

Women's Studies Program

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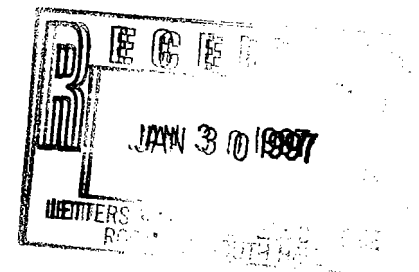
January 28, 1997

To: Dean Philip Certain
Letters and Sciences

From: Jane Collins, Associate Chair,
Women's Studies Program

Subject: Plan for Assessment of Major

Enclosed please find our Program's Plan for the Assessment of the Undergraduate Major, as approved by our Program and Executive Committees in December 1996.



WOMEN'S STUDIES PROGRAM
College of Letters and Science
University of Wisconsin-Madison

PLAN FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF THE UNDERGRADUATE MAJOR

December 1996

In the fall of 1996, the College of Letters and Sciences informed the Women's Studies Program of the need to prepare a plan for the assessment of the undergraduate major. Our Curriculum Committee developed a plan which has been unanimously approved by our Executive and Program Committees. That plan is described in this document. This plan represents, in our judgement, the most effective way to evaluate the major in the absence of additional staff or budgetary resources to devote to the task.

I. Educational Goals and Objectives

A. The goals for the Women's Studies major were first articulated in our initial proposal to implement a new academic program, submitted in December of 1984. The specific objectives outlined in that document were the following:

1. to educate students in depth in the range of new and rediscovered knowledge about women and gender issues across the humanities and social and biological sciences.
2. to permit students to combine disciplinary training at the level of the concentration or of the full major with interdisciplinary training which focuses on women and gender in a framework which allows complementary understanding and insights to emerge.
3. to give students both a strong knowledge base and a theoretical framework for studying and researching women and gender issues in the disciplines.
4. to prepare students for advanced study of women and gender for graduate work in either a traditional discipline or Women's Studies.
5. to enhance preparation of students for the range of careers open to those educated in the liberal arts and to permit the combining of profession-oriented education with Women's Studies for the wide range of positions in which the expanded knowledge about women and gender to be gained from Women's Studies is particularly pertinent.

B. We can distill from these statements the following specific goals. The undergraduate major will provide:

1. a strong knowledge base in Women's Studies (including knowledge of the experiences and accomplishments of women historically, currently and across cultures).

2. familiarity with existing theoretical frameworks for studying and researching women and gender issues.

3. skills in critical thinking (including the ability to read critically and independently, to recognize and use theory, and to communicate clearly in writing).

Because of the diversity of approaches encompassed within Women's Studies, and because of the constant evolution of the field, it is neither possible nor desirable to establish a more precise set of knowledge goals.

II. Instruments and Methods for Assessment

A. The Women's Studies Program has many on-going assessment activities related to undergraduate teaching. These include the following:

1. student evaluations of faculty teaching (which are monitored by the Program Chair)
2. peer reviews of teaching, conducted whenever a course is taught for the first time by an instructor, or at the instructor's request.
3. feedback provided by majors to our undergraduate advisor, or our Associate Chair
4. letters from graduated majors to our undergraduate advisor or Program members
5. self-appraisals of the effectiveness of our teaching conducted in the process of applying for curricular grants from the Ford Foundation, supporting curricular enrichment in the areas of Women of Color Across the Curriculum and Internationalizing Gender Studies.
6. regular circulation of course syllabi among teaching faculty
7. pedagogical workshops conducted by the Curriculum Committee and the Multi-cultural Committee

Some of these activities provide feedback to individual faculty, while others extend to a broader assessment of the major.

B. In addition to these measures, the Women's Studies Program intends to assess learning in the major in the following manner.

1. *Portfolios across the Range of Requirements for the Major*

Each year we will select one course from each of the five major requirement areas (humanities, social sciences, biological, multicultural and theory) and will ask the faculty member in charge to

place two of the best papers from that course in a portfolio. The Curriculum Committee will be charged with reviewing these papers. By reading across the five requirement areas we will be able to assess acquisition of knowledge base, theory and critical thinking skills in these relatively distinct branches of the Women's Studies curriculum.

2. Survey of Majors in Capstone Seminar

We would prepare and administer a small survey instrument to be administered to Women's Studies majors during the capstone seminar. This would give majors an opportunity to provide feedback on their experience in the major, benefits and problems they encountered, and to solicit their suggestions for improving the experience. The instructor for this course would summarize results and present them to Curriculum Committee.

3. Systematic Review of Communications from Graduated Majors

We regularly receive letters from our former majors describing their career activities and addressing how the major prepared them (or did not prepare them) for their subsequent work and study. We already retain a file of these letters, but in the interest of assessment, we would ask the undergraduate advisor to review these communications at intervals and to report to the Curriculum Committee on their contents.

We believe that this combination of activities would provide opportunities to assess three important aspects of our objectives as outlined above: learning in the major, experiences in the major and impacts of the major on careers. While there are more effective and systematic ways to accomplish these goals, we believe that the plan we have outlined represents the best we can do without receiving new resources or sources of support.

Timetable for Implementation

We would initiate these measures during the second semester of 1997-98, and would repeat them annually in the second semester.