Western UNIVERSITY · CANADA

Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies

Final Assessment Report & Implementation Plan
September 2025

Faculty / Affiliated University College	Faculty of Arts and Humanities and Faculty of Social Science	
Degrees Offered	B.A.	
Date of Last Review	2016-2017	
Modules Reviewed	Honours Specialization in Gender and Women's Studies Specialization in Gender and Women's Studies Major in Gender and Women's Studies Minor in Gender and Women's Studies Major in Sexuality Minor in Sexuality Minor in Black Studies Minor in Feminist, Queer, Critical Race theory Honours Specialization in Global Gender Studies (jointly with the Centre for Global Studies at Huron University College)	
External Reviewers	Dr. Carla Fehr, Department of Philosophy University of Waterloo	Dr. Simone Pfleger, Women's & Gender Studies University of Alberta
Internal Reviewer	Dr. Andrew M. Johnson, Associate Dean Faculty Health Sciences	Hussain Naseer Undergraduate student Mechanical Engineering
Date of Site Visit	February 26 & 27, 2025	
Date Review Report Received	April 24, 2025	
Date Program/Faculty Response Received	Program: June 3, 2025 Faculty: June 9, 2025	
Evaluation	Good Quality	
Approval Dates	SUPR-U: October 21, 2025 ACA: October 28, 2025 Senate (for information): November 14, 2025	
Year of Next Review	2032-2033	
Progress Report	June 2028	

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 Program 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 Undergraduate Program Review Committee (SUPR-U) 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 undergraduate cyclical review process that is made public; all other documents are confidential to the Program, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, and SUPR-U.

Executive Summary

Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies (GSWS) became a department in 2006, under the name Women's Studies and Feminist Research (WSFR). The program had existed since the 1980s and had grown significantly in terms of undergraduate teaching. An interdisciplinary program located both in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities and the Faculty of Social Science, students in GSWS study the cultural norms, social and societal constructs, and historical, economic, and political contexts affecting women and gender.

The department has a diverse cohort of affiliate faculty members from across the university who are key members of the community. Recent hires have supported program growth. For instance in 2022, the program introduced a new minor in Black Studies – a module that was created through interfaculty collaboration. Total modular enrolments in 2023-2024 were at 133.

The program self-study was informed by input from multiple groups, including the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee and the Black Studies Coordinating Committee. Meetings with these groups, along with dedicated departmental meetings, shepparded the review process. Also, current students and program alumni were surveyed and existing curriculum maps were updated and analysed.

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

Strengths and Innovative Features Identified by the Program

- Sustained growth with strong modular enrollments in the Major and Minor in Gender and Women's Studies, while Sexuality Studies modules remain stable.
- A newly approved Major in Black Studies is the only such program in Canada.
- Faculty consistently demonstrate excellence in teaching and research, evidenced by awards for Excellence in Teaching, competitive research grants, and publications in prestigious journals.
- Interdisciplinary curriculum provides both broader and deeper coverage when compared to most other Gender Studies programs.
- Actively curated alumni database used to create panels and workshops each year so that current students can learn from and network with program alumni.
- Many program students participate in exchange programs through the International Office, with students recently traveling to locations within India, Europe, and the United Kingdom.
- Previously dependent on special topics courses, the program now offers key permanent courses such as Black Feminist Thought and Reproductive Justice.

    - Thoughtful, collaborative approach to addressing Indigenous issues and reconciliation in the curriculum while being mindful not to overburden the single Indigenous faculty member.
- Strong ties with the London community are fostered through Community Engaged Learning assignments that connect students with local organizations.
- The Program prioritizes creating safe spaces for students to explore social justice, equity, and equality - through teaching and research, students are empowered with critical analytical tools to confront oppression. Students are prepared for socially impactful careers in both local and international contexts.
- Community building is actively supported through departmental events and a welcoming office space that includes a lounge and seminar room for meetings and social interaction.
    - Students consistently note that “community” is one of the best things about GSWS for them.

Concerns and Areas of Improvement Identified and Discussed by the Program

- Undergraduate course enrollments increased from 645.5 FCEs (2011/12) to 2,554.5 FCEs (2023/24), creating significant capacity strain.
- At least three faculty retirements are expected within five years.
- Faculty members supervise Honours thesis students voluntarily, on top of regular duties with minimal institutional support.
- Program navigation issues include - inconsistent numbering making it difficult for students to identify module-specific courses, particularly in Sexuality Studies and Black Studies; Students frequently miss requirements and need special permissions.
- New enrollment minimums impact courses like GSWS 2274F/G which face cancellation. Smaller, theory-heavy EDIDA courses align with feminist/queer pedagogical goals are vulnerable under new course enrolment thresholds.
- Current enrollment boosting strategies are not particularly effective since 1) faculty-wide strategies don't often work for interdisciplinary departments like GSWS; and 2) capping popular GSWS courses does not redirect students to less popular ones – students simply choose electives outside the Faculty.
- Graduate recruitment is impacted by less competitive funding packages, which impacts the growth of the undergraduate program as there is reduced TA pool and increased faculty workload.
- Program relies on graduate students from other departments who lack gender/sexuality studies background.
- Relatively few community engaged learning courses are offered – the program is considering ways to offer at least one such course per term.

Review Process

As part of the external review, the review committee, comprising two external reviewers, an internal faculty reviewer, and an internal 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 (Academic Programs)
- Acting Associate Vice-Provost (Academic Planning, Policy and Faculty Relations)
- Director of Academic Quality and Enhancement
- Associate University Librarian and Library Staff Members
- Dean, Faculty of Social Science
- Acting Dean, Faculty of Arts and Humanities
- Associate Dean (Academic), Faculty of Arts and Humanities
- Associate Dean (Academic), Faculty of Social Science
- Department Chair
- Undergraduate Chair
- Administrative Staff
- Program Faculty
- Program Students

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 Program and Decanal responses form the basis of this Final Assessment Report (FAR) of the Gender, Sexuality & Women's Studies Program. The FAR is collated and submitted to SUPR-U by the Internal Faculty Reviewer with the support of the Office of Academic Quality and Enhancement.

Summative Assessment – External Reviewers' Report

External reviewers noted *"that GSWS is an exceptionally strong department providing excellent undergraduate education. GSWS research and teaching contribute to Western University's mission and provide research expertise and undergraduate programming essential to Western University's Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Decolonization and Accessibility (EDIDA) Strategic Plan."*

Strengths of the Program

- Demonstrates exceptional commitment to social justice through its comprehensive integration of equity, diversity, inclusion, and decolonization principles; and, thoughtfully addresses marginalized perspectives across multiple axes of identity and power, creating an educational environment that not only

reflects contemporary societal needs but actively prepares students to engage meaningfully with diverse communities and complex social dynamics.
- Employs a blend of traditional and non-traditional assessment methods which recognizes varied backgrounds, ensuring that all students can demonstrate their knowledge and skills through multiple pathways while meeting degree requirements and learning outcomes.
- Faculty and staff have cultivated an exemplary culture of student-centered support that extends beyond traditional academic advising. Through the intentional creation of safer spaces and a genuinely supportive environment, the program demonstrates its commitment to holistic student development.
- The diverse portfolio of speaker series, conferences, research days, and other scholarly events – delivered in both in-person and online formats – ensures broad accessibility while fostering consistent engagement among students, faculty, and the wider academic community.
- Recent investments in full-time and limited-term faculty positions represent an advancement in the program's capacity. This expansion has not only enhanced teaching capabilities but has also meaningfully contributed to faculty diversity.
- Strong collaborative relationship with Western Libraries, particularly through innovative initiatives like the undergraduate journal *Tulips*.

Prospective Improvements for the Program to Consider

- Enhance curriculum effectiveness by incorporating more practice-oriented content and activities to ensure a better balance between theoretical knowledge and practical application by embedding community-engaged projects and experiences into existing courses to strengthen connections between academic content and real-world contexts and expand experiential learning opportunities throughout the program. (*Associated with Recommendation #1*)
- Maintain emphasis on active participation while expanding innovative assessment strategies, particularly in upper-year courses, to further enhance student engagement and achievement. (*Associated with Recommendation #1*)
    - Strengthen assessment practices through the integration of AI as a learning tool, along with the development of clear guidelines for its ethical and effective use.
    - For lower-level courses, diversify assessment formats by reducing reliance on writing-intensive assignments and exploring more creative, inclusive alternatives beyond traditional essays and exams.
    - Optimize limited TA resources by reconsidering assessment strategies in large courses and re-evaluate the responsibilities assigned to TAs.
- Consider streamlining module requirements and reducing prerequisites to improve accessibility and flexibility for students. This includes developing alternative entry pathways into the Sexuality Studies and Black Studies modules. (Associated with Recommendation #1)

- To enhance student engagement and outreach, the program should consider bolstering its social media presence. The program could leverage existing communication resources from the Faculties of Arts and Humanities, Social Science, or central administration to provide valuable support for these initiatives. (Associated with Recommendation #2)

Pulled from the narrative of the external reviewer's report, these considerations align with and complement the formal recommendations made.

Summary of the Reviewers' Recommendations and Program/Faculty Responses

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

Reviewers' Recommendations	Program/Faculty Response
Recommendation #1 - Strategic Curricular Review - to identify and protect classes that are most central to the goals and mission of GSWS. Specifically: • Provide concrete support for Black Studies courses such as teaching relief for faculty members working on these modules to ensure this work does not hinder their career advancement • Provide Black Studies with its own course code • Continue offering the Transgender Studies course • Reassess use of writing assignments across the curriculum • Examine deployment of TAs in light of rebalanced assessments • Reassess prerequisites for mid- and upper-level courses • Develop policy and set of practices concerning the use of AI	**Program:** • The Undergraduate Chair has initiated a curricular review, identifying courses for revision and withdrawal to improve departmental efficiency. These lists will be presented to faculty during an upcoming retreat. As a new Undergraduate Chair will take over on July 1, 2025, proposed changes are expected in Fall 2025 with implementation planned for Winter 2026. • In May 2025, the Acting Chair, Undergraduate Chair, and Interim Dean of Arts & Humanities met with the Associate VP of EDI to discuss support for the Black Studies module. A dedicated subcommittee will be established to oversee the maintenance, review, and revision of the Black Studies curriculum. • GSWS 2274: Introduction to Transgender Studies will be promoted and advertised to students in A&H and Social Science. The Chair will meet with the Deans of A&H and Social Science to determine how to protect the course to ensure it can be offered annually. • At the next departmental retreat; one agenda item is to discuss writing assignments and how to make better use of them across the curriculum. The Undergrad Committee will continue the work in the fall. • The Graduate Chair, Undergraduate Chair, and Department Chair will collaborate on improving the use of Teaching Assistants while ensuring graduate students are not overburdened. This may involve reducing or eliminating first-year tutorials. A formal plan will be developed and presented to faculty in Fall 2025. • The Undergraduate Committee will develop policies and practices on AI to be approved by the department. **Faculty:** • The Department has begun the process of developing a subject area in "Black Studies" that will make those courses easier to identify for students and as such will also help with promotion.

	• The Dean's Office anticipates continuing the practice of the 2024-25 academic year - discussing course planning with each program/department, to ensure strategic use of teaching resources which will result in enhanced student experience. • The department's efforts in reviewing curricular and TA support are commendable, and the Dean's Office stands ready to assist with both reviews as needed. • The Associate Dean (Academic) will continue to consult with the Educational Policy Committee of the Faculty regarding how to approach AI in ways that support student learning and meet the needs of programs and Departments.
Recommendation #2 - Systematic Promotion of Program and Courses. • Develop a social media strategy and implementation plan to raise the profile of GSWS with undergraduate students early in their tenure at Western	**Program:** • The department will develop a promotion plan, involving all department officers, the undergraduate Assistant, and the Gender Studies Student Collective. • The Undergrad Chair and Chair have been in communication with the A&H Communications officer to update the department website. • The Undergrad Chair is communicating with the Gender Studies Student Collective to better understand how they promote their events to maintain consistency. • The department will work with the Experiential Learning Coordinator in A&H to determine if an internship for a Social Media Coordinator can be created in the department. **Faculty:** The Dean's Office will support the Department's efforts to review and revitalize recruitment, not only through the A & H offices mentioned in the program's response (Communications and EL), but in A & H events that have similarly been revitalized recently, such as Arts and Humanities Day.
Recommendation #3 - Leverage EDIDA Expertise • More efficiently and effectively support and implement the EDIDA Strategic Plan by supporting GSWS courses and faculty, and compensating GSWS experts for assisting with EDIDA activities in other areas of the university	**Program:** • The Chair has discussed how best to use the department's EDIDA expertise with the Deans of Social Science and Arts and Humanities as well as the Associate VP of EDI. The department is currently contributing to a planned Certificate of EDI being organized by the Faculty of Arts and Humanities. • The department will consider further plans for leveraging EDIDA expertise at upcoming departmental retreats.

	Faculty: GSWS has long been a source of inspiration and expertise for the Faculty and for the University to draw on in all areas of EDI. For example, the Certificate in EDI that is being developed would draw on courses from across the Faculty and beyond.
Recommendation #4 - Invest in maintaining and enhancing collegial and supportive relationships among members of the department. • Invest more time in coupled social-academic activities such as brown bag lunches, reading groups, pedagogy discussion groups, and work in progress research talks.	**Program:** The department is planning to hold weekly gatherings beginning Fall 2025 with the purpose of bringing department members, including grad students, together. The gatherings will be flexible, without specific agendas, to allow faculty to attend when they are able, but also to alleviate the pressure of any one member having to plan or organize. The hope is that these gatherings will enable the program to gather informally and build community. **Faculty:** The Dean's Office applauds the Department's efforts and will support the excellent measures being taken. The Faculty strives to maintain such relationships across all departments, for instance through lunches with the Dean and other opportunities to gather and will continue to do so.
Recommendation #5 - Develop clear lines of communication, responsibility, and accountability among the Provost's Office, Deans' Offices, and GSWS.	**Program:** • The incoming Chair will work with the administrative staff in GSWS to develop a workflow and communication chart in the spirit of making workloads more equitable and to establish clear lines of communication within the department. • The Chair will meet with the Deans' offices to discuss any changes that have been implemented. **Faculty:** The Dean meets regularly in one-on-one meetings with Chairs, as well as in bi-weekly Chairs' meetings, to work together on Faculty strategy and to convey crucial information. The Dean's Office is committed to continue working closely with Departments on curricular and budget-related matters, the goal always being the success of Departments and of the Faculty.

Implementation Plan

The Implementation Plan provides a summary of the recommendations that require action and/or follow-up. In each case, the Program Chair, and the Deans of the associated Faculties are responsible for enacting and monitoring the actions noted in Implementation Plan.

Recommendation	Proposed Action and Follow-up	Responsibility	Timeline
Recommendation #1 Strategic Curricular Review which includes optimization of assessments and TA deployment	• Revise the Gender and Women's Studies modules and the Sexuality modules to promote greater efficiencies across the department. • Continue contributing to the planned Certificate of EDI being organized by the Faculty of Arts and Humanities. • Promote and advertise GSWS 2274F/G: *Introduction to Transgender Studies* to students in Arts and Humanities and Social Science. • Discuss writing assignments and how to make better use of them across the curriculum at upcoming faculty retreats. Task the Undergraduate Committee with actioning this work. • Develop a plan (to be presented to faculty) regarding more effective use of TAs across courses. This may require changes to undergraduate courses through eliminating or reducing the numbers of tutorials offered at the first year. • Develop policies and practices on AI to be approved by the department.	• Undergraduate Chair • Dean's Office	By April 2026
Recommendation #2 Systematic Promotion of Program and Courses	• Develop a comprehensive promotion plan in collaboration with all department officers, Undergraduate Assistant, and the Gender Studies Student Collective. • Engage with the Gender Studies Student Collective to understand their event promotion strategies. • Collaborate with the Arts and Humanities Communications Officer to update the department website.	• Undergraduate Chair • Department Chair	By January 2026

	• Work with the Experiential Learning Coordinator in Arts and Humanities to explore the creation of a Social Media Coordinator internship.		
Recommendation #3 Leverage EDIDA Expertise	• Continue internal discussions on leveraging the department's EDIDA (Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Decolonization, and Accessibility) expertise. • Actively contribute to the development of the planned Certificate in EDI. • Discuss further strategies for leveraging EDIDA expertise during upcoming departmental retreat.	• Undergraduate Chair • Department Chair • Dean's Office, Social Science • Dean's Office, Arts and Humanities	By September 2026
Recommendation #4 Invest in maintaining and enhancing collegial and supportive relationships among members of the department.	• Host a department-wide retreat at the end of August 2025 where this topic will be discussed. • Initiate informal weekly gatherings for all department members, including graduate students.	• Undergraduate Chair • Department Chair	By September 2025
Recommendation #5 Develop clear lines of communication, responsibility, and accountability among the Provost's Office, Deans' Offices, and GSWS.	• Create a workflow and departmental communication chart. • Meet with Deans' offices to discuss implemented changes.	• Undergraduate Chair • Graduate Chair • Dean's Office, Social Science • Dean's Office, Arts and Humanities	By January 2026