

Gender Studies?

Dr. Nancy Finley

From: palist-bounces@lists.nwsa.org on behalf of Simona Sharoni [simona.sharoni@gmail.com]
Sent: Tuesday, November 18, 2008 11:05 PM
To: palist@lists.nwsa.org
Subject: Re: [NWSA-PAD] women's and gender studies
Attachments: Name change.doc; ATT00025.txt

Hello there,

We changed our department's name to Gender and Women's Studies this past summer. I am pasting below and attaching the word document we circulated to our Associates at a summer retreat. We had a committee called New Directions that worked on this and other issues like curriculum transformation for 3 years. We anticipated resistance but the vote for the name was unanimous.

We are still using the old name until we get the motion for name change approved by our own Senate and then the SUNY system.

This strikes me like a good topic for discussion at the next conference.

best
 Simona

Discussion Document Re: Women's Studies New Directions Committee

(Discussion of Name Change)

At the WMS Steering Meeting on Wednesday, October 25, 2005, the Ad Hoc New Directions Committee was established. One of the tasks of the New Directions Committee was to "consider if "Gender" should/could be more formalized into our [the WSP] program in terms of courses/emphases/Program name".

The members of the Ad Hoc New Directions Committee subsequently gathered information regarding this task (see, for example the links posted on ANGEL under the "Name Change" folder). We did some research into what other SUNY programs are called (the list is reproduced below). Additionally, we investigated what the current discussions were within the field regarding the pros and cons of using particular terms in the Program/Department name.

After reading articles on the subject, as well as reviewing the posts to the Women's Studies listserve (WMST-L) debate that members had about this very subject, we had several of our own conversations about the issue. A summary of the primary points discussed can be found below.

Some **options** for names are as follows:

11/19/2008

Women's Studies

Women's and Gender Studies

Gender Studies

Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies

Feminist and Gender Studies

Gender and Women's Studies

Gender and Sexuality Studies

Summary of points raised during the discussions on changing the name of the Women's Studies Program

Arguments for retention of the term "woman"

- It maintains a term that has a history of struggle associated with it. The social movement that came out of the 1960s and 70s served to make the space for Women's Studies programs. This history is referenced by maintaining the term "woman".
- It does more to ensure that the program addresses issues of oppression and inequality. Rather than simply treat "gender" as a neutral topic, it is important to emphasize that women have experienced (and continue to experience) inequalities based on how gender is constituted in society.

Arguments for inclusion of the term "gender"

- The term allows for a discussion of the relevance of such things as "masculinity"â€"it allows for a discussion of how it is that masculinity and femininity are constructed by larger social relations.
- The term allows for a discussion of the relevance of sexualities/sexuality studies.
- The term reflects a transformation from "second wave" to "third wave" feminist concerns. The category of "woman" is interrogated for its essentialist assumptions (that are characteristic of what is known as "second wave" feminist theorizing). This move away from the essentialized (and binary) category of "woman" is more conducive to an intersectional analysis in which race, class, gender, and sexuality are seen as being mutually constitutive and contextual.

What are other SUNY Schools doing?

Below is a list of all of the SUNY schools offering *at least* a minor in Women's Studies:

Albany: "Women's Studies"

Binghamton: "Women's Studies" (Program)

Brockport: Women and Gender Studies (Program)

Buffalo (University at): "Department of Global Gender Studies"

Buffalo State: (Minor in women's studies)

Fredonia: "Women's Studies" (department)

Geneseo: (Minor in Women's Studies)

New Paltz: Women's Studies (Program)

Oneonta: "Women's and Gender Studies"

Oswego: "Women's Studies" (Program)

Potsdam: "Women's and Gender Studies"

Purchase: "Women's Studies" (program)

Stony Brook: "Women's Studies" (program)

Some preliminary conclusions?

Our discussions regarding the name change of the program were not exactly conclusive. Some of us were interested in retaining the term "woman" in the name. We were pretty much in agreement that the name should change to keep up with the transformations in the discipline, and for reasons outlined in some of the documents that we researched. It was agreed that the term "gender" should be incorporated into the title in some way. While the committee had initially agreed on suggesting that the program call itself "the Women's and Gender Studies Program" (now Department), there were also suggestions for placing the term "gender" first.

We were also attracted to the term "feminist" for the political reasons discussed above. However, we were concerned about the potential problems that might be created for the program (primarily in terms of students' current perceptions of the meaning of that term), so we advocate for infusing courses with a feminist framework, but perhaps not including the term in the name of the department at this point.

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Simona Sharoni, Ph.D
Associate Professor of Women's Studies
Chair, Women's Studies Department
SUNY at Plattsburgh
101 Broad Street
Plattsburgh, NY 12901-2681
Tel: 518-564-3026
Fax: 518-564-4226
Webpage: simonasharoni.com

We used these questions to help frame the discussion:

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Name

(How) Will the name affect

- our ability to draw students to our courses and our major/certificate?
- our ability to obtain various forms of institutional and community support?
- what core and cross-listed courses we offer, who teaches them, what they cover or how they are taught?
- our relations with other programs and departments?

What name best reflects what we currently do in our courses? Our research? Our programming?

What name best reflects what we *aspire* to do in our courses? Our research? Our programming?

What are the limits and dangers of each of the alternatives? Which of these are more troubling to what aspects of the program? Which are we in the best position to guard against?

What does our name say about

- our academic and political priorities?
- our interest in multi- and interdisciplinarity?
- our attention to intersectionality?

What are the implications for our future as a department (defining subfields, faculty lines, etc.)?

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