

Gender, Sexuality & Women's Studies
Final Assessment Report & Implementation Plan
May 2024

Faculty / Affiliated University College	Arts and Humanities / Social Science	
Degrees Offered	MA, PhD	
Date of Last Review	2014-2015	
Approved Fields	Feminist Theory Health and Embodiment Representation and Cultural Production Globalization, Equity and Social Structures Sexuality	
External Reviewers	Dr. Leila Harris, Institute for Gender, Race, Sexuality and Social Justice University of British Columbia	Dr. Sailaja Krishnamurti, Department Head of Gender Studies Queen's University
Internal Reviewers	Dr. Kevin Mooney, Associate Dean (Graduate) Don Wright Faculty of Music	Adira Daniel, Ph.D. Candidate, Psychology Faculty of Social Science
Date of Site Visit	February 1 & 2, 2024	
Date Review Report Received	May 17, 2024	
Date Program/Faculty Response Received	Program – May 9, 2024 Faculty – May 10, 2024	
Evaluation	Good Quality	
Approval Dates	SUPR-G: June 24, 2024 ACA: September 4, 2024 Senate (for information): September 13, 2024	
Year of Next Review	Year of next cyclical review: 2031-2032	
Progress Report	June 2027	

Overview of Western's Cyclical Review Assessment Reporting Process

In accordance with Western's Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), the Final Assessment Report (FAR) provides a summary of the cyclical review, internal responses, and assessment and evaluation of the Gender, Sexuality & Women's Studies Graduate Programs delivered by the Faculty of Arts and Humanities.

This FAR considers the following documents:

- the program's self-study brief;
- the external reviewers' report;
- the response from the Program; and
- the response from the Dean, Faculty of Arts and Humanities.

This FAR identifies the strengths of the program and opportunities for program enhancement and improvement, and details the recommendations of the external reviewers – noting those recommendations to be prioritized for implementation.

The Implementation Plan details the recommendations from the FAR that have been selected for implementation, identifies who is responsible for approving and acting on the recommendations, specifies any action or follow-up that is required, and defines the timeline for completion.

The FAR (including Implementation Plan) is sent for approval through the Senate Subcommittee on Program Review - Graduate (SUPR-G) and ACA, then for information to Senate and to the Ontario Universities' Council on Quality Assurance. Subsequently, it is publicly accessible on Western's IQAP website. The FAR is the only document from the cyclical review process that is made public; all other documents are confidential to the Gender, Sexuality & Women's Studies Graduate Programs, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, the School of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies (SGPS), and SUPR-G.

Executive Summary

The graduate program in the Department of Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies (GSWS) started in 2007 with an MA degree, followed by the PhD degree in 2009.

GSWS is an interdisciplinary department that is located within both the Faculties of Arts and Humanities and Social Science. The MA is a one-year, non-thesis degree that runs from September to August. Two curriculum options are offered: a course-based MA and a project-based option. The PhD is a four-year program (12 terms). As of May 2023, there were 7 students enrolled in the MA program and 32 students enrolled in the PhD program.

To inform the program's self-study, dedicated consultation – either through retreats, meetings, focus groups or surveys – took place with core, affiliate and part-time faculty members, departmental staff, current students and alumni.

The external reviewers shared a positive assessment of the Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies Programs. They offer nine recommendations with considerations for further enhancement.

Strengths and Innovative Features Identified by the Program

- A particular depth of expertise in feminist theory, which makes the program unique in Canada.
- In addition to core faculty members, the program features a network of 60 affiliate faculty members situated across six Faculties at Western University.
- The traditional PhD comprehensive examination structure has been replaced with *either* the design of two undergraduate courses, one second year (breadth) course and one fourth year course (depth) *or* the design of one second year course (breadth) and a research paper (depth).
- An annual conference in the spring enables MA students to present their research projects to an audience comprised of the GSWS community.
- Participation in collaborative specializations *Migration and Ethnic Relations* and *Transitional Justice and Post-Conflict Reconstruction* enables students to explore their interest in pursuing feminist/intersectional research.
- The Scholarly Practicum course option enables MA and PhD students to obtain experiential learning for up to 1.0 course credit. The practicum involves students conducting research for a community-based organization under the supervision of a community and academic supervisor.
- Sense of community and supportive culture result in strong cohort experience which has led to collaborative research experiences.
- Student success during and after the program, as exemplified by: 1) strong track record of publication and success in securing funding for doctoral studies from varied sources - Vanier Scholarships, OGS, SSHRC, Trillium; 2) alumni succeeding in academic positions - obtaining prestigious postdoctoral fellowships, work in organizations in their fields of expertise; 3) alumni noting that the skills they developed in critical analysis, teaching, communication,

presentation, research design and implementation have been extremely helpful in securing employment and achieving their career goals.

- Dedicated PD opportunities for: 1) teaching; 2) research; and 3) conference organization, planning, and presenting
- Students consistently highlight the program's interdisciplinarity as a strength and the rewards that come from learning about topics from different disciplinary points of view.

Concerns and Areas of Improvement Identified and Discussed by the Program

- Applications have been decreasing and top applicants do not always accept admission offers as this program cannot compete with other universities that offer 5 years of funding.
- For both MA and PhD students, the amount of funding per student has remained relatively stable despite significant increases in the cost of living.
 - o International students are restricted from applying for many external scholarships (e.g., SSHRC) and international OGS awards are few.
- Increasingly, it is recognized that faculty who belong to one (or more) minoritized groups bear an exceptionally high demand for both student and peer mentoring.
- Students and faculty identified the need for professional development (PD) workshops to continue after coursework.
- Managing workload for joint appointments across units (within and across faculties) continues to be an issue.
- Continued concern about the number of PhD students who are unable to complete their degrees in four years.
- Revisiting the possibility of concentrating faculty expertise to further build on research and teaching in critical health humanities with a view to revisiting an earlier proposal to introduce an Interdisciplinary Development Initiative in this area.

Review Process

As part of the external review, the review committee, comprising two external reviewers, one internal reviewer and a graduate student reviewer, were provided with Volume I and II of the self-study brief in advance of the scheduled review and then met in-person over two days with the:

- Vice Provost, School of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies
- Associate Vice-Provosts, School of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies
- Associate Vice-Provost, Academic Planning, Policy and Faculty
- Director, Office of Academic Quality and Enhancement
- Dean, Faculty of Arts and Humanities
- Associate Dean, Faculty of Arts and Humanities
- Department Chair
- Graduate Chair

- Associate University Librarian
- Graduate Program and Department Staff
- Program Faculty Members
- Graduate Students
- Program Alumni

Following the site visit, the external reviewers submitted a comprehensive report of their findings which was sent to the Program and Dean for review and response. Formative documents, including Volumes I and II of the Self-Study, the External Report, and the Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies Program and Decanal responses form the basis of this Final Assessment Report (FAR). The FAR is collated and submitted to the SGPS and to SUPR-G by the Internal Reviewer with the support of the Office of Academic Quality and Enhancement.

Summative Assessment – External Reviewers' Report

External reviewers shared that they *“were impressed with the GSWS program, the training it is providing, and the quality of the research and graduate students. The program has a strong faculty contingent, is contributing to the curriculum and strategic directions of the university in important ways, has dedicated staff, faculty are clearly committed to student learning and success [...]. This is clearly a valuable program for the university and the community.”*

Strengths of the Program

- GSWS faculty are well trained and well-respected regarding research and teaching. There is significant breadth and depth of expertise across both the core and affiliate faculty members.
- Pool of affiliates associated with the GSWS program is extensive. As such, there is strong coverage across a range of issues, concerns, and thematic expertise.
- Exemplify commitment to interdisciplinary scholarship and teaching, and serves as a key example of academic programs that bridge to community and societal concerns.
- Diverse staff and faculty as well as thematic and intellectual leadership on concerns related to EDI significantly contributes to achieving the University's EDI objectives.
- The program attracts students with diverse backgrounds and interests, which is of benefit to the university as a whole.
- Cross-appointed faculty between GSWS and Indigenous studies strengthen the linkages with other areas of study.
- Alternate admission pathways for non-traditional students, especially practitioners.

- One-year MA program is well suited to the needs of diverse student learners.
- Students have expressed satisfaction with the training and credited this program for their success in academic careers.

Prospective Improvements for the Program to Consider

- Faculty support and mentorship for pre-tenure Black faculty to ensure career development and program sustainability. (*Embedded in Recommendation #1*)
- Review formal communications channels and approaches across the unit and their role in fostering and maintaining program community. (*Embedded in Recommendation #2*)
- Strengthen the connection between gender, race, sexuality, Indigeneity and decolonization. For instance via increased linkages with Indigenous Studies. (*Embedded in Recommendation #3*)
- Clarify structure and objectives of the practicum component. (*Embedded in Recommendation #4*)
- For PhD students: 1) clarify the candidacy requirements; 2) ensure applicability of methods course taught to students; 3) review the professional development course with respect to relevance and timing; 4) review timelines for completion and support given to PhD students who are required to continue paying tuition fees while not progressing towards completion. (*Embedded in Recommendations #5 & #6*)
- Issues impacting the one-year MA are 1) communication of the expectations regarding the scope of research for the one-year MA from application to completion stages; 2) increased coursework, and limited one-year timeline make it challenging for students to conduct primary research with human participants and archival research. (*Embedded in Recommendation #6*)
- Reconsider the goals, focus and timeline of the program, create a more flexible format where students select between a course-based IRP and a thesis-based MA program. (*Embedded in Recommendation #6*)
- It is worrisome that international students are not afforded any TA opportunities, even with suitable training and background. (*Embedded in Recommendation #7*)
- Explore creative recruitment strategies as a response to a decline in domestic applications and examine funding options for international students. (*Embedded in Recommendation #7*)
- Clarification regarding inter-faculty funding would reduce complexities around TA funding, teaching releases or assignments, more complex. (*Embedded in Recommendation #8*)
- Minoritized faculty bear an exceptionally high demand for both student and peer mentoring. (*Embedded in Recommendation #9*)

Summary of the Reviewers' Recommendations and Program/Faculty Responses

The following are the reviewers' recommendations in the order listed by the external reviewers.

Reviewers' Recommendation	Program/Faculty Response
<p>Recommendation 1: Faculty Resources</p> <p>a) Sessional faculty who are already working with graduate students should be allowed to supervise them.</p> <p>b) Recent faculty hires affiliated with Black Studies and Indigenous Studies be offered appropriate mentorship and career development support.</p> <p>c) Reflect on a mentorship and succession plan for leadership /administrative roles, and also create a plan for strategic hiring needs going forward.</p>	<p>Program:</p> <p>a) Discuss at a department meeting how limited duties appointments could be involved in the (co)supervision or other mentoring of Master's students. Explore the possibility of LD faculty members co-supervising MA Independent Research Projects (IRPs), as they cannot receive Masters-level SGPS membership. Consult with the Dean on how LD faculty members could be compensated for supervisory labour.</p> <p>b) Consult with newer faculty members affiliated with Black Studies and Indigenous Studies programs to explore the kinds of mentorship and support they need to participate in GSWS' graduate programs. Discuss career development support for faculty members associated with Black Studies and Indigenous Studies with the Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion and the Deans of the Faculties of Social Science and Arts & Humanities.</p> <p>c) Two strategic planning sessions will be planned for the fall of 2024; the first session will focus on developing mentorship and succession plans for leadership/administrative roles and identifying strategic hires. This discussion should also consider workload equity for EDIDIA faculty members.</p> <p>Faculty: The Dean's Office:</p> <p>a) agrees with the program's response: those with LD appointments cannot hold Masters or Doctoral SGPS membership and as a result cannot supervise students. In addition, given that their employment is for a single semester, it is not feasible to ask them to take on supervisory duties.</p> <p>b) fully supports that faculty members associated with the Black Studies and Indigenous Studies programs are made aware of the mentorship opportunities at Western, as well as other supports.</p> <p>c) will support any discussion of strategic hiring, mentorship and succession plans for leadership in the department.</p>

<p>Recommendation 2: Community and Communication Program and unit leadership should explore: a) strategies to foster and maintain a culture of respect and transparency. b) creative strategies for rebuilding the sense of community, especially among newer members.</p>	<p>Program: a) At the May 2024 department meeting, discussion will be aimed at developing specific strategies to assist in rebuilding community and strengthening departmental culture in 2024-25. The reviewers' recommendations and issues explored in the self-study will be discussed. b) The Graduate Chair will consult with students to elicit feedback on how they would like to participate in (re)building community and the barriers they experience that curtail their participation in departmental activities.</p> <p>Faculty: The Dean's Office is confident that the department will identify strategies to bolster a culture of respect and transparency.</p>
<p>Recommendation 3: Internal interdisciplinarity Greater support for interdisciplinarity, which could include cross-listing courses, collaborative teaching, and cross-curriculum course development.</p>	<p>Program: The Department Chair and Graduate Chair will lead a discussion on supporting interdisciplinarity within GSWS graduate programming. The self-study will be consulted where affiliate members suggested a number of strategies for faculty-student engagement across disciplines. This session will consider how and where ties could be strengthened with the Faculty of Social Science, as identified in the reviewers' report.</p> <p>Faculty: The Faculty of Arts and Humanities fully supports interdisciplinary research and will consider all suggestions from the department.</p>
<p>Recommendation 4: Practicum Greater support, including funding, is needed to show students how it could be integrated into their programs at the PhD and the MA levels.</p>	<p>Program: In the Fall 2024, the Graduate Program Committee will consult faculty and students who have participated in the scholarly practicum to get feedback on the strengths and limitations of its current structure and should consider the development of practica with existing community-based organizations, including those that are led by GSWS alumni, which were identified during the self-study. This discussion should also involve community-engaged learning resources at Western who can provide guidance on these issues.</p> <p>Faculty: The department has a clear plan for assessing the practicum component.</p>

<p>Recommendation 5: Professional development across career goals Consider breaking the pro-seminar professional development into modules or workshops that can be taken according to needs and interest through the programs.</p>	<p>Program:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A sub-committee on Professional Development (PD) will be established by the Graduate Program Committee and will involve faculty and students. This committee will explore alternative structures (e.g., modules) for PD in addition to, or in replacement of, the required course. This sub-committee should compile PD opportunities that already exist for students at Western, at other universities, and online and consult with students and faculty about strengths and gaps in PD in the graduate program. • Consider establishing a sub-committee on Methods. This committee should consult with students to gather information about the kinds of training they would like; compile a list of methods courses and resources currently available to students at Western, at other universities, and online; and consider how methods seminars could be delivered informally by faculty, affiliates, and upper-year graduate students, and additionally serve as sites of community building and professional development. <p>Faculty: The program's proposal to create sub-committees on professional development and methods will address this concern. Note that Western already offers a broad suite of professional development opportunities with the Own Your Future program.</p>
<p>Recommendation 6: REB and 1 year MA: a) Explore strategies that would allow REB clearance to be more streamlined for MA students. b) Offer training and prepare proposals and REB protocols in Term 1 for MA students interested in human subjects' research. c) Supervisors should guide incoming students in choosing projects that are appropriate in scale and timeline for the MA level. d) Options for students seeking training in human subjects research could include part of a project in the methods course, or a course-based practicum. e) Offer an additional term (16 months) program to students seeking to do research with human participants or more intensive publication-oriented research.</p>	<p>Program:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) The Graduate Chair will consult with REB about whether an expedited process is possible for MA students working within a 1-year timeline. b) The feasibility of this strategy will be explored by the Graduate Program Committee as part of a broader discussion on how to potentially modify the MA program (see e, below). A review of the degree structures of other gender/sexuality/women's studies programs in Canada would be helpful in undertaking this discussion to explore the merits and limitations of the different structures and to ascertain what faculty resources are necessary to support the desired degree structures. c) In keeping with the current IRP structure and guidelines, supervisors actively provide mentorship to students to help them undertake projects that are feasible within the 1-year time limit. d) This has been included in the required Feminist Methodologies course in the past. The Graduate Program Committee will consider how this could be integrated into the graduate curriculum at the MA level. e) The Graduate Program committee will discuss a possible expansion of the MA program to include a 16- or 24-month thesis option. <p>Faculty: The Dean's Office agrees with the program that completing ethics review within a one-year MA is not feasible. Any modifications to the length of the MA program will be reviewed by the Associate Dean (Graduate) before being sent to SUPR-G as a major modification.</p>

<p>Recommendation 7 Funding for International MA students: Explore ways of enhancing funding and lifting the present restriction that does not permit international students to serve as TAs.</p>	<p>Program: This has been an ongoing discussion at the Arts & Humanities Graduate Chairs meetings. The Program anticipates that this discussion will continue and hopes that providing TA funding for international MA students will gain further traction and effect a positive outcome in response to these recommendations.</p> <p>Faculty: Funding of graduate students is re-considered each year.</p>
<p>Recommendation 8: University governance and interdisciplinarity: Collaborate at the unit, faculty, and university-wide levels to overcome financial and governance obstacles that at times restrict interdisciplinary engagement.</p>	<p>Program: During a strategic planning session, the Department Chair will lead a discussion for faculty and students to reflect on barriers to and supports for interdisciplinary engagement that will support the graduate curriculum and graduate student experience.</p> <p>Faculty: As noted in point 3 above, the Faculty of Arts and Humanities fully supports interdisciplinary research and will consider all suggestions from the department. Given that no specific barriers were mentioned in the recommendation, we await feedback from the department.</p>
<p>Recommendation 9: Contributions to institutional EDI: a) Proactively support the work of the unit on EDI, given the leadership that is being provided across campus by faculty, staff, and students. b) Provide appropriate resources and support for GSWS (graduate programs, affiliated programs, and the department) to recognize that a perennial challenge relates to the high demands that many of the faculty and students in this program face.</p>	<p>Program: The Program agrees that it is crucial for the Faculty and the University to acknowledge the contributions of GSWS to the strategic directions of the university that pertain to interdisciplinarity, community-engaged research, and EDIDI; but, are unclear as to how the university could better recognize and “proactively support” the work of faculty and students in this regard. The Program will explore what resources and supports are required to offset the challenges associated with the demands imposed by taking on this labour in addition to normal workload associated with research, teaching, and service. This discussion will be led by the Department Chair during Department meetings in the fall of 2024. The results of these discussions will be communicated with the Dean and Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion as appropriate.</p> <p>Faculty: The Faculty and the University do recognize the important work that GSWS does for EDI.</p>

Implementation Plan

The Implementation Plan provides a summary of the recommendations that require action and/or follow-up. In each case, the Graduate Program Chair, in consultation with the SGPS and the Dean of the Faculty is responsible for enacting and monitoring the actions noted in Implementation Plan.

Recommendation	Proposed Action and Follow-up	Responsibility	Timeline
<p>Recommendation 1: Faculty Resources b) Recent faculty hires affiliated with Black Studies and Indigenous Studies be offered appropriate mentorship and career development support. c) Reflect on a mentorship and succession plan for leadership /administrative roles, and also create a plan for strategic hiring needs going forward.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet with newer faculty members in Black Studies and Indigenous Studies, to identify the kinds of mentorship and support needed for their participation in GSWS' graduate programs. • Discuss career development support for Black Studies and Indigenous Studies faculty members with the Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion and the Deans of the Faculties of Social Science and Arts & Humanities. • Plan and host two strategic planning sessions in fall 2024 to focus on: 1) developing mentorship and succession plans for leadership/administrative roles and identifying strategic hires; 2) workload equity for EDIDIA faculty members; and 3) barriers to and supports for interdisciplinary engagement. 	Graduate Chair Department Chair	By December 2024
<p>Recommendation 2: Community and Communication Program and unit leadership should explore: a) strategies to foster and maintain a culture of respect and transparency. b) creative strategies for rebuilding the sense of community, especially among newer members.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss specific strategies needed to rebuild community and strengthen departmental culture at an upcoming departmental meeting/retreat and develop an actionable plan. • Meet with students to discuss how they would like to participate in (re)building community and identifying barriers and facilitators to their participation in departmental activities. • Discuss community building approaches well suited to cohorts of students who have limited ability to attend campus in person. 	Graduate Chair Department Chair	By December 2024

<p>Recommendations 3 and 8: Interdisciplinarity Greater support for interdisciplinarity, which could include cross-listing courses, collaborative teaching, cross-curriculum course development and identifying governance obstacles that at times restrict interdisciplinary engagement.</p>	<p>Focus discussion at a dedicated strategic planning session on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • supporting interdisciplinarity within GSWS graduate programming; • reviewing strategies for faculty-student engagement across disciplines that were proposed by affiliate members in the Self-Study; • considering areas for strengthening collaboration with the Faculty of Social Science; and • barriers to, and supports for, interdisciplinary engagement. 	<p>Graduate Chair Department Chair</p>	<p>By December 2024</p>
<p>Recommendation 4: Practicum Greater support, including funding, is needed to show students how it could be integrated into their programs at the PhD and the MA levels.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consult faculty and students who have participated in the scholarly practicum to get feedback on the strengths and limitations of its current structure. • Consider the development of practica with existing community-based organizations, including those that are led by GSWS alumni. • Involve community-engaged learning support teams at Western who can provide guidance on these issues. 	<p>Graduate Program Committee</p>	<p>By December 2024</p>
<p>Recommendation 5: Professional development across career goals Consider breaking the pro-seminar professional development into modules or workshops that can be taken according to needs and interest through the programs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a sub-committee on Professional Development (PD) which will involve faculty and students and will 1) explore alternative structures for PD in addition to, or in replacement of, the required course; 2) compile PD opportunities that already exist for students at Western, at other universities, and online; and 3) consult with students and faculty about strengths and gaps in PD in the graduate program. • Establish a sub-committee on Methods which consult with students 1) to ascertain the kinds of training they would like; 2) compile a list of methods courses and resources currently available to students at Western, other universities, and 	<p>Graduate Program Committee</p>	<p>By June 2025</p>

	online; and 3) explore varying ways of delivering methods seminars.		
Recommendation 6: REB and 1 year MA: a) Explore strategies that would allow REB clearance to be more streamlined for MA students. b) Offer training and prepare proposals and REB protocols in Term 1 for MA students interested in human subjects' research. c) Supervisors should guide incoming students in choosing projects that are appropriate in scale and timeline for the MA level. d) Options for students seeking training in human subjects research could include part of a project in the methods course, or a course-based practicum. e) Offer an additional term (16 months) program to students seeking to do research with human participants or more intensive publication-oriented research.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore whether an expedited REB process is possible for MA students working within a 1-year timeline. • Explore degree structures of other gender/ sexuality/ women's studies programs in Canada to examine the merits and limitations of the different structures and to ascertain what faculty resources are necessary to support the desired degree structures. • Consider how training in human subjects research could be integrated into the graduate curriculum at the MA level. • Discuss a possible expansion of the MA program to include a 16-, 20- or 24-month thesis option. 	Graduate Chair Graduate Program Committee Dean's Office	By January 2025
Recommendation 7 Funding for International MA students: Explore ways of enhancing funding and lifting the present restriction that does not permit international students to serve as TAs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue examining options to enhance funding for international MA students, as well as mechanisms that would allow for these students to serve as TAs (or similar roles). • Re-examine program learning outcomes to ensure that none are directly associated with TAs' experiences, which might imply an inequity between domestic and international students and their ability to serve as TAs. 	Graduate Chair	Ongoing

<p>Recommendation 9: Contributions to institutional EDI: a) Proactively support the work of the unit on EDI, given the leadership that is being provided across campus by faculty, staff, and students. b) Provide appropriate resources and support for GSWS (graduate programs, affiliated programs, and the department) to recognize that a perennial challenge relates to the high demands that many of the faculty and students in this program face.</p>	<p>Explore what resources and supports would be required to offset the challenges associated with the demands imposed by taking on this labour in addition to normal workload associated with research, teaching, and service.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Communicate the results of these discussions with the Dean's Office and the Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion as appropriate. 	<p>Department Chair</p>	<p>By December 2024</p>
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