



2016-2017 Cyclical Program Review of Women and Gender Studies

PROGRAMS:

Honours BA in Women and Gender Studies (in Combination)

Final Assessment Report

Submitted by: Dr. Richard Nemesvari, Dean of Arts; Dr. Kathryn Carter, Associate Vice-President: Teaching and Learning; Dr. Paul Jessop, Vice-President: Academic

Date: December 15, 2017

PART ONE: EXECUTIVE RESPONSE

A) EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REVIEW DOCUMENTS

Self-Study

- The self-study describes significant developments in the program, including a name change, staffing changes, and student mentorship. It was prepared by Dr. Margaret Toye and included contributions from faculty in the program collected at department meetings. The document responded to previous reviewer recommendations and contextualizes how the recommendations of the previous review have been addressed and adopted. The document asks reviewers to respond to questions around staffing resources and program sustainability.
- The document alignment with Laurier's Strategic Academic Plan, particularly with regard to diversity, academic excellence, and experiential learning. Program-level learning outcomes are described, as is the process by which they were developed and are articulated by year. Degree Level Expectations are clearly articulated for the program. Since the Women and Gender Studies program is not a direct-entry program, admission requirements are set by the Faculty of Arts and the Admissions office.
- Curriculum is organized to align with the program's learning outcomes and requirements for the Honours program and minor are clearly organized in the document, including courses from other programs which are approved as part of the Women and Gender Studies curriculum. The document notes that program offerings could be expanded with more resources to allow a broader range of students into Women and Gender Studies programs, while at the same time allowing more course selection to majors. The document notes that while Women and Gender Studies does not have a stand-alone graduate program, full-time faculty who teach in the program also teach in the MA in Cultural Analysis and Social Theory, and in the M.S.W. Social Work program. The program sees its courses fill regularly and the courses offers online versions of some of its most popular courses to help increase the teaching capacity in the program. Service teaching numbers are high, showing a strong demand for Women and Gender Studies courses. The program utilizes high impact practices such as blended learning, tutorials, writing intensive courses, and community engagement and courses are updated regularly to remain current with both new pedagogies, and developments in the field.
- The document notes that, while faculty complement is limited, the program continues to teach an impressive number of both majors and non-majors. The program is anticipating changing to a location on campus which will improve their visibility and accessibility for students. This change in their space will certainly improve campus visibility, but shared office for CAS members will continue to be required in their new space. The self-study outlines the program's committee and decision-making structure.
- Teaching evaluations reveal a consistently high-quality student experience, with satisfaction rates that align with or exceed university and faculty averages. The program is active in offering events and faculty contribute regularly to both their own fields and the university as a whole. Graduates are successful in finding employment after graduation and many enter further educational programs such as a Bachelor of Education upon completion of the Women and Gender Studies program.

- The self-study concludes with a strategic plan outlining creative ways of sustaining and improving the program such as additional cross-appointments, planning as part of the coordinator role, and the possible creation of a Research Chair in Women and Gender Studies.

External Reviewers' Report

The external reviewers for the Women and Gender Studies cyclical review were Dr. Alexandra Boutros from the Department of Communication Studies at Wilfrid Laurier University and Dr. Annalee Lepp from the Department of Gender Studies at the University of Victoria. The site visit took place on February 16-17, 2017 at the Waterloo Campus of Wilfrid Laurier.

Executive Summary

As reviewers, we found the Women and Gender Studies program to be a program that brings together dedicated, productive, enthusiastic, and well-qualified faculty members with an engaged student community. The program has obvious synergies with the academic mandates and strategic plans of the university, provides students with a cohesive and rigorous grounding in the discipline that nonetheless contributes to their critical acumen in the Arts and Social Sciences, and engages in social activism and community engagement in ways that enhance the university community as a whole. The Women and Gender Studies program has done outstanding work in such areas as sharing of resources and collaboration with other units, curriculum planning and revision, the development of program and year level learning outcomes, and serious consideration of potential strategies to address some of the challenges the program faces and its sustainability in the context of significant resource constraints. The program is clearly strongly committed to and invested in program quality and excellence in teaching, the assessment and achievement of the program's learning outcomes, and to undergraduate student learning and success. All the available data also indicate that the program also has great potential for future enrollment growth, including increases in the numbers of combined honours majors and minors.

List of Recommendations

1. In an effort to highlight its distinctive features at WLU and in the Faculty of Arts and to position itself as a destination program in the region, the review team recommends that the Women and Gender Studies program undertake an initiative that would involve a profile-enhancing branding exercise; the development of a refreshed mission statement that highlights the program's unique strengths (for example, interdisciplinarity, exploratory pedagogies, engaged and experiential learning, etc.); the clustering of courses that could serve as a marketing tool and would be a way to organize the course offerings thematically for students; and the enhancement of its communications plan and promotional materials in line with this overall initiative. These materials should be shared with relevant student recruitment and advising units.
2. Wherever possible, the review team recommends that the WGS program intensify student recruitment and retention efforts especially at the 100 and 200 levels. For example, the Women and Gender Studies program has already instituted the practice of developing a power point that instructors present to classes (*Self-Study Report*, p. 67); however, a power point could be specifically tailored to 100- and 200-level students. The latter would not only include information about what courses will be offered the following term or the next academic year and program degree requirements (combined honours and minor), but also the benefits of a combined honours program or minor.

3. The review team recommends that the WGS program enhance its promotion of the benefits of a combined honours or an honours/minor program on the website, in promotional materials, and in discussions with relevant advising units.
4. Given the diversity of Women and Gender Studies students' interdisciplinary interests and their future career or educational goals, it would be beneficial if students could combine their honours program with programs outside of the Faculty of Arts (see *Self-Study Report*, pp. 36 for restrictions in this regard) and the review team recommends that this possibility be explored with the relevant administrative units.
5. The review team recommends that the WGS program further adjust the program learning outcomes to align more directly with faculty resources and capacity and current course offerings (as suggested in section 2c).
6. Given that WS 100 (in class and online) is a critical foundational course in the program where students are first introduced to Women's and Gender Studies as a discipline, to key concepts, histories, and relevant contemporary issues, and to library resources and basic research skills, the review team strongly recommends that the program initiate a collaborative process with instructors to develop greater standardization of curriculum and consistent learning outcomes to be presented in the course syllabi. The revision of the online version will require working with the Centre for Teaching Innovation and Excellence in Online Learning, but the learning outcomes and course content should be as consistent as possible with the in class version.
7. The review team recommends that, if a required methodologies course for majors were developed, it would be best positioned at the 300 level in conjunction with WS 303: Feminist Theory and in preparation for a potentially newly envisioned 400-level capstone course. The methodologies course could also incorporate a professional development component with a focus on academic and non-academic writing, digital communication, etc. One strategy to address the program's limited faculty resources would be to offer the methodologies and feminist theory courses in alternate years and thereby build up enrollment demand.
8. While the review team fully supports the development of a 300-level experiential learning course, they also suggest that the program consider another strategy to allow for the creation of an experiential learning component without stretching limited faculty resources even farther by re-envisioning majors' 400-level capstone experience. For example, rather than building WS 490 around specialized thematic content, the WS 490 capstone seminar could provide majors with an opportunity to pursue their particular interests as aligned with their future educational or professional goals and to master the program learning outcomes in one of two ways; for example, they would be given the choice between engaging in independent research (having completed the methodologies course at the 300 level) and producing a major graduating project; or engaging in a university-based experiential learning practicum and producing a major graduating project which would incorporate critical reflections on and analysis of their service learning experience, which would be grounded relevant research.
9. In relation to recommendations 2. and 3. above, the review team recommends that the WGS program implement strategies to encourage minors to consider a combined honours degree program as a way to enhance the number of majors.
10. The review team strongly contends that a common and more central space for Women and Gender Studies would help the program's visibility and help to promote a stronger sense of community and affiliation among both faculty and students. We acknowledge that plans are tentatively made to move the program to a more central location on campus and recommend that these be confirmed and effected as soon as possible.

11. If additional financial compensation, or course release, for the position of coordinator is not possible, the review team recommends that the service contribution of this position be recognized fully and through the Dean's office. A letter from the Dean to the coordinator's chair acknowledging the expectations of the position and that it constitutes a significant service contribution and suggesting the coordinator be excused from extensive service in their home department would be one way of institutionally recognizing this work.
12. The review team recommends that the Women and Gender Studies Coordinating Committee continue to involve interested faculty from additional units across the university. We suggest that the Committee focus on securing the involvement of other faculty in administrative activities and teaching. We recommend that administrative barriers to the offering of joint or cross listed courses and the joint appointment of faculty be lessened as much as possible. We also recommend that administrative barriers to teaching in Women and Gender Studies by members of other units be reduced as much as possible. More specifically, we recommend that the Dean of Arts allow faculty from other departments to teach Women and Gender Studies courses as part of their regular workload through an exchange of stipends. We would emphasize that the Women and Gender Studies program should retain autonomy over who teaches in their program, but would suggest that regularizing exchanges between programs would allow more courses in Women and Gender Studies to be taught by full-time faculty and would, over time, enhance the stability of the program. Since there is only one full-time faculty member associated with the program, stipend exchange is vital. We recommend that the Dean's office take an active role in encouraging this revenue-neutral exchange to occur with as little difficulty as possible.
13. Although perhaps beyond the scope of this review, the review team would also strongly suggest that the Faculty of Arts introduced sustained Faculty level student advising on the benefits, structures, and workings of combined majors and minors. Program coordinators only come into contact with some students, but Faculty academic advisors could be promoting the idea of combined honours majors more rigorously across the entire Faculty of Arts.
14. The review team recommends that the Women and Gender Studies program coordinator and the Coordinating Committee continue to actively consider ways of lessening the administrative pressures associated with the program. Whether the solution to this lies in a productive amalgamation with another unit in which the autonomy of the program is maintained, or in another option altogether, we want to stress that the program is in a time of contraction in terms of faculty resources and so should seriously consider all options. We would like to recommend that the Dean work with the program on possible structural administrative changes, but emphasize that any structural, institutional changes should maintain the autonomy of Women and Gender Studies, be arrived at collaboratively, and enhance and benefit all involved.
15. As review team acknowledges that replacement of existing Women and Gender Studies faculty lines (through retirement or attrition) is not possible in the current budgetary climate, but we recommend that replacement of these hiring lines be prioritized within the Faculty of Arts when hiring becomes possible.
16. The review team reiterates that the Women and Gender Studies program seek to grow the number of students registered as majors and minors. Given the high service function of the program, it seems likely that more students could be attracted into the program if the recruitment and retention of students was intensified and the benefits of majors and minors clearly outlined, particularly at the 100 and 200 levels.

17. The review team recommends that the Women and Gender Studies program highlight the productive interdisciplinary links within the discipline as a way of emphasizing the ways in which the program connects to other programs in the Faculty of Arts (and potentially outside the Faculty of Arts also). We feel that this will help students understand the benefits of combined honours majors and minors without compromising the disciplinary specificity of the WGS program.

Unit Response

The Unit Response was authored by the current Women and Gender Studies Program Coordinator, Dr. Carol Duncan, with input from faculty members in the program and the program advisory committee. The report identifies that during the course of the cyclical review, there have been three different program coordinators and that input on the Unit Response was sought from each one. The response thanks the reviewers for the time and effort put into the review and notes no corrections or clarifications to the report.

The Unit Response outlines the process by which the program discussed the seventeen recommendations made by the external review committee, and identifies three areas of recommendations that they believe should be the top priorities for the program:

1. Administration, Leadership and Faculty Replenishing (Recommendations #14 and #15)
2. Refining and rebranding the program, growing the number of students registered as majors and minors (Recommendations #1, #2, #9, #16 and #17)
3. Standardized core course curriculum at the first year level (Recommendations #6)

For each of the prioritized areas, the program cited its rationale for the importance of the recommendations associated with it, identified any actions that had already taken place toward its implementation, and noted where consultations or collaborations were required in order to complete it. The program then responded to the remaining recommendations, indicating if they agreed with each or not, noting any discussions or consultations that would need to take place in order to implement it, and where decision-making for each recommendation would lie. The Unit Response concludes by reiterating the program's gratitude toward the review team, and affirming the importance of the program to helping students develop an "informed understanding of a broad range of social issues in local, national and international contexts" (p. 7).

B) IDENTIFICATION OF PROGRAM STRENGTHS

1. The Program contributes to all three pillars of the Strategic Academic Plan: Academic Excellence, Experiential Learning, and Diversity.
2. The Program provides a significant amount of service teaching to the Faculty of Arts.

3. The instructors who teach in the Program, and the students who in enroll in their classes, have a deep commitment to the goals and learning outcomes of their classes.

C) OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT AND ENHANCEMENT

1. The Program could increase its profile among students and other departments/programs.
2. The Program could explore additional opportunities for cross-listed offerings to address challenges in resources.
3. The Program could enhance its student recruitment efforts, especially at the 100 and 200 level.
4. The Program could develop strategies to encourage students taking a WGS Minor to consider converting that into a Combined Major.

D) PRIORITIZATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Two of the External Reviewers' recommendations, Recommendations #10 and #15, entail resource and space allocations that cannot be addressed outside of the wider budgetary constraints and physical resource planning in the Faculty of Arts, and in the university. The Dean appreciates the Reviewers' recognition of the challenging budget issues facing the FoA, and that plans are already in place to move the Women and Gender Studies Program to a more centralized location on campus, but is not able to prioritize these recommendations in this report. Recommendation #16 is specifically identified by the Reviewers as a reiteration of earlier suggestions, and therefore is not prioritized separately.

The Dean also appreciates the Program's understandable decision to group several of its responses under wider headings, but has chosen to provide his prioritization comments by following the more usual method of discussing the recommendations individually.

Recommendation #1: The review team recommends that the Women and Gender Studies program undertake an initiative that would involve a profile-enhancing branding exercise...and the enhancement of its communication plan and promotional materials. The Program accepts this recommendation, and in its response lists four strategies to help achieve it. These strategies are reasonable and achievable, and should be pursued as the resources of the Program allow.

Recommendation #2: The review team recommends that the WGS program intensify student recruitment and retention efforts especially at the 100 and 200 levels. The Program accepts this recommendation while at the same time noting the strong enrollment numbers already achieved through students choosing WGS courses as electives. The goal is to convert more of these students into Majors, although the service teaching already being provided by the Program must be recognized as very significant.

Recommendation #3: The review team recommends that the WGS program enhance its promotion of the benefits of a combined honours or an honours/minor program on the website, in promotional materials, and in discussions with relevant advertising units. The Program agrees with this recommendation, and will pursue discussions with the relevant units. It has also contacted the Diversity and Equity Office, and the Social

Innovation and Community Engagement program, to establish links with students potentially interested in the combinations suggested by the Reviewers. Other potential contacts might include Global Studies, English, Philosophy, and Sociology.

Recommendation #4: Given the diversity of Women and Gender Studies students' interdisciplinary interests...it would be beneficial if students could combine their honours program with programs outside of the Faculty of Arts. The Program is willing to consider this recommendation, but it acknowledges the need to be sure of the availability and processes required for such potential cross-faculty degrees. The Dean would be pleased to work with the Program Coordinator to determine the appropriate approaches to achieve such arrangements.

Recommendation #5: The review team recommends that the WGS program further adjust the program learning outcomes to align more directly with faculty resources and capacity and current course offerings. The Program is fully willing to pursue this recommendation in discussion with the Coordinating Committee and the Dean of Arts.

Recommendation #6: Given that WS 100 (in class and online) is a critical course in the program...the review team strongly recommends that the program initiate a collaborative process with instructors to develop greater standardization of curriculum and consistent learning outcomes to be presented in course syllabi. The Program's response to this recommendation notes that this topic was discussed at the unit's Retreat, and that this revealed a greater level of informal collaboration among instructors of WS 100 than might be indicated by course syllabi. Nonetheless, the Program Coordinator agrees to work with the Curriculum Committee and the Coordinating Committee to make the results of this collaboration more obvious. The Dean suggests that a collegial effort to achieve more official standardization would be a useful way to address the implementation of this recommendation.

Recommendation #7: The review team recommends that, if a required methodologies course for majors were developed, it would be best positioned at the 300 level in conjunction with WS 303: Feminist Theory and in preparation for a potentially newly envisioned 400-level capstone course. The Program is willing to consider this recommendation as part of its review of course offerings.

Recommendation #8: While the review team fully supports the development of a 300-level experiential learning course, they also suggest that the program consider another strategy to allow for the creation of an experiential learning component without stretching limited faculty resources even farther by re-envisioning majors' 400-level capstone experience. The Program is willing to consider this recommendation as part of its review of course offerings.

Recommendation #9: In relation to recommendations 2. and 3. above, the review team recommends that the WGS program implement strategies to encourage minors to consider a combined honours degree program as a way to enhance the number of majors. As noted in the comments above, the Program will generate a number of initiatives in order to attract more potential Majors.

Recommendation #11: If additional financial compensation, or course release, for the position of coordinator is not possible, the review team recommends that the service contribution of this position be recognized fully and through the Dean's office. This recommendation is "wholeheartedly" supported by the Program Coordinator and the Coordinating Committee. The Dean is willing to write a letter acknowledging the significant contributions made by the Coordinator, and suggesting that service in their home department be

reduced, but is not fully convinced of its necessity. Certainly, there is no need to convince the Dean of the crucial importance of this role, and its appearance under the Service heading in the faculty member's Annual Report officially established the contribution being made. Similarly, any department Chair who failed to recognize the need for a reduction in service to that unit by a member fulfilling such a role would be strongly encouraged by the Dean to adjust their expectations. There are other Coordinators of Programs providing this service outside of their units, and if a letter was provided to one such Coordinator it would need to be provided to all of them.

Recommendation #12: The review team recommends that the Women and Gender Studies Coordinating Committee continue to involve interested faculty from additional units across the university....We recommend that administrative barriers to the offering of joint or cross listed courses and the joint appointment of faculty be lessened as much as possible. We also recommend that administrative barriers to teaching in Women and Gender Studies by members of other units be reduced as much as possible. More specifically, we recommend that the Dean of Arts allow faculty from other departments to teach Women and Gender Studies courses as part of their regular workload through an exchange of stipends....We recommend that the Dean's office take an active role in encouraging this revenue-neutral exchange to occur with as little difficulty as possible. The Coordinator of WGS is willing to discuss this recommendation with the Dean of Arts. The Dean assumes that what is being recommended applies to CAS members who teach in other departments and programs, although the logistics of what is being proposed will need to be carefully examined.

Recommendation #13: The review team would also strongly suggest that the Faculty of Arts introduced sustained Faculty level student advising on the benefits, structures, and workings of combined majors and minors. The Coordinator of WGS proposes to pursue this recommendation through discussion with the Dean and then with other Faculty of Arts departments and program. From the perspective of the advisors within the Dean's Office this type of information is already being provided to students. One of the elements of the FoA emphasized by its Faculty Advisors is the ability to construct highly personalized degree patterns, so at the decanal level this recommendation is already being implemented. Whether it should also be pursued at the departmental and program level will need further consideration, since the responsibilities of departmental and program advisors is focussed primarily on their own degree requirements.

Recommendation #14: The review team recommends that the Women and Gender Studies program coordinator and the Coordinating Committee continue to actively consider ways of lessening the administrative pressures associated with the program....We would like to recommend that the Dean work with the program on possible structural administrative changes, but emphasize that any structural, institutional changes should maintain the autonomy of Women and Gender Studies, be arrived at collaboratively, and enhance and benefit all involved. The Program's Coordinator and Coordinating Committee agree that structural changes may be necessary to sustain Women's and Gender Studies, including possible amalgamation with a larger unit. The question of "autonomy" in these situations is complicated, as may be seen in the parallel situations of Cultural Studies (amalgamated with the Department of Communication Studies) and North American Studies (amalgamated with the Department of History). In all cases, however, decisions can only be reached through extensive collaboration and collegial discussion.

Recommendation #17: The review team recommends that the Women and Gender Studies Program highlight the productive interdisciplinary links within the discipline as a way of emphasizing the ways in which the program connects to other programs in the Faculty of Arts (and potentially outside the Faculty

of Arts also). The emphasis on the Program's interdisciplinary nature is recognized as one of the ways to encourage the growth of Majors, and will play a role in the strategies for raising its profile.

SIGNATURES

Richard Nemesvari

November 20, 2017



Kathryn Carter

December 12, 2017



Paul Jessop

December 15, 2017



PART TWO: IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Recommendation to be Implemented	Responsibility for Implementation	Anticipated Completion Date	Additional Notes
Recommendation #1: That the Program undertake a profile-enhancing branding exercise and enhance its communication plan and promotional materials.	Coordinator and Coordinating Committee	September 2018	
Recommendation #2: That the Program intensify student recruitment and retention efforts especially at the 100 and 200 levels.	Coordinator and Coordinating Committee	September 2018	
Recommendation #3: That the Program enhance its promotion of the benefits of combined honours or an honours/minor program on the website, in promotional materials, and in discussions with relevant advising units.	Coordinator, Coordinating Committee, other relevant administrative and academic units	September 2018	
Recommendation #4: That the Program explore combining with programs outside of the Faculty of Arts.	Coordinator, Coordinating Committee, Dean of Arts	January 2019	
Recommendation #5: That the Program adjust its learning outcomes to align more directly with faculty resources and capacity and current course offerings.	Coordinator, Coordinating Committee, Dean of Arts	September 2018	
Recommendation #6: That the Program develop greater standardization of curriculum and learning outcomes in	Coordinator, Coordinating Committee	September 2018	

WS 100			
Recommendation #7: That if a required methodologies course for majors was developed it be positioned at the 300 level in conjunction with WS 303 and in preparation for a potential new capstone 400-level course.	Coordinator, Coordinating Committee	January 2019	
Recommendation #8: That the Program consider creating an experiential learning opportunity by re-envisioning majors' 400-level capstone experience.	Coordinator, Coordinating Committee	January 2019	
Recommendation #9: That the Program implement strategies to encourage minors to consider a combined honours degree as a way to enhance the number of majors.	Coordinator, Coordinating Committee	September 2018	
Recommendation #11: That the service contribution of the Coordinator be recognized through the Dean's office.	Coordinator, Dean of Arts	September 2018	
Recommendation #12: That administrative barriers to cross-listed courses and joint appointments be minimized, and that faculty from other units teach in the Program as part of their workload through an exchange of stipends.	Coordinator, Dean of Arts	January 2019	
Recommendation #13: That sustained Faculty level advising be provided on combined majors and minors.	Coordinator, Dean of Arts	September 2018	
Recommendation #14: That structural, institutional	Coordinator, Coordinating Committee, Dean of Arts,	April 2019	

change be explored for the Program	relevant academic units		
Recommendation #17: That the Program highlight its interdisciplinary strengths as a way of connecting with other programs both inside and outside the Faculty of Arts.	Coordinator, Coordinating Committee	September 2018	