

Gender, Women's, + Sexuality Studies – Year Three Review
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During our Academic Program Review in 2015, the Department of Gender, Women's, + Sexuality Studies (then Gender and Women's Studies) identified fourteen initiatives that we, in collaboration with the CAHSS Dean's Office and the Provost's Office, were going to work towards. These goals included:

- Fully fund the remaining ½ GA unfulfilled from 2006 BA proposal
- Increase part-time funding to ensure appropriate number of core sections and rotation of key electives
- Build course offerings in critical sexualities, health, and gender
- Increase visibility through OIA and Admissions
- Increase department visibility in recruitment and advising materials
- Part of our innovation and excellence in supporting student development is our ability to bring our active research agendas into our curriculum and classes. Therefore, we sought university support for GWST's interdisciplinary research cluster
- Build stronger infrastructure to support cross-listed courses
- Increase Operating budget
- Pedagogical workshops
- Professional development course
- Additional Faculty lines
- Enhance departmental space, especially dedicated teaching space
- Increase Travel funds

In the sections below, we will discuss our progress towards these goals and how they have affected the department overall.

Organizational and Programmatic Initiatives

Of these fourteen recommendations, we have made most progress in the area of programmatic initiatives, increased visibility, and increased operating and instructional budget. The department has offered a wide variety of well attended workshops, from our Teaching Across Differences workshop series and timely workshops on DACA and sexual assault awareness and prevention, and has co-sponsored talks and workshops in other departments that were connected to the work we do in GWST. This academic year also saw the beginning of Dr. Mejdulene Shomali's Arab and Muslim American Experiences in the US events. These events were made possible by funding provided by the Provost's office and the CAHSS Dean's office and have since been supported by thirteen other academic departments and campus units. These events include two talks, a panel, and a zine workshop, and are the first series of events concerning Arab and Muslim experiences at UMBC. Finally, two faculty members received training in inclusive teaching practices from The Cornell University Center for Teaching and Learning and are working to bring the valuable lessons learned through the training to the campus at large.

The most significant programmatic initiative within the department has involved development of the curriculum and visibility of the Critical Sexuality Studies minor. With the support of pressure-enrollment funding, the department has been able to increase sections of the introductory course for the minor. In addition, Dr. Kate Drabinski developed and offers the first ever transgender studies course at UMBC. This course emerged from student interest and has been well received. To increase visibility of the minor, and to better reflect the department's curriculum, we requested and received a name change that adds the word "sexuality" to our title. This change will signal to students that course work on sexuality is central to the department's mission. We anticipate an increase in enrollments in Critical Sexuality Studies courses and an increase in the number of declared minors.

As a result of the college-wide FRAP review, the Dean's office augmented the GWST operating budget. This increase ensures that the department can cover more travel for our faculty and, therefore, that they can attend more conferences to present their own work and stay abreast of the research in their fields and participate in the leadership or caucus roles that many of our faculty hold in their national organizations. Unfortunately, the increased operating budget was accompanied by a modest decrease in the FRAP- allocated part-time instructional funds. Fortunately, timely addition to the part-time instructional budget through the pressure-enrollment review process enabled the department to maintain course offerings. In addition, the Dean agreed to continue small short-term allocations for specific additional sections.

GWST was also approved to search for an Assistant Professor to fill the vacant line in our department. We are in the middle of this search and, with a superb shortlist of candidates, we are confident that we will be successful. We were hoping for a successful post-doc search this year, though our nominees were not recommended by the Dean. Our prospective candidates were selected to fill the significant curricular gap in the area of Black feminisms – while our post-doc search was unsuccessful this year, we will continue to pursue opportunities to expand faculty resources, grow our course offerings in this area, and to meet critical core course needs. Our graduate assistant support was also decreased slightly in the college-wide review. However, we have established a temporary agreement with LLC to increase their ½ time GA commitment to GWST to a full-time position. This full-time position has enabled us to allocate more GA hours to support faculty research and teaching. We were in the process of working out a long-term agreement for full-time GA when Dr. Herring died. Thus, the future for this full-time position is uncertain – we will continue to work with LLC faculty and the director as they move.

We have also not made much organizational progress in the area of cross-listed courses. Our department has forged productive relationships with departments like History, Sociology, Psychology, American Studies, and Africana Studies to ensure that our cross-listed courses are consistently offered, and we've offered other departments like Philosophy and Political Science funds to run cross-listed courses that haven't run for several years. Despite these successes, we haven't seen the kind of organizational and campus-wide support for cross-listed courses that we would hope for in the future. The core faculty also need to undertake a review of cross-listed courses to highlight gaps that we can work with allied departments to fill. This is a complicated situation because GWST has grown substantially as an independent interdisciplinary since many of the cross-listed courses were developed. With our own specific analytics, which many scholars outside the field are unfamiliar with, the current courses do not always meet our students' needs.

The core faculty, with consultation of the Coordinating Committee, need to develop a thoughtful process for moving forward. We will begin this process in the next three years.

Research

Over the three-year period, our faculty have been incredibly productive. Overall, the department have published four books (another book will shortly go to press), published eight refereed journal articles, published five refereed creative pieces, and delivered over twenty refereed presentations at national conferences. Our faculty have also won a number of awards for their research – Dr. Carole McCann was named Lipitz Professor in 2017, Dr. Amy Bhatt was named a CAHSS Research Fellow for the 2019-2020 year, Dr. Kate Drabinski was awarded Dean’s Research Funding in Fall 2018, and Dr. Mejdulene Shomali was named a *Winter Tangerine* Fellow (2017) and a Voices of Our Nation Arts Foundation Fellow (2018). She was also named to the shortlist of the Honeysuckle Press 2018 Poetry Chapbook contest.

Student Experiences and Success

Part of what makes Gender, Women’s, + Sexuality Studies unique is our strong support of our students’ personal and intellectual development. Students have reported, in our annual assessments completed after the capstone course each spring, that they were drawn to the department because of the strong student-centered culture that we have created. The coursework is rigorous and challenging, students feel engaged in class, and the faculty have developed effective pedagogies to support student success that make a clear difference in the atmosphere in the department.

Advising and Mentoring

Dr. Kate Drabinski continues to serve as the advising coordinator for the department. Our faculty establish strong mentoring relationships with our students through advising and have encouraged a number of our students to pursue internships, research awards, URCAD, and other academic and professional opportunities.

While we have not been able to develop a course solely devoted to professional development, our capstone course, GWST495, has also given us space to develop this curriculum. Students are guided through a research project – from the initial conception of the idea through the production of the final product – lead through the URCAD process, and given career and professional guidance from the faculty instructor and guests brought to class, including the Career Center. These students are surveyed at the end of each spring term and their comments – about what they found relevant, what they found challenging, and what suggestions they have for the 495 course and the department – have been crucial in guiding ongoing refinements in the course.

Students have also been incredibly active in Women Involved in Learning and Leadership (WILL, renamed WILL+ this semester to reflect the longstanding policy of welcoming trans and non-binary students). Dr. Kate Drabinski is the WILL+ Director and, under her guidance, students have become increasingly involved on campus. After the 2016 Elect Her programming, a workshop that encourages and trains young college women to run for student government and

future public office, five WILL+ students were elected to offices in SGA. WILL+ also runs a number of other successful programs that seek to educate students on a variety of topics – Start Smart, just one of these initiatives, gives students the tools to negotiate in professional settings and increases students’ financial literacy. These workshops draw a steady attendance of engaged students and we are looking forward to another successful program this semester.

Graduation and Retention

Gender, Women’s, + Sexuality Studies graduated two large classes of students in 2015-16 and 2016-17. We graduated 11 and 15 majors, 10 and 12 minors respectively, which constituted nearly half of our total students. After these large classes graduated, our major enrollments dropped to twenty in Fall 2017 10-day freeze data. Our minor enrollments, despite our large graduation cohorts in these years, have remained steady over the three-year period.

In the Fall of 2018, GWST saw the largest incoming class of students we’ve ever had. This increase is due, in equal parts, to our participation at Admissions annual recruitment staff training sessions and our department’s robust effort this spring to actively recruit admitted students. In an effort to bolster retention, we hosted a Welcome Week event at the beginning of the semester, have been more active on our major and minor listservs and department website, and have continued efforts in class to reach out to and personally welcome all new students. Our current enrollments are at 25 B.A. students, 9 Critical Sexuality minors, and 35 Gender and Women’s Studies minors – these numbers are all up from Fall 2017.

Alumni Achievements

As part of our more active recruitment activities, the department has augmented its website to include information about GWST alumni. Dr. Kate Drabinski routinely completes alumni interviews during the summer months. These interviews are then posted to the department website and other social media over the course of the following academic year, and are used as talking points when department faculty or staff are working admissions and orientation events. These in-depth interviews and accompanying photos provide students with vital answers to the pressing question of what they can do with a GWST degree. Among the interviews are:

<https://gwst.umbc.edu/alumni-profiles/>

Conclusion

Moving forward, the department will continue to focus on the following initiatives: secure a full-time GA position; increase faculty lines and part-time funding; build course offerings in sexuality, health, and gender; establish a stronger infrastructure to review and support cross-listed courses; and continued to increase visibility through OIA and admissions. These initiatives are critical to the continued success of the department. Increasing our graduate assistant support is vital to support high quality teaching and research activity in the department in the face of the service burden of the GWST faculty. That is, our faculty are consistently called upon to develop

programming or pursue initiatives that further UMBC's commitment to inclusive excellence. The additional support for their research and teaching provided by graduate assistance will ensure that our faculty are able to complete these vital services to the university without sacrificing the department's curricular obligations or their own scholarly progress. Additional GA support will also allow the department to have additional administrative support to help us continue to organize workshops and events that benefit the wider campus community. Our Critical Sexuality Studies minor requires an increase in the number of course sections offered so that students can meet the minor requirements in a timely manner. And continuing to expand course offerings in the area of sexuality, health, and gender will enable our faculty to create new and innovative courses in their specialities. In order to further develop our course offerings in these areas, the department also requires additional faculty – through an increase in the number of faculty lines and an increase in our part-time funding – to ensure the appropriate mix of core and elective courses to enable students to complete the degree in a timely manner as well as to fund vital cross-listed courses that would not otherwise be offered. This is especially critical as so many of our courses are filled by students from outside the department who are looking to meet the GEP Culture requirement. Our department would also benefit from increased support for cross-listed courses – as many of our courses are cross-listed with other departments, a smoother, more efficient infrastructure would ensure that these courses are more easily scheduled, offered with increasing frequency, and more widely publicized to the campus community. Finally, as the discussion above has outlined, we have made significant progress in increasing our visibility through OIA and admissions, but further development in this area will help continue to drive our enrollment and retention numbers in the years to come.

Appendix 1: Selected Alumni Achievements

Charrise Alexander graduated with a major in Gender and Women's Studies and was also involved in the WILL program. Charrise currently works as a lawyer in DC. She has helped her firm found the first Employee Resource Group that is focused on LGBT+ employees and has taught webinars about diversity in her workplace.

Michelle Barrow was one of the first UMBC students to get a Gender and Women's Studies degree. Since leaving GWST, she worked at a variety of non-profit organizations before she moved into a marketing position with the Division of Professional Studies.

Caitlyn Leiter-Mason, a Sondheim Scholar, graduated Summa Cum Laude in 2014 with a double major in Gender and Women's Studies and Political Science. After beginning her career as a state-level campaign manager and Development and Supporter Engagement Coordinator with Planned Parenthood, Caitlyn headed to Rutgers to pursue a Master's in Public Policy.

Amelia Meman graduated Summa Cum Laude in 2015 with a B.A. in Gender and Women's Studies. She is currently the Program Coordinator for the Women's Center and is part of the critical work the Center accomplishes on campus, including organizing Critical Social Justice week and providing critical student support. She is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Social Work at the University of Maryland Baltimore.

Lexx Mills graduated with her B.A. in Gender and Women's Studies in 2013. She completed a Fulbright teaching English in Malaysia and, upon her return, joined the DC Teaching Fellows program. She taught in DC and Baltimore before she joined the Port Covington Development team to have a more direct impact on communities. As part of the team, Lexx has worked on workforce development to bring jobs to members of the community and with schools to advance educational partnerships.

Anne Sageng graduated in 2012 with majors in Gender and Women's Studies, American Studies, and Cultural Anthropology and was also part of the WILL program. Anne's work coordinating clinic defense training with WILL translated to her current position as a volunteer coordinator with Planned Parenthood.

Max Wiggins graduated in 2015 with a major in Gender and Women's Studies. Max is currently an Upper School English Teacher at the Park School in Baltimore and is pursuing a graduate certificate in Leadership in Independent Schools at Johns Hopkins. He plans to pursue a second graduate certificate in Urban Education.

Garrett Wright completed a B.A. in Theater and a Certificate in Gender and Women's Studies in 2001 before GWST offered a major. Garrett spent a number of years working for the Legal Aid Society of New York and DC before moving to a position with the Legal Aid Services of Oregon.