Dear Professor H. Morphy,


My key concern about the changes outlined in this document pertains to the future of the Gender, Sexuality and Culture (GSC) Major. Such concern comes from an anxiety about the disestablishment of several Gender Studies programs across Australia in the past year, notably the programs at the University of Queensland, University of Wollongong, and La Trobe University.

I am currently a PhD Candidate in the School of Cultural Inquiry. I graduated from the ANU in 2012 with a Bachelor’s degree with First Class Honours in GSC and was the joint recipient of the 2012 ANU Gender Institute Prize for Excellence in Gender Research for an undergraduate thesis.

Over the past 5 years, I have watched the gradual collapse of the GSC Major. When I came to the ANU in 2009, the GSC Major was administered in the School of Humanities and had three FTE teaching staff (Dr. Rosanne Kennedy, Dr. Helen Keane, and Dr. Gaik Cheng Khoo). At this stage, GSC had the appearance of a coherent and concrete discipline; it offered a diverse range of courses, which drew on the particular research interests and strengths of its three teaching staff.

As you will be aware, following the disestablishment of the Faculty of Arts in 2010, Dr. Keane was relocated to the School of Sociology, while Dr. Kennedy and Dr. Khoo remained in the renamed School of Cultural Inquiry (SCI). Having the GSC program split between these two areas certainly raised a lot of questions at the time and made my time as an undergraduate student difficult.

Then, in 2012, Dr. Kennedy was moved into the English program and Dr. Khoo into the Film Studies program, effectively dispersing the GSC program between three disciplines. This, in combination with other reasons, saw the resignation of Dr Khoo in late-2012, without replacement. Dr. Khoo’s departure has drastically reduced the amount of Later Year GEND-coded courses on offer in the last year (Fig. 1). Now, with only two FTE teaching staff, split between two research schools, having two compulsory First Year courses (GEND1001 and GEND1002) to teach each semester, and a small, but consistent Honours/HDR cohort, it has become nearly impossible for either Dr. Kennedy or Dr. Keane to run their own specialised Later Year courses.

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Fig. 1. 2000-level GEND-coded courses on offer 2009-14.
Furthermore, it should be noted that three out of the nine Later Year GEND-coded courses currently on the books were specific to Dr Khoo’s research interests and will have to be removed from the Major course list. These courses include:

- GEND2030 - The Politics of Dance/Musicals
- GEND2031 - Cinema in Southeast Asia: Genre and Cultural Identities
- GEND2032 - Multiculturalism in Australia through Food and Sport

As this outlines, the need for staff to run courses for a Major is essential. As I see it, the GSC Major lacks the resources to continue as a Major, especially subject to the BA review currently in progress. Here, things such as the proposed reconfiguration of course delivery methods (i.e. move towards problem based learning), as outlined by Professor Royston Gustavson in an email to students on 31 July 2013, are simply incompatible with the current administration and staff levels of the GSC Major. How are you going to ensure the GSC Major remains viable in 2014 and beyond?

On Page 10 of the “Change Management Proposal,” it claims, “Gender, Sexuality and Culture will continue to be a major in the BA and be convened by the School of Sociology.” The Major is currently administrated out of the SCI, not Sociology. Has the Head of Sociology even been consulted about this possible convenorship? Who will be taking responsibility of the GSC Major?

In May 2013, I attended a Student Forum hosted by the ANUSA CASS Representatives and, most recently, I attended the CASS Student Forum, as part of the formal consultation process for the proposed RSHA restructure on 23 July. At both of these meetings, the information delivered was presented in the form of “this is happening” and leaved little room for student involvement, with the exception of a rather short consultation period. Would you consider having HDR student representation on the steering committee of the RSHA restructure? Or possibly, establishing smaller planning groups for individual disciplines, such as GSC?

I wish conclude by highlighting my experience as a GSC graduate. I came to the ANU in 2009 with an aspiration of becoming a historian, however, given the flexible nature of the Arts degree, I was able try a little bit of everything. Fortunately, I enrolled in Dr. Keane’s “Introduction to Gender Studies” course. Taking this course, not only caused me to change Majors, but it also opened me up to a completely new ways of thinking about complex ideas pertaining to everyday concepts, such as gender, sexuality, and identity. As a result, I graduated with a degree that facilitated a critical capacity to think and communicate creatively and independently about the world I live in.

I am really passionate about the GSC Major and its future at the ANU. As an emerging academic in the field, who will be representing the ANU, I would like to say with confidence that the GSC Major is going strong, if not, expanding.

Yours sincerely

Jonathon Zapasnik
PhD Candidate in Gender Studies
School of Cultural Inquiry, RSHA