

**University of Nebraska at Kearney  
Women's, Gender, and Ethnic Studies Academic Program Review  
Report by Academic Program Review (APR) Team**

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**Women's, Gender, and Ethnic Studies Program**

Department/School: College of Arts and Sciences (CAS)

Programs and affiliated units: Women's, Gender, and Ethnic Studies Program

Dates of site visit: March 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020

**Team Members:**

Lindsey Churchill, APR Chair (Associate Professor of History and Director of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, University of Central Oklahoma)

Carol Lilly, (Professor of History; CAS Ed Policy Committee Member; Former WS Director; Served Previously on APR 2004 and 2010).

Sandra Loughrin (Associate Professor of Sociology; Member of WGES Advisory Council)

Erin (Ellie) Lindner (Graduate Assistant for WGES; UNK WGES Alumna)

Tran Doan (Undergraduate Student. WGS Minor)

**I. Abstract**

The Women's, Gender, and Ethnic Studies Program at University of Nebraska Kearney is a rigorous yet accessible and welcoming academic program that adds outstanding value to campus. The program serves students, staff, faculty, and the larger community. The program is truly interdisciplinary and collaborates with the division of Academic Affairs as well as Student Affairs. There is a devoted core of faculty and students who help the program thrive and contribute to the institution. The conference the WGES program sponsors, the *No Limits* conference, attracts undergraduate students from throughout the region to present their research. Despite budgetary constraints as well as other constraints, the Director of WGES has helped sustain an innovative and productive program. Most limitations of the program can be resolved without an additional budget and others only require a modest budget increase. Creating a Major WGES program is a natural progression and expansion for this already thriving program.

**II. Evaluation of Self Study Document**

Based on interviews from a range of stakeholders at UNK including the Office of Research, Sponsored Programs, and Research Development, various Colleges Deans, including extensive discussions with the CAS Dean, WGES Advisory Council, WGES affiliated faculty, representatives from ODI and the Women's Center, WGES students, Assessment Director, and WGES Director, the self-study document accurately and thoroughly represents

all aspects of the program. The WGES program should be lauded for creating a program that is academically rigorous yet accessible. The faculty and students consistently expressed excitement and support for the program. One way the program supports student research and community building is through the *No Limits* conference. Affiliated faculty as well as the advisory board mentioned their strong support and excitement for being a part of WGES. Other divisions and programs on campus expressed their admiration for the institutional contributions of WGES and the desire to collaborate even more extensively with the program.

The self-study report from 2020 addresses the APR from 2010 (WGS) and 2012 (ETHS). Five of the recommendations were addressed. Other recommendations not fully addressed include: 1) Creating a new major in Women's, Gender, and Ethnic Studies. While the major proposal received Board of Regents approval it still needs support from the CCPE 2) Expanding and cross listing courses. 3) Developing more online course options. 4) Increasing campus commitment and appreciation of Ethnic Studies. 5) Adjunct budget and office associate support and more secure director compensation.

### III. Evaluation of WGES Mission Statement

*Women's, Gender, and Ethnic Studies:*

- interdisciplinary study of the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality within the context of class
- explores the interlocking nature of systems of oppression and privilege
- empowers students to redefine difference
- prepares them to work successfully in a globally diverse and rapidly changing job market

### IV. Evaluation of WGES Resources

#### **Qualifications of Faculty**

The WGES Program has been fortunate to have Dr. Linda Van Ingen as its director for over a decade. Dr Van Ingen is a highly qualified scholar of gender studies in the Department of History. She has stellar teaching evaluations and is an exemplary administrator. Under her guidance, the program has successfully kept up with ever-changing theoretical frameworks, merging with Ethnic studies to create a unique program that fully encompasses the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. Dr. Van Ingen has been aided in her work by a committed group of Faculty and Staff from such diverse Departments and Offices as Marketing and MIS, Modern Languages, Psychology, the Archives, and the Office of Diversity and Inclusion. In addition, over 40 faculty from across campus teach 35 courses in the WGES Program. Almost 75% of those faculty are tenured at the Associate or Full Professor level. The Program has also benefitted enormously from the assistance of Ms. Amber Lewis, a local high school principle with a background in History and Women's Studies, and Graduate Assistant, Erin (Ellie) Linder.

### **Quality of Students**

Due to the interdisciplinary nature of the program, assessment is based on student alumni surveys rather than course learning objectives or projects. The WGES Advisory Council is currently strategizing the most effective way to assess student learning. One possibility for assessment would be a student portfolio to be completed as part of a minor degree. However, if the WGES major were to be approved, a research course would be implemented as part of a major degree requirement. This would allow the council to arrange student learning objectives and course requirements for assessment.\

The annual *No Limits* conference has provided a platform to showcase the diverse work of current WGES minors. Eleven students presented at the *No Limits* Conference at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln in 2019, eight students presented at the University of Nebraska, Omaha in 2018, and thirteen students presented at the University of Nebraska, Kearney in 2017. This shows the research capabilities of UNK undergraduates and the potential for student research projects in the areas of race, gender, sexuality, and intersectionality. The *No Limits* conference is only one of many current opportunities that WGES students have used to disseminate their research. In the past students have presented at regional conferences in their major fields of study, UNK Research Day, and published their works in the UNK *Undergraduate Research Journal*.

### **Facilities**

The WGES Program shares an office in the Calvin T. Ryan Library with the International Studies Program. It is a large and lovely space and the Program is grateful to the Library for providing it to them. However, it was never intended to be permanent. Moreover, it is in the very back of the second floor and is not easy for students to find. It is a good quiet place for a faculty member to escape and study—but not a good location to enhance the visibility of a small program seeking growth. Ideally, WGES would be in close proximity to those Offices with whom it shares inherent interests, such as the Women’s Center or the Office of Diversity and Inclusion.

Additionally, because the WGES does not have a stable space, Director Linda Van Ingen holds council meetings within her home department, the Department of History. The future director will not have access to a conference room of this size and will need adequate space to hold WGES council meetings.

### **Staff Assistant**

Over the past decade, WGES and other Interdisciplinary Programs were provided access only to the Administrative Assistant of the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs. Not surprisingly, that Administrative Assistant while extremely competent, was also extremely overburdened. Just in the last three months, that Administrative Assistant (with the WGES budget) has moved to a new position working for the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences where she is perhaps only a bit less overburdened. Under current budgetary constraints, it seems unlikely that WGES will get a staff assistant, but it seems appropriate to note that this situation is not entirely adequate for the program.

*Funding for Adjunct Instructor: Inadequate*

Since 2012, funding for Ms. Lewis who has served as an adjunct instructor for WGES, teaching its Introductory course each semester, was funded by the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs, through an agreement with his Assistant Dr. Kenya Taylor. When Dr. Taylor retired in August 2019, that agreement was not renegotiated and funding for the course was then simply taken out of the WGES budget for operating expenses, although in theory such budgets cannot be used for personnel. WSTD 220 is not only essential for the WGES minors but has been a highly successful course within UNK's General Studies program, averaging approximately 20 students per semester. A resolution to this situation must be found immediately in order to ensure the continued success of the program.

**Office** [See Facilities]

**Operating Budget**

If Ms. Lewis' teaching costs are removed from it, the annual Operating Expenses Budget of \$6,900 is sufficient to cover all other expenses, and to provide funding for the annual *No Limits* Conference. However, it is critical to ensure that the Program Director's summer stipend also continues. Several times in the past decade, it has been under threat of removal. The Program cannot survive without the dedicated efforts of a Director whose work and achievements are valued by the administration.

V. Evaluation of WGES Effectiveness

**Student Academic Achievement**

Due to the interdisciplinary nature of the program, assessment is based on student alumni surveys rather than course learning objectives or projects. The WGES Advisory Council is currently strategizing the most effective way to assess student learning. One possibility for assessment would be a student portfolio to be completed as part of a minor degree. However, if the WGES major were to be approved, a research course would be implemented as part of a major degree requirement. This would allow the council to arrange student learning objectives and course requirements for assessment.

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Additionally, as was reported in 2010, students who minor in WGES tend to be unusually focused and high-achieving students who are eager to participate in co-curricular programs and engage in student research. Students continue to use their training and skills developed within the WGES minor in their post-graduate careers, including pursuing advanced degrees, acquiring teaching positions, government positions, and working in non-profit organizations.

### **Teaching Effectiveness**

Although there is no dedicated faculty line for the WGES Program, WSTD and ETHS core courses have been taught by adjunct Amber Lewis and Director Linda Van Ingen. These courses have always been successful as they serve as the gateway to becoming a WGES minor. In the past five years alone, the number of WGS minors rose from 16 in Fall 2015 to 28 in Fall 2018 and the number of ETHS minors rose from three in Fall 2015 to eight in 2019.

As stated in the 2010 report, the WGES program attracts motivated, high-achieving faculty who are dedicated to teaching effectiveness, student engagement, and student mentoring. The WGES Program consists of 40 faculty members who teach approximately 35 courses for the minor. All course syllabi are submitted and approved by the WGES Council, to ensure that students are receiving a valuable interdisciplinary education through assignments and course work.

### **Use of Information Technology**

WGES faculty are using information technology resources appropriately and effectively. Over the past ten years, UNK has implemented measures to extend pedagogy to online teaching and learning. The summer WSTD core course is taught entirely online and is equally as effective in recruiting WGES majors as the in-class course offered in the Spring/Fall. Affiliated faculty members teaching courses fully online are required to go through a semester-long eCampus training workshop to learn the necessary skills to be as effective online as in the classroom. The recent implementation of the Canvas platform, from Blackboard, has also allowed faculty to expand course designs, while social based platforms like Zoom, Voicethread, and Vidgrid have allowed faculty to offer synchronous courses with online discussions, asynchronous courses with pre-recorded lectures, or hybrid courses.

### **Curriculum Quality**

The WGES Program offers a robust degree in Women's and Gender Studies (WGS) and Ethnic Studies (ETHS); each with an 18-credit hour requirement. The core WGS course satisfies the criteria suggested by the National Women's Studies Association. All other WGS and ETHS courses are reviewed by the WGES Advisory Council and subject to a vote before they are accepted as course electives fulfilling the WGES minor. As suggested in the 2010 report, ideally WGES courses will be cross-listed in the UNK Course Catalogue/Schedule of Classes, allowing students easy access to course information and scheduling.

### **Faculty Research, Service, and Development**

The Director of the WGES program won the 2019 Pratt-Heins Excellence Award for service, showing clear faculty dedication to the WGES Program and student interest. Affiliated faculty members have won prestigious awards, including the Leland Holt Distinguished Faculty Award (Susan Honeyman, 2019), the Pratt-Heins Award for Excellence in Teaching (Marguerite Tassi, 2009; Susan Honeyman 2013), and the Pratt-Heins Award for Excellence in Service (Carol Lilly 2014; Linda Van Ingen 2019).

The program also has a highly active Advisory Council, who meet on a monthly basis to discuss program issues and ways that WGES can better serve students, the UNK community, and the Kearney community. In the past year, the WGES program has been involved with the *No Limits Conference* (Spring 2019), the *LBTQ Research and Community Symposium* (Spring 2019), and the *Pearl of a Program: 30 Years of Women's Studies* (Fall 2019) conferences, all promoting WGES, UNK campus involvement, and community involvement.

In general, as stated in the 2010 report, UNK WGES faculty are among the most productive and motivated on campus. The interdisciplinary nature of the program itself leads to a diverse group of faculty members with varying interest in the area of women's studies, gender studies, sexuality studies, and intersectional studies. These varying programs and areas of expertise allow for a comprehensive liberal arts education.

### **Assessment**

The assessment process for WGS and ETHS was suspended in 2017 with the removal of the senior research project and the shift of the WGES from 24 to 18 credit hours. The WGES Advisory Council is currently strategizing the most effective way to assess student learning. One possibility for assessment would be a student portfolio to be completed as part of a minor degree. However, if the WGES major were to be approved, a research course would be implemented as part of a major degree requirement. This would allow the council to arrange student learning objectives and course requirements for assessment.

## **VI. Recommendations for the Future**

These recommendations are presented in three parts 1) Resources and Space 2) Strengthening University and Community Connections 3) Sustaining and Expanding Academic Programming

### **1) Resources and Space**

- a. Because WGES is an interdisciplinary program (one of its strengths), there are no dedicated fulltime tenure track faculty who solely teach WGES courses. Revenue and resources are needed to sustain this program.
- b. At minimum, an adjunct to teach the introductory courses is needed to sustain the program.
- c. WGES needs a space that is accessible to students in order to support its program and mission. CAS Dean Ryan Teten indicated he was supportive of finding space

for the WGES program. Space will help recruit and retain students to the program.

- d. As requested in the 2010 report, for the Director to be most effective, an academic support staff person is needed to facilitate with routine administrative matters. The support staff need not be a full-time position or may be an admin shared with a similar program (such as the International Studies Program) or smaller academic department. This is increasingly necessary with the recent increase in minors, as well as the possibility of additional responsibilities if the WGES major is approved.
- e. Additional support is desperately needed in a permanent adjunct position and routine funding for the core courses in Women's Studies and Ethnic Studies. This is particularly important given that the future WGES Director is from a small department and will not be able to teach these courses herself, as had previously been the case.

## **2) Strengthening University and Community Connections**

- a. UNK is unique in the way that Academic Affairs and Student Affairs collaborate and support one another. The WGES should create more formal collaborations with both the Office of Diversity and Inclusion as well as the Women's Center on campus. This would also enable faculty to support students who are searching for internships and community connections.
- b. Collaborate with Living Learning Communities on campus, particularly the gender-neutral housing community.
- c. Work with the Office of Research, Sponsored Programs, and Research Development as they indicated there was money available "for building interdisciplinary coalitions" and developing curriculum. The ORSPRD also indicated they would support monthly research forums for faculty and students.
- d. Reach out and connect with local businesses in order to develop career opportunities and connections for students as well as to create fundraising opportunities.

## **3) Sustaining and Expanding Academic Programming**

- a. Create a unique prefix for WGES in order to cross list courses. Students expressed confusion about their ability to find WGES courses in the catalog. This would help with enrollment and likely expand the program as courses would be more accessible to students. The 2010 APR expressed the importance of cross listing courses and issues with information barriers.
- b. Faculty in the WGES Advisory council and others throughout the site visit stressed the need to develop course offerings within the field of Ethnic Studies as well as to support more diversity in hiring.
- c. Since UNK will likely become a Hispanic Serving Institution, the development of Latinx Studies or courses regarding the Latinx population in WGES offers a significant opportunity for recruitment.
- d. *Most importantly, the Women's, Gender, and Ethnic Studies Program would be able to do even more for campus with the approval of the Major program.* WGES at UNK is a unique program that encourages the expanding field of

intersectionality and how to understand difference in our increasingly diverse and globalized world. Indeed, enrollment in Women's and Gender Major programs have increased over 300% in the last few decades. Approving the WGES Major at UNK is something that both students and faculty empathically support and will require little to no new resources since it is an interdisciplinary program.