

NWSA PA&D Budget Survey 2012

Jill Bystydzienski

Co-Chair, PA &D Taskforce on the Budget Crisis and Women's Studies

Professor and Chair

Department of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies

The Ohio State University

bystydzienski.1@osu.edu

Loretta Kensinger

Co-Chair, PA &D Taskforce on the Budget Crisis and Women's Studies

Professor, Former Program Coordinator

Women's Studies Program

California State University, Fresno

lkensing@csufresno.edu

Executive Summary

At the 2009 NWSA annual meeting's Program Administrators & Development (PA&D) pre-conference, after concerns had been expressed by many program administrators regarding the effects of the economic downturn on their programs, a Taskforce on the Budget Crisis was established and a survey subsequently developed and sent in 2011 to 336 institutions. Due to a very low initial response rate, the survey was re-sent in 2012 and 35% of the contacted directors/chairs responded. The majority of respondents were from programs and departments housed in universities and 4- year colleges, particularly those that offered minors, BA/BS degrees, and graduate certificates. The survey focused on the years 2009-2012, asking about gains and losses in the curriculum, increases and decreases in various resources such as positions, travel funds, release time, and operating budgets. It also inquired about consolidations with other units as well as successful strategies for lessening the impact of the economic downturn.

The following are the major findings of the survey:

- A majority of responding programs/departments (about 60%) were neither affected negatively nor positively by the economic downturn. However, since many started out with few resources, no increase over a three year period cannot be regarded as a positive outcome.
- Fewer than 10% of the programs reported a decrease in course offerings between 2009 and 2012 while 25% reported an increase. Decreases in course offerings affected negatively the retention of current students as well as recruitment of new majors and minors; they also led to offering larger course sections and greater reliance on other units for women's studies courses. Increases in course offerings had the opposite effects.
- For the most part, faculty and staff positions were not cut during this time period, although 20% of programs were affected by decreases in travel funds and 10% experienced decreases in release time for directors. Twenty-four programs reported decreases to their operating budgets but these were generally in line with overall budget cuts at their institutions.
- Ten percent of women's and gender studies programs had merged with other units although the majority retained program autonomy and benefitted in resources from the consolidations.
- One-third of the respondents shared strategies of how they successfully managed to withstand the economic downturn, including creative ways to fundraise; garnering support of deans, heads

of departments, and relevant committee members; and making a compelling case for their programs to the administrators who control the budget.

Introduction

At the November 2009 Annual NWSA conference in Atlanta, during the Program Administrators and Development (PA&D) Pre-conference, many Women's Studies administrators expressed concern about the effects of the economic downturn on their programs. Some administrators commented that their programs were unaffected or grew during the time. Many were willing to share strategies for growing or stretching their budgets. A proposal for a Taskforce to study how the budget crisis was affecting Women's and Gender Studies was brought to the PA&D business meeting and passed. Jill Bystydzienski and Loretta Kensinger were elected to co-chair the task force. In 2010, the PA&D endorsed the goal of conducting a survey on current program resources. Such a survey was thought also to provide opportunities for individuals to share successful financial strategies. The survey was developed and administered in 2011, but due to a low response rate it was administered a second time. Results were received in 2012. A preliminary report on the results was made at the NWSA PA&D business meeting in Oakland, where a written report was called for. Below we provide the requested analysis.

We thank Allison Kimmich, NWSA Executive Director, and Patti Provance, Deputy Director, for their help in digitizing and distributing the survey. And we thank all the participating directors for their time and energy in responding to the project.

Survey Demographics

We received 119 responses to the survey, for a response rate of 35% (the survey was sent to 336 institutions).

Of the 119 responses, 58.8% (70) came from public institutions and 36.9% (44) from private institutions; 75.6% (90) were from universities, 19.3% (23) from 4-year colleges, and .2% (1) from a community college; 4.2% (5) of the respondents did not indicate type of institution.

A large majority of respondents reported offering an undergraduate minor (82.4%, 94) and 59.6% (68) BA/BS majors. A significant number of respondents reported offering graduate certificates (42.1%, 49) and a small number of programs offered undergraduate certificates (10.5%, 12); 9.6% (11) of respondents had Ph.D. programs, while 17.5% (20) offered MA/MS degrees.

Our report thus has most relevance to those programs and departments housed in universities and 4-year colleges, particularly those that offer minors, BA/BS degrees, and graduate certificates.

Curriculum

About one-half of the respondents reported no change in the number of courses offered in 2009/2010 (53.7%) and in 2010/11 (50.4%). For 2011-2012, 40.3% reported no change. For academic year 2009/10, 25.2% of the respondents reported an increase in courses, 26.8% had an increase in

2010/2011, and 28.5% reported an increase in 2011/12. Comparatively, a minority 7.5% (9) reported a decrease in 09/10, 9.2% (11) in 2010/11, and 9.2% (11) in 2011/12.

The qualitative comments add detail to these numbers. Respondents were asked to respond to three questions: 1) Briefly describe the impact of any losses on your students and curriculum; 2) Briefly describe the impact of any gains on your students and curriculum; and 3) Are there other ways that your curriculum has been affected? One difficulty in reading the qualitative responses is that respondents may have reported losses in some aspects of the curriculum, but also seen gains in other areas. Further, some items reported as losses may also have led to unexpected gains.

Qualitative responses regarding impact of losses on the curriculum

Fifty-four respondents provided comments to this question, of whom 3 reported curriculum increases, and 15 commented either that there were no curriculum changes or the question was not applicable to their situation. Six respondents did not directly address the issue of curriculum impact, reporting changes in faculty or budget without discussing their link to the curriculum. Two of these reported programs in suspension, and one reported grave concerns about being eliminated or absorbed into other programs. While many responses were unique, four distinct groups emerged from the remaining qualitative data responses on the impact of decreases in curriculum.

First, twelve respondents expressed concerns about not having enough faculty to teach courses in the curriculum to graduate students on time, and to recruit new majors and minors. As one person wrote, “no one available to teach required ‘Intro’ courses is bad for prospective minors.”

Second, eight reported losses in the variety and regularity of courses being offered and issues in sequencing courses. For example, “.adjuncts are being cut. This makes it more difficult for students to complete their programs and diminishes the variety of perspectives and topics available to majors and minors...It is difficult to provide the required courses in sequence.”

Third, four respondents indicated the need to “pack courses.” One put this succinctly, stating, “‘losses’ have been in terms of losing small lower division courses due to pressures to raise student enrollment.”

Fourth, three responses discussed the volatility in curriculum when it relies on cross-listed courses. Clear voice for this concern was given by the respondent who stated: “We have some fluctuation over time because most courses are cross-listed with departments and as a program we have little to no control. An especially sparse year of course offerings diminishes student options and their ability to take courses that most interest them.”

Qualitative Responses on Gains to the Curriculum

Fifty-eight respondents offered comments in this section; 7 wrote that the question was not applicable to their situation. Answers to this question can be placed into four general categories.

First, the largest gains were in number of course sections offered. Here the most specific increase across respondents was in the number of introductory courses offered, followed by increases in GE and cross-listed sections. A few reported increased ability to offer small or capstone courses, but the largest number of respondents (18) commented that students had more variety of courses and electives available. For example, “Students have more options and thus more flexibility in their curriculum.” Another respondent stated, “More courses means more faculty teaching which gives students more choices.” It should be noted that four respondents reported that the increase in some general

education or introductory sections meant a decline in ability to offer more variety in the curriculum (e.g., “We have had trouble offering low enrollment specialty courses...students get less diversity of options & less Women’s Studies only.”) A positive trend in reporting expansions in curriculum and course offerings worth noting is that where greater variety was singled out, at least six programs reported this expansion in the area of sexuality or LGBTQ studies. As one respondent noted, “The cross-listed (marketed) courses have gone up and down, ending with an increase this year. We have a broader range of courses from more disciplines with increasing focus on LGBTQ issues.”

Second, increased opportunity to reach more and a greater variety of students was seen as having a real or potential ability to strengthen recruitment into the major, minor, or certificate. This response was embedded in many answers reporting on increases in course offerings, but was also found in responses regarding increases in class sizes without increases in course variety or sections. One respondent stated simply, “We are attracting, retaining and graduating more certificate earners.” Another wrote, “...the number of students in intro class doubled enrollment.” Still another stated, “In being able to offer a new course, “Introduction to Sexuality Studies,” we have drawn many new students whose interests lie in this area.”

Third, five respondents focused on program organization or reorganization, leading to important curricular and outreach gains. Some wrote of being newly established programs, such as this respondent who noted, “In the last five year, (we were created five years ago) we have developed our curriculum programs—major and minor, and graduate specialization. This was a great improvement.” Others focused on consolidations of programs that have led to growth in outreach and course topics, or major concentrations for students. One reported, “We have increased student interest in Women’s Studies by consolidating the two programs in our administrative unit, Women’s Studies and Religion...” And another, “We have realigned into the School of Language, Culture and Society with Ethnic Studies, Anthropology, and Foreign Languages. This has meant the opportunity for cross-listing that has created more course opportunities for our students and more diverse students in our WS courses.”

Fourth, six responses focused on increases in personnel hiring that has positively impacted variety of courses, section numbers and outreach. The majority here reported gains in graduate assistants.

Other ways the curriculum has been affected

Sixty-eight respondents provided answers to this question, fifteen stating simply “no,” or “no impact on the curriculum.” Of these “no’s” two responses were particularly telling; one stated, “No, we didn’t have money then and we don’t have money now,” and the other, “No growth since 2009 and we’re pretty close to zero anyway.” There is, as might be expected, a great deal of variety in these answers, though a number of common themes can be discerned.

First, 27 programs reported budget increases or no impact from the budget on curricular issues. The largest number (6) of these increases resulted from new faculty hires, particularly at the tenure track level. At least four respondents did note that where budget cuts had occurred, they impacted programming and outreach, not curriculum. One program reported the addition of lectures as part of its budget growth.

Second, the single largest concern for programs with few or no core faculty was the increased difficulty in recruiting faculty from other programs/departments to teach cross-listed courses, or to be released to cover core program curriculum. As one respondent noted, “Although we’ve been able to maintain # of seats in cross-listed courses, it has become more challenging to do so...”

Third, five decreases in staffing were cited. Programs experienced the loss of directors, the reduction of directors to half-time, the loss of administrative staff, the loss of faculty, and loss of teaching assistants. Such losses were perceived as contributing to curricular difficulties, especially placing greater demand on cross-listed faculty.

Fourth, a common grouping of issues raised in this section revolved around increased pressures to fundraise, often in situations of decreased donor dollars.

Finally, it should be noted that while many reported that the budget impacts they experienced were similar to those experienced by other units across campus, one person reported the loss of status as an institute, and another stated, "We were threatened with closure, our budget completely cut, in Fall 2011 (this has been hinted at before), but were able to defend our existence (yet again!) and received a promise of full funding."

Positions

The majority of respondents reported that the number of faculty, lecturer and staff positions in their program/department stayed the same (60.5%). Some programs increased their tenure track faculty positions (15; 12.6%) while a similar number lost such positions (13; 10.9%). Twelve programs lost lecturer positions, while 17 increased them.

The number of administrative assistant positions stayed the same for 73.1% (87) of the programs/departments; four programs had increases and nine experienced a decrease in such positions.

As discussed above, position increases as well as losses had important effects on the curriculum and programs/departments more broadly. Where faculty and/or lecturer positions were cut, fewer courses could be offered and programs increasingly had to rely on faculty in other units to teach their courses. Conversely, where such positions were added, the number and variety of courses grew. The addition of positions, including staff, resulted also in more and better programming and outreach.

Travel Funds

Respondents were asked whether their travel funds decreased, increased or stayed the same between 2009 and 2012. Sixty-eight (57.1%) of the respondents reported no change in travel funds; 21 (17.6%) reported a decrease, while 11 (9.2%) reported an increase.

For those who received increases in travel funds, the range was from \$500 to \$5,000, with majority of units reporting modest additional amounts. Six programs reported no longer having any travel funding, five reported a 50% decrease, while others experienced a range of 6% to 75% cuts in their travel budgets.

Respondents also were asked about any non-funding changes in travel since 2009. Those who answered this question, reported that there were new more restrictive rules in their institutions regarding travel such as only being able to receive funding if one presents a paper at a conference, being allowed to go to only one conference per year, and program administrators not being able to reallocate funding from a faculty member who does not use her/his funding to one needing to travel more.

Release Time

Respondents also were asked whether the amount of release time from teaching for administrators and others remained the same, increased or decreased since 2009. Eighty-four (70.5%) reported that release time stayed the same in their programs/departments, while it increased for 4 (3.3%) and decreased for 12 (10%).

Of the 12 who reported decreases, seven indicated that all release time for directors had been cut, leaving these administrators teaching the same number of courses as regular faculty members.

Other Program Resources

Forty-six (38.6%) respondents reported other changes to their program resources, while 54(45.3%) reported no change, and 19 provided no response to the question.

Of the 46 indicating change, 24 experienced reductions to their operating budgets, most reporting as this respondent that “cuts across the board resulted in a reduction in our operating funds.” Additionally, seven respondents reported that other resources, such as a special research budget or a speakers’ series fund were eliminated. On the other hand, nine programs/departments indicated an increase in their base budgets and four reported new sources of funds such as online courses and private donations.

Consolidations

Twelve (10%) of the programs reported a merger with other units. Seven of these indicated that the consolidation was imposed from outside the unit, but for 8 it was seen as a positive step. Five programs reported that the merger was undertaken to avoid other alternatives. Ten of the 12 reported that an independent WGS degree exists despite the merger.

How programs have been affected by mergers

The report included a number of qualitative questions aimed at acquiring greater insight into the issues of mergers. The most common responses indicated that mergers often were administrative, not programmatic, in nature; in other words, mergers often consolidated units in the sharing of staff and administrative resources but left departments and programs independent in function and status. Most retained their original name.

Forty-four respondents took time to respond to questions regarding on-going active discussion of mergers or separations on their campus. Half of these respondents indicated no active discussion and the other half reported some discussion had occurred but that consolidation had been rejected or appeared unlikely.

Successes to share

The respondents were asked to report whether they had any successes where they managed to roll back proposed changes or budget cuts, or lessen the impact of the economic downturn since 2009/2010. Thirty-six replied to the question.

Ten respondents discussed the importance of finding creative ways to bring more financial resources into their units. These included “redoubling development efforts” such as “leaning on private donors and supporters,” “reaching out to our local AAUW who now fundraises for us,” finding outside grants, and increasing online course offerings. Nine others indicated that due to strong support by their deans, heads of departments, and curriculum committee members, they were able to offer more general education courses, increase their enrollments, and sustain majors and minors. Strategic representation in places such as key committees helped several programs protect diversity and multicultural requirements in the GE curriculum.

Eight respondents wrote about the importance of promoting their work on campus and being able to make a strong argument regarding Women’s and Gender Studies’ contributions to their institutions’ diversity plans, thus preventing the erosion of programs. And several underscored the importance of making a compelling case for their programs to the administrators who control the budget.

Three shared their experiences involving attempts to merge their programs with other units on campus. In two cases, the programs were successfully able to resist mergers that were not intellectually viable due to having strong allies in important places in their institutions. In one case, the merger turned out to be very productive, allowing more resources for the program as a result of it becoming part of a larger unit.

Conclusion

This project originated in response to the uncertainty and pressures that program administrators were operating under at a time of an economic downturn felt throughout higher education. The survey was a response to administrators’ desire to understand their unique experiences within the wider national WGS context. The loss of any WGS program or program administrative support is of deep concern to NWSA (note the two programs reporting suspension and seven directors who have had all release time cut). But what the survey revealed in general is that while a minority of women’s and gender studies programs/departments were affected negatively by the economic downturn in recent years, the majority either remained in the same situation as before or managed to increase their resources. Fewer than 10% of the programs reported a decrease in course offerings between 2009 and 2012 while 25% reported an increase. For the most part, faculty and staff positions were not cut during this time period, although 20% of programs were affected by decreases in travel funds and 10% experienced decreases in release time for directors. Twenty-four programs reported decreases to their operating budgets but these were generally in line with overall budget cuts at their institutions. The survey also revealed that 10% of WGS programs had been merged with other units although the majority retained autonomy and benefitted from the consolidations. About a third of the respondents provided stories of how they successfully managed to withstand the economic downturn.

These results indicate that women’s and gender studies academic units have weathered relatively well during the recent economic recession. There is little indication that WGS programs were singled out for budget cuts and in many cases programs used effective strategies to retain or gain new resources. A note of caution is that in the majority of cases programs experienced neither gains nor losses, which for many meant continuing to operate with very limited resources. It is thus important for NWSA to continue its mission to build capacity for WGS programs.