

### **Forty Years of Women's and Gender Studies: A View from the Trenches**

Linda K. Pritchard

*This article looks at women's history and women's studies with a focus on their institutionalization at non-elite U. S. universities. The fortieth anniversary of women's studies has prompted many reviews of the field, with most tracing the intellectual trajectory of key scholarly concepts. The present study takes a structural approach to determine how effectively women's studies has been implanted in institutions of higher education. Personal recollections as a graduate student and as a faculty member and administrator at three regional comprehensive universities, as well as a small study of thirteen universities in the mid-west Mid American Conference universities, suggest the complexities of institutionalizing women's studies in non-elite organizations. Despite the apparent success of women's studies in the U.S., the lack of structural integrity in most programs makes them vulnerable during periods of systematic higher education retrenchment.*

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This article joins recent retrospectives on teaching about women and gender during forty years in the U.S. academy. Decadal anniversaries provide practitioners a convenient opportunity to plot the past trajectory in order to inform next steps and new directions in the field. My qualifications for joining current reviewers are thin. I write from the perspective of a nondescript scholar, one of the grunts on the ground who helped propel the study of women and gender into various stages of institutionalization within higher education. I hope my observations might illuminate a little-studied stratum of women's and gender history and studies at non-elite institutions in the U.S.

The outlines of the women's and gender story since the 1970s are well-established: initial exclusion, intellectual agility and expansion, political intrigue, faculty passion, and student devotion. A parallel narrative of women and gender studies under siege emerged from a barrage of naysayers issuing taunts of irrelevance and threats of insurmountable barriers.<sup>1</sup> To counter real and perceived threats, scholars

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have disagreed on nearly every facet of the scaffolding, strategies, and tactics needed to insert gender into formal education. No matter, we successfully constructed new multi/interdisciplinary fields focused on the study of gendered identities and relationships. These are variously called women's history, women's studies, gender history, gender studies, queer studies, LGBT studies, feminist studies, or some combination or variant of these titles.

The forty-year marker has produced several excellent analyses of the formation process. The *Journal of American History* in December 2012, contains a roundtable with a comprehensive review article by Cornelia H. Dayton and Lisa Levenstein aptly titled, "The Big Tent of U.S. Women's and Gender History: A State of the Field," followed by responses representing contested aspects of the field. Also appearing in 2012, *Rethinking Women's and Gender Studies*, edited by Catherine M. Orr, Ann Braithwaite, and Diane Lichtenstein, offers provocative previously unpublished essays "to map and to interrogate foundational concepts and narratives associated with the field of Women's and Gender Studies (WGS) by focusing on its key terms."<sup>2</sup> Useful earlier reviews of the field include Carol R. Berkin, Judith L. Pinch, and Carole S. Appel, *Exploring Women's Studies: Looking Forward, Looking Back* (2006); Alice Ginsberg, *The Evolution of American Women's Studies: Reflections on Triumphs, Controversies, and Change* (2008); "Gender History: Meanings, Methods and Metanarratives," the first chapter of Kathleen Canning's *Gender History in Practice: Historical Perspectives on Bodies, Class, and Citizenship* (2006); and Helen Crowley, "Women's Studies: Between a Rock and a hard Place or Just another Cell in the Beehive?" in *Feminist Review* (1999).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Allison Piepmier makes this overlooked point, when she asks herself, "'How,' I wondered, 'can we be such outsiders when our classes immediate fill, we have a large cohort of affiliated faculty, and we're able to find funding to host some of the most successful events on campus?'" Allison Piepmier, "Besiegement," in *Rethinking Women's and Gender Studies*, eds. Catherine M. Orr, Ann Braithwaite, and Diane Lichtenstein (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012), 121.

<sup>2</sup> "Preface," in *Rethinking Women's and Gender Studies*, XIII.

<sup>3</sup> Cornelia H. Dayton and Lisa Levenstein, "The Big Tent of U.S. Women's and Gender History: A State of the Field," *Journal of American History* 99 (2012): 793-818; Catherine M. Orr, Ann Braithwaite, Diane Lichtenstein, eds., *Rethinking Women's and Gender Studies* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012); Alice Ginsberg, *The Evolution of American Women's Studies: Reflections on Triumphs, Controversies, and Change* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008); Carol R. Berkin, Judith L. Pinch, and Carole S. Appel, eds., *Exploring Women's Studies: Looking Forward, Looking Back* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2006); Kathleen Canning, *Gender History in Practice: Historical Perspectives on Bodies, Class, and Citizenship* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006); Helen Crowley, "Women's Studies: Between a Rock and a Hard Place or Just Another Cell in the Beehive?", *Feminist Studies* 61 (1999): 131-150.

Scholars who implanted the fields of women's history and women studies into higher education were often themselves new to the graduate academy. After Ph.D. training in research universities, we dispersed to become full-time and contingent faculty in a range of institutions across the U.S. and western Europe. The expansion of comprehensive universities in the 1960s and 1970s provided new Ph.D.s like myself with full-time opportunities that had not previously existed.<sup>4</sup> In the U.S. these were colleges with directional descriptors like Eastern or Central and those with 'at' in their name. Smaller in scope than flagship universities, these public universities have a regional rather than national draw, lesser entrance requirements, somewhat lower tuition and fees (but now growing rapidly), and few graduate programs. The result often is a more ethnically diverse student body and a wider range of student backgrounds and abilities. The burgeoning community colleges, a similar unfamiliar cultural landscape, employed others.

Faculty at comprehensive universities and community colleges focus on teaching before scholarship. Instead of formulating scholarly debates in the field, we are consumed with direct student interaction and forging resilient institutional structures to study women and gender. What may seem here more like personal reminiscences hopefully will resonate with the experiences of others who have struggled to keep the nascent fields of women's and gender studies afloat under similar conditions. I have had a faculty career with minor scholarship in American religious history, teaching women's history and women's studies courses in three four-year universities, organizing a center for the study of women and gender in one, dean at two other colleges of arts and sciences, and an unexpected turn as program/department head of a Women's and Gender Studies.

I arrived as a graduate student in the History Department at the University of Pittsburgh by accident in 1969. After four years at the University of Michigan as a first-generation undergraduate student, elite historians such as John Higham, Sydney Fine, and Bradford Perkins did not notice me in upper-division classes of seventy-five plus students. Someone did see raw potential, my graduate student section leader for the first half of the American History survey. Walter Glazer employed me to find references to Salmon P. Chase in William Garrison's *The Liberator* housed in the William L. Clemens Library, research he needed for his dissertation. After two years teaching history in a California high school, I contacted Wally again, because he was the only person I knew to ask about the next educational step. By that time, he was an assistant professor at Pitt.

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<sup>4</sup> Social scientist Martin Trow has documented the twentieth-century shift in higher education from elite to mass access. The ripple effect included bulging mid-range comprehensive universities and community colleges with concomitant new faculty positions. See Martin Trow, *Twentieth Century Higher Education*, edited by Michael Burrage (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, 2010), especially chapter two.

At the time I believed I would return to high-school teaching after finishing my M.A. I had no idea I would become part of ‘history from the bottom up.’ Nonetheless, my conversion to the New Social History was quick and decisive.<sup>5</sup> The first graduate student I remember meeting in the department was Susan J. Kleinberg, now better known as S. Jay Kleinberg, emerita historian of women from Brunel University in England and editor of this journal, *History of Women in the Americas*.<sup>6</sup> She was ahead of me in the program by a year or two. I think Jay must have been the first to utter the phrase ‘women’s history’ in my hearing. Having carved out a research area for her dissertation that was not yet a field, she was about to teach the first course in women’s history at Pitt in 1970.

I do not recall our Pitt history faculty being positive or negative toward research on women. In those days, social history graduate students claimed a particular identity group or social category for research. In my case, it was religion; for colleague, Nora Faires, it was ethnicity and immigration; for Peggy Renner, it was education; and so forth. Since ‘women’ already had been claimed, it did not occur to us to trespass on Jay’s territory. I am chagrined to note how short-sighted we were to think ‘women’ could remain a simple and singular social category. I certainly did not understand the robustness of gender as a category of analysis and how it would infuse nearly all new research on *any* subject.

Whether directly reflected in our research areas, the resurgence of feminism captured the hearts and minds of women (and some men) who were Pitt graduate students for the first time in large enough numbers to be heard. We took up workplace and reform activities relating to women and labor union organizing on behalf of graduate students. In the Pitt History Department, our Women’s Caucus protested the distribution of graduate assistantships and allocation of summer money primarily to married men. One of our signature events raised money to attend the first Berkshire Conference of Women Historians (Berks) in 1973. When the department would not fund us directly, we solicited individual faculty donations from a table near the elevator with a homemade thermometer marking our progress.

Similar activities took place in every social science and humanities department at Pitt. Where feminist women faculty members were present, such as in English, they led. In most departments, graduate

<sup>5</sup> For U.S. history, Samuel P. Hays was creating the New Society History, while David Montgomery was a leader in the New Labor History. Not lost on me was the fact that my family would remain invisible to history if this new orientation did not succeed.

<sup>6</sup> A first-generation graduate student suffers similar culture shock to one entering college for the first time. I remain grateful for the important socialization Jay Kleinberg offered.

students were the impetus for a new interdisciplinary program. In May 1971 an ad hoc committee made a recommendation to the university president to create a Women's Studies Program at Pitt. My emotional remembrance is of a lengthy timeline, bitter faculty governance proceedings, and a hostile administration. Yet by Fall 1972, the program was established and three faculty approved as joint appointments including one in History.<sup>7</sup>

The rationale for women's studies was the need for compensatory research and teaching to demonstrate that women indeed were present with agency and important to society now and in the past. This characterization of women as a singular category did not seem limiting at the time, partly because the earliest works in women's history introduced the diversity of women's experiences. Pitt hosted a conference called *Women and Education* in Winter 1972, one of the first national meetings that could be considered a prequel to the National Women's Studies Association. The historians present were Gerda Lerner and Anne Firor Scott. Lerner was on the verge of publishing *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History* (1972). Scott only later fully explored the relationship of white to African American women, but her classic book, *The Southern Lady* (1970), took us out of the usual literature on New England into the U.S. South.<sup>8</sup> These pioneers are one of the reasons that Dayton and Levenstein can note that U.S. women's and gender history "has not been visibly riven by generational divides."<sup>9</sup> These pioneering historians helped to frame the field of gender intersecting with race and class.

The job market in the humanities was beginning to soften in 1980 when I finally finished my Ph. D. I was grateful to find a tenure-track position at the University of Texas-San Antonio (UTSA), chartered in 1969 with classes held in an office park until the main campus opened in 1975.<sup>10</sup> As the only woman in UTSA's history department at the time, the comfort of a feminist professional community was left for my generation to create. Getting courses on women on the books and staffing them was the first task. I created a U.S. women's history course and taught *Women in American Society*, an interdisciplinary course created for undergraduate social science majors.

<sup>7</sup> For the official story of the creation of the University of Pittsburgh Women's Studies Program, see <http://www.wstudies.pitt.edu/about/program-history>, especially [1972 - Prologue to the Women's Studies Program, University of Pittsburgh](#) and [1977 - Women's Studies Program Five Year Report](#) (accessed 24 April 2013).

<sup>8</sup> Gerda Lerner, ed., *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History* (New York, NY: Random House, 1972); Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930* (1970, reprinted by Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1995).

<sup>9</sup> Dayton and Levenstein, "The Big Tent of U.S. Women's and Gender History": 793.

<sup>10</sup> A brief history of The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) is available at <http://utsa.edu/about/history/> (accessed 24 April 2013).

Activism, diversity, and multi/interdisciplinary themes guided our work at UTSA to create an academic feminist community. When the history department hired Susan Smulyan in American Studies, I had a partner in feminism for the three years she was stayed. Neither of us had tenure, and I at least expected to stay quiet until then. The lack of any semblance of attention to issues of women campus-wide prompted us to move up the timetable. Notions of faculty service guided our collective efforts, but as well, feminist concepts of activism provided an alternate vision. We reached out to the local community to include activist Latinas, African Americans, and lesbians, as well as straight white women, in our activities. In 1985, we organized a volunteer committee of faculty, staff, and students to create Women's History Week. Until I left UTSA in 1998, I was a proud member of a broad-based committee of women and men who planned, raised money for, and carried out a week of diverse, multidisciplinary lectures, panels, films, and events.

The concept of gender inserted itself in the early 1990s. The success of Women's History Month and subsequent support by UTSA administrators who saw the value in co-curricular relevance and successful community outreach led to the creation of the Center for the Study of Women and Gender in 1993.<sup>11</sup> I do not remember how gender got into the name of the center, but it did not cause particular agitation. By then, Joan Wallach Scott's article, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis" appeared in the *American Historical Review* (1986), and she had given a keynote address on the subject at the Berks. As well, Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* appeared in 1990.<sup>12</sup> The conversation had shifted to the fluidity of gender categories, although what that meant in application was contradictory. We easily welcomed men into the scholarship on women through UTSA's Center, agreed the study of women included the relationships to men by definition, and believed that gender was a cultural construction. Even so, when the National Historical Publications and Records Committee (NHPRC) funded an archivist for our new UTSA Archives for the Study of Women and Gender, she exclusively collected the papers of local women's organizations and women leaders of San Antonio.

From the beginning, the Center for the Study of Women and Gender was in the capable hands of my new colleague, Linda Schott. She continued the Center's original vision of scholarship, diversity, and community outreach, creating a venue for a multi-year Conference of Women Historians in Texas

<sup>11</sup> Special thanks go to former UTSA administrators, Dean Dwight Henderson and President Sam Kirkpatrick, for understanding the value of these activities for the campus and community and providing resources to get them off the ground.

<sup>12</sup> Joan Wallach Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *American Historical Review* 91 (1986): 1053-75; Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990, reprinted by New York, NY: Routledge, 2006).

(CoWhit); working closely with the organizers of the *Women & Texas* conference in Austin to infuse women into the Handbook of Texas History (latest edition, 1999); sponsoring and hosting the U.S. Latin American Trade and Women: Breaking Trade and Gender Barriers conference; and facilitating the production of a documentary film, '*Getting Where We've Got to Be: Women in the Texas State Legislature*'. When a new upper administration arrived at UTSA in the late 1990s, the Center for the Study of Women and Gender was folded into the History department, Linda's release to administer the center was gutted, and the center died an undignified death.

In retrospect, I deeply regret our failure to create degree programs in women's studies at UTSA. Institutionalized programs garner the support of students as well as faculty, so they are harder to dislodge (though not impossible, as is evident nationally in the last several years). This lack of foresight stemmed from the failure to understand the power of collaborative interdisciplinary study. We might have become involved with the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA, founded in 1977), although the reports from that front limited its initial outreach due to intellectual and identity divisions. At least the NWSA offered resources for us to draw on during the years of the Center's existence.

I was able to continue the long tradition of administrators making a difference. As dean of two colleges of arts and sciences, I promoted women's and gender studies in small ways. At Arkansas State University, I immediately approved a minor in women's studies and one in African American Studies that had languished in limbo for years. Eastern Michigan University (EMU) already had a robust program, but lack of resources was taking a heavy toll. I approved the first full time permanent director, and EMU's Women's Studies Program hired my former UTSA colleague, Linda Schott. By 2008, we had switched roles. She left EMU to become dean of arts and humanities elsewhere, and I unexpectedly became the interim director of EMU's Women's Studies Program.

Eastern Michigan University is rightfully proud of its Women's and Gender Studies program. We claim the first women's studies degree in the state of Michigan, beginning with a minor in 1975, followed by master's degree ten years later, then an undergraduate major, and a recent graduate certificate. From the beginning, women's studies at EMU was faculty-driven without institutional financial support. Our program followed the historical pattern whereby faculty from the humanities and social science departments met in the early 1970s to generate "women-in" courses: women in American history, European history, psychology, sociology, anthropology, education, criminology, etc. "Faculty Affiliates" from a variety of departments taught courses on women in their disciplines. These are cross-listed with Women's and Gender Studies, another common attribute of U.S. women's studies programs. In the beginning at EMU faculty taught without compensation, because the courses were outside the catalog offerings. Over time horizontal groupings of courses were bundled into programs of study leading to degrees.

EMU's Women's and Gender Studies Program eventually developed several well-enrolled basic courses within a university-required General Education sequence. These courses are gateways to the women's and gender studies major and minor. More importantly, these courses expose a wide swath of male and female students to the basic concepts in the field. Unfortunately, itinerant faculty who for the most part are credentialed at the Masters level teach these introductory courses almost exclusively, because Faculty Affiliates reside in departments with competing curricular priorities.

Administrative needs at EMU grew at each stage of program development. Courses needed to be coordinated and scheduled, students needed to be advised, and Women's History Month activities planned and run. Faculty women who freely had taken on these administrative burdens began to demand small orts of support, first for space (a closet), a telephone, a part-time director with a little release time, some clerical help. When I took the interim director position in 2008, forty years of incremental change had produced a structure that was a department except for the title. The Associate Dean said for all intent and purposes, Women and Gender Studies functioned as a department; in fact, he wished we would become one because "seventeen departments and one program" in the College of Arts and Sciences is cumbersome to say.<sup>13</sup>

Eastern Michigan University's success mirrors the positive trends in women's and gender studies across the nation. One obvious measure is the number of Women's and/or Gender Studies programs in the U.S. The growth of such programs was immediate and sustained, as a study commissioned by NWSA demonstrated. At the founding of the NWSA in 1977, 276 programs existed nationwide. The next decade saw the largest growth in programs, and by 1989, the number of program had nearly doubled to 525 nationwide. In 2007, there were 652 women's and gender studies programs at community colleges, four-year colleges, and universities, enrolling nearly 90,000 undergraduate students in the U.S.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Former Associate Dean Wade Tornquist, College of Arts and Sciences, Eastern Michigan University said this many times to me.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Reynolds, Shobha Shagle, and Lekha Venkataraman, "A National Census of Women's and Gender Studies Programs in U.S. Institutions of Higher Education," *National Opinion Research Center* (2007), on behalf of the National Women's Studies Association, Chicago, IL. The picture was never as rosy in the U.K. or on the European continent.

When I entered my current position as Interim Director, I was predisposed toward an optimistic view of EMU's program. The intellectual discussions around the concepts of women and gender suggested the robust scholarly underpinnings of the field. In 2005, the EMU program had added the less identity-driven name of *gender* to its program title in order to augment the singular focus on women. The Women's and Gender Studies Program had grown exponentially in student credit hours thanks to its general education courses, Introduction to Women's Studies, and later, Introduction to Gender and Sexuality. The result was a program larger than three other departments in the university in terms of student enrollment. EMU's Women's and Gender Studies was well-regarded in the state, hosting a successful Michigan Women's Studies Association Conference in 2007.

Nonetheless, I quickly became worried about our future. I discovered a disconnect between the scholarly and the organizational location of women's and gender studies. The *structural* position of women's and gender studies at Eastern Michigan University did not match its *academic vibrancy*. The very decentralization and shared resources that insured its initial success was not sustainable for the long term. Women's and gender studies courses, faculty, and students did not belong to us; we were a shell program.

Like most, EMU's program is multidisciplinary at its core. Historically, we have relied on contributions of tenured and tenure-track faculty from traditional disciplines to teach courses for our minor, major, and graduate programs. This has resulted in a major structural problem. *Faculty tenure resides in the home department and not in Women's and Gender Studies*. As a result, the program has no formal role in advocating for positions, hiring, evaluation, or tenure and promotion of faculty members. First-generation EMU women's studies faculty bought into the task of making and supporting women's studies by any means necessary. As they retire, whether the department replaces them or not (EMU's History department did not), new faculty are unlikely to risk tenure for service to women's and gender studies. Regardless of the desire of our Faculty Affiliates to teach in the program, they fill home department needs first.

Additional problems emerged due to the lack of input into traditional department matters. Faculty Affiliates plan cross-listed courses, sequence them, and assess them for student success, but the program cannot insure they are taught in a timely fashion. As a result, *Women's Studies does not control course offerings or control its own curriculum*. We rely on the kindness of our friends so see that our program continues to function. No unit in the university can guarantee course offerings, but women's and gender studies does not have access to the usual academic carrots and sticks.

*Nor can we insure qualified faculty teach Women's Studies courses.* Until recently, Women's and Gender Studies could not hire faculty directly. Cross-listed courses are staffed by the academic department in which faculty reside. Many of the courses are core and restricted elective courses, the mainstay of our degree programs. Yet in Winter 2009, little more than forty percent of our cross-listed courses were taught by tenured or tenure track faculty. For some high-volume courses, such as Psychology of Women and Feminist Philosophy, contingent faculty hired on a course-by-course basis without benefits taught nearly all sections. Even for courses we control, the best we can do is to hire part-time faculty. More than 80 percent of our bread-and-butter Introduction to Women's Studies and Introduction to Gender and Sexuality are taught by adjuncts, along with an occasional faculty member who can wriggle free of her or his department. Our instructors are among the best in the university, but they cannot take the place of Ph.D.-trained faculty.

Another problem comes with the inability to tenure: *students follow individual faculty into traditional departments instead of staying in women's and gender studies.* High teaching demands at regional comprehensives (EMU requires four courses per semester) make it difficult for faculty to take on women's and gender studies students in addition to those in their own department for independent studies, honors theses, and M.A. theses. Students wonder where the "there" is in Women's and Gender Studies and leave for the more structured programs of their mentors. This limits women's and gender studies' common experiences and community in which we pride ourselves.

A final problem related to the location of tenure outside Women's and Gender Studies is the *program director could not be tenured in Women's Studies.* This was not a problem in the beginning. Prior to 2003 when we hired an outside program director, committed individual faculty from different departments rotated sequentially as program directors. When Linda Schott arrived, she was tenured in the History department, as I am, but I do not think it would happen again. In a time of declining faculty positions, departments will not risk losing nearly impossible-to-come-by positions to an administrative hire. The person who came in second in the 2003 Women's Studies search for program director was a political economist. The preliminary "read" on her situation was that neither the Political Science nor Economics department would claim her.

The classic women's studies model was putting our successful program in jeopardy.

I quickly concluded that our historic and admired Women's and Gender Studies program at Eastern Michigan University had no structural integrity. We boasted of multidisciplinary functionality, but the result was a hollowed-out shell. Faculty surrounded the program and cast their net in it periodically, but

they could not provide a stable core. Part-time instructors did God's work, but they did so without oversight and future curriculum development. Simply put, we were not doing right by our students.

In order to sound less like a cranky university administrator demanding resources, I decided to poll my colleagues at some peer institutions to see if the structure of women's and gender studies programs elsewhere were on more solid ground. Perhaps a less hide-bound university had solved the problems above. Defining "peer" was the first obstacle. We had several lists floating around my campus, all with supporters and detractors. I decided to go with the American quirk of choosing comparable institutions based on sports teams. For Eastern Michigan, that means universities in the Mid American Conference called the MAC. These are all middling universities located in the upper Midwest in the states of Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Pennsylvania, and New York.<sup>15</sup>

The group looked similar in size and programming. Student enrollment ranged from about 35,000 at Kent State to 20,000 plus at Miami of Ohio and Ohio University; EMU was about 23,000. None of the MAC universities were flagship at the time of the study. Three are in Michigan: Central, Western, and Eastern Michigan University. All have some sort of program in Women's Studies or Women's and Gender Studies. One significant difference is relevant, however. According to the Carnegie classification, Eastern Michigan University is a Masters-L (for large), while all the others are Research-High or Doctoral.

One way to think about the results is to hypothesize that more institutionally-developed campuses would provide a higher degree of structural integrity for Women's and Gender Study programs. If it is simply a matter of complexity of university setting, then MAC universities other than EMU should have solved some basic structural problems. If the lack of program integrity looks similar in these institutions, then the problem is likely to be pervasive and a condition of the field as a whole. Email inquires to the women's studies directors at the MAC universities during 2008-09 confirmed that common problems afflicted women's and gender studies.

Only two of the thirteen MAC universities at that time could tenure the director/department chair or faculty members directly in Women's Studies. Both these institutions, SUNY-Buffalo and University of

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<sup>15</sup> Thirteen universities comprise the MAC. They include Akron, Bowling Green State, Kent State, Miami, Ohio, and Toledo universities in the state of Ohio; Ball State University in Indiana, Northern Illinois University in Illinois, SUNY-Buffalo in New York, and Eastern, Western, and Central Michigan universities in Michigan. The University of Massachusetts has since replaced Temple University in Pennsylvania. See MAC website, <http://www.mac-sports.com/> (accessed 24 April 2013).

Toledo, are Research 1-designated. Each had a women's studies *department* instead of a program. All but one of the remaining universities, including others designated as Research 1, had programs with directors where, as Amy Levin from Northern Illinois said: "The tenure is held in that person's Ph.D. department, or the closest applicable field." The director positions were not necessarily administrative appointments. Vicki Krane, program director at Bowling Green State in Ohio, put it this way: "I am on loan from my home program." Suzanne Holt, from Kent State, wrote, "Well, brace yourself for the facts! No hired full-time administrator...the Director is always already working for her own department, and I know, in several of the last few directorships, she goes down to half-time." The situation at Ball State was even worse. According to Julee Rosser, "Currently, [the] director is two part-time positions put together and is not a tenure-track position." She went on to say that in 2008 the dean put together an ad hoc committee of only tenure-track or tenured people to discuss the future of the Ball State program. As a result, the director cannot serve; "no one from the Women's Studies Program is on this committee."<sup>16</sup>

The distinction between *department* and *program* contributes to the inability to tenure in women's and gender studies. Amy Levin at Northern Illinois reported that in the state of Illinois, "programs cannot give tenure; consequently, we have to do joint appointments." At Eastern, it is not the state of Michigan, but the faculty union that determined only a department can grant tenure. A narrow reading of the faculty contract requires a split appointment, not a joint one, so that no confusion exists about where the faculty home (and tenure) lies. Since 2006, EMU's Women's and Gender Studies Program was allocated one .49 faculty with virtually no input into her evaluation.

Does the lack of the ability to tenure in Women's Studies remain a problem? Judith Grant, of Ohio University, agrees: "We can't grant tenure, we can't control our courses, and we are only advisory in merit, tenure and promotion of our joint appointment faculty." Then director, Cathryn Bailey, from Western Michigan University explains: "The main problem is that there is no mechanism to consistently gain access to 'affiliated faculty' so that they may teach courses within Gender and Women's Studies. Some official way of ensuring their participation is critical." As well, the tradition of cross-listed courses housed in other departments is a continuing problem. Central Michigan's Tara Saathoff-Wells said it this way: "It is consistently frustrating to try to coordinate across department – course time overlaps, gen ed [general education] courses, and temporary faculty that we know nothing about in terms of their skills and/or perspectives."

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<sup>16</sup> All communication was completed via email and telephone with the author.

This small research study of the structural status women's and gender studies programs strongly suggested that all was not well with women's and gender studies in regional comprehensive universities. My questions to the directors' of Women's and Gender Studies in MAC schools elicited the same frustration I was feeling as I began to steer the EMU program. Despite the strength of the academic function of women's and gender studies, the EMU program was a house of cards that any strong wind could blow down.

After heartfelt discussions among Faculty Affiliates and administrative supporters, EMU's Women and Gender Studies Program voted to become a department. The approval process via faculty governance was reminiscent of the political struggle within the university to become a program. We listened to how we were now unneeded since women were already integrated into traditional disciplines. We were pilloried because we had no faculty but told that we could not hire faculty because we were not a department. We were hoisted on our petard of being too successful to warrant a change in the model. Nonetheless, the EMU Women's and Gender Studies Program became the Department of Women's and Gender Studies in 2009. We hired a full-time tenure track faculty member into the department in 2010. She is on track for tenure in the department, joining our now-tenured split appointment in Women's and Gender Studies and Sociology. We incorporated a hybrid structure of faculty affiliates, called Department Members, who provide a required minimum of teaching and service to the department. We are searching for a permanent head tenured in the Department of Women's and Gender to begin in 2013-14.

Bowling Green State University (BGSU) in Ohio tried another solution: Vicki Krane wrote in 2008 that women's studies was "about to submit the paper work to join with American Culture Studies and Ethnic Studies into a School structure. This would benefit all three programs. We will be able to share resources and...better coordinate offerings that serve multiple majors." Women's Studies at BGSU is now part of the School of Cultural and Critical Studies under the directions of Suzann Peña.

Department status at EMU for women's and gender studies brought no panacea. Our 1.49 faculty is not large enough to support curricular and service needs even with commitments from our Department Members. Yet approval for new faculty positions is skewed to large departments where retirements are endemic. Adding gender to our name in 2005 was done without articulating or documenting its meaning. Even so, we argued pragmatically for a first faculty hire in gender and sexuality, successfully linking the position to the creation of a minor in LGBT Studies. An eventual collision of the following is likely: traditional feminist analysis of gender as constructed performance with a political gay rights movement increasingly relying on the belief that gender identity is fixed. A Queer Studies minor is now on the books, but we don't have enough staffing for it. How to prioritize its program needs in light of our Women's and Gender Studies major, minor, and M.A. is an on-going, occasionally tense, discussion.

These recent changes at EMU have occurred during devastating funding cuts to public higher education in the U.S. Regardless of the successful scholarly assessment of the field, we are all on high alert. These have taken out perfectly viable women's and gender studies programs including the University of Nevada-Las Vegas and other lower profile programs. Some of U.S. citizens even go to court to block federal and state money from going to colleges that offer programs in women's studies and its progeny. The Association of Canadian Studies in the United States reported that poll in 2009 asked whether Canadian Studies and/or Women's Studies should be cut (nearly a third agree). A blog reports a *Times Higher Education* (London) story that profiled the "last stand-alone undergraduate degree in women's studies" in the UK.<sup>17</sup> Decisions to strengthen local women's and gender studies programs are more important than ever.

We are not the first to invent a new discipline. Historical patterns in women's and gender studies likely resemble those in fields that emerged before. The literature on sectarian movements within established religion could provide interesting theoretical and comparative models. Certainly forty years is not long enough to evaluate the trajectory of women's and gender studies. No matter, reflection on the past in order to chart a successful course for the future is in all of our best interests, especially for our students. In the end they will redefine whatever terms and structures we create today.

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<sup>17</sup> See "When Budget Cuts Loom," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 28 March 2010, for a report that does not include closures and mergers since then. The Association for Canadian Studies in the United States sent an email to members on 22 April 2009 in order to make them aware of this poll. A men's-rights advocate asked the U.S. District Court in Manhattan to block federal and state money from going to colleges offering programs in women's studies, according to *The Chronicle of Higher Education* News Blog, 29 April 2009. Anthony Paletta created an online forum in Britain to discuss "Women's Studies on Decline in Britain?", 11 February 2008, which directly contrasts the success of women's studies in the U.S. to the lack thereof in Britain.