

UGC REPORT ON THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW
OF
GENDER + WOMEN'S STUDIES

A. Student Learning Outcomes

The report of the external reviewers noted that the department has implemented a model of assessment that leads “in thoughtful, reflexive assessment tools and implementation in the field of GWST nationally and on the campus.” As a department, the faculty of GWST has agreed upon a set of learning outcomes that each of their courses will meet. They fall into three main categories: a) educating students in the interdisciplinary study of women, gender and sexuality and its intersections with race, class, age, nation, and ability in regional, national, and international contexts; 2) developing students’ engaged citizenship and their commitment to social justice; and 3) developing skills in information literacy, critical thinking, effective research, and clear writing. To ensure those goals are met in each class, the core faculty in GWST engages in a two pronged and labor-intensive process: a) an annual assessment of student achievement to ascertain the effectiveness with which they facilitate students’ ability to meet the learning outcomes through specific course activities; and b) an incorporation of student reflections and interviews to understand the student’s level of preparation and preparedness to undertake a research project in the department’s capstone course.

Responsive to this bimodal assessment, the faculty revise their course assignments and syllabi to strengthen students’ ability to meet the learning outcomes. In 2010, the faculty initiated this formal assessment process, which emphasizes, “closing the loop” within the process itself. This means that the faculty implement changes to individual courses and to the scaffolding of skills building over the core curriculum to improve student learning outcomes. This method of assessment has led specifically to a revised set of assignment in the required methodologies course (GWST 300). The faculty undergoes this assessment of particular courses on an annual basis. It is also worth noting that the core faculty is committed to teaching GWST 100, the introduction to the field. The outside reviewers comment this “is in line with best practices in higher education nationally in terms of promoting student retention and generating excitement about the field.”

B. State of the Discipline; Program Modifications; Program Changes

Founded as a program in 1982, GWST was approved to offer a 24 credit undergraduate certificate in 1999 and to offer a 39 credit BA in 2007. This was accomplished with a governing structure dependent on a voluntary Coordinating Committee, drawn from faculty members in other departments across the university. In 2013, GWST became a department. In addition to the major, the department offers a minor in GWST and a minor in Critical Sexuality Studies (CSST) as well as undergraduate and post-baccalaureate certificates in GWST. The UGC approved the CSST major in 2012, which entailed the development of seven new courses and the substantial revision of six existing courses.

This was the first APR as a department, which, in Fall 2014 was home to 37 majors, 34 minors, and 3 participants in the certificate programs (undergraduate and post-bac). In addition to the major, minors, and certificates, GWST runs a living and learning community: Women Involved in Learning and Leadership. Conceived as the “laboratory component” of GWST, WILL helps develop leadership skills through community-based activist projects and allows GWST students to put their classroom knowledge into practice.

The department’s own assessment process, formalized in 2010 and described above in section A, laid the groundwork for a revision of the assignments in required courses better to scaffold the skills and conceptual content that students learn in the core. To assure that both majors (who must take GWST 300) and minors (who are not required to take GWST 300) are prepared for the capstone course, GWST 480: Theories in Feminism, the faculty has made adjustments to the requirements and plans to develop a new course.

GWST faculty are significant contributors to other interdisciplinary programs on campus, notably Global Studies and MLLI, which has occasioned the development of courses in Gender in Modern South Asia and Gender, Human Rights, and Political Violence in Latin America. Despite the expansion of GWST courses, the self-study and outside review note gaps in the curriculum.

The report of the external reviewers notes that the GWST core curriculum is “exemplary in the field nationally.” They comment particularly on its rigor, coherence, and efficacy in building students’ skills across the curriculum.

C. Undergraduate Program

The undergraduate program is made up of a 15-credit set of required core classes and 21 credits of electives. Within the electives, students must take 12 credits across three content areas (history and public policy; representations as/in culture; and material, social and technological contexts) and 6 credits that are designated “range of experience” courses. It is worth noting that a significant portion of the courses required for the GWST major are in fact cross-listed courses. This highlights two aspects of this department: first, its interdisciplinarity and second, its dependence on faculty whose primary appointment is in other departments. Thus, should that faculty take leave or move on from UMBC, there is no mechanism to guarantee their courses cross-listed with GWST will be continued or replaced. All of the documents (the self-study, outside review, and dean’s response) note the challenge this poses to the department and its curricular offerings.

In addition to the BA, students can pursue a certificate in GWST that is 24 credits and a GWST minor, which is 18 credits and consists of three required courses and 9 credits of electives. A second minor, Critical Sexuality Studies, enables students to pursue a specialty in LGBTQ studies and also consists of three required courses and 9 credits of elective courses.

The self-assessment and outside review made clear the faculty’s commitment to effective pedagogy, highlighting the exploitation of campus-wide resources, such as workshops on “writing across the curriculum,” Breaking Ground Grants, and working with other programs on

campus.

D. Research Opportunities for Undergraduates

The senior capstone seminar requires original research, so all GWST majors and minors complete an original research paper before graduating. Other courses have required research components as part of their curricula. The outside reviewers also noted that the department also supports student research that has led to presentations at national conferences such as the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) and at university- sponsored undergraduate research symposia such as URCAD. The faculty in GWST has also consistently served as mentors for students whose research has been published in the *UMBC Review*.

E. Undergraduate Advisement

The department has developed a comprehensive advising strategy for its majors, minors, and certificate students. The outside review noted the students' satisfaction with the advising, which often went beyond advice about the major.

F. Council of Majors

The department is home to a Council of Majors that encompasses the major, minor, and certificate students. The GWST COMM hosts annual events for the campus community.

G. Faculty Development; Teaching Quality

The department's self study and the outside review emphasized a commitment to teaching, grounded in feminist pedagogy. The faculty engages in peer evaluation of teaching and takes advantage of workshops in pedagogy offered on campus (through the Faculty Development Center) and at national conferences. SCEQ scores suggest that students value this commitment. The faculty is constantly assessing their courses to ensure that assignments are well scaffolded and achieve the student learning goals.

H. Additional Comments; Summary Evaluation

Like a number of small department and interdisciplinary programs at UMBC, GWST does a tremendous job serving the college and university with modest resources. The outside reviewers noted the commitment the department has made to thoughtful pedagogy as well as the students' satisfaction with the major. GWST students are well prepared to engage challenging theoretical questions and, professors in classrooms across the university note their writing and thinking skills.

Because the department relies significantly on cross-listed courses required for the completion of the major, the department is at a disadvantage when faculty from other departments take leave, move into administration, shift their teaching focus, or in other ways move away from teaching the courses cross-listed with GWST. All three documents surveyed here note this challenge for the department. The UGC strongly supports the Dean of CAHSS's commitment to addressing this challenge at the college level and to offering part-time funding to ensure key offerings.