

May Spotlight

UNCG Women's and Gender Studies Program: Enhancing Your Global Perspectives

Ever wondered what you might learn majoring or minoring in Women's and Gender Studies? What types of careers might be a good fit with the major or how the minor could positively impact your future career? Are you just curious, want to take a few courses in the program, and wondering what you could get out of it? The following interview with Beth Walker, Lecturer, Undergraduate Advisor and Masters Admissions Advisor for the Women's and Gender Studies program, provides an excellent introduction to how the program can impact your studies and career.

Why did you decide to go into the Women's and Gender Studies field? What has been your career path so far?

Some career paths lead straight on, while others are not so direct. My path to WGS might be described as an erratic spiral. First, I matured during the "Women's Lib" movement, when women's equality was openly limited both by tradition and, frequently, by law. In that respect I embody some of the recent history that we cover in our WGS courses.

With my undergraduate degree in Biology, I taught in public schools for nine years, the last four in an alternative high school teaching health where I became an advocate for health education. That led me to pursue a Masters in Health Education, which led me to working in non-profit health agencies as well as in women's health clinics, at Research Triangle Institute and at Wake Forest University School of Medicine.



Just after finishing a MA in Liberal Studies at UNCG in 1999, I enrolled in WGS' Post-Baccalaureate Certificate program where one of my professors asked me if I would be interested in teaching an evening course at UNCG in Women's Studies (at that time we did not have Gender in our title). I jumped at the chance! The rest is history - I began teaching WGS at UNCG regularly in 2004.

What is the most unique aspect of your field?

Women's and Gender studies provides a form of cultural examination that I don't think is found in many other disciplines. Almost all of our courses include a 'personal and political' aspect - the old term from the 1970s - looking at how 'the way things are' came to be and examining the cultural underpinnings. Critical inquiry is at the core of our field, and here at UNCG our program has over 30 affiliated faculty members from departments and programs across campus, making it truly interdisciplinary. Our students take courses in Religious Studies, Psychology, English, History, Sociology, Philosophy, African American Studies, Human Development and Families - and more. It's this broad examination that gives our students a global appreciation of humanity's ongoing efforts to understand and eliminate oppression.

What career opportunities are available to students who major in Women's and Gender Studies?

I so love this question! It's asked of almost any humanities/liberal arts major. The tongue-in-cheek response is "Practically any careers!" You find our majors everywhere. But what they are excellently prepared for would be work in service providing agencies, non-profits, human resources, education, advocacy, social justice organizations and more. A great number of our majors are double majors, combining the WGS perspective to History, English, Public Health, Sociology, Psychology and more. We have graduates who have gone on to law school, have developed their own human service programs, are teaching, working as researchers in the health field, even working here on UNCG's campus. The world awaits our graduates!

What advice do you have for students of all majors who might be interested in the field of Women's and Gender Studies? How might the minor enhance their studies?

I advise all students not to be afraid of asking critical questions and stretching beyond comfortable boundaries to gain a different perspective. This advice applies both to taking

challenging courses as well as applying it to their studies within a particular course. If a student is interested in political or global issues, is passionate about human rights, is intrigued about what and who has been 'left out' of history, I recommend WGS classes. A minor in WGS provides an additional focus on how the aspects of gender, sexualities, class, race and other 'groups' are related to many other disciplines. It's all about valuing perspective.

For students who are not Women's and Gender Studies majors, what do you see as the advantage of taking courses in the program?

Colleges and Universities often tout the benefits of an 'interdisciplinary' education. Our courses are indeed interdisciplinary - our students choose electives from a wide variety of programs and have the opportunity to engage in meaningful internships where they get to see how cultural problems are being addressed. My favorite comment from students who are not majors who take our courses is, "I can't believe I never learned any of this before." That, to me, is the purpose of education!