

June 22, 1992

TO: Carol Shiner Wilson, LVAIC Associate
FROM: Carolyn Van Dyke, Associate Professor of English, Lafayette
REGARDING: Need for women's studies at Lafayette

In response to your request, here are some of the functions that the women's studies program serves here.

- Women's studies courses (both the introductory course and electives in various departments) are popular among students, drawing overflow enrollments and high evaluations despite heavy workloads.
- To judge by students' own testimony and by instructors' observations, these courses are unusually good at teaching critical thinking and the examination of assumptions and values.
- Especially within the last two or three years, our women's studies courses examine the interconnections of gender with other social and cultural categories (race, ethnicity, class, religion, sexual orientation). Thus they address the interests of an increasingly diverse student body and the needs of an increasingly diverse society.
- A strong women's studies program helps us to attract students, particularly the intellectually curious, independent-minded students whom we are most eager to enroll.

Regarding this last point, Carol Rowlands, our Acting Director of Admissions, tells me that our women's studies courses and minor constitute a very attractive option for prospective students. Although few high school students ask if we have such a program (few are yet aware that women's studies exists), they do ask about innovative academic programs in general. In response, the Admissions staff can cite women's studies as a concrete example. Students react very positively to that information, seeing women's studies as evidence that at Lafayette, they can tailor their academic work to their own interests.

- A substantial number of our newest faculty members pursue feminist theory or women's issues as secondary academic specializations. Because feminist studies is in the vanguard in many disciplines, a lively women's studies program is important in attracting and retaining talented faculty.

As the attached chart indicates, women's studies majors or minors, and women's centers, are nearly universal at the institutions with which we wish to compete.