

Contact: Diana Gonzalez

**REQUEST TO RE-OPEN ADMISSIONS TO THE MASTER OF ARTS PROGRAM IN WOMEN  
AND GENDER STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA**

**Action Requested:** Consider recommending approval of the request by the University of Northern Iowa to re-open admissions to the Master of Arts Program in Women and Gender Studies in the Graduate College.

**Executive Summary:** Admissions to the program were suspended in March 2012 (Agenda Item ESAC 2) to allow faculty to restructure the program curriculum. The request to re-open admissions is based on the fact that the restructuring has been successfully completed. This proposal was reviewed by the Board Office and the Council of Provosts and is recommended for approval. The proposed program re-opening addresses the Board of Regents Strategic Plan priorities to “provide educational excellence and impact as well as economic development and vitality” and Goal #8 – “Iowa’s public universities and special schools shall be increasingly efficient and productive.”

**Background:**

- ◇ **Description of program.** The Women and Gender Studies curriculum is designed to meet the need of students who strive for analytic clarity and rigor in gender-focused research. Students may employ the skills in reflective and critical analysis as well as the broad base of knowledge that they obtain in the program to (1) prepare for a Ph.D. program with a disciplinary or interdisciplinary focus on gender; or (2) prepare for a career in the public or private sector in the areas of women’s health, gender and violence prevention, or another area based on student interest; or (3) satisfy strong intellectual interests and curiosity while pursuing advanced education in the liberal arts.

Through core courses and selected electives, students will accomplish several objectives:

- ⇒ Examine theories concerning the social and historical constructions of gender.
- ⇒ Explore how gender defines relationships among women and men and between men and women.
- ⇒ Recognize that women’s lives have been underrepresented in traditional disciplines and investigate previously neglected materials to identify women’s as well as men’s roles in cultural or social endeavors.
- ⇒ Study, compare, and evaluate an array of disciplinary perspectives on gender, including cross-cultural, economic, sociological, historical, and literary perspectives.
- ⇒ Identify intersections of gender with race, class, age, sexual identity, and ethnicity, both locally and globally, in the present and in the past.
- ⇒ Employ new methodological and critical approaches to materials customarily treated in other ways, revising the content and assumptions of particular disciplines to address gender and related issues more effectively.

- ◇ Effect of restructuring. The changes add a non-thesis option for students seeking an applied track which will be more attractive to students who seek to enter the workforce after the graduate degree. The revised program offers two focus areas – Gender and Wellness; and Gender and Violence Prevention. These focus areas tap into existing strengths of the university. The core set of courses is designed to serve both the applied and theoretical tracks. Students on the applied track will complete a more significant (longer and more rigorous) internship rather than a thesis.
- ◇ Rationale for the requested action. The desired restructuring has occurred and the new format is ready to admit students. Faculty affiliated with the program reviewed peer programs and examined data from student and alumni evaluations of the program. They found that students and alumni felt that creating clearer career paths in the program would make it more attractive to a large pool of students. Most of the high enrollment peer programs examined by the faculty had an “applied” track as well as a thesis option.
- ◇ Three-year cost analysis of re-opening admissions. After review by the deans of the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences and the College of Humanities, Arts, and Sciences, as well as the University Curriculum Committee, it was determined that there will be no additional costs to reopening admissions. The courses in the program continued to be taught because there were seven students at the time of the suspension of admissions. The revised program is not expected to add demands on university resources. There will be minor costs to market the new track in the program and to create new publicity material. The existing budget of the program is expected to be sufficient to cover these costs.
- ◇ Duplication. A graduate program leading to a Master of Arts degree is not available elsewhere in the state. The University of Iowa offers a graduate certificate in Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies. Iowa State University offers a graduate minor in Women’s Studies. Programs at institutions such as Drake University, Coe College, and Grinnell College are offered only at the undergraduate level.
- ◇ Five-year trend of applications prior to suspension of admissions. Applications to the program have always been relatively low with an average of nine applications per year in the five years prior to 2012. In 2011, there were 11 applications; in 2010, ten; in 2009, three; in 2008, five; and in 2007, 13 applications.
- ◇ Marketing plan to recruit students. Since limited enrollment contributed to the request to suspend admissions, a marketing plan has been developed to address increased enrollments. The program’s advisory board has been revised to include ties to non-profit and charitable organizations in the region and state. This is expected to build a network to provide referrals to the program. The new “applied” track will be promoted and should be attractive to students seeking to enter the workforce upon completion of the degree. The program has a high profile on campus and in the local community because it sponsors speakers and other programming and is linked to several campus initiatives, such as the Center for Violence Prevention and the Global Health Corps. The Graduate College has pledged financial support if necessary and will help in recruiting by sending Graduate College staff to recruiting fairs or by helping fund recruiting done by the program.

- ◇ Workforce need/demand. The program's advisory board has identified a need for skilled employees in women's health, violence prevention, and other related areas. Organizations, such as women's shelters, the Bureau of Child Care and Community Services, victim services agencies, homeless shelters, hospitals, or churches will likely employ graduates of the program.
- ◇ Link to institutional strategic plan. The program has a strong relationship to the university's strategic plan. One of the values in the plan is diversity; the program helps the university create a welcoming community that celebrates pluralism and the unique contributions of each person and group. With the new "applied" track, the program will better meet the strategic goal of providing rigorous and relevant graduate education that meets the needs of graduate students, the university, and the community. The program is also aligned with the Graduate Education strategic plan.
- ◇ Supporting information. Although the program does not have a large enrollment, it helps UNI meet several strategic initiatives. The program also provides a vibrant intellectual environment on campus on the issues of gender because it is the primary sponsor for a variety of speakers' series and other campus events throughout the year. The program is important both from a curricular and a co-curricular standpoint. The UNI faculty leadership as well as the university administration believes that the program has been restructured successfully and that the revised program will be able to draw and graduate a larger number of students.