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Cal Poly College of Liberal Arts Adds New Department: Women's and Gender Studies

SAN LUIS OBISPO -- After almost two decades as an independent academic unit, the Cal Poly Women's Studies Program is becoming the Women's and Gender Studies Department, the 17th department in the College of Liberal Arts.

The Women's Studies Program was founded in 1990, a time when issues of gender and sexuality were becoming increasingly commonplace throughout the United States. In 2000 the program hired its first permanent faculty line, Mary A. Armstrong, who will now serve as department chair.

The program recently expanded its faculty and course offerings. Currently 25 faculty members from nine different departments teach core and elective courses in the Women's and Gender Studies Department.

Along with the increased status that comes with departmental standing, the name change from "Women's Studies" to "Women's and Gender Studies" reflects the new department's commitment to serving all people and to investigating gender issues from every perspective, Armstrong said.

"Sometimes students or faculty will ask if men can be involved with women's studies," said Armstrong, "While we will always highlight research addressing the status and contributions of women, issues of masculinity are a critical part of the work we do, as are issues of sexuality."

Along with a minor program, the Women's and Gender Studies Department offers an ongoing faculty lecture series, supports visiting guest speakers throughout the year, and awards seven annual student scholarships and the Barbara Hallman Faculty Award.

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