

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Women and Gender Studies Program
Program Performance Review

Dean's Summary Report and Recommendations
May 2013

Overview

The Women and Gender Studies Program, under the collegial and thoughtful leadership of their chairs, has established a strong and popular GE curriculum for our campus and are on their way to establishing a recognized profile for their discipline in the College and the University. In particular, the program is becoming a leader of cross-discipline collaboration for the campus. The program learning goals provide a touchstone for the existing program and for the plans to develop the program and redesign the curriculum. As the reviewers have noted, since 1982, the program has “grown significantly” in a way that is “consistent with national trends in women’s and gender studies.”

As my remarks below will indicate, the strength of the program is in the commitment of the faculty to the discipline and their particular fields and to contributing to the breadth of knowledge provided in their GE curriculum and the depth of investigatory experience students acquire in the course of completing major and minor study plans.

Faculty and Student Success

The most visible evidence of faculty success is in the popularity of the program’s courses across campus. The faculty have designed interesting and engaging courses in a discipline that many of our students only begin to explore once arriving in college. Committed to “feminist pedagogy, theory, and praxis,” faculty serve as campus models for student-centered teaching approaches. Given that many of their GE courses are fairly large with high enrollments, such commitment is particularly admirable.

Additionally, the establishment of the Queer Studies minor is a model of interdisciplinary success. Drawing on the expertise faculty across the College, this minor is an example of faculty working together across units to create an interdisciplinary intellectual community.

Since the review team did not get the opportunity to talk to students, the evidence of students’ success can be most easily measured indirectly in the growth of the major and the popularity of the program’s courses. I do, however, encourage the program to talk with students as it examines issues regarding advising practices and the major. While the reviewers recommended that the faculty improve advising practices, the program response indicates more confidence in its success. I encourage the faculty to work closely with the Office of Institutional Research and Analytic Studies to find valid measures for determining student success (For e.g.: pass rates in your courses, retention rates of identified cohorts, case studies of groups of students) and either courses that are proving difficult for students or curricular bottlenecks.

The report also documents numerous directed reading classes that include faculty/student collaboration, “a great deal of service learning” activities, and an internship that is part of the required capstone experience for majors. Such high impact practices suggest that alumni likely have a strong connections with the community that could serve to benefit current students and inform future curricular choices.

The PPR and the reviewer’s report both note the importance of distributing the targeted FTES such that faculty teach three courses along with their other advising/internship/research responsibilities. I encourage the chair to keep this priority in

the forefront of her plans as she schedules classes and as the program thinks about growing the curriculum. Decisions to add more upper division (low capped) courses, an alternate introductory course for majors, or a free-standing internship course will have implications for the way in which faculty meet their individual portion of the program target.

In this regard, I agree with the reviewers' recommendation that you postpone the development of a graduate certificate until the undergraduate curriculum is "overhauled" and the FTES generated is not so fully dependent on high-enrolled GE courses. The program might, however, consider an undergraduate certificate tied to a minor. This might be an additional source of FTES in non-GE courses and should graduate students have room in their study plans, they could take the 400-level courses.

Finally, given the importance for probationary faculty to complete the research and service commitments they need to earn tenure and for tenured faculty to continue to publish and engage in professional service, I also agree with the reviewers' recommendations that the program work with the Office of Grants and Contracts, the FDC, and the H&SS Director of Development to seek the additional support they need to be active and productive professionals and scholars.

Graduation and Retention

According to your own calculations, the number of majors increased steadily since the beginning of the program; the number of majors graduated was until recently, seeing a similar growth. As the table below indicates (See Table 1), there was a significant drop in graduation rates 2012.

Table 1

All Majors Graduated according to A&R (WMST collected data)

2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
7	9	13	18	19	22	10

While this drop may be partially attributed to budget cuts and decreased enrollment, as you indicate, it is certainly worth investigating this further before it becomes a trend. As I have suggested, the number of majors and the graduation rate maybe be improved by revised advising practices and the planned curricular revisions. In addition, I encourage you to reach out to undeclared students at NSO and to promote the minor and the new minor in Queer Studies. Faculty should also continue the efforts started at the time of the last PPR to reach out to the local community colleges.

As you move forward with your plans to increase the number of tenure track faculty, you should do so in the context of a careful and long term plan for exploring "new intellectual directions." As the reviewers note as well, you rely heavily on part time faculty, even for some upper division offerings. While you don't say very explicitly how you would like to overhaul the curriculum, I encourage you to keep in mind these competing needs: adding full time faculty who would replace the part time faculty; attracting, retaining, and graduating majors; providing a curriculum that continues to reflect the intellectual

developments in your fields; keeping faculty FTES targets (number of courses taught each semester) in line with program expectations.

Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment

In restructuring the major and minor, the program should be mindful of their Student Learning Goals. It is possible that as you grow the curriculum you may find that your SLOs can be commensurately revised. Noting how much of your allocation is currently committed to GE courses, I would ask that you think about ways to shift the balance slightly without losing sight of target and allocations.

Your report summarizes the program assessment strategy that you have developed since the last PPR, a strategy whose “primary systematic method of measure student achievement” is the review of a senior portfolio. While this is certainly a credible and reliable means for determining the ultimate skills of your majors when they complete the program, it does not show where or how these skills are developing in the course of the major or, therefore, provide you with a way of determining where in the curriculum under developed skills might be targeted for improvement. It would be helpful for you to refer to the curricular map/rubric that you have already created to determine where particular skills are being developed in the course of the major and how the interleaving of the curricular map and the results of the portfolio assessment might inform anticipated changes in the curriculum.

Budgets and Target

As noted in the PPR report, the program fairly regularly meets or exceeds its target. I encourage you to analyze the distribution of your of lower and upper division FTES and in particular, your heavy reliance on lower division GE. For example, in spring 2013, nearly 190 FTES were generated in GE courses while only 14 from non-GE courses. Certainly, if the program wishes to continue its path toward becoming a department (see UPS 100.600), it is important to consider the viability of a department that relies so completely on GE. In order to meet your desire for growing the major, in addition to outreach to our feeder community colleges, you may want to reach out to students in your lower division courses. Certainly having full time faculty teach the gateway courses is a way to increase the number majors as students are likely to see these faculty members as potential advisors and mentors.

In the report, you voice concern about the increasing SFR and that it has been “over that of the college”—which is, itself, higher than many of the other Colleges on campus. Unfortunately, this is a catch-22 since SFR is calculated as a relationship between FTES and FTEF. And as your program has exceeded target (FTES) more quickly than it has added faculty (FTEF), the SFR is going to increase (see Table 2).

Table 2

Year	# of Faculty	FTES	FTEF	SFR
2005-2006	2	91	4.6	19.8

2006-2007	3	123	6.1	20.2
2007-2008	4	195	6.6	29.5
2008-2009	4	240	6.0	40
2009-2010	4	156	5.5	28.5
2010-2011	4	174	6.6	26.5
2011-2012	4	195	7.75	25.16

Since the program has made a decision to surpass target at a rate higher than the increase in faculty, I recommend that you look at how the SFR is being distributed across the curriculum and whether your faculty are sharing the burden. This is particularly worth looking at given the high number of part time faculty and your desire to increase the number of upper division courses and the number of tenure track faculty. If you are to increase 300 and 400 level classes without also increasing the number of majors, you are likely to add to your problems of under enrollment at that level and, therefore, increase the burden on the lower division GE glasses for reaching target. And if you had more tenure track faculty in place of part time faculty, they must be prepared to teach the high enroll GE classes that support the program. While I am not meaning to discourage you from any of these choices, I am encouraging you to work through the implications of each.

Facilities

The program has an enviable space for students and faculty to congregate. Though space demands have required that the suite be shared with other units (like the Dean’s office), nonetheless, you have a comfortable location for students to study and hold meetings and informal gathering. While I appreciate the commitment of PTF to the program the desire to have the entire program centrally located, the goal may not be easily achieved. The PTF who were interviewed by the reviewer team “cited their inclusion in department decision-making and pedagogical discussion.” However, if the program sets as a priority having all full and part time faculty in a single space, then it might be necessary to relocate into a space that would allow for growth rather than limit the size of the program to the size of the current suite where many of the faculty are located. I encourage the chair to participate in the conversations of the College Space Committee to discuss and propose College priorities in making decisions about best ways to assign and reassign space.

I appreciate your need for both small and large classrooms—those that lend themselves to active learning and those that can hold the K2 classes you depend on—and the challenge of strategically scheduling those courses in relation to classroom availability and student access.

Summary of recommendations

1. Examine issues regarding advising practices and the major. Invite the input of your alumni regarding the curriculum, and work with our Office of Institutional

Research to find valid measures for determining student success and appropriate responses to problems.

2. Postpone the development of a graduate certificate until the undergraduate curriculum is “overhauled” and the FTES you generate is not so fully dependent on high-enrolled GE courses.
3. Work with the Office of Grants and Contracts, the FDC, and the H&SS Director of Development to seek the additional support they need to be active and productive professionals and scholars.
4. Develop plans to expand your number of majors by reaching out to undeclared students at NSO, promoting both of your minors, and continuing your efforts to reach out to local community colleges.
5. Create an intentional plan for overhauling the curriculum that considers competing needs: hiring full time faculty who would replace the part time faculty; attracting, retaining, and graduating majors; providing a curriculum that continues to reflect the intellectual developments in your fields; keeping faculty FTES targets (number of courses taught each semester) in line with program expectations.

Final thoughts

The Women and Gender Studies Program has made great strides in the growth of its majors, the addition of an important minor, the success of its GE, and the intellectual rigor of its faculty. I encourage them to continue growing and establishing themselves in our College and on our campus with intention and forethought.

Dr. Angela Della Volpe, Dean
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