Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (WGSS) Program
Criteria for Evaluating WGSS Courses and Courses Cross-listed with WGSS

Approved May 24, 2021

Procedures:

1. Interested faculty members are encouraged to discuss an idea for a course with the WGSS Steering Committee. To gain approval of a course, the proposer should:

    - Submit a course outline.
    - Be prepared to meet with the WGSS Steering Committee to discuss pedagogy, potential reading assignments, and likely methods for evaluating students.

2. In order to ensure that WGSS courses and cross-listed WGSS courses continue to conform to WGSS standards and to changes/development in the discipline, a WGSS course or a course that is cross-listed with WGSS shall be reviewed by the WGSS Steering Committee every three years. The person should be prepared to meet with the WGSS Steering Committee and submit a syllabus, and a sample assignment.

3. Major changes in approved courses should be brought to the WGSS Steering Committee before being taken to the A&S Curriculum Committee.

    Major Course Revisions as Listed in CIM:
    • changing a course to a higher or lower level (i.e., change of instructional level, including adding/deleting the graduate level)
    • changing Liberal Education (LE) Core or GE course prerequisites or enrollment restrictions (e.g., major/minor, GPA)
    • adding, deleting, or reallocating more than 25% of instructional subject matter (i.e., change of topical outline/timetable for course content)
    • changing credit hours
    • adding or changing one or more course designations (e.g., LE Core Outcomes/Requirements)
    • changing from a fully face to face to an online or a hybrid course offering (applies when more than 25% of the instruction is delivered online)

4. New instructors of an existing WGSS course or a course cross-listed with WGSS should meet with the Steering Committee.

Step #1: Focus of the Course

The proposed course may cover but is not limited to the following topics:

- Colonialism/postcolonialism
- Cultural differences
- Economic development
- Diaspora

- Dis/Ability--physical or mental
- Environmental justice
- Ethnicity
- Feminist body politics
- Gender identity and expression
- Gender representation and aesthetics
- Globalization
- Nationalism(s)
- Race
- Sexuality
- Social class
- Social justice movements
- Structures/processes/histories of identity formation
- Whiteness and white supremacy

Step #2: Framework/Approach

If your course covers one or more of the topics above, think about Step #2: Does the course use a framework that emphasizes at least two of the following frameworks? Instructors are strongly encouraged to incorporate all frameworks but courses that use at least two frameworks will be considered.

I. Intersectional Feminism

Law professor, social theorist, and Black feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term "intersectionality" to explain African American women's oppression experiences. She explains that "intersectionality is an analytic sensibility, a way of thinking about identity and its relationship to power. Originally articulated on behalf of black women, the term brought to light the invisibility of many constituents within groups that claim them as members but often fail to represent them. Intersectional erasures are not exclusive to black women. People of color within LGBTQ movements; girls of color in the fight against the school-to-prison pipeline; women within immigration movements; trans women within feminist movements; and people with disabilities fighting police abuse — all face vulnerabilities that reflect the intersections of racism, sexism, class oppression, transphobia, able-ism and more. Intersectionality has given many advocates a way to frame their circumstances and to fight for their visibility and inclusion." (Crenshaw, 2015)

Intersectionality is not an "additive" model; that is, these identity markers (e.g., "woman" and "Black") do not exist independently of each other. For example, women of color are at the intersection of multiple systems of oppression that are interlocked and cannot be separated from each other. In other words, intersectionality is not about theorizing the diversity of identities but about their relationship to power.

In the WGSS program, we believe that it is critical to use intersectionality as an analytical framework to "understand how identities and power work together from one context to another" (Crenshaw, 2015). We use intersectional feminist approaches to center the voices and realities of those experiencing overlapping and concurrent forms of oppression in historical and

contemporary contexts. Using an intersectional feminist lens means that we recognize the historical contexts surrounding critical social issues such as racism and sexism, class discrimination, homophobia, and transphobia, among others, and how their impact extends across generations and geographical boundaries.

References

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II. Social Justice

A social justice framework analyzes how power, privilege, and oppression impact our experiences of our social identities (Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Office at BU). Social justice refers to the belief in the "full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable" and all members of a space, community, or institution, or society are "physically and psychologically safe and secure" (Adams qtd. by DEI Office, BU). Many argue, however, that the meaning of social justice should not be limited to distribution issues, and that social justice policies must address "the structures, processes, and institutional contexts" that create these inequities in the first place (Martinez and Cooper, 2020). Ideally, social justice research will be engaged and in dialogue with the communities most impacted by

the social justice issues it addresses, speaking to and with them, rather than about them (Collins, 2012).

A social justice framework is important in the WGSS Program because WGSS is an interdisciplinary field of study that draws from the humanities, social sciences, arts, and natural sciences to examine the lived experiences of marginalized groups as these are impacted by systems of power. The WGSS Program is a site of activism for social change, making social justice a core value of the Program. The WGSS Program advocates for racial, gender and other forms of equity in society while, at the same time, challenging and working to dismantle all forms of oppression.

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Martinez, M. & Cooper, D. (2020). Words Matter. In Adrianna Kezar and Julie Posselt (Eds.), *Higher Education Administration for Social Justice and Equity: Critical Perspectives for Leadership.* Routledge.

III. Decolonial Thinking

Decoloniality or decolonialism focuses on untangling the production of knowledge primarily rooted in Eurocentric episteme. Decolonial thinking acknowledges the long-lasting hegemony of the West and Western imperialism. It critiques the perceived universality of Eurocentric knowledge production and the superiority of Western culture. Decolonial approaches, methods, and movements seek to consider differences in ideas, social practices, histories, identities, and beliefs as part of a myriad of means of "production of knowledge," which may diverge from a Eurocentric perspective. Decolonial thinking is not a means to reject the scientific, medical, social, and ethical "advances" of the modern era. Instead, it seeks to restore, rediscover, recognize, acknowledge, and validate the multiplicity of lived experiences, culture, and knowledge of indigenous people, people of color, and colonized people.

In the WGSS program, we encourage decolonial thinking to examine, challenge and remedy colonialism's distorted legacies. We acknowledge the gendered processes of colonization, settler-colonialism, and racial capitalism and how these historical events continue to racialize, erase and objectify marginalized and non-Western cultures and societies in the contemporary moment. We acknowledge that colonialism's effects and influence transcend historical boundaries – much of the language we speak, the narratives we retell, higher education, research and publishing, and the intellectual approaches we take are still under Western colonial influences. We seek to reclaim feminism as more than just a pursuit of the Western world and its

people, contest the construction of Western feminism as the referent point in feminist theory and praxis, and decenter gender hierarchies, racial privilege, and hetero and cisnormativity.

References

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IV. Transnational Feminism

Transnational feminist approaches to doing feminist pedagogy and research started in the 1980s as feminists in the Global South were critically engaged with addressing global feminism or concepts of international feminism rooted in a 'sisterhood-is-global model.' Transnational feminists viewed the notion of universal sisterhood as tending to ignore transnational inequalities, unequal power differentials, colonial relationships of power, and oppressive structures of global capitalism (Fernandes, 2013).

In *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses* (1984), transnational feminist theorist and Professor of WGSS Chandra Mohanty contests the construction of the West as the referent point in feminist theory and praxis and how white privilege plays a central role in white feminism. Mohanty, in particular, critiques Western feminist discourses and Western

feminist texts that produce, re-produce, and portray "Third World Women" as singular, monolithic subjects who are homogeneous in their goals and interests. In other words, Western feminisms appropriate and colonize the constitutive complexities that characterize the lives of women in the so-called Third World and developing countries while positing themselves as the authorial subjects and the yardstick by which to encode and represent cultural 'others.' Mohanty does not question the descriptive and informative value of Western feminist writings on women in the Global South; instead, she argues that Western feminist writings on women and gendered relationships must be understood in the context of the global hegemony of Western scholarship.

Transnational feminist theory and practice "has become one of the central paradigms in interdisciplinary women's and gender studies programs and curricula" (Fernandes, 11). It offers critical tools for understanding and analyzing the exercise of power in a globalizing world and new ways of looking at inequalities both locally and globally. Transnational feminist frameworks emphasize the interconnected systems of oppression such as colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, patriarchy, and globalization. These intersections create and reinforce unequal power relationships and social and economic inequities in a globalizing world.

This is a framework that:

1. Uses an intersectional lens
2. Decenters the West
3. Is anti-capitalist
4. Is anti-imperialist
5. Is anti-globalization
6. Is grounded in decolonizing methodology

Transnational Feminism is at the core of our interdisciplinary program. The WGSS Program considers social and historical contexts because meanings and explanations vary according to people's histories, realities, and lived experiences. WGSS believes that Transnational Feminism is a critical and analytical framework that illuminates the experiences of oppression of those living in the Global South and diaspora communities. Incorporating this framework into your course will widen and deepen students' understanding of all oppressed people's realities in both the Global South and the West and how these oppressions are linked locally and globally. For example, to understand the oppressions that people experience in the Philippines, it is essential to understand the historical relationships between the United States and the Philippines.

References

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V. Queer and Transgender Studies Frameworks

A queer theoretical approach to teaching and scholarship focuses on challenging normative assumptions about the world. Beginning in the 1960s, LGBT activists reclaimed "queer," transforming it from a pejorative term into one that resists oppressive practices and ideologies reinforced through compulsory heterosexuality. Moreover, reclaiming queer worked to distinguish them from gay and lesbian activists seeking assimilation within heteronormative society. Following the lead of queer activists, queer scholars developed queer theory in the 1980s to challenge the heteronormative foundations of academic knowledge production, and further disrupt ideas about what is considered "normal." This resulted in the establishment of Queer Studies as an academic discipline, which intersects with Lesbian and Gay Studies in that it values the lived experiences and practices of LGBTQ+ peoples as important sites of knowledge production and activist resistance. However, Queer Studies departs from Lesbian and Gay Studies in that it sees "lesbian" and "gay" identities as socially constructed and culturally contingent, thereby questioning the very foundations of Lesbian and Gay Studies.

A queer framework and approach to teaching is invested in challenging "normalcy" beyond gender and sexuality, and thus investigates taken-for-granted perspectives about identity, race, nation, and transnationalism. Queer theorists approach analyses of gender and sexuality through an intersectional framework, calling into question how structures such as neoliberalism, homonationalism, homonormativity, capitalism, whiteness, and globalization seek to assimilate and "normalize" marginalized people (i.e., queer people and people of color). Therefore, a queer framework challenges various ideas, practices, and structures normalized within everyday life.

Queer Studies connects with Transgender Studies in that it provides critical frameworks for analyzing how gender is socially constructed, performed, and regulated in ways that both marginalize and liberate LGBTQ+ peoples. However, Transgender Studies is distinct from Queer Studies in that it focuses on the experiential knowledge, histories, and practices of transgender people in particular. It is strongly informed by the social justice activism of transgender people of color in the 1960s who fought for their humanity, indeed their right to exist, in a society that violently excluded them. Since the 1990s, Transgender Studies has documented the histories and cultural contributions of transgender people. More recently, it has increased its focus on the negative impacts of state surveillance and the deepening of global economic and climate crises on transgender communities worldwide while highlighting how transgender activists and cultural producers address these problems. Transgender Studies is therefore "intimately connected to, and deeply motivated by, sociopolitical efforts to stem the tide of anti-transgender violence, and to save transgender lives" (Stryker, 2006). In other words, research in Transgender Studies is invested in advocating for and improving the quality of life for transgender people, and by extension everyone else.

Queer Studies and Transgender Studies frameworks and approaches to teaching are central to the WGSS Program. We recognize how heteronormative, homonormative, white, and cisgender perspectives have rendered invisible the realities of queer, trans, and gender non-conforming people, particularly those who are from communities of color. Teaching from a Queer and Transgender Studies lens shows students how gender and sexuality intersect with race, ethnicity, ability, and other vectors of difference to exclude the most marginalized people in society.

Significantly, teaching from a Queer and Transgender Studies lens enables students to imagine alternative ways of being in the world that are creative, resistant, and liberating.

References

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Step #3: Meeting with the WGSS Steering Committee

If you have any questions about the language in this document and whether or not your course meets these requirements, please make an appointment to discuss your course with members of the Steering Committee. Instructors should be prepared to submit a syllabus, course outline, readings, and assignments for review by members of the Steering Committee.

If you are submitting a new course, it is a requirement that the Steering Committee evaluate your course based on the above criteria.

NOTE
Existing WGSS courses and cross-listed courses will be reviewed every three years by the Steering Committee. Instructors should be prepared to submit a syllabus, course outline, readings, and assignments for review by members of the Steering Committee.