



NATIONAL WOMEN'S STUDIES ASSOCIATION

Protecting Our Futures: Challenges & Strategies for Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies



About NWSA

Established in 1977, the National Women's Studies Association has as one of its primary objectives promoting and supporting the production and dissemination of knowledge about women and gender through teaching, learning, research, and service in academic and other settings.

Our commitments are to: illuminate the ways in which women's studies are vital to education; to demonstrate the contributions of feminist scholarship that is comparative, global, intersectional and interdisciplinary to understandings of the arts, humanities, social sciences and sciences; and to promote synergistic relationships between scholarship, teaching and civic engagement in understandings of culture and society.

NWSA recognizes that women's studies is broader than what happens in the classroom and acknowledges women's centers staff as feminist educators. Campus-based women's centers have a long history of working together with women's studies to transform the curriculum, the campus environment, and society at large.

Through their scholarship and pedagogy our members actively pursue knowledge to promote a just world in which all persons can develop to their fullest potential—one free from ideologies, systems of privilege or structures that oppress or exploit some for the advantage of others. The Association has more than 3,000 individual and 350 institutional members working in varied specialties across the United States and around the world.



Welcome from the NWSA President and Interim Executive Director

“Enjoy the currents and crosscurrents in the exchange of ideas, theories, and strategies!”
—Dr. Betty J. Harris, NWSA’s First Black President,
“Currents & Crosscurrents: Women Generating Creativity and Change: 18th Annual Conference” (1997)

We extend our sincerest thanks to Dr. Angela Clark-Taylor, Dr. Hannah Regan, Dr. Ariella Rotramel, and all other contributors to and supporters of “Protecting Our Futures: Challenges & Strategies for Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies,” including the previous iteration of the National Women’s Studies Association (NWSA) Governing Council. This timely and critically important report gives us an opportunity to pause and reframe how our work, especially but not only the administrative, is situated and valued as we work to strengthen the field.

Still, it is also necessary for us to acknowledge the ways Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (WGSS) program and department administrators remain overwhelmingly white despite our intellectual community appearing to be more racially diverse than ever. That is evidenced by participation in our annual Chairs and Directors Meeting and our Program Administration and Development (PAD) pre-conference, as well as the composition of the brilliant contributors to this report. Women, nonbinary, and LGBTQ folks of color continue to be excluded from administrative positions. Many senior faculty and administrators still do not see, and therefore do not support and nourish, our administrative ambitions and potential.

While our positionalities are certainly not inextricably linked to resistive institutional or administrative politics, they remain threatening to the status quo, even in WGSS. Having served as Program Director and in myriad administrative roles in Student Life, we are also acutely aware of the many reasons women, nonbinary, and LGBTQ folks of color opt out of these roles. In addition to the racism, heterosexism, transantagonism, xenophobia, and colonialism we are sure to face within and outside WGSS, many of us are dissuaded by the ways time-consuming administrative work takes us “away from the classroom” and/or “away from our research.” It’s also the case that many of us have not been enthusiastically encouraged to pursue administrative roles. For justifiable reasons, a prevailing narrative about directing programs and chairing departments is that it’s “not worth the hassle.”

At the same time, administrative work is crucial not only to our survival efforts, it’s crucial to our ability to thrive. While not always victorious, program directors and department chairs have the potential to (re)shape curricula within and outside the classroom, organize critically resistive programming, and support contingent and early career (or pre-tenure) faculty—just to name a few. To be sure, much of our enthusiasm about these kinds of undertakings is mitigated by college and university “administrators who seem completely ignorant about, indifferent to, or outright resistant to our work.”

Many of us work at colleges and universities that are severely under-resourced. Some of us work at well-resourced colleges and universities that are implicitly or even explicitly committed to impoverishing WGSS and our kin disciplines, if not eliminating us altogether. Still, our field teaches us to remain committed to our radical imaginations and “fighting the good fight.” This, however, does not require us to deny our weariness or to sacrifice our health and wellness. That is but one reason why our field also teaches us the importance of collectivity.

Along these lines, we invite you to support and promote the following NWSA initiatives that will aid our efforts in strengthening WGSS, while remaining accountable for the ways we have collectively been inattentive to our shortcomings. We also invite you to encourage longstanding, new, and potential members to support these efforts and to collaborate with us to develop new initiatives that will enable us to “co-create the kind of NWSA we all deserve and that we need more now than ever”:

- the “State of the Field” conference sub-theme for our upcoming conference;
- the annual PAD pre-conference;
- the annual (virtual) Chairs and Directors meeting;
- the Women of Color Leadership Project (WoCLP) for women of color interested in WGSS and NWSA leadership;
- the constituency groups committed to strengthening the field, including the Women’s Centers Committee; the Community College, Graduate Student, and Undergraduate Student caucuses; the Contingent Faculty, Feminist Pedagogy, and Gender, Women’s and Feminist Studies Ph.D. interest groups; and the Social Justice Education Task Force;
- the external review database;
- our regionally-focused partners and allies, such as the Southwest Institute for Research on Women (SIROW) and Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies South (WGS South);
- and our new membership engagement initiatives outlined in our two-year strategic plan, including the President’s Blogs, Feminist Frequencies, and our forthcoming Community Spaces.

In closing, this preliminary study invites more scholarship, more coalition-building, and more interventions focused not only on widening the pipeline to positions of leadership, but on shifting how WGSS programs, centers, and departments are anchored at postsecondary institutions.

Heidi R. Lewis, Ph.D.
President, 2023-25



Kristian Contreras, Ph.D.
Interim Executive Director



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Report Overview

Political fights over higher education's purpose continue to roil institutions throughout the United States. These specific attempts to curtail our field are occurring within a broader national context that is seeking to silence critical discussions on race and ethnicity, promote settler colonialism, and deny lifesaving medical care to trans youth. Women's, gender, and sexuality studies (WGSS) has long been one of the disciplines at the center of these discourses. Facing not only derision but also attacks upon individual scholars and WGSS scholarship by conservative leaders and reactionary organizations. In 2022, this began to manifest itself with yet another resurgent effort to delegitimize and defund WGSS.

The National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) embarked on an effort to respond to direct threats to WGSS departments in 2022. A working group of NWSA leadership and faculty of WGSS departments who had come under attack met over the 2022-2023 academic year to set an agenda for a series of responses to support WGSS departments. The 2023 NWSA Vice President suggested the development of this survey and subsequent report, which was approved by the President and voted on by the Governing Council. The authors volunteered to lead this effort and, with the committee, developed the survey which was used for this project.

The questions within this survey covered topics including department structure, budget, faculty lines, staffing, enrollment, and perceptions of support by key institutional leaders. In addition, data from The Chronicle of Higher Education was used to track anti-diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) legislation and Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) was used to explore institutional data including characteristics, revenue/expenditures, and Carnegie classification. The complete survey instrument is included as an appendix with this report.

While the report provides timely information that can be useful for WGSS departments and faculty it is limited in several ways. First, though the report offers a good breadth of information it does not offer as much depth as it would if we were able to interview participants or collect information from every WGSS department and faculty member. The use of a survey to gather data had two limitations: it limited the depth of information through abbreviated open-end answers or quantitative responses and generated varied understanding of what information questions were trying to solicit, thereby generating varied responses to questions dependent of the survey participant. The information gathered also generated numerous follow-up questions from the report authors and NWSA leadership.

On completion of reviewing and preparing the information for this report we are left wondering about how the racial and other intersecting identities of WGSS leaders affect institutional support. The interplay between type of institution, such as Minority-Serving Institutions (MSI) and Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) on the focus of WGSS curriculum at each institution is another area where questions remain. In addition to these more complex questions, we also need more primary data on what institutional support looks like, demographic make up of departments, and curricular focuses of individual WGSS departments. Though there is much information we still desire, the resulting data shared within this report provides preliminary information on the current climate, support, and enrollment trends of WGSS departments in 4-year colleges and universities across the United States.

Summary of Data

In February 2023, NWSA and the WGSS listserv (WMST-L) circulated a survey to collect data from WGSS Departments.¹ In addition, 809 Departments were identified by a state-by-state internet search of 4-year colleges. 723 of the 809 had email contact information and were sent the WGSS Survey at least 3 times. This resulted in 244 completed surveys.²

The data summarized in the table below looks at WGSS departments that participated in the study alongside all identified WGSS departments.³ The table shows that 34% of WGSS departments have standalone tenure lines, while 66% are programs with multiple faculty types. The majority of departments offer a minor (95%) and a major (56%), with smaller percentages offering concentrations at the undergraduate and graduate levels, as well as certificates and doctoral degrees. A majority of departments/programs are at public institutions (51%) compared to private (49%).⁴ Additionally, 25% of departments are at religiously-affiliated institutions, while 75% are at non-religious institutions. Carnegie Classifications show a significant portion of departments fall under the Very High Research and Master's Granting categories. Finally, The Chronicle of Higher Education legislative map was used to examine DEI bills: 25% of departments are in states with anti-DEI bills introduced, with 11% in states with active bills. Overall, 60% of departments have no anti-DEI legislation present in their state.

While we would like to have provided information regarding institutional categories for race/ethnicity, IPEDS only identifies HBCUs and tribal colleges based on an established list of schools. Other identities, such as Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) and Minority-Serving Institution (MSI), are based on particular percentages of students which can vary from year to year and may also have varying definitions depending on the context, and are therefore not readily available in the IPEDS data. You can [see the complete explanation of this](#) on the IPEDS website.



To see the complete list of schools which were identified to have WGSS programs/departments, use the QR code

1 WGSS department will be used in this report for clarity for the reader but refers to a range of department and program structures and names report at institutions within our discipline.

2 A small number of other responses were removed due to duplicate responses, incomplete responses, or not meeting selection criteria such as international or community colleges. Community colleges were excluded due to their unique mission, employing an open-door mission with a focus on Associate's degrees and entry into the workforce or transfer to a 4-year college. Not many community colleges offer Associate's in WGSS. Additionally, we did not have the labor power to compile the necessary contact list; we highly encourage a follow-up survey to go to these colleges which is better tailored to them.

3 We refer to key characteristics of institutions such as public/private, religious affiliation, and Carnegie classification as aspects of the environment which may contribute to departments' sense of precarity or tension, due to their connection to particular beliefs systems, legislative control, and overall resources.

4 We used respondents' report of their institution name to match the survey data with IPEDS data, and then deidentified the data moving forward from that point.

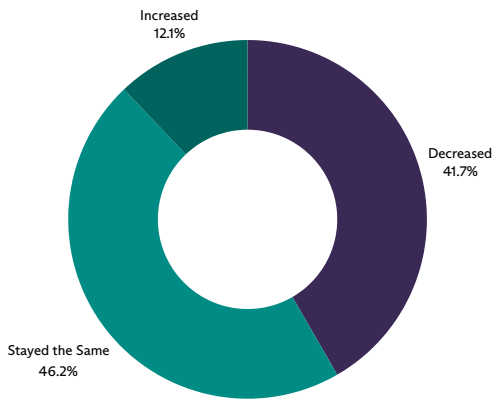


Figure 1: Budget Change

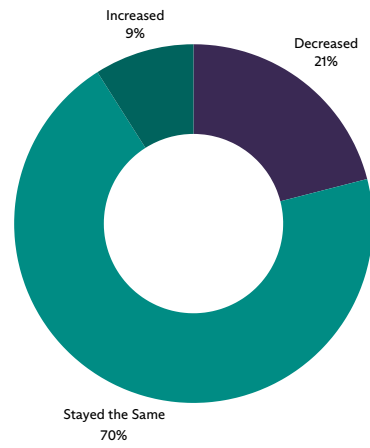


Figure 2: Space Change

84

Departments
have tenure
lines

119

Departments
have joint
appointments

210

Departments
have affiliated
faculty

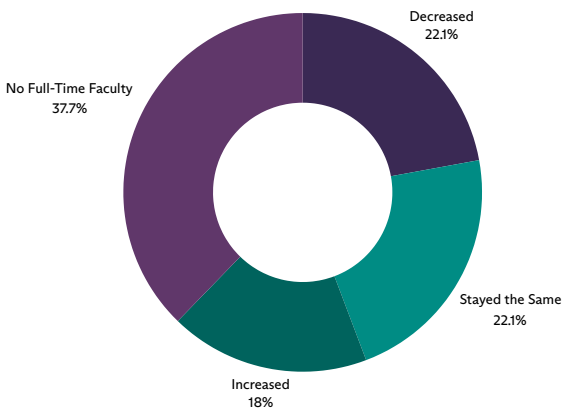


Figure 3: Full-Time Faculty Change

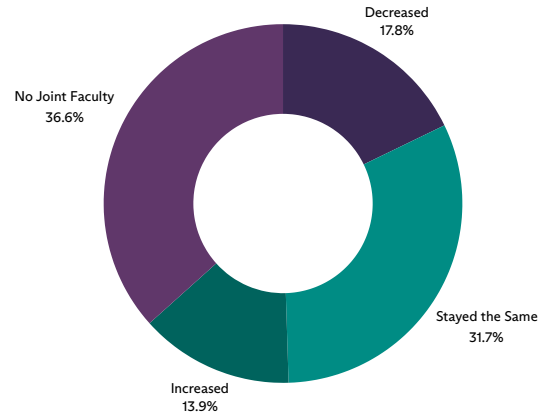


Figure 4: Joint Faculty Change

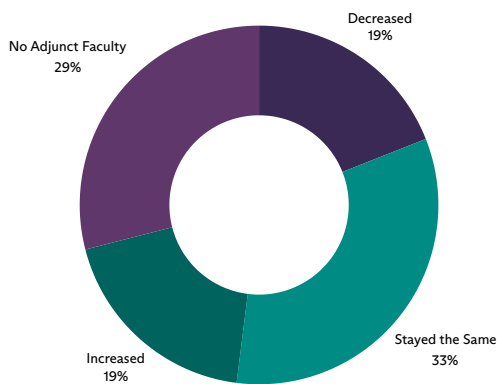


Figure 5: Adjunct Faculty Change

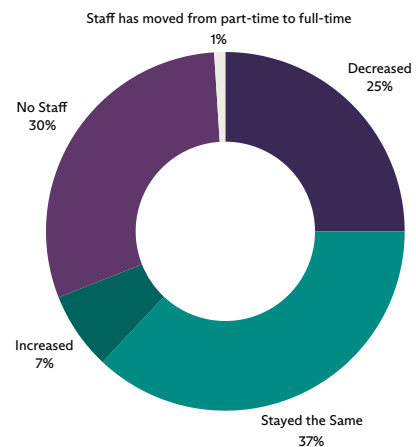


Figure 6: Staff Change

Summary of Data

	Survey Participants	All WGSS Departments/Programs
Department or Program	34% Standalone w/ Tenure lines 66% Programs w/ Multiple Faculty Types	N/A
Department Offerings	Minor - 95% Major - 56% UG Concentration - 13% Master's - 12% Grad Concentration - 5% Grad Certificate - 27% Doctoral - 5%	N/A
Public/Private	59% Public 41% Private	51% Public 49% Private
Religiously Affiliated	18% Religious 82% Non-religious	25% Religious 75% Non-Religious
Carnegie Classification	24% Very High Research 15% High Research 9% Doctoral/Professional Degree Granting 32% Master's Granting 19% Bachelor's Granting	19% Very High Research 13% High Research 10% Doctoral/Professional Degree Granting 34% Master's Granting 22% Bachelor's Degree* *Around 2% of non-responses are classified as Special Focus, such as law schools
DEI Bills	26% of respondents are in states with one or more anti-DEI bills introduced 14% of respondents in states with one or more active anti-DEI bills 60% of respondents have no anti-DEI legislation present at this time	25% of all departments are in states with one or more anti-DEI bills introduced 11% of all departments are in states with one or more active anti-DEI bills 63% of departments have no anti-DEI legislation present at this time

Institutional Climate

In this report, institutional climate was measured by WGSS departments' perceptions of support by leadership, including the President, Provost, and Dean. Our discussion of institutional climate also includes the perceived availability of resources such as faculty,⁵ budget, and space (Figures 1-6).

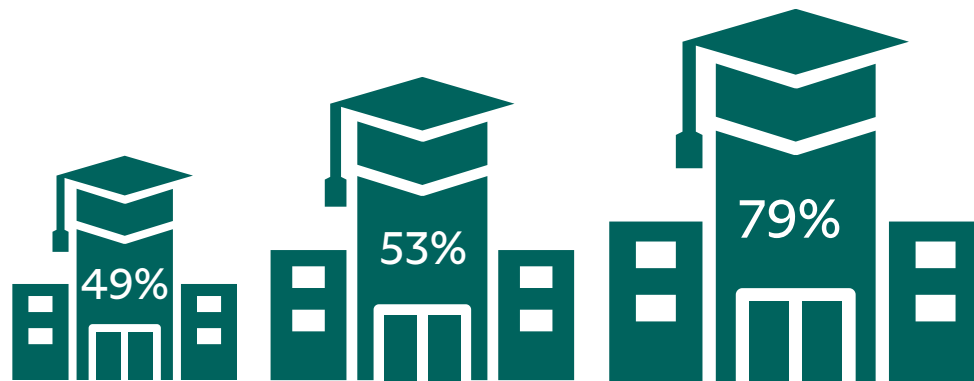


Figure 7: Graphic showing percent of support reported at each level of leadership: president, provost, dean

Increased levels of resources were reported at each subsequent level of leadership⁶ support. Specifically, while 49% of departments reported their presidents were supportive and 53% reported their provosts were, 79% of departments reported their deans were supportive (Figure 7). While many departments experienced loss of faculty lines and budget regardless of leadership support, departments were far more likely to report budget increase when any of the three leaders were supportive, and more likely to report faculty increases if the provost was supportive.



Figure 8: Graphic showing the more support a department has from leadership, the more resources they report

The more leadership support a department reported having, the more resources they reported having (Figure 8). Specifically, the more leaders the department reported were supportive the more likely they were to report a budget increase.

⁵ Faculty here is defined as tenure/tenure-track faculty whose lines are in the WGSS department; affiliated or associated faculty from other departments; joint appointments; and adjunct faculty

⁶ Throughout, we use “leaders” or “leadership” to refer to this combination of president, provost, and dean, as these were the three individuals we asked about in the survey.

Institutional Climate

In addition to the statistical relationships found between leadership support and resources, the qualitative responses are illuminating of what form that support takes. Although the survey only allowed respondents to say yes or no to the support questions, many respondents describe a more nuanced relationship. These variations include leaders who are nominally supportive but rarely back their words up with financial resources or leaders who don't fully understand what the purpose of WGSS departments are or what their faculty and students do. While classes are often highly enrolled and part of core curriculum, leaders' expectations that these courses are offered are rarely supported with tenure-lines or space. Overall, the perception is of benign neglect rather than open hostility, as summed up in this example: "They are supportive in principle, but not necessarily where the rubber meets the road in funding." Some do express more extreme sentiments, as the following: "President and Provost see no value in WGSS as department and field of research. They recognize it as a DEI need, but one that can supplement other core disciplines. For instance, they are big supporters of diversity and in particular, women in STEM, but do not see the value in studying gender as a locus of power, per se." Additionally, several respondents expressed that their leadership is only supportive of an antiquated form of WGSS and feminism, which rarely considers intersectionality especially as it concerns people of color and LGBTQ+ communities. One respondent says "the lack of support comes from admin upholding structural racism/transphobia/ableism," while another says "when it seems that WGS's programs might draw too much attention as (for example) promoters of social justice, as aggressively anti-racist, as feminist, and resolutely supportive of queer and non-binary rights, the folks in upper administrative offices promptly distance themselves from WGS." A third respondent noted the gap in missions between the university and the program: "While there seems to be support for the program, it appears that many senior administrators think of it as the 'women's studies' model from the 1970s that only advocates for cis, het women. Our mission and learning goals include cis het women, but also include queer and trans people and topics, BIPOC people and topics, disability, and other intersectional topics."

"[Leadership is] supportive in principle, but not necessarily where the rubber meets the road in funding."

Also of note in the qualitative responses is the connection between women holding these leadership positions and the perception of support. Many respondents mentioned recent leadership transitions, several of which involved women moving into these leadership roles, sometimes for the first time in the institution's history. These respondents expressed hope of more forthcoming support. However, it seemed far more impactful when the person holding a leadership role was someone who had previous affiliation or connection to WGSS in some manner, moreso than that individual's identity as a woman. One participant also noted the limitations of what some leaders will support: "The current/new [president] talks the talk of women's equality, but it is not a really modern version (more of a 90s/Lean In type of "feminism" with the focus on leadership/power positions rather than equity & justice). She also does not support LGBTQ issues/community members."

⁷ Although it is likely that other identities such as race or queerness might have impacted the support of institutional leaders as well, this was not addressed in the responses we received and would be an excellent topic for a future study to specifically discuss.

National Climate

The initial group formed by NWSA as a response to the challenges faced by WGSS department focused on those departments struggled with initiatives to defund or merge departments. Cases in states like Wyoming and Maine, where departments are facing legislative defunding attempts and dealing with the elimination of all department staffing highlight the common threat of budget cuts. Schools in other states such as New York and Idaho confront forced mergers and censorship related to reproductive justice and support for trans communities and individuals.

In this era of political battles and budgetary attacks, WGSS departments in states with bills like [Tennessee SB102/HB158](#) and [North Dakota HB1503](#) restricting collaborations and speech, and looming threats of forced mergers, the urgency to protect academic freedom, WGSS, and other social justice aligned disciplines is paramount.

These early conversations shaped how data was collected for this survey and delivered in this report. In particular, the analysis of qualitative responses sought to understand the effect of anti-DEI bills. It is clear that the climate created by state governments and federal laws, whether they have been passed or just proposed, are impacting the experiences of WGSS departments. The nature of these effects are of course related to respondents' home states. For example, respondents in Florida felt a significant squeeze on their capacity to teach about core concepts. As of this writing, Florida has passed two bills, which prohibit diversity statements and affirmative action in hiring as well as using public funds for any DEI effort including curricula. As this respondent shares: "laws passed in 2021, 2022 & 2023 have negatively impacted enrollments at our College and our ability to recruit and retain good faculty. From "Stop WOKE" and "Don't Say Gay!" to this year's trans bathroom ban and SB 266, which bans the spending of state funds on "diversity, equity and inclusion," or on "activism" (which would seem to be the code word for Women's and Gender Studies) -- Florida is a hostile environment."

Similarly but to a different and lesser degree, departments in Texas expressed a sense of precarity. Texas has also passed two anti-DEI laws, which at this time address DEI in student recruitment, hiring, and admissions practices, but not curricula. However, the environment this has created still contributes to a sense of overall unease:

"Texas has been particularly difficult in trying to control these things, but overall they have not been able to limit our teaching of Gender Studies courses. They have not been able to lower our budget. We are a bit under the radar at the time. I feel scared though to speak about abortion rights in any classes of mine. I would likely get in trouble for doing so - students are making reports about any inclusion or diversity language that professors are using - they are reporting directly to the upper administration, and we are getting pushback. We feel watched and monitored."

**"We feel
watched and
monitored."**

National Climate

In contrast, a number of respondents described what can be considered the opposite of our colleagues struggling under harmful and reductive legislation as well as policies. Of these participants, many named actively receiving legislative support. California, in particular, is driving efforts for these departments, with the entire California State University (CSU) system now requiring students to take an Ethnic Studies course offered by an Ethnic Studies program. Although this could indicate support for DEI curricula overall, it can also draw students away from WGSS courses.

“Living in California, we have not faced any anti-DEI or anti-LGBTQ legislation, and access to reproductive health services is protected. In fact, legislation enacted requiring inclusion of LGBTQ and gender-based topics in the secondary social sciences curriculum has better prepared students to be interested in gender studies coursework. The state legislature created a new (and highly welcomed) Ethnic Studies general education requirement for the CSU system two years ago, and the CSU has undergone several General Education revisions in the past six years. These have decreased opportunities for students to take lower and upper division General Education courses in Gender Studies, but we are still overall seeing strong enrollments because we are offering courses with interesting topics in modalities/times in the schedule that are attractive to students. We have a state law that prevents state employees from engaging in state-funded travel to states that discriminate on the basis of LGBTQ status. As of July 2023 there are 26 states we are not allowed to go to for conferences, research activities, etc if we wish to use state funding or wish to count this work as part of our workload (we have to take vacation days if activities are self-funded on work days). This is putting some limits on research and scholarship activities that support promotion and tenure and contributions to the field (although we can petition for waivers in exceptional circumstances), but it's also protecting the well-being of faculty/staff who don't want to be forced to visit hostile states in order to keep their jobs. We note that these same 26 states are among those that make it difficult for pregnant people to get needed health care, and the LGBTQ-related travel ban is therefore also protecting pregnant employees from being at risk if health complications arise.”

The power of students surfaces in many responses as well. Respondents expressed that, as described further in the enrollment section, many of these laws have spurred students' interest in taking courses in these topics, creating pressure on administration. On the other hand, faculty fear students reporting them for covering controversial topics in the classroom, contributing to the sense of precarity they already feel from legislation. Additionally, respondents describe how legislation other than anti-DEI legislation, such as the overturning of *Roe vs. Wade*, [Alabama HB314](#) which bans abortion, or [Ohio HB68](#) which limits access to care for transgender individuals, have impacted their students' education, both in increasing interest in the departments and making it difficult for some students to focus on their academic performance amid personal challenges.



Enrollment Trends

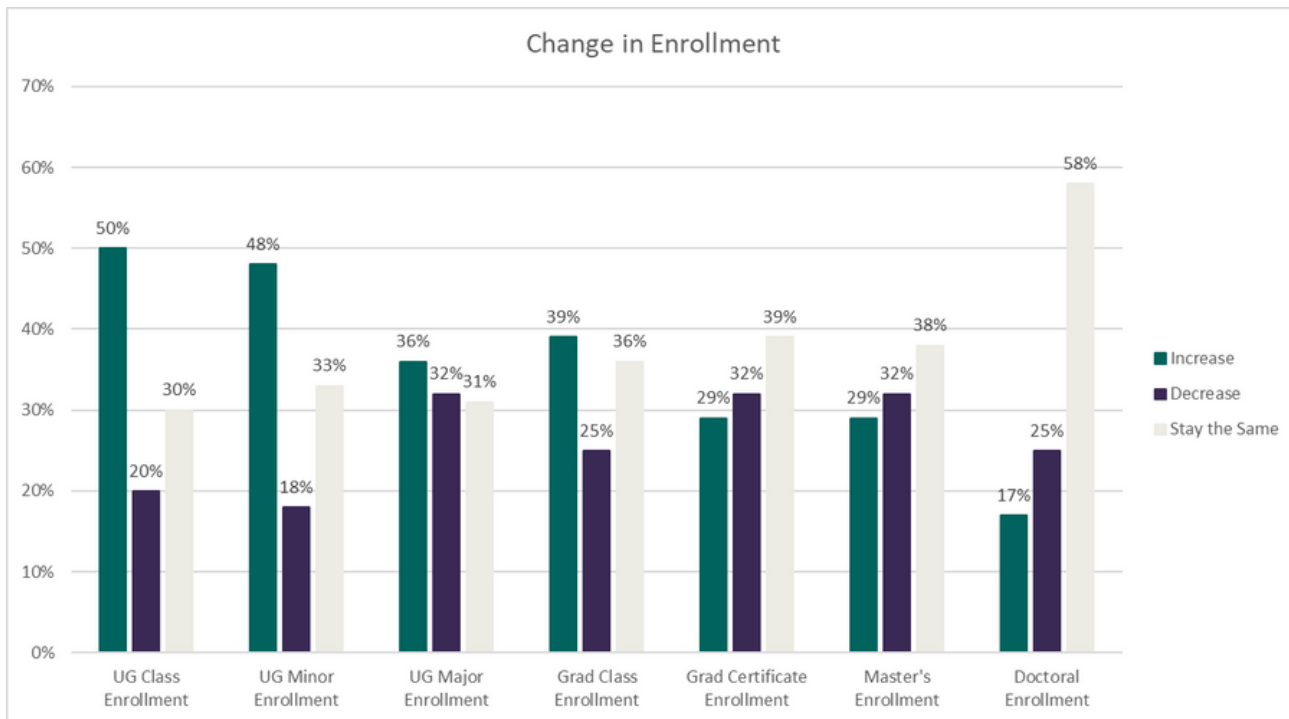


Figure 9: Each bar represents the percent of departments who reported change in their enrollment

Most respondents expressed their department's maintenance or growth in enrollments across majors, minors, and undergraduate courses, as well as in the number of courses they are offering. However, in the qualitative responses, many describe difficulty meeting the demand with the number of faculty they have, especially due to limited tenure-track faculty.⁸ This comes on the heels of increasing university expectations that WGSS departments support general education requirements with their courses: "WGS teaches lots of GE general education classes that all students need to take to graduate. Our GE enrollments have stayed strong, but the number of our classes has been cut." Despite steady or growing enrollment in courses, however, many respondents expressed that leadership only evaluates the number of majors when distributing resources:

"We fall in the middle of departments in the college for enrollment, but have the smallest number of tenure-line faculty (only 4, and 2 are Assistant Professor). The service needs far exceed TT faculty capacity. Also we have a popular minor with over 50 students and grad certificate (15-20) but neither of these metrics are used by the administration when making hiring decisions. They are only interested in number of majors."

This means that the many departments without a major, or whose majors are small compared to other departments, such as at STEM-heavy schools, even while populous or growing overall, remain at a disadvantage when it comes to receiving funding. Many respondents also reported that WGSS is commonly part of a double-major – sometimes by university requirement – and sometimes this results in WGSS not being counted in the same manner as single majors. This occurs because, according to respondents, WGSS is sometimes treated as a "secondary" major and only the primary major counts in the data.

"[Leadership is] only interested in the number of majors."

⁸ Although most departments are limited in all faculty types, tenure-track/tenured faculty are of particular significance because affiliated/associated faculty often must prioritize the needs of their home departments over the WGSS courses, and adjunct or other NTT faculty positions are very precarious.

Enrollment Trends



Overall, there are indications that both local and national occurrences are contributing to the growing interest in WGSS. Several respondents mentioned increases following the repeal of *Roe vs. Wade*, as well as happenings on campus such as the creation of social media accounts addressing gender-based inequalities at the university. Some departments also described lingering effects of the pandemic that are reducing interest, such as faculty continuing to teach online while students seek in-person contact. Finally, it is always worth keeping in mind that many universities are facing decreased undergraduate enrollment at the institutional level (Knox 2022), and decreases in WGSS enrollment may simply be representative of this decline.



In this graphic, the green people represent those who report that they cannot function with their current resources; the purple represent those who say they can.

The bottom line? Among our responding departments, more than half said they do not currently have the resources needed to function.

Figure 10: Percent of respondents reporting their department cannot function at current staffing levels vs. those who report they can

-  Department reporting they cannot function
-  Department reporting they can function

Summary and Strategies

Gaining institutional support from senior leaders, leveraging national and local networks, and navigating institutional and national politics emerged as necessary strategies for sustaining and growing WGSS. While statistical impacts may not always be straightforward, the importance of having strong leadership support at the president, provost, and dean level cannot be understated. In this section we provide a few strategies that have emerged from the survey data that WGSS departments can implement.

To seek to gain institutional support from senior leaders, it is essential to work with university groups, such as faculty leadership bodies, student advocates, advancement and donor relations, and media relations. Finding ways to tell your story by accessing and collecting institutional data on graduation rates, career placements, and alumni networks remains important and can help demonstrate the impact and value of the department. Being visible and setting annual or biannual meetings to engage with university leadership can help you build strong relationships to leverage later. NWSA can serve as a partner in data collection and review through their external review network. External review teams can assess the present state of the department or program including if future plans will be sufficient to maintain or improve quality. An external review is another way to tell your story and advocate for resources to your institutional leadership. In addition, WGSS faculty noted within this survey the few leaders with a background in WGSS were the most supportive to their work. More WGSS faculty may want to consider entering university leadership roles if we want to see broader change in higher education.

In addition to working with NWSA, it is also important to **leverage national and local networks.** Consider building relationships with other national organizations such as the American Association of University Professors, American Association of University Women, and American Civil Liberties Union, Southwest Institute for Research on Women, and WGS South (Formerly the Southeastern Women's Studies Association or SEWSA) to build meaningful solidarity but also resources in their respective commitments to WGSS-informed scholarship and organizing. Perhaps most impactful are regional networks with feminist community organizations and other institutions with whom WGSS departments work collectively to share resources, information, collegial support. They are also potential avenues for collective organizing. Great examples of this work can be found both organized by a university system like the Wisconsin WGSS Consortium and organized directly by faculty as with the Greater Rochester Consortium of WGSS.

Gaining the support of your institutional leadership and creating national and local networks for your WGSS department are the strategies we suggest to help **navigate institutional and national politics.** By being prepared with information through existing institutional, regional, and national partners, WGSS departments will be better able to respond to threats to their resources and autonomy. While engaging across these multiple constituencies, developing clear and persuasive data-supported messaging is essential. Understanding what will resonate with different audiences, both within and outside the academic community, is key to effectively advocating for resources and support. Building these strong networks of affiliates may lead to contacts with political representatives or media outlets that can all be essential steps in securing ongoing support for departments that may be under institutional or governmental attacks.

While we know WGSS scholars know there is no one-size-fits-all solution, we want to encourage you to try approaches that may have not been employed previously. Whether that be a collaboration with a local non-profit to work on a state policy issue, hosting a gathering for regional WGSS departments, or creating an annual report for your institution and local community, we know this is added labor to already busy schedules. By taking one step at a time and proactively engaging with stakeholders, building a strong network of support, collecting and maintaining data, and developing a compelling messaging strategy, institutions may work towards sustaining and growing valuable departments like WGSS.

Conclusion

The social justice nature of the project of WGSS to change higher education and society itself may always cast WGSS in a precarious role. There remains a need to consistently cultivate diverse support networks and attend to current as well as potential future threats to WGSS from within our institutions and beyond.

NWSA must continue to share these stories and strategize ways to deepen our ties and ability to sustain the work of WGSS departments as they encounter another wave of backlash. You are encouraged to review other reports produced by NWSA that may help, including the [impact of the pandemic on WGSS](#) and the power of collectively organizing. In addition, [the NWSA report that includes recognition of leadership of this field](#) includes understanding obstacles and inequities for WGSS. Finally, another helpful resource is a series of reports on the status of WGSS from the [American Academy of Arts and Science](#).

If you are experiencing similar challenges, please reach out directly to nwsa@nwsa.org or by phone at 773-524-1807 so NWSA can amplify your efforts and provide support.



Rosamond King, 2019
(Photo Credit: April Martin)

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Appendix: Survey Instrument

Q1. What is your institution (we will pull the IPED data to gather information such as type of institution and size. We will deidentify the institution from your individual answers, but we will lump them together by Carnegie classification, location, etc.)

Note: Participants were asked to select whether they were responding as a Women, Gender, & Sexuality Studies Program/Departments or a Women/Gender Equity Center and subsequently funneled to the appropriate questionnaire based on their response

Q2 Please select your affiliation (can only select one):

Women, Gender & Sexuality Studies, Program/Departments (1)

Women/Gender Equity Center (2)

Q3 The following questions are focused on women, Gender, & Sexuality Studies Program/Departments

What is your title/rank (select all that apply)

Lecturer (1)

Teaching Professor (2)

Assistant Professor (non-tenure-track) (3)

Assistant Professor (tenure track) (4)

Associate Professor (5)

Full Professor (6)

Department Chair (7)

Program Chair (8)

Program Coordinator (9)

Post-doc (10)

Research Associate (11)

University Staff (non-teaching, please provide title) (12)

Other (please specify) (13)

Q4 The following programs exist at your institution for women and gender studies:

Undergraduate concentration (1)

Undergraduate minor (2)

Undergraduate major (3)

Major-concentration (undergraduate) (4)

Master degree (5)

Ph.D. (6)

Graduate certificate (7)

Graduate concentration (8)

Q5 Do you have a standalone women/gender studies department with tenure track lines?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Q6 Do your faculty have joint appointments with other departments?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Q7 Do you have affiliated faculty that teach in the program?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Q8 Do you feel the university president is supportive of your women/gender studies department/program?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Q9 Do you feel the university provost is supportive of your women/gender studies department/program?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Q10 Do you feel the dean is supportive of your women/gender studies department/program?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Q11 Is there anything you wish to share about your department or program's relationship with the institution, president, provost, or dean? Please use this space to share.

Q12 Over the past five years, what has happened to your department's space?

The space has been increased (1)

The space has stayed the same (2)

The space has decreased (3)

Q13 Over the past five years, what has happened to your department's budget?

The budget has decreased (1)

The budget has stayed the same (2)

The budget has increased (3)

Q14 Over the past five years, what has happened to your full-time faculty?

The full-time faculty have decreased (1)

The full time faculty have stayed the same (2)

The full-time faculty have increased (3)

We do not have full-time faculty (4)

Q15 Over the past five years, what has happened to your joint faculty?

The joint faculty have decreased (1)

The joint faculty have stayed the same (2)

The joint faculty have increased (3)

We do not have joint faculty (4)

Q16 Over the past five years, what has happened to your adjunct faculty?

The adjunct faculty have decreased (1)

The adjunct faculty have stayed the same (2)

The adjunct faculty have increased (3)

We do not have joint faculty (4)

Q17 Over the past five years, what has happened to your department or program's staff (non-teaching individuals)?

The staff have decreased (1)

The number of staff have stayed the same (2)

The staff have increased (3)

Staff have been moved from part-time to full-time (4)

We do not have staff (5)

Q18 Can your department fully function based on your current tenure/staffing status?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Q19 Over the past five years, what has happened to your department's women/gender studies courses?

The number of courses have decreased (1)

The number of courses have stayed the same (2)

The number of courses have increased (3)

Q20 Over the past five years, what has happened to your enrollment for: your undergraduate women/gender studies (WGS) classes? (1); your WGS minor? (2); your WGS major? (3); your graduate WGS classes? (4); WGS master's degree? (5); WGS graduate certificates? (6); WGS Ph.D.? (7)

Note: this was a matrix table which asked for enrollment of each of the above, with the below options for each category

Decreased (1)

Stayed the same (2)

Increased (3)

N/A (4)

Q21 Is there anything you wish to share about your department or program's course enrollment, number of faculty or staff, or majors and degrees? Please use this space to share.

Q22 To what extent has national, state, and local legislation impacted your practice, teaching, scholarship, enrollment, budget, etc. (including the overturning of Roe v. Wade)?

Q23 Can you speak out directly about women's issues at the institution, at the state-level, nationally, and/or within professional organizations? Please elaborate.

Q24 Is your institution religiously affiliated?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Note: The following was shown only if the respondent indicated that their institution was religiously affiliated

Q25 If your institution is religiously affiliated, how has that impacted your practice as a women/gender studies faculty member and/or your department?

Q26 Are you engaged in diversity, equity, inclusion, and/or belonging work within your university?

Yes (please specify) (1)

No (2)

Q27 Are you engaged in diversity, equity, inclusion, and/or belonging work outside of your university (e.g., conferences, professional organizations)?

Yes (please specify) (1)

No (2)

