

# Final Assessment Report for the 2024-2025 Cyclical Review of the Women and Gender Studies Program

## INTRODUCTION

In accordance with Laurier's Institutional Quality Assurance Procedures ([Policy 2.1](#)), this Final Assessment Report provides a summary of the cyclical program review process for the Law and Society program, prepared by the Quality Assurance Office, along with an identification of strengths of the program(s) under review authored by the Vice Dean of the Faculty of Arts. All recommendations made by the external review committee in their report are listed, followed by a summary of the program's response, and the decanal response. Recommendations prioritized are listed in the Implementation Plan, with those not being prioritized for implementation noted as well.

The Final Assessment Report is reviewed and approved by the Provost and Vice-President: Academic. Following completion of the Final Assessment Report, it is approved by the Program Review Sub-Committee and Senate Academic Planning Committee. Approval dates are listed at the end of this report. Final Assessment Reports are submitted to Senate as part of an annual report on cyclical reviews, and to the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance for information. Final Assessment Reports and Implementation Reports are posted on the university's [Cyclical Program Review Public Accountability webpage](#).

The Implementation Plan for the recommendations prioritized in the Final Assessment Report can be found at the end of this report. Units will submit their first Implementation Report two years following approval of the Final Assessment Report at Senate. The Implementation Report will include comments from the unit on actions taken toward the completion of recommendations, comments from the relevant Dean(s) related to the progress made, and comments from the Program Review Sub-Committee, which is responsible for approving the Implementation Report and deciding if further reports are required. The Implementation Report is submitted to the Senate Academic Planning Committee for information.

## SUMMARY OF REVIEW PROCESS

The Women and Gender Studies program undertook its last cyclical program review in 2016-2017. The Self-Study was authored by Dr. Andrea Brown and Dr. Hillary Pimlott, both of whom served in the role of Program Coordinator for Women and Gender Studies during the cyclical program review. Staff support from Sylvia Hoang, Bev Bagley and Cathy Mahler and the input of the Women and Gender Studies Coordinating Committee in the Self-Study are also gratefully acknowledged. In addition to the Self-Study (Volume I), the program also submitted a copy of faculty curricula vita (Volume II), a volume of course syllabi, and a list of proposed external reviewers (Volume III). A draft of the Self-Study was reviewed by the Quality Assurance Office, and the Vice Dean of the Faculty of Arts prior to submission of the final version.

Following Laurier's IQAP, the external review committee for the review consisted of two external reviewers from outside the university, and one internal reviewer from Laurier but outside of the unit. The review committee was selected by the Program Review Sub-Committee on October 24, 2024, and a virtual external review took place during the week of March 17-21, 2025.

The review committee consisted of **Dr. Rebecca Godderis** from the Department of Indigenous Studies, Law and Social Justice at Wilfrid Laurier, **Dr. Ann Braithwaite** from the Diversity and Social Justice Department at the University of Prince Edward Island, and **Dr. Sal Renshaw** from the Gender Equality and Social Justice, Religion and Cultures and Indigenous Studies - Gender Equality and Social Justice programs at Nipissing University. During the external review, the committee met with the following individuals and groups:

- Dr. Trish McLaren, Associate Vice-President: Academic
- Dr. Hillary Pimlott, Women and Gender Studies Program Coordinator
- Dr. Gavin Brockett, Vice Dean of the Faculty of Liberal Arts
- Women and Gender Studies undergraduate students
- Dr. Karen Stote, full-time faculty member
- Women and Gender Studies Coordinating Committee members
- Women and Gender Studies Contract Teaching Faculty
- Ms. Cathy Mahler, Office Administration Coordinator
- Mr. Matt Thomas, Department Head, Information Resources and Ms. Meredith Fischer, Liaison Librarian
- Ms. Sally Heath, Associate Director: Academic Program Development and Quality Assurance

The review committee submitted their completed report on May 27, 2025. The executive summary from the report, and its recommendations, are provided below.

## EXTERNAL REVIEWERS' REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Women's and Gender Studies program at WLU now stands at an important crossroads. It mirrors national trends for WGS programs in terms of doing a large amount of service teaching at the lower levels but is challenged by having far fewer declared majors. Nonetheless, there are truly promising and exciting opportunities on the horizon which may go a long way towards reversing this latter trend. WGS has long run on very limited full time faculty resources—and currently has only one full time faculty member appointed to the program, with no cross appointments. This has resulted in most of the regular teaching being done by long term contract faculty (on differing kinds of appointments—from the more stable position of lecturer to more precarious positions), and the program administration being done by a program coordinating committee of full-time faculty members drawn from a range of different units, some of whom also irregularly teach in the program. This divide has resulted in several notable consequences for the program that have been outlined in detail throughout this report. Short of adding several new full-time positions to the program—something we highly recommend but

believe is unlikely in the current fiscal climate—the Review Team has focused predominantly on ways to shore up teaching strength in the program, using cost neutral existing faculty resources. We strongly recommend the Faculty of Arts at Waterloo work with the Faculty of Human and Social Sciences and the Faculty of Liberal Arts at Brantford to collaborate on expanding the inclusion of full-time faculty cross appointments and consider how undergraduate and graduate programs can work together. We understand the university wide Faculty Structuring conversation is very timely in this regard. Expanding teaching strength would also aid in a curricular expansion and renewal process that can address some of the current issues facing the program with a specific focus on the variety of course offerings and student options for progression through the major. This is an especially opportune moment to undertake this rethinking project, given the new standalone major (and WGS participation in the Faculty of Arts co-op program). Without question, WGS could be positioned as a hub for the academic, intellectual, and experiential exploration of a range of social justice issues—around gender and sexuality but also race, indigeneity, sexuality, disability, etc. At a university that does not have other programs dedicated to “identity” studies—such as Black Studies, Sexuality Studies, etc., there is an exciting opportunity for WGS to expand in new directions, provided, it must be emphasized, that there is a willingness to creatively explore and develop new ways of thinking about faculty and curriculum and the full institutional support to do so.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESPONSES

The External Reviewers’ Report included 12 recommendations to improve the quality of the Women and Gender Studies program and students’ experience in it. All recommendations have been listed verbatim below, followed by a summary of the program’s response, and a response by the Vice Dean of the Faculty of Arts.

**Recommendation #1:** As part of an extensive curriculum review and renewal process, the Review Team recommends updating the program and degree level learning outcomes in accordance with new curriculum priorities.

**Unit Response:** We agree with the importance of undertaking a curriculum review of the WGS program, part of which would include revisiting the program’s learning outcomes and their alignment with the institutional degree level expectations.

**Decanal Response:** The Dean of Arts supports curriculum review and will work with the program to ensure resources to achieve this outcome.

**Recommendation #2:** We recommend that the program monitor standalone intake data year over year—without waiting until the next review cycle—and continue to consider curriculum and programming in relation to this.

**Unit Response:** We agree that it will be important to monitor the standalone intake data beginning this year and that it should in part inform our strategy on recruitment and retention. It will play an important role in our curriculum review and renewal process as we seek ways to develop the appeal of the WGS Program to attract standalone majors in particular and grow our student numbers in general.

**Decanal Response:** The Dean of Arts will support monitoring of data.

**Recommendation #3:** We recommend that WGS–current teaching faculty and PCC members–embark upon a “retreat” (or a few such meetings) in order to elaborate and expand on curricular possibilities. Part of this process would be to engage in the “meta” level discussions about field formation and definition–something that struck the Review Team has been missing as part of a regular process in WGS (and not surprising, given its current structure). A retreat will also work towards a new focus on “community building” for WGS–a sense of shared purpose that we heard from many people seems to be missing right now;

- We further recommend that an outside person be brought in to facilitate this retreat and discussion about curriculum expansion and renewal, about field formation, and about how WGS at WLU is articulated, in order to focus the discussion and help bridge some of the divides that exist right now;
- Finally, we recommend (insist) that money be found to remunerate precarious faculty members for participating in this retreat.

**Unit Response:** During this past year, the PCC had discussions about holding a retreat this summer although WGS is in the process of transition between Coordinators. Nonetheless, we concur with this recommendation as we see it as important to undertake not just a renewal of curriculum and program, but also as part of a multi-year community-building strategy that ideally (and despite some of the obstacles noted in the Self-Study) will see a more collaborative collective engagement between contract and full-time faculty. There are some tensions that exist between CTF and full-time faculty but which an outside facilitator helping to lead the process of review and renewal would be a welcome opportunity to have those “meta” level discussions that are desperately needed in WGS. We agree that it is incumbent that contract faculty are able to participate and that this means that they should be paid to be part of this process.

Of course, this is where the University Administration should step up to ensure that this process can go forward to help WGS grow as an attractive program for students.

**Decanal Response:** The Dean of Arts will work with the Coordinator to ensure adequate resources to support a retreat that can help set priorities and respond to program needs.

**Recommendation #4:** We recommend that a process of engaging more existing faculty in WGS–through more formal cross appointments on both the Waterloo and Brantford campuses–be embarked upon, with an understanding that all teaching done through such cross appointments “counts” towards both (or more) units in which the faculty members are involved.

**Unit Response:** While we acknowledge the potential of this process to benefit the program and the full-time faculty who wish to be a part of WGS, the self-interest of other academic units, which are not likely to be as keen on cross-appointment of full-time faculty, since such a move would reduce the latter’s commitments to their original home units, which in turn increase the hiring of contract faculty replacements and may be seen as undermining the home unit’s ability to meet the needs of its own majors or even just the unit’s functionality. In an institution in which there has been a constant talk of budget cuts since before the 2008 financial “meltdown” (and alongside the actual impact of the cuts) creates a milieu of defensiveness and an impulse to guard one’s resources. We believe that any movement in this direction will take a commitment from the Provost and Vice-

President: Academic to support such moves between academic units in a manner that would encourage faculty who wish to be cross-appointed to be able to do so.

**Decanal Response:** If there are faculty who wish to be cross appointed with WGS, then the Dean of Arts will work with them and their home programs to facilitate such movement.

**Recommendation #5:** We recommend that, as part of the curricular renewal process, the program does a calendar “clean-up”—ensuring that course names and descriptions reflect what courses are actually doing. This would also aid in ensuring that the program “looks like” what the field currently is and does.

**Unit Response:** Since the WGS Program has been functioning more or less in a holding pattern over the last few years, due to faculty and staffing changes, we would agree that the recommendation for a “calendar ‘clean up’” is a good idea and would be an obvious task to undertake particularly in light of any changes in the review and renewal of curriculum.

**Decanal Response:** This would be a priority as WGS has staff and faculty resources to make it possible.

**Recommendation #6:** As part of a recruitment and retention strategy we strongly recommend that the university administration, along with the WGS program, work to more fully promote and profile the new possibilities in WGS—the standalone major, the Co-op program, and any other new initiatives and reorganizations that ensue.

**Unit Response:** We agree that the new possibilities, such as the standalone major and Co-op program, represent some important developments that, as a program, we will need to publicize and promote, as well as some other events that we hope will demonstrate our continued importance in the Faculty of Arts and as part of the University. We agree that the University Administration could work more fully to promote and profile WGS to help develop the program and expand recruitment.

**Decanal Response:** The Dean of Arts commits to continuing to promote WGS through our recruitment and public outreach efforts.

**Recommendation #7:** We strongly recommend that wherever possible, the Coordinator of WGS also be someone who teaches in, and/or is appointed to the program. We recognize that with only one full appointment right now, this is a difficult recommendation on which to follow through, but with new cross appointments, we believe that such an arrangement can be made—and that the benefits of this synergy are too important to overlook.

**Unit Response:** We concur with this recommendation and with the support of the University Administration (see the response to Recommendation #4) to permit cross-appointments of full-time faculty and see this as a

step towards putting WGS on a more stable footing in the near future. We hope to secure the support of the University Administration for cross-appointments.

**Decanal Response:** The University does permit cross-appointments and if there are FT faculty who wish to engage more directly with WGS in order to help provide leadership the Dean of Arts can support this.

**Recommendation #8:** We recommend that all faculty teaching in WGS, no matter their employment status or relation with WLU, be invited to be part of the PCC, and be involved in administrative discussions and decisions about the program. While there may be restrictions on representation at the level of voting, the presence of faculty who deliver the preponderance of the program should be recognized as important to discussion about program governance.

- We further recommend that monies be found to remunerate contract teaching faculty for any participation in the PCC.

**Unit Response:** While there might not be a whole-hearted agreement with this recommendation from all members of the PCC and amongst CTF, we think that any kind of half-heartedness could be overcome through the community-building process (of which this is part!). We do see the importance of this recommendation to help build that sense of community between contract faculty, who are doing the great bulk of the teaching, and the full-time faculty who have responsibility for governance and administration but have less involvement in the day-to-day teaching. We think that to also encourage the participation in the PCC meetings, we will see about scheduling meeting times that will enable CTF to attend as well as the full-time faculty members.

**Decanal Response:** Compensation for CTF participation in departmental leadership will be in accordance with Collective Agreements. We support and appreciate CTF contributions to WGS.

**Recommendation #9:** We recommend that a physical home/space be found for WGS—to give what is now a very dispersed program a visible place where program faculty and administrators can be easily found.

**Unit Response:** While the program agrees with this recommendation in theory, a potential challenge with this is that the WGS Program Administrative Assistant will be part of an Administrative Assistant already assigned to one or more departments and/or programs. Thus, where the location of the WGS Administrative Assistant depends upon which staff person will have this position as part of another regular staff position.

**Decanal Response:** The Dean of Arts takes this recommendation under advisement in light of the important response provided by the program.

**Recommendation #10:** We recommend that the role of administrative support for the program be revisited, and that this position be moved out of the Dean's office where it is currently located. We recognize that there have

been many cutbacks in admin support but have concerns about where this position for WGS is now located (to be clear, our concerns are not with the person doing this work!).

**Unit Response:** Our administrative support in the person of Cathy Mahler in the Dean's Office has been excellent! WGS has really benefitted by Cathy's dedication but with the additional workloads placed upon administrative staff, it comes at a cost in terms of stress and time for staff. We agree that WGS would benefit from a staff person who will be a dedicated part of our program, which is crucial as such a person provides the "institutional memory" that small programs like WGS rely on.

**Decanal Response:** As resources permit, the Dean of Arts Office will assign WGS administration to staff who will support the program to the best of their abilities.

**Recommendation #11:** We recommend that, as part of the curriculum rethinking process, the program plan its curricular offerings over a 3-year cycle, ensuring that students can get the courses they need to graduate on time with the options necessary for their continued engagement and success.

**Unit Response:** WGS's ability to implement this recommendation will become more likely with the three-year appointment of Dr. Alex Boutros as the new WGS Program Coordinator. We can see that planning courses for the program over a three-year cycle is obviously beneficial and would be another part of the ideal outcome of the curriculum review and renewal process. This will become more important as other aspects of programming become more prevalent throughout the Faculty of Arts. For example, the introduction of the Co-op Program as part of almost all other undergraduate degrees in the FOA will require that there is provision of a few courses, including third- and fourth-year courses, during the Spring-Summer semesters to ensure that Co-op students will be able to progress through their degrees in the same amount of time as non-Co-op students.

**Decanal Response:** The Dean of Arts supports this recommendation.

**Recommendation #12:** We recommend the development of a more focused and vocationally oriented set of recruitment materials specific to WGS to profile the uniqueness of the program and the future possibilities for students post-graduation.

**Unit Response:** We will collaborate with Recruitment and Admissions to ensure that recruitment materials for the program are more clearly focussed and vocationally oriented, especially to highlight the uniqueness of WGS, and which will also highlight future possibilities for students after graduation.

**Decanal Response:** The Dean of Arts will support the development of suitable recruitment materials.

## PROGRAM STRENGTHS

**Vice Dean of the Faculty of Arts:** The Program is small but mighty, with a committed team of faculty from a variety of departments ensuring its strength. Chairs from a variety of backgrounds have devoted themselves to nurturing a program in which they believe wholeheartedly. This commitment enables the university to continue to support it despite limited resources.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT AND ENHANCEMENT

**Vice Dean of the Faculty of Arts:** With only 1 full time faculty member, the program continues to be at risk. The university must continue to examine how best to ensure continuity of this important program and to direct more resources to support the faculty member and those from other departments who contribute to its success.

## SIGNATURES

Dr. Heidi Northwood

September 30, 2025



## APPROVAL DATES

Approved by Program Review Sub-Committee: November 7, 2025

Approved by Senate Academic Planning Committee:

Submitted to Senate (for information):

Implementation Report Due Date:

## RECOMMENDATIONS PRIORITIZED FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND ACTION PLAN

*The following Implementation Plan was created by the Vice Dean of the Faculty of Arts as part of the Decanal Response.*

Recommendation to be Implemented	Responsibility for Implementation	Responsibility for Resourcing (if applicable)	Anticipated Completion Date	Additional Notes
<b>Recommendation #1:</b> As part of an extensive curriculum review and renewal process, the Review Team recommends updating the program and degree level learning outcomes in accordance with new curriculum priorities.	Program		August 2028	
<b>Recommendation #2:</b> We recommend that the program monitor standalone intake data year over year–without waiting until the next review cycle–and continue to consider curriculum and programming in relation to this.	Program		Ongoing	
<b>Recommendation #3:</b> We recommend that WGS–current teaching faculty and PCC members–embark upon a “retreat” (or a few such meetings) in order to elaborate and expand on curricular possibilities. Part of this process would be to engage in the “meta” level discussions about field formation and definition–something that struck the Review Team has been missing as part of a regular process in WGS (and not surprising, given its current structure). A retreat will also work towards a new focus on “community building” for WGS–a sense of shared purpose that we	Program	Dean of Arts	August 2026	

<p>heard from many people seems to be missing right now;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We further recommend that an outside person be brought in to facilitate this retreat and discussion about curriculum expansion and renewal, about field formation, and about how WGS at WLU is articulated, in order to focus the discussion and help bridge some of the divides that exist right now;</li> <li>• Finally, we recommend (insist) that money be found to remunerate precarious faculty members for participating in this retreat.</li> </ul>				
<p><b>Recommendation #4:</b> We recommend that a process of engaging more existing faculty in WGS—through more formal cross appointments on both the Waterloo and Brantford campuses—be embarked upon, with an understanding that all teaching done through such cross appointments “counts” towards both (or more) units in which the faculty members are involved.</p>	Program	Dean’s Office	August 2028	
<p><b>Recommendation #5:</b> We recommend that, as part of the curricular renewal process, the program does a calendar “clean-up”—ensuring that course names and descriptions reflect</p>	Program		August 2027	

what courses are actually doing. This would also aid in ensuring that the program “looks like” what the field currently is and does.				
<b>Recommendation #6:</b> As part of a recruitment and retention strategy we strongly recommend that the university administration, along with the WGS program, work to more fully promote and profile the new possibilities in WGS—the standalone major, the Co-op program, and any other new initiatives and reorganizations that ensue.	Dean and Program	Dean of Arts	Ongoing	
<b>Recommendation #7:</b> We strongly recommend that wherever possible, the Coordinator of WGS also be someone who teaches in, and/or is appointed to the program. We recognize that with only one full appointment right now, this is a difficult recommendation on which to follow through, but with new cross appointments, we believe that such an arrangement can be made—and that the benefits of this synergy are too important to overlook.	Program and Dean	Dean of Arts	August 2028	
<b>Recommendation #8:</b> We recommend that all faculty teaching in WGS, no matter their employment status or relation with WLU, be invited to be part of the PCC, and be involved in administrative discussions and decisions about the program. While there may be restrictions on representation at the level of voting, the presence of faculty who deliver the	Program		Ongoing	

<p>preponderance of the program should be recognized as important to discussion about program governance.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We further recommend that monies be found to remunerate contract teaching faculty for any participation in the PCC.</li> </ul>				
<p><b>Recommendation #9:</b> We recommend that a physical home/space be found for WGS—to give what is now a very dispersed program a visible place where program faculty and administrators can be easily found.</p>	Dean		Ongoing	
<p><b>Recommendation #10:</b> We recommend that the role of administrative support for the program be revisited, and that this position be moved out of the Dean’s office where it is currently located. We recognize that there have been many cutbacks in admin support but have concerns about where this position for WGS is now located (to be clear, our concerns are not with the person doing this work!).</p>	Dean		August 2027	
<p><b>Recommendation #11:</b> We recommend that, as part of the curriculum rethinking process, the program plan its curricular offerings over a 3-year cycle, ensuring that students can get the courses they need to graduate on time with the options necessary for their continued engagement and success.</p>	Program		August 2027	

<b>Recommendation #12:</b> We recommend the development of a more focused and vocationally oriented set of recruitment materials specific to WGS to profile the uniqueness of the program and the future possibilities for students post-graduation.	Program	Dean of Arts	August 2027	
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