Report to the UCC on the Interdisciplinary Minor in Poverty, Justice, and Human Capabilities Proposal

Subcommittee Members: Barbara Ostdiek (chair), Kerry Ward, Mary Ellen Lane, David Tenney, Sorin Lupascu

Over the past three months, the subcommittee has considered the PJHC minor proposal, seeking input from the full CUC, the Faculty Senate, the Center for the Study of Women, Gender and Sexuality. Resulting changes to the proposal are summarized below and are captured in the track-changes version of the document. Specific issues raised regarding the proposed minor are also addressed in this report.

After assessing the design of the minor and the administrative and intellectual support for the minor, the members of the subcommittee concludes that the PJHC minor adds value to Rice undergraduate educational offerings and that the intellectual and administrative structure supporting the minor is strong and sustainable.

Design of PJCH Minor

- The subcommittee was concerned regarding both the wording in the proposal and the actual intended focus on gender vs. a balance of other issues such as race and ethnicity. *Dr. Strassmann revised the document to 1) support the need of a strong focus on gender in understanding poverty, justice, and human capabilities and 2) to provide greater emphasis on the importance of race and ethnicity in understanding these issues.*

- The CUC was concerned that the minor could be easily “picked up” as part of the major course of study. While the structure in the initial proposal minimized the likelihood of this, the CUC requested additional restrictions on the minor. *As originally proposed, 1) neither of the capstone course options is required for the SWGS major; 2) the race elective is not required for the major; and 3) the Summer Service Learning Internship is not required for the major. In addition, at the request of the CUC and upon agreement of the CSWGS Advisory Board and the PJHC Steering Committee, the number of SWGS courses that can count toward the PJHC minor is limited to three (3).* The committee feels that this accomplishes the goal of a clear delineation between the major and the minor.

- The subcommittee was concerned with the form and role of the required internship, particularly with it falling after only the introductory core course. *Dr. Strassmann explained that the internship is NOT intended to be a research experience but rather an experience to provide perspective and context for the issues addressed in the minor. The revised proposal more clearly conveys this intent.* The subcommittee was satisfied with the clarified role of the internship.

- Several minor issues were addressed in the revised proposal: relaxing the language that students are “required” to participate in programmatic offerings around the minor;
requiring a capstone “project” rather than a capstone “paper” in SOCI 470 or POLI 338 could avoid technical difficulties regarding stated requirements; and the enrollment cap for PJHC introductory class was decreased from 40 to 30 to reflect resources available for internships.

**CSWGS Support of Minor**

The subcommittee chair spoke at length with Dr. Rosemary Hennessey, Director of the Center for the Study of Women, Gender and Sexuality, about the intellectual and administrative support of the Center for the PJHC minor. The minor does have the Center’s full support. The Center did consider extensively the potential impact of the PJHC minor on the SWGS major and concluded that the minor offered an important avenue of studies for students interested in these issues but for whom the SWGS major did not make sense. Furthermore, since the PJHC minor overlaps with the SWGS major but is not merely a subset, the minor offers an intellectual complement to the major that may be more appropriate for some students.

In terms of academic content, approach, and leadership, Dr. Hennessey is very comfortable with the minor. She is comfortable with the role of Dr. Strassmann and with the make-up of the PJHC Steering Committee (see below). Dr. Hennessey is also comfortable that CSWGS can provide the required administrative support for the minor. CSWSG (or its institutional predecessor) has been running the SWGS program and SWGS major several years and the PJHC program for 3 years.

**Consideration of Concerns Raised by Faculty Senate Members**

**Prominent Role of Non-tenure-track Faculty**

Dr. Diana Strassmann, with the support of the PJHC Advisory Board and the CSWGS, is the proposer of this interdisciplinary minor. She co-teaches (with Dr. Michael Emerson) the required foundation course for the minor and co-teaches and teaches the two course options for the second required course (SWGS 422 and SWGS 250/POLI 250). (There is a third required course addressed below). Dr. Strassmann is a Professor of the Practice and has been on the Rice faculty since 1983. She holds a PhD in Economics from Harvard University and is the founding editor of *Feminist Economics*, a scholarly journal. Dr. Strassmann has played a prominent faculty role in the CSWGS and in the SWGS major.

Other faculty involved in the teaching the set of required course options are Dr. Michael Emerson, Dr. Elora Shehabuddin and Dr. Donald Ostdiek.

- Dr. Emerson co-teaches the foundations course (HUMA 280/SOCI 280) with Dr. Strassmann. He also teaches SOCI 470, one of two options for the capstone required course. Dr. Emerson is Professor of Sociology and Founding Director of the Center on Race, Religion and Urban Life. He holds his PhD in Sociology from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
Dr. Shehabuddin co-teaches one of the two course options (SWGS 250/POLI 250) for the second required course. Dr. Shehabuddin is an Assistant Professor of Humanities and Political Science. She holds her PhD in Political Science from Princeton University.

Dr. Ostdiek teaches POLI 338, one of two options for the capstone required course. Dr. Ostdiek is Assistant Dean of Student Judicial Programs; Director of Policy Studies; and a lecturer in the Political Science Department, a position he has held since 1997. He holds his PhD in Political Science from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

In addition to Dr. Strassmann, Dr. Emerson, Dr. Ostdiek, and Dr. Shehabuddin, Dr. Elias Bongmba (Professor of Religious Studies) and Dr. Helena Michie (Professor of English; Dept. Chair) comprise the PJHC Steering Committee.

The remainder of faculty listed for minor elective courses all hold PhDs and, to the best of our knowledge, are tenured or tenure-track faculty with the exception of Dr. Melissa Forbis, Dr. Karoline Mortensen, and Dr. Brian Riedel.

Dr. Forbis, a postdoctoral research fellow at CSWGS, conducts the SWGS practicum, Applied Women’s and Gender Studies (SWGS 496/497).

Dr. Mortensen, an Assistant Professor of the Practice in Political Science, teaches two electives in the minor: Health Policy (POLI 329) and Environmental Politics and Policy (POLI 331). She holds her PhD in Health Services Organization and Policy from the University of Michigan. Her vita reflects an active research agenda.

Dr. Riedel, Program Coordinator for SWGS, teaches Introduction to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies (SWGS 201). He holds his PhD in Anthropology from Rice University.

These three instructors offer 4 electives out of a total of 31 electives in the minor. Given the constraint on elective distribution (1 from Non-Western Courses; 1 from Race & Ethnicity Courses; and 1 open choice from approved list), a student would not receive minor credit for more than one course taught by any of these three faculty members as all of their courses fall in the “Other Electives” category from which a maximum of one course may be counted towards the minor requirements.

For a point of comparison, note that the recently approved Global Health Technologies interdisciplinary minor has six core (required) courses divided into two tracks (one for science and engineering majors and one for humanities and sciences majors); all but one of these courses are taught by non-tenure track faculty. These faculty members are teaching fellows, professors of the practice, or lecturers.

**Feasibility of Minor – Course Offerings**

A concern raised by both CUC and Faculty Senate members is the feasibility of completing the major given the number of elective courses that have not been offered in the last year or two
and the number of elective courses that are not intended to be offered every year. The subcommittee reviewed detailed course offering information compiled by David Tenney for the set of required and elective courses and reviewed the indications of necessary course offering support from the relevant department chairs and deans. The subcommittee feels there are sufficient choices among regularly offered courses that the feasibility of completing the minor for any given student is not a concern.

Conflict of Interest for Minor Proposer

Faculty Senate expressed concern regarding conflict of interest for the proposer of the minor, Dr. Strassmann, in light of her heavy instructional role in the minor. Dr. Strassmann co-teaches the introductory core course and she co-teaches one of the options for the second required core course. The subcommittee does not feel that conflict of interest is not any different from Dr. Strassmann than for any other department or group of departments. Proposers will very likely always have an intellectual and resource stake in the minors and majors they propose, regardless of the number of courses they are directly teaching.