



All Things Ignatian



Women's & Gender Studies a MINOR that makes a MAJOR difference

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Women & Jesuit Mission After General Congregation 33 made brief mention of the “unjust treatment and exploitation of women” in a list of injustices Jesuits are called to address in their mission, at General Congregation 34 the Society of Jesus acknowledged that “the legacy of systematic discrimination against women . . . is embedded within the economic, social, political, religious and even linguistic structures of our societies” (*Decree* 14.363) and invited “all Jesuits, as individuals and through their institutions, to align themselves in solidarity with women” (14.373). Among the practical ways of responding to this call, the *Decree* identified the following: “explicit teaching of the essential equality of women and men, . . . esp. in schools, colleges and universities” (14.374); “support for liberation movements which oppose the exploitation of women and encourage their entry into political and social life” (14.375); and “specific attention to the phenomenon of violence against women” (14.376).

WGS & the Jesuit Mission at Creighton By its curricular and extra-curricular programming and the research, publishing, and public speaking of its faculty, the WGS Program does the “heavy-lifting” with respect to this aspect of the Jesuit mission at Creighton. WGS explicitly, critically, and purposefully adds women and the demands of gender-justice to “the integrating vision of the world” to which the University Mission Statement commits us. As a WGS minor ('08) observed, “The oppression of women world-wide is among the paramount moral challenges of our time. The WGS minor is the most promising vehicle available for developing the critical tools one needs to cogently advocate for women in one’s local and global communities.”

What is WGS?

A program in the College of Arts & Sciences that combines two interdisciplinary fields – Women’s Studies and Gender Studies – to offer an 18-credit hour minor to undergraduate students. Embracing its foundations in **Women’s Studies** (WS), WGS highlights the experiences and contributions of women, both historically and in contemporary societies around the globe. As **Gender Studies** (GS), the program explores social constructions and experiences of gender (masculinity and femininity) and diverse sexual orientations. By virtue of their combination (WS + GS) in Creighton’s program (= WGS), students discover new, more inclusive ways of thinking and relating in contemporary society.

The Value of WGS

Sex, sexuality, & gender are fundamental aspects of human experience, but they are currently among the most contentious issues in the American cultural context. By exposing students to scholarship on gender and sexuality, e.g., offensive gender stereotypes and sexist or non-inclusive language that demean, marginalize, and alienate others, WGS courses can equip them with the requisite knowledge and critical awareness to interact more effectively with colleagues and clients of various cultural backgrounds and diverse sexual orientations, capacities that can enhance career competence and personal relationships in the future. In addition, by introducing students and the campus community to the burgeoning scholarship on gender and sexuality emerging in all academic disciplines, WGS provides opportunity to explore and examine “hot-button” issues with the rationality and disciplinary expertise necessary to our

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collective search for solutions to current problems and controversies. The annual **Women & Religion Lecture**, co-sponsored by WGS & the Kripke Center, and various **Women’s History Month** events are among WGS extra-curricular initiatives serving the larger Creighton & Omaha communities.

Making a Difference

The program slogan (“a MINOR that makes a MAJOR difference”) intends a twofold meaning. First, WGS intends to make a **major** difference in the personal, professional, and intellectual lives of Creighton undergraduates. Second, WGS aims to make a difference in a student’s **major** field of study. Surveys of WGS minors confirm that the program is delivering the “difference” on both scores. Not only are WGS students integrating the perspectives, concepts, and insights acquired in WGS courses into their senior theses and other projects in their majors and/or the Honors Program; they attest the impact of WGS on their personal lives. In the words of a recent minor: **“WGS opens your eyes to the injustices in our society and institutions and allows people to understand they CAN make a difference at Creighton & in the world.”**

Research

Currently, 27 faculty members from 13 departments in the College offer courses that count for WGS. Due to their expertise, many are asked by professional journals to review books dealing with women, gender, and/or feminism and to speak to groups on campus and in the region and throughout the country. A significant number of them are conducting research and publishing on women, gender, and/or sexuality. Therefore,

WGS courses afford unique opportunities for faculty-student collaborative research and for the development of valuable mentoring relationships. Students are able to present their research to the campus community at the annual **WGS Student Showcase** as well as to a larger public, e.g., at the **No Limits WGS Student Conference** hosted by the University of Nebraska system.

Honoring Difference-Makers

At commencement exercises WGS recognizes its graduating minors for “making a difference” in the classroom (**Simone De Beauvoir Award for Academic Excellence**), in research (**WGS Research Award**), and in service (**WGS Service Award**). Reflective of its commitment to “the incarnational work of academics” appropriate to a Jesuit institution, i.e., “walking the talk/thought” of the classroom into advocacy on behalf of justice, WGS now also bestows the **SAGE Award** (Student Advocate of Gender Equity) and the **Kali Mann Memorial “Iron-Jawed Angels” Award for Leadership in Service of Gender Justice**. The latter was established in memory of WGS graduate Kali Rose Mann ('09), a woman truly Herself For Others. The award is now accompanied by a cash prize funded by Kali’s fiancé, Donnie Hicks.

