

Gender and Women's Studies Building Concerns

February 22, 2023

The lack of physical space for Gender and Women's Studies faculty, staff, and students is an ongoing problem, as documented in our department's external review during AY 2018-19. Our self-assessment for that review outlined some central concerns: "We do not have enough offices for faculty whose tenure home is in GWS; the building does not meet ADA requirements (second floor offices and the basement are accessible by stairs only); the roof leaks on occasion, the basement is prone to flooding, and our plumbing is unreliable." The external reviewers' report further emphasized these problems: "The department does NOT have the necessary physical resources. The current building—a run-down house, in which the university, we were told, is unwilling to make any additional investment—does not have enough offices for faculty: two are not housed in the building with the other faculty. The office space that does exist is not adequate and conducive to fostering productive research, writing, and teaching. One highly productive, grant-getting Associate Professor is in the partially finished basement. One faculty member expressed the lack of space and the poor conditions of the departmental space as an issue of 'basic dignity.' [...] Clearly, it should be a very high priority of the College to move the department into a functional and adequate **professional** office and teaching space."

The external review identified faculty growth – specifically through 100% tenure-track faculty lines – as one of three initiatives providing "the greatest opportunity for the department in expanding undergraduate impact," writing that "the department must hire at least one more full-time tenure track or tenured faculty member." Since that review, our department has lost five senior tenured faculty: one transferred her GWS line weight to her tenure home, one retired, and three took positions at other institutions. All but one of these were joint-appointed faculty, and all but one had offices elsewhere on campus. To address the external review recommendations and to replace faculty losses, we have hired five new assistant professors in recent years. Four of these are 100% appointments, and we expect that the fifth will have a 75% appointment in GWS beginning in Fall 2023. All are underrepresented minorities. Additionally, we have added a specialized faculty member (Teaching Associate Professor) with a 100% appointment in GWS. In accordance with the external review and our own stated departmental goals, we have undergone a beneficial structural shift: the majority of our faculty are now 100% lines in GWS. In total, our faculty FTE has grown from 7.99 FTE in AY 2018-19 to 12.25 FTE for AY 2023-24. The headcount for the total number of tenure-stream faculty has remained the same – 13 tenure-stream faculty in AY 2018-19 and AY 2023-24, while the number of faculty (tenure-stream and specialized) with *tenure home* in GWS has increased from 7 to 12. Our department also now has an annual Chancellor's Postdoctoral Fellow in trans studies, and we hire 2-6 graduate teaching assistants each semester.

During this same period, the office space allocated to GWS (1205 W. Nevada) has remained unchanged. The problems with our current space roughly fall into three categories: (1) a lack of basic available office space, (2) the poor (and worsening) conditions of our current space, and (3) inaccessibility and inadequate ADA compliance.

1. Available Office Space

As of Fall 2023, GWS will have a total of twelve faculty (tenure-stream and specialized) with tenure homes in GWS. Our building has only six faculty offices.

All viable rooms for faculty offices are located on the second floor. One of these offices is half-sized, measuring 13' x 7' (at its widest point), with no installed heating; in the past this served as a TA office. Our faculty have made significant compromises to work with the facilities that we have, while regularly making requests for additional or alternative office space. Two of our recently-hired assistant professors currently share an office. One faculty member uses the half-size office. Three faculty with tenure homes in GWS remain in offices elsewhere on campus. We have no remaining space for our two incoming assistant professors.

The basement floor has an additional two offices and one classroom. At present, one basement office is shared by our postdoctoral fellow and a visiting lecturer, with the other shared by two graduate teaching assistants. The basement classroom is shared by four graduate teaching assistants.

Based on DMI data, GWS has been allocated a disproportionately small amount of office space compared with other LAS academic departments. At 2349 square feet of office space, GWS is currently the second smallest space in LAS. (Only Asian American Studies, which currently has significantly fewer faculty, has less office space). For comparison, if GWS will have 12 faculty with tenure homes in the department next year, similarly sized departments have significantly more space, sometimes up to six times more space than GWS. (Astronomy, with 13 faculty, has 8,906 square feet of office space; Geology, with 11 faculty, has 9129 square feet of office space; and Geography, with 10 faculty, has 13,860 square feet of office space, according to DMI.)

2. Material Conditions of Current Building

While we currently have no option but to utilize the basement space, we wish to stress that we find the basement's conditions to be unprofessional, unsafe, and unsuitable for any employee. For years, the basement has regularly flooded, causing repeated water

damage to doors, baseboards, and shelving, as well as nearly perpetually damp carpet. The entire area remains dank and cold, requiring us to continuously run dehumidifiers and, in winter months, space heaters. Use of the heaters recently caused a power outage in the building.

The building as a whole requires near-constant repair that is disruptive and demoralizing. This year alone, repairs have included the removal of several wasp nests from the attic; ceiling repairs in several offices due to storm damage; foundation fixes on the south side of the building (previous fixes were made to the north side); and repairs to the western wall, as leakage resulted in paint sliding off of the interior basement wall. Mold is a serious health concern.

3. Accessibility and ADA Compliance

Only the first floor of our building meets the minimum for ADA compliance, though we note that even here, there is very limited room for wheelchair users to move about. The second and basement floors, accessible only by stairs, are non-compliant with ADA requirements. This poses a particular concern given that our department teaches some of the only courses in the College of LAS that are specifically focused on disability studies. Students, graduate teaching assistants, and colleagues who use wheelchairs or who otherwise find stairs inaccessible cannot meet with GWS faculty and instructors in our offices, requiring us to reserve the first-floor conference room or meet elsewhere on campus.

Taken together, these three sets of problems now prove insurmountable for our department to address on our own. More significantly, the conditions of our working environment threaten our ability to successfully carry out both the mission of our own department and that of the University of Illinois. Some primary concerns include:

- GWS remains one of the most diverse departments on campus with a strong record of recruiting, supporting, and retaining underrepresented faculty, especially faculty of color. In AY 2023-24, seven of our 13 tenure-stream faculty (or 54%) are from historically underrepresented racial/ethnic minorities (compared with 15% for LAS and 13.3% for the campus in AY 2022-23). If we add Asian-American faculty and trans faculty, this number increases considerably. Despite our successes in hiring and retaining a diverse faculty, our retention efforts are heavily undermined when we cannot provide the basic necessity of a professional office for each faculty member. Pre-tenure faculty whose offices are separate from their tenure home (and thus the majority of their colleagues) are at a particular disadvantage. The building also

negatively affects our recruitment of potential faculty members, as any tour of our facility clearly shows we do not have adequate office space for our current faculty, let alone incoming colleagues, and the unsound basement conditions are especially embarrassing.

- As we work to increase our course enrollments to address growing student demand, expand our major and minors, and build toward a Ph.D. program, we face a dilemma in which we must promote our department and field of study to students who can see that the department's material conditions are unprofessional and inadequate. Although our faculty regularly win prestigious awards for our scholarship and teaching, our material working conditions convey to students that our department and our field are not valued. While we know that this is not the intention of the College or the University, our glaringly inadequate material conditions make it difficult to convince students – at both the undergraduate and graduate levels – that there is a vibrant, valuable future for them in pursuing a GWS degree.
- The situation outlined in the above paragraph is particularly alarming given the national climate, which increasingly and explicitly targets gender and ethnic studies programs and classes for defunding and denigration. At a time when gender and ethnic studies are under concerted attack in the political sphere, it is even more important that our physical space demonstrate that the University actively values these fields' scholarly, pedagogical, and public service contributions, rather than communicating institutional abandonment.
- We are also concerned that our department's physical space may undermine our ability to cultivate donors as external sources of funding. For example, we are concerned about what our facility communicates to alumni. Likewise, we have observed that while our students are often eager to introduce their families to faculty at convocation, family weekends, and similar events, we are hesitant to bring parents and family members into our dilapidated building due to capacity, safety, and accessibility limitations, not to mention its other shortcomings. Our faculty members have also expressed hesitation to show our building and offices to campus guests, including colleagues from other institutions, invited speakers, and prospective faculty for other campus units.

We have exhausted our own capabilities to house GWS faculty and staff, and many of the fixes we have resorted to are neither professional nor sustainable. We request that the College (a) provide us with a clear timeline for construction of the new building and (b) provide safe and professional office space for our faculty and staff from Fall 2023 until the new building is

inhabitable. We propose below some possible options and would be eager to work with LAS to pursue any of them:

1. Lease nearby office space. According to [Facilities and Services](#) policies, “Lease space may be an option for the following unit needs:
 - Immediate faculty retention or acquisition
 - Transitional Space for unit functions during building renovation projects
 - Temporary space for campus unit expansion needs”

Given that the above scenarios all apply to GWS’s current situation, we request that LAS explore with the campus the possibility of temporarily leasing space nearby for the time between now and the construction of the new shared building. We have identified potential spaces near campus that are currently available (and which also house other university units, such as the iSchool and the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion).

2. Submit a space request to the Office of the Provost on behalf of GWS. (See details at <https://fs.illinois.edu/services/capital-programs/spaceplanning>.)
3. Consider the purchase or rental of a temporary, portable building to be located in the empty lot beside or behind GWS to provide at least four (and ideally, six) additional offices for faculty.

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