then be better equipped to develop the field even further. As earlier, when the B.A. option in Women's Studies was first offered, students who wanted to be able to specialize in feminist thought and praxis were frustrated that there were no advanced degree options for them to pursue. Majoring in Women's Studies was a wonderful opportunity, but current and future graduate students interested in completing higher-level work were not satisfied with the courses available.

---

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Scheman.

The establishment of a feminist research and graduate center was an important milestone in the history of Women's Studies. Not only was the faculty able to develop a series of graduate-level courses, but CAFS also created an intellectual community that brought together graduate students, as well as scholars from other departments at the University, and even scholars from all over the world. On campus, feminist scholars located in various departments throughout the university, were able to foster alliances and lasting friendships. When Jennifer L. Pierce was struggling with the immense dissatisfaction she felt with regards to her home department of Sociology, it was her involvement with CAFS and Women's Studies that provided her with a community that introduced her to a great many allies and new friends, as well as a space where her feminist philosophies and methodologies were accepted and encouraged. And, in the midst of her battle for well-deserved tenure status in the Sociology Department between 1993 and 1998, many of these friends and allies were instrumental in helping Pierce defend her achievements to the Department and College.<sup>54</sup>

In addition to supporting one another, faculty involved with CAFS entered into collaborative research projects that often resulted in national/international recognition, external funding, the publication of articles and books, and multi-national conferences. As research and scholarship was to be a major function of CAFS, it was necessary for faculty to create research projects that would bring outside funding and national recognition to CAFS. According to Sara Evans, a professor in the History Department who started teaching at the University in 1976, and who had been involved in Women's Studies/CAFS during her entire career, any good center should be able to generate ideas that bring about outside funding.<sup>55</sup> Together with another faculty member, Barbara Nelson (Political Science), Evans conceived of the first major research project to be conducted under the auspices of

---

<sup>54</sup> Pierce, "Traveling from Feminism to Mainstream Sociology and Back: One Woman's Tale of Tenure and the Politics of Backlash," *Feminist Waves, Feminist Generations: Life Stories from the Academy*, 109-139.

<sup>55</sup> Phone interview with Sara Evans (10/30/2012).

CAFS: the *Comparable Worth Project* (1984).<sup>\*</sup> This project brought in funding from the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, the Northwest Area Foundation, and the National Academy of Science. CAFS also participated in the Ford Foundation Curriculum Integration Project (1995), a three-year, nation-wide research initiative that involved thirteen institutions of higher education. The project aimed to support curricular revision within women's studies programs and area and international studies programs, and to assist faculty in these respective programs incorporate more interdisciplinarity into their own research. This entailed cooperation between programs and between colleges and universities involved in similar projects. The CAFS project was titled *Ways of Reading*, and aimed to create and update undergraduate courses in women's studies, area studies, and international studies.<sup>\*</sup> CAFS also launched a Rockefeller Humanist-in-Residence project (1989) titled *Theorizing Female Diversity*. With funding from the Rockefeller Foundation, CAFS provided fellowships for visiting scholars in order to bring more diverse and exciting feminist research to CAFS.

In addition to these and other research projects, CAFS developed a formal graduate minor in Feminist Studies, a PhD Program, and served as the editorial home of noted feminist journal *Signs* for a five-year term.

---

<sup>\*</sup> This project emerged in response to findings of the Minnesota State Council on the Economic Status of Women that a wage gap existed in the salaries of male and female government employees fulfilling jobs of comparable worth. Jobs were evaluated on a point system based on four factors: skill, effort, responsibility, and working conditions. The Minnesota State Council found that female-dominated positions were paid less than male-dominated positions with equal or less point values. In 1982, the state legislature ordered that this inequity be corrected. Approximately \$21.7 million was appropriated for the purposes of fixing wage disparities for state employees.

<sup>\*</sup> In 1995-96, one of the courses that faculty members revised was IntR 3101 Theoretical Approaches to International Relations, the core theory course in the International Relations Program. The course was redesigned to integrate issues of gender more fully (*Ways of Reading Project, Annual Report 1995-96*, found in CAFS records, University Archives).

### **The Implementation of a Formal Graduate Minor**

In 1985, faculty in CAFS submitted a proposal to the graduate school for the implementation of a formal graduate minor in Feminist Studies with the proposed implementation date set at 05/01/86<sup>56</sup>. Graduate students completing a major in another field could apply to the Graduate Minor Program in Feminist Studies at the M.A. or PhD level. Up until this point, graduate students were able to take a concentration of graduate courses in Feminist Studies, but they could not complete a formal minor. As previously mentioned, the Women's Studies Program had been denied the opportunity to offer a graduate program, which prompted the establishment of the Center for Advanced Feminist Studies. When CAFS first opened in 1982, Women's Studies' faculty compiled graduate-level courses for graduate students to take in addition to the required courses for their home department. As graduate students were once required to complete a minor or supporting program outside their department, Women's Studies' faculty created the opportunity for graduate students to apply to their supporting program. According to Scheman, students applied to this "non-existent thing,"<sup>57</sup> this unofficial graduate minor in Feminist Studies. Yet, these students made up a community of intellectuals dedicated to feminist theory and praxis, and after about two or three years of offering this unofficial minor, faculty approached the graduate school with a proposal for creating an official minor. When asked about the projected costs for the minor program, the faculty responded, "there aren't any costs, because we're actually, we're doing it, we just need to name it correctly."<sup>58</sup>

Faculty such as Amy Kaminsky, Naomi Scheman, Toni McNaron, among others, have strong recollections of the numerous barriers that had to be overcome

---

<sup>56</sup> Proposal for Feminist Studies Minor, Center for Advanced Feminist Studies records, University of Minnesota Archives, Collection Number 2005-0041; letter to Dean of Graduate School, Robert Holt (10/10/1985), CAFS records, University Archives.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Scheman.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Scheman.

at every stage of the development of Women's Studies. According to Naomi Scheman,

There was a feminist sociologist here who was affiliated with us, named Barbara Laslett, and she described this kind of thing, which would happen every time we asked for anything. It happened when we put in place the Graduate Minor, when we put in place the Ph.D., we'd go through 'no you can't do this, here's why you can't do this, this is bad, you have to do it this way,' we said, no. And blah blah blah 'oh, okay.' She called these the rituals of degradation, and we always had to go through the rituals of degradation.<sup>59</sup>

In other words, at every step of the way, faculty in Women's Studies had to constantly negotiate with the College of Liberal Arts. Scheman says that these 'rituals' have stopped somewhat in recent years, but certainly during the time she was the chair of Women's Studies from 1986-89, these 'rituals' were commonplace. After many 'rituals of degradation,' CAFS became home to the first freestanding graduate minor. When the PhD Program was developed more than a decade later, it was built off the successful graduate minor already in place. According to Dawn Rae Davis, who was part of the first group to enter the PhD program in Feminist Studies at the University of Minnesota in 1998, "the CAFS minor degree program was entirely compatible with producing feminist scholars whose research was defined by primary disciplinary identities outside women's studies but whose work also included important feminist components, methodologies, and/or an explicit focus on gender."<sup>60</sup> Thus, the graduate minor filled a void in the field of women/feminist studies. The minor program gave graduate students the opportunity to study and apply feminist theory and methodologies to their research projects in traditional disciplines.

---

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Scheman.

<sup>60</sup> Dawn Rae Davis, "A New Wave, Shifting Ground: Women's Studies PhDs and the Feminist Academy, from the Perspective of 1998," *Feminist Waves, Feminist Generations*, page 274.

## From Program to Department

There is no official date or record as to when the Women's Studies Program made the transition from being a program to being a department. Because of the history and the many 'rituals of degradation' required in negotiations with CLA, those involved with the transition from program to department status decided to accomplish this transition covertly. Though those involved in Women's Studies knew they were doing all the things departments were supposed to do, that essentially, all that was required was a name change, they also knew that any request for department status would be met with heavy resistance at the College level. This resistance meant faculty had to put in enormous amounts of their limited time and energy in order to justify their requests at every turn. As far as Scheman can recall, they had never submitted any official requests to change their status from 'program' to 'department,' but just knowing from experience how difficult it was to get the College to fulfill any of their official requests, resistance to the status change was considered inevitable. So Scheman, then chair of Women's Studies, thought up a way to achieve department status without going through official channels: "I ordered new stationary, and just every time we filled anything out or any of those things, I just wrote 'department.' And whenever anybody, including a dean, said 'program,' I corrected them as though it was a slip of the tongue."<sup>61</sup> And it worked.\*

This covert change from 'program' to 'department' was very important for Women's Studies at the University of Minnesota. According to Scheman, though the distinction between 'program' and 'department' was unclear at the University, within the national scene of women's studies, being a department was crucial. Being a department meant autonomy, that you were responsible for setting your own

---

<sup>61</sup> Interview with Scheman.

\* Though some might find it hard to believe that Women's Studies became a department this way, it is in fact true. There exist no known official or unofficial documents that would indicate requests made to the college for departmental status on behalf of Women's Studies.

curriculum, that you had your own Major, as opposed to simply gathering women's studies-related courses that were offered in other departments; it also meant that you hired, budgeted, and tenured your own faculty.<sup>62</sup> Women's Studies at the University already did all of these things, so all the faculty wanted was the appropriate formal designation.

### ***Signs* at the University**

Founded in 1975, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* was, and continues to be, one of the leading academic journals in the field of women's studies. Though it was initially housed at Rutgers in Chicago and continues to be edited there today, various colleges and universities were given the opportunity to host the journal for a stint of five years at a time. When its term at Duke University was nearly complete in 1989-1990, professors Ruth-Ellen Joeres (German) and Mary Jo Maynes (History) decided to apply to bring editorship of *Signs* to Minnesota.

One of the major attributes of *Signs*, and indeed, of women's studies as a field of study, is its goal of interdisciplinarity. In the very first editorial, *Signs* editors identified a dedication to interdisciplinary scholarship, stating, "We intend to publish writing that engages the respect of those both inside and outside a particular academic field. Reading such texts, an audience can fix and grasp a sense of the totality of women's lives and the realities of which they have been a part."<sup>63</sup> However, it is evident from the proposal that was submitted on behalf of the University of Minnesota, that as feminist scholarship grew and evolved, the interdisciplinary nature of *Signs* content gradually fell away to become more disciplinary, "there has been a decline in the proportion of interdisciplinary articles published in SIGNS, interdisciplinary within the two broad categories of social sciences and humanities as well as between them."<sup>64</sup> From the beginning, when discussions of applying for the editorship of *Signs* were still in the early stages,

---

<sup>62</sup> Interview with Scheman.

<sup>63</sup> Stimpson, Burstyn, Stanton and Whisler, "Editorial," *Signs* 1.1 (Autumn, 1975): v.

<sup>64</sup> Proposal for *Signs*, Department of Women's Studies Papers, University Archives.

Ruth-Ellen Joeres stressed that CAFS should aim to re-establish the initial goal of interdisciplinarity, and felt that a co-editorship would help achieve this, specifically a co-editorship between a humanities scholar and a social scientist. Joeres recalls that there had previously only ever been one editor to oversee the journal, “And it just struck me for a journal and a field so utterly interdisciplinary, that’s really very narrow, just to have one editor who is going to be bound to be tied to some particular discipline.”<sup>65</sup> Maynes introduced Joeres to a professor with whom she had recently been working closely, Barbara Laslett (Sociology), and together the two women helped to write up the proposal to bring *Signs* to the University under their co-editorship.

Their proposal was successful, and the University of Minnesota was chosen to be the next site for the editorship of *Signs*. Joeres emphasizes that while she and others fully believed that CAFS *should* host *Signs*, they were all surprised nonetheless when they found out that they had been chosen. Joeres remembers that sometime during the summer of 1990 when she heard that their application had been accepted – just months before she and others would begin their term as the new *Signs* staff – she called Laslett, “and I said, ‘well, what do we do now?’ and she [Barbara Laslett] said something like, ‘I’m going to go play tennis,’ [laughs] which was very smart, I think I just sat home and bit my nails.”<sup>66</sup> Application for the editorship of *Signs* was highly competitive, so it is understandable that CAFS faculty responded to their acceptance with surprise in spite of their qualifications and national recognition as one of the leading feminist research and graduate centers.

In the editorial of the Spring issue of 1991,<sup>\*</sup> Joeres and Laslett emphasize their intent to maintain an interdisciplinary focus, an intent that was also stressed in

---

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Ruth-Ellen Joeres (10/09/2012).

<sup>66</sup> Interview with Joeres.

<sup>\*</sup> Joeres and Laslett began their tenure as editors in 1990. However, the first issue of *Signs* that was published under their co-editorship was the Spring issue of 1991. This was due to the very involved process of moving materials from one host University to the next, as well as the enormous time commitment of preparing materials for a single journal issue. Thus, the final issue published under the auspices of CAFS at the University of Minnesota was the Winter issue of 1996 while

the proposal they submitted for the editorship of the journal. In the proposal, Joeres and Laslett outlined their understanding of interdisciplinarity, and how they viewed this approach as particularly integral for feminist scholarship in the 1990s:

We have a particular way of thinking about interdisciplinarity within feminism. We believe it involves an understanding of women in society and culture in which both the social and the cultural are seen to shape, and be shaped by, each other. And it is this kind of scholarship we wish to encourage. We want to foster the construction of scholarship that crosses institutionalized divisions of knowledge and is accessible across disciplinary boundaries. These goals are central, we believe, to hearing the diversity of feminist voices in the 1990s, and to this end, the combined editorial skills of a humanist and social scientist will be particularly valuable.<sup>67</sup>

By the 1990s, 'feminism' had become a broad category, applicable to multiple, even opposing viewpoints amongst women. 'Feminism' and feminist scholarship could not be attributed a fixed set of concerns or ideals. Focusing on certain issues or viewpoints and neglecting others enacted a form of epistemic violence, in which certain people or branches of 'feminism' were privileged while others were silenced. Thus, Joeres and Lasletts' commitment to providing space for multiple voices from multiple disciplines to speak encompasses the goal of interdisciplinary scholarship: to be able to view an issue in its entirety, and to not remain tethered to the methodologies and ideologies of one single discipline.

In addition to a co-editorship, Joeres and Laslett proposed a number of other changes to the structure of the journal. One of these changes was the inclusion of the "Forum." In the first editorial, Joeres and Laslett explained the "Forum" thus, "We want 'Forum' to serve a twofold purpose: first, to serve as an outlet for the discussion of issues, both academic and political, that are of interest to feminist scholars but on which opinions are likely to differ, and second, to provide an

---

the journal was in the process of transitioning to the University of Washington for a new five-year term.

<sup>67</sup> Proposal for *Signs*.

opportunity for discussion of public and policy issues as they affect women.”<sup>68</sup> This way, feminist scholars could reach across disciplines and engage in a kind of a dialogue with one another. The ‘Forum’ in the third issue of *Signs* edited at the University tackled the problems associated with the popular term ‘political correctness,’ which has often been used to claim that women’s studies, multiculturalism, etc., are merely fads as opposed to fields of study with academic merit and potential longevity. Joeres and Laslett wrote a short introduction to the problem of ‘political correctness,’ which was then followed up by two essays on the subject: one written by Marilyn Frye, the other by Alice Kessler-Harris.<sup>69</sup>

The journal featured a wide variety of topics, including abortion, welfare, citizenship, feminist-Marxist theory, psychoanalysis, prostitution, queer theory, among many others. In addition to the regular issues published every quarter, the editorial team produced four special journal issues during the five-year term: Women, Family, State, and Economy in Africa (Summer 1991); Theorizing Lesbian Experience (Summer 1993; the issue featured Gloria Anzaldúa as one of the special issue editors); Feminism and the Law (Summer 1994); and Postcolonial, Emergent, and Indigenous Feminisms (Summer 1995).

Along with Joeres and Laslett, there were at least a couple dozen other people involved in the production of the journal at one time. There was a group of associate editors, mostly comprised of faculty at the University of Minnesota, a managing editor, assistant editor, editorial assistant, as well as an editorial board of faculty from neighboring colleges and universities. A group of associate editors would be assigned a manuscript to read and evaluate, and they would then report back to the larger group. Toni McNaron, who was one of the associate editors, recalls the fierce debates that would ensue during those editorial meetings. For instance, “to the extent that an article had anything personal in it, then that would raise a red flag for a certain number of people in the group, who would say ‘well in

---

<sup>68</sup> Ruth-Ellen Joeres and Barbara Laslett, “Editorial: Looking Backward, Moving Forward,” *Signs* 16.3 (1991): 435-36.

<sup>69</sup> *Signs* 17.1 (1991): 779-880, 781-793, and 794-804.

my field, that would really be discounted.... We can't be personal."<sup>70</sup> She notes that the atmosphere was never hostile, though. Rather, editors would have stimulating debates. Despite the stress of running an academic journal, all the faculty involved were heavily invested in the work they were doing, which made the endeavor intellectually satisfying as well as a bonding experience.

Joeres recalls the general consensus among faculty regarding the lasting impact of the experience. About a year after the editorship ended, the faculty reunited at a Chinese restaurant, "and we all said, 'This is the most important thing we ever had had in our academic careers.'"<sup>71</sup> Not only was the process of editing an academic journal a stimulating experience, but the presence of *Signs* at the University of Minnesota helped increase the visibility of CAFS and the Women's Studies Department. As co-editors, Joeres and Laslett were constantly being interviewed by people from all over the world, or participating in conferences. Being in charge of running one of the premier feminist academic journals to emerge out of the 1970s was, as Joeres termed it, "a big thing."<sup>72</sup> And certainly, having *Signs* at the University helped increase the visibility of individual scholars, as well. Serving on the editorial board or as an associate editor was a major accomplishment, and several CAFS faculty took on the role of special issue editor at various times. Susan Geiger (Women's Studies), Toni McNaron (English), Mary Louise Fellows (Law School), Joanna O'Connell (Spanish and Portuguese), and Angelita Reyes (Women's Studies) were all special issue editors at one point or another, and had the opportunity to work with well-known national and international scholars within their respective fields who were also serving as special issue editors (ex. Gloria Anzaldúa, Ruth Meena, Rhonda Copelon).

The presence of *Signs* at the University of Minnesota has been called one of the last great events in the twenty-some years of CAFS' existence. Following the time that *Signs* was hosted at Minnesota, the PhD Program in Feminist Studies was created and housed within CAFS. However, during the early years of the new

---

<sup>70</sup> Interview with McNaron.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Joeres.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Joeres.

millennium, CLA and the University were experiencing budget problems, and when administration of the graduate program was transferred to the Department of Women's Studies, the Dean of CLA could not rationalize the existence of the Center. The subsequent defunding of CAFS and its eventual demise has been deemed by many current and former faculty members in Women's Studies/GWSS to be a great loss for feminist scholars and students at the University of Minnesota.

### **The PhD Program in Feminist Studies**

When CAFS opened its door to PhD students in Feminist Studies in 1998, the University of Minnesota was only one of six such programs in North America.<sup>73</sup> As with nearly every other development in the history of Women's Studies at the University, the PhD Program was made possible by faculty and graduate students dedicated to creating the option of a PhD. Sam Bullington and Amanda Lock Swarr were two graduate students in a small committee, "working to institute a PhD program in feminist studies at our university. The hard work of this committee was done by faculty members Helen Longino, Jennifer Pierce, and Edward Schiapa."<sup>74</sup> In their roles as graduate students serving on this small committee, Bullington and Swarr identified the level of student interest in a proposed PhD program, discovering that nearly all the students they approached supported the creation of such a program.

In the proposal for the PhD that was presented to the Educational Planning and Policy Committee, it was argued that as the University had long held a position of eminence with regards to women's studies in the national and international scene, it should only be considered fitting that Minnesota would also offer a PhD

---

<sup>73</sup> Davis, "A New Wave, Shifting Ground: Women's Studies PhDs and the Feminist Academy from the Perspective of 1998," *Feminist Waves, Feminist Generations*, 272. According to Davis, York University was home to the first Ph.D. Program in 1991, followed by Clark and Emory in 1992, then the University of Washington in 1997, and finally, the University of Minnesota, along with the University of Iowa, in 1998.

<sup>74</sup> Bullington and Swarr, "Negotiating Feminist Futures," *Feminist Waves, Feminist Generations*, 297.

Program at a time when only a handful of other programs existed. In addition, it was maintained that there continued to be an increase in student demand for PhD training, as, “The Center for Advanced Feminist Studies regularly receives inquiries from individuals seeking this degree.”<sup>75</sup> Initially, there were many who feared that PhD students in Feminist Studies would not be taken seriously in the job market. The idea of implementing a PhD Program had been debated for years by faculty teaching in Women’s Studies, because they feared they would be doing a disservice to their students. Amy Kaminsky recalls one of the major questions that had been key to the debate, “who knows what happens once you go out with a PhD in Feminist Studies?”<sup>76</sup> However, despite the risk of perhaps being unable to find employment following graduation, students *wanted* the option to do a PhD in Feminist Studies. At the time faculty submitted the program proposal, in fact, women’s studies programs and departments advertising faculty positions *required* that a candidate have a PhD in Women’s or Feminist Studies. This new requirement was cited in the proposal as another reason why a PhD Program was needed at the University. Increasingly, women’s studies programs and departments at colleges and universities across the U.S. were recognizing the need to have faculty who were specially trained in women and gender. The PhD Program at the University of Minnesota would, “prepare scholars capable of conducting innovative interdisciplinary research on women and gender and future faculty equipped to staff interdisciplinary women’s studies programs and departments and to teach women and gender focused courses in a discipline.”<sup>77</sup>

The proposal for a PhD Program in Feminist Studies was successful, and the first group of PhD candidates was accepted for the 1998 fall term. The establishment of the PhD Program ushered in a new generation of feminist scholars. These scholars would go on to teach women’s studies to future generations in a way that had not yet been possible. The women (and some men) who built the field of Women’s Studies had to start nearly from scratch. Because it was an entirely new

---

<sup>75</sup> Proposal for PhD Program, CAFS records, University Archives.

<sup>76</sup> Interview with Kaminsky (09/24/2012).

<sup>77</sup> Proposal for PhD Program.

field of study when it began appearing in colleges and Universities across the nation in the early 1970s\*, the original faculty had to learn how to teach and perform feminism across a variety of disciplines. Since the beginning, Women's Studies has been seen as an interdisciplinary endeavor, which meant that faculty who had been trained in only one discipline (English, History, Political Science, etc.) had to learn from other feminist faculty members throughout the University. According to Dawn Rae Davis, one of the students who made up the first group of PhD candidates in Feminist Studies at the University of Minnesota,

Past generations of feminist scholars received doctoral training in programs other than women's studies and migrated between women's studies and other disciplinary locations.... In contrast, many women's studies PhDs will have been primarily or solely in the field all along and immersed in its particular scholarship throughout their academic careers.<sup>78</sup>

Thus, the first generation of graduate students in Feminist Studies was in a unique position. These students would receive a formal, highly specialized graduate education that integrated all the lessons and discoveries made by their predecessors, while also producing their own original research and scholarship. Whereas their predecessors had initially entered the field of Women's Studies in higher education as scholars of one discipline, these graduate students would go on to do post-graduate research and instruction as scholars of feminist theory and pedagogy in multiple disciplines. Davis writes, "Both interdisciplinarity and a concentrated, exclusively feminist focus of study are central to defining women's studies as a site of advanced degree training distinct from the other training feminist scholars obtain in other disciplinary locations (although often supplemented by minor degree training in women's studies)."<sup>79</sup> As Davis illustrates,

---

\* In the "Introduction" to her book, *When Women Ask the Questions*, Marilyn Jacoby Boxer states that women's studies began with one program, at San Diego State University, in 1970.

<sup>78</sup> Davis, "A New Wave, Shifting Ground," *Feminist Waves, Feminist Generations*, 271-272.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 270.

the PhD Program in Feminist Studies is unique and irreplaceable; it is not enough to supplement a degree in a traditional discipline with undergraduate training or a graduate minor in women's/feminist studies. Students in the PhD Program in Feminist Studies would be unencumbered by any responsibility to a 'home' department in a traditional discipline, and free to pursue issues of women and gender *across* disciplines and using a variety of methodologies.

### **CAFS is De-funded**

During the early years of the new millennium, the Center for Advanced Feminist Studies became the target of budget cuts. In 2001, then-director Lisa Disch (Political Science) was informed by Steven Rosenstone, the dean of CLA, that she needed to seek funding from deans of other schools, a process that was by turns frustrating and humiliating.<sup>80</sup> Centers were increasingly seen as a drain on University resources, and the dean of CLA no longer felt he should pour funds into CAFS.<sup>81</sup>

Before Disch had been instructed to seek outside funding, administration of the graduate curriculum had been transferred from CAFS to the department of Women's Studies. This transfer had negative consequences for CAFS. Graduate training had been one of CAFS' major aims when it opened in 1983, but once the graduate programs in Feminist Studies became more established, it no longer made sense to house graduate students in an administrative unit separate from the Women's Studies Department. While the transfer of the graduate curriculum from CAFS to Women's Studies was a positive innovation, signaling the department's readiness to be considered an autonomous unit comparable to traditional long-standing departments, it also meant that CAFS lost a valuable community. CAFS directors such as Disch had a difficult time convincing College deans and other administrative units in the University of the continued relevance of CAFS as a locus of feminist research and scholarship.

---

<sup>80</sup> Phone interview with Lisa Disch (10/22/2012).

<sup>81</sup> Phone interview with Disch.

Dean Rosenstone instructed Jennifer L. Pierce, the last director of CAFS before it was de-funded, to raise grant money for the operation of CAFS, while the College continued to pay for the director's course release as well as a part-time graduate research assistant.<sup>82</sup> One of the University's administrative units, the Development Office, was to provide CAFS with assistance in seeking external funding. However, as Pierce recalls, "CAFS was at the bottom of the list of priorities for the Development Office and their staff was not helpful. Further, the Development Office claimed not to understand the difference between the academic department of Women's Studies and the Center."<sup>83</sup> Pierce repeatedly explained to various individuals that Women's Studies was responsible for administering graduate and undergraduate curriculums, while CAFS brought feminist scholars together from across the University, the national, and the international community to participate in collaborative research projects, and to organize conferences, colloquia, and workshops. However, the distinction between Women's Studies and CAFS failed to impress the College and University, and many still failed to understand how the two units differed.

In the spring of 2004, CAFS – still under Pierce's term as director – teamed up with the Steven J. Schochet Center for GLBT Studies – which was also being threatened with elimination – as well as the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Programs Office, to draft a proposal to combine the two centers.<sup>84</sup> The new center that was proposed was termed, "The Center for Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies," and aimed to, "encourage and support research in the areas of feminist, gender, and sexuality studies."<sup>85</sup> The two centers had already collaborated on a couple of successful conferences, one celebrating CAFS and feminist generations at the University of Minnesota, and the other on gender and immigration, both of which generated funding.<sup>86</sup> However, "The proposal was rejected by the College of

---

<sup>82</sup> Email correspondence with Jennifer L. Pierce (10/22/2012).

<sup>83</sup> Email correspondence with Pierce (10/21/2012).

<sup>84</sup> Aikau, Erickson, and Pierce, "Introduction," *Feminist Waves, Feminist Generations*, page 35.

<sup>85</sup> Proposal to merge CAFS and Schochet, CAFS records, University Archives.

<sup>86</sup> Email correspondence with Pierce (10/21/2012).

Liberal Art's Budget Advisory Committee (BAC) – it was deemed too costly – and in the end, the dean of the College of Liberal Arts concurred with BAC's decision."<sup>87</sup> A couple of years after this decision, Jennifer Pierce and Kevin Murphy (History) – from the Schochet Center – were called to a meeting with the College dean, where they were informed that CLA would no longer provide any funding for the centers.<sup>88</sup> However, Rosenstone did not want to close down the centers. Pierce recalls, "Interestingly, he did say that 'he didn't want to be the Dean who shut down CAFS.' If CAFS and Schochet wanted to move forward – without the course release, RA support, or any other money from CLA – he would not stand [in] our way."<sup>89</sup> And yet, the denial of financial support essentially amounted to closing the centers. Following their defunding, CAFS and Schochet existed for a while, though in a state of "hiatus," which meant they existed in name only, with no director, staff, office space, or programming.<sup>90</sup>

University faculty members, particularly those who had been involved in CAFS, continue to mourn the loss of the feminist research center.\* CAFS not only provided many faculty members from traditional departments a refuge where they were given support and respect for their research interests,\* but it offered an intellectual community for the undertaking of collaborative research projects and the development of theory. The Center for Advanced Feminist Studies also attracted scholars and graduate students from all over the world, allowing for collaboration amongst feminist academics of all stripes. Thus, the defunding of CAFS was a sad turn in the history of Women's Studies at the University, particularly given that many faculty members feel CAFS would still be widely used and appreciated today.

---

<sup>87</sup> Aikau, Erickson, and Pierce, "Introduction," *Feminist Waves, Feminist Generations*, page 35.

<sup>88</sup> Email correspondence with Pierce (10/21/2012).

<sup>89</sup> Email correspondence (10/21/2012).

<sup>90</sup> Aikau, Erickson, and Pierce, "Introduction," *Feminist Waves, Feminist Generations*, page 35.

\* Based off informal conversations with faculty members.

\* In her piece, "Traveling from Feminism," (*Feminist Waves*) Jennifer Pierce describes the stark contrast between her home department in Sociology and CAFS, stating that her involvement with CAFS gave her the opportunity to build networks and friendships with feminist scholars from all across the University.

## **Women's Studies Becomes Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies (GWSS) & Home to the GLBT Minor**

Despite the loss of a valued research center, Women's Studies at the University continued to grow and evolve in exciting ways. In less than five years, the department experienced two interrelated advances: the addition of the GLBT Minor, and a name-change.

Sexuality has long been a topic of concern for Women's Studies/GWSS at the University, as it is considered one of the many aspects of individual and collective identity that shape, and are shaped by, culture and society. Sexuality, like gender, race, class, etc., influences the ways in which we experience the world, the discrimination we may or may not face, and the types of relationships we form. Courses in GLBT Studies had been offered at the University since 1988 through various programs and departments (including Women's Studies),<sup>91</sup> but there had not yet been a cohesive curriculum offered. In light of student interest in sexuality studies, made evident by the fact that GLBT Studies courses had high enrollment rates, as well as the many students who had taken the initiative to design their own programs centered on sexuality studies, GLBT Advisory Boards at the University decided that a minor in GLBT Studies was greatly needed. During spring 2004, the Department of Women's Studies agreed to house the proposed Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies Minor.

Three years later, in 2007, the Department of Women's Studies requested a name-change: Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies (GWSS). The earlier addition of the GLBT Minor certainly gave the matter of a name-change more urgency, as,

[The GLBT] minor, which had been developed as a free-standing program, chose Women's Studies as its home precisely because our department has, for many years, offered courses on sexuality issues, and because the research program of a significant portion of the faculty is about sexuality.... This new

---

<sup>91</sup> "Appendix B: GLBT Minor," Department of Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies, University of Minnesota, Self-Study Report (Spring 2007): 2.

addition to our programmatic offerings simply does not fall under the old label, “Women’s Studies.”<sup>92</sup>

In addition, several other departments and programs across the nation had either changed or proposed to change their name to another variant, though compliance with a national trend was not the motivation behind the department’s request at the University of Minnesota. Rather, faculty felt “Women’s Studies” no longer represented the full scope of the field. However, out of respect to their own history, the department chose to keep ‘women’ in the title. The inclusion of ‘gender’ and ‘sexuality’ added more dimensionality to the department’s mission, making it clear that its focus was not only on women, women’s lives, women’s history, etc. While the study of women has always been an integral part of the field, it does not represent the totality of the field. Along a similar vein, the inclusion of ‘gender’ and ‘sexuality’ does not imply that these categories, along with ‘women,’ encompass the three most important social categories for understanding identity and subalternity. Rather, the grouping of the three subjects highlights the intersectionality of multiple aspects of identity, and the ways in which these aspects can be analyzed when investigating issues of oppression and representation. The Self-Study elaborates, “In this sense, we do not want to simply add objects or subjects of study, but to reinvigorate what is known as feminism and its domain of inquiry. This sense of open inquiry and repeating [sic] questioning drives the field and suggests that we consistently interrogate our projects.”<sup>93</sup> In other words, far from establishing a set of claims regarding the most pressing concerns for feminist/women’s studies, the grouping of ‘gender,’ ‘women,’ and ‘sexuality,’ allows institutional dialogue to progress and evolve, and what/who gets included in the discussion. This is not to say that feminist scholars have not already thought long and hard about their accountability to multiple communities. Instead, the name-change reflected a continued dedication to accountability and self-reflexivity.

---

<sup>92</sup> “Appendix C: Name Change,” Self-Study Report, page number not given.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

## Women's Studies Today/Conclusion

Women's Studies has come a long way in the past forty years. It has evolved from an experimental program with a handful of dedicated faculty members and staff to an autonomous department with a diverse core faculty group, acclaimed undergraduate and graduate programs, and innovative research that is international in scope. The Department has faced strong internal and external opposition time and again, yet it has flourished. According to Amy Kaminsky, "We really have, from the very beginning, learned to use the institution's own language of democracy and inclusion and all that stuff to... move ourselves into the center."<sup>94</sup> The University has aspired to be more diverse, and to promote an international curricular perspective, two goals that have been at the core of Women's Studies since its inception. Now, as the Department of Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies, it continues to demonstrate its dedication to interdisciplinarity, diversity, and transformative scholarship.

The Department offers a wide variety of courses every semester, all taught by core and adjunct faculty with an array of research interests and expertise. Naomi Scheman continues to teach part-time in both Philosophy and GWSS, bringing her philosophical background into conversation with feminist thought and theory. Richa Nagar utilizes her undergraduate and graduate experience with geography to discuss feminist praxis and the politics of development. Jacquelyn Zita specializes in biology, environmental justice, and sexuality studies, all in conjunction with feminist theory and philosophy. Amy Kaminsky, Regina Kunzel, Susan Craddock, Jigna Desai, Zenzele Isoke, and Edén Torres are also among the core faculty members who contribute their research interests and educational backgrounds to the GWSS undergraduate and graduate curriculums. This core group is bolstered by dozens of affiliated faculty members from departments such as Sociology, French and Italian, American Studies, History, Theater Arts and Dance, English, Linguistics, among many others.

---

<sup>94</sup> Interview with Kaminsky (09/24/2012).

The extent of Women's Studies' influence on other departments is evident. Whereas in the beginning the Program had to seek faculty members from other programs and departments who were interested in teaching a course in Women's Studies, you would now be hard-pressed to find a program or department that did not strive to incorporate issues of gender, race, class, and sexuality into its own curriculum – perhaps with a few exceptions. Transforming the curriculum of other programs and departments has been a constant goal of Women's Studies at the University of Minnesota, as evidenced by the following statement from the proposal for the Women's Studies B.A.,

We have hoped our presence on campus would encourage more faculty and students to conduct needed research within their own areas of competence in order to increase what we can know about women in this country and across cultural and historical lines.... Just in the few months of the Program's functioning, many departments have been encouraged to offer additional courses taught by their regular faculty [by] focusing on the way women have figured in their discipline. This is one of the primary goals of the Program, so we greet this beginning of increased departmental effort with genuine pleasure.<sup>95</sup>

Women's Studies faculty members have understood that in order to radically alter the ways in which research, praxis, and pedagogy can function to uncover hidden knowledge and assumptions about the world, it is not enough to simply build a separate field of study. If there is to be lasting change, other departments and programs must be open to self-reflexivity. Traditional disciplines must examine their own curriculum and methods to determine who, and what, has been omitted. Women's Studies has inspired the re-evaluation of other fields and disciplines, and continues its efforts to radicalize those traditional disciplines resistant to change. The Department of Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies, "promotes scholarship that pushes established boundaries while providing a rich and rigorous undergraduate and graduate education that asks students to view the worlds

---

<sup>95</sup> Proposal for B.A. in Women's Studies, University Archives.

around them with a curious, yet, critical lens.”<sup>96</sup> By teaching students to question the status quo, and conducting groundbreaking research in a wide variety of fields – science, health, migration, collaboration, environmental justice, etc. – GWSS is changing the face of many disciplines throughout the University.

As Women’s Studies at the University of Minnesota celebrates its fortieth year, it is important not only to recognize and appreciate its rich legacy, but also to look forward and consider its bright future. According to Regina Kunzel, Department chair and Professor in GWSS, “our undergraduate enrollments are strong, we are recruiting excellent graduate students into the Feminist Studies Ph.D. program, and our faculty continue to produce exciting research.”<sup>97</sup> Given the Department’s long tradition of fostering students and scholars dedicated to feminist theory and practice, we can only expect that GWSS will persist in this regard, and continue to grow and evolve in dynamic ways.

## References

Aikau, Hokulani K., Karla A. Erickson, and Jennifer L. Pierce. Introduction to *Feminist Waves, Feminist Generations: Life Stories from the Academy*, edited by Hokulani K. Aikau, Karla A. Erickson, and Jennifer L. Pierce, 1-45. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

Boxer, Marilyn Jacoby. *When Women Ask the Questions: Creating Women’s Studies in America*. Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.

Bullington, Sam, and Amanda Lock Swarr. “Negotiating Feminist Futures: Transgender Challenges and Contradictions of a PhD in Feminist Studies” in *Feminist Waves, Feminist Generations: Life Stories from the Academy*, edited by Hokulani K. Aikau, Karla A. Erickson, and Jennifer L. Pierce, 290-317. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

---

<sup>96</sup> “About GWSS,” Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies web page, Twin Cities, University of Minnesota web site, <http://gwss.umn.edu/about/>.

<sup>97</sup> Email correspondence with Regina Kunzel (12/19/2012).

- Burstyn, Joan N., Domna C. Stanton, Catharine R. Stimpson, and Sandra M. Whisler. "Editorial." *Signs: A Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 1.1 (Autumn, 1975): v-viii.
- Chambers, Clarke A., and Anne Truax. "Interview with Anne Truax." *University of Minnesota Digital Conservancy*. <http://purl.umn.edu/50781>.
- Chambers, Clarke A., and Gayle Graham Yates. "Interview with Gayle Graham Yates." *University of Minnesota Digital Conservancy*. <http://purl.umn.edu/50863>.
- Davis, Dawn Rae. "A New Wave, Shifting Ground: Women's Studies PhDs and the Feminist Academy, from the Perspective of 1998" in *Feminist Waves, Feminist Generations: Life Stories from the Academy*, edited by Hokulani K. Aikau, Karla A. Erickson, and Jennifer L. Pierce, 270-289. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.
- Ginsberg, Alice E. Introduction to *The Evolution of American Women's Studies: Reflections on Triumphs, Controversies, and Change*, edited by Alice E. Ginsberg. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.
- Joeres, Ruth-Ellen Boetcher, and Barbara Laslett. "Editorial: Looking Backward, Moving Forward." *Signs: A Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 16.3 (1991): 433-440.
- Lehmberg, Stanford, and Ann M. Pflaum. *The University of Minnesota: 1945-2000*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.
- Pierce, Jennifer L. "Traveling from Feminism to Mainstream Sociology and Back: One Woman's Tale of Tenure and the Politics of Backlash" in *Feminist Waves, Feminist Generations: Life Stories from the Academy*, edited by Hokulani K. Aikau, Karla A. Erickson, and Jennifer L. Pierce, 109-139. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.
- Skinner, Marilyn B. *Sexuality in Greek and Roman Culture*. Maryland: Blackwell Publishing, 2005.
- Spector, Janet D. "Feminist Archaeology: What This All Means (After All These Years)" in *Feminist Waves, Feminist Generations: Life Stories from the Academy*, edited by Hokulani K. Aikau, Karla A. Erickson, and Jennifer L. Pierce, 46-66. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.
- "About GWSS." *Gender, Women & Sexuality Studies: University of Minnesota*. <http://gwss.umn.edu/about/>.

“Women’s Center 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Exhibit Archive: The 1960s – Part 4.” *University of Minnesota Women’s Center*.  
<http://blog.lib.umn.edu/sspp/womenscenter/the-1960s---part-4.html>.

Center for Advanced Feminist Studies records. University of Minnesota Archives:  
Collection Number 2005-0041.

Department of Women’s Studies papers: 1975-2002. University Archives: Collection  
Number 2000-10.