

**Florida Atlantic University
College of Arts and Letters
Women's and Gender and Sexuality Studies
Program Review
February 17-18, 2020**

Review Team

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OVERVIEW

This report provides the findings of the review team, Dr. Susan Shaw, Dr. Sharon Bird, and Dr. Mihaela Cardei, on FAU's Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies Master of Arts, undergraduate certificate, and Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies concentration in WGSS. The findings are based on a review of the Department's self-study document, web materials, and a site visit on February 17-18, 2020. The team met with:

- Dr. Russell Ivy, Senior Associate Provost for Academic Affairs
- Dr. Barclay Barrios, Associate Dean of College of Arts and Letters
- Dr. Karin Scarpinato, Associate Vice President for Research
- Dr. Robert Stackman, Dean of the Graduate College
- Dr. Jane Caputi, Professor of WGSS
- Dr. Josephine Beoku-Betts, Professor of WGSS
- Dr. Nicole Morse, Director of WGSS and Assistant Professor of Communications
- WGSS Graduate Students
- WGSS Affiliates/Executive Committee members
- Dr. Michael Horswell, Dean of the College of Arts and Letters
- WGSS Advisory Council
- Ji Young Bae (did not meet with her, but she was instrumental to coordinating the external program review process)

These meetings, like the reviewers' visit overall, were well organized, informative, and enjoyable. We appreciated the wide range of stakeholders we could speak with as part of the process. The WGSS external reviewers received a self-study in advance of the review process and were provided with other related documents and information pertinent to the review, including previous external review documents.

The FAU WGSS program is positioned in the state of Florida as the first M.A. in WGSS, and is currently one of only three graduate programs in the state. The core WGSS faculty are nationally and internationally recognized scholars whose commitment and leadership of the program have been

instrumental to the success of WGSS. Their work with graduate students has been significant. Most notably, WGSS Master's program outcomes include graduates who, for example, are an Emmy-award winning writer and director (focusing on feminist and LGBTQ themes), an Operations Director of NextGen, a Women and Gender Equity Center Coordinator, and multiple other graduates who are now in leadership positions across the state and country.

Nationally, Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies programs take many forms, ranging from the offering of a few courses (with no degree options) to Bachelors of Arts, Bachelors of Science, Master's and Ph.D. programs. Some WGSS programs exist as academic stand-alone departments, and many across the country exist as programs within other units. The trend over the past few decades, however, has been for WGSS programs to transition to departments and stand-alone majors with clear pathways to internships, graduate programs, and careers.

Strengths

- The two core WGSS faculty members are highly accomplished scholars whose teaching and research bring high visibility to the university and are crucial to the success of the WGSS students, especially the graduate students.
 - Dr. Caputi was named an Eminent Scholar by the Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association in 2016, and she currently has a forthcoming book with Oxford University Press. She also recently curated an exhibition at FAU's library.
 - Dr. Beoku-Betts is a co-PI on the university's NSF ADVANCE catalyst grant and is president of Sociologists for Women in Society. In 2018-19 she received a Fulbright Scholars Award, and she is co-editor of two forthcoming books with Zed Books and Emerald Publishing Company.
- The new WGSS Director is highly engaged and committed to the program and its success; her training and expertise in queer studies are also crucial to the growth of the WGSS undergraduate concentration in the Bachelor of Arts Interdisciplinary Studies
- The program offers the first Master's program in WGSS in the state of Florida.
- The program's graduate students are highly engaged and ambitious.
- The program's affiliate faculty are highly engaged and have great hope for the future of the program.
- The program is well positioned to initiate collaborations between WGSS and other programs to address FAU "pillars" focusing on the environment (e.g., environmental justice) and healthy aging (especially LGBTQ+ health and aging in the region).
- The program has a highly committed Executive Committee
- The program offers internships that have been crucial to the career success of the M.A. graduates
- WGSS has strong connections within the local community
- Conversations with students confirm that the commitment of the core faculty (Dr. Beoku-Betts and Dr. Caputi) is central to the program and its success.

Challenges

- FAU WGSS currently offers no major or minor. Undergraduate students instead take WGSS courses toward a certificate or a concentration in Interdisciplinary Studies. Though the certificate and concentration enable undergraduate students to complete WGSS coursework in conjunction with other majors, without a minor or a major, the WGSS program numbers (course enrollments, and other metrics, like majors graduated) have remained fairly static over the past few years, which makes it difficult for the program faculty and director to make a compelling case for new faculty hires. At the same time, without a major, FAU academic advisors may have little justification for advising students to take courses that are not “degree pursuant.” Without a minor, the visibility of WGSS may additionally remain low.
- Regarding the WGSS Graduate Program, a number of additional challenges exist. WGSS currently brings in 5-6 new students per cohort each year. This number needs to be a little higher to ensure a healthy number of graduates from the Master’s program. Another related issue is that the number of graduate courses offered, given core faculty sabbaticals and professional obligations (e.g., grant work and leadership in professional societies and on campus), poses challenges for the graduate students trying to complete their programs of study. Relatedly, with few core WGSS faculty and the fact that these faculty members are highly research-active and accomplished, the time the faculty have for mentoring graduate students is sparse. FAU allows for graduate students to include faculty from outside the university on their advisory committees, but the students still need the advice and mentoring of the core WGSS faculty, and one of the two core faculty must chair any MA thesis committee. WGSS students do not know the affiliated faculty and so are unsure of classes to take and additional faculty members to add to their committees. MA students are rarely approved to do a thesis, even though many express preference for this option. The program does not require a methods course, and this adds to students’ difficulty in completing a thesis in a timely manner.
- The low stipends continue to be a challenge, although this has to be addressed at the university level. The health insurance is currently an issue at FAU, but healthcare insurance for graduate students is expected to start in Fall 2020.
- Though the FAU Women’s, Sexuality and Gender Studies program implies that faculty expertise in sexuality and/or queer studies is central to the program and that courses in these areas are offered, the current WGSS faculty either do not have this particular expertise and/or do not have teaching assignments that enable them to create and/or teach these courses. Affiliate faculty confirmed that they bring this expertise, but their teaching assignments are not routinely in WGSS and/or seats in their classes are not made explicitly available to WGSS students. Relatedly, the WGSS graduate students and core faculty specifically emphasized the need for a graduate course in sexualities or queer theory.
- WGSS has no core faculty member actively teaching in WGSS whose primary area is in sexuality studies/queer studies; the new director has this background but there is no guarantee that she will teach graduate courses in WGSS since her teaching load is in her home department.

- While the new director is well qualified and enthusiastic, they are still new to the professoriate and pre-tenure. Without experience in administration and without the weight of tenure and promotion, they may face significant challenges in navigating the many tasks associated with directing the program. They need mentorship from a slightly more experienced department chair who is still aware of the challenges of a new position in administration and who knows how to navigate university structures and processes. We believe their success is dependent on leadership and support from the director of the interdisciplinary studies program who should do the heavy lifting for the program as its primary administrator. We would expect to see the director of interdisciplinary studies delve into the discipline of WGSS so he can provide appropriate leadership.

Progress on Recommendations from Previous Program Review

- Space, as noted in the 2013 review, continues to be a challenge. Space for the Program Director, faculty and graduate students are located across two buildings on campus. Relatedly, much of the space is shared (not exclusive to WGSS). While this is better space than the program had in 2013, it is still inadequate. The shared graduate office is small, and students cannot access the director's office directly because the door leading to that hallway is locked. If the interdisciplinary studies main office door is locked, students have no access at all to the director's office.
- The 2013 report recommended developing a WGSS concentration in the interdisciplinary studies degree as a step toward an undergraduate major. The program has successfully completed this task, and one student has graduated with this option.
- In her 2005 review, Sue Rosser noted that the program, which then had three lines, was "towards the smaller end of the range for program with budgeted faculty" and she questioned if that structure had the critical mass and composition to meet program goals. By 2013, the program was down to two lines, and the reviewer recommended hiring more core faculty. Offering an MA and certificates (and potentially an undergraduate minor) with only two core faculty is clearly creating difficulties in offering courses and providing mentoring relationships, especially for the graduate students.

Responses to WGSS 2020 Self-Study Questions

Question 1: *How do you view the Center's future in the university's Race for Excellence Strategic Plan (2015-2025)? What are your recommendations for strategies that might strengthen the Center's role/positioning in the university's Race for Excellence Strategic Plan (2015-2025)?*

The review team is enthusiastic about the possibilities of WGSS participating in meaningful way with the Pillars. In particular, we believe WGSS can align with the Healthy Aging Pillar with a focus on + Gender/LGBTQ aging. We also think that the program could align with Environmental Science through a focus on Environmental Justice.

Question 2: *Do you have any other models to suggest of Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies programs which have been successfully assimilated into Interdisciplinary Studies Programs?*

While WGSS has now added a concentration in the interdisciplinary studies degree as recommended, that should be seen as a step not an ending place for an undergraduate major. The national trend for the discipline is toward standalone programs/departments with the minor and major. While inclusion in the interdisciplinary studies department and major is a significant move forward, if the program is to align with national disciplinary norms, it should continue to work toward standalone status. We do not recommend assimilation into an interdisciplinary studies unit and major as a long-term strategy for success.

Question 3: *What strategies might work for us to strengthen our recruitment efforts to increase student enrollment locally and nationally into the graduate program?*

A 4+1 combined Bachelor's/Master's degree may be one way to strengthen recruitment efforts at FAU into the graduate program. We suggest beginning with the interdisciplinary studies major as the pathway to the 4+1, and we also encourage conversations with other majors (such as sociology, history, and English) to explore possibilities for other pathways into the 4+1. Working with academic advisors in these programs will be key so they can start advising Juniors into the 4+1 (after catalogue approval for the 4+1); this could help increase the cohort numbers for the Master's. Also, online programs may provide options for recruiting additional students to the Master's program. To recruit nationally, we suggest presence at the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) annual meeting's MA/PhD recruitment reception. Although FAU's stipends are low, many MA programs in the discipline do not offer funding at all. FAU should highlight the availability of tuition waivers, stipends, and scholarships in recruitment efforts. We also encourage the program to increase its social media presence as a way to gain national attention.

Question 4: *What strategies might work to strengthen our recruitment efforts to increase undergraduate enrollment into the BA in Interdisciplinary Studies with an emphasis on Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies?*

Given the current FAU context for WGSS, the reviewers suggest that a starting place for building the WGSS curriculum would be to take a few steps that would help to increase student enrollments and program visibility, even prior to development of a minor and/or a major at some future point. (1) A first step would be to apply for the Intro to WGSS to be approved for IFP credit. (2) A possible second step, pending additional faculty FTEs, would be the development and offer of an undergraduate course in sexualities and/or queer theory. Student interest in LGBTQ+ studies as a minor or as part of a major has grown rapidly across the nation, suggesting that a large and growing population of students would take these courses if they were offered and would minor or major in WGSS if an option to take these courses (and obtain a minor or major) were available. We also believe that the LGBTQ community in South Florida is an untapped resource for support and fundraising, and we believe an emphasis on LGBT/queer studies could invite LGBTQ community members into support of the program. (3) We also suggest the director each semester identify courses across the curriculum that can be cross-listed as WGSS and provide a list of these courses to WGSS certificate and graduate students as soon as possible so they can plan their coursework.

Additional Recommendations

- We emphasize the need for additional faculty in the program. This is essential for successful growth in both the undergraduate and graduate programs. (1) An instructor who could take on a heavy teaching load or a teaching postdoctoral appointment could be useful ways to meet needs in the program while allowing the college flexibility given constraints that make tenure track positions more difficult to offer at this moment. (2) We recommend the program pursue possible joint appointments, such as a shared position with one of the health-related departments for an LGBTQ+ healthy aging position or with environmental studies for an environmental justice position. We encourage the college to consider WGSS for future cluster hires and initiatives. We were disappointed that WGSS was not included in the college's most recent cluster hire in African diasporic studies because that is an area in which many WGSS scholars specialize. We encourage WGSS to initiate conversations with other departments across the university to imagine innovative shared appointments that align with the Pillars. (3) We also recommend the college use funds generated by WGSS core faculty in pursuit of their scholarship (such as Fulbright Fellowships, sabbaticals, and grant-related course releases) to hire replacement instructors for those courses the core faculty will not teach while away. This will help tremendously with problems students encounter in taking courses in a timely progression toward degree. (4) We also note that the program should begin to think about a transition plan as the two core faculty members near retirement in the future. We believe that some overlap between new hires and senior faculty will be essential for a successful transition.
- Currently, Professors Caputi and Beoku-Betts and the graduate students have offices on the second floor of the Living Room Theatres building. At the end of that hallway is a currently unused space that would make an excellent open space for WGSS graduate students and undergraduate students to study and meet together. We recommend allocating this space to WGSS and providing appropriate furniture to make a welcoming space for WGSS students.
- The review team recommends WGSS center to design guidelines for selecting the chair of the Advisory Council and the duration of this appointment, as well as a process that would allow new members to join the council, thus bringing new ideas and initiatives.
- As mentioned above, the new WGSS director needs support to be most effective. We recommend FAU-specific mentoring for the WGSS Program Director. In particular, the Director would benefit from regular meetings with a Department Chair or group of Chairs with whom they can ask routine questions about university policies and processes. We recommend the university support their participation in the annual NWSA chairs and directors meeting and the Program Administration and Development (PAD) pre-conference at NWSA.