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Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies Discipline Assessment Report 2008/2009

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UMM Gender, Women, & Sexuality Studies Discipline

Assessment of Student Learning

Introduction:

The Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies discipline (formerly Women's Studies) has been in a holding pattern for a few years and therefore has conducted minimal formal assessment. However, with a new coordinator (Jennifer Rothchild), and a newly formed steering committee (as of Spring 2008), the discipline will likely be undergoing a number of changes in the upcoming months and years. Indeed, several changes have already been made and will be outlined below. Although these changes have not been based in formal assessment measures, they *are* the result of a thoughtful assessment of the major by steering committee members.

Learning Goals for Majors

Upon successfully completing the GWSS program at UMM, majors will have a complex understanding of the implications and intersections of gender and sexuality across disciplinary, chronological, and geographical barriers. Students will use diverse methodologies and critical paradigms to reach this understanding.

Assessment Measures:

The chief assessment tool within the GWSS major has long been WoSt 4901 (now GWSS 4901) Assessment of Student Learning in Women's Studies. In this course, students graduating with a major in Women's Studies/GWSS compile a portfolio of work done in the major, write a paper about their experience in the Women's Studies/GWSS program, and then discuss this work (both paper and portfolio) in a meeting with Women's Studies/GWSS faculty. Although the information gleaned from this process is quite valuable, the current GWSS steering committee recognizes that it should not be the only means of assessment. Therefore, developing a more formal and complete assessment plan is one goal for future meetings and discussions.

However, because of the many transitions which the discipline has experienced in the last year—namely a new coordinator, a new steering committee, and renewed commitment to the program on behalf of many faculty members across campus—several forms of informal assessment have also taken place since the Spring 2008 semester. These have included several brainstorming sessions with steering committee members and students in the major; a well-attended roundtable discussion about the major open to all faculty and staff on campus; and a meeting in Fall 2009 with Cheryl Contant, new Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Dean. Based on these discussions, several changes have already been put into place and are outlined below.

Since GWSS is an interdisciplinary major, several courses that majors take are housed in other disciplines and are thus assessed within those disciplines.

Examples of Changes

[Based on Informal Assessment of Major Since Most Recent Assessment Report (2005-06) & through March 2009]

A steering committee consisting of interested faculty members across campus was formed in the spring of 2008.

A proposal was developed (and ultimately passed by all necessary University units) to change the name of the major from Women's Studies to Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies. The major reason for suggesting the name change was to better reflect the content of the major as it already exists. While the name "Women's Studies" suggests an exclusive focus on issues pertinent to women, the name "Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies" highlights more effectively that issues of gender identity (both male and female), sexuality, and gendered experience form the content of the major. Therefore, this revision responds to the interests of our faculty, staff, and students and aligns our program with current and emerging trends in the field. "Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies" is a broadly recognized name and is used at many universities and colleges

nationwide, including the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities.

Several changes were also proposed (and accepted) for the catalogue description of the major, primarily to correspond to the name change and to better represent what the major actually does. The structure of the major was revised to divide elective courses into courses with primary GWSS content and partial GWSS content. This increases the options for students interested in pursuing a GWSS major.

The website is undergoing regular updates to reflect all of the changes already noted.

The steering committee continues to investigate options for securing a regular rotation of faculty to teach core GWSS courses, including GWSS 1101 Introduction to Gender, Women's, and Sexuality Studies and GWSS 4101 Feminist Theory.

The steering committee continues to brainstorm about a new version of the capstone course, either separate from or combined with the current Assessment course.

The steering committee has brainstormed about several ways of better advertising the major and plans to hold a social and informational event for students early next fall (2009) for this purpose.

The steering committee continues to believe that the discipline would experience greater stability if housed in the Dean's office and has discussed ways of pursuing this goal.

The steering committee plans to have annual meetings with the Dean every year to assure stability and support for the discipline.

Recommendations for Improving Assessment Processes:

Break down the objectives for the major into specific and measurable learning goals and course goals.

Place these learning goals on the discipline website.

Develop a formal assessment plan for the entire major that clearly delineates how courses within the major meet the learning goals for the major.

Conduct yearly assessment meetings to discuss the major.