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## **Response to External Reviewers' Report, Department of Sociology and Sexuality Studies**

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### **A. Introduction**

Two external reviewers, Dr. Marlon Bailey (Department of Women and Gender Studies, Arizona State University) and Dr. Michael Borgstrom (Department of English and Comparative Literature, San Diego State University) visited the Department of Sociology and Sexuality Studies on September 19 and 20, 2019 to evaluate the program in Sexuality Studies. Although our faculty would like to offer alternative framings of a few of the reviewers' specific observations (see Appendix 1), we agree with their overall assessment. We welcome the opportunity to consider the reviewers' assessment in our detailed response below.

### **B. Strengths**

The reviewers observe that Sexuality Studies is a unique and nationally prestigious program that dovetails with the overall cultural mission of SF State. They praise our record on student success, noting the number of students who declare and complete our minors, our clear learning outcomes and pathways for transfer students, and our cutting-edge focus on sexuality and social justice, particularly for sexual and gender minorities. The reviewers also recognize the indisputable strength of our faculty, including our deep commitments to student learning, our innovative research, and our success in securing large federal grants. Lastly the reviewers praise our research center, the Center for Research and Education on Gender and Sexuality (CREGS), as a strong research hub for faculty conducting social science and behavioral research as well as applied research internship training for students.

### **C. Reviewer Recommendations**

The reviewers note that our program faces several challenges and they make helpful recommendations to ensure the continued growth of Sexuality Studies at SF State. Their recommendations cover four key areas: (1) interdisciplinarity, (2) institutional location, (3) faculty composition, and (4) resources. The reviewers' recommendations dovetail with recent faculty discussions concerning program identity and direction, and we welcome the opportunity to further prioritize and foreground this work. In the current section, we summarize each of the reviewers' recommendations and in the subsequent section, we describe our short-term and

longer-term plans and response. We also specify the resources we need to put these plans into action.

#### Interdisciplinarity:

The reviewers recommend that we increase our program's interdisciplinarity to better align with the broader field of Sexuality Studies. In particular, they recommend that we expand beyond our social science expertise to give equal attention to work in the humanities, which is central to Sexuality Studies as an academic field.<sup>1</sup> As the reviewers note, our program highly values interdisciplinarity, but we have struggled in recent years to maintain programmatic breadth, leading to a tension between our stated aims and our program offerings. As a result, we have fallen out of step with the larger field of Sexuality Studies and our current social science orientation may not align with students' expectations.

#### Institutional Location:

The reviewers also recommend that we revisit the program's institutional location within the joint Department of Sociology and Sexuality Studies. As the reviewers note, the Sexuality Studies program was a stand-alone unit until 2012, when it merged with the Department of Sociology in the context of a university-wide reorganization. Due in part to the program's move, all of our current faculty are sociologists, except for one clinical psychologist. The reviewers suggest that our institutional location has limited our interdisciplinarity and led to a siloing of Sexuality Studies in the Department of Sociology. They recommend rethinking this location and developing our connections with the wider network of sexuality studies faculty at SF State.

#### Faculty Composition:

The reviewers recommend that the University fund new tenure-track positions in Sexuality Studies, highlighting our urgent need for new faculty hires. Only two of our current faculty have primary appointments in Sexuality Studies, which forces the program to rely on sociology faculty and hampers our ability to deliver a fully interdisciplinary curriculum. The reviewers also note that our current faculty lacks the racial/ethnic diversity that typifies Sexuality Studies as a field and they recommend greater racial, gender, and disciplinary diversity in future hires.

#### Resources:

The reviewers largely attribute our challenges to insufficient institutional support and they urge the University to invest additional resources in Sexuality Studies. Specifically, the reviewers report that the program receives inadequate funds for programmatic and faculty development, hindering our ability to support faculty research, increase our visibility on campus, and strengthen campus-wide ties. Furthermore, the reviewers note that the University does not provide financial support for CREGS, nor office space on the main campus, despite its alignment with the department, national prestige, and clear contributions to SF State's mission. As the reviewers emphasize: "Given its prominence and prestige, it is inconceivable that [CREGS] should receive no funding from the university." According to the reviewers, additional resources are urgently needed to enable Sexuality Studies (including CREGS) to increase its footprint on

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<sup>1</sup> Sexuality Studies is an interdisciplinary field that primarily draws from scholarship in the social sciences (e.g., sociology, anthropology, psychology) and the humanities (e.g., arts, literature, philosophy, history), as well as from other interdisciplinary fields (e.g., cultural studies, ethnic studies, women and gender studies). Sexuality Studies also draws from the natural sciences and from professional programs (e.g., public health, education, public policy).

campus, deepen its interdisciplinarity, and more fully support student success and faculty retention. Without this investment, the reviewers stress that our program will be unable to realize its full potential, because our current resources “simply cannot stretch in all of the directions that a program such as Sexuality Studies requires.”

#### **D. Program Response**

##### Institutional Location:

To address the above challenges, the reviewers suggest three possible paths: (1) separate Sexuality Studies from Sociology to create a truly autonomous interdisciplinary program, (2) keep Sexuality Studies housed with Sociology and revamp the curriculum with targeted hires to better reflect the field’s interdisciplinarity, or (3) rebrand the program to focus more narrowly on the social scientific study of Human Sexuality, discontinuing the project of interdisciplinary Sexuality Studies.

Our faculty view Option 1 as impractical at this time. We have invested considerable effort to build our current program and we have utilized our strengths as social scientists who study sexuality to great effect, as the reviewers note. We prefer to build upon these strengths as we expand our program’s interdisciplinarity, instead of splitting apart and starting again from the ground up. We also view Option 3 as unsatisfactory, because we do not wish to abandon the interdisciplinary mission that has been at the heart of the program since its inception. As a program that brings sexuality courses to a diverse range of students across campus, we believe that an interdisciplinary curriculum has greater reach than an exclusively social science one. Consequently, we plan to refresh our commitment to interdisciplinarity and revitalize our program through building our capacity not through constricting our vision. To these ends, our faculty agree to Option Two. We are committed to remaining a joint department and working collectively to strengthen our interdisciplinary Sexuality Studies program. This is a practical path that foregrounds academic integrity and student success. In the remaining paragraphs, we detail our plans for achieving our goals and specify the resources that we need to perform this work.

##### Interdisciplinarity:

To strengthen our interdisciplinarity from our current institutional location, we have developed short term and longer-term plans. In the short term, we plan to continue and deepen our work in the following areas:

- Reach out to our current affiliated faculty to strengthen and possibly formalize ties (21 people in 13 departments) and identify potential new affiliated faculty in other departments, particularly those trained in the humanities and/or interdisciplinary programs. This will help to reduce the siloing of Sexuality Studies within Sociology and contribute to our interdisciplinary capacity.
- Allow affiliated faculty in other departments to serve as first readers on graduate student theses. Some of our MA students already pursue creative and humanities-oriented thesis projects (e.g., film projects, poetry anthologies) and this programmatic change will ensure that they receive appropriate expert faculty guidance.
- Continue our work with Women and Gender Studies (WGS) to formalize strong ties between our MA programs, by creating pathways for WGS students to receive a graduate certificate in

Sexuality Studies and for our students to receive a graduate certificate in WGS. These conversations are already underway.

- Explore opportunities for cross-listing more of our undergraduate and graduate courses, particularly with humanities and/or interdisciplinary programs. For example, we recently met with the chair of Race and Resistance Studies and the Associate Dean of Ethnic Studies to discuss cross-listing courses.
- Ensure that our hiring committee gives full consideration to applicants with training outside of the social sciences, particularly in the humanities and/or in interdisciplinary programs. For example, we are currently inviting three candidates to campus for a new assistant professor position in Transgender Studies; one of these candidates holds a Ph.D. in English with a concentration in Cultural Studies, another has a Ph.D. in Gender Studies with a concentration in Asian American Studies, and the third has a Ph.D. in Public Health, with a certificate in Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies.

Many of these efforts are already underway, reflecting our Department's ongoing commitment to program development. However, while these efforts are important components of our broader strategy and help support incremental change, they are insufficient to enact the broader structural changes that our faculty and the reviewers consider to be essential. As the reviewers make clear, our current efforts to increase the interdisciplinarity of Sexuality Studies must be enhanced by longer-term planning and structural changes, which require additional University resources. To these ends, our longer-term plans include the following:

- Hire two new faculty in Sexuality Studies to begin fall of 2021, including one senior scholar with expertise in the humanities and/or cultural studies who can step into a leadership role within the program and coordinate an interdisciplinary team across campus.
- Host a series of focus groups with affiliated faculty to solicit initial input on the program's future direction; host a follow-up half-day retreat where sexuality studies faculty across campus plan for the future.
- Co-host with CREGS, an annual forum of interdisciplinary scholars, including an invited keynote speaker, discussing new directions in Sexuality Studies, for students and faculty.
- Focus our annual faculty retreat (January 2020) on ways to strengthen the humanities-oriented interdisciplinarity of Sexuality Studies. This will include: (a) engaging in values-building activities to clarify the program's collective mission, vision and identity, and (b) revisiting our course offerings and program learning outcomes to better align with the interdisciplinary field. (Note: two of our faculty conducted similar work for the Sociology program as part of Teagle Curriculum Redesign Initiative and they are well qualified to initiate this work).

#### Faculty Composition:

We agree with the reviewers that our current challenges are primarily driven by limited capacity and require additional resources to fully address. Our most urgent need is for new faculty. In the past few years, the number of tenured/tenure track faculty members in the Department of Sociology and Sexuality Studies has decreased from 17 (including one FERP) to 11, even though the number of students in our combined programs has not diminished. Moreover, 2 of our fulltime faculty members primarily have research assignments, teaching one or two courses per year. Consequently, only 9 of our tenured/tenure-track faculty have primary teaching

assignments. We anticipate that the pressures on our teaching faculty will increase in the near future, as Sociology comes off impactation in fall 2020 and the number of Sociology majors and minors grows. This will put even greater demand on our faculty, who are already stretched beyond capacity as they strive to deliver an undergraduate major and minor in Sociology, two undergraduate minors in LGBT Studies and Sexuality Studies, and one graduate program in Sexuality Studies.

To build our program in this context, we urgently request two new hires in Sexuality Studies, including one senior scholar with expertise in the humanities and/or cultural studies who can step into a leadership role, and one junior scholar who can contribute to an interdisciplinary team. These hires will provide an opportunity to increase our faculty size, as well as its racial, gender, and disciplinary diversity. Our department has an excellent record of hiring faculty of color (four of our five most recent hires were people of color) and we anticipate continuing this pattern in the future. For example, two of the three top candidates in our current search are people of color and all identify as transgender or non-binary.

#### Resources:

The reviewers report that additional resources are urgently needed to develop our program to its full potential, as a vibrant interdisciplinary unit that supports student success in all its forms and serves as a model for the campus community and the broader field nationwide. As they emphasize, we cannot do this work without significant and sustained investment from the College and University. We wholeheartedly agree with this assessment and we request the following:

- Two new faculty hires in Sexuality Studies (see above): Searches to be conducted in Fall 2020.
- \$2000 a year for an annual, half-day retreat with affiliated, interdisciplinary faculty in order to coordinate program offerings and strategically plan for the program's future (including stipends to attendees).
- \$4000 a year to host an annual forum of interdisciplinary speakers, cohosted with CREGS, including an invited keynote speaker, discussing new directions in Sexuality Studies, for students and faculty across campus.
- Institutional support monies for CREGS, and an office on the main campus to provide consistent student internship programming and scholarship support for faculty. Specifically, one full time administrative position and an annual budget of \$20,000.
- Two courses release per semester for the Sexuality Studies' Graduate Director, beginning 2020-2021, to lead the programmatic development work described in this document.
- Four additional faculty offices so that the majority of faculty can have private offices. This will facilitate class preparation, offer more flexible office hours and student support and enhance scholarship.
- A designated seminar room for graduate courses, program meetings, and events.

#### **E. Conclusions**

We are pleased by the reviewers' careful and detailed review of our program and we are heartened by their vision for the future. As the reviewers report, our faculty are dedicated and

accomplished teacher-scholars and we are well poised to build upon our strengths as we expand our program's interdisciplinarity. With new hires and additional resources, Sexuality Studies can be a flagship program for SF State, embodying our campus's commitment to social justice, cutting-edge scholarship, and student success. We are excited to develop our program with enhanced institutional support and we look forward to discussing our response to the external review with the Provost shortly.

## Appendix 1

We would like to offer the following clarifications about the Reviewers' observations:

Pp. 4) The reviewers suggest that Sexuality Studies has been subsumed under Sociology. This is not our perspective. The number of faculty with primary appointments in Sociology is significantly larger than the number of faculty with primary appointments in Sexuality Studies, but both programs enjoy equal footing within the department and share resources equitably.

Pp. 13) The reviewers describe the relationship between Sociology and Sexuality Studies as a "forced marriage." Although the merger of our two units took place in the context of a university-wide reorganization that pressured small units to merge with larger units, the decision to join Sociology and Sexuality Studies was initiated and unanimously supported by faculty in both programs who welcomed the opportunity for cross-pollination and interdisciplinary collaboration.

Pp. 14) The reviewers state that Professor Darius Bost left our program because we failed to provide adequate support for his interdisciplinary scholarship. Although we cannot speak to Professor Bost's reasons for leaving, we can clarify that our department provided him the same level of research support offered to all of our junior faculty in the form of teaching release time.

Pp. 15) The reviewers suggest that our department was opposed to hiring a senior interdisciplinary scholar of color because her work was located in the humanities. Our issue with that hire was with the process, not the person. We were asked on short notice to consider hiring this scholar, with tenure, without a formal search process. Although we were (and continue to be) excited about her work, we did not want to circumvent our hiring process. She joined another department on our campus and now collaborates with members of our department very productively and positively.