



WEBER STATE UNIVERSITY

College of Social & Behavioral Sciences

Program Review: Women and Gender Studies (WGS) Program - Dean's Response - September 2020

Submitted by: Dr. Julie Rich, Interim Dean, College of Social & Behavioral Sciences

I would like to thank the program review team, Dr. Valerie Hegstrom - Professor of Spanish Literature and Coordinator of Global Women's Studies, Brigham Young University, and Dr. Jason Barrett-Fox - Assistant Professor of English and Director of Composition, Weber State University, for their efforts and thorough assessment of the College of Social & Behavioral Sciences Women and Gender Studies program at Weber State University. I would also like to thank Dr. Melina Alexander (Program Director) and the faculty members who support the WGS program for their comprehensive self-study and their thoughtful response to the review team's report. I have read the program review and the WGS response to the review team's report. The review team highlighted the strengths of the WGS program and also delineated a few challenges. I will begin my response on the program strengths noted by the review team.

Strengths of the Women and Gender Studies Program

The WGS has many strengths of note, primarily the energetic and committed director, and the dedicated and engaged faculty. The director and faculty are well-trained, skilled, and highly innovative. Other strengths include, a committed, informed, and caring administrative assistant, a beautiful new building with updated equipment and support from the college. I concur with the report on these mentioned attributes and strengths.

The report also notes the clear and well-structured curriculum, which is extremely important for a successful program. I applaud your community-oriented and high impact approach to education and feel that this is one of the WGS program's great strengths. For example, the WGS course that takes students to the United Nations in New York to attend the Committee on the Status of Women (CSW) meetings is innovative and powerful.

I commend you on the well-articulated learning outcomes and the metrics you are collecting to help inform and drive program change. This approach helps keep the program vibrant and forward thinking. I support and thank the WGS director for her dedication and commitment to meeting and advising each new minor student. This type of mentoring ensures the success of our students and aids in their program completion.

I would like to emphasize the outstanding progress that has been made since the previous WGS program review in 2011/2012, with the following recommendations implemented:

- a. Broaden the program to be more inclusive of gender studies and promote a greater understanding of LGBTQ issues.
- b. Update technology and computer in the main office.

- c. Expand the curriculum by providing online classes.
- d. Maintain formal, stable connections with social service agencies, women's organizations, and communities throughout Ogden.
- e. Strengthen relations with the Office for Diversity and the Women's Center.
- f. Create a committee that can plan the future of the program on a short and long-term basis.
- g. Develop and record measurable learning outcomes to demonstrate the effectiveness of the program.

Challenges and recommendations for the Women and Gender Studies Program

The review team notes various challenges and recommendations that I would like to comment on. There is presently three different mission statements for the program, which can lead to confusion. I support the creation of a single, focused mission statement that will help guide the WGS program. I also support the recommendation from the report to consider somehow incorporating the college's mission statement language to enhance "the quality of life in northern Utah and beyond" and the university's stated goal to serve as an "educational [and] cultural ... leader for the region." I look forward to reading the new WGS mission statement that will be crafted by the advisory board and director.

A serious challenge with the WGS program is the amount of overload faculty must do. Women and Gender studies courses are normally taught by full-time faculty 'out of load' at an adjunct salary. Because the participating faculty strongly believe in the importance of the program, some have even covered classes without getting paid. This demonstrates a need for greater support from the upper administration and budgeting more program funds. I will endeavor to try and rectify this issue, but with the present budget cuts, due to COVID-19, this may prove highly challenging. The report also recommends that codified procedures be put in place for the orientation of contract and adjunct faculty, and to also have a review process for all faculty. The dean's office supports this recommendation.

An important directive from the reviewers is for the CSBS dean and associate dean, and the WGS program director to work with the department chairs of WGS affiliated faculty members to obtain Memorandums of Understanding (MOU), which will agree to allow these faculty members to regularly offer a WGS course 'in load' as part of their normal teaching regimen (e.g., once a semester, once a year, or even every other year). It is also recommended that the dean of Social & Behavioral Sciences should support this initiative by reaching out to the deans. I am committed to helping craft the MOUs both within the college and with other colleges.

I support the suggestion by the review team that the WGS program director should work with the department chairs in other departments to develop courses that could be cross-listed in a given department and in WGS. This action will solidify and strengthen the overall program.

The review team recommended creating an indicative exam, to be administered (online) at the beginning of the Introduction to Women's Studies course and again as an exit exam before graduation. I endorse using this approach to serve as a broad measure of program outcomes.

The report mentions that the learning outcomes for the WGS program are generally well-defined, but recommends making sure all are more specific and measurable. I support this directive and hope the changes can be completed in a timely manner. The review team mentioned concern about a better strategy for advising the WGS students. The College of Social & Behavioral Sciences has three academic advisors and one has presently been assigned to the minor programs in the college. I would recommend

that the WGS program director and the administrative assistant meet with CSBS advisor Britnee Ramirez to explore how to best guide our WGS students.

The report also mentioned that there was a substantial loss to the operating budget from 2015-16 to 2018-19. This WGS budget shortfall is concerning and I would recommend that the WGS director, administrative assistant, and the dean review the accounts with Betty Kusnierz (WSU Budgeting) and make sure that there is adequate funding for the program, if possible. This year the university is facing a 2.5% budget cut that will impact all CSBS programs. Regarding the salary budget for staff, I agree with the report that there needs to be more hours for the administrative assistant (greater than 10 hours per week). The WGS director and I should strategize to try and increase the funding for additional hours. We should also explore providing additional release time and stipend for the director.

A number of additional recommendations by the reviewers were offered. These shall be considered and discussed between the dean and the WGS director.

Again, I would like to thank the review team for their comprehensive report that will help strengthen our WGS program. I especially would like to share my appreciation for Dr. Melina Alexander, the WGS advisory board and the WGS faculty. Their tireless efforts have helped to build a stronger WGS program over the last few years. The College of Social & Behavioral Science is strongly committed to the ongoing support of the Women and Gender studies program and to the faculty, staff, and students. If there are any concerns or comments regarding this response to the WGS program review, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



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