Proposal to Merge:

Southwest Institute for Research on Women (SIROW) and
Center of Excellence in Women’s Health (WCoE)

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Units Included in the Reorganization:

Southwest Institute for Research on Women (SIROW)
Center for Excellence in Women’s Health (WCoE)
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We propose to merge two UA units – the Southwest Institute for Research on Women (SIROW) and the Center of Excellence in Women’s Health (WCoE) creating a “team science approach” to social behavior and medical research on women and girls. While this proposal is small in the scheme of the challenges facing the University, it has potential to cultivate research networks and externally funded research projects - subsequently raising the University’s reputation and ranking. We respectfully submit this proposal for consideration and look forward to feedback from the review committee as well as our colleagues.*

1. How consolidation will strengthen teaching, service, research or creative activities:

This proposal builds on the strength of the two units – SIROW’s long standing productive history of external research funding on and about women and gender, and the WCoE’s significant contributions to teaching, research and clinical practice in the area of women’s health. Aligned with the UA’s land grant mission and strategic plan to be a leader in Southwest, Native American, Borderland, and Latin American studies, both units, already leaders, having extensive outreach and research programs in the southwest United States specifically within the borderlands and with vulnerable, health disparate, underserved, and understudied populations. Consolidating the two units brings together their respective expertise (SIROW’s social and behavioral research; WCoE’s medical and clinical research as they focus on UA’s mission and strategic plan. Additionally, the partnership of the WCOE with Dr. Mari Wilhelm (who serves as deputy director of the WCOE) from the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences provides additional connections with units such as Nutritional Sciences, Center for Physical Health and Nutrition, Arizona Cooperative Extension, and ERAD (an informal externally funded team of seven program evaluators). SIROW and WCOE have already collaborated on highly successful research projects. Merging the two units will result in a formalized interdisciplinary approach that is forward thinking, embraced by prominent institutions (our aspirational peers) of higher education, and endorsed by NIH and other funding agencies. This interdisciplinary research approach has evidenced striking new findings that reconfigures conceptualizations, transfigures approaches across disciplines, and changes practice at the individual, societal and policy levels – all while generating new research ideas. The SIROW and WCoE merger will foster such synergy.

Teaching and Service: While neither unit is a teaching unit per se’, both have contributed to the UA teaching mission. SIROW has had faculty development grants, organized professional conferences (with continuing education credits), developed courses, provided foreign exchange program for students (with Canada and Mexico), offered preceptorships, independent studies, internships, databases for secondary data analysis for master thesis and dissertations and so on. The WCoE has supported a graduate student program, developed continuing medical education programs, and partnered on women-specific medical curriculum in the four health sciences colleges. To strengthen the UA teaching mission, the newly merged unit will request that teaching be specified as part of our mission and subsequently expand our contribution to teaching by reconfiguring personnel within the new unit to teach at least one General Education Tier I course per semester in women’s health, multidisciplinary research methods, sex-based biology, women in science and engineering, and/or other topics of relevance. Together we will formalize our student-sponsored activities (internships, preceptorships, etc) developing an application process under the direction of one person (instead of several) streamlining and saving on personnel workload. The proposed merged unit will be in a better position to submit for F awards,
BIRCWH and WHRR proposals, and other instructional related external funding opportunities given its enhanced interdisciplinary and added teaching mission – advancing the UA teaching mission without added financial burden.

The proposed merged unit will build upon the service work currently being offered by SIROW and the WCoE. Most of the current service work is performed within the directors’ tenured homes (Department of Women’s Studies; Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology). With this merger comes a commitment to look for appropriate ways in which personnel can better serve each of the respective academic departments as well as the wider University.

**Research and creative activities:** The proposed merger will strengthen our research and creative activities by giving organizational structure to research on and about women and girls. Yet, it is the interdisciplinarity that gives the merger its strength and thus it is important that the tenured academic homes remain separate. Bridging the social and behavioral science with medical research will strengthen our ability to write award winning research applications; and importantly, the research will fill current gaps in our understanding of the intersections between the social behavioral and medical fields. Each of the two units comes to the table with areas of strength – not only with respect to the academic training of the researchers and the specific areas of research foci, but with regard to personnel, research sites, and collaborations. To name a few, SIROW brings expertise in quantitative and qualitative methods and analysis, three off-campus community-based research sites including one in Phoenix, AZ, numerous UA campus- and community- based health intervention projects, and the Women in Science and Engineering (WISE) program. The WCoE brings an administrator versed in organizing and uploading research grants, faculty and academic professionals who are expert in community-based participatory research and action, and several community-based projects relevant to women’s health. Both units have numerous formal and informal links to borderlands communities and people including working alliances with school districts, Indian tribes, governmental agencies (e.g. juvenile corrections; immigration detention facilities; county health departments), and community-based organizations. The merger will situate us in better position to take advantage of our respective resources. We envision quarterly research meetings where data is discussed and new research proposals are conceptualized. An overall strategic plan will be developed through a participatory process. We foresee increased synergies, intellectual value, and enthusiasm.

While the majority of the work is research based creative work will also be accomplished. Together we will pursue the development of evidenced based interventions, intervention manuals, and the translation of effective programs to Spanish. We will ensconce art projects, creative writing workshops, memorials, readings, and other creative work that focus on women and gender issues from a historic and current perspective. These creative projects will intertwine social conditions (poverty, domestic violence, empowerment), behaviors (HIV risks, eating disorders, parenting) and medical realities (breast cancer, childbirth, life span issues) documenting women’s lives, bringing awareness to issues, contributing to women’s well being, and informing the research agenda.

2. **Raising the unit’s and University ranking or reputation:**

This proposed merger will raise the unit and university reputation and ranking by increasing externally funded research projects. We will promote a “team science” approach to increase research funding opportunities particularly with NIH, NSF, industry, and private foundations. While we realize that remarkable research on and about women is located in other units across the UA campus, we are anticipating that this newly formed research unit would serve as a resource for UA professors, clinicians and investigators across the University including those located within the Medical School in Phoenix. The noteworthy, historical reputation that SIROW and WCoE have for bridging academia, research, and outreach will be bolstered - yet
consolidated - raising reputation and rank. The merged unit would also create a more cohesive collective for training students, writing for Ph.D. and post-doc support proposals (F awards, BIRCWH and WHRR proposals), and allowing access for multipurpose data sharing. With a larger more cohesive unit conducting research on women and girls and the expansion of research projects and funding that will follow, the UA, and particularly our academic home departments, will be better able to recruit and retain graduate students, faculty, visiting scholars who are interested in research on and about women and girls.

3. Processes of consultation:

This proposal has been discussed with SIROW’s health researchers and staff, the Head of the Department of Women’s Studies, and faculty, researchers and staff at the WCOE as it was being developed. It was vetted with the Dean of the College of Medicine. It was emailed to the Dean of the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences (SBS) and the SIROW Steering Committee on Monday, October 13, 2008. Positive feedback was received from the Dean of SBS as well as from several SIROW Steering Committee members.

* Note: This proposal does not conflict with merging of SIROW and Department of Women’s Studies as proposed in the Collage of SBS White Paper nor does it conflict with the White Paper proposing a consortium “Critical Analysis and Social Change”.

Budget Considerations

Given that the combined permanent state funding for both units (SIROW and WCoE) is less than $200,000 and represents less than 6% of the total grant funding generated by the two units, a reduction in budget is not being proposed. It would be expected that the state funding and the negotiated IDC return rate for the respective units would remain the same. None-the-less, cost benefit will be generated through:

- Offering one Gen Ed class with an average of 100 seats in Fall and Spring semesters would contribute to the teaching University’s mission – and reduce teaching costs elsewhere within the University,
- Increase grant funding supporting faculty, researchers and students,
- Increased IDC returns for the University
- Perhaps improved ability to fundraise given a larger unit and increased research portfolio.