2006-2007 Assessment Report

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1. What goals or learning objectives/outcomes were assessed in AY 2006-2007?

What question or issue were you addressing? A primary learning objective of the Women’s Studies Program is to read and apply feminist scholarship to the study of social, political and economic systems. This learning objective emerges from our mission statement which reads- “we situate gender in specific historical and cultural contexts to examine how socio-economic policies, political movements, and individual experiences shape our lives”.

2. What data did we collect to assess this issue?

This learning outcome reflects a common theme threaded throughout all of the courses in the Program. Each course has at least one writing prompt and one full length writing assignment that requires students to situate gender in specific historical contexts; in short, to examine gender from a structural perspective. We utilize a variety of methodologies formal and informal to measure learning outcomes. Obviously our course assignments including reading, writing and classroom participation are designed to achieve the desired learning outcomes. The writing assignments are the most exact measure of student learning outcomes.

3. What did the data tell you?

Throughout the semester the faculty discuss how writing assignments measure positive student outcomes. In-depth writing assignments allow for an assessment of a student’s overall comprehension of the issue. In particular we look for each student’s ability to apply complex and nuanced terminology such as gender, sexism, and institutional racism, etc., how these concepts are historically shaped, and how they intersect to produce a variety of social-political formations.

In many ways our methodology for assessing this learning outcome is very similar to departments who utilize a capstone course which is evaluated by committee. Our process is less formal but gives us a very clear idea of how our students perform. Our student’s ability to address gender from an institutional and structural rather than simply a individual lens, as demonstrated by their argumentation and critical thinking skills is the best measure of their learning outcomes.
4. *Faculty Reflection: What areas are seen as needing improvement?* We see from Women’s Studies minors and special majors the importance of more contact with the material. Thus, we value classroom discussions and small group activities to give students opportunities to explore in greater depth feminist discourse. Women’s Studies typically offers one symposium a semester to which we encourage the participation of all of the women’s studies classes. We will continue to offer such opportunities for increased exposure to the discipline in addition to opportunities for our minors and special majors to attend and deliver papers at conferences. In addition to creating more cohesion among our students, experience has shown that increased exposure leads to greater confidence with the material and to improved writing outcomes.

5. *What assessment activities are planned for the upcoming academic year?* The revision of the Women’s Studies textbook is back on the drawing board. The first edition is outdated but we have decided to proceed with the revision because we believe that the book supports the teaching approach that is the most conducive to positive student outcomes. Some of our courses will continue to utilize WebCT, and other online teaching methodologies to increase student access to the instructors as well as the material. We will continue our in-class end of the year survey to determine the needs of students and ways to improve our teaching and Program as a whole.