**CURRICULUM ASSESSMENT**

**SYLLABI ANALYSIS OF UPPER DIVISION COURSES IN THE DEPARTMENT OF GENDER AND WOMEN’S STUDIES**

**(Academic Year 2015-2016)**

Khanum Shaikh, Assistant Professor

Department of Gender and Women’s Studies

**College: Humanities**

**Department: Gender and Women’s Studies**

**Program: Undergraduate**

**Assessment liaison: Khanum Shaikh**

1. **Please check off whichever is applicable:**

**A. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Measured student work.**

**B. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Analyzed results of measurement.**

**C. \_\_\_\_\_X\_\_\_ Applied results of analysis to program review/curriculum/review/revision.**

**‘Global Learning’ & The Field of Gender and Women’s Studies**

Institutions such as CSUN that cater to a diverse student body have been engaged in robust conversations around creating pedagogies that 1) engage students from diverse backgrounds and their cultural competencies, and 2) foster individuals who are well informed of and functional in a globalized world. These issues are highly relevant to the interdisciplinary field of Gender and Women’s Studies, and this year’s assessment looks at issues of ‘global education’ within the field of GWS.

The Association of American Colleges and Universities (ACC&U) global learning as “a form of learning that prepares students to critically analyze and engage with complex global systems, their implications for the lives of individuals, and the sustainability of the earth.”1 Global learning is also seen as an educational practice that benefits all students, and many universities focus on developing ‘intercultural competencies’ of both faculty and students, and on developing global perspectives in their curricula.

For decades, Gender and Women’s Studies as a field has been concerned with how we, as scholars and teachers, conceptually engage ‘the global’ in ways that is tuned in to difference (geographic, economic, political, cultural) while at the same time highlighting institutional/structural linkages through a gender/sexuality lens. This scope is enshrined in one of our departmental SLOs in that we seek to provide students the ability to ‘recognize the gender dimension of social, economic, cultural, historical, political, national and global inequalities’ from a feminist perspective. Given the diversity of our faculty and their research foci, we see ourselves as a department that has an enormous potential to provide a cutting edge feminist education that reflects the larger innovations within our field, a goal that goes hand in hand with the broader university level conversations about how to effectively engage, retain and successfully graduate students from diverse backgrounds. For this assessment, the ‘global’ and ‘global learning’ encompasses 1) non-Eurocentric theories and epistemologies that are crucial to the field of GWS, and 2) a non-U.S. centric approach to learning. This model of learning has the potential to advance more complex understandings of the social, cultural, and political worlds that we inhabit, to connect with students who bring diverse ways of knowing, and offer a more accurate reflection of the breadth of feminist scholarship and activism.

1. **Overview of Annual Assessment Project(s).**

This years’ assessment is focused on the GWS curriculum to examine whether or not our upper division courses succeed in providing students with an effective feminist education with a rigorous global outlook. This assessment builds upon a detailed GWS assessment (2013-2014) in which Dr. Brenny Mendoza analyzed 26 syllabi designed by part-time and full-time faculty in our department to identify the gaps and strengths of GWS at CSUN vis-à-vis the larger field of Gender Studies. One finding of Dr. Mendoza’s assessment was that our courses remain to a large extent, U.S. centric, both in framing and in content, and that the ‘global’ appears rather disconnected from the rest of the course material, usually toward the end of the semester with a tendency of portraying ‘Third World’ as victims of larger social/cultural/political institutions.

To assess these questions, I analyzed the content of 18 syllabi for a total of 7 upper division courses taught by both Part-Time (PT) and Full-Time (FT) faculty of the Department of Gender & Women’s Studies. These courses were offered during the academic year of 2015-2016.[[1]](#footnote-1) While I recognize that syllabi alone do not capture the full texture of the content introduced during actual class time, for the purpose of this assessment I consider these syllabi as a reflection of a major part of the course materials.

Upper division course **syllabi analyzed** during this assessment include the following:

GWS 300 Women as Agents of Change (6 syllabi)

GWS 301 Feminist Theories (1 syllabus)

GWS 302 Feminist Methods (1 syllabus)

GWS 320 Women and Urban Space (1 syllabus)

GWS 350 Gender, Race, Class, and Sexuality (7 syllabi)

GWS 400 Gender and Women’s Studies Senior Seminar (1 syllabus)

GWS 495B Bollywood/Hollywood: Gender Sexuality & Nation - Elective (1 syllabus)

 **Questions** guiding this assessment are:

1. To what extent do GWS faculty expose students to non-Eurocentric and non-U.S. centric content and theories in our upper division course work?
2. What are some challenges and constrains we face in providing an effective ‘global’ learning environment?
3. What are some concrete areas of improvement?

**Key Findings of Syllabi Content Analysis**

Texts: A persistent issue in courses like GWS 350 is the use of readers that offer concise excerpted materials. While these are useful in teaching undergraduate students, much of the newer research is published in journal articles that tend to be long and sometimes too cumbersome for undergraduate students who may not have a prior background in GWS. Many of the readers currently being used are very U.S. centric in content, and theoretically draw on U.S. centric paradigms.

Theoretical frameworks and epistemologies: Non-Eurocentric epistemologies that mostly appear in our upper division syllabi include: U.S. WOC feminism, borderland feminism, intersectionality theory, whiteness studies, and some Native feminist theories. In 2015-2016, only GWS 320, 400, and 495 included postcolonial, decolonial, transnational, and queer theory.

Conceptions of feminist activism and feminist agency are overwhelmingly understood in liberal, reformist and U.S. based frameworks in a majority of our courses. This tendency is particularly pronounced in syllabi of part-time faculty (though not exclusive to). The ‘empowerment model’ is the primary model that underlies much of the discussion around feminist activism. Different cultural models of resistance and agency should be included in more of our courses. (Exceptions are Native feminist and borderland theories)

Thinking outside the U.S. Many of the courses analyzed, particularly GWS 350, offer very slim and decontextualized glimpses of issues beyond the U.S., sometimes limited to single newspaper articles. This blocks us from exposing students to different political institutional structures within which feminist thinking/activism has proliferated (e.g. authoritarian regimes, religious states, communist government, etc.), transnational processes of racial formation, different articulations of sexualities across space and time, and a plethora of feminist strategies/movements that must contend with issues of colonialism, caste, feudalism, transnational NGO funding politics, and much more etc.

Films/Visual Materials: There is a dire need for GWS faculty to have access to more contemporary audio/visual materials to expose students to a multiplicity of feminist perspectives. This is a larger institutional issue and a huge disservice to students who need exposure to visual narratives that de-center Euro and U.S. centric education.

Disconnect in course content: There is a problematic disconnect between the Feminist Methods course and the Feminist theories course as taught in 2015-2016. The former exposes students to critical methods that draw on diverse feminist perspectives, while the latter was extremely narrowly constructed and outdated. This disconnect undoes the work of some faculty. Moreover, the sequencing needs to be fixed in a way that a re-worked Theories course precedes the Methods course.

The Feminist Theories course, as taught in this academic year, is extremely outdated. This is something that must be remedied.

For many of the courses the course descriptions do not match the course content as written out in the syllabus

In general, our course materials for 2015-2016 have negligible content on Africa, or East Asia.

**Recommendations from this Assessment**

1. A broader discussion of these issues in the next GWS meeting to solicit feedback, and to envision future possibilities based on this years assessment.
2. Set up at least 2 forums for internal dialogue/education on current theoretical trends in GWS for the year 2016-2017. These discussions are already underway, and we will set a time for faculty to meet and share our own research with one another to keep abreast contemporary issues in framing/teaching within our field, and to help build a more vibrant intellectual environment to learn from one another.
3. If we can secure funding, GWS at CSUN can organize a roundtable on feminist pedagogies and departments. This roundtable can include faculty from other Cal State Universities (or other local institutions). This purpose of this forum will to think about curricular issues and teaching strategies to keep us cutting edge and connected to other local institutions.
4. Building on existing efforts in the department, we need a clearer demarcation as to which course materials to use in which courses so as to avoid overlap and redundancies across courses. As a department, we discussed the possibility of creating a moodle page where we each upload materials specific to each course.
5. Perhaps we can offer a future course on global feminist movements – not just case studies from different countries, but actually some depth on specific histories and socio-political contexts within which these feminist movements emerged.
6. The Feminist Theories course must be taught by full-time faculty, and must reflect more contemporary thinking in the field of GWS.
7. If possible, students should be required to take Feminist Theories before they take Feminist Methods. This is an issue that has been of concern to other faculty as well.
8. Identify and secure funds for one faculty person to 1) conduct research and build a solid repertoire of instructional audio/visual materials for the library that we can use in our courses, 2) work on demarcating which materials are appropriate for use in which courses, 3) organize the suggested feminist pedagogy roundtable with invited speakers from other near by institutions, and 4) co-ordinate other efforts such as internal dialogue/education to help us learn from one another.
9. I strongly recommend that future assessments continue these conversations and efforts. GWS is a discipline that specializes in ‘culturally relevant pedagogy’ and ‘global learning’ that are buzzwords at the larger university level. By keeping ourselves abreast of our field, we can serve as a resource to our students, other faculty, and to the larger learning environment at CSUN.
10. **Preview of planned assessment activities for next year.**

Next year’s assessment will focus on one of the following tasks: 1) build on specific aspects the 2014-2015 assessment of on-line and hybrid courses, or 2) build on specific aspects of this year’s work to assess effective teaching and learning within GWS. Based on a meeting with GWS faculty we will decide which of these two options will be most beneficial to the goal of enhancing the educational environment for students in GWS at CSUN.

1. There are a number of elective courses that do focus on regions beyond the U.S. which were not offered during the 2015-2016 academic year, and hence have not been analyzed for content in this assessment, (e.g. Women, Gender and Global Development; Global Sexualities; Women and Gender in Islamic Societies, etc.). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)