

WOMEN'S STUDIES CURRICULUM REVIEW

Public Report

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2 Executive Summary

Women's Studies moved into the Department of Philosophy in 2015 and has undergone an number of changes, including a streamlining of the curriculum to ensure that students could complete the program and the appointment of a full time academic staff member to the program. The curriculum mapping data show that the program is meeting its program learning outcomes but that there is room for improvement, especially in the area of qualitative and quantitative methods. This result was echoed by students in both a student survey and focus groups.

We used a simple hand-written curricular mapping tool suitable to the size of the program. Jenny Godley (Sociology, Women's Studies Advisory Committee) developed the student survey and provided the analysis contained in this report. The focus groups questions and process were developed by the Women's Studies Advisory Committee, with particular support from Lisa Stowe (Communications, Media, and Film). Shelby Montgomery, a graduate of the program, facilitated the groups and prepared the report.

The student data also highlighted the need for improved support for students in navigating the program and the transition to paid employment.

Finally, both student data and comparisons to other Canadian programs have highlighted the need for the program to update its name to better reflect the state of scholarly work in the field and the knowledge and skills of our undergraduates. We recommend the name be changed to Gender and Sexuality Studies.

The Women's Studies Curriculum review was led by Joe Kadi (Women's Studies Program Coordinator) and Nicole Wyatt (Department Head, Philosophy). The Women's Studies Advisory Committee served as the review team: Penny Farfan (School of Creative and Performing Arts), Jenny Godley (Sociology), Lisa Stowe (Communication, Media, and Film), Rebecca Sullivan (English).

3 Context

Interdisciplinary Women's Studies programs focus on gender and sexuality, as they exist independently, and as they exist in relation to other important social issues. Power relations linked to race and ethnicity, social class, and ability/disability which impact the lives of women and the LGBTQ2+ community on local and global levels are also examined. Women's studies students learn feminist theories, analyses, and research methodologies. Women's studies draws from, and contributes to, a wide range of academic disciplines, including: Sociology, Political science, History, Philosophy, Economics, English literature, Psychology, Religious studies, Natural sciences, Creative, performing, and visual arts, Ethnic Studies, Transgender Studies, and Indigenous Studies.

The Women's Studies program at UCalgary originated in the Faculty of General Studies, later the Faculty of Communication and Culture. After the 2010 merger that created the Faculty of Arts the program was initially administered by an Associate Dean of Interdisciplinary Studies. In 2015 the program was moved into the Philosophy Department.

As of Fall 2018 the program had 32 majors and 16 minors. Between 2013 and 2017 we have had on average 25 majors each year, with a previous high of 32 in 2015. Almost half of our majors are pursuing combined degrees, primarily in another Arts discipline. There were 507 section enrollees in Women's Studies courses in 2017-18 (including Spring/Summer 2018). Courses at the first- and second-year level usually fill to capacity and it is clear from student requests for overloads and additional sections that we are not meeting the student demand for courses in the program.

The program has only one permanent academic staff member; a second is currently seconded full time to the program. The program uses sessional instructors to meet teaching requirements not provided by full-time faculty. An advisory committee composed of specialists in feminist research and/or gender and sexuality studies drawn from throughout the Faculty of Arts advises the Women's Studies Program Coordinator as well as the Undergraduate Program Director and the Department Head.

The development of the program over the past five years has been guided by two guiding principles capturing key values of scholarship in gender and sexuality:

- Learning and scholarship in gender and sexuality should be creative, participatory, and community-based.
- Learning and scholarship in gender and sexuality should work from feminist, intersectional, and anti-oppression frameworks to uphold cultures of inclusion and respect.

The program level outcomes listed in the next section were developed in light of these values.

3.1 Program Level Outcomes

1. Students will gain foundational knowledge about historical and contemporary systemic inequities.
2. Students will be able to use a gender and sexuality lens (among others) to analyze and critique world events/issues, society, culture, and politics.
3. Students will gain the skills to understand, interpret, and critique data.
4. Students will engage in creative, participatory, and community-based approaches to learning.
5. Students will be comfortable using feminist, intersectional, and anti-oppression frameworks to uphold cultures of inclusion and respect.
6. Students will be given the chance to develop self-reflection, empathy, and social responsibility in such a way that it fosters leadership potential.

3.2 Program Structure

3.2.1 Overview

The BA in Women's Studies features four core courses that provide every student with the same foundation in the discipline. These classes address all of the program level outcomes described above.

The required first year class addresses all program level outcomes at an introductory level. Students are introduced to the historical context of issues in gender and sexuality and acquire foundational theoretical and methodological frameworks within a participatory classroom environment.

Required courses at the 300 level deepen students understanding of both theory and methods for gender and sexuality research and scholarship. Focus is placed on students' ability to understand, interpret, and critique data. At the 400 level the required praxis course develops skills in community-based research and inquiry, and features work-integrated learning. Participatory classrooms allow students to develop leadership skills across multiple contexts.

Special topics classes at the 300 and 400 level allow students to closely interrogate specific issues, contexts, and histories, as well as further developing analytic and interpretational skills. At the 500 level we offer an independent research option as well as intensive community service learning class.

Due to the interdisciplinary nature of the program, students must include courses from other programs that address issues related to gender and sexuality.

3.2.2 Program Details

To complete a BA in Women's Studies students must successfully complete a minimum of 48 units in Women's Studies while fulfilling the following requirements:

1. *Core Courses*: 12 units [Women's Studies 201](#), [311](#), [315](#) and [405](#).
2. *Women's Studies Options*: an additional 36 units chosen from [Courses Constituting the Field of Women's Studies](#). Students may apply to the Program Co-ordinator to have a pertinent course not on the list counted toward their degree.

Students may also enrol in the BA Honours in Women's Studies which has the same requirements as the BA with the addition of the completion of an honours thesis under the supervision of a faculty member (Women's Studies 590).

3.3 Academic Plan Alignment

The University of Calgary *Academic Plan* identifies three academic priorities that are meant to guide the actions of the University's members. These are

- Prioritizing People
- Connecting Communities
- Driving Innovation

Our program aligns with several of the specific goals falling under these priorities:

1.2 Enhance and support a campus learning culture:

Our focus on creative and participatory learning environments supports students in developing a growth mindset that enables them to take risks and learn from failure in a supportive environment.

1.4 Encourage and develop leaders:

Fostering student leadership skills by developing self-reflection, empathy, and social responsibility is one of our program level outcomes.

2.1 Connect and collaborate with [communities]:

Community-engaged learning, work-integrated learning, and experiential learning are core features of the Women's Studies curriculum at all levels. Recent initiatives include a new course in Islam and Feminism introduced in response to the needs of the large Islamic community in Calgary and on campus.

3.1 Facilitate interdisciplinarity

Women's studies is an interdisciplinary program which requires students to take a diverse range of classes in the Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences, and Sciences. Methods and research from a wide range of disciplines are brought together in our classes and students are taught to integrate these diverse perspectives.

3.2 Encourage pedagogical innovation and evidence-based teaching practices:

Women's studies faculty are active participants in programs and activities of the Taylor Institute, and regularly come to together to discuss and review the pedagogical approaches used in the core classes and share best practices.

3.5 Enable leadership and innovation in sustainability:

Women's studies faculty have worked actively with the Office of Sustainability over the last few years, including developing a new block week class on Ecofeminism which features experiential and community-based learning.

4 Guiding Questions

1. What is our assessment of the strength of each class, the sequence in which classes are offered, and the coherence of the program as a whole?
2. How do students assess the strength of each class, the sequence in which classes are offered, and the coherence of the program as a whole?
3. Have we, in the WMST program at U of C, remained true to the guiding principles of communal connections, social justice, and intellectual strength that have been the defining features of WMST since it began?
4. Have we, in the WMST program at U of C, strengthened our commitment to the participatory classroom, and continued to experiment with experiential education and group learning, in such a way that student learning is enhanced and student understanding of the uniqueness of WMST as a discipline is enhanced?
5. Have we, in the WMST program at U of C, retained the values and principles of the original WMST approach to learning, and at the same time, altered the values and principles of our approach to learning in ways that reflect new and deeper understandings of social issues, conceptual frameworks, and critical thinking?

After data gathering and analysis was complete, the Women's Studies Advisory Committee identified four areas for change: guiding principles for program, course development, creating resources to support our students, program name.

4.1 Building on the guiding principles for our program

The guiding principles/values of our current program are two-fold. First is providing our students with experiential/communal learning, in a participatory classroom. A second is our focus on intersectional feminism, with special attention paid to social justice. These guiding principles and their frameworks are explicitly referenced in two of our learning outcomes (4 and 5).

Our commitment to both of these continues. Going forward we want to further develop our intersectional feminism through three key frameworks; sustainability, transnationalism and decolonization, and sexual human rights. This will allow the program to expand on our contributions to the **University of Calgary's Sustainability Strategy; the Indigenous Strategy, *ii' taa'poh'to'p***; and the focus on **Campus Culture** in the 2017-22 **Eyes High Strategy**, specifically as it relates to “overcoming structural, social and cultural barriers to create a safe, inclusive, healthy and respectful environment — one that values diversity and the dignity of every person” (Eyes High Strategy 2017-22, 9).

Our work on sustainability is most visible through an innovative Block Week course on Ecofeminism. This course has been offered as a 300-level special topic, but we are now proposing a new 400-level course that will be eligible for addition to the course inventory for the Sustainability Certificate. In addition, issues relating to various aspects of ecofeminism are integrated into many of our core courses.

Similar to our work on sustainability, our commitment to decolonial pedagogies, theories, and methods is an ongoing and increasingly dominant framework for our curriculum. To cite one small example, all WMST syllabi include the official university land acknowledgement. While we do not as yet have a course on Indigenous Gender and Sexuality, due to lack of resources, topics such as two-spirit identity, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW), and indigequeer are included in core courses. Decolonialism does not only refer to Indigenous reconciliation; it recognizes the impacts of colonial pasts and presents in the global context. Thus, we are committed to courses on Global Feminisms, as well as Islam and Feminism. Non-western approaches to gender and sexuality, including Global South theory and transnational feminist and queer frameworks, are integrated into our core courses. We have particular expertise in Arab/Middle Eastern culture, a unique feature of our program, and will be building this aspect of our work.

Finally, our program upholds the global standards of sexual human rights. Our pedagogies foreground the rights of dignity, security, and freedom of all people regardless of their sex, sexuality, gender identity, or gender expression. This includes but is not limited to the right to sexual health, education, labour, and fulfilment. We offer a 400-level course on Pornography in alternate years, and one of our instructors developed and taught a 500-level community-engagement course in Sexual Consent. Sexual human rights frame our pedagogy on difficult and controversial subjects in our introductory course (WMST201), such as abortion and forced sterilization, gender-based and sexual violence, poverty and labour, and colonialism.

4.2 Course development

There are a number of ways our curriculum will be strengthened with the addition of particular courses. The WMST advisory group, as well as the results of the focus group discussions, and the student surveys, highlighted the need for more courses pertaining to theory, research, and methods.

First, we propose two courses connected to research and theory. One would be a special topics course in research methods, tentatively numbered 415xx, for which 315 will be a prerequisite. A second would be a special topics course in theory, tentatively numbered 411xx, for which 311 will be a prerequisite. These classes would be taught every other year, and can be taught by the current academic staff in the program.

In addition, we want the Ecofeminism class to move from its current designation as a special topics, 300-level course, to its own core course, at the 400 level. This will allow the class to be added to the course inventory for the Sustainability Certificate.

Thirdly, in light of the numerous concerns expressed by students concerning the content and accessibility of classes on the field of study list for Women's Studies, we will carefully review the existing list.

Lastly, we would like to explore the possibility of setting up a CMCL 507/509 stream for our students, and link these two courses to our own Community Service Learning course, WMST 503. A model for this already exists with the Community Health Science program. This would allow us to coordinate student work in peer mentoring with commitments to community engagement.

4.3 Creating resources to support our students

As an interdisciplinary program, students must navigate a number of departmental bureaucracies to complete their degrees. Currently our advising resources are stretched thin as we continue to provide individualized counselling on the same issues over and over again. Students have voiced strong support and even a willingness to help develop online and downloadable toolkits and guides for Honours, Majors, and Minors. Such resources will include information about coordinating their degree with some of the more popular co-degrees (such as Sociology, Development Studies, and International Relations), as well as information on the Science breadth courses. These resources can be supplemented with information sessions held once in fall and winter term to inform our students about how to navigate the program. Options include prezi, slide decks, interactive PDFs, and infographics.

In the medium term, we would like to create resources to support students in transitioning from their degree program to the world of work: specifically, students need to understand how to present their skills to employers and connect what they learn in the program to workplace needs.

4.4 Name change

While some of the Canadian programs continue to use Women's Studies as their program title, or as part of their program title, use of the term Gender Studies has become more prevalent. This reflects the understanding that the word 'gender' is more accurate and inclusive, and more readily grasped by our students. In addition, it is important to include Sexuality Studies, as this indicates that our program explicitly recognizes sexual rights issues such as bodily autonomy and freedom from violence. For these reasons we suggest that the name of this program be switched from Women's Studies to Gender and Sexuality Studies (GSST).

We would like to highlight the fact that we repeatedly hear from students who believe the word "women" (in the program title) denotes a lack of attention to genderqueer, nonbinary, and even masculinity studies, and that it creates a sense of exclusion rather than inclusion. We recognize and respect the historical significance of Women's Studies. Indeed, we include that history in our core courses. However, at this juncture, we have the opportunity to look forward to the future of the field, and want to make it clear that our program embraces new knowledges and best practices for gender and sexual justice.

5 Action Plan

Action Item	Timeline	Responsible Lead	Rationale
Create a special topics class in methods numbered 415.xx with 315 as a pre-req and a special topics class in theory numbered 411.xx with 311 as a pre-req.	Year 1	Undergraduate Director and Program Coordinator	Curricular mapping and student surveys/focus groups suggested the need for more courses addressing program outcomes 2,3 and 5 at the advanced level 415 will address program outcome 3 and 411 will address outcomes 2 and 5..
Establish Ecofeminism, previously taught as a special topic, as regular course (420).	Year 1	Undergraduate Director and Program Coordinator	This reflects the Program's commitment to sustainability, and will allow the class to be added to the course inventory for the Sustainability Certificate.
Review the list of field of study courses, paying close attention to course outlines and pre-requisites.	Year 2	Program Coordinator and Advisory Committee	Students raised concerns in focus groups about (a) the difficulty of accessing the courses in this list due to pre-requisites and (b) the content of these courses.
Explore the possibility of stronger linkages between the CMCL 507/509 mentorship stream and WMST 503 (Community Based Learning).	Year 2	Advisory Committee	Strengthen and further develop the role of experiential learning in our Program.
Apply for a Taylor Institute grant to develop courses reflecting our expertise in gender and sexuality in Arab/Middle Eastern cultures.	Year 2-5	Program Coordinator	Strengthen student understanding of intersectionality (outcome 5) by offering more courses focused on transnationalism and decolonization.
Develop online resources to assist students in navigating	Year 1 and ongoing	Program Coordinator	Students consistently requested more support in this area,

the program requirements.			and academic advisors report that they spend a lot of time providing the same clarifications to students one at a time.
Offer twice yearly information sessions about the program.	Year 2 and ongoing	Program Coordinator and Undergraduate Programs Administrator	Students consistently requested more support in this area, and academic advisors report that they spend a lot of time providing the same clarifications to students one at a time
Initiate the process of changing the program name from Women's Studies (WMST) to Gender and Sexuality Studies (GSST)	Year 2	Undergraduate Director and Program Coordinator	Comparison to other Canadian programs shows that use of the term Gender Studies has become more prevalent. Students expressed the desire for the program name to better reflect the material they are learning.