GOAL: TO IMPROVE STUDENT AND ADVISING AND MENTORING PROCEDURES

OVERVIEW

The MA program in Women’s and Gender studies is going into its 5th year as of fall 2020. In that time, and as of June 2020, we have graduated a total of 23 students. The students in the program are quite independent and represent different levels of engagement with the program. In other words, some students attend the program full time, others part time. Part-time students may take as few as one class in a semester. This, of course, means that not all students are focused on professional development, because their graduation dates are far out. Other students are employed and actually have no or little need for professional development.

Until recently, the WGS Program has structured advising and mentoring around engagement with the Executive Officer. Because all incoming students have the EO as their initial advisor, it seemed most efficacious to have the EO serve as the point person for most of the student’s academic and professional development.

This is in addition to students working with their thesis advisor, whose role is predominantly to guide students through the completion of their thesis. While students work in one-on-one interactions with their advisor toward finishing their thesis, they continue to receive academic advisement with the Director. Part of the reason for this is that the program offerings in WGS are dependent upon cross-listed classes and the WGS faculty are not always aware of the electives that may be available.

This structure facilitates constant contact with students, allows for progress updates, and makes it easier to engage in professional development as they consider job opportunities or continuing their academic career. The EO meets with EVERY student at least twice a semester. The first circumstance under which the EO meets with every student is at the beginning of the semester mandatory
meeting. The second instance is when students are registering for classes. Every student must meet with the EO in order to register for the next semester.

While the program has always engaged in some professional development activities, they were, up until 2019, limited. The dominant activity was a professional development workshop focusing on preparation to apply to PhD programs, which is described below. In 2019, the WGS MA program expanded our professional development activities to include the following:

1. **Academic Advising**
   Students have one-on-one meetings with the EO, once each semester. During those meetings, topics covered include an audit of classes taken; program completion assessment, discussion of future plans; identification of thesis advisor or thesis progress update. Students continue to meet with the EO for academic advising even after they have identified a Thesis Advisor.

2. **Mandatory Group Meeting**
   At the beginning of each semester there is a mandatory meeting of all students to review the handbook, facilitate student introductions, discuss the roadmap to completion and assess student interest in types of professional development activities they are interested in.

3. **Brown Bags**
   The department develops one brown bag each semester for students to meet with professionals, activists, and academics who do work that may be of interest to current students. Brown Bag invitees have included Prof. Lynn Roberts, Associate Dean of Student Affairs and Alumni at Hunter College, who discussed her role as a reproductive justice advocate, and Prof. Bianca Williams, Assoc. Prof. of Anthropology, who discussed her experiences as an activist. We anticipate future Brown Bags with directors of such organizations as the Audre Lorde Project, the New York Women’s Foundation, and the New York Foundation to help students learn about career opportunities.

4. **Professional Development Workshops**
These workshops focus on applying to PhD Program and are led by Prof. Wendy Lutrell and a short session with one of the librarians. Professor Lutrell has been gracious enough to hold three sessions over the last three years. Generally, about 1/3 of WGS’ graduating class continue into a PhD program.

5. **Alumni Networking Sessions**  
In 2019, for the first time, we invited alumni to visit with current students to discuss their career trajectory since leaving the program. These 2 hour sessions followed by a short reception allowed students to network and learn about the kinds of opportunities they may be able to take advantage of. We plan to enhance our Alumni project and offer more opportunities for current students to meet with alumni for professional advice.

6. **Mentoring Project**  
One new project that we will implement in Fall 2020, is to have each incoming student paired with a current student who will serve as a mentor. This will allow students to learn about what soon-to-graduate students are planning and will likely offer incoming students an opportunity to consider academic and career options they had not necessarily considered.

7. **In 2018, the Center for the Study of Women and Society office was redesigned after over 15 years of accumulating materials and resources. In redesigning the office, we were able to create a drop-in atmosphere, organizing the space for informal advising and sharing with office staff and guests.**