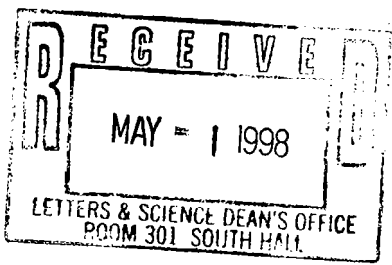


Women's Studies Program

110 Ingraham Hall
1155 Observatory Drive
Madison, WI 53706-1397
Telephone: 608/263-4703



May 1, 1998



MEMORANDUM

To: Associate Deans Fitzpatrick, Nagel and Ozzello

From: Jane Collins, *JC* Associate Chair

Re: Assessment in Undergraduate Major

Enclosed please find our report assessing the undergraduate major. This report was produced by our Curriculum Committee and will be discussed by our Program Committee at our May meeting. The original plan is attached.

Women's Studies Program Assessment of Undergraduate Major

Submitted to Dean of Letters & Sciences
May 1, 1998

Abstract: In our assessment of the undergraduate major, we used three instruments: student portfolios in each of our five requirement areas, questionnaires to graduating majors enrolled in our capstone seminar, and letters from graduated majors. From reviewing the portfolios, we found evidence that students were learning in each of the three areas for which we have established goals, that is, that they were acquiring a knowledge base in Women's Studies, theoretical frameworks for studying women and gender, and skills in critical thinking and writing. From reviewing the questionnaires, we found a high degree of satisfaction with the Women's Studies major, including advising, course availability for majors, course content and skills acquired. Students had constructive suggestions for improvements in programming. These included development of an internship program and an honors program, more courses dealing with multi-cultural issues and taught by women of color, and more upper-division science courses. We are currently implementing new programming in each of these areas. Letters from alumni provided information on the kinds of jobs and graduate programs majors have moved on to, many of which are in the social or health services. These letters related job and/or academic success to experiences in the major. Based on this review, we believe that the major is successfully preparing students in the ways it was designed to do. The assessment was useful in helping us to relate our on-going activities to our original set of goals, and in providing us access to student views and suggestions. We did not identify any significant problems to be solved, but will move forward on our internship program, implementing the new honors program, development of science courses, and hiring of faculty in the areas identified.

College of Letters and Science Assessment Report

(Due back to your Academic Associate Dean by May 1, 1998)

Department or Program Name:

Abstract: (This should be a brief summary of no more than 300 words that can be used in the College's report to the Provost's Office. The abstract should indicate the focus of assessment activities during the 1997-98 academic year. It should indicate what actions the department or program is taking to change its program as a result of the assessment. It should indicate whether the assessment was of the Undergraduate Major, the Graduate Program, or both.)

Assessment Tools Used: (Using the attached chart, please specify which assessment activities have taken or will take place in your department or program. Indicate also the year when these activities took place or will take place. If you used other tools, please describe them.)

Direct Indicators

| | Undergraduate Major | Graduate Program |
|-------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| National Exams | _____ | _____ |
| Local Exams | _____ | _____ |
| Capstone Course(s) | _____ ✓ _____ | _____ |
| Embedded Testing | _____ | _____ |
| Student Portfolios | _____ ✓ _____ | _____ |
| Review theses & dissertations | _____ | _____ |
| Performance Evaluations | _____ | _____ |
| Pre and Post Testing | _____ | _____ |

Indirect Indicators

| | Undergraduate Major | Graduate Program |
|------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| Student Surveys | _____ ✓ _____ | _____ |
| Exit Interviews | _____ ✓ _____ | _____ |
| Alumni Surveys | _____ ✓ _____ | _____ |
| Employer Surveys | _____ | _____ |
| External Reviews | _____ | _____ |

Narrative:

I. Goals of the Major. In December 1996, the Women's Studies Program submitted to the College of Letters and Sciences a Plan for the Assessment of the Undergraduate Major. This plan was developed by the Women's Studies Curriculum Committee and approved by the Program Committee. The Plan articulated three specific goals for the major: 1) to provide students with a **strong knowledge base in Women's Studies**, including knowledge of the experiences and accomplishments of women historically, currently and across cultures; 2) to familiarize students with existing **theoretical frameworks for studying and researching women and gender issues**; and 3) to help students develop strong **skills in critical thinking**, including the ability to read critically and independently, to use theoretical concepts and to communicate clearly in writing.

II. Assessment Activities. The Women's Studies Program devised a combination of measures to allow us to evaluate success in achieving these goals. The four activities involved are described in detail in the original plan (Attachment 1). Briefly, they include:

A) **Portfolios across the range of requirements for the major.** These portfolios are reviewed by the Curriculum Committee as a direct indicator of learning in each area of the major;

B) **Survey of majors in capstone seminar** (WS 640–Advanced Seminar in Women's Studies). We are asking students enrolled in WS 640 in Fall and Spring semesters to complete a written questionnaire evaluating their experience in the major. This activity is similar to an exit interview, since it is conducted in the last, or next-to-last semester of the major. Questionnaire results are reviewed by the Curriculum Committee to gain insight into how our majors evaluated their experience in the program, their views of its strengths and weaknesses, and their suggestions for improvement. The survey instrument is included as Attachment 2.

C) **Review of communications from graduated majors.** The program files and retains letters from graduated majors and will review these as a non-systematic survey of alumni providing information on the placement and success of our graduated majors.

D) **Feedback.** Having reviewed these three forms of evidence, the Curriculum Committee generates a report, including any suggestions for change, which is presented to the full Program Committee for discussion and action.

III. Results of Assessment Procedures

A) Portfolios.

1) Feminist Theory. [course: WS 441, "Contemporary Feminist Theory," Prof. N. Kaiser] The papers presented in the portfolio responded to an assignment requiring students to investigate the way a theoretical concept worked in a text or texts. Students demonstrated an ability to recognize and define such concepts and to analyze (not simply describe) the ways that they were used in an argument. They were able to discern and critique the effects of theoretical

framing. The papers that were presented demonstrated that the students had met goals 2 and 3 above.

2) Humanities. [course: WS 310, "Special Topics in Women and the Humanities: Writing Women's Li(v)es" Prof. E. Marks].

The papers presented from this course demonstrated students' abilities to analyze the ways that texts are constructed, and to recognize and name literary devices. Students could identify dominant ways of writing, as well as writing practices that work against dominant traditions. They were able to use feminist theories of writing to analyze texts. Papers demonstrated learning across all three goals, but particularly goals 2 and 3.

3) Biology and Health. [course: WS 530, "Biology and Gender," Lect. J. Scheder]. The student writing evaluated for this course consisted of response papers written in relation to specific readings. The papers gave evidence of student ability to read scientific research, and to evaluate and critique the underlying assumptions and logic of scientific argumentation. Students were able to think and write critically about the gendered and racially structured "pre-understandings" that cause certain questions to be asked, and others ignored in biological science, and that cause questions to be framed in certain ways. Papers demonstrated learning across all three goals, but particularly in 2 and 3.

4) Social Science. [course: WS 320, "Special Topics in Women and Society: Political Economy of Gender in International Perspective," Prof. A. Tripp]

Student papers for this course demonstrated knowledge of the different situations in which women are working around the world, including differences in labor market and workplace conditions, and difficulties in recognizing and validating domestic labor. Students used feminist political economic theory to trace connections between women's work inside and outside the home, women's roles in community and social organizations, corporate power and state policy. Papers demonstrated learning in goals 1, 2 and 3.

5) International/Multi-cultural Perspectives. [course: WS 443, "Anthropology by Women," Prof. M. Lepowsky]

Papers for this course were not available, but will be reviewed later.

B) Survey of Majors.

Questionnaires were completed by 39 of 48 majors enrolled in WS 640 in Semester I & II 1997-98. The following is a compilation of results from both semesters.

1) Questions Pertaining to Skills Acquired and Career Plans:

Thirty-three of the 39 majors surveyed completed double or triple majors. The departments in which students completed an additional major were:

Psychology - 9

Journalism - 2

Political Science - 5

Preventive Medicine - 1

Sociology - 4

Communication Arts - 1

Social Work - 3
Zoology - 3
Anthropology -2
English - 2

History - 1
Philosophy - 1
Pre-Med - 1
Genetics - 1

Six students did not double major, but completed an area of concentration within Women's Studies. Those areas of specialization were: Philosophy, History of Medicine, History, Sociology, International and Legal Theory

Students were asked to specify what skills, knowledge or abilities they felt they had acquired as a result of the Women's Studies major. The majority of students (24) mentioned the development of critical thinking, particularly the ability to ask questions, understand underlying assumptions, read with greater interpretive skills or challenge prevailing views. Twelve students mentioned improvement in written expression, and an additional nine said they had developed greater confidence in oral expression and debate. Many students mentioned the importance of the major in building their confidence as women, both through exposing them to women's history and issues and through encouraging them to think, write and speak with independence. Quite a number mentioned that they had developed an exposure to multiple cultures and alternative perspectives that helped prepare them for understanding and acting in "the real world" after graduation.

Students were asked about post-graduation plans. The following career plans were listed:

Graduate School (various fields) - 12
Therapist, Counseling, Social Work - 8
Medical School-3
Genetic Counseling/Women's Health - 3
Communications - 2

Women's Advocacy Organizations - 2
Librarian - 1
Working Abroad - 1

2) Questions Pertaining to Suggestions for Improving the Major.

An overwhelming degree of satisfaction was expressed with advising services for the major. In the 39 surveys, the pre-registration system and advising services were uniformly praised, and the quality of these services was often explicitly contrasted with those in the other major. Students expressed concern with the difficulty that they had in registering for Women's Studies courses prior to declaring the major. They felt this limited the opportunities for non-majors to be exposed to Women's Studies course work. This is a serious issue, but one that cannot be addressed without additional staffing.

With regard to additional programming, students most frequently mentioned the need to offer WS 442 (Lesbian Culture) more often and during the regular academic year (not just summers). The second most frequently voiced desire was for an internship program, or some other venue for community outreach or hands-on activism. [The Women's Studies Program has developed an internship experience which will be available to students for the first time in 1998-99]. Six students expressed a desire to have more women of color teaching in the program, and eight

asked for more racial and cultural diversity in the curriculum. [The addition of Prof. Dionne Espinoza to our faculty beginning in the Fall of 1998 will make it possible to add to our course offerings in this area, and we are currently planning to search jointly with Asian-American Studies for a faculty appointment.] Six students wished to see more upper-level science and health courses taught. [Two additional upper-level science courses are now under development by faculty]. Other new courses mentioned as desirable were: Women and the Arts, Contemporary Literature, Women and Sports, International Human Rights, Women and the Life Cycle, Economics or Political Economy, and Religion. Two students expressed concern that they had not been able to write an Honor's thesis in Women's Studies. That option became available to students in the Spring of 1998.

A final set of suggestions involved the need for more interaction among majors, and between majors and faculty/staff.

C) Communications from Graduated Majors.

We recognize that this is not a systematic survey. However, in any survey of alumni, certain students will be more motivated to respond than others. We believe we have tapped into this same pool in collecting notes, letters and email correspondence to our undergraduate advisor and other faculty, including thank you notes for recommendations, etc. A compilation of the current occupations of students writing to the program includes:

MSSW program - 4

Medical school - 2

Graduate school (MSSW - 4; Economics - 1; Counseling Psychology - 1; Architecture -1;

Nutritionist - 2

Administrator, American Medical Association Office of Women and Minority Health -1

Public Relations Director, Horizon Theater

Only two people who wrote to us had not yet found jobs, and their letters arrived within 4 months of graduation.

Most of these letters commented on the way in which the Women's Studies Program had prepared the student for the career or program of study in which they were involved. One student who was enrolled in the School of Social Work at Columbia University, was also working in a hospital with adolescents suffering from mental illness. She wrote: "About 50% are African American and 50% are Hispanic. All are living in poverty. All are being raised by their single mothers or grandmothers. ...My supervisor at work said that I have such an acute understanding of these topics. As I thought about my awareness, I realized that this came from my Women's Studies degree." The young woman working in the AMA Office of Women and Minority Health wrote: "I think it is important for folks in Women's Studies to know that my Women's Studies classes shaped my career choices and provided a strong foundation of knowledge on which to build."

Summary of Evaluation Activities.

The review of portfolios indicated that students were gaining skills and knowledge that met our learning goals. Student writing was of high quality and all of the papers demonstrated abilities to conduct critical analysis, and to use theory. While few of the papers reviewed for the assessment revealed learning in goal #1, that is largely an artifact of the courses selected. Most learning about women's experiences in history and across culture takes place in our survey courses, in our multi-cultural courses, and in several other venues not included in the exercise.

Student surveys revealed a high degree of satisfaction with the logistics of the major, including the amount and quality of advising and mentoring. Students believed themselves to be acquiring skills and knowledge relevant to post-graduation activities. They frequently referred to the "transformative" character of course work, in developing their ability to think, read and write critically. Students integrated their Women's Studies major with a wide range of different fields through the double major. They provided constructive suggestions for improving course offerings and asked for experiences (such as internship and honors programs) that would allow them to practice or deepen their learning.

Letters from alumni indicated that most are successfully employed or attending graduate school. Many of the letters link success in post-graduation activities to preparation received in the Women's Studies major.