

Sex Ed

UNC will make available a Sexuality Studies Minor this fall

By Sarah Carucci

This Fall, UNC will be adding a new option to its list of undergraduate minors. Following in the tradition of many universities across the nation, including such benchmark schools like the University of California at Berkeley and the University of Michigan, UNC will be launching its own Program in Sexuality Studies.

The study of sexuality encompasses research in fields across many disciplines as diverse as anthropology, political science, biology and sociology. It includes not only the study of those issues specifically designated as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer but also the full spectrum of human sexuality across historical, geographical and cultural boundaries. The Program in Sexuality Studies will provide a home for those who wish to study the intellectual and cultural traditions that have shaped our current understanding of sexuality and gender as well as create the space needed for those who wish to challenge such traditions and, perhaps, generate new theories.

The current range of courses that UNC offers pertaining to the study of sexuality exist largely because of a \$200,000 bequest made by Dr. Charles Williamson to encourage gay and lesbian studies. The funds left behind by Williamson began to be distributed in 1996, most notably in the form of \$4,000 course development grants to interested faculty members. These grants resulted in a relatively wide array of course offerings in a number of academic departments – some were permanent, but many were only offered periodically. These classes often end up at or over capacity and are well attended. Yet while both faculty and student interest in the field have been consistently high, the campus has lacked a central locus in which these courses could be organized and administered into a coherent line of study.

Several years ago a group of faculty dedicated to fostering a tolerant academic environment formed the Queer Faculty Network. Though many of the members were already teaching courses relevant to Sexuality Studies, many saw the need to centralize the field of study. In the Fall of 2000, Provost Robert Shelton appointed a committee to review

the campus climate in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity. The report touched on many elements of campus life, but in particular it stressed the need for a creation of an academic program in Sexuality Studies. The Provost's LGBTQ Advisory Board was created out of the report's recommendations. The advisory board, chaired by Political Science Professor Pamela Conover, includes faculty members and students from a variety of departments and is charged with developing a minor in sexuality studies.

For now, the minor in Sexuality Studies will be housed within the Women's Studies Curriculum. This decision keeps with a general trend of universities across the nation. Conover will administer the program in conjunction with other members of the Advisory Board. Requirements for the minor include a minimum of 15 credit hours in Sexuality Studies as well as specific course distribution requirements. The official outline of the minor states, "The minor in *Sexuality Studies* is designed for students who want to explore the study of sexual/gender identities – such as gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender, and heterosexual – as well as the full range of human sexual behaviors and identities in diverse cultures and historical periods. It is especially appropriate for students who anticipate working in advocacy roles for sexual minorities or in professions that address the needs and issues of sexual minorities as a sub-population."

Courses in the program cover an array of topics and are housed within 18 different academic departments including English, History, African-American Studies, Communication Studies, Anthropology and Women's Studies.

The introduction of the Program in Sexuality Studies here at UNC will mark a critical point in the University's history. Its creation was an essential step in keeping UNC at the forefront of academic research and intellectual inquiry. Even more important, some say, is the fact that this program is another step toward acknowledging and granting legitimacy to the range of alternative sexual and gender identities that make up not only the UNC campus but also the broader global community. •

The introduction of the Program in Sexuality Studies here at UNC will mark a critical point in the University's history. Its creation was an essential step in keeping UNC at the forefront of academic research and intellectual inquiry.