



TO: Mike Mahon
President and Vice Chancellor

DATE: June 27, 2018

FROM: Alan Siaroff
Chair, Academic Quality Assurance Committee

RE: Department of Women and Gender Studies Academic Quality Assurance Review

In accordance with the U of L *Academic Quality Assurance Policy and Process*, the Academic Quality Assurance Committee approved the review of the Department of Women and Gender Studies at its June 22, 2018 meeting.

The Self Study Committee for this review comprised Suzanne Lenon (Program Review Coordinator), Carol Williams, and Glenda Bonifacio.

The review produced five documents:¹

1. *Women & Gender Studies: Self Study Report* (received February 5, 2018) – Self Study Report, developed by the Department of Women and Gender Studies Self Study Committee.
2. *University of Lethbridge, Department of Women's [sic] and Gender Studies: External Reviewers Report, April 17, 2018* (received April 18, 2018) – by Habiba Zaman (Simon Fraser University) and Anne Braithwaite (University of Prince Edward Island) based on their site visit of March 26-27, 2018.
3. *Self-Study Committee Response to Recommendations from the External Review Report* (received May 7, 2018) – response of the Self Study Committee to the external review.
4. *Dean's Response to the Academic Quality Assurance Review, Women and Gender Studies* (received June 4, 2018) – response to the review, written by Craig Cooper, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science.
5. Self Study Committee response to the *Dean's Response* (received June 14, 2018).

¹ All documents are available upon request.

Self Study

The Self Study Report summarized the strengths of the Department of Women and Gender Studies:

- The discipline of women and gender studies is interdisciplinary.
- The Department embodies the four pillars of liberal education from the U of L Academic Plan: breadth; connections; critical thinking; and civic engagement.
- Initiatives in the Department consistently help realize the Academic Plan strategic priorities of: student access to research; indigenization; and internationalization.
- All faculty members are engaged citizens.
- Faculty members have positive relationships with other Departments and faculties.
- Faculty members apply creative and innovative learning activities in their classrooms.
- All faculty members in the Department have ongoing research programs.

Several challenges were noted in the report:

- Since 2011 the number of students taking a Major or Minor in Women and Gender Studies has grown.
- It is uncertain whether the curriculum should focus on breadth or depth.
- In terms of teaching the Department has less than four full-time faculty members.
- How can the Department offer sufficient undergraduate courses while granting study leave and course reliefs and sharing expertise with other units?
- There is a lack of awareness about the undergraduate program, particularly among first year students.
- Most students discover the Department part way through their program, which impedes the Department's ability to attract students into the Honours Thesis and Master's program.
- It is difficult to balance the Department's commitment to undergraduate education and the increasing pressures to grow graduate education.

The report stated several potential opportunities for the Department:

- The establishment of the School of Liberal Education can offer opportunities for greater collaboration and for strengthening the Department.
- The Department's links with the Centre for Oral History and Tradition and the Institute for Child and Youth Studies have the potential for expanded collaborations and graduate training opportunities.
- The revitalization of University Hall may lead to the creation of humanities and social science lab and community space for students in the Department.

The major threat discussed in the report was hostility towards feminism, but this was also seen as an opportunity for coalition building.

Several questions for feedback from the external reviewers were noted:

- What are the potential focus areas for a future tenure track appointment?
- How can the Department strengthen alliances with other academic units?
- Should the Department complete a curriculum review of the WGST major?
- Should the Department reduce the requirements for a WGST minor, and how should this be done?

- Should the Department offer a fourth-year core course requirement for all WGST majors?
- How can the Department increase its visibility to first and second year students?
- How can the Department increase the number of WGST majors?
- How can the Department balance commitments to growing the undergraduate program with increasing demands for graduate education?
- Should WGST 1000 be offered as a core requirement for first year students in Arts and Science?

External Review

The External Review Report noted the strengths of the Department of Women and Gender Studies:

- The Department is dynamic and contributes immensely to the culture of the university.
- The faculty members are outstanding researchers and scholars, with peer-reviewed publications, journal editorial work, and national and international research dissemination.
- The faculty members excel at community-engaged research.
- Courses reflect current trends and emphases in the field and are pedagogically innovative and creative.
- The Department reflects the U of L strategic plan's focus on liberal education and the Academic Plan's strategic priorities of indigenization, internationalization, and student access to research.
- The faculty complement is collegial and cohesive.
- Undergraduate and graduate curricula model interdisciplinary modes of inquiry.
- The Department is committed to student-centred learning experiences.
- The Department participates in graduate studies.
- Faculty members are highly engaged within the university and the external community.
- Students praise the Department's courses, programs, and faculty members.

Weaknesses and challenges mentioned in the report included:

- The Department is stretched thin in terms of the number of current faculty members.
- There are three adjunct faculty members who do no teaching or service within the Department.
- For teaching assistants there is no formal training or clear allocation of hours.
- The Department does not have any full-time administrative staff and shares its administrative staff support with the Department of Psychology.
- Students are not usually aware of the Department when entering the university and only discover the discipline later in their academic careers.
- As the number of graduate students increases, office and instructional space will be a problem.
- Financial resources are constrained.
- This is a small Department and adding student advising to its roles is a challenge.

There were many recommendations in the body of the report, and reiterated in the concluding section:

1. Identify efficiencies in course offerings and program structure. Determine alternative paths of entry into the Department to increase student recruitment. Enhance flexibility in core and elective courses to allow for faculty interests and mitigate faculty burnout. Maximize the teaching capacity of core faculty members. Enable more ways to offer graduate courses, without affecting the undergraduate program.
2. Complete a full curriculum review to identify and articulate the key foci, knowledge, and content that the current curriculum offers. Involve students in this review. After this review is complete, update course names and descriptions in the Calendar as required.
3. Hold annual Departmental retreats to: review the curriculum and the rationale for the courses; consider new courses in response to changing interests and disciplinary expectations; and ensure equitable distribution of teaching and administrative duties.
4. Investigate the creation of multiple pathways into and through the undergraduate program. For example, developing several 1000-level options, or reconceptualizing 2000-level courses as alternate entry points using topical courses that do not require a 1000-level course as prerequisite.
5. Acknowledge in the Calendar course descriptions that many undergraduate courses vary in topic and focus, depending on the instructor and their interests, for example by including possible course names. Also, make this clear in the timetable.
6. Explore further cross-listing of courses, and cross-appointment of faculty.
7. Consider adding a capstone course experience that focuses on the discipline's emphasis on knowledge production.
8. Investigate further options for graduate course offerings, including .75 and 1.5 credit courses and participating in the Master's co-op program.
9. Add at least one new faculty member to the Department in the near future.
10. Pursue a new joint appointment between Women and Gender Studies and Indigenous Studies.
11. Create a new category of "associate faculty" that encompasses a group of like-minded faculty from across campus who are appointed for a renewable limited term and can teach cross-listed courses and co-supervise Master's students.
12. Assign a half-time staff member who is responsible for administrative duties for the Department.
13. To build Departmental visibility and recognition: (a) organize an open house early in the fall semester and invite students in the large-enrolment first year courses; (b) make further use of the Departmental website and of social media platforms to advertise current events, faculty CV, and Departmental accomplishments; (c) post a one-page outline of each course on the Departmental website; (d) on the website post a timeline of the history and development of the Department; and (e) engage in outreach to area high schools.
14. Given the U of L's plan to expand graduate studies, keep the space needs of Departmental graduate students in mind.

The report addressed the specific questions for the External Reviewers that were posed in the Self Study Report:

How can the Department strengthen alliances with other academic units?	Several of the recommendations in the report address this. The Department should explore the additional cross-listing of courses from other units and cross-appointments of faculty from other units whose teaching and/or research interests align with the Department.
Should the Department reduce the requirements for a WGST minor, and how should this be done?	The Department should revisit the rigid existing requirements for a minor and offer students alternate paths for earning a minor.
Should the Department offer a fourth-year core course requirement for all WGST majors?	The Department should explore developing a capstone course experience. Given limited resources, this course should be cross-listed at the undergraduate and graduate levels.
How can the Department increase its visibility to first and second year students?	Suggestions to build visibility for the Department are included in the recommendations.
How can the Department increase the number of WGST majors?	The recommendations on curriculum and on building visibility can help with increasing the number of majors.
How can the Department balance commitments to growing the undergraduate program with increasing demands for graduate education?	Some of the recommendations could help mitigate the demands on limited faculty resources.
Should WGST 1000 be offered as a core requirement for first year students in Arts and Science?	This is not recommended at this time due to limited resources.
What are the potential focus areas for a future tenure track appointment?	The recommended curriculum review will identify the main themes and approaches of the program, which will help in making decisions about how to grow the faculty complement should a position become available.

Program Response

In their Program Response, the Self Study Committee addressed the recommendations from the External Review Report:

2. Complete a full curriculum review to identify and articulate the key foci, knowledge, and content that the current curriculum offers. Involve students in this review. After this review is complete, update course names and descriptions in the Calendar as required.	Agreed. An annual retreat is a good way to engage a curriculum review process.
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9. Add at least one new faculty member to the Department in the near future.	Agreed. Departmental growth is constrained by the current faculty complement.
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10. Pursue a new joint appointment between Women and Gender Studies and Indigenous Studies.	Agreed. The Self Study Committee recommends a joint search committee with faculty from both units, and that the joint appointment be a tenure track position.
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11. Create a new category of "associate faculty" that encompasses a group of like-minded faculty from across campus who are appointed for a renewable limited term and can teach cross-listed courses and co-supervise Master's students.	Agreed, with reservations. Cross appointments can mean cross-listed courses, and cross-listing has not always been successful for the Department.
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12. Assign a half-time staff member who is responsible for administrative duties for the Department.	Agreed.
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13. To build Departmental visibility and recognition: (a) organize an open house early in the fall semester and invite students in the large-enrolment first year courses; (b) make further use of the Departmental website and of social media platforms to advertise current events, faculty CV, and Departmental accomplishments; (c) post a one-page outline of each course on the Departmental website; (d) on the website post a timeline of the history and development of the Department; and (e) engage in outreach to area high schools.	An "open house" should be framed as a "meet and greet," a more social gathering that allows students to be introduced to the research expertise of faculty, senior undergraduates, and graduate students. This was organized in Fall 2017 and the Department will regularize an annual meet and greet. The Department will maintain at least a Facebook platform and will look into further revisions to the Departmental website.
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14. Given the U of L's plan to expand graduate studies, keep the space needs of Departmental graduate students in mind.	Agreed. There needs to be expansion of the available office space for graduate and senior undergraduate students. There is also a need for social science/humanities lab space for workshops, research gatherings, and community engagement.
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Deans' Response

In his response, the Dean addressed the recommendations in the External Review Report:

2. Complete a full curriculum review to identify and articulate the key foci, knowledge, and content that the current curriculum offers. Involve students in this review. After this review is complete, update course names and descriptions in the Calendar as required.	Agreed. The curriculum review could be done at a Department retreat.
4. Investigate the creation of multiple pathways into and through the undergraduate program. For example, developing several 1000-level options, or reconceptualizing 2000-level courses as alternate entry points using topical courses that do not require a 1000-level course as prerequisite.	Agreed. This should be done as part of the curriculum review.
5. Acknowledge in the Calendar course descriptions that many undergraduate courses vary in topic and focus, depending on the instructor and their interests, for example by including possible course names. Also, make this clear in the timetable.	Agreed. This should be done as part of the curriculum review.
6. Explore further cross-listing of courses, and cross-appointment of faculty.	Agreed.
7. Consider adding a capstone course experience that focuses on the discipline's emphasis on knowledge production.	Agreed.
8. Investigate further options for graduate course offerings, including .75 and 1.5 credit courses and participating in the Master's co-op program.	There was no specific recommendation on this.
9. Add at least one new faculty member to the Department in the near future.	It is unknown where the resources can come from to implement these recommendations.
10. Pursue a new joint appointment between Women and Gender Studies and Indigenous Studies.	
11. Create a new category of "associate faculty" that encompasses a group of like-minded faculty from across campus who are appointed for a renewable limited term and can teach cross-listed courses and co-supervise Master's students.	This category already exists, and several departments in Arts and Science appoint associate members from other departments to help with graduate supervision. The Department should explore this recommendation.

13. To build Departmental visibility and recognition: (1) organize an open house early in the fall semester and invite students in the large-enrolment first year courses; (2) make further use of the Departmental website and of social media platforms to advertise current events, faculty CV, and Departmental accomplishments; (3) post a one-page outline of each course on the Departmental website; (4) on the website post a timeline of the history and development of the Department; and (5) engage in outreach to area high schools.

Agreed. The Department should consult with the Communications Director in Arts and Science.

14. Given the U of L's plan to expand graduate studies, keep the space needs of Departmental graduate students in mind.

The opening of the new science and academic building will free up space in University Hall which offers the possibility of creating more useable space for faculty and students in the program.

Self Study Committee Response

In their response to the Dean's comments, the Self Study Committee emphasized the importance of discussing with the Dean the replacement of the lost tenure track faculty position.

The Academic Quality Assurance Committee is satisfied that the Department of Women and Gender Studies academic quality assurance review has followed the U of L's academic quality assurance process appropriately, and acknowledges the successful completion of the review.

Sincerely,



Alan Siaroff

Chair, Academic Quality Assurance Committee

Cc: Andrew Hakin, Provost and Vice President (Academic)