

**F. O. Matthiessen Visiting Professorship of Gender and Sexuality
and the
Committee on Degrees in Studies of Women, Gender, and Sexuality
Harvard University**

The F. O. Matthiessen Visiting Professorship of Gender and Sexuality at Harvard University is designed to support a regular series of visiting professors working in the area of Gay and Lesbian Studies. Although Gay and Lesbian Studies—and more amply, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies—constitute a dynamic and innovative field in many colleges and universities throughout the United States, Harvard University has hardly been at the forefront. The F. O. Matthiessen Chair will effectively allow Harvard University to tap into the vibrant new scholarship that focuses on sex, sexuality, and sexual orientation as they bear on history; governance and the law; ethics, morality, and religion; literature, art, and performance; psychology and psychoanalysis; biology; anthropology; sociology; the Classics, and other disciplines and fields.

What is WGS?

The Committee on Degrees in Studies of Women, Gender, and Sexuality was formally constituted by a unanimous vote of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences in November 2003, and began its first full academic year in the fall of 2004. The vote approved the refashioning of the previously existing Committee on Degrees in Women's Studies, established in 1986, and effectively recognized the changed and changing reality of the field. For instance, courses devoted to gay and lesbian studies, to sexuality and sexology, and to queer theory had been offered for a number of years under the rubric of Women's Studies—a rubric that did not accurately reflect the contents of such courses. The change of name thus not only allows for more diverse and accurately designated curricular offerings, but also functions as a mandate to develop offerings specifically focused on LGBT issues. The upshot—and expectation—is that a wider array of students with a wider array of interests will turn to a more visibly receptive and dynamic program.

Why is there no independent LGBT program?

While it may be tempting to adduce entrenched heterosexism and homophobia as the impediments to an independent LGBT program, long-standing structural and administrative concerns are more significant. Indeed, although the student-run newspaper, *The Crimson*, called for an independent “Queer Studies” department in an editorial published shortly before the 2003 vote, the institutional history and administrative complexity of Harvard University are such that the creation of new and self-standing programs would have proved extremely arduous, even impracticable. Accordingly, rather than miring ourselves down in an attempt to create an entirely new program with a new staff, new space, and new faculty, an informal group of concerned faculty decided, after considerable research and deliberation, to build on our existing strengths and to work within the existing structures. The deans and the president were quick to support our decision, which avoided potentially counterproductive politicization and which stressed instead academic and curricular development from within the refashioned site of Women's Studies.

Why is WGS not a department?

As an interdisciplinary honors program, WGS is comparable to other programs or degree-granting committees such as History and Literature, Literature, and Social Studies, all of which remain among the most prestigious undergraduate concentrations in the College. The non-departmental status of these programs, including WGS, is essentially an effect of an administrative system that understands established academic disciplines as contributing to less established yet typically more flexible interdisciplinary programs. Fortunately, however, the administration supports a number of joint positions (full faculty lines shared between WGS and a department). The administration has, moreover, recently increased the number of faculty positions in WGS and has even agreed to the possibility of an appointment entirely in WGS.

Does it make a difference that WGS is a committee and not a department?

Yes and no. Like a department, a degree-granting committee is in charge of curricular development, instructional offerings, and advising. And like a department, a degree-granting committee allows students to pursue a full range of courses for an undergraduate degree. Yet whereas a department tends to be centered on a single discipline and its subfields and is able to make full appointments, a degree-granting committee like WGS is interdisciplinary and, as such, is *generally* limited to joint appointments, an arrangement that, for all of its difficulties (some departments are simply more open to innovation and dialogue than others), also has considerable benefits. One of the most notable benefits is the creation and consolidation of innovative and exciting intellectual ties that are, interestingly enough, true to the original spirit of the University: that is to say, a turning of the many to the one. Finally, while most degree-granting committees do not admit graduate students, at least one—Religion—has a full-fledged PhD graduate program. WGS is seriously considering instituting a graduate program, either on its own or in cooperation with other departments.

What kind of LGBT studies courses will be taught?

The possibilities are virtually endless, but emphasis will be placed on courses in history (of lgbt social movements, of sexuality and sexology, of sex, the law, and morality); government (anti-sodomy statutes, morals legislation, marriage and civil unions, the military, nationalism, and citizenship); biology and life sciences (essentialism versus constructivism; human sexual “development;” HIV/AIDS); literature, art, and music; religion and ethics; queer theory; the Classics; immigration and globalization; and area studies (homosexuality in Latin America, Asia, Africa, Europe, the U.S., and so on).

Who will be teaching them?

The tenured faculty (Epps, Jardine, Najmabadi, Park) and regularly employed instructors will teach some of these courses, but obviously cutting-edge scholars and teachers supported by the F. O. Matthiessen Visiting Professorship will be critical to ensuring a steady and varied roster of courses. There will also be possibilities for collaborative ventures, including interdisciplinary team-taught lecture courses and seminars.

Will undergraduates be able to get their degree in WGS?

Undergraduates had always been able to get a degree in Women's Studies; the degree will now be in Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies.

Will there be a graduate program?

The Committee has had substantive discussions about the creation of a graduate program, consulting colleagues at Harvard and its peer institutions as well as high-ranking members of the administration. WGS will intensify the discussions in the near future, particularly as developments such as the F. O. Matthiessen Visiting Professorship materialize. In the meantime, WS and WGS have remained actively affiliated with the Graduate Consortium in Women's Studies (GCWS), an inter-institutional organization that brings together faculty from seven area schools—Harvard (GSAS, Divinity, Education), MIT, Brandeis, Tufts, Boston College, Simmons, and Northeastern—to offer doctoral level courses in women's studies, gender and sexuality studies, and LGBT studies. Faculty members of WGS also regularly offer WGS-related graduate courses in their departments and lead graduate workshops.

Is Harvard behind other institutions in the field?

Harvard is unquestionably behind other institutions, notably Yale, Duke, the University of Chicago, the University of Pennsylvania, Berkeley, NYU, Brown, Rutgers, and many other colleges and universities that have instituted a range of opportunities for LGBT students ranging from mentorship programs at Brown and elsewhere to the Larry Kramer Initiative in Lesbian and Gay Studies at Yale.

What is the strategy for catching up?

The strategy for "catching up" is also, quite frankly, a strategy for moving beyond (this is Harvard, after all). With currently four tenured faculty members, WGS is marked for growth. A search for a new faculty member is currently under way and another offer is pending. The approval of new positions is only the most visible of a series of achievements that can be traced to the reconfiguration of Women's Studies as Women, Gender, and Sexuality. But along with negotiations with University Hall, WGS has undertaken a number of measures to reexamine its history, calibrate its challenges, and realize its possibilities for productive growth. These measures include bringing together directors and department heads from peer institutions for consultation; organizing symposia and colloquia, including a collaborative venture with the Larry Kramer Initiative in Lesbian and Gay Studies at Yale (a memorial conference in honor of renowned lesbian writer, Monique Wittig); actively promoting studies in gender and sexuality through the Gender and Sexuality Seminar at the Humanities Center and the aforementioned Graduate Consortium in Women's Studies; and sponsoring a wide but coherent range of performances, readings, and lectures. Another strategy will be aimed at working with post-doctoral fellows, who come to Harvard not only to do research but also to participate in teaching, give public lectures, direct or engage in seminars, and cultivate further intellectual and institutional ties. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the F. O. Matthiessen Visiting Professorship will allow us to strengthen our offerings in LGBT Studies and to bring much-needed visibility and energy to this most vibrant of fields.

Why a Visiting Professorship instead of a Full Professorship?

A full professorship stipulates a basic endowment of \$4 million, a sum that obviously requires a greater effort on the part of alumni and faculty alike. Beyond such monetary concerns, however, a visiting professorship is an ideal way for the program to receive and contribute to cutting edge ideas across a varied range of disciplines, to showcase new talent and new initiatives, and to seek out and “study” scholars who might subsequently be hired on a full-time basis.

What does \$1.5 million buy?

The \$1.5 million endowment will allow Harvard to hire highly qualified scholars as visiting faculty, for roughly one semester every year or the full academic year every other year. Each scholar would typically teach two courses each semester during his or her appointment, as well as advise students on senior theses and independent projects.

What kinds of scholars will be sought for the position?

Harvard will seek established, world-renowned scholars as well as promising younger scholars who evince a commitment to teaching and mentoring as well as research and publications.

What role will a Visiting Professor play in WGS and the University as a whole?

Visiting professors in WGS will perform duties that visiting professors in general perform at Harvard: specially designed courses of instruction; regular advising of students; participation in symposia, colloquia, and conferences (including special public lectures); and direction and advisement of senior theses. Many visiting professors also establish professional relationships with students that continue long after their departure from the university.

How will the Matthiessen Professor be selected? The Dean of Faculty of Arts & Sciences in consultation with faculty members in related fields will be responsible for all appointment decisions. The Dean will initiate the process by appointing a committee of faculty members who teach courses in gender and sexuality studies and/or who have a personal interest in the field. In turn, the committee will canvas the field and then recommend to the Dean a qualified scholar for the position.

What is the procedure for making a gift?

Donors should make their gift payable to Harvard University, directed to the F.O. Matthiessen Visiting Professorship of Gender and Sexuality. If the donor is a Harvard or Radcliffe College graduate, he/she will get credit toward their class gift. Generally speaking, four and five-figure gifts are payable over three years including the year pledged. Six-figure and higher gifts are payable over five years.