

# Unit Plan for Assessing and Improving Student Learning in Degree Programs

Unit: Gender and Women's Studies

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## SECTION 1: PAST ASSESSMENT RESULTS

**Brief description of changes or improvements made in your unit as the result of assessment results since 2000.**

The Gender and Women's Studies Program began offering an interdisciplinary major under the heading of LAS Interdisciplinary Studies in fall 2003. This year we wrote 'A Request for a New Unit of Instruction' that is currently on its way to the IBHE. During these planning stages GWS faculty have had several conversations about student outcomes. They agreed that two required courses in particular, GWS 350, Introduction to Feminist Theory, and GWS 498, Senior Seminar (the senior capstone course) were integral in achieving the outcomes listed below.

Our means of assessment, however, has largely been informal. The associate director conducts exit interviews with students to discuss their experience in the program, what types of skills and knowledge they have achieved, what gaps we need to fill, and their suggestions for improving the program. These conversations have generated some minor changes, such as moving the Senior Seminar from spring to fall to give students the opportunity to expand their projects as senior theses in the spring. Feedback from alumnae, although very positive, has not yet been systematized to reach all graduates.

## SECTION 2: REVISED ASSESSMENT PLAN

(a) **PROCESS**: Brief description of the process followed to develop or revise this assessment plan.

Student outcomes and assessment were discussed generally in faculty meetings. The courses and curriculum committee then met to draft outcomes and an assessment plan.

(b) **STUDENT OUTCOMES**: List Unit's student learning outcomes (knowledge, skills, and attitudes).

**Students will:**

- **Outcome 1.** Understand how racial, ethnic, religious, class, and other social categories intersect with gender and shape understandings of what it means to be female, male, transgender, and/or intersexed
- **Outcome 2.** Be familiar with women's and men's roles in families, cultures, social institutions, politics, economics, history, and global contexts.
- **Outcome 3.** Recognize the impact of culture, politics, and social structure on women's and men's psychology, behavior, and styles of communication.

- **Outcome 4.** Understand how political, economic, and ethical policy issues arise from gendered expectations and beliefs.
- **Outcome 5.** Know and be able to compare new methods of research and theories of knowledge that have informed the study of gender and sexuality.
- **Outcome 6.** Develop the critical thinking skills needed to assess, critique, and construct arguments based on theoretical justification and empirical data.
- **Outcome 7.** Develop communication skills (written and verbal) in order to persuasively construct arguments, summaries, and analyses of material with which they interact; and to articulate their ideas and understanding of material to one another in class presentations and discussion.
- **Outcome 8.** Develop reading skills to enhance their ability to analyze a variety of texts, including written, visual, cultural, and political forms of representation.
- **Outcome 9.** Develop their intellectual commitment to improve their skills and talents in the course of their studies.
- **Outcome 10.** Develop their ethical commitment to apply what they have learned and understand the importance of civic engagement.
- **Outcome 11.** Develop advocacy skills in order to understand the ways in which gender, race, class, sexuality, and disability structure individual, community, representational, and institutional practices; and the willingness to intervene in bias in each of those venues.
- **Outcome 12.** Achieve an understanding of the practices of academic disciplines and the innovations of interdisciplinarity.

**(c) MEASURES AND METHODS USED TO MEASURE OUTCOMES:**

1. GWS will organize an assessment team every year and that team will ask for written assignments and tests from GWS intro courses (GWS 250 and 260), Feminist Theory (GWS 350) and the Senior Seminar (GWS 498) in order to:
  - a) set a baseline understanding of the skills that GWS majors and minors enter the program with (using paper and test scores from the intro course).
  - b) examine written work from the intermediary Feminist Theory course (GWS 350) and note progress or lack thereof in the knowledge of the field and writing and critical thinking skills of the students.
  - c) work with the professor of the senior seminar (GWS 498) to help define the goals for writing and critical thinking, as well as assess all the other criteria as they are developed in the course of the student's final research project.
2. GWS faculty will attend the final presentations in the senior seminar (GWS 498) and write reviews of the projects.
3. The basic assessment goals of GWS will become part of each faculty members' grading rubric. Each core class will include a discussion of the general assessment standards for the program and each year students and faculty will be invited to attend a discussion session that critically interrogates those standards.

Students will also be invited to respond anonymously to how well they feel their courses prepare them to meet the standards.

4. The Program will develop and administer an online survey for former students.

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