

# Sexuality Studies Crisis

by Kimberly Fisher

I really didn't know if Carolina was the right place for me, but then I stumbled across the website for sexuality studies. No other public university in North Carolina offered anything like it. I was very impressed that Carolina had created space within the undergraduate curriculum to explore the diversity of human sexuality across academic disciplines and across cultures. Maybe, I hoped, Carolina supported the type of academic and campus environment that I needed to thrive. I have been here for a semester, and that initial impression has changed.

The Sexuality Studies program was created in 2004 and may be gone by 2008. Blatantly violating its written promises for increased support, the University administration has withdrawn its formal support of the program and Sexuality Studies.

It needs two things to survive: a director, and sustained support from the University administration. Administrative support should take the form of granting a course release for the Sexuality Studies director, which would allow her or him to teach one fewer class each year so that she or he could devote more time to administering the program. No new academic program can survive without a person to fundraise, publicize, and organize the curriculum.

Former Provost Shelton promised this form of support in a formal letter to the program's acting chair last summer. Provost Grey-Little failed to fulfill this agreement, and withdrew not just one, but two course releases for the Sexuality Studies director. As a result, Sexuality Studies has been without a director and a budget for the entire 2006-7 school year.

Students, faculty and staff have worked through the appropriate channels to help fix this problem, meeting with Dean Levine, Dean Andrews, and the Vice-Chancellor of Student Affairs, Dr. Jablonski. The Student Advisory Committee to the Chancellor continues to raise this issue with Chancellor Moeser himself, emphasizing that administrative leaders have a responsibility to follow through with their promises. Yet nothing has changed.

If nothing else, the positive student response to Sexuality Studies should be reason enough for the university administration to give it the support it deserves. Sexuality Studies classes are the first to fill when students register. Students who take Sex and Gender in Society, Comparative Queer Politics, Politics of Sexuality or other classes in the program don't come out the same way they went in. I've heard people say that these classes changed their lives. I'm currently in two classes listed in the program and

each has given me a unique outlook on myself and the world.

The value of Sexuality Studies extends beyond student response - it contributes to the vitality of Carolina's undergraduate curriculum. Sexuality Studies provides an understanding of how human sexuality is intrinsically connected to the public realms of race, class, and politics. All students, whether they're straight or queer, have to grapple with these issues on a daily basis.

Furthermore, Sexuality Studies represents a new and challenging area of academic inquiry and research. As Karen Booth, Professor of Women's Studies and Sexuality Studies, stated, "The area of human sexuality is not considered important in many of the mainstream disciplines. There's been a real expansion of scholarly work done in the area but professors aren't given enough room to pursue these subjects." In giving full support

to Sexuality Studies, Carolina establishes itself as an academic trailblazer, on the cutting edge of scholarship within the social sciences.

The Sexuality Studies program matters. It enriches undergraduate students' intellectual development. It enhances the vitality of the undergraduate curriculum. Why, then, has the administration failed to support the program? It isn't clear. What is clear is that this lack of support is connected to a larger issue of administrative

irresponsiveness, irresponsibility, and failure to take seriously issues of sexuality in general, and homophobia in particular.

Carolina should take pride in its stated commitment to diversity and academic excellence. The Sexuality Studies program exemplifies this commitment. This program, more than any other, reaches out to all students. The inclusion and appreciation of difference found within Sexuality Studies courses will not remain isolated to the classroom. Students engaged in this program will take what they learn to help Carolina to be truly supportive of all forms of intellectual and human diversity.

What can students do about Sexuality Studies? First of all, sign the online petition to save Sexuality Studies: <http://www.petitiononline.com/sxst/petition.html> Additionally, students must demonstrate that they care about the program. E-mail the Chancellor, the Provost, and the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences to let them know your opinion. Finally, encourage your parents and alumni to speak to the administration on your behalf.

