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As faculty members and research associates affiliated with the programs in Gender and Women's Studies at Dalhousie University and/or Saint Mary's University, we are writing in support of Mount Allison University's Women's and Gender Studies program.

We hope that Vice-President Gloria Jollymore's comments in the *Huffington Post* are accurate when she states the University does not intend to cut this program, and that "Mount Allison has not initiated any type of formal review of this program or any other."¹ The fact that the acting program director for WGST announced the cuts, however, raises doubts.

This is exactly the wrong time to cut the curriculum, resources, or programs in Women and Gender Studies. Contrary to popular belief that we are in a post-feminist and post-racist era that is no longer in need of attending to gender, race, and other inequities, the necessity of such programs is evident in the realities of systemic discrimination and inequality, including as expressed through the spectacles of racism and sexism that continue to plague and scandalize campuses across the country to this day.

Rape culture is on the rise on campuses across North America. This is such a concern that the Ontario government developed guidelines for provincial colleges and universities to address it.² Only a year ago, Mount Allison had the second highest rate of sexual assault reporting out of 87

¹ Jesse Ferreras, 02/02/16. "Mount Allison University Cutting Women's Studies Program, Prof Says", *Huffington Post* http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2016/02/02/mount-allison-university-womens-studies_n_9144102.html?utm_hp_ref=canada-living&ir=Canada+Living&utm_source=change_org&utm_medium=petition

² Ontario Women's Directorate (Jan 2013). *Developing a Response to Sexual Violence: A Resource Guide For Ontario's Colleges and Universities*. (Queen's Printer).

universities in Canada.³ While better reporting does not necessarily mean higher rates of sexual assault, it is still the reality that 1/1000 Mount Allison students are reporting sexual assault annually. If half the students are women, and >90% of sexual assaults happen to women, this suggests about 1/500 women students. It is the responsibility of the University to address such crises through every available avenue, including through the curriculum – such as what is delivered through WGST courses and programs. Core courses, such as the Introduction to Women and Gender Studies, enable and encourage – if not require – students to examine such issues, and to apply the critical insights of their underlying causes, and the ethical frameworks for addressing them, to studies in other disciplines. Gender Studies teaching and research are concerned not only with the victims of sexual violence, but also with the ways hegemonic masculinity (norms about what it means to be a ‘real man’) are implicated in the perpetuation of sexual violence.

Equally importantly, Gender Studies programs across the country have expanded far beyond attention to sex and gender equality alone. They are one of the key programs at the forefront in teaching and research about a wide range of interrelated aspects of social inequality, including heterosexism, ableism, racism, ethnocentrism, colonialism, and classism. Gender Studies courses teach students to think broadly and critically about how policies, institutions, images, media, and everyday interactions perpetuate or challenge inequalities through such intersecting axes. It is thus not surprising that in the past year, following the Facebook incident in the Faculty of Dentistry, and the broad consensus that such sentiments and conduct have no place in any institution, in 2015-16 at Dalhousie our core course – Introduction to Gender and Women’s Studies – has seen a 20% increase in enrolment, and the largest class – of 200 students – to date.

The advances made through the critical analyses and pedagogical approaches of Gender Studies are exactly what universities need in 2016, and students are clear about this, as evidenced through rising enrollments.

Universities across the country are scrambling to figure out ways to change their campus climates to be less inequitable. In following through with recent taskforce reports such as those at Dalhousie, UBC, Lakehead, McMaster, McGill, Ryerson and Saint Mary’s, Canadian universities are struggling to find ways to enhance ‘cultural competence’ among faculty, staff and students. Gender and Women’s Studies programs are an absolutely key component of these efforts because these programs attend to intersecting aspects of diversity and show leadership in the advancement of social justice and equality.

With rapid increases in immigration, international student enrollments, refugee settlement, and internationally educated professionals seeking licensure in Atlantic Canada, professional associations in health care and social services are turning to universities for help in figuring out how they can enhance their members’ capacity to work well with diverse groups. At the same time universities are discerning appropriate responses to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Again, with the expansion of intersectional analysis and their collaborative

³ CBC News, 02/09/15. “Mount Allison posts highest reported sexual assault rate among N.B. universities” <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/mount-allison-posts-highest-reported-sexual-assault-rate-among-n-b-universities-1.2950023>

fostering of anti-racist and other diversity-minded approaches to all subjects, Gender Studies programs are among the few that equip graduates with the critical thinking skills, awareness, and critical reflexivity to work effectively across social and cultural differences. We need Gender Studies programs more than ever right now in Atlantic Canada!

Considering the contribution made by WGST courses and programs to all of our post-secondary institutions, including Mount Allison, and the strong and steadily increasing enrollments in recent years, there is no justification to cut such programs: to do so would be terribly out of sync with the needs of Atlantic Canada in 2016, and with the social responsibility to progressively strengthen our institutions. We need to be actively supporting and expanding Gender Studies programs, not cutting them.

We strenuously protest any move to cut the Women and Gender Studies program at Mount Allison University.

Signed the Faculty and Associates of the Gender and Women's Program at Dalhousie University and the Program in Women and Gender Studies at Saint Mary's University,

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