

**Women and Gender Studies: Essential for the Core**

By Maurene Damm

"For most of history, anonymous was a woman"-Virginia Woolf

Gender inequity has been an issue for most of history. From the beginning of time, women have unspoken role in society which has steady improved in the twentieth century. As women's roles have evolved, it is important to understand the issues which did and continue to surround women. Without looking back on the issues which affected women, there is no way to move forward.

Within the past thirty years, Women and Gender studies programs have been forming at the collegiate level. These programs examine women and gender in different types of fields. Many of these programs do not get the recognition they deserve; this much is true at Marquette University. While the program has classes within many different disciplines, these classes are offered at high prerequisite level, and are not accessible for most students. Students who are strict graduation schedule cannot be exposed to these classes.

The Women and Gender Studies Program (WGST) at Marquette can be more widespread throughout Marquette's curriculum. Gender is an important topic which needs to be exposed to more students. The current introductory curriculum can be expanded to include Women and Gender Studies topics; this will allow more students can take WGST classes earlier in their academic careers. Marquette University will only benefit from infiltrating the WSGT program more deeply into the Core of Common Studies.

Within this paper, I will present my mixed method research plan of gender on campus. I will present difficulties experienced by Women and Gender Studies programs in other campus

which will lead into an examination of the program here at Marquette. Next, the gender issues seen on campus, and how the students see campus related to gender. I then analyzed Marquette's Core of Common studies, and the current presence of WGST classes at Marquette. I will also compare the types of WSGT class at Marquette to those of other universities. This leads into my results of student views and interest in WSGT program which then segways into my proposal of inclusion of more WSGT classes within the Core.

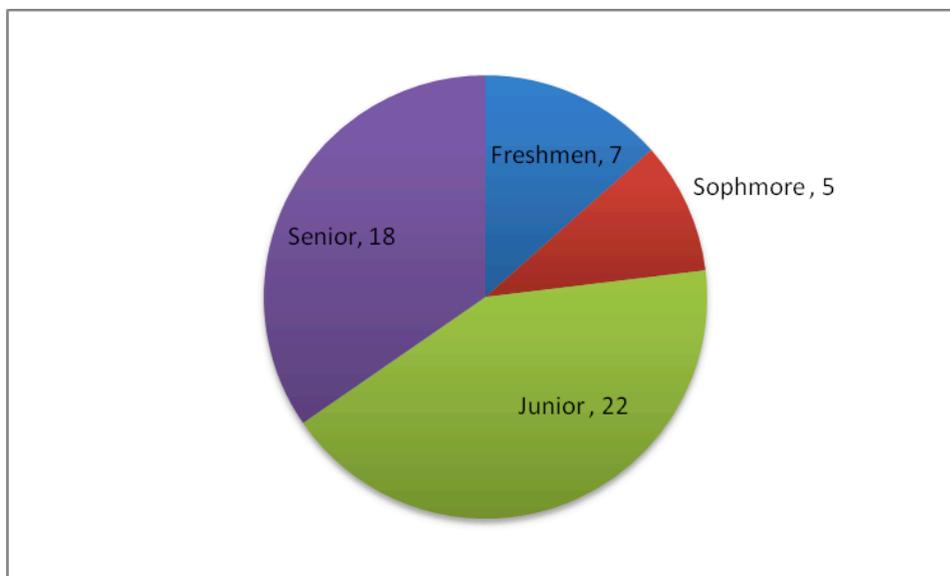
### **Methods**

When beginning my project, I knew I wanted to examine perceptions of gender on campus. I have used a mixed method formula with an emphasis in personal experiences. I started the project with a focus group of women asking how they saw gender on campus, and the issues which surround it. The women I talked to knew there were gender inequities, but did not know how to directly express them. Out of the eight girls who were in my focus group none of them had taken a WGST class. They were interested in the idea of taking a gender specific class, but were not sure how they would fit it in the schedule. This prompted me to look into the Women and Gender studies program here at Marquette. I interviewed the director of program, Dr. Amelia Zurcher. She explained the program, and the general purpose of it. Then led me into research Gender studies programs at other universities, and the personal and academic benefits of these classes.

Through my research, I formalized a general foundation of Gender Studies programs throughout the country and in other countries. Many of the articles I read expressed the difficulties they experienced implementing the program, and the growth the experienced.

I distributed a survey among 52 undergraduate students. The goal of survey was to understand student views towards the WSGT program and perception of gender issues on campus. A copy of the survey is attached in the appendix A. The survey asked students about their participation within WSGT program at Marquette and their interested level within the program. Students were asked to explain their reasoning for or against the program. The level of perception of gender issues on campus was rated on a scale from one to ten with ten being an extreme level of gender inequity. Student then had to list the issues they believed are on campus. The results of the survey are discussed further as they

The breakdown of the student who took the survey is the following:



#### 1. Student Participation Breakdown by Year

A majority of the students who participated in the survey are uppermen with junior standing students having the largest number.

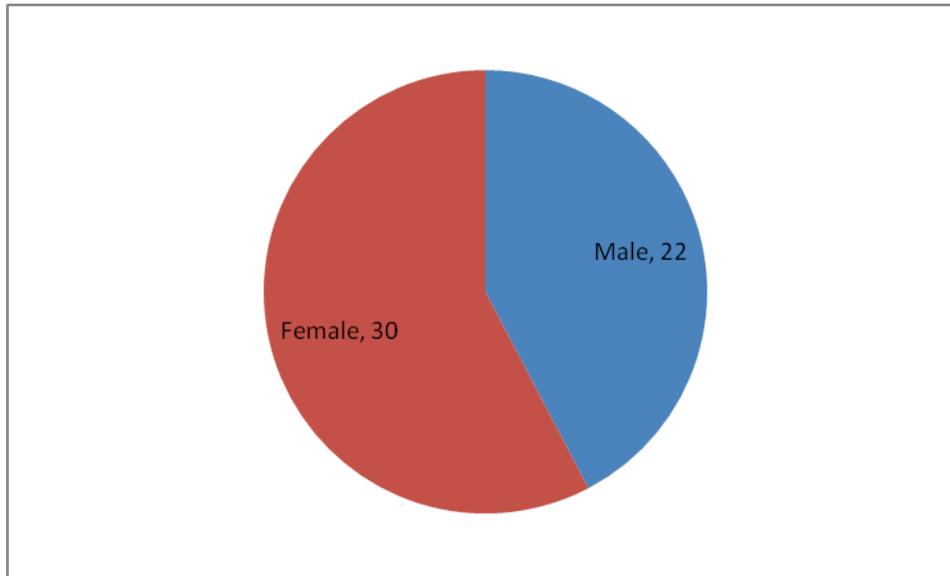


Figure 2. Gender Breakdown.

As shown above, the majority of the student who took the survey are female. The results of the survey are discussed further in the Results section of the paper.

### **Background of Women and Gender Studies Program**

In the US, the feminist movement of the 1960's and 1970's had been key to establishment of women and gender studies programs around the country rather quickly. However the difficulties of implantations of Women and Gender Programs are not always financial, but were extremely political as well. Efforts to include a Women Studies minor at Loyola University Chicago were generally supported, but "turned up pockets of resistance, particularly insofar as the proposal was interpreted as trespassing upon the existing core"(Van & Gallman). While support for the program was there, administrators and professors did not want their curriculum encroached upon. They felt a clear message "gender may be a acceptable subspecialty, but do not try to sneak it into a central position in the curriculum"(Van &

Gallman). Gender as a whole was accepted but not on a level which would make it wide spread throughout the university. It was not seen as a useful discipline to teach to students.

Establishment of these types programs reached different countries later than the U.S. The movement for Women and Gender Studies programs in Australia began in the late 1980's, and it did not occur in the Middle East until the late 1990's. The implementation of these programs faced similar issues. When Tel Aviv University in Israel began the process, they had different committees voice concerns and were "vary of the 'trendy aspect.' They were asked questions like "Was it a discipline? Was it a science? Is our teaching faculty knowledgeable and erudite in the field?"(Neval). They were forced to answer questions like this in order to bring the program into the university. The program at Tel Aviv was eventually implemented, and has become a success. While it is still predominately women, there is a "social and cultural transformation"(Neval) happening on the campus and with the students.

Not everyone is on board with Women and Gender Studies Programs. Critics in the US believe WGST is "overly focused on political issues and on providing false reassurances of women's worth, overemphasizing students' personal feelings and experiences in place of serious scholarship"(Stake). They believe WGST allows for little debate or expression of opinion. One critic dismissed women and gender class as "frivolous and having little intellectual merit"(Stake). WGST courses are seen to be marginalizing and offer no academic benefit to student. Many of these conclusions are based on "input from small, highly selected samples of dissatisfied WGST teachers and student"(Stake).

A majority of Women and Gender studies learning is based on participatory learning, development of critical thinking and open-mindedness, validation of personal

experience/development of confidence, and development of political/social understanding/activism(Stake). Students are encouraged to express their thoughts and opinions. Scholar have found these students have increased awareness of sexism and other social inequities, and more open attitude towards women and other traditionally oppressed groups. These classes develop the student as a whole. Based on a study done by Jayne Stake and Margaret Gerner of the Psychology Department of the University of Missouri, student who had taken Women and Gender studies classes were shown to have “developed considerably more self-esteem and were more confident about and motivated to achieve their career goals” (Women’ Studies the Study of Women?).

These types of programs “use a multidisciplinary approach both to accumulate new information that has been overlooked by traditional disciplines and to develop a new theoretical perspective on how to understand the experience of women”(Women’ Studies the Study of Women?). Women and Gender studies can be incorporated into various academic fields, and offer a new perspective to old topics. Gender is all around us.

Women and Gender Studies courses will only grow with an “impetus will likely come from faculty members who are committed to incorporating gender into their teaching and scholarship. Success will come by convincing students and colleagues that these methods are a vital way of understanding human experience” (Vann & Gallman). Generally speaking, these programs are “broad interdisciplinary” (Vann & Gallman). They bring different disciplines together, and are able to examine topics in a new and different way.

Marquette’s Women and Gender Studies Program

The history of women and gender studies has a rich history at Marquette. In 1982, Dr Carolyn Asp organized a meeting of women faculty from different departments and colleges “to discuss the formation of a support group for University women faculty that would bridge the department and collegiate divides that to this day still impede interdisciplinary engagement”(Hay). The organization was named ALPHA, and it became the recognized voice of gender issues on campus. Through the organization’s efforts more women faculty were hired, the creation of the Women’s Studies program and the creation of the interdisciplinary minor in 1985. This was due to the increased awareness and support of women. As the number of women faculty increased, the need for ALPHA’s extra-departmental mentoring decreased. The group met for the last time in spring 1997.

As an introduction to the current Women and Gender Studies Program at Marquette, I first interviewed the director of the Women and Gender Studies Program, Dr. Amelia Zurcher. I interviewed her in her office on Monday, October 3<sup>rd</sup>. Her role as director of the program is crucial in its development and growth. She organizes speakers for the campus, and runs the advisory board for the program. Undergraduate and graduate research programs are run under her supervisor. Her main focus is growing the program in a positive direction at Marquette because “this is a very important academic field for a lot of universities, and there is a need for us to be recognized”. The program was relaunched in 2009 with a more widespread curriculum and the addition of a WSGT major. Within three years, the department has had incredible growth with of a couple of students majoring in WGST to now nineteen different students within the program. It is not exclusively women either; there are four men majors due to the shift towards more gender studies. When she spoke of the growth of the program, she seemed extremely proud of it.

Dr Zurcher, who teaches Introduction to Women and Gender studies class, said she can absolutely see a change in the attitudes and views of students after the completion of the course, and one example she cited was about music videos. She showed them a movie revealing the sexism of the music video industry, and the students “will be like ‘wow I have been watching this my whole life and never noticed this’”. She believes “gender is in everything. There really isn’t anything that doesn’t have to do gender”. Exposing students to the issues and discrepancies of gender will only further their understanding of how our society works, and functions. She spoke of how rewarding it is to see the change within the students because a lot of the students who come to the introduction program are not necessarily WGST majors. These students are able to learn about gender, and it relates to all different fields. She said “it is a really important lens and it’s in every discipline”. Learning about gender allows students to see how gender functions in different facets of our lives.

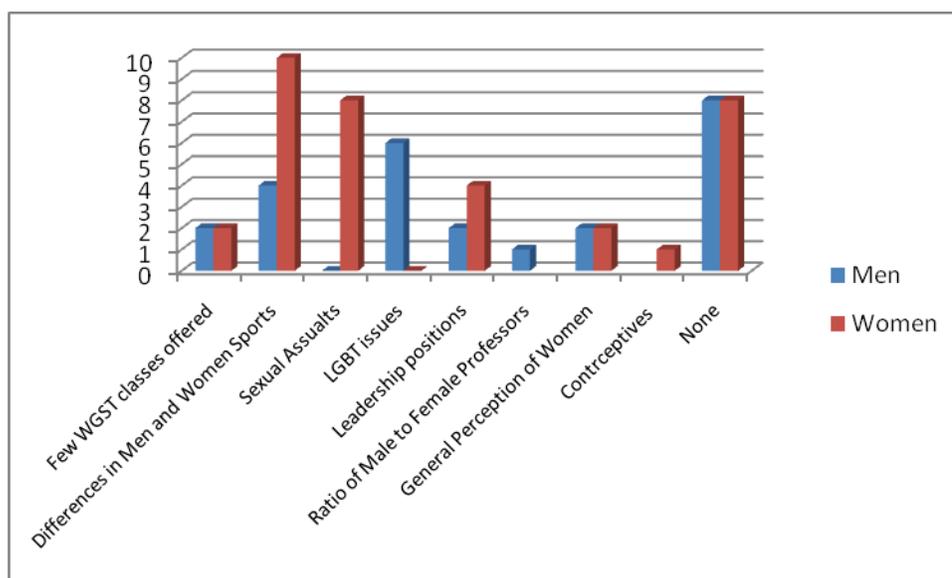
The current program at Marquette is primarily interdisciplinary, and the professors who teach the classes are from different departments. The program can “be a very good stimulus for interdisciplinary research and a very good discipline for interdisciplinary teaching”. It allows teachers examine tradition topics in a fresh way, and give a fresh perspective to students. Expanding the program to include all disciplines at Marquette can offer new outlooks to students and faculty.

### **Gender Issues at Marquette**

Marquette, like all college campuses, has its fair share of gender issues. Dr Zurcher’s first thought was of sexual violence, and how huge it has been here. My thoughts went to the issue of sexual assault with one student, and a Marquette Athlete which occurred last year. The incident

was quieted, and released to the public after several months. She told me about a gender resource center which will be opened by Fall 2012, and possibly partially open by Spring of 2012. She stressed how there are so many issues under the surface on campus. “our different majors and classes really divide by gender and we almost never talk about that” There is gender separation in some of the most obvious ways, and never really noticed. It is engrained in our thinking. Generally, we see “engineering is mostly guys, business is mostly guys, and nursing, a lot of the social justice professions is mostly women”. Gender inequity is all around us, and I wanted to examine the perception of gender issues on campus through student view.

Through results of the survey I distributed on campus, I found there is an inequality of the gender perception among men and women. 22 out of the 30 women polled rated gender inequality on campus below five. 8 out of the 22 males stated gender issues on campus were a 1. However the rest of the result were evenly distributed. More males gave 8 and 9 as answers compared to their female counterparts. A majority of the students believed there are gender inequalities on campus, but not a very high level of them.



### Figure 3. Student Raised Gender Issues on Campus

Of all the issues listed on the survey, all of the issues were concerned with female inequity. While this is a major component of all Women and Gender studies classes, males do experience some gender inequity, and I found it curious no one listed any sort of it. I found it interesting 8 men and women said they did not see gender inequity at Marquette. The students who had taken WGST classes listed two or three issues when students who had not taken a WGST class only listed one issue. Women were more concerned with issues of sexual assault and differences in funding in sports teams. Men were more evenly spread out on the issues.

### **Student Participation in WGST Program**

Out of the 52 students surveyed, only eight students had taken a class with a Women and Gender Studies emphasis. Only two out of the eight had taken more than one class. These eight students offered more in depth on the open ended survey questions compared to other participants. While most participants offered one to two responds for feelings towards gender issues and WSGT classes, these eight students came up with three to four different types of answers demonstrating their knowledge of the field. The answers addressed LGBT issues, women's health services, gender climate, and the limited class course WGST.

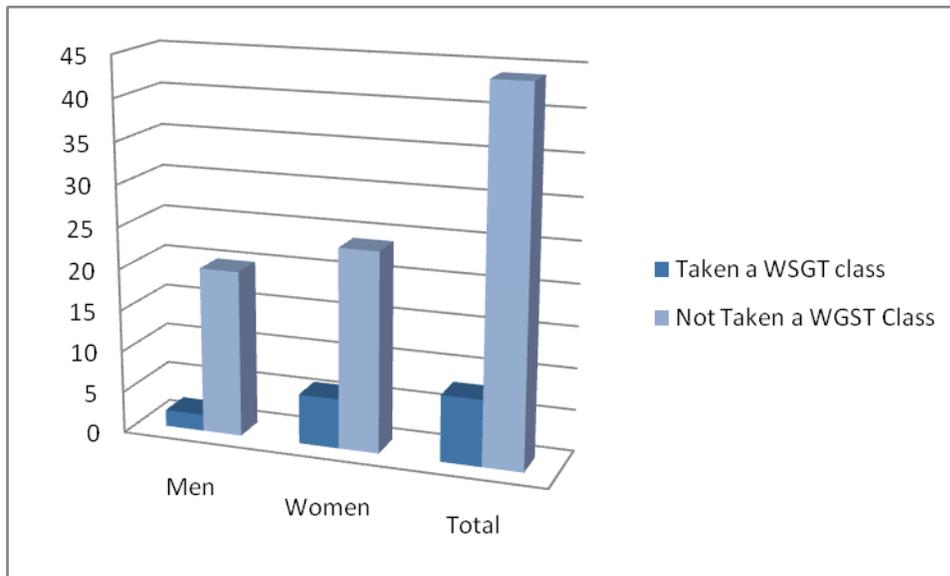


Figure 4. Student Participation in the WSGT program.

A majority of the students polled are upperclassmen. The eight students who had taken WSGT classes were upperclass men. I believe this is due to the majority of the WSGT classes being upper division classes, and not accessible to students without the higher class standing. Half of the student body is being excluded from the possibility of taking these classes.

The next graph is a representation of students polled who would be interested in taking a WSGT class. The data shows more men polled would be interested in taking a class with a gender focus than women.

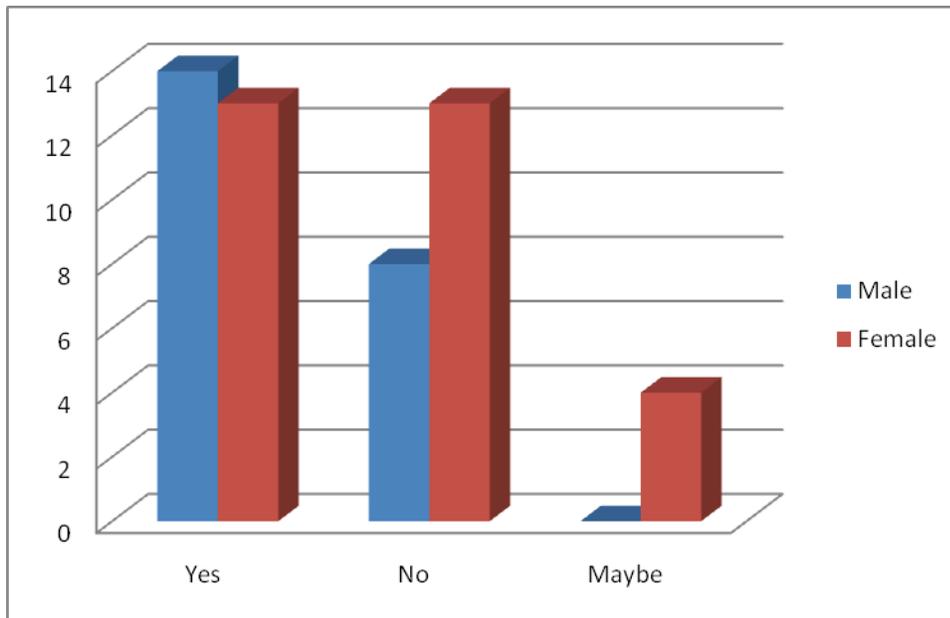


Figure 5. Student Interest Level in the WGST program.

When students answered yes, they all answered it was an interesting topic, and would be cool to see how it is applied in different studies. The students who answered no gave a wider variety of answers. More women were not interested in taking these classes than men. Four women answered they were not interested in feminist issues. Four women also believe other issues are more important than gender issues. All of the students who answered no had any previous experience with WGST classes.

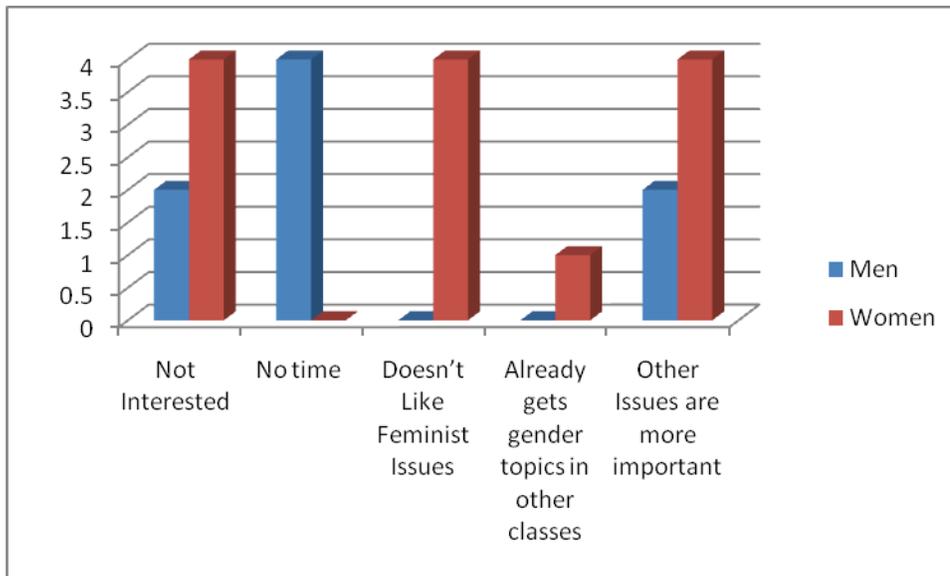


Figure 6. Student Reasons Against Taking a WGST Class.

More women were not interested and believed other issues are more important than men did. Four women said they did not like feminist issues, and would rather study other topics. All the women who were not interested in taking a WGST had never taken one before. This is clearly reverse sexism. These women do not think there is an issue, and do not care to examine it. All of the women who said they were not interested in taking a WGST class only listed one gender inequity and gave a rating below a 5 of gender inequities on campus.

A majority of the men voiced more concerns about scheduling conflicts in regards to taking WGST classes rather than a low interest level. They said they found the topics interesting, but could not fit the classes into their schedule.

### **The Core of Common Studies**

Every incoming freshman attending Marquette University must complete the same basic Core of Common Studies despite their declared major. It structured to follow a three tiered sequence. The first tier is to 'Examine the World' through Rhetoric and Mathematical

Reasoning. 'Engaging the World' through Individual and Social Behavior, Diverse Cultures, Literature/Performing Arts, Histories of Cultures and Societies, and Science and Nature. Then 'Evaluation the World' with courses in Human Nature and Ethics and Theology is the final tier. These requirements are mean to shape and properly develop the student.

The core of Common Studies requires every student to take thirty six credits. This requirement includes:

Core of Common Studies:

6 credits of rhetoric  
 3 credits of Mathematics and Reasoning  
 3 credits of Literature and Performing Arts,  
 3 credits of histories of cultures and societies  
 3 credits of science and nature  
 3 credits of individual and social behavior  
 3 credits of diverse cultures  
 6 credits of theology  
 6 credits of human nature and ethics

There are a total of one hundred and fifty possible classes to fit this core requirement, and only five of these classes are gender related. This semester of these five classes, they only fit into the Individual and Social Behavior requirement. These five classes can be found as a part of the Fall Course catalog for Gender and Women Studies.

WGST Fall 2011 Courses within the Core:

Introduction to Women and Gender Studies  
 Women, Crime, and Criminal Justice  
 The Family  
 Human Sexuality  
 The Psychology of Prejudice

WGST Spring 2011 Courses within the Core:

Crime and Criminal Justice  
 Introduction to Schooling in a Diverse Society  
 Culture and Health  
 Studies in Race and/or Ethnic Literature: Chicano/Chicana Literature  
 Psychology of Prejudice

## The Family

Culture and Health, Introduction to Schooling in a Diverse Society, and Studies in Race and/or Ethnic Literature apply to the Diverse Culture requirement of the Core, and the others fit in the Individual and Social Behavior requirement.

### WGST Fall 2010 Courses within the Core:

Human Sexuality  
The Family  
Race and Family

These classes only qualify for one of the eight total requirements that need to be fulfilled before graduation. There is a lack of variety in the types of gender studies classes which can appeal to all students, and can fit them into their Core. The classification and type of WGST is extremely narrow. Only 3% of the accepted Core classes have an emphasis in WGST. The program does not have set course curriculum every semester, and therefore it can be harder for students to attempt fit a WGST class to their schedules. Instead it changes due to the availability of faculty members, and the courses they can teach.

WGST focus can apply to multiply different fields. The majority of the existing WGST at Marquette classes are within the Individual and Social Behavior Requirement, and it is not the only field where gender can be applied. Other universities apply gender to all sorts of fields. West Virginia University offers courses with a gender focused all areas from “Library Instruction” to “Athletic Coaching Education”(Center for Women’s Studies). Loyola University Chicago has a very impressive Women’s Studies and Gender Studies curriculum. A multitude of classes in different fields at an introductory level like “Women in Religion”, “Mass Media and Popular Culture”, and “Sex, Science and Anthropology”(Women’s Studies, Loyola University

Chicago) are available to all students. Marquette's "Women in the Bible", "Gender and Communication", and "Sociology of Sex and Gender"(Courses) are all upper division classes and have prerequisites to take them. Marquette can apply these same models to expand current course offerings so students in their first and second years can easily enroll in WGST classes.

### **Proposal: Push For More Gender**

I am proposing a ten percent increase of CORE classes with a WGST emphasis. I want to see more types of gender related classes within the Core curriculum, and in different fields. Currently a major of the WGST classes are in literature and behavioral studies classes. There are plenty other fields which gender can be applied to and examined.

If this proposal is accepted and put into practice, it would expand on Marquette University's CORE curriculum and the WGST program itself. I am asking for additional CORE classes with a gender emphasis that will remain constant from semester to semester. This way more students would be able fit WGST classes into their schedule while remaining on track for graduation. The program would have to be expanded to accommodate growing need for regular courses each semester. A majority of the students surveyed have shown interest in taking WGST classes if it were more accessible. As results from my survey, no one of the underclassmen had a WGST class

Since this proposal will push for a growth in the program, it will also lead to more interdisciplinary research opportunities for professors and undergraduate or graduate students interested in the field.

For this proposal to happen, the program will have to grow. The only way the program will grow is through an internal push, and interest shown by individual and faculty at Marquette. This type of expansion does not necessary require more funding. Current class curriculum can be altered to have gender emphasis; the faculty must be willing to address gender issues in basic level classes. These classes offer students emotional and academic benefits. Gender is an important lens to examine life through, and without it, Marquette students are being shown a great disservice.

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Appendix A

Gender Studies at Marquette

My name is Maurene Damm, and this survey is for my Advanced Composition research project on gender perception and knowledge at Marquette University. The results of the survey will only be used within a classroom environment. Thanks for your participation!

Gender:        Male            Female

Year in school:        Freshman        Sophomore        Junior    Senior    Graduate

Have you ever taken a class at Marquette University with a Woman and Gender Studies focus?

Yes    No

If yes, list the class (es).

Rate your view of the level of gender inequities and issues seen on Marquette University's campus. 1 being lowest level of inequalities to 10 being highest level.

1        2        3        4        5        6        7        8        9        10        N/A

Based on your rating above, please list below the gender inequalities and issues you feel are at Marquette University.

If more Women and Gender Studies course were offered each semester, would you be interested in taking them?

Yes    No

Why or why not?

As referred to in Methods section of the paper.