Academic Program Review
Summary of Review

Department: Department of Women’s Studies
Faculty: Humanities
Date of Report: April 2009

The external review team unanimously agreed that the Department of Women’s Studies at the University of Victoria is vibrant, robust, one of the strongest in Canada and well known and respected across North America. The department is marked by a high level of co-operation and collegiality. The review team noted that all faculty make teaching, university service and student engagement central to their work. Since the last review in 2003, the department members have produced an impressive number of publications including, books, peer reviewed articles, book reviews, policy and other reports and films. The department’s work is closely aligned with the objectives laid out in the university’s Strategic Plan. Most importantly, student satisfaction surveys indicate that students have a high degree of satisfaction.

Following review of the department’s self assessment and meetings with key departmental and university personnel, the team observed that the Women’s Studies is now at a critical juncture that will determine both its ability to sustain its current level of productivity and its future shape. The team identified the loss of full time faculty resources, the commitment to increasing enrolments and the mounting of a new graduate program as three challenges for the department going forward.

The review team made four major recommendations to deal with the challenges identified. The first recommendation is that the department be able to replace the loss of a senior faculty member and also be permitted to add a junior member. Secondly, the department should strike a graduate program sub-committee in consultation with the Dean of Graduate Studies to explore innovative, creative and collaborative ways of constructing a graduate program at the Masters level. With respect to the undergraduate program, the team suggests that the curriculum and programming be reviewed with an eye to balancing enrolment growth pressures with the need to maintain a coherent and cumulative educational experience for students pursuing a degree in Women’s Studies. Lastly the team suggests that an additional .5 fte in administrative support would be needed when the graduate program becomes established.

Both the department Chair and the Dean of Humanities are pleased with the review team’s endorsement of the department. The Provost supports the Dean’s view that the Department of Women’s Studies has carved out a distinctive place among its peers in Canadian universities by having worked very hard to foster an innovative and progressive curriculum.

The department members have taken seriously the curricular issues raised and are clearly motivated to ensure that their program responds to student needs and demands. They have devised an alternative model which maintains curricular coherence while creating multiple entry points into the program as suggested by the review team. In addition, they have created a more diverse menu of first year courses and relaxed their first year prerequisites. The department is keen to proceed with plans to establish a formalized Masters program and has met with the Associate VP Academic Planning, the Dean of Graduate Studies and the Dean of Humanities to discuss. The Dean and the Associate VP agree that the impact on teaching resources, at this point in the vision of the program, would be minimal. However, should the demand for the program rise beyond current expectations, resourcing would then need further attention. Both the department and the Dean feel that additional staff resources would be required to support the addition of a graduate program. They are exploring how this may be possible in a collaborative manner with other similar sized programs. The Dean and the Provost fully support replacement of the department’s upcoming retirement loss and agree that other temporary shortfalls in the department’s teaching capacity can be met through the available sessional pool of instructors.