

Proposal to Deactivate the Sexuality Studies Major

11 July 2019

To: Curriculum Committee
Office of Academic Affairs

From: Martin Joseph (Joe) Ponce
Associate Professor, English
Director, Sexuality Studies Program, 2018-2019

Dear Colleagues:

I am writing in my role as outgoing Director of Sexuality Studies to submit a proposal to deactivate the Sexuality Studies major. This decision emerges out of a year-long review of the entire Sexuality Studies Program undertaken during 2018-2019.

Review process

This proposal is based on information gleaned from a number of sources:

- the “Proposal for Transition of Sexuality Studies Program into WGSS Department” that was submitted to Dean Hahn on April 25, 2018 (included here as “Appendix 1”)
- an open forum that was held on October 9, 2018, for Sexuality Studies faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students
- an online questionnaire circulated to current Sexuality Studies majors and minors in early November 2018 that inquired about their experiences in the program and their views of potential changes
- a meeting on December 11, 2018, with several members of the Sexuality Studies Oversight Committee to discuss further the creation of the LGBTQ Studies minor
- a meeting on January 22, 2019, and follow-up emails with Professors Shannon Winnubst, Mollie Blackburn, and Jian Chen, all former directors of the Sexuality Studies Program
- a report written by me that outlined the findings of the internal review, articulated several proposals about future directions, and was circulated to the Oversight Committee
- an Oversight Committee meeting held on February 18, 2019, to confirm the decisions made and to discuss next steps
- a revised report written by me and submitted to Dean Peter Hahn on February 26, 2019, that included the proposal to deactivate the Sexuality Studies major; this proposal derives from that document
- an email from Dean Hahn on April 2, 2019, approving the proposals laid out in the review report, including the proposal to deactivate the major (appended at the end)
- a meeting with Arts & Sciences curriculum administrators on April 18, 2019, to discuss the logistics of deactivating the major

Background

In the wake of the two-year review of the Arts & Humanities centers requested by Dean Hahn, the Diversity and Identity Studies Collective (DISCO)—the administrative unit in which Sexuality Studies was housed, along with American Indian Studies, Asian American Studies, Disability Studies, and Latina/o Studies—was disbanded. It was assumed that Sexuality Studies would be moved thereafter into the Department of Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies (WGSS). For 2018-2019, I requested that Sexuality Studies remain independent and housed in the Humanities Institute. During that year, I conducted an internal review to assess the program’s current and future situation, particularly with regard to its curricular elements—the major, minor, and Graduate Interdisciplinary Specialization (GIS). After several meetings, conversations, and email exchanges with Sexuality Studies faculty, graduate students, undergraduate students, and Oversight Committee members, I and others came to the conclusion that the Sexuality Studies major is not sustainable under current conditions.

Rationale for deactivating the Sexuality Studies major

Summary

In brief, the reasons for deactivating the major include the following:

- Dwindling resources over time have rendered the tasks and responsibilities of advising and overseeing the major much too labor-intensive for a single faculty member with one course release and one shared staff member (Nick Spitulski) to assume.
- There is no one else at OSU who is willing to take on the responsibilities of advising the Sexuality Studies major.
- The faculty and staff in Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies (WGSS) are already stretched thin. It would be untenable and irresponsible simply to transfer to the department the substantial amount of academic labor, effort, and time it takes to run the Sexuality Studies Program without additional resources.
- Administering, supporting, and promoting the Sexuality Studies major is not a key priority of the WGSS department.
- The distinction between the Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies Department and the Sexuality Studies Program has often been a point of confusion for students and presumably others. Deactivating the Sexuality Studies major will eliminate the confusion between the two units’ undergraduate degrees. (The Sexuality Studies minor is currently being changed to the “LGBTQ+ Studies” minor and will be administered by WGSS once approved.)
- Staffing the core course for the major, Comparative Studies/Sexuality Studies 2214: Introduction to Sexuality Studies, has been difficult since there are no Sexuality Studies faculty specialists in Comparative Studies. Without a designated specialist in the department, enrollment in that course has been highly variable. The course was canceled at least once in the past few years due to low enrollment.

The broader context I: Diminishing program resources

For 2018-2019, the program was given the following resources:

- One course release for the director (which I had to postpone because it was approved too late in summer 2018 for me to change my 2018-19 teaching schedule)
- \$4,000 in programming funds
- Nick Spitulski, the Administrative Manager for the Humanities Institute, shared with other centers housed there

The director's tasks and responsibilities are much too labor-intensive for a single faculty member with one course release and one shared staff member to assume. The responsibilities include the following:

- Advising minor, major, and GIS students
- Overseeing the interdisciplinary curriculum whose 37 courses are housed in 17 units and 2 colleges
- Approving course electives (those that contain at least 50% sexuality studies content) on a case-by-case basis
- Assessing the major:
 - Administering and evaluating exit surveys and sample essays from graduating seniors
 - Soliciting and reviewing syllabi for all Sexuality Studies courses taught that year
 - Reviewing course evaluations for the two Sexuality Studies courses on the books: Comparative Studies/Sexuality Studies 2214: Introduction to Sexuality Studies; and Sexuality Studies 5620: Sexuality and Violence
 - Inputting information into the online system
- Staffing 2214 without designated faculty in Comparative Studies
- Assessing Sexuality Studies 2214 as a GE Social Diversity in the U.S. course
- Publicizing the courses and degrees
- Managing 3 listservs; updating the website; fielding email queries
- Administering the [Barbara and Si Sokol Scholarship](#) (and DISCO scholarships in the past)
- Overseeing the budget: event programming, co-sponsorships
- Constituting and managing the Sexuality Studies Oversight Committee
 - Since faculty have departmental and other service obligations, serving on this committee means additional "volunteer" service. The general feeling is that everyone is overworked. Under such circumstances, delegating uncompensated labor to faculty whose investment in the program may be limited or secondary is no easy (t)ask.

This is obviously to say nothing about the responsibilities that the director has to their home department, teaching, research, advising, and other professional obligations.

The program has gradually lost resources over time. When Debra Moddelmog was coordinating the Sexuality Studies Program, she was also the director of DISCO and thus received 2 course releases. As a formal administrative unit, DISCO also had two staff

members and two GAAs (working for the 5 interdisciplinary programs, it is true). After Debra became chair of English in 2014, the subsequent directors of Sexuality Studies received only one course release. From 2014-2018, Shannon Winnubst, Jian Chen, and I worked with Jonathan Branfman as the major and minor advisor (shared with Disability Studies) and Nick Spitulski as the DISCO Program Coordinator. During the current transition year (2018-19), the program lost the GAA advisor, leaving just Nick and me.

In addition, the breakup of DISCO and the loss of key Sexuality Studies faculty (e.g., Amy Bonomi, Tanya Erzen, Sarah Fields, Lynn Itagaki, Katherine Marino, Debra Modellmog, Tanya Saunders, Judy Wu) have led to a diminished and demoralized sense of the program. Combined, these conditions may also have indirectly contributed to the declining numbers of Sexuality Studies students.

Majors graduated by year

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|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| • 2008-9: 2 | • 2012-13: 2 | • 2016-17: 9 |
| • 2009-10: 4 | • 2013-14: 13 | • 2017-18: 7 |
| • 2010-11: 2 | • 2014-15: 12 | • 2018-19: 5 |
| • 2011-12: 5 | • 2015-16: 9 | • Current: 14 |

The broader context II: Administrative labor associated with the major

The most laborious aspects of administering the Sexuality Studies Program arise from the major. Overseeing the curriculum has typically entailed asking Nick Spitulski (previously, a GAA) to comb through the catalogue each semester, see which courses are being offered the next semester, list them on the website, and publicize them on the listservs. However, the lack of a comprehensive oversight system (again, to account for the 37 courses housed in 17 units and 2 colleges, not including the one-off electives) has had several downsides: sometimes the information gathered at one point becomes inaccurate later because staffing and locations change; it is nearly impossible to avoid scheduling conflicts when so many departments' courses are at play; advising and planning is made difficult by not knowing when or how often a given course will be offered; there is no systematic way for the director to identify and approve potential one-off electives (courses with at least 50% sexuality studies content).

The inter-departmental and inter-college nature of the curriculum also makes it difficult to assess the intellectual coherence of the major. Although surveys and anecdotal evidence suggest that students generally appreciate the broad range of disciplinary approaches to sexuality that they encounter across courses, there have also been a few complaints of too much overlap in content.

While the question of coherence might be at least partly addressed through 2214: Introduction to Sexuality Studies, again, there is no Sexuality Studies specialist in Comparative Studies who can regularly teach it. (Tanya Erzen left many years ago and has never been replaced.) Of course, the Sexuality Studies Program itself, with which 2214 is cross-listed, has no designated faculty at all. Thus, staffing that course has been challenging, even as those who have taught it have done so very well (with one exception). Without a core,

tenure-track faculty member to anchor 2214, the course cannot easily be relied upon to recruit potential majors and minors either—or even enroll to substantial capacity.

Finally, the demands of maintaining the degrees and organizing events have meant that other tasks associated with growing the major and taking responsibility for majors' post-graduation futures—e.g., forging contacts with departmental liaisons regarding course offerings, formalizing internship possibilities with local organizations, providing programming and resources geared toward career opportunities—have fallen by the wayside.

Deactivation vs. termination

Those involved in these deliberations have decided to *deactivate* rather than terminate the major because there remains hope that someday institutional conditions would be conducive to reinstating it. It should be emphasized in this regard that the reasons for deactivation are *not* due to lack of student interest, scarcity of course offerings, or reservations about the major's intellectual value. Rather, the problem lies with administering the major.

In short, without a substantial reinvestment in the Sexuality Studies Program—e.g., incentives to faculty for taking on the role of Sexuality Studies director, additional WGSS staff support, new faculty hires across the college—Sexuality Studies in its current form cannot continue. The ongoing economics of austerity at OSU and the downsizing of tenure-track faculty in Arts & Sciences means that the possibility of incentivizing the Sexuality Studies directorship to make it an attractive administrative position and rebuilding a robust core of faculty in this field through new tenure-track hires across departments is highly unlikely. Thus, without a robust infrastructure to assist with the numerous tasks associated with administering it, maintaining a thriving Sexuality Studies major is simply impossible.

Impact on the university

The Sexuality Studies Program has played a vital role in supporting the university's intellectual mission to critically examine the production of social differences, hierarchies, and power, while also valuing social diversity and inclusion on campus. The minor has long been popular among undergraduate students, particularly those majoring in the social sciences and humanities, even as the numbers have steadily declined over the past few years. The shift in naming and emphasis to "LGBTQ+ Studies" may help to regitalize interest in the minor. As the numbers of majors cited above indicates, however, the major has enrolled a relatively small number of students. Thus, the impact of deactivating the major may be regarded as limited. (That said, I have already had to inform a number of potential majors that we are no longer accepting new students.)

It is important to note that students who are interested in this field can major and minor in Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies. It is also worth stressing that, with the exception of the Introduction to Sexuality Studies course which will be eliminated once the major is fully deactivated, all of the courses on the major curriculum are still available for students to take (barring individual departments removing them from their curricula). One possibility of preserving the work that the major performed in terms of gathering together all the courses with significant sexuality studies content is publicizing that list in other places—perhaps on the university's LGBTQ website or on WGSS's website.

The deactivation process going forward

New and current students

- No new students will be enrolled in the major. Students expressing interest in the field will be directed to the Sexuality Studies minor and the WGSS major and minor.
- The Sexuality Studies Oversight Committee agreed that students who have officially enrolled in the major by spring 2019 should be allowed to complete the major, if they choose to do so.
- The Sexuality Studies Oversight Committee also agreed that English/WGSS 2282: Introduction to Queer Studies should be allowed to substitute for the required core course, Comparative Studies/Sexuality Studies 2214, since the latter is offered so irregularly.
- I will work with Arts & Sciences advisors and WGSS staff to determine how best to advise and support current majors until they graduate.

Timeline

- The deactivation of the major will become effective once all of the current majors have graduated. Since the newest student enrolled as a first-year in autumn 2018, this will likely take place around spring 2022.

Courses

There are currently 10 Sexuality Studies courses on the books. When all current majors have graduated, 9 of them will be deactivated. Sexuality Studies 5620: Sexuality and Violence will either be converted into an English course or deactivated.

1. SXLTYST 2214 - Introduction to Sexuality Studies
2. SXLTYST 4998 - Undergraduate Research
3. SXLTYST 4998H - Undergraduate Honors Research
4. SXLTYST 4999 - Undergraduate Research: Thesis
5. SXLTYST 4999H - Honors Thesis Research
6. SXLTYST 5191 - Internship
7. SXLTYST 5193 - Individual Studies
8. SXLTYST 5194 - Group Studies
9. SXLTYST 5620 - Sexuality and Violence
10. SXLTYST 5700 - Workshop [not in the online catalog but on the SS major sheet]

Additional information

- As noted above, the Sexuality Studies minor is being transformed into the LGBTQ+ Studies minor and will be administered by the Department of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies when approved.
- The Graduate Interdisciplinary Specialization in Sexuality Studies is currently being reviewed for its curricular viability and sustainability as well.

Appendix 1

Proposal for Transition of Sexuality Studies Program into WGSS Department

25 April 2018

Jian Chen, Current Director
 Joe Ponce, Past Director
 Mollie Blackburn, Co-Founder & Past Director
 Shannon Winnubst, Past Director and Chair of WGSS

In response to the review of centers in the Division of Arts & Humanities and the proposed revision of the Humanities Institute, the Sexuality Studies Program must decide where and how it will be best served. Accordingly, the four faculty most directly involved in the administration of the program propose a three-phase move of the program into the WGSS Department:

- | | | |
|------------|--|---------|
| Phase I: | Full curricular review of the current program
Led by Joe Ponce, with a funded course release
Housed in Humanities Institute for transition year | 2018-19 |
| Phase II: | Development of LGBTQ minor
Led by Joe Ponce, with support from Winnubst,
Blackburn & Chen
Attention to faculty and staff support required in WGSS | 2018-19 |
| Phase III: | Implementation of LGBTQ minor
Transition of SS Program to WGSS Department | 2019-20 |

This core faculty committee agrees that a comprehensive assessment of the current inter-departmental (inter-college) Sexuality Studies curriculum is necessary before any major changes to the program can be implemented. However, based on past conversations with students and broader national trends, this assessment will be undertaken with an eye toward creating a specifically designated LGBTQ Studies component (at this point, envisioned as a minor). We anticipate that this designation will both align with the shared fundamental aims of both WGSS and the Sexuality Studies Program as well as distinguish the two units from one another.

In Phase I, 2018-19, Joe Ponce will serve as the director of Sexuality Studies, which must continue to exist in order to serve the current majors (15), minors (23), and GIS Students (8). With **a funded course release**, he will focus on this curricular assessment by convening meetings with undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in the degrees and with instructors who regularly teach the courses. He will also examine the curricular and staffing requirements that would be necessary to implement an LGBTQ minor (and, for future reference, an LGBTQ major and GIS). **Engaging in this comprehensive assessment will require one year of continued administrative support for the Sexuality Studies program, including the expertise of current DISCO Program Coordinator Nick Spitulski and a Graduate Assistant**

Advisory. (The complexity of the program is not something that can simply be handed off to the current WGSS advisor.)

In Phase II, 2018-19, the Sexuality Studies core faculty committee will develop an LGBTQ minor. This will include an overview of national curricula and a specific proposal for the faculty and staff required in WGSS to support such a minor. Staff positions in WGSS must be able to absorb this work and could require a rewriting of the positions at higher salaries. WGSS will also require greater depth in the fields of LGBTQ studies.

In Phase III, 2019-20, the Sexuality Studies program, with its LGBTQ minor, will be formally moved into the WGSS Department. We strongly anticipate the ongoing need for a faculty coordinator to direct the program, and, given the small FTE of WGSS, it would be ideal for such a position to be funded by the Division.

Across all phases, the Sexuality Studies Program must maintain its **current level of \$5,000 annual funding for programming.** The Program has hosted a remarkable international conference in queer studies of over 300 participants three times (2012, 2014, 2017) and published an excellent volume of essays from the inaugural conference. This dedicated funding is critical to the ongoing growth of the program in any institutional configuration.



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11. July 2019

Dear Professor Ponce,

Having been involved in the Sexuality Studies Program since my hire in 2008 and now serving as Chair of the Department of Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies, I now concur with the decision to deactivate the Sexuality Studies Program.

Thank you for your diligent work on this situation.

Sincerely,

Shannon Winnubst
Chair & Professor

Subject: RE: Sexuality Studies review and proposals

Date: Tuesday, April 2, 2019 at 7:43:44 AM Eastern Daylight Time

From: Hahn, Peter

To: Ponce, Martin

CC: Fink, Steven, Prak, Jennifer, Goliver, Katherine J., Winnubst, Shannon, Barrett, Shawn R., Brendel, Caitlin

Joe:

The proposals in your attached report are approved. Generally, you may roll forward on all fronts. I am cc-ing several colleagues who can answer questions/provide advice on specific features.

Steve Fink can advise on the technical aspects of discontinuing a major and of gaining official sanction for new curricular structures. Thank you for agreeing to advise all current students in sexuality studies until they graduate.

Jen Prak will review Nick's job duties and affirm to me whether he has the time to continue in the proposed role in phasing out sexuality studies. If not, we'll consider alternatives.

Katherine Goliver can advise on how to handle the Sokol Scholarship and other endowments and cash accounts.

Naturally, Shannon also will be a key partner for you.

Let me know if you have questions.

Best,
Peter

From: Ponce, Martin <ponce.8@osu.edu>
Sent: Tuesday, February 26, 2019 11:13 AM
To: Hahn, Peter <hahn.29@osu.edu>
Subject: Sexuality Studies review and proposals

Dear Dean Hahn,

I'm writing to submit a review of the Sexuality Studies Program per the agreement from last April 2018. The attached document outlines several proposals that have emerged from the review. The Appendix includes additional context and information about the review process and the proposals.

Here, in brief, are the main proposals:

- Phase out the Sexuality Studies major
- Transform the current minor into the "LGBTQ Studies" minor
- Explore the possibility of doing the same with the GIS
- Dissolve the current Sexuality Studies and reconstitute it as the Queer and Trans Research Network

I look forward to hearing back from you, particularly with regard to the major.

Best,
Joe

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