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Contact: Rose Norman (539-0723 home; 895-6320 work)

UAH Approves Women's Studies Minor

It's official. UAH now offers a program in Women's Studies leading to an undergraduate minor. This multidisciplinary minor involves about 17 UAH faculty members from four colleges (Liberal Arts, Nursing, Science, and Administrative Science) ^{who} offer courses that will count toward the 21-hour minor. The UAH program offers the only Women's Studies degree in north Alabama, and joins Women's Studies programs at three other Alabama research universities (UAB, UA Tuscaloosa, and Auburn), as well as the 600 Women's Studies programs at colleges and universities throughout the United States.

The Women's Studies program is the result of two years of work by a Women's Studies Task Force, appointed by Dr. Jack Ellis, Dean of Liberal Arts. The task force involved faculty across the university, and their proposal was reviewed and approved by the Liberal Arts Curriculum Committee and by the University Curriculum Committee, as well as by the Provost. The task force was formed as a response to curricular work over the past several years by the Women's Studies Interest Group (WSIG). They have been surveying faculty, identifying courses relevant to Women's Studies, and listing them in a separate section of the published course listings. Students and some community members have been asking about the possibility of organizing these into a minor for years. Through the volunteer efforts of faculty, students, and staff, as well as gift funds, these requests have become a reality.

The minor organizes existing courses in a coherent structure where the sum of the experiences provides a more comprehensive insight into the discipline of Women's Studies than the individual courses provide on their own. As such, it provides an interdisciplinary experience that includes examination of women's status through history and across cultures, in their economic, health, family, political, and social roles.

Final approval for the proposed program was stalled because no new programs could be approved during this summer's financial crisis. Creative use of existing resources, however, allows this program to draw entirely on existing faculty and thus requires no new major financial resources. Financial support from

gift funds helps cover some administrative costs, such as a student worker, and the program will be soliciting contributions from external sponsors to sustain future growth.

This week, Dean Ellis appointed a Women's Studies Program Advisory Committee who have already selected a Director of Women's Studies, Dr. Rose Norman. Dr. Norman chaired the task force that recommended the minor and has been active in the UAH Women's Studies Interest Group since its inception in 1990. Members of the Program Advisory Committee are Dr. Sandra Carpenter, Psychology; Dr. Nancy Finley, Sociology; Dr. Craig Hanks, Philosophy; Dr. Reet Henze, Nursing; and Ms. Susan Herring, Library.

Students can begin the minor by enrolling in a foundations course this coming spring, Introduction to Women's Studies (WS 200), to be offered by Dr. Nancy Finley. This interdisciplinary course presents an introductory overview of the academic discipline. It will draw on the expertise of UAH faculty from several departments, and is open to all students, both male and female, in any major, at any class rank. It promises to be an exciting course, offering a blend of humanities and sciences approaches found nowhere else on campus.

The Women's Studies section of each semester's schedule of classes lists courses that may be counted toward the minor. Some of these are required for the minor (e.g., WS 200), while others count as electives. Students should consult Dr. Norman or a member of the Program Advisory Committee for advice on selecting courses.

Since its origin in 1970, Women's Studies has become a thriving and extensive area of scholarship which enhances traditional academic paradigms. From Women's Studies, a theoretical and methodological foundation has emerged to form a recognized intellectual discipline with a meaningful body of literature and its own scholarly organizations. As an area of scholarship, the principal focus is on the contributions, perspectives, and experiences of women in all areas of human endeavor. These include the status, portrayal, or achievements of women in areas such as art, history, science, and the professions. The Women's Studies perspective exposes an overwhelming amount of knowledge that had previously been invisible in our intellectual environment and develops theoretical perspectives concerning those omissions.

Students might choose to minor in Women's Studies for a variety of reasons. Most obviously, it enhances workplace skills through improved understanding of gender dynamics. Insofar as most all occupations are integrated by gender to some extent, this is an advantage for both men and women. The advantages are particularly great in fields such as management, public policy, social work, law, health care, education, and clinical work.

The Women's Studies minor can also prepare students for careers in community agencies such as battered women's shelters, counseling centers, rape crisis centers, women's health and vocational agencies. In some cases, a Women's Studies minor may serve as a qualifying degree. It can also prepare students for graduate work in Women's Studies or in fields where gender is a central focus.

For further information about the program, call Dr. Rose Norman at the UAH English Department, 895-6320.