

2009

Women's Studies Curricular Assessment Report, Fall 2009

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Recommended Citation

Mead, Kristina, "Women's Studies Curricular Assessment Report, Fall 2009" (2009). *Looking Back, Looking Forward*. 134.
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Women's Studies Curricular Assessment Report Fall 09 –Kristina Mead

1. What is the mission of your department or program in terms of student learning?

The Women's Studies Program takes its mission to be three-fold. We intend to foster a critical awareness of and intellectual sensitivity to content, method, and real-life implications of the field.

2. What are the goals of your curriculum and other components of the major in terms of student learning?

By the time a student completes the Women's Studies major, she or he will be able to:

1. demonstrate a critical awareness of gender and its relationship to other issues, both within and outside of the women's studies discipline;
2. demonstrate a critical awareness of content of the relationship between gender and other politicized aspects of "identity," including race, class, age, religion, sexuality, etc.;
3. apply appropriate methods for approaching the intellectual work of the discipline, recognizing distinctions between and the impact of content and methodology;
4. employ interdisciplinarity in the deconstruction of content, method, and theoretical positioning.
5. demonstrate a critical awareness of and intellectual sensitivity to the relationship between theory and practice

Our introductory core course, "Issues in Feminism," helps students develop the "critical awareness" of gender and its relationship to other issues that we describe in goals 1 and 2 above. This class, along with all of the other classes in the "core curriculum," also seek to achieve goals 3 and 4 by covering material in an interdisciplinary way. Of course, we begin to address the material implications of issues (goal 5).

The "Cultural and Social Methods" class directly addresses goal 3. It seeks to expose students to a variety of methods of approaching intellectually the content of women's studies. It challenges them to think about how the way in which they conduct their research might be as significant as the topic on which their research is conducted. (Similarly, classes offered in women's studies often employ a feminist pedagogy, not just cover women's issues in terms of content.) This practice also asks students to begin exploring the issues raised in goal 5, by calling upon them to think about how their method of research relates to their own intellectual and socio-political goals. The course examines scientific methods, social analysis based on empirical research, and the interpretive strategies that have developed out of the humanities. Students apply the methods learned to their own research projects. This class also seeks to meet goal 4 by crossing disciplinary boundaries and looking for their interconnections.

The "Feminist Theory" course tackles goal 5 by exposing students to questions of both theory and practice, but it also seeks to deepen students' understanding of content (goals 1 and 2) and method (goal 3) by giving them theoretical tools to examine the issues in and processes of the field. Interdisciplinarity (goal 4) pervades the course

from senior research projects in 2008 ranged from 6-15 with a mean of 10.7. In 2009, total scores ranged from 9 to 15, with a mean of 13.4.

Table 1

	2003-2006	2008	2009
Q1: disciplinary sense of gender and its issues	2.5	2.3	2.7
Q2: other aspects of identity	2.4	2.3	2.8
Q3: content and method	2.6	1.8	2.7
Q4: sense of interdisciplinarity	2.4	2.1	2.8
Q5: connect theory and practice	2.4	2.2	2.6

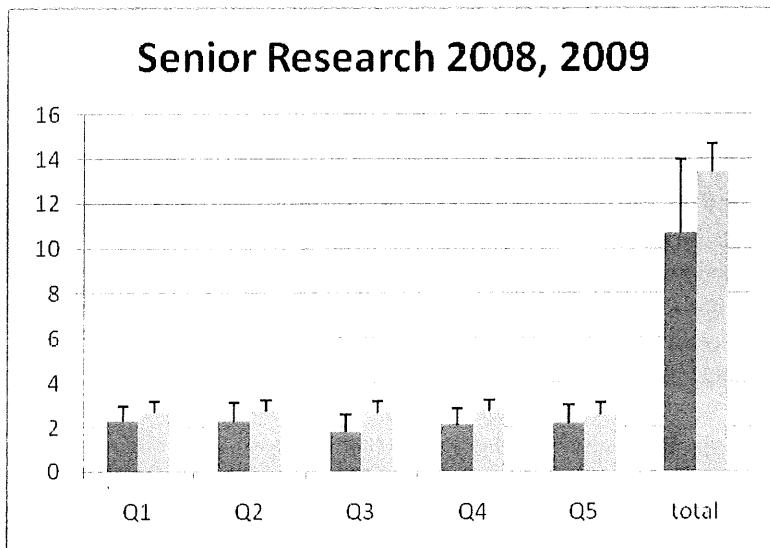


Fig. 1. Scores (1-3) on the five assessment checklist questions (Q1-Q5; see appendix) and the total score. Data are means and error bars indicate standard errors.

Because the sample sizes are small (11 for the years spanning 2003-2006, 5 in 2008, 8 in 2009), there is no statistical difference among the three groups of senior research projects, and there are no real trends either. However, the following points can be made.

- 1) There is a huge disparity in quality. Some projects are fascinating, scholarly, well-written and creative masterpieces. Other projects are poorly conceived. Faculty readers and committee members disagreed on whether low scores reflected a lack of scholarly rigor on the part of the project, or indicated reader difficulty in interpreting projects outside their area of expertise. We need to address the variation on both of these fronts. Whatever the source, assessment scores varied tremendously. For instance, in 2008, projects varied from 6 out of 15 points (a score of 40%) to a perfect score of 15/15 (a score of 100%). There is also variation from year to year. In 2008, the mean score was 10.7/15 (71%), with 2 out of the 5 papers receiving at least one failing grade in at least one area, for a total of 6 failing grades. However, in 2009 the mean score was 13.4 out of 15 (89%), and there was only one failing grade in one area in one paper out of all 8 papers.

the senior research process. There is great interest in both the Women's studies program and in the Women's Studies Committee in developing and improving our senior research program, while recognizing that solutions need to address the needs without overwhelming our faculty. We plan to continue to discuss strategies throughout our fall meetings. Some preliminary ideas are listed below.

- 1) *Creating community and providing support* Members of the Women's Studies Committee spoke to the struggle that many WMST students feel as they embark on their senior research. While some of this is common to students doing independent work in all disciplines, the very nature of some of the questions asked in WMST leads to self-evaluation and questioning of identity. This kind of personal work can lead to anxiety and paralysis. Anecdotal reports suggested that this was the case for at least two of the students from 2008. We would like to address this by creating a learning community among the students who are doing senior research. Some faculty have been creating reading groups for their students. These important groups can satisfy some of the needs of our students. We would like to see this become part of the departmental culture and be available to all senior researchers. We are considering a model in which students would be required to meet once a week to talk about the process of their research. This would be facilitated by a faculty member. For example, if several students are grappling with statistical issues, a meeting or two could focus on statistics help. Students would still have their primary research advisor. In addition, we are thinking of creating a blackboard or facebook page that students could use to communicate, share ideas, and provide support amongst themselves. This formation of a more structured learning community could help us achieve the goals expressed in the prompt to question 6.
- 2) *Senior research course* Eventually we would like to explore the possibility of creating a senior research course that would be required of all seniors, as per Soc/Anth. This would provide structure and consistency, and would relieve the overload on some core WMST faculty, who have had to serve on 6-10 research committees at times. At the moment, I do not think we have the ability to staff such a course, and this would have to go through AAC. This is merely a long-term goal.
- 3) *Portfolio* We are also considering the value of creating a portfolio for each student. This would help us to assess process as well as product. The portfolio could be items from multiple courses or could be based solely on the research experience, and could be collected during the senior research workshop/course. Seeing evidence of approaches considered but not taken might help us address concerns about content and method and about interdisciplinarity. While these did not show up as areas of special concern numerically, we discussed how as readers our different disciplines might lead us to lack the context to interpret some student work appropriately. Having a larger portfolio to assess might eliminate some of the scoring discrepancies. However, other people on the committee felt that portfolios were time intensive to collect and assess, and that our energies might be better spent in formulating a senior research course/seminar.
- 4) *Disparity among readers* We are considering several strategies for addressing this issue:

Women's Studies Curricular Assessment Checklist

Student Name:

Evaluator Name:

Date:

Please answer all questions (both sides of this sheet), rating the project on a scale of 1-3: "1" indicating that the project fails to attain this goal (fail), "2" that it meets the criteria acceptably (pass), and "3" that it does so with genuine excellence (high pass).

Feel free to provide any additional explanatory information in the "comments" section. These responses will only be used to conduct an assessment of the Women's Studies curriculum.

1. Does the work demonstrate a critical awareness of and intellectual sensitivity to the intellectual content of the discipline as it relates to women's issues and the role of gender?

fail

pass

high pass

1

2

3

comments?

2. Does the work demonstrate a critical awareness of and intellectual sensitivity to the content of the discipline as it relates to the relationship between gender and other politicized aspects of "identity," including race, class, age, religion, sexuality, etc.?

fail

pass

high pass

1

2

3

comments?

Formative Review Plan Women's Studies Program

The purpose of this evaluation is to provide formative feedback for those teaching in Women's Studies. We envision this process as an exchange of knowledge between peers, a collaborative process that provides us with an opportunity for us to learn from one another. Ideally, the interaction should be productive and useful to both the faculty member under review and those she has chosen to observe her.

CORE FACULTY

General expectations:

- ❖ Each core faculty member shall engage in formative evaluation every 3-5 years.
- ❖ The faculty member shall choose two observers from the Women's Studies faculty, at least one of whom is a senior colleague.
- ❖ She shall arrange at least two classroom observations for each observer, though both observers may visit the same classes. The observer and observee may choose to arrange mutual visits, since visiting another's class may be as useful as having one's class visited.
- ❖ The observer and observee should engage in conversation preceding the classroom visits to provide context for the class session.
- ❖ They observer and observee should have a conversation subsequent to the class to debrief.

In addition to the required classroom visits, the core faculty member shall then choose at least one from the following menu of options to engage with her colleagues about teaching:

- ❖ Cluster-conversations with colleagues who teach also in Women's Studies.
- ❖ Cluster-conversations with colleagues who teach or have taught common courses.
- ❖ Sharing of syllabi, texts, and other materials.
- ❖ Consultations about dynamics that affect pedagogical choices for Women's Studies courses.
- ❖ Reading groups on pedagogical or course materials.
- ❖ Participation in pedagogical sessions offered by the GLCA or Ohio 5 consortia.
- ❖ Any other process developed in consultation with the persons you have chosen to observe you.

ASSOCIATED FACULTY

Since there are particular challenges and opportunities associated with teaching Women's Studies classes, we look for the participation of our associated faculty in formative evaluation through the Women's Studies program. We ask the associated faculty to choose from the menu of options offered below. The program will make one of these options, such as reading groups or cluster conversations, available biannually.

- ❖ Cluster-conversations with colleagues who teach also in Women's Studies.
- ❖ Cluster-conversations with colleagues who teach or have taught common courses.
- ❖ Sharing of syllabi, texts, and other materials.
- ❖ Consultations about dynamics that affect pedagogical choices for Women's Studies courses.
- ❖ Reading groups on pedagogical or course materials.
- ❖ Another process developed in consultation with the Women's Studies Committee.

Because we recognize both the special features of teaching Women's Studies and the value of supporting our colleagues, we also invite associated faculty members who wish to have classroom observations with other Women's Studies faculty to contact the program. We would be willing to coordinate our classroom visits with those that are being conducted in that faculty member's home department.

Women's Studies will review this document in three years to evaluate whether or not it is meeting the needs of our faculty.

Draft: November 2002