

Women's Studies
Assessment Report – 2008-2009

For the academic year 2008-09, the Women's Studies Program completed an assessment of Program Learning Goals for the Major – *“Students who graduate with a baccalaureate degree in Women's Studies will demonstrate strong critical analytical skills and can effectively engage in and contribute to debates on complex issues and problems.”*

Learning Goals and Objectives for Women's Studies

Students majoring in Women's Studies are expected to attain the following Goals:

1. Critical Analysis

1.1 Students can critically analyze, explain and address socio-cultural, economic and political issues and problems. They approach issues through a lens of diversity and articulate the complex ways in which race, class, gender and culture intersect each other.

1.2 Students can think in complex ways and contribute to on-going debates and discussions in the field through the development of strong analytical skills and arguments.

2. Use feminist perspectives

2.1 Students can effectively use different feminist concepts, frameworks and/or theories to analyze, explain and address socio-cultural, economic, and political problems and institutional structures.

2.2 Students demonstrate how Women's studies scholarship contributes to, and is in turn influenced by critical theories from other disciplines.

2.3 Students can develop effective comparisons and contrasts between various feminist ideas, concepts and/or theories.

2.4 Students are successful in using feminist epistemologies to explain the organization of social institutions and power structures.

3. Communicate Effectively – Students can communicate clearly and effectively:

Students can write sophisticated research papers that are clear, organized, and free of grammatical errors. Their knowledge and understanding of feminist texts and scholarship is articulated through effective written communication. They are able to explain key theoretical concepts and debates within feminist theory clearly and effectively.

SUMMARY: Students graduating with a Baccalaureate in Women's Studies CAN:

1. Think clearly and critically.
2. Analyze and develop arguments regarding complex issues from a feminist perspective.
2. Understand social and historical contexts and their impact.
3. Communicate their knowledge and understanding of feminist concepts/theories clearly and effectively.

Methods Used to Assess Program Learning Goals and Objectives

1. Measure

One direct measure was used to assess student competency in attaining Program goals and objectives: the **Written Final Assignment** for the capstone seminar in Women's Studies: WOMS 180: Feminist Theory, during Spring 2009. Students were encouraged to develop their own topics for the final assignment based on specific requirements. **[Please see attached Appendix 1: Final Assignment]**. The final assignment was prepared after taking into consideration the main categories within the Grading Rubric. Further, the direct assessment was conducted based on a review of student assignments using the rubric.

2. Grading Rubric

The Grading Rubric for the direct assessment of student competency was developed by the Program Faculty in consultation with students participating in the Capstone Seminar. **[Please see attached Appendix 2: Grading Rubric]**.

A total of 10 assignments were assessed. Faculty members were involved in finalizing the rubric, conducting reviews of student work, discussing the findings, and the plan for anticipated changes resulting from the assessment.

3. Findings

Areas in which students are achieving expectations

The direct assessment of **Learning Goals and Objectives for Women's Studies** revealed strengths as well as areas requiring improvement. Students were evaluated based on performance in three main categories: Critical Analysis, Feminist Scholarship, and Written Communication.

It was found that Women's Studies Majors are generally Highly Competent (average 70%) or Mostly Competent (30%) in Critical Analysis and investigation of issues; developing strong arguments that contribute to on-going debates within Women's Studies; and reveal strong evidence of the complex ways gender intersects with the politics of race, class and culture.

Women's Studies Majors are also Highly Competent (70%) or Mostly Competent (30%) in evaluating a range of feminist theoretical texts, effectively engaging in debates regarding them and clearly establishing connections between them.

The assessment revealed that students are also Highly Competent (60%), and Mostly Competent (40%) in effectively organizing their material, and communicating their arguments cohesively, with a clear central purpose.

4. Areas in which improvements are needed

4.1 Although most students reveal competence in critical analysis, independent research, and developing feminist perspectives, there is a slight gap between interpretation of theory and its practical implications. This is evident in the lack of balance between students' examination of feminist theory on the one hand, and the development of their own independent research on a socio-political, economic or cultural group/institution on the other hand. A few students (roughly 30%), focus either too heavily on developing their own individual research projects or developing feminist perspectives without fully examining their implications on particular research topic.

4.2 Although most students have attained competency in Written Communication, they could benefit from attending writing workshops focused on improving critical thinking and interpretation skills, strategies for developing arguments based on feminist theory, and organization and development of cohesive written papers.

5. Plans for Improvement

The Women's Studies Program is planning to organize writing workshops in Spring 2010 designed to address the above needs. Emphasis will be given to the application of feminist theory in practice; using feminist epistemologies to explain the organization of social institutions and power structures (**Learning Goals and Objectives 2.4**); and developing strong written communication skills.

6. Future Assessment Plans

Women's Studies Department will be participating in a Program Review in AY 2009-10. Assessment will address: current course offerings, requirements for the major and minor in Women's Studies, and future plans, including proposing new courses.

In Fall 2009, the department will formally review the current direct assessment tool for the capstone seminar, and consider conducting either direct or indirect assessments for other required courses, such as exit surveys, during the fall semester. These would be more effective in assessing the alignment of student performances with Department Learning Goals and Objectives.