Assessment Plan for Women and Gender Studies Minor: Pilot 2013-14

Program Mission Statement:

The Women and Gender Studies Program is committed to continuing its history of serving the University of North Dakota, its faculty and students, and the community through teaching, research, and service across disciplines by

1. Developing and providing opportunities for learning at all levels including coherent undergraduate and graduate curricula;

2. Fostering multi- and interdisciplinary collaboration and research utilizing the skills and work of a wide web of associates; and

3. Sharing and integrating academic work by offering, coordinating, and supporting public programming.

This mission relies on models and advocates a pluralism of interests, perspectives, theories, and approaches that cross traditional academic structures to enable creative synergy on and off campus. The Program emphasizes feminist analysis of all aspects of gender, foregrounding intersections with sex, sexuality, race, class, religion, ethnicity, age, ability, and nationality. The Program provides a collaborative hub that furthers the mission of the University of North Dakota. Women and Gender Studies at the University of North Dakota takes a leadership role within the NDUS system and the state by advancing challenging academic inquiry, critical insight, social justice, global awareness, civic engagement, and self-empowerment.

Learning Objectives:

The following three Learning Objectives were designed to assess how well the minor prepares students to recognize and utilize approaches, scholarship, and learning modes typical of the academic field designated by “Gender Studies,” “Women’s Studies,” and “Feminist Theory.”

Learning Objective 1: Self-Reflexiveness Does the student’s written work show that the student can critically reflect on personal experiences, subject positions, and views?

Evidence of such critical reflection might include

- Articulating and evaluating positions on social and political issues
- Analyzing the implications of personal experience and identity
- Participating in discussion and critique employing various perspectives and genres
- Openness to other viewpoints and reconsideration of own position
- Applying analytic strategies and theoretical concepts and frameworks to situations beyond the classroom

**Learning Objective 2: Analyzing Gender**

Does the student’s written work show that the student consistently and meaningfully incorporates gender, sex, and sexuality as analytic lenses?

Evidence of such incorporation might include

- Examining the significance but also instability of common categories such as “women” or “men”
- Distinguishing between “gender,” “sex,” and “sexuality” and interrogating their relationships
- Analyzing intersections between markers of identity and difference (e.g., sexuality, race, religion, class, ability)
- Moving between a variety of intellectual perspectives (e.g., disciplinary, historical, cultural, political) to generate insight into gender, sex, and sexuality
- Showing multicultural or global awareness and making critical connections and comparisons

**Learning Objective 3: Contextualizing Power**

Does the student’s written work show that the student can understand and evaluate the complex forces that construct the world?

Evidence of such evaluation might include

- Investigating social structures, discourses, and ideologies with special attention to systems of oppression (e.g., sexism, ethnocentrism, homophobia, classism, racism)
- Identifying opportunities for resistance or reimaginings that promote diversity and equality
- Examining distribution, conditions, and effects of agency and power
- Drawing on relevant historical and sociocultural contexts
- Utilizing major analytic frameworks such as materialism or cultural studies

**Program Structure:**

Women and Gender Studies is an interdisciplinary program primarily affiliated with the College of Arts and Sciences with no tenure-track lines devoted to the program. The Director and course instructors vary. A Curriculum Committee was established in 2011 and charged with assessment. Membership on this committee may rotate but currently includes Yvette Koepke, Melissa Gjellstad, and Michelle Sauer.
Students who complete a minor take three core WGS courses in addition to a variety of courses with relevant subject matter in many fields. Assessment will focus on the required core courses with a “WGS” prefix, beginning with either or both WGS 225 (Introduction to the Study of Women) and WGS 220 (Introduction to Gender Studies) and culminating in WGS 480 (Feminist Theory).

Although it is possible to complete a WGS major, that process is overseen by the Interdisciplinary Studies program and will not be specifically addressed in this assessment plan (though such students will participate in our assessment through their WGS courses).

**Assessment Plan:**

Women and Gender Studies has never had a formal assessment plan and has undergone a wholesale program revision over the past few years. This plan, developed by the current Curriculum Committee, is therefore a pilot for three reasons:

1. It will be open to discussion by the general membership during 2013-14.
2. The program only has a small pool of data at this time.
3. It will be subject to a trial implementation during 2013-14.

Given the small program size, the plan will be implemented annually in order to gather more comprehensive data. A program Blackboard site will be used to collect and store assessment materials.

**All WGS Classes:**

- **USAT Forms:** These forms offer indirect assessment of student perceptions around their learning.

- **Reflective Writing:** In each of the three WGS courses, students will do a graded writing near the end of the semester evaluating their own learning around the three objectives. Students will write one paragraph describing their learning in each area using specific examples from their experiences related to the course.

  Beyond providing an opportunity to directly assess student outcomes, this writing will accomplish two other important goals: students will know the program goals from the start, and we will be able to measure student growth from the beginning to the end of the program, including learning around Essential Studies goals.

- **Instructor Worksheet:** At the end of each WGS course, after completing student evaluation, each instructor will complete a Learning Objectives worksheet assessing student learning in each of the three areas and offering feedback. This worksheet will also afford an opportunity to compare instructor assessment of student learning with the assessment of an outside committee (described below).
Introductory WGS Classes:

Either WGS 225 (Introduction to the Study of Women) or WGS 220 (Introduction to Gender Studies) is required and usually serves as the beginning of the minor. They are taught by varying instructors who are chosen and supervised by the Director, who reviews textbooks and syllabi, does in-classroom teaching observations, and provides support and performance feedback.

Both introductory classes are also assessed regularly by the Curriculum Committee as part of their Essential Studies status. WGS 225 currently serves as an Essential Studies “Diversity” course with a “Global” special emphasis. We plan to validate WGS 220 as an Essential Studies “Diversity” course with a “United States” special emphasis, which is how the course has been designed and taught. To this end, the Curriculum Committee has designed a standard rubric to evaluate diversity learning in a common assignment:

- **Common Assignment:** In each section of WGS 220 or 225, students will do at least one out-of-class, graded, multi-page writing assignment toward the end of semester engaging in critical analysis of diversity as defined by the program-specific rubric. In order to maintain flexibility across a range of instructors, instructors will choose from a menu of specific types of assignments including an analysis of a global gender issue, a critical response to a class reading, or an analysis of a cultural text. Instructors will select at least one assignment meeting the criteria and provide the original assignment and student product for all students in a class to the program Blackboard site. The Curriculum Committee will then be able to sample the pool and evaluate diversity learning across sections using the rubric.

“Capstone” Experience:

Though WGS 480 has been taught by the Director over the past few years, it has been and can be taught by different professors and in various ways (e.g., topics, disciplines, approaches). We intend to validate Feminist Theory as an Essential Studies Capstone. The course currently functions as a capstone for the program in that it is required of all minors and is taken toward the end of students’ degrees and therefore is the focus of our assessment of student learning over the course of the minor.

- **Final Projects/Exams:** For each section of WGS 480, final projects and exams (if utilized) will be assessed directly by the Curriculum Committee using the Learning Objectives worksheet, which assigns a value of 1-5 to the degree to which the student work demonstrates each of the three learning outcomes. Since WGS 480 is a small class, each piece of student product can be evaluated. Committee members’ assessments will be compared and analyzed for trends and significance.