

Guide to Graduate Study in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at GW

Updated August 2021

Welcome, new and returning graduate students! We compiled this guide to give you, in one document, most of the basic information you will need at each stage of your graduate work. Please save it, and refer to it throughout your time at GW. Also be sure to bookmark the [CCAS Academic Policies](#).

Special Notes for Fall 2020 & 2021

1. This Guide is written for “normal” times with in-person classes and meetings. Whenever you have questions or are unsure what to do, always feel welcome to contact your advisor or WGSS@gwu.edu.
2. As of the 2020-2021 official GW Bulletin, WGSS has made changes that we believe improve our MA Program and benefit students. Older versions of this guide and possibly some web pages may not have the changes incorporated here. The main change is that all MA students now take WGSS 6299 Research Capstone course in the Spring of their second year. This Capstone Seminar forms a culminating research experience in a unique writing and learning community for MA students in their final semester, as they write a substantial, article-quality research paper on their chosen topic. Some students link this research project to their Practicum placement, but that is not required. On occasion, a student elects to write a 6 credit thesis; they must register for 3 credits of WGSS 6998 (thesis credits) in the Fall of year 2, and 3 credits in the Capstone in the Spring. The Practicum option is now 3 credits WGSS 6283 plus 3 credits in the Capstone. The previously required MA Comprehensive Exam has been abolished. ☺

Advisors

Before registering, incoming students should consult with their advisor to discuss courses and programs of study. Although there are no regular faculty office hours between May 31st and August 15th, advisors are often available by email at various points during the summer. Advisors usually arrange office hours for walk-in visits or appointments the week before classes start; these are advertised via email.

Liberal Arts Advisor: Ashwini Tambe tambe@gwu.edu

Public Policy Advisor: Cindy Deitch deitch@gwu.edu

As students proceed through their course work, they should feel free to find a mentor who will serve as a more in-depth source of intellectual and professional guidance, but remain in regular contact with their assigned academic advisor every semester, and check on their DegreeMap record every semester, to ensure appropriate progress toward degree.

By their second semester, students are required to complete a *Program of Study* form. It must be signed by their advisor and submitted to the WGSS office before registration for the second semester. Revisions to the Program of Study form may be made as often as needed; each change requires the advisor's approval. Please write to the WGSS program at wgss@gwu.edu for the Designing Your Program of Study form.

MA in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies with a concentration in a discipline or topical area of interest:

3 theory/methods courses plus Capstone (12 credit hours):

- [WGSS 6220](#): Fundamentals of Feminist Theory (Fall, usually first year)
- [WGSS 6221](#): Research Issues in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (Fall, usually 2nd year)
- [WGSS 6225](#): Contemporary Feminist Theory or approved alternative such as Global Feminisms. Confer with advisor for approved alternative.
- [WGSS 6299](#): Capstone Research Seminar (Spring of 2nd year)

3 credit hours from the following two options: (footnote here -- important)

- [WGSS 6283](#): Three-credit Practicum(Spring)
- [WGSS 6998](#): Thesis (3 credit hours)

(Please note that students are not required to write a thesis, most of our students do not choose the thesis, and the thesis is not recommended for most students. Think of the thesis as approximately double the amount of work and time as the non-thesis capstone research project. Most students choose the Practicum. In certain circumstances, a student may seek special permission to take another course for the final 3 credits instead of the Practicum.)

In your first year, consider identifying an area of concentration; this can be a traditionally defined field, like "Sociology" or "Art History," or a thematically designed field, like "Gender in Global Cultures." Students take four graduate courses (12 credit hours) in their chosen discipline/field while in the program. Typical choices for a liberal arts concentration include disciplines such as Philosophy, History, Sociology, Anthropology, English, Religion, Political Science, or Economics. Most students create a topical concentration around an area of interest such as gender and health, gender and international development, race and gender, LGBT studies, among many other possibilities. For this option, the student, in consultation with the advisor, must find and take four graduate level courses (12 credits) in courses that fit the chosen concentration topic.

In addition, students should take three courses (9 credit hours) of electives related to their program of study for a total of 36 credit hours. Students may take more than four courses in their discipline/field of choice. For advice about these courses, students should locate a mentor in the relevant department as early as possible.

A typical program of study for the MA in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies with Anthropology as the chosen discipline and the Practicum option, for example, might look like:

FALL	SPRING	FALL	SPRING
<u>WGSS 6220</u>			<u>WGSS 6283</u>
<u>ANTH 6591</u>	<u>WGSS 6225</u>	<u>WGSS 6221</u>	<u>WGSS 6290</u>
	Elective	<u>ANTH Elective</u>	(or new <u>capstone</u>) ¹
<u>ANTH 6501</u>	Elective	<u>ANTH 6331</u>	Elective

¹ Beginning in Spring, 2020, WGSS is offering a new capstone research seminar for second year MA students where everyone is working on a thesis or independent research project with faculty guidance, sharing results, and giving each other feedback. This is now required for students entering in 2020. Under this requirement, thesis students register for only 3 (instead of 6) thesis credits plus 3 credits of capstone research; Practicum students register for the 3 credit Practicum plus 3 credits of capstone research. Comprehensive exams are not required. For students entering before 2020, the above requirements are highly recommended; if you choose the old requirements instead then the comprehensive exam (3 5-page essays over 3 days) would be required.

MA in Public Policy with a concentration in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies

2 theory/methods courses plus Capstone (9 credit hours):

- [WGSS 6220](#): Fundamentals of Feminist Theory (Fall, usually first year. Occasionally an alternative theory course might be approved)
- [WGSS 6221](#): Research Issues in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (Fall, usually 2nd year)

5 courses in the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and Public Policy core (15 credit hours):

- [WGSS 6240](#): Gender and Public Policy (Spring)
- [PPPA 6003](#): Economics (usually Fall) [PPPA 6002](#): Research Methods in (Fall/Spring)
- [PPPA 6006](#): Policy Analysis (Fall/Spring; PPPA 6011 is an alternative)
- One of the following: one additional PPPA course or [PHIL 6230](#), [PHIL 6242](#), [WGSS 6265](#), or [SOC 6265](#).

3 credit hours from the following two options.

- [WGSS 6283](#): three-credit Practicum (Spring)
- [WGSS 6998](#): Thesis (3 credit hours)

(Please note that students are not required to write a thesis, most of our students do not choose the thesis, and the thesis is not recommended for most students. Think of the thesis as approximately double the amount of work and time as the non-thesis capstone research project. Most students choose the Practicum. In certain circumstances, a student may seek special permission to take another course for the final 3 credits instead of the Practicum.)

In addition, students take three elective courses related to their program of study (9 credit hours) to complete the total of 36 credit hours. A typical program of study for the MA in Public Policy with a concentration in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies might look like:

FALL	SPRING	FALL	SPRING
<u>WGSS 6220</u>	<u>PPPA 6002</u> or <u>6003</u> or <u>6006</u>	<u>WGSS 6221</u>	<u>WGSS 6283</u>
<u>PPPA 6002</u> or <u>6003</u> or <u>6006</u>	<u>WGSS 6240</u>	<u>PPPA 6002</u> or <u>6003</u> or <u>6006</u>	<u>WGSS 6299</u> ²
Elective	Elective	Elective	PPPA course

² Beginning in Spring, 2020, WGSS is offering a new capstone research seminar for second year MA students where everyone is working on a thesis or independent research project with faculty guidance, sharing results, and giving each other feedback. This is now required for students entering in 2020. Under this requirement, thesis students register for only 3 (instead of 6) thesis credits plus 3 credits of capstone research; Practicum students register for the 3 credit Practicum plus 3 credits of capstone research. Comprehensive exams are not required. For students entering before 2020, the above requirements are highly recommended; if you choose the old requirements instead then the comprehensive exam (3 5-page essays over 3 days) would be required.

Choosing Between the Public Policy and Liberal Arts Options

The M.A. in Public Policy with a Concentration in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies was established in 1982 as a "first-of-its-kind" graduate degree option formally combining Women's, Studies (as it was called at the time) and Public Policy. It remains a unique and distinctive feature of the GW program. Students take required core Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies courses and electives with other Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies graduate students and required core Public Policy courses with students in other public policy/public administration graduate programs. This program provides students with a professionally oriented degree, the M.A. in Public Policy, including training in the conventional social science components of that degree: economics, quantitative methods, policy analysis. This training makes our graduates competitive in the mainstream world of public policy. Most important, it also provides students with a feminist analysis and the tools to criticize conventional ways of thinking about and studying public policy that have traditionally excluded women and marginalized groups. It offers opportunities to gain expertise in specific policy issues important to gender and social justice, and to participate in Washington women's/gender policy networks and organizations.

The M.A. in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies with a concentration in a liberal arts discipline, or a topical focus, offers students the opportunity to craft an individualized program of study in close consultation with faculty advisors. Students are expected to develop intellectual depth and a degree of expertise through a four-course concentration in either (a) a specific discipline such as Anthropology, Sociology, English, History, Philosophy (other disciplines are also possible, with permission), or (b) a topical area such as gender and health, gender and international development, race and gender, LGBTQ issues, queer theory (other areas are possible). There are ample opportunities for students with policy interests to include policy courses (such as Gender and Public Policy, among others) in their program of study, either as part of their chosen discipline/field or as electives.

The disciplinary concentration works well for students interested in going on for a Ph.D. in a discipline and for those whose interests fit easily within disciplinary lines. Students are encouraged to find a faculty mentor in their disciplinary concentration. Alternatively, students may choose an M.A. in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies because their intellectual passions and career objectives are truly interdisciplinary. The topical focus option provides academic space for students with diverse interests.

Choosing Between the Practicum and the Thesis Option

Each MA student faces the choice of whether to write a thesis or to do the practicum option. Although it is possible to do both a thesis and a practicum, most students do one or the other.

The Practicum

The practicum provides students with professional level experience in a policy-related organization combined with weekly seminar meetings, readings and written work that integrates theory and practice. The practicum is offered only in the Spring semester of each year. Most students take the practicum in their second year, but some do it earlier. The timing depends on what works best for the student's interests, needs, and schedule. Doing this practicum involves finding a part-time internship (preferably paid) that relates to WGSS; students can also count 3-5 hours of volunteering done at a local gender-related organization as such work. The WGSS Program regularly circulates information on internship opportunities as part of our Weekly Digest, so it is a good idea to keep an eye out for them, and to start applying to these in the Summer of year 2. Additional information on the Practicum is usually emailed in October or November.

NOTE: we do not know how COVID restrictions will affect Practicum placement options for Spring 2022.

Placement arrangements, including an application, interviews, and a contract, are completed in November-December of the preceding Fall term. Thus, students who wish to take the practicum in the Spring of their first year must decide before the end of their first semester. The Practicum instructor can provide individualized advice in finding a placement if the student begins the process by November or earlier. Students considering the Practicum are strongly urged to consult with the instructor (Spring 2020 instructor, Janine Moussa, Janinemoussa@gmail.com) during the Fall semester. Dr. Cynthia Deitch, deitch@gwu.edu, is also available for consulting.

The Practicum requires attendance at the weekly seminar, assigned readings, and writing assignments that reflect on the relation between scholarship and praxis.

WGSS 6295 and WGSS 6280 (electives)

All students taking [WGSS 6295](#) Independent Research or [WGSS 6280](#) Independent Study, must submit a brief description of their proposed project and obtain written permission from a faculty sponsor who agrees to supervise the research prior to registering. Forms are available from the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies office. [Warning: Students who register for WGSS 6295, 6280 or thesis credits without written permission, risk having the credits NOT COUNT toward the degree.](#)

Although each of these may take a variety of forms, [WGSS 6280](#) is typically a directed readings course, designed so that the student may gain command of the literature in a specific field of inquiry not readily available through offered courses. In contrast, WGSS 6295 is typically a semester or more of intensive independent research under faculty supervision that should not duplicate the Capstone or thesis. For 6289 or 6295, students and faculty sponsors should agree ahead of time (in a written contract) on the expected written outcomes or final projects.

The Thesis

Most WGSS MA students do NOT choose the thesis option. However, if you are considering the thesis, here is information we hope will help: A student invites a faculty member to serve as thesis advisor. After a suitable topic has been agreed upon by the advisor and student, the student invites a second faculty member to serve as reader (the thesis advisor can help find a reader). A thesis topic approval form should be filled out and submitted to the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program. Submit this form the first semester of registration for thesis credits. Most students need about two semesters to complete the thesis. It is unrealistic to expect to first start thesis research, with no prior work, the same semester you hope to graduate. **Warning: Students who register for thesis credits without written approval risk having the credits not count.**

The Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies website provides a [list of Faculty and Affiliated Faculty](#) to assist students in finding a faculty member with whom they would like to work, but generally the thesis advisor is someone with whom the student has already worked and established a rapport. This list is not exhaustive, and students are welcome to create links with other faculty. Students should also consult with the Director of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and/or their advisor.

Further details concerning the MA thesis:

- a. The length of a thesis varies. Suggested length is 40-50 double spaced pages.
- b. If the proposed director or reader is from outside GW, her/his curriculum vitae must be submitted to the Columbian School of Arts and Sciences (CCAS) by the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program for approval.
- c. The final thesis, after being approved by reader and advisor, should be submitted electronically at <http://library.gwu.edu/etd>. More detailed information about the submission process can be found on the above website.
- d. It is important to consult this website early on as it also contains important information about the submission requirements, as well as the final submission process and deadlines. It is helpful to set up a timeline in consultation with your advisor.

- e. In planning your schedule, keep in mind that most faculty are not on contract in summer and may be unavailable to work with you in June, July, and August. Individual faculty may choose to make themselves available, but you should consult with your advisor early on to agree on deadlines.
- f. Once you have submitted the thesis electronically, the site will provide a paper approval form that needs to be signed by your advisor. This form goes to CCAS. A copy should also be submitted to Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies.
- g. Accepted theses become the property of the University and are kept on file with Gelman Library.

Some general guidelines for writing a thesis:

- h. Define a research question.
- i. Contextualize the topic within existing literature, discussing how it relates to previous research and theory, and what it will contribute.
- j. Explain your methods and sources of information.
- k. Present your findings.
- l. Discuss the theoretical, policy, or other implications of the findings.
- m. Draw some conclusions.

Human Subjects Permission: See the Office of Human Research's website humanresearch.gwu.edu. If your thesis involves research on living people (such as interviewing, observing, questionnaire, focus group, etc.), you must get IRB approval. The website provides additional details, required CITI training, and access to required forms. For student projects, they may try to process the forms quickly, in several weeks, but recently the process has taken several months in some cases. Your advisor and/or other WGSS faculty can help you figure out what to do. If you fail to obtain Human Research approval, the University may require you to start your thesis all over again, not use any of the data (interviews, etc.) you collected without permission, register and pay again for thesis credits, and other penalties.

What happens if you need more time?

If you have finished your coursework and have taken your 6 thesis credits but need more time to finish the thesis, beyond the Spring semester, current CCAS policy permits the following:

- If a student registers for "continuous enrollment" (CE) for the summer and finishes by August 15th, the student pays a nominal fee and graduates in August.
- If a student registers for CE for the Summer but does not finish by August 15th, she/he may register and pay again for CE for Fall, finish within the first 3 weeks of the Fall semester, and graduate in January. Students are usually charged regular tuition rates for 1 credit of Fall or Spring CE.

- If the student needs more time (beyond the first 3 weeks of the Fall semester), she/he registers for “continuing registration” (CR) for the Fall and pays for one credit. The student must file by January 15, to graduate in January.

Be sure to consult your academic advisor and CCAS throughout the process.

The Comprehensive Examination. NOT required for students who take WGSS 6299 Capstone.

Students who entered before 2020 and do not take the Capstone are required to pass the comprehensive exam in order to complete the MA degree. The MA Comprehensive Exam is offered *twice* a year: in the Fall and Spring, near the end of each semester. Students who plan to take the exam should consult an earlier version of this Guide and notify their advisor at the beginning of the semester in which they plan to take the exam.

Academic Integrity:

For all written work for courses, thesis, and independent research, students must comply with the University’s [Academic Integrity Code](#). This means assignments and exams must be written in your own words and must represent original responses to the questions. "Re-cycling" your own writing from other sources (previous papers, exams, assignments, etc.) is generally not allowed without permission from the instructor.

Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies MA Thesis Information Sheet

(Revised: August 2019)

The University holds students responsible for following the guidelines and meeting the deadlines specified in the documents listed below. Be sure to read and understand the requirements registration, thesis credits, graduation, etc.

1. Resource documents you should be sure to consult:

- GW [CCAS Academic Policies](#)
- GW *Thesis and Dissertations* style guide (online at <https://library.gwu.edu/etd>).
- See WGSS's own *Guide to Graduate Study in Women's Studies* on what is typically expected in WGSS theses. Some of the information here is also in the Guide.
- Previous MA theses are available electronically via Gelman Library.

2. Example of Typical CCAS Deadlines: The final copy of the MA thesis, formatted according to GW guidelines, officially approved by the Thesis Advisor and the Reader, usually is due for electronic submission by the following dates (but **be sure to verify the dates for the year you are graduating**):

- January 15 for Winter graduation
- May 1 (in 2020; may be different in other years).
- August 15 for Summer graduation.

3. Some Tips for Avoiding Major Headaches:

- Read the GW guidelines so you don't miss deadlines, or have to retype/reformat at the last minute.
- Almost everyone underestimates the time it takes to do the research and write the thesis. Try to be realistic in your planning.
- In planning your schedule, keep in mind that WGSS faculty, as well as most other GW faculty, are not paid to work with students over the summer (though some may be willing to give students some of their time).
- If you run into a writing block, feel isolated or overwhelmed, get help by going to the Writing Center and/or getting together with other students working on theses or independent research for feedback and support.

4. Typically, in writing a thesis in the social sciences (humanities may be different), one would:

- Define a research question.
- Locate the topic within the existing literature, discussing how it relates to previous research and theory, and what it will contribute.

- Explain your methods and sources of information.
- Present your findings.
- Discuss the theoretical, policy, or other implications of the findings.
- Draw some conclusions.

5. Human Subjects Permission: See the Graduate Student Handbook and the Office of Human Research website (below). As explained in the GW Graduate Student Handbook, if your thesis involves research on living people (such as interviewing, observing, questionnaire, focus group, etc.) you must get what is called IRB approval. For more details, required CITI training, and access to forms, go to <https://humanresearch.gwu.edu/> and follow instructions. For student projects, they usually try to in a few weeks, but it may take longer. Your advisor and/or other WGSS faculty can help you figure out what to do. As indicated in the Handbook and on the website, if you fail to obtain Human Research approval, the University may require you to start your thesis all over again, not use any of the data (interviews, etc.) you collected without permission, register and pay again for thesis credits, and other penalties. In other words, this is serious!

6. Example of a time line (subject to negotiation with your thesis advisor and reader): Note: For students taking the new MA Capstone in Spring, Professor Eiko Strader may have a revised timeline for everyone's drafts.

- Spring, first year: Begin defining a general topic and finding an advisor
- Summer, first year: Background reading; secondary sources; literature search.
Usually this would be independent work by the student.
- September-October, second year: In consultation with your thesis advisor, finalize your topic and research strategy. Submit to WGSS the "Thesis Topic Approval" form signed by your thesis advisor and DGS (academic advisor). Initiate IRB review if necessary. (IRB will not approve any research done before submission to the IRB.) Although the IRB tries to process most student applications within 2-3 weeks, some proposals may take 2 months or longer. Allow enough time.
- November - March, second year: Conduct research and begin writing (schedule will vary).
- January – February: Write first draft and submit to advisor. (Alternatively, your thesis advisor might prefer that you submit chapters or sections rather than a full draft)
- March: Revise thesis in response to advisor's comments.
- April 1: Give second draft to both advisor and reader (Alternatively, your Reader might be involved in reading earlier drafts or may prefer to read only the final draft after it is approved by the thesis advisor.)
- April 15 – May 1: Get final approval for any additional revisions. Format and electronically submit thesis <https://library.gwu.edu/etd> and <https://library.gwu.edu/etd/ccas>. CCAS

requests that you submit before May 1 so that any formatting problems can be fixed. If you wait until May 1 to submit electronically, you risk not graduating until August for any minor problem.

- Modifications to this timeline should be made in negotiation with one's advisor.