

TO: College of Arts and Sciences Curriculum Committee

FROM: Rose-Marie Avin, Director
Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program

DATE: February 7, 2022

RE: Departmental Status and Renaming Request

The Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program is making two requests: one to change its status from an academic program to an academic department and the second to rename the unit.

Proposal to Create the *Department of*
Race, Ethnicity, Gender, and Sexuality Studies
in the College of Arts and Sciences

Historical Evolution of the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program

The Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (WGSS) Program has undergone significant changes over the last forty years. The following gives a timeline of the numerous key changes.

- The Women's Studies Program was referenced in the catalog in 1981.
- A minor was implemented in fall 1984.
- A certificate was implemented in fall 2002.
- A standard major was implemented in fall 2006.
- An LGBTQ Studies Certificate was implemented in fall 2012.
- The Critical Hmong Studies (CHS) Certificate Program was relocated from the Department of Languages to the Women's Studies Program in fall 2017.
- The Women's Studies Program was renamed the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program in keeping with trends in the field that emphasize intersectionality as a core analytic (see further explanation of intersectional theory below). The major, minor and certificate programs were renamed to match this effective fall 2018.
- A Women of Color Feminisms Certificate is being proposed to be implemented in fall 2022, consistent with trends in the field that center the historical and contemporary contributions of women of color feminists who bring Critical Race Studies and Ethnic Studies lenses to the study of gender and sexuality.

Number of Students

The WGSS Program has also grown during the last five years in terms of the number of students (source: Office of Institutional Research).

Year	WGSS Majors	WGSS Minors	WGSS Certificates
2016-2017	24	30	16
2017-2018	26	23	39
2018-2019	27	36	80
2019-2020	20	36	101
2020-2021	17	28	87

Year	LGBTQ Certificates	CHS Certificates
2016-2017	-	1
2017-2018	11	3
2018-2019	13	4
2019-2020	10	7
2020-2021	10	20

Number of Faculty, Academic Staff, and Affiliates

- 2021-2022: Director: 50% + 2 tenure-line faculty in WGSS + 1 tenure line faculty in CHS who teaches in the WGSS Program, and one academic staff with a .50 appointment in fall 2021 and a .25 appointment in spring 2022.
- The WGSS Program has 20 Affiliates from 10 departments/programs (American Indian Studies, Communication and Journalism, English, Geography, History, Music and Theatre Arts, Philosophy and Religious Studies, Political Science, Psychology, Sociology) who consistently teach courses cross-listed with WGSS.
- In spring 2022, the CHS Certificate Program and the WGSS Program plan to request a tenure-line position in Asian American feminisms.

Rationale

In December 2018, Dr. Kristin Mapel Bloomberg, the external reviewer, strongly recommended that the WGSS Program be granted departmental status. She wrote in her External Reviewer Report: “The Program’s 2012 external reviewer recommended that it achieve department status. ... Program status currently impacts WGSS...Program status affects the perception of WGSS – it enhances lingering notions that WGSS is not “academic” enough, or that it is an ad hoc collection of “interest” courses. It is a mature academic field of inquiry that, properly resourced, can be a high-quality expression of the central objectives of the Academic Master Plan: commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusivity; high-impact learning; global education; and robust contribution to the Liberal Education Core” (page 27).

In 2018, the internal reviewers (Professors Wayne Carroll, Susan O'Brien, Anjela Wong) also acknowledged that the WGSS Program contributes significantly to the Liberal Education Core outcomes of the University and strongly supports the University Strategic Plan and the Academic Master Plan through its coursework. Equity, Diversity, and Inclusivity (EDI) is infused throughout the WGSS Program via course delivery and the research and service of its faculty. The internal reviewers write: "The WGSS program is the flagship program at UWEC actively pursuing this goal. Issues of EDI are the essential focus of all WGSS courses" (Internal Review Report, page 2). More specifically, the WGSS Program provides a large number of the LE-R1 (Responsibility—Equity, Diversity, and Inclusivity) courses offered at UWEC (see table on page nine). All of the twenty-three courses listed in the appendix have the R1 attribute and many meet the Design for Diversity Requirement. The WGSS Program also makes strong contributions in the areas of high impact practices through internships, domestic immersion, and study abroad programs.

The WGSS faculty believe that changing our status from a program to a department and renaming the unit *Race, Ethnicity, Gender, and Sexuality Studies* would more accurately reflect its many institutional contributions, which are outlined below. Although we are making two requests: a status change from program to department and a name change from *Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies* to *Race, Ethnicity, Gender, and Sexuality Studies*, we strongly believe that the two requests are intrinsically linked because both changes are needed to make the CHS Certificate Program and the WGSS Program more inclusive and visible. Furthermore, the evolution of WGSS as an interdisciplinary field strongly informed by Critical Race Studies and Ethnic Studies frameworks, combined with the core faculty's expertise and commitment to teaching, research, and service in these areas, further supports this change. Thus, changing the program status at the same time as the name change makes the most organizational and administrative sense and will assist with the alignment of priorities as we coordinate our strategic planning with that of the university.

As noted above, the name and status changes will make the unit more inclusive and the programs it includes more visible. It also will reflect the intersectional framework that is integrated throughout all our courses, will make the unit more stable, and will be a strong affirmation for students who identify with the new name of the program and for faculty who work in these areas of study.

First, all required core WGSS courses use feminist and queer frameworks rooted in critical race, transnational, decolonial, and indigenous feminist theories to examine the intersections of race and ethnicity with gender and sexuality. WGSS core faculty draw from the methods forwarded by feminist and queer of color scholars like Chandra Talpade Mohanty, José Esteban Muñoz, Kimberlé Crenshaw, María Lugones, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Nguyen Tan Hoang, and Gloria Anzaldúa to teach and research in this area. This body of scholarship is firmly rooted in WGSS and is different from scholarship on race using historical, sociological, or anthropological frameworks. The methods of these scholars and our faculty are uniquely attendant to the intersections between gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity within systems of power. In fact, such methods demonstrate that we cannot fully understand how gender and sexuality operate

within these systems if we do not also examine how they are co-constituted by and through paradigms of race and ethnicity. Importantly, their research reflects an investment in the pursuit and support of social justice efforts that center the histories and knowledge production of women of color, transnational, and QTPOC (queer and transgender people of color) feminists. This investment is similarly reflected in the teaching, research, and service of WGSS core faculty. The name change will thus more accurately reflect the work we as Critical Hmong Studies and WGSS scholars are *already doing* in this field.

Necessarily, the WGSS Program uses intersectionality as an analytical framework to “understand how identities and power work together from one context to another” ([Crenshaw, K. “Why Intersectionality Can’t Wait,” *The Washington Post*, September 24, 2015.](#)) First coined by Black Feminist and Critical Race Studies scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, intersectionality provides a necessary analytic for understanding how “race and gender interact” to shape the “structural, political, and representational aspects of violence on women of color” ([Crenshaw, K. “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color,” *Stanford Law Review*, 43\(6\), 1991.](#)) Research in WGSS utilizes intersectionality to understand how race and gender are impacted by sexual orientation and ethnicity, among other aspects of identity, within systems of power.

While intersectionality is a central analytic within the field of WGSS, this has not always been the case. Historically, the evolution of Women’s Studies to Women’s and Gender Studies, then Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, has emphasized the research and political concerns of U.S. based white feminist scholars. As the field developed, women of color, transnational, and QTPOC feminist scholars like those cited above found it necessary to intervene and reshape it into one that was more inclusive ([see, for example, Black lesbian feminist scholar Audre Lorde’s 1981 speech at the National Women’s Studies Association Conference](#)). Currently, WGSS is positioned as an interdisciplinary field grounded by intersectional, decolonial, transnational, queer, and transgender feminist theories that understand gender and sexuality as always being shaped by and through race and ethnicity ([see, for example, recent themes for NWSA Conferences](#)). However, this positioning, while increasingly reflected in WGSS curricula across the nation, is not universal. Changing the unit’s name to the *Department of Race, Ethnicity, Gender, and Sexuality Studies* would further highlight our commitment to women of color, transnational, and QTPOC feminist scholarship.

Second, it is important to recognize that the WGSS Program serves as an umbrella for the WGSS Major, Minor and Certificate, the Critical Hmong Studies Certificate Program, the LGBTQ Studies Certificate, and will offer the Women of Color Feminisms Certificate (assuming approval at all levels in spring 2022). Adopting the name of *Race, Ethnicity, Gender, and Sexuality Studies* as we transition to department status would, as previously mentioned, more accurately reflect the offerings of our unit. The new name is a better fit for all the courses, programs, and scholarly work that are currently offered in WGSS and that we will continue to offer under the new name. Hence, the *Department of Race, Ethnicity, Gender, and Sexuality Studies* will be an umbrella for all the programs that we currently offer.

Third, faculty, instructional academic staff, and affiliates use intersectional, transnational, decolonial feminist, critical race, queer and transgender approaches to center the voices and realities of those experiencing overlapping and concurrent forms of oppression in historical and contemporary contexts. The WGSS Program has developed five criteria for recommended frameworks to be incorporated in all WGSS courses and courses cross-listed with WGSS. The criteria are: Intersectional Feminism; Social Justice; Decolonial Thinking; Transnational Feminism; and Queer and Transgender Studies (see “Criteria for Evaluating WGSS Courses and Courses Cross-listed with WGSS”). Critical Race Studies and Ethnic Studies constitute vital aspects of each of these WGSS frameworks. We are currently working with affiliates to assure that multiple criteria are incorporated in the course content. Thus, core faculty of WGSS believe it is time to explicitly highlight race and ethnicity in the department’s name.

Dr. Kong Pheng Pha was hired to develop the Critical Hmong Studies (CHS) Certificate Program in 2017. Since that time, Dr. Pha has grown the CHS Certificate tremendously, developed new courses, proposed immersion trips that are in the pipeline, received national grants, expanded the CHS Resource Center, and established partner organizations in the community to provide students with service-learning and volunteer opportunities. Thus, the CHS Certificate Program is a full-fledged program that has in turn strengthened the vitality of the WGSS.

Furthermore, the CHS Program grew out of the longer history of the discipline of Ethnic Studies, which was born out of student activism to fight back against racist curriculum found in traditional disciplines. Ethnic Studies utilizes intersectionality to think about how the histories, theories, and experiences of ethnic groups and communities of color have been historically excluded from mainstream and dominant curriculums. Thus, “Ethnic Studies” or “Ethnicity Studies” not only studies ethnic groups and ethnicity in the U.S., but it also fundamentally and explicitly utilizes anti-racist, intersectional, and social justice frameworks and uses the direct lived experiences of ethnic groups in order to reframe what we consider knowledge in the university. As an ethnic minority and stateless refugee group in the U.S. for example, the specific ethnicity of Hmong Americans expands our conversation about the state of race and racism in the U.S. Thus, adding “ethnicity” to the department name will highlight Hmong Americans and the specific ways Ethnic Studies as a discipline is also infused throughout our curriculum.

Dr. Rae Langes was hired in fall 2020 to teach courses for the LGBTQ Studies Certificate. Since then, Dr. Langes has developed two new innovative courses that highlight intersectional feminist, queer of color critique, and critical race approaches to the study of LGBTQ+ topics. Transgender Activism and Cultural Production teaches students how transgender activism, by addressing various social justice issues (e.g., misogynoir, immigrant rights), enriches and complicates transgender cultural production in the entertainment industry, performing arts, sports, and social media, among other spheres. Black Feminist and Black Queer Studies teaches students about the critical theories, social justice activism, public intellectualism, and cultural productions of Black women and Black LGBTQ+ people in the United States. Thus, this course draws from Black feminist theories to highlight intersectional Black experiences. In all of Dr. Langes’ courses, students learn how race and ethnicity inform the social construction of gender and sexuality, their relationships to power, and the intersectionality of LGBTQ experiences.

Finally, the WGSS Program has developed a Women of Color (WOC) Feminisms Certificate, which is to be implemented in fall 2022. The WOC Feminisms Certificate is interdisciplinary and offers students an introduction to contemporary thought, criticism, and writings by women of color feminist scholars and activists. Furthermore, it highlights the role of race and ethnicity in the formation of gender and sexuality in the experiences of women of color. This new addition to the existing academic plans in the WGSS Program reinforces that WGSS is a unit that centralizes equity, diversity, and inclusivity (EDI) in its curriculum, research, programming, and outreach initiatives. Thus, the teaching, research/publishing, community outreach, and scholarly and activist programming outputs are comparable to other departments on campus. The departmentalization and name change will truly reflect the central themes of the unit: refugee and immigrant communities and communities of color, race/racism/anti-racism, queer and trans studies, intersectionality and transnationalism, and racial and gender justice.

Fourth, WGSS becoming a department will ensure long-term stability and future student recruitment possibilities. The status change would increase the profile of WGSS at UWEC and in the University of Wisconsin (UW) System, which would make it easier to recruit students. As a UW System-leader in academic certificates (LGBTQ Studies and WOC Feminisms) and course topics that respond to changing student demographics and interests, department status would confer the stability needed to continue developing and growing with our students. Historically, every three years, the program is under threat of losing its ability to offer the major and minor programs. This signifies that the WGSS Director and faculty spend an enormous amount of time recruiting students for the program. This uncertainty concerning the status of the WGSS Program is one of the factors that has made it challenging to recruit students and retain tenure-line faculty.

Without departmental status, WGSS remains vulnerable to budget cuts. Members of the UW System Women's and Gender Studies Consortium addressed this issue in an article entitled [“Covid-19, Disaster Capitalism, and the Crisis in Women and Gender Studies.”](#) They wrote: “the students who are most likely to depend on these academic programs—women, queer and trans individuals, students of color and those with disabilities—stand to lose out. All of these issues are exacerbated when we shift the lens to first generation students, scholars of color and those living in rural communities.”

Fifth, UWEC student demographics trend increasingly more diverse (see [“UWEC Factbook Enrollment Profile](#)). This is in keeping with national trends which predict increased student of color representation, particularly with an increase in first and second-generation immigrant families (see the *New York Times* Article, [“Children from Immigrant Families are Increasingly the Face of Higher Education” by Miriam Jordan, 2020](#)). Courses in WGSS and CHS include the voices of scholars of color and the faculty are also more diverse than in many other departments or programs. This diversity both in course content and faculty has been proven to benefit the successful retention of BOTH students of color AND faculty of color. (see [““Someone Who Looks Like Me”: Promoting the Success of Students of Color by Promoting the Success of Faculty of Color” by Michael Benitez, et al., 2017](#) and [“Retaining Faculty of Color: Costs and Consequences” by Michael Johnson Jr., 2019](#)).

Sixth, making WGSS a department and changing the name will enhance the ability of UWEC to attract faculty of color in other disciplines. New faculty of color in arts, humanities, and social sciences disciplines are often trained in intersectional analysis and are excited to become an affiliate in the WGSS Program in addition to joining their home department. As research on this topic indicates, EDI is not just an “added feature” to existing Predominantly White Institutions like UWEC, but rather a factor upon which the future of higher education depends. WGSS is already exemplary in regard to EDI, and it will be better poised to support future shifts in student body AND campus faculty demographics as a department. In the past, departments have consistently reached out to the faculty in the WGSS Program to meet with the various prospective minoritized candidates during their campus interviews. Therefore, the *Department of Race, Ethnicity, Gender, and Sexuality Studies* will be an asset to the university as more departments are trying to diversify their faculty and we welcome the opportunity to support these efforts going forward.

Seventh, the status and name change will put the WGSS Program at UWEC on the same level with other comparable WGSS programs in the UW System. For example, UW-La Crosse, our most comparable institution, already has a strong Department of Race, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. Like UWEC, UW-La Crosse has vibrant departments that teach topics on race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. Departments like Archaeology and Anthropology, English, History, Political Science, Sociology and Criminal Justice all have courses that focus on race and ethnicity, gender, and/or sexuality. The courses in these departments are vital to those fields’ academic knowledge and teaching pedagogies. Like the Department of Race, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at UW-La Crosse, the WGSS program seeks to be a hub where students gain interdisciplinary knowledge and are exposed to teaching pedagogies specific to the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. This reflects contemporary shifts in academia where the traditional disciplines continue their academic pursuits in the area of race, ethnicity, gender, and/or sexuality using canonical literature and methodologies, while interdisciplinary departments engage in research and scholarship using new, alternative, and experimental literature and methodologies. Interdisciplinary departments such as the proposed *Department of Race, Ethnicity, Gender, and Sexuality Studies* provide a different framework and approach to the study of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality which complements the courses of more established departments. The creation of such an interdisciplinary department at UW-La Crosse as well as at public university systems in the United States is a testament to the way that scholars and students yearn for interdisciplinary departments that work alongside traditional departments to produce knowledge.

Additionally, our status and name change will allow our unit to become more visible within the UW System and will highlight our intersection with CHS and our commitment to intersectional, transnational, decolonial, and interdisciplinary approaches to racial, gender, sexual, and queer justice. Moreover, the WGSS Program at UWEC is distinct with its strong development of Queer Studies and Transgender Studies within this intersectional framework. Changing the WGSS Program’s status to department and renaming it will help maintain its distinction as one of the foremost EDI leaders in western Wisconsin.

We recognize there are other programs and departments who offer courses that contribute to the EDI mission of the university. We believe that there is room for all of these courses given the different frameworks and approaches to race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality that are employed by the disciplines. Further, we believe that these different perspectives will benefit students by providing breadth and depth of understanding of EDI issues and increase the collaboration between departments. We expect more courses will be cross-listed with the new department, which will tremendously benefit students in all programs and reduce their time to graduation by offering a greater range of course options for degree completion.

In summary, a change in status from program to department and renaming the unit will:

1. Highlight the inclusive nature of the WGSS Program and enhance recognition of the importance of the Critical Hmong Studies Certificate Program, the LGBTQ Studies Certificate, and the Women of Color Feminisms Certificate.
2. Help the WGSS Program grow through increased recruitment of majors and minors.
3. Contribute to the WGSS Program stability by retaining tenure-line faculty.
4. Help the University recruit more minoritized students and faculty of color in other disciplines.
5. Be a strong affirmation for students who identify with the program and provide support for faculty who work in this area (thus also increasing the retention rate for diverse faculty who get support and mentoring from WGSS faculty in addition to their home departments).
6. Reflect the university's unwavering support for programs/departments engaged in EDI work.
7. Allow us to strengthen EDI and students' academic experiences through our collaboration with other departments and programs at UWEC.

APPENDIX 1**Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies (WGSS) and Critical Hmong Studies (CHS) single prefix and cross-listed R1 courses (2021-22)**

HMNG	130	Hmong American Experiences in the U.S.
WGSS	100	Intro to WGSS
CJ/WGSS	111	Gender, Race, Class, & Comm: Soc Construction of Iden
SOC/WGSS	202	Sociology of Gender
RELS/WGSS	203	Women and World Religions
HIST/WGSS	205	American Women's History
WGSS	206	Perspectives in LGBTQ Studies
WGSS	215	African-American Feminism in the Humanities
MUSI/WGSS	224	Music and Gender
WGSS	260	Masculinity Studies & Feminist Theories
ENGL/WGSS	296	Perspectives on Women's Literature
WGSS	306	Transgender Activism and Cultural Production
WGSS	310	Gender & Violence
HIST/WGSS	313	Gender, Sex, & Science in European History
WGSS	315	Women of Color Feminisms
CJ/WGSS	317	Diversity & Comm: Organizational & Media Cont
WGSS	335	Transnational Feminism
PSYC/WGSS	336	Psychology of Women
WGSS	345	Black Feminist and Black Queer Studies
PSYC/WGSS	348	Black Psychology

HMNG/WGSS	365	Intersectionality: Crit Approach to Iden & Just
WGSS	375	Ecofeminism & Environmental Justice
PHIL/WGSS	377	Philosophy & Feminism

Proposal approved by WGSS Steering Committee on November 22, 2021.

*Attached document titled: Criteria Evaluating WGSS Courses

*Attached letter of support from Dr. Stephanie Ryttilahti, Director of the Women's and Gender Studies (WGS) Consortium of the University of Wisconsin System

Requested effective date: Effective upon approval at all levels of governance; changes to appear in the 2023-2024 catalog.