



June 18, 2008

Dear Dean Cochran,

We regretfully decline USF's counteroffer, and announce our departure from the University of South Florida.

As you know, this is a difficult choice for us, but ultimately a clear one. It became obvious to us that salary – for both of us – is not the central question, other than as a representation of the value that USF puts on research and pedagogy. Rather than engage in a process of negotiation and renegotiation over money, then, we took a hard look at the present and future of the University of South Florida and decided that we do not share its commitments and direction.

The status of Women's Studies is the clearest example of this. Only five years ago, eight full-time faculty members held lines in this nationally recognized and ranked department, one with a rich, ground-breaking history in one of the most exciting emergent intellectual fields of recent decades. Currently, not including Carolyn, the department has dwindled to two permanent lines. Over the past decade the Department of Women's Studies has been starved of resources and teaching lines, while simultaneously having one of the highest ratios of student credit hours to instructional dollars. The current administration's reorganizational efforts will almost certainly leave Women's Studies a department in name only, with neither a chair nor budgetary autonomy. These proposed cuts come in spite of both a strong and highly visible student movement to save the department, and enormous international support for retaining actual departmental autonomy. (As scholars of gender, we would be remiss not to mention the current gender makeup of those who have recently made these decisions.) The administration's claim of Women's Studies' centrality to the university seems to be merely semantics.

We do appreciate your hope, stated to us in our recent meeting, that Women's Studies would regain its departmental status in the future, and we do believe that you personally support continuing and building such progressive intellectual programs. But the commitments and performance of Provost Wilcox lead us to believe that, even with significant budgetary stability, this will not happen under the current administration.

The University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, on the other hand, has standing institutional commitments to build their Women's Studies program to national prominence. Only last week the Regents of the University of Wisconsin approved a new Master's degree in Women's Studies at UWM, and, as evinced by Carolyn's hiring, they are allotting tenured lines and dedicated research funds to the program (and this in a recessionary economic climate). I suspect you can see the appeal of such academic commitments.

But this process is not about only one of us. Kennan has taught at USF for a decade (as well as serving as an administrator and developing programs for university/community relations, such as the highly-regarded Conversational Symposium). His scholarship is internationally influential, his national stature well recognized, and his teaching evaluations consistently excellent. And yet he has been blocked from a tenure-earning position. Recently, with your support and help, it appeared that Kennan was finally going to have the tenure home he was long-ago promised. But we recently learned that this will not happen because of opposition from within the Provost's office, pressure emanating from an Associate Provost unable to separate his personal sense of affront from his professional responsibilities.

We do regret leaving. USF has over the past decades developed a thriving intellectual environment, a large number of promising young scholars, and an admirable commitment to teaching and to scholarship. But on balance these strengths seem increasingly marginalized, as USF allows more and more of its scholars to be hired away by other universities, as sports holds increasing prominence in terms of donations and of the University's reputation, and as business and government grants take precedence over scholarship which does not immediately lead to profit.

Kennan submits his official letter of resignation under separate cover. He will be happy to assist in training whomever replaces him as Director of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences, and will gladly remain available to that person in the coming year.

We do not envy you your job in the near future, but we wish you and USF well.

Sincerely,



Carolyn J. Eichner
Associate Professor
Department of Women's Studies



Kennan Ferguson
Director
Interdisciplinary Social Sciences