

## Feminist & Gender Studies External Review Response

*Submitted to Dr. Emily Chan, Vice President and Dean of the Faculty  
by Dr. Heidi R. Lewis, Director and Associate Professor  
and Dr. Nadia Guessous, Associate Director and Assistant Professor  
on behalf of the Feminist & Gender Studies Program  
May 9, 2022*

### Introduction

First and foremost, we thank **Dr. Layli Maparyan** (Katherine Stone Kaufmann '67 Executive Director of the Wellesley Centers for Women and Professor of Africana Studies at Wellesley College), **Dr. Ibtesam Al Atiyat** (Associate Professor of Sociology and Anthropology at St. Olaf College), and **Dr. Victor Mendoza** (Associate Professor of Women's Studies and English at the University of Michigan), for an especially thoughtful, layered, nuanced, inspiring, and robust review of our program and subsequent report.

Continuous self-reflection is a practice we have voluntarily, intentionally, and systematically cultivated. This is made evident by the fact that we have consistently assessed and reshaped the program (e.g., conducting student focus groups, developing mission and vision statements, and revising our course evaluation tool, major and minor, advising practices, and statement on scholarship). This is in addition to regular salary reviews and tenure and promotion evaluations we have undergone during the 2014-15, 17-18, 18-19, 20-21, and 21-22 AYs. While this has been challenging for us to sustain as a small program of three with hefty service burdens, it has contributed tremendously to our growth and strength. For this reason, we were especially excited by the opportunity to have our program assessed by an external review team of this caliber with deep knowledge about the history of our field, as well as the challenges of working at predominantly white and wealthy institutions. Being referred to as a "strong, cutting-edge, BIPOC-forward, trans/nonbinary-affirming academic unit" (1) was both humbling and encouraging. We have thoroughly enjoyed thinking about and discussing the report and look forward to addressing their recommendations.

### Process

In December 2019, Dr. Claire Garcia, then Dean of the Faculty and Interim Provost, approved our proposal to conduct a 2020-21 AY external review and the review team members. However, our plans were derailed by COVID-19. While we planned to conduct an in-person review this year, lingering concerns regarding coronavirus resulted in a one-day virtual review on March 30, 2022.

The subsequent parties were scheduled to meet with the review team (in the following order), with invitations and reminders sent by Dr. Lewis starting in September 2021: Dr. Lewis; Dr. Guessous; Dr. Rushaan Kumar, Assistant Professor of Feminist & Gender Studies (FGS); Dr. Peony Fhagen, Senior Associate Dean for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Faculty Development; Dr. Emily Chan, Vice President and Dean of the Faculty; declared FGS majors; former program directors and former and current members of the Advisory Board: Drs. Phoebe Lostroh, Associate Professor of Molecular Biology and former Program Director; Dennis McEnnerney, Associate Professor of Philosophy and former Program Director; Gail Murphy-Geiss, Professor and Chair of Sociology, former Program Director, and inaugural Advisory Board member; Natanya Pulley,

Assistant Professor of Creative Writing and current Advisory Board member; Tomi-Ann Roberts, Professor of Psychology, former Program Director, and inaugural Advisory Board member; Alistaire Tallent, Associate Professor of French and former Program Director; Sanjaya Thakur, Associate Professor and Chair of Classics and former Program Director; Patricia L. Waters, Professor of Psychology and former Program Director; and Naomi Wood, Associate Professor and Chair of Spanish & Portuguese and current Advisory Board member; and staff collaborators: Rochelle Dickey, Vice President for Student Life and Dean of Students; Rosalie Rodriguez, Senior Associate Dean of Students for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion and Director of the Butler Center; Mateen Zafer, Senior Assistant Director of Admissions; Anna Thompson, Sexual Assault Response Coordinator; Dr. Heather Horton, Senior Director of Student Health & Wellbeing; Jordan Travis Radke, Director of the Collaborative for Community Engagement; Jim Burke, Director of Summer Session; Dr. Allen Bertsche, Director of Global Education; Kate Holbrook, Chaplain; Gretchen Wardell, Career Coach; and Belinda Barrientos, Advising Hub Administrative Assistant and Bridge Scholars Program Coordinator. The day concluded with a collective meeting with Drs. Lewis, Guessous, and Kumar.

We finalized the schedule and virtual packet of materials and granted access to the review team on February 3, 2022. The packet included the schedule; the then program directors' response to the November 2011 external review; a website table of contents; and benchmarking web research findings prepared by Dr. Amanda Udis-Kessler, Director of Assessment and Program Review, on faculty, students, curriculum, and other relevant and available information for comparable programs and departments at Amherst, Bates, Bowdoin, Carleton, Claremont McKenna, Colby, Colgate, Davidson, Hamilton, Middlebury, Pomona, Swarthmore, Wellesley, Wesleyan, and Williams. Additionally, the packet included the following folders and additional information: Assessment (antiracism and assessment reports), Curriculum (course grids, syllabi for core and elective courses, major and minor requirements, course numbering paradigm, cross-list proposal policies, revised course evaluation questions, and data compiled by Dr. Udis-Kessler on course enrollments and cross-listed courses), Faculty (CVs for Drs. Lewis, Guessous, and Kumar; statement on scholarship; and information about our collaborative faculty initiatives), Programming & Outreach (brochures and fliers; event posters; annual newsletters for alumni, parents, and donors; and links to social media pages), and Students (demographics compiled by Drs. Udis-Kessler and Lewis; findings from student and alumni surveys conducted by Dr. Udis-Kessler; student transcript analyses and information about the majors declared by students enrolled in gateway courses compiled by Dr. Udis-Kessler; and links to the *Iota Iota Iota* (Triota), *FemGeniuses*, and *The Monthly Rag* web pages). Access to these materials was also granted to Drs. Chan and Fhagen. After the review concluded, one former Program Director requested access to the materials, which was granted.

Per guidelines provided by the Dean of the Faculty website, we requested and received the final report on April 30, 2022. Just under one week after receipt, Drs. Lewis and Guessous met with Dr. Chan to discuss. We appreciate her enthusiasm, support, and encouragement, and sincerely look forward to collaborating with her office regarding the myriad possibilities for collectively responding to the recommendations.

## Response

Overall, we could not be more pleased with the external reviewers' description and assessment of our program as well as their thoughtful and comprehensive recommendations. We appreciate the myriad recommendations intended to increase material institutional support for the program,

especially the first (**a new tenure-track line**), which dovetails with the proposal we recently submitted to Dr. Chan expressing interest in participating in an upcoming cluster hire in support of faculty diversity, equity, and inclusion. In addition to substantiating our commitments to fostering “inquiry into structures and modes of power as they are mediated by gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity, class, caste, nation and citizenship, age, and ability,” as well as our vision of embodying “a feminist ethos of critical engagement and responsiveness that is attentive to shifting relations of power,” a new hire would also attend to our students’ concerns about challenges scheduling courses and their desire for “more topical breadth” (5).

The sixth recommendation (**a significant budget increase**) dovetails with another proposal we recently submitted to Dr. Chan. Our operating budget has not increased since the arrival of Dr. Lewis in 2010 despite hiring two full-time faculty and the increasing number of majors and minors. Further, we continue substantiating our impact outside the major and minor, with approximately 25% of Colorado College students taking an FGS course in the last decade. We also plan to submit an additional proposal to increase our operating budget to secure a 12-month Academic Administrative Assistant. We hired Michael Krugly in this position just prior to the 2021-22 AY, and he recently accepted a position with the Human Resources Department at the college because the 9-month position and salary structure was no longer feasible. Further, sharing the assistant with two other growing interdisciplinary studies (ID) programs (Asian Studies [AS] and Race, Ethnicity, & Migration Studies [REMS]) only compounds the precarity and unsustainability of this model.

Similarly, we appreciated the fifth recommendation (**a new space**), which also dovetails with our proposal requesting a tenure-track line, as well as conversations Dr. Chan initiated during her term as Associate Director of REMS and continued even before our receipt of the external review report. While we are fond of the ID House because of its intimacy and the ways it allows us to build and foster community with students and our colleagues, especially in AS and REMS, we are all increasingly outgrowing the space. Due to the growth of its labor force, REMS will be borrowing the AS office during the 2022-23 AY, and neither Program Director can occupy the space, which has been the case in the past. Similarly, our program only has office space for Fall 2022 block visitors, because Dr. Guessous is graciously allowing them to use hers during her sabbatical. However, our block visitor in Spring 2023 will not have viable office space in the ID House. Additionally, if Dr. Lewis continues in her role as Coordinator of Early Career Faculty Development Programs, our program will likely retain three visitor blocks, and those visitors will not have viable office space in the ID House. Last, but certainly not least, the upstairs space is not ADA compliant, which is particularly problematic for a program increasing its attention to Critical Disability Studies. Ideally, FGS would occupy an ADA-compliant space with an office for the Academic Administrative Assistant, four office spaces for its current and visiting faculty (five if we are granted a new tenure-track line), a workspace for the 15 students who occupy the work-study funded Office Assistant position created by Dr. Lewis, a lounge or study area, and a large classroom. To be clear, while we do not desire detachment from AS or REMS, we realize we may not be able to remain physically connected depending on options that are or will become available. Still, a “dream” would be for the college to build a new space for all ID programs so we can continue nurturing critical, collaborative connections.

We began addressing the second recommendation (**clear discipline-based standards for cross-listed courses**) at the start of the 2019-20 AY, as we have long-shared our students’ and review team’s concerns that cross-listed courses may not reflect the ways our field and program have evolved. While we did revise our cross-listing proposal process in February 2019, asking

colleagues to converse more substantially with our revised mission and vision, we still have not addressed courses approved during a time when our program was less explicit in its commitment to intersectional and transnational studies of gender and sexuality. One reason was Dr. Lewis' sabbatical and COVID-19. Prior to that, however, we were admittedly fatigued and weary about potential backlash and the affective labor this process would require. While we are increasingly adept at navigating intergenerational tensions catalyzed by our resistive relationship to "traces of the older structure" (2), we are cautious about exacerbating them and aim to do so only when we deem it necessary. Our sense of urgency was recently reanimated, however, when unintentional but no less harmful racist and transphobic pedagogical practices were enacted in an FGS course taught by a faculty member outside the program. Hence, now that we have received our external review report and Drs. Lewis, Guessous, Wood, and Pulley are tenured and more able to contend with potential backlash, we feel more confident reimagining our cross-listing policies in ways that cohere with our values and yield courses that illustrate "fidelity to the field" (2), while maintaining our commitment to building and nurturing collaborative ties with our colleagues who contribute to the dynamism of the program.

We smiled when we read the third recommendation (**consider expanding the slots on its advisory board**), because we recently conversed about the ways doing so would fulfill our mission to work "in collaboration with artists, activists, and scholars at Colorado College and beyond" and achieve our vision "to be an intellectual, political, and creative space for the pursuit of exemplary collaborative initiatives locally, regionally, nationally, and transnationally." While we were mostly considering additional memberships for intellectuals off-campus, we want to take seriously the reviewers' point that adding additional members on-campus would support "increasing feminist community on campus and possibly generating more collaborative, interdisciplinary work between people (faculty and students) from FGS and other units" (5). We do not, however, see this as an either/or. Hence, we will discuss these and other possibilities and implement changes prior to the end of Drs. Wood's and Pulley's term during the 2023-24 AY. For now, we remain deeply grateful for our current structure, which has allowed us to benefit from the institutional knowledge and support of our colleagues and to maintain continuity in program leadership during a period of many transitions.

We also smiled when we read the seventh recommendation (**support students attending the National Women's Studies Association [NWSA] annual conference**), because we sponsor our three Triota officers attending NWSA annually. In fact, we maintain our institutional membership in addition to our individual memberships to support the organization and receive the three free student memberships that support this initiative. Dr. Lewis first raised this idea during the summer 2013 program retreat. While there was some resistance from members of the core faculty (due to the expense but despite a healthy operating budget), the program directors ultimately approved, and students attended the conference with Dr. Lewis in 2013, 2014, and 2015. Unfortunately, a subsequent Program Director terminated the practice "to save money" (again, despite a healthy operating budget), and students were not able to attend in 2016 or 2017. When Dr. Lewis became Program Director in 2018, she reinstated the practice, which was derailed by COVID-19. Hence, when students were last able to attend the conference in November 2019, our graduating seniors were only sophomores (several undeclared). This year, the conference returned (albeit virtually and over multiple days), and while Dr. Lewis advertised all related events through the student listserv, our majors simply do not remember. We are excited, then, for NWSA to return to in-person conferencing this November and look forward to providing our elected student leaders with an opportunity we value and fought hard to secure and maintain. We also appreciated learning about students' enthusiasm for such an experience.

Regarding the fourth recommendation (**departmental status**), we appreciate the review team encouraging us to rethink our agnosticism for significant reasons we had not considered, namely the recruitment and retention of prospective hires. We agree departmental status would allow us to gain or increase credibility and legitimacy externally; still, we initially were not certain it would achieve those goals internally or that it would better position us to leverage institutional resources. During the aforementioned meeting with Dr. Chan, however, we appreciated her wisdom, understanding, and encouragement along these lines and will pursue this possibility during the 2022-23 AY. Similarly, and as we also communicated to Dr. Chan, we would appreciate opportunities to revisit previously interrupted conversations about an Interdisciplinary Studies division, which could result in increased institutional and structural support for all ID programs and would reflect actual ID Program practices and structures. Indeed, while ID Program seats are included on various college committees, some faculty elected or appointed to represent ID programs no longer have meaningful and sustained relationships with these programs. They may have in the past, but we are not sure this makes them eligible and best-suited to represent and advocate for today's ID programs, especially since they are growing substantially and actively redefining the norms of their fields. Hence, it seems an external review (or at least a serious reconsideration) of the college's academic structure in conjunction with conversations centering faculty hired in ID programs is long overdue.

Last, but certainly not least, we appreciated the ways the last four recommendations (**center FGS faculty in efforts related to the realization of Colorado College's antiracism commitment, revise directorial contract, reduce transphobia and increase queer- and trans-positivity, and promote BIPOC faculty to the rank of Full Professor**) encourage the administration to more substantially support the most marginalized members of our community, including but not limited to those in FGS, especially as the college continues to promote its evolving commitments to antiracism, diversity, equity, and inclusion. However, as the reviewers note, "There is an emerging recognition that BIPOC faculty must be central to these efforts, yet there is an acknowledgement that such centrality comes at a cost – an increased service burden for those faculty, often with accompanying hypervisibility that makes them more susceptible to various forms of racist backlash. These are not comfortable conversations, but they are necessary" (7). Hence, we encourage the college to continue thinking about substantial and structural ways to acknowledge the uneven distribution of risk, affective labor, and backlash marginalized faculty contend with on a regular basis at a great cost to themselves and their careers. This work is often invisible to the majority even though they benefit from it in ways they don't always recognize. Therefore, it is incumbent on the institution to find ways of institutionally acknowledging the value of this labor and making it less costly to those carrying it out by rendering the contributions of programs like FGS more visible, making the campus more inclusive and hospitable, and providing support to FGS that is commensurate with its actual labor and enables it to continue thriving in the years and decades to come.