

Program Review
Women and Gender Studies Program
 Weber State University
 Spring Semester 2020

The two members of the 2020 Review Team for the Women and Gender Studies (WGS) Program at Weber State University are

- Valerie Hegstrom, Professor of Spanish Literature and Coordinator of Global Women's Studies, Brigham Young University, and
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On Tuesday, February 4, 2020, we (the review team) interviewed faculty (Professors Stephanie Wolfe, RC Callahan, Adrienne Andrews, Kathryn MacKay, Stephanie Speicher, and Emily Peterson), staff (Administrative Assistant Roe Schoof), students (Yuritzi Rosas Hernández and Mary Jarvis), and administrators (Program Director Melina Alexander, Dean Julie Rich, and Associate Dean Susan Matt) related to the WGS program. We learned a great deal from their answers, concerns, insights, and dedication and we are favorably impressed with Weber State's WGS program.

The WGS program at Weber State is a minor program, which often serves students in the College of Social & Behavioral Sciences, particularly those majoring in Social Work, Criminal Justice, and Psychology. It also supports the General Education Diversity requirement and the Bachelor of Integrated Studies program.

Program Strengths

Weber State's WGS program has many strengths. Chief among these are an outstanding program director, dedicated and self-sacrificing faculty members, a skilled and caring administrative assistant, newly renovated facilities and updated equipment, and support from deans and other administrators. Everyone we interviewed (students, faculty, staff, and deans) praised the skills and dedication of WGS program director Melina Alexander, under whose direction the program is flourishing.

1. Mission Statement (Standard A)

The WGS Advisory Board plans to create a single, focused mission statement. In the meantime, though, they have created a strong minor program curriculum, which provides a firm foundation in the field of Women and Gender Studies. The board also regularly measures the success of the program against the outcomes they have established.

2. Curriculum (Standard B)

The WGS curriculum is clearly laid out and articulated, as are the steps necessary for students to take to complete that curriculum successfully. The curriculum is both consistent with WGS's mission and demonstrates thoughtful, interdisciplinary curriculum planning that incorporates community-oriented and high-impact practices (such as courses that take students to the United Nations for first-hand learning or into the library's special collections archive of women's organizations to create displays for the museums at Union Station).

3. Learning Outcomes and Assessment (Standard C)

Another strength of the WGS Program lies in its carefully articulated learning outcomes, which make clear the kinds of learning, skills, and behaviors students will have achieved at the time of graduation. In addition to being well articulated, learning outcomes support the goals of the program and are responsible to the constituencies served. Additionally, evidence of learning is regularly collected, assessed, and aggregated, not to mention being systematically reviewed against program-specific thresholds, by the administrator and the faculty. Program change is driven by putting this data to use in the continued construction of new courses and other learning opportunities for students.

4. Academic Advising (Standard D)

Due to the commitment level of both the program's administrator and her administrative assistant, another strength in the WGS Program comes in the aid students receive in planning their individual programs of study. This strength is accomplished despite the program not having a dedicated advisor. The highly engaged program director demonstrates a high level of commitment, as well, to selecting and training her support staff. The program director meets with every new minor student to help them declare the minor program and to create a plan for their minor course of study. Students report feeling supported by the program director and administrative assistant and state that the director has a very "open-door policy."

5. Faculty (Standard E)

The core of full-time faculty members (individuals who all teach or work in departments that lie outside the WGS program) who have affiliated with the WGS program is dedicated to providing and improving upon a quality minor program in Women and Gender Studies. They are well-trained, skilled, and innovative instructors.

6. Program Support (Standard F)

After some turnover, it appears the current administrative assistant (Roe Schoof) is skilled, informed, and committed to the sustenance of the program. She took the Introduction to Women's Studies class online to better understand the program. She has a good working relationship with the program director and advisory board. She likes the flexibility of her

appointment and believes the ten hours per week that she is contracted by the program are enough to accomplish her assignments, which include website updates, continuing education meetings, setting up classes in the online system, finances, setting appointment for students with the director, creating the agenda and minutes for the board meetings, processing student waivers, facilitating scholarship applications, and helping with Women's History Month activities. She hopes to catch up on filing and website updates during summer months. (The program director believes it would be helpful to the program if the administrative assistant were contracted to work more than ten hours per week.)

The newly renovated program's facilities are top-notch, including the director's office, the administrative assistant's workspace, the shared workroom, conference rooms, and classrooms. The administrative assistant shares her workspace (a large WGS-dedicated counter and desk) with the administrative assistant to Social Work and Gerontology. The director has her own office, which is well appointed for meeting students and taking care of other program needs.

7. Relationships with External Communities (Standard G)

One of the most outstanding strengths of WGS at WSU is its strong and robust connections to community partners through its affiliation with CCEL (Center for Community Engaged Learning). These relationships are both clearly defined and help provide students with high-impact learning experiences.

The WGS Advisory Board (with members from several campus entities external to WGS) meets monthly and provides informative meeting minutes.

8. Program Summary (Standard H)

The WGS program was previously reviewed during the 2011/2012 academic year. It is worth noting that because of serious illness and other issues, the program has experienced multiple turnovers in directorship and administrative staff. In spite of these challenges, the program has implemented the following recommendations made during the previous program review:

- a. Broaden the program to be more inclusive of gender studies and promote a greater understanding of LGBTQ issues. (The program has proposed a new minor in Queer Studies.)
- 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.

Program Challenges

The WGS program faces several challenges.

1. Mission Statement (Standard A)

As noted in the program's self-study, the program currently has three different mission statements (one listed for program review by the university, another listed on the WGS website, and another in program notes and used for yearly program evaluations). This proliferation could lead to some confusion about desired outcomes for the program and planning for program courses, events, and other activities. The program director has identified this challenge and plans to work with her WGS Advisory Board to review the three statements and create one clear mission statement that includes student outcomes. On a positive note, all three current mission statements support college and university mission statements, specifically the College of Social & Behavioral Sciences' mission to study "behavior and thought in individual, social, cultural, physical and historical contexts" and "to enhance social justice," as well as Weber State University's aim to encourage "freedom of expression" and value "diversity."

2. Curriculum (Standard B)

Our team found that the program does maintain the appropriate courses to support the minor and that they are offered on a regular basis. That said, oftentimes these courses are offered under unacceptable conditions. For instance, the director accepted a load of 21 hours in the fall semester (a typical load at WSU is 12 hours). Such an extreme overload is surprisingly not exceptional for the director, and our team recommends more support for her and is concerned about the potential for burnout. Additionally, our team discovered that the vast majority of professors in the program teaches WGS courses out of load, which means that they teach the courses on top of their full loads of 12 hours in their home departments. Teaching out of load means that rather than getting paid their regular salary, these tenure-line professors are teaching WGS courses at the adjunct rate. At least one faculty member expressed frustration, stating that the university administration is supportive of WGS in theory, but not monetarily, adding that the program depends upon the kindness of faculty members who continue to cover classes without getting paid for it.

3. Learning Outcomes and Assessment (Standard C)

Program outcomes are generally well-defined, though some more work is recommended in making them more specific and more measurable. The program director is aware of this need and is already at work on revisions. Each learning outcome should be assessed by at least one

direct measure, where thresholds for acceptable performance for each measure are defined. Currently, the program does not measure its Learning Outcome 2.B.

4. Academic Advising (Standard D)

Our team feels that WGS needs a stronger, more explicitly defined strategy for advising their students. Most of this is handled by the already over-extended program director, and students suggested more contact could be helpful. The part-time administrative assistant expressed interest in learning about and helping with low-level advisement issues. The program self-study lists Stephanie Quinn as the advisement center liaison to WGS, but it does not appear that students recognize this advisor as a resource who can help them learn about WGS's program or track their progress within the minor or BIS emphasis.

5. Student Involvement / Support

The students we interviewed did not know each other; they do not feel connected as a cohort of WGS students. They often feel isolated because family members, friends, and classmates do not understand (and sometimes belittle) the WGS students' interests in women's rights and social justice. The students did not know that the program's student organization, the Social Advocacy Club, exists.

6. Faculty (Standard E)

All core WGS faculty at WSU are affiliated faculty members and they belong to other departments and have heavy responsibilities within those departments. Nevertheless, these instructors are excellent, passionate, and committed to their students and to community outreach, but, as noted earlier, they are in most cases teaching these WGS courses outside of their regular loads, which places an undue burden on them and worries our team about overextending and underpaying them for their WGS work.

Additionally, though processes are in place to determine appropriate teaching assignments and service workloads, to guide and mentor contract/adjunct faculty, and to provide adequate support for mission-specific program activities, the overextended director of the program, according to our team's assessment, needs to be granted more time and resources to accomplish these tasks.

While most adjunct faculty who teach within the the WGS program hold advanced degrees (a Master's degree or PhD), because the WGS program does not have firm commitments from other university programs and departments to help cover the required WGS courses, during the 2019-2020 school year at least one section of the introductory course was taught by a recently graduated WGS minor, holding only a Bachelor's degree. While the program director assured our team that this would only happen one time, this situation is clearly less than desirable. One non-traditional student we interviewed revealed that when she took Introduction to Women's

Studies several semesters/years ago, the instructor was unable to correctly define key terminology in the field (for example: cisgender, heteronormative).

7. Program Support (Standard F)

Though the support staff is dedicated and capable, she is employed only part-time and shared with another program. Because of some confusion with a prior administrative assistant, the WGS program lost some of its operating budget. Appropriated funding dropped from \$40,423 in 2015-16 to \$20,601 in 2017-18 to a low \$14,367 in 2018-19.

Program Weaknesses

We have identified a few weaknesses in the current support for the program that should be addressed.

1. Curriculum (Standard B)

Though beyond the control of the WGS program director and advisory board, the program cannot demonstrate that there is an appropriate allocation of resources for curriculum delivery that is consistent with the mission of the program. Again, those running and teaching in this program are managing to deliver a robust and exciting curriculum, but they are currently doing it with fewer resources than they need. Our team believes that stretching administrators and faculty that thin is unsustainable and sets a dangerous tone for a program in women and gender studies about the value of women's labor.

2. Student Learning Outcomes (Standard C)

WGS student learning outcomes are directly linked to the program's curriculum, and an explicit curriculum grid exists that illustrates that alignment, but this grid is not online.

3. Academic Advising (Standard D)

Despite the gargantuan efforts of the program director, who meets individually with all incoming students, due to being spread too thin, no structure is in place to check in with students in mid-career or at the end of their program of study. This makes it difficult for students to receive guidance or mentoring as they make important decisions about their future careers or plans for graduate study.

4. Faculty (Standard E)

The program does not currently have appropriate and codified procedures for the orientation of contract and adjunct faculty, nor does it have in place a periodic review process for all faculty.

Because the WGS program “borrows” all of its faculty from other departments, it has very little control over the demographic diversity of its faculty. The members of the WGS advisory board are diverse in terms of race, ethnic background, and gender, but the majority of core classes in the WGS program are taught by white women (with the notable exception of RC Callahan).

Recommendations: Suggested Changes to Meet the Standards

We recommend the following changes and advice to help the WGS program better meet the standards set forth in the program review information:

1. Mission Statement (Standard A)

The WGS advisory board should thoughtfully review the mission statements of the College of Social & Behavioral Sciences and WSU as they look closely at the three current WGS program mission statements and program outcomes to ensure that their new mission statement will align with and support those of the college and university. Specifically, the WGS program might consider the college’s aim 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.”

2. Curriculum (Standard B)

- a. If possible, the WGS program director should have an additional course reduction to make it possible for her to sustain the load of administering the program.
- b. Ideally, the WGS program director will be able to teach at least one WGS course per semester in order to work closely with WGS minors and BIS students, but this course should be taught in load and not as an added burden beyond her already heavy teaching and administrative load.
- c. With the support of the dean and associate dean of Social & Behavioral Sciences, the WGS program director should work with the department chairs of core WGS affiliated faculty members to obtain Memos of Understanding, which agree to allow these faculty members to regularly (once a semester, once a year, or even every other year) offer a WGS course in load (as part of their normal teaching load). The dean of Social & Behavioral Sciences should support this initiative by reaching out to the deans of Arts & Humanities and other colleges to lay the groundwork for obtaining these MOUs.
- d. Additionally, the WGS program director (with her deans’ support) should reach out to other departments on campus to invite more faculty members to affiliate with WGS and consider teaching within the WGS program (and obtain MOUs like those mentioned in c above).

- e. With the support of the dean and associate dean of Social & Behavioral Sciences, 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. (For example, the Department of Health Administrative Services or the School of Nursing might develop a course on Women's Health that could serve as an elective for their own students, as well as WGS students. English Professor Jason Barrett-Fox might be asked to offer a course on Rhetoric and Gender. English or Foreign Language professors might offer courses on women writers that could be cross-listed. Andrea Easter-Pilcher, the Dean of the College of Science, might help facilitate the development of a course on Women in Science.)

3. Learning Outcomes and Assessment (Standard C)

WGS program outcomes should relate directly to the new mission statement. Each learning outcome should be specific and measurable. Each learning outcome should be assessed by at least one direct measure. Our team recommends establishing a simple diagnostic exam, which can be administered online at the beginning of the Introduction to Women's Studies course and again as an exit exam before graduation. This diagnostic exam could serve as a comprehensive direct-measure of program outcomes.

WGS learning outcomes and their alignment with the program's curriculum should be posted online on the program's website.

4. Academic Advising (Standard D)

WGS needs a stronger, more explicitly defined strategy for advising their students with a structure in place to periodically check in with students. This will only be possible if the program director is not expected to handle a full teaching load and all of the advising of students. A few possible strategies related to advisement that the WGS Advisory Board might consider include

- a. creating a brochure, flyer, or map to help students understand all advising resources available to them and how to connect with them,
- b. preparing the program's administrative assistant to perform specific low-level advisory assignments to help guide students through the completion of the minor,
- c. creating stronger connections with Stephanie Quinn or another liaison in the advisement center who can provide information about the minor, internships, preparing for graduate school, and job opportunities,
- d. committing another member of the Advisory Board (not the program director) to serve as a WGS internship coordinator and/or graduate school/career planning advisor, and
- e. instituting short exit interviews for each graduating minor to indirectly measure program outcomes and offer advice about graduate school and career planning.

The program director is working on strengthening connections with program alums. Those connections should be used to support efforts to advise current students in the program.

5. Faculty (Standard E)

The WGS program should put in place a procedure to orient and support faculty who teach in the program. One simple way to do this without overburdening the program director would be to schedule best-practices meetings for all WGS instructors. These meetings could be held once a semester (or more often). During these meetings, the program director could give reminders and make announcements about program outcomes, upcoming events, resources, etc. Each experienced instructor could share one of their best ideas, texts, assignments, presentations, or exams with other colleagues. Instructors could share strategies for teaching successfully inside the program curriculum. Another approach to training WGS instructors could involve securing funding (perhaps from the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences) to invite a regional or national WGSS scholar (perhaps a current or past leader of the NWSA) to campus to meet with faculty to discuss current pedagogical practices in the field, as well as the state of the discipline. WSU WGS faculty could prepare for such a workshop by reading an article or book chapter by the invited guest.

In order to periodically review instruction within the WGS program, the Advisory Board might organize teaching partnerships. Partners would agree to learn from each other by reviewing a sample of each other's materials (syllabus, assignments, presentations, exams, etc.) and attending each other's class two or three times during a given semester. Partners could also meet once a semester to discuss their teaching philosophy. Then each partner would be prepared to write a short review of the other's teaching. This peer review process would be a supportive, mentoring experience for colleagues, and at the same time require little time investment from the program director.

Faculty who teach within the WGS program should hold appropriate advanced degrees. If the program is able to implement recommendations 2 c-e above, difficulties in staffing courses should be alleviated.

6. Program Support (Standard F)

With the dean of Social and Behavioral Sciences, the WGS program director should reach out to the Director of Academic Finance and Administration (Betty Kusnierz) and the Controller and Director of Accounting Services (Ron Smith) to access more information about budget training and available instructional wage money, with the goal of being able to compensate adjunct faculty and part-time support staff who work within the WGS program, as well as support the program budget in other ways.

If possible, the administrative assistant (or other support staff) should be contracted to work for WGS for more than ten hours per week.

7. Program Summary (Standard H)

In addition to some recommendations from the 2011/2012 WGS program review our team has reiterated above, the following suggestions should be revisited and considered:

- a. Carry out a time-to-degree study. (This should determine why higher numbers of minors are not graduating each year. The program director has recognized and is studying this issue. Her efforts to understand and solve this problem should be supported.)
- b. Create a line in the budget that allows the Coordinator and faculty to attend national and regional WGSS meetings and conferences (SIROW and NWSA).
- c. Plan for a future major in Women and Gender Studies. (At least one of the students interviewed expressed that she would have liked to major in WGS.)
- d. Increase the teaching-release-time for the coordinator of the program to fifty percent.

Additional Recommendations

We further recommend

1. The creation of a stronger network and connections between WGS students. This could be accomplished in several ways:
 - a. A once-a-semester program open house or mixer for WGS faculty and students, at which students could ask questions of faculty and discuss subjects considered “taboo” in other settings,
 - b. Strengthening the program’s Social Advocacy Club and making sure that every minor and students from all WGS classes are invited to join and participate in events and activities,
 - c. The creation of a chapter of Triota (the national WS student honor society) at WSU, and/or
 - d. Participation in a coalition of WGSS undergraduate students at all Utah universities.
2. The establishment of a protocol that clarifies the relationships between the WGS program and Vice Provost Kowalewski (curriculum), Dean Rich (budget), and Assistant Vice President for Diversity Andrews (support, activities). A more clearly defined sense of these relationships could be useful for alleviating some of the strain on the program’s director and freeing up resources.
3. An advisory board discussion and exploration of feminist pedagogies, including team teaching possibilities and community-based experiential learning opportunities.