

## **TITLE: ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR WOMEN'S STUDIES UNDERGRADUATE MAJORS 2010-2011**

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### **I. BACKGROUND**

The Department of Women's Studies identified our existing Senior Seminar (WS 197) as a productive on-going site for conducting assessment of learning outcomes for the major. This required seminar is situated well for assessment because the learning objective for graduating seniors is to synthesize their undergraduate studies into an independent research project. The current goal of the course is that students put into practice as researchers and writers the arguments and ideas they have acquired over the course of their undergraduate education in the Women's Studies major. The course is currently organized as an intensive research and writing workshop. In addition to completing weekly written assignments, students are expected to work collaboratively by reading and peer-reviewing each other's drafts. At the end of the quarter, students are required to present their original research publicly to the Women's Studies community, core faculty, and the public. The existing course is a site for seniors to form an intellectual cohort for reflection on their overall knowledge base in the field of Women's Studies. Students then deploy that knowledge base in the creation of original research that potentially contributes to the field.

The existing course goals and content combined with the existing tradition of the course culminating in formal public presentations of original research lent itself as a site for development of assessment methods that utilize direct measures of student learning that are performance-based and focus on the actual work that students have produced. Since students are required to grapple with solving original and unstructured problems, this meets what is considered the best "authentic" scenario for direct measure, through both their final written and oral presentations. We decided to focus on the senior seminar because it is the best existing site for student self-reflection on their Women's Studies knowledge base and all of our core faculty have previously committed to the tradition of attending the final oral presentations. Additionally, many of our majors attend the event in their 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> years, and therefore it creates a sense of continuity and mentorship among students that ultimately reinforces learning goals among students over time.

Women's Studies used the Department of Undergraduate Education Assessment Grant to revise our existing Student Learning Outcomes and to design and implement two complementary assessment rubrics: one descriptive rubric to

evaluate the final research papers in Senior Seminar (WS 197) and one rating scale rubric to evaluate students' public oral presentation of that research at our annual Spring Women's Studies event. These assessment tools were designed with the primary goal of better calibrating student learning outcome goals with stated department missions (<http://www.humanities.uci.edu/womensstudies/about/trans.php>) including concern for analyzing the interrelated systems of gender, race, class, and sexuality (intersectionality); multidisciplinary critical cultural studies methods; and transnational feminist studies. The initial year's assessment is being used to establish baseline data and to refine our assessment rubrics. Our secondary goal was to lay the foundation for formulating useful rubrics for ongoing assessments of long-term (post graduation; life-long) learning outcomes. We began meeting this goal by revising our existing Graduating Senior Exit Survey to include questions that correspond to the assessment rubrics. This revised Exit Survey is being administered for the first time in Spring 2011 within the context of WS 197 and these students will be offered incentives (bookstore gift certificates) to complete the survey again in one year.

Women's Studies drew upon extensive resources in the professional field of Women's Studies, including a 2007 Report on Assessment and Integrative Learning for the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA), based on a three-year study of seven academic departments. We reviewed this existing literature and a selection of existing Women's Studies Assessment models, including assessing the "knowledge plot" in student papers; using introductory vs. capstone courses as a site for assessment; and alumnae surveys to then select, review, to develop our own on-going assessment tools. Despite the commonplace understanding that Women's Studies is a "contested field," studies have shown a remarkable consensus about core learning. The 2007 NWSA report, "Questions for a New Century: Women's Studies and Integrative Learning" summarizes all the previous major assessment reports on the discipline and documents shifts in disciplinary goals and assessment methods. Key areas of core learning include: 1) strong emphasis on research 2) importance of cultural diversity 3) analyses of differences among women 4) incorporation of international material in the U.S. classroom and 5) importance of interdisciplinarity.

## II. FINDINGS

Women's Studies used our initial findings from the core faculty's anonymous evaluation of the WS 197 (Spring 2010) students' public oral presentations of their research at our annual Spring Women's Studies event to 1) establish baseline data from the ratings scale rubric, 2) draw initial tentative conclusions 3) inform the creation of a descriptive rubric for the evaluation of research papers

and 4) modify our statement of student learning outcomes.

After our initial rating scale assessment of the oral presentations, it was clear that some of the assessment questions were more appropriate for the evaluation of written materials vs. oral presentations (questions regarding citations and sources). Since we have a small core faculty, we decided to streamline the rating scale rubric for 2011 in order to produce a rubric for the oral presentations that could be used effectively by our affiliate faculty. Rather than change any questions, we used face validity to simply reduce the number of questions asked, transferring those more appropriate to the research papers to the assessment rubric for papers. Without comparative data (since this is our first year) our actual findings to date about learning outcomes are limited and tentative.

The initial data showed that faculty recognized our students are producing strong original research and are able to communicate their findings effectively in oral presentation.

INITIAL FINDINGS INDICATED THE FOLLOWING AREAS OF STRENGTH:

- Clearly stated research purpose
- Attributed sources accurately
- Incorporated theoretical and historical evidence/ data to forward argument
- Conceptualization of topic and research plan
- Knowledgeable about their chosen topic
- Main points appropriate to central topic
- Demonstrated familiarity with key debates in Women's Studies about their topic
- Intersectional analysis, especially the how categories of gender, race, class, and sexuality are mutually constituted. *\*This finding demonstrated a positive advancement of student's learning from knowledge to comprehension to analysis to synthesis.*

INITIAL FINDINGS INDICATED THE FOLLOWING AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT WITHIN OUR ASSESSMENT OF "INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS":

- Fewer of the projects engaged the category of *class* analysis within an intersectional analysis of "race, class, gender, sexuality" than other areas.
- Fewer of the projects demonstrated a comparative analysis of how *class* and *sexuality* intersected with other categories of analysis.
- Fewer of the projects demonstrated an understanding of how the categories of *class* and *sexuality* are mutually constituted by other categories.

#### OTHER FINDINGS:

- Findings showed strong inter reader-reliability between core faculty. We are interested to see how this finding will or will not shift as we expand participation to our affiliated faculty in Spring 2011.

The process generated several useful conversation among faculty including:

- 1) The problem of delineating between evaluation of learning outcomes for the program and learning outcomes for the Senior Seminar course.
- 2) Concerns were raised about the instrumentality of assessment. These led to productive conversations about how the data generated will be used, for whom it is useful, and who the various stakeholders are now and in the future. To what extent are these assessment tools an internal mechanism for faculty and departmental evaluation and a tool for critical pedagogical and curricular development and insight and to what extent might this data generate new modes of accountability to outside stakeholders? Faculty discussed and shared material from national public debates about the “assessment movement” including concerns that measures of before-and-after learning are difficult to find, control, measure, or derive comparisons from, their limited use, and the difficulties and limitations of evaluating university teaching on the basis of short-term changes in student performance.

### III. PLANS FOR USING FINDINGS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Women’s Studies plans to address the concern of delineating between evaluation of learning outcomes for the program and learning outcomes for the Senior Seminar course by 1) looking at results over time and 2) by cross tabulating by our students who are Queer Studies minors. Faculty also indicated an interest in knowing whether we are teaching what we want students to know across our program. We could in the future collect data from a different course and run same instrument.

We plan to use the results in undergraduate advising and also in planning extra-curricular activities (like our recently instituted Winter Film and Discussion Event) that support our stated student learning outcome goals.

Faculty will be presented with the annual results of the assessment and the results will be available for their review and use for improvement of student learning outcomes. This data will be especially valuable as we revisit our curriculum, course titles, and plans for future outside assessments, including WASC accreditation.

#### IV. PLANS FOR SUSTAINING THE INITIATIVE

An annual summary report of the assessment results will be presented to faculty at the core department meetings and discussed with our regular lecturers and TAs. The gathering of assessment data will begin to build an archive of information for faculty about our majors. We will archive past reports in the Department. The administering and reporting on results of assessment rubrics will become part of the duties of the Undergraduate Director in close collaboration with the Core Faculty and the faculty teaching the WS 197 Senior Seminar (this teaching responsibility rotates between core faculty). We plan to continue to administer the two current assessment rubrics and our revised exit survey. The on-going results will be used to develop future assessment rubrics; to formulate goals for ongoing assessments; and to calibrate student learning outcome goals with stated department missions.

As a field Women's Studies has foregrounded feminist methods such as "student-centered" education – which emphasize a theoretical commitment to student input on what students tell us about how they learn. For this reason, feminist assessment methods draw on qualitative as well as quantitative data and on the application of knowledge as well as the acquisition of knowledge. Therefore, we have the goal of continuing to use multiple assessment methods and of situating evaluations in a context that will require a long-range plan that is outside the scope of the current grant. In our initial proposal, we hoped to implement an on-going survey for alumnae, corresponding to our exit survey for graduating seniors, to begin to measure long-term learning goals. We are providing incentives (bookstore gift certificates) with resources from the DUE Assessment Grant this year to encourage our 2011 graduating seniors to follow up with us after one year, as a pilot. We do not currently have the resources to continue to develop this alumnae instrument or to develop the means of effectively administering it to alumnae over time. However, with the current grant, we have put in place the groundwork for future ongoing assessment of alumnae to track learning outcomes post-graduation.

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