

Academic Program Review of the  
Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies Program  
University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

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Prepared by the Academic Program Review Subcommittee:

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The Self Study for the WGSS program was received in the Deans office in March 2007 and submitted to the Academic Program review committee. The external review site visit was done in November 2006 and the report was submitted in January 2007.

### **Summary of the Self-Study**

The purpose of the WGSS program is to develop and teach appropriate courses for the Women's Studies minor program using interdisciplinary courses, maintain a strong connection between theory and practice through using outreach programs and act as a campus resource for faculty and staff.

The WGSS program works toward the following goals and objectives:

- Critical thinking
- Understanding differences
- The sense of history as women
- The value of both theory and practice
- Collaborative work

The program achieves these goals and objectives by offering a variety of opportunities that inform and challenge traditional disciplines and develop analytical perspectives incorporating their own courses and courses from a wide spectrum of university departments.

### **Notable Strengths and Weaknesses:**

The WGSS program's most notable strength is its multidisciplinary approach which allows for great flexibility and variety. The program has also been very successful in procuring outside funding as well as managing the needs of the WGSS Self-Sufficiency Program which allows excellent student and community opportunities. The WGSS program has also been exemplary in terms of assessment, not just in collecting data but also acting on and closing the assessment loop to further strengthen the program.

The WGSS program's weaknesses primarily stem from a lack of support in resources and in a campus climate toward scholarship in WGSS as well as overall support of faculty and co-faculty for their roles in WGSS.

### **Programs**

The WGSS offers a minor which includes 24 credits including one General Education course, 9 credits of interdisciplinary courses and 9 credits in the discipline and a senior seminar.

### **Curriculum**

The curriculum includes courses within the WGSS program and other interdisciplinary courses.

### **Program Success**

Successes of the WGSS program include a well developed yearly assessment plan using direct (student portfolios) and indirect (reflective essays) methods. Their senior seminar includes a service-based practicum in the community. They piloted a pre/post survey on attitudes in 2004. The program has used various means to attract students into their courses including the Women's Studies Student Association, Film Festivals, Lunchbox/Soapbox presentations and History month offerings.

### **Previous Program Review and New Program Initiatives**

The previous academic review of the WGSS program stated concerns regarding the General Education class W-S 100, class size and assessment of their General Education class. These issues have all been addressed in that there are now more sections of W-S 100 and that there is systematic assessment in place.

### **Personnel**

The addition a third FTE has greatly helped in achieving the WGSS program's goals. Travel support for the program has been well funded. The program still needs more than a ½ time program assistant to function efficiently.

### **Support for Achieving Academic Goals**

As mentioned earlier, the WGSS program needs a program assistant funded more than ½ time. The program also needs general classroom modernization, more office and storage space. There is also the continuous challenge of maintaining library resources for study and research.

### **Comments on the External Review**

The external reviewer found the WGSS program effective in developing supportive professional and community relationships. The cooperating faculty are committed, enthusiastic and contribute significantly to campus governance and are aimed at enhancing the campus environment. The WGSS minor has an excellent balance between interdisciplinary and cross disciplinary courses. The program combines local, national and international women's and gender study issues. The students are committed and able to integrate WGSS experiences and knowledge into practice in their community. The Self-Sufficiency Program (SSP) is innovative and successful at developing knowledge and experience for students. The reviewer notes that student knowledge gained from experiences in SSP as well as individual WGSS courses and the minor "will empower them as individuals and enable them to operate as agents of social change."

The WGSS web site was cited as one of the most useful and a comprehensive site for not only program information but also for information on women's and gender studies for students in the field. According to the reviewer, the program has been "phenomenally" effective at securing external funding, citing two major grants of \$397,224 and \$900,000.

Challenges that the reviewer found includes the need for more marketing, more clerical support needed for Self-Sufficiency Program, a lack of established guidelines for recognizing scholarly and professional work in the program's area, and a somewhat "chilly climate" towards female faculty. Combined with marketing issues, comes the need to re-increase the sections of W-S 100 to help recruit minors and "occasional" students (non-minors and non-degree seeking students) to WGSS. In the area of scholarship, the reviewer notes that UW-L does not use guidelines for recognition of women's and gender studies scholarly and professional work that have been established by the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA). The reviewer feels that this traditional view of scholarship at UW-L for evaluation and rewards has disadvantaged WGSS faculty and co-faculty. The NWSA guidelines stipulate that scholarship of integration, application, and teaching are as worthy of reward as the scholarship of discovery. The reviewer notes that faculty and co-faculty "excel in the scholarship of integration, which consists of critical cross-cultural interdisciplinary, curriculum transformation, and program development; the scholarship of application, which NWSA defines as connections to lived experience and social structures; and the scholarship of teaching."

For clarity, we felt that it was best to include the external reviewer's statement on the "chilly climate" for women at UW-L:

"The success or failure of the WGSS department, its faculty, co-faculty and students are to some extent determined by the campus climate. I found that overall the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse campus is unusually chilly for women. WGSS co-faculty report that they experience abnormally high levels of hostility in other departments. Both WGSS faculty and co-faculty noted that they are not rewarded for their WGSS work and they believe that their involvement with WGSS has hurt them. Faculty and co-faculty provided a great deal of specific anecdotal data supporting these claims. Incontrovertible quantitative evidence of a the chilly climate is that last year the campus lost seventeen female faculty but only a handful of male faculty. I concur with faculty and co-faculty who believe that the palpable hostility to women, particularly WGSS co-faculty, strongly

discourages junior faculty from contributing to the WGSS department, which hinders its development and prevents the department from cultivating new leadership. *Moreover, this has an extremely negative affect on WGSS enrollments, for studies indicate that nationally students consistently cite their interactions with women's and gender faculty as among the most important factors influencing their decision to pursue a degree in women's and gender studies.*"

### **Comments on the Dean's Letter**

The Dean's letter regarding the Self Study and external review of the WGSS program re-confirmed the strengths of their multidisciplinary curriculum, their success in securing external funding and effective community programs. The Dean recommended that the WGSS program work with the CLS public relations committee on ways to better market themselves. Regarding the campus climate toward female faculty the Dean could not accurately assess these concerns due to his lack of time here in his position but agreed that it should be addressed if this is a factor.

### **Recommendations from the Academic Program Review Committee**

The WGSS program is an active and thriving unit at UW-L. The WGSS program offers an excellent curriculum of General Education, area specific and multidisciplinary courses, and effective community outreach opportunities for their students. They have aggressively secured outside funding and have worked to increase their visibility through various marketing techniques. The increase of 1 FTE has helped the program increase their sections of W-S 100 and their ability to service the campus General Education program. We commend the program for their curricular development of new courses in the discipline and look to see more new offerings. The APR committee recommends that the WGSS program receive an increase in the funding for their clerical staff so that the very important and successful Self Sufficiency Program can be maintained. The program should also work with the CLS public relations committee so that they can become more visible through university wide marketing.

The external reviewer's concern regarding the campus' climate toward women is especially disturbing. We should really be looking at how each member of the campus is functioning as an effective partner in the greater goals of the university and how each of us can contribute significantly toward excellence regardless of gender. We commend the program for continuing to address this issue in their response to the external program review by looking into ways to communicate with university administration and Campus Climate personnel. The Academic Program Review committee finding no serious issues to address and recommends that the WGSS program should be reviewed again in its regular 7 year review cycle.