

Application for the Mildred Dahne Award Department of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (WGSS)

The Department of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (WGSS) is applying for the Mildred Dahne Award during its fiftieth anniversary year, having been founded in 1972, just a year after the academic discipline of Women's Studies began with the establishment of the first program at San Diego State University.

Our first application for the Mildred Dahne Award, in 2006, recounted the achievements of the (then) Women's and Gender Studies Program to that date. An interdisciplinary base of teacher-scholars offered courses and coordinated the minor for the first two decades. TCNJ's program matured along with the academic field of Women's Studies (as reflected in its name change to Women's and Gender Studies), and, during the 1990s, the college embraced the discipline as central to a mission-driven TCNJ education by adopting the Gender requirement for all students. Beginning in 1998, the program built its own core faculty, initially with appointees to other departments. By 2006, faculty were able to hold appointments fully within WGS; the major had been established and rapidly grown in numbers; WGS had founded the Women in Learning and Leadership (WILL) program, a combined curricular and co-curricular program; and the innovative dual majors in Early Childhood and Elementary Education and WGS, a state and national model, had just been launched. In the years since then, the program became a department, and Sexuality was added to its name in recognition of increased course offerings in sexuality studies.

The current core faculty includes Nelson Rodriguez, Marla Jaksch, Janet Gray, and alma khasawnih, whose lines are fully within WGSS, and Zakiya Adair and Leigh-Anne Francis, who are jointly appointed with African American Studies. Deborah Hutton, Professor of Art and Art History, will join the core faculty in the fall of 2022 with a partial appointment in WGSS. The breadth of the WGSS curriculum continues to be augmented by teacher-scholars across multiple departments, as well as ten to twelve dedicated adjuncts, including the director of WILL, Mary Lynn Hopps, the department's program coordinator, Cecilia Colbeth, and several alumnae of our major who have gone on to careers in education, advocacy, and public policy.

In this proposal, we describe examples of the department's dedication to **excellence in teaching** and learning, its outsized **impact** on the campus community and beyond, and its **creativity and innovation** since the 2006 proposal. These dimensions of our departmental practice are intertwined, and are also linked to student involvement, faculty scholarship, and the dynamic theoretical frameworks of our interdisciplinary field of study.

1. Excellence in teaching and/or support of teaching

In keeping with the historical formation of our field, WGSS courses extend across a wide range of disciplines while also capturing advances in focus, pedagogy, theory, and methodology that are particular to the field. The department's courses of study thus constitute an interdisciplinary liberal arts foundation, supporting students in developing the skills commonly associated with the liberal arts (such as critical thinking, written and oral communication, teamwork, intercultural competency, and ethical reasoning). Our courses do more: they cultivate students' capacities to analyze unequal social systems and create knowledge that centralizes marginalized

lives, as well as the emotional intelligence to stretch beyond their comfort zones, persist in problem-solving, and confront injustice with confidence and determination. Our courses are both self-reflective and intellectually challenging, breaking down students' assumed knowledge with a critical lens that often changes their lives.

High-impact learning experiences, such as community engagement, internships, and original individual and collaborative research, are woven into the major. WGSS faculty-student partners have been selected for MUSE, participated in research seminars, and co-presented collaborative research at local, national, and international workshops and conferences. Faculty have collaborated with students on published scholarship. For example, Janet Gray co-authored a book chapter and a journal article with students. Five trans WGSS alumni participated as research partners with Marla Jaksch and Leigh-Anne Francis on an article about resistance to anti-trans discrimination on campus. Two students work as research assistants with Janet Gray and Leigh-Anne Francis on an essay collection titled *Feminists Talk Whiteness*, forthcoming from Taylor & Francis.

Inclusion and *equitable access* are integral to excellence in our field. The 2006 proposal mentions WGS's early leadership in globalizing its curriculum; the department continues to create transnational course content, as well as study abroad and transnational community engagement experiences. Further, our current strategic plan for teaching and course development places a strong emphasis on antiracism and the intersectional analysis of multiple oppressions (including gender, race, sexuality, class, and disability, among others). In part through its close partnership with African American Studies, WGSS has been a leader in the development of antiracist curricula and pedagogies in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences. We take special pride in our record of mentoring and partnering with first-generation, BIPOC, queer, and trans/nonbinary students, and students with disabilities, through an enriching college education in which they can see themselves.

During the semesters of emergency remote instruction, in addition to the training and transformation of courses required of all faculty, the WGSS faculty sought additional training and resources in antiracist and trauma-aware teaching, shared those resources, and conducted workshops for adjuncts. The care that the WGSS core faculty brings to instruction is reflected in students' comments on recent evaluations. Intellectual challenge, compassionate and inclusive pedagogy, and personal transformation are recurrent themes: "an extremely understanding professor who is knowledgeable in the subject...and has passion for the content and her students" (Dr. Adair). "This class changed the way I see the world around me and how I interact with my peers and all other people" (Dr. Francis). The instructor "is extremely knowledgeable and leads amazing lessons that really make you think and communicate with each other" (Dr. Gray). "Having her guidance...really pushed me past the finish line and I am forever grateful" (Dr. Jaksch). "I was pushed to deeply analyze world events...and to be specific with my analysis...something I had never done before" (Dr. khasawnih). The instructor is "knowledgeable, respectful, kind, inspiring, open, and enthusiastic...one of my favorite classes I have ever taken" (Dr. Rodriguez). Numerical rating averages for course and instructor ranged from 4.3 to 5.0 for nearly all sections offered over the past three years, scores that are especially significant, given the documented bias in students' ratings of women and BIPOC instructors.

The excellence of teaching in WGSS is evident in our department's outsized representation among award-winners in competitions. In the twelve years that the Center for the Study of Social Justice has awarded the Alan Dawley Prize to TCNJ students for scholarly and creative works that address social justice issues, four WGSS majors have won. Since 2017, WGSS majors from TCNJ have carried away six first prizes and two second prizes, as well as honorable mentions, for the annual state-wide essay competition sponsored by the New Jersey Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Consortium. Seven WGSS/TCNJ students, since 2014, have won state-wide competitive grants the Consortium offers for students undertaking unpaid internships in the nonprofit, public service, and education sectors.

Teaching excellence in WGSS is also evident in our alumnae's successes in pursuing advanced degrees. In keeping with the interdisciplinarity of WGSS, graduates have entered and earned advanced and terminal degrees in a wide variety of fields. Examples include Law at Rutgers and CUNY; Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania; Applied Psychology at CUNY; Education and Counseling at TCNJ; Public Policy at Rutgers; Library Science at Rutgers; Public Health at Tulane; Public Administration and Nonprofit Management at Seton Hall; Social Work at Smith, Rutgers, Bryn Mawr, and Pittsburgh; Sociology at Northeastern; English at the University of California Riverside; and Women's and Gender Studies at Rutgers, The Ohio State, the University of Hawaii, the University of Ireland, and Kingston University (London). Two of our graduates are now professors in our field.

2. Department impact

WGSS is widely recognized in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, and across the campus, as a leader in addressing social justice issues. WGSS's impact on the TCNJ community is widespread, channeled through the curriculum, co-curricular events, and the faculty's formal and informal service roles. In the curriculum, typically three WGSS faculty members offer one or more First-Year Seminars every year, and Marla Jaksch helped to create the recent revision of the first-year Community Engaged Learning program. Courses offered by WGSS instructors fulfill Liberal Learning requirements for at least 1350 students per year. The department offers the majority of Gender courses; in addition, our courses fulfill requirements in three of the five Broad Areas of Human Inquiry, fulfill Race/Ethnicity and Global requirements, and incorporate advanced community-engaged learning both locally and abroad. Transdisciplinary collaborations have produced WGS-housed or cross-listed courses that cover requirements for a long list of majors and minors: African American Studies, Anthropology, Art and Art History, Classical Studies, Communication Studies, Comparative Literature, Criminology, Economics, Environmental Studies, English, Health and Exercise Science, History, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, International Studies, iSTEM, Journalism and Professional Writing, Religious Studies, Philosophy, Psychology, Public Health, Social Justice, Sociology, Urban Education, USA Studies, and World Languages and Cultures.

As was true before 2006, Women's History Month continues to be WGSS's most prominent (but not the only) channel for presenting co-curricular experiences that have broad impact on the campus community. WGSS partners with student organizations, alumni, and other academic and administrative units to produce and fund these events. Talks and gatherings with second-wave feminist icon Gloria Steinem, #MeToo founder Tarana Burke (with AVI), Black feminist theorist Patricia Hill Collins (with the Dawley Center), transnational environmentalist Vandana Shiva,

and Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones, have been among the most high-profile of these events. Other recent speakers include human rights attorney Noura Erakat speaking on Palestine; author Michelle Duster discussing her book about Ida B. Wells; and Mohawk Bear Clan Mother Louise Herne speaking on the impact of indigenous women on the U.S. suffrage movement.

The WGSS faculty are active on campus at every level. Faculty have served on college-wide governance bodies, including the Faculty Senate, Liberal Learning, Support of Scholarly Activities, Mentored Research and Internships, Global Engagement, Community Engaged Learning, Cultural and Intellectual Community, and Environmental Sustainability. They also serve on task forces and committees for the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, currently the Curriculum Committee, the Anti-Black Racism Committee, and the Antiracism Advocates. WGSS faculty serve as guest speakers for student organizations, courses, speaker series such as the Politics Forum, and public events such as the panels on the January 6, 2020, insurrection at the Capitol. Marla Jaksch's role as the third Barbara Meyers Pelson '59 Endowed Chair in Faculty-Student Engagement amplifies the department's college-wide impact.

WGSS has an impact on the surrounding community through creative, engaged service and teaching. For example, in 2021 Leigh-Anne Francis established a series of dynamic public conversations about themes in sculptures by BIPOC artists, facilitated by TCNJ student-scholars of color at Grounds for Sculpture. Marla Jaksch regularly incorporates community-engaged learning in her courses in partnership with local schools and community organizations, and is currently teaching an early college course at Trenton Central High School.

WGSS's broader-scale impacts are represented in part by the dissemination of faculty scholarship through national and international publications and presentation venues. Collectively, the faculty in WGSS have published numerous peer-reviewed articles and book chapters, and edited books and special journal issues on intersectional and social justice-based topics. Faculty scholarship also includes digital multimedia productions, legal expert testimony, co-authored books, conference presentations, and major grant proposals. Pedagogical and scholarly collaborations with external partners are another dimension of WGSS's impact. Zakiya Adair is currently teaching, researching, and exploring curriculum development on trans-Atlantic Black feminism at Goethe University in Frankfurt, Germany. Marla Jaksch is a part of an on-line collaboration working with STEM students in Delhi, India. WGSS has created and offered faculty-led Study Abroad programs to Italy, Tanzania, and India that incorporate community-engaged learning and research through partnerships with organizations and educational institutions in those regions.

3. Innovation and creativity

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“Women's Studies” as an interdisciplinary academic field has engaged in continual creative transformation since its founding over 50 years ago. Consistent with the field, the WGSS department is dedicated to continual innovation, with the aim of transforming what counts as knowledge and empowering students as agents of social justice. Since 2006, in the core curriculum, we have added a course on intersectional mixed-methods research methods and added a requirement that majors take a course cross-listed with African American Studies. Courses added that fulfill Liberal Learning requirements and electives in other academic

programs cover peace studies, environmental justice, sexuality and LGBTQ+ studies, educational equity, reproductive justice, disability studies, and gender and development. The hiring of our two colleagues with joint appointments in African American Studies fortified WGSS's longstanding partnership with AAS and amplified our curriculum with new courses on the transnational history of gender and race in the performing arts, pop culture, and popular music (Zakiya Adair), race and gender in criminal justice, queer and trans people of color, and Black people's resistance to anti-Black violence (Leigh-Anne Francis). Our newest colleague, alma khasawnih, has developed a course offering transnational perspectives on graffiti and social movements.

Program development is another dimension of WGSS's innovation. After 2006, with Nelson Rodriguez's leadership, the department established a minor in Sexuality and Queer Studies. The department has continued to support its programs for dual majors in Education, and has amplified its offerings to include the programs in Urban Early Childhood Education, Urban Elementary Education, Special Education, Early Childhood Special Education, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Education, and Early Childhood Deaf and Hard of Hearing Education. These programs have become newly relevant for teachers in training, who will graduate prepared to help the school districts in which they are hired to meet the mandate of New Jersey's new state law requiring the teaching of LGBTQ and disability studies at the middle and high school levels.

The department also created the first graduate certificate program in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, initially titled Gender Studies, now Gender and Sexuality Studies. Originally designed to articulate with the English MA program, the certificate program now also articulates with the Counselor Education MA programs. In 2020, WGSS collaborated with African American Studies in establishing the minor in Social Justice. This past year, WGSS faculty has collaborated with other HSS faculty to propose a graduate certificate program in DEIA, to which the department will contribute two required courses and several electives.

Finally, a prime example of innovation and creativity in WGSS is its pioneering of blended and online education by training for and developing summer and winter courses since TCNJ started offering them. This became even more significant when TCNJ shifted to fully remote learning and WGSS faculty were called upon to assist other colleagues in this transition.