

**HANDBOOK FOR THE MASTER OF ARTS  
DEGREE IN WOMEN'S, GENDER, AND  
SEXUALITY STUDIES**

**2021-2022**

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# Handbook for the M.A. Degree in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies

## Introduction

This *Handbook for the Master of Arts Degree in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies* is designed to provide a convenient guide to students in the M.A. program in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Georgia State University. This *Handbook* is meant to supplement the *College of Arts and Sciences Graduate Bulletin*. (The *Graduate Bulletin*, available online at <http://enrollment.gsu.edu/catalogs/>, always takes precedence over any departmental documents.) Students should use this *Handbook* for guidance but remain in contact with the WGSS Director of Graduate Studies and with the WGSS office.

The Institute for Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies was established in 1994 and initiated the M.A. program in the fall of 1995. **Dr. Stephanie Evans** is professor of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, and Director of the Institute. **Dr. Susan Talburt** is Professor of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies. **Dr. Megan Sinnott** is Associate Professor of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and the WGSS Director of Graduate Studies. **Dr. Julie Kubala** is Senior Principal Lecturer in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and the WGSS Director of Undergraduate Studies. **Dr. Chamra Kwakye** is Lecturer in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies.

The WGSS has over 30 affiliated faculty in the College of Arts and Sciences, the College of Education and Human Development, the College of the Arts, and the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies. Affiliates teach women's, gender and sexuality studies courses, serve on WGSS committees, and serve on graduate thesis committees as members or chairs. A complete list of WGSS Affiliated Faculty is on the WGSS website.

Here is contact information for the core faculty and staff of WGSS:

Stephanie Evans, 404-413-6583, [sevans62@gsu.edu](mailto:sevans62@gsu.edu)

Julie Kubala, Undergraduate Director, 404-413-6580, [jkubala@gsu.edu](mailto:jkubala@gsu.edu)

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Megan Sinnott, Graduate Director, 404-413-6584, [megansinnott@gsu.edu](mailto:megansinnott@gsu.edu)

Susan Talburt, 404-413-6581, [stalburt@gsu.edu](mailto:stalburt@gsu.edu)

For updates on WGSS course offerings, activities, and policies, visit our web page at <http://wgss.gsu.edu/>.

Students are encouraged to participate in governing WGSS by serving on WGSS committees. Students interested in the governing of WGSS can obtain a copy of the Institute for *Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Bylaws* from the WGSS office and contact the WGSS Graduate Director.

## **Degree Requirements**

### **Master of Arts**

#### **Required:**

**30 hours course credit (5 core classes, and 5 electives for a total of 30 hours)**

**6 hours Thesis Research (in addition to 30 hours course work)**

The M.A. in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies requires **thirty** semester hours of graduate course work, fifteen hours of which are required (**WGSS 8001, WGSS 8002, WGSS 8003, WGSS 8004 and WGSS 8005**), and fifteen hours of which may be taken from WGSS courses or from approved courses in other departments. If any of the core required classes are not offered during your first year you will be able to substitute an appropriate WGSS graduate course to complete the **30 hours** of course credit necessary to complete the degree. (Students holding Graduate Assistantships may be required to carry more hours, although this requirement does not alter the number of hours required to complete the WGSS M.A. degree. Directed Research and Thesis Research hours do not count towards the required 30 hours of course credit) For available courses, visit the GSU GoSolar or PAWS web pages and search under the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (WGSS) course subheadings. In the event that a student needs to take a course outside of WGSS (either from a different department at GSU or at another college or university), they must seek approval from the Graduate Director using the "course exceptions" form on the WGSS website. In addition, students will need to fill out a course substitution form from the college (<https://cas.gsu.edu/request-to-substitute-courses>) at the beginning of the semester in which you are taking the substituted class. Normally, students can take up to a maximum of two (2) courses outside of WGSS (courses without a WGSS prefix).

Course work must be completed with a cumulative grade-point average of 3.0 (B) or better. Students must receive a "B-" (B minus) or above in all core and elective WGSS courses, a "C" or above in all other courses that count toward the degree, in addition to maintaining an overall minimum GPA of 3.0. First year, full-time graduate students are expected to take the 5 core courses (WGSS 8001-8005) offered fall and spring semester of their first year. Part-time graduate students are expected to take at least one core course each semester until they finish the core.

### **Annual Evaluation of Students**

All students enrolled in the WGSS M.A. program will receive an annual evaluation. The purpose of the annual evaluation is to review students' academic progress, evaluate students for GRA funding, commend students for outstanding accomplishments, and alert students to problems in their progress through the program. Students will be evaluated by the WGSS core faculty on the basis of 1) GPA; 2) timeliness of academic progress (e.g., selection of thesis advisor and thesis committee, absence of incompletes on the transcript, etc.); 3) performance on thesis proposal defense (where relevant); 4) scholarly/artistic/activist productivity (e.g., presentations,

publications, performances, awards, etc.); and 5) GRA performance (where relevant). Annual evaluations will take place during April of each year. On April 1 of each year, students will fill out the annual evaluation form and submit a current copy of their curriculum vitae to the Graduate Director. Students will receive evaluation letters by the end of the spring semester each year.

### **Thesis Committee**

A thesis committee shall be comprised of a minimum of three (3) faculty members. A minimum of two (2) shall be WGSS faculty members (Core or Affiliate). The third member, as well as any subsequent members, may be members of the WGSS faculty or other departments. Under special circumstances, students, with permission of the thesis committee chair/advisor and the Graduate Director, may have committee members from other institutions. In such cases, the student will request a CV from the external committee member and submit it to the chair/advisor of the thesis committee, who, in consultation with the graduate director, will approve the committee member. In no instance, however, shall the number of committee members who are not members of WGSS exceed the number of committee members who are members of WGSS. Full time students shall select their thesis advisor by the second semester of their first year and shall complete the selection of their thesis committee by September 1 of their second year. See the “thesis committee form,” due to the Graduate Director by September 1 of the second year of the program, on the WGSS website.

The Chair/advisor/director of the thesis committee must be a WGSS faculty member. Under special circumstances and with permission from the Graduate Director, committees may be co-chaired; however, at least one co-chair must be a WGSS faculty member and the number of co-chairs who are not members of the WGSS cannot exceed the number of co-chairs who are members of the WGSS.

At no time shall the number of committee members who are not full-time, tenured or tenure-track faculty members exceed the number of committee members who are full-time, tenured or tenure-track faculty members.

### **Thesis Options**

- 1). Thesis Research
- 2). Creative Thesis
- 3). Action Research Thesis

Each of these options is described in detail in the appendix of this handbook.

### **Thesis Proposal and Thesis**

The thesis proposal is defended before the thesis director and two other committee members. Committee members will take at least **two weeks** to review a thesis proposal; this means the

student must submit their proposal to the committee at least two weeks prior to the thesis proposal defense date. Before the student can proceed with writing the thesis, the student's committee must approve the proposal unanimously. When a committee has approved a thesis, the WGSS Graduate Director must be informed immediately and presented with the signed Thesis Proposal Defense form.

The **thesis** is a relatively limited project (approximately 60-80 pages typed and double-spaced) on a focused and manageable topic. Students may find it useful to examine the women's, gender, and sexuality studies M.A. theses that are available online through the GSU library. The student is responsible for making the final version of the thesis conform to format, style, and other requirements of the College of Arts and Sciences. Students should consult the *College of Arts and Sciences Thesis Guidelines* for thesis requirements available at <http://cas.gsu.edu/files/2014/08/Revised-Guidebook-11-2014.pdf>. An electronic version must be submitted to the GSU Office of Graduate Studies.

**Thesis Defense:** When the thesis committee judges that the thesis is ready for presentation, the student presents the thesis orally before the thesis committee and any other interested faculty and students. This public presentation is known traditionally as the **thesis defense**. Since it is a public defense, students should create a flyer announcement, put it in the department, and distribute it to the WGSS listserv (the Business Manager can assist in distributing, but not writing, the email). The thesis committee is the sole judge of the quality of the thesis and must approve it before it can be turned in to the Office of Graduate Studies. Approval is indicated by the signature of the thesis director, as per the above hyperlinked guidelines for electronic thesis submission; however, a WGSS Thesis Defense Form signed by all committee members must also be deposited with the WGSS Graduate Director.

To summarize, the thesis process requires two "defenses." You will first defend your proposal to your committee, and when your thesis is complete (according to the thesis director) you will have a final thesis defense with the same committee. You will need to send your thesis to your committee **2 weeks** prior to the defense and schedule a time in which all committee members are available. A "defense" is basically an open discussion in which your committee (who will have already read your proposal or final thesis) will ask you questions and make suggestions for revisions. You should prepare a short introduction (no more than 10 minutes) at the beginning of the defense in which you talk about your goals and/or conclusions of your research. These defenses are typically friendly question and answer sessions in which your committee tries to guide your thesis and help you clarify points/arguments. While students tend to be nervous about anything called a "defense," it really is a chance to get feedback and discussion on your topic from your committee. Be sure to have the appropriate thesis defense forms ready each time (in house forms found on WGSS website) and the final signature page for the final thesis defense, which will be sent to the graduate school.

Students may begin taking Thesis Hours (WGSS 8999) in the semester in which they defend their thesis proposal. **A minimum of six (6) thesis hours is required for the M.A. degree.** In

principle, thesis hours are intended for students who are actively working on a Master's thesis after a thesis proposal has already been approved; however, students may use thesis hours to conduct preliminary research. Students should consult their thesis advisors regarding their academic progress and the use of thesis hours. Students are exhorted to use thesis hours judiciously and with prudence.

### **Your thesis must be carefully prepared according to the Graduate Office of Arts and Sciences guidelines.**

The Graduate Office requires you to submit a draft of your thesis for format check fairly early in the semester in which you intend to graduate. Per departmental guidelines, in order to submit your thesis for format check, you must: 1) have successfully defended your thesis proposal and 2) have your advisor's approval of the thesis draft you intend to submit. Please check the college of arts and sciences for information on registering for graduation and other guidelines: <http://cas.gsu.edu/graduation-2/>. See <http://cas.gsu.edu/graduation-requirements/> for thesis guidelines, also available on the WGSS website.

### **Research Involving Human Participants**

Any study involving human research participants requires special approval. If the thesis research project (or any other project) uses questionnaires or otherwise involves human research participants, the student must be reviewed and approved by the GSU Institutional Review Board (IRB). See the GSU IRB website for more information. Students (as well as the faculty members who sign off on their applications) must complete an online training module before submitting the application. Please note that this training module is lengthy and may take from 1.5 to 4 hours to complete. The IRB approval process can take anywhere from two weeks to two months. *No data collection can take place prior to IRB approval.* Plan accordingly!

Students will generally go through the IRB process, under the direction of their thesis advisor, after they have completed the thesis proposal defense. However, in some cases it makes more sense for a student to start the IRB process in advance of the thesis proposal defense. They may do so with the approval of their advisor and/or the Graduate Director.

### **Transfer Credit**

Students may transfer up to **six semester hours** of previous graduate course work toward the M.A. degree upon recommendation from the WGSS Director of Graduate Studies and approval by the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

### **Financial Assistance**

#### **Graduate Assistantships (GAs)**

The Institute for Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies awards a small number of **graduate assistantships (GAs)** each year. There are three types: GRA (graduate research assistant), GLA (graduate lab assistant), and GTA (graduate teaching assistant). Students holding GRAs work with faculty members on research projects. Students holding GLAs work with the Director of WGSS, the Graduate Director, the Undergraduate Director, and the Business Manager to assist with clerical and creative needs of WGSS. Second year funding for graduate students usually takes the form of a Graduate Teaching Assistantship (GTA), as GRA positions are not normally available for a second year. Students holding GTAs usually teach a section of WGSS 2010 (or similar lower-level class) after one semester of guided mentorship in instruction and course preparation; these students are typically advanced students who are in the thesis-writing stage. Please note that, unlike GRAs and GLAs, GTAs may be for one semester only and may carry a variable stipend. Normally, GRA positions are not available for a second year of funding, and most funded students are required to transition to a GTA and to teach one section of WGSS 2010 per semester for their second year of funding. If the faculty deems a student unlikely to be able to successfully teach WGSS 2010, a GA will not be available to them.

The Director of WGSS, in consultation with the Graduate Director and other faculty, decides which students will receive GAs. GRAs are assigned to faculty based on research interests. GLAs are assigned tasks by the WGSS Director as needed. GTAs are assigned to classes by the WGSS Director. GRA and GLA positions require 10 hours of work each week during the semester (which includes several hours at the front desk).

GA positions pay at least \$5,000 for the academic year (fall and spring semesters). Summer funding is contingent on student's progress and availability of funds. GA positions also include tuition remission; students holding GAs pay only student fees and health insurance.

Students holding GAs must register for at least 12 hours to be considered full time (note: this requirement does not hold for non-GA students). Nine to twelve hours may be regular classes or thesis hours, and the remaining hours may be WGSS 8990, Directed Research (a variable hours course that does not meet but gives GAs course credit for doing GA work).

Students can receive GA funding for 2 years total (which may be non-consecutive). Students are encouraged to apply for extramural fellowships and may hold GAships outside WGSS. *All students holding GAs are required to carry health insurance, either through university student health insurance or an approved alternate provider. (International students are required to carry university student health insurance whether or not they hold a GA.)*

### **Eligibility Requirements for GAs**

1. Students receive graduate assistantships based on availability and on the student's academic record or prospective performances, academic or career interests, as well as previous experiences in (for example) research, volunteer work, or community service.

2. GA students must be registered for at least **12 semester hours** of course work in fall and spring semesters. In order to reach the 12 credit hours students will register for **Directed Research (WGSS 8990)** to reflect the work done for the GA, for **12 credit hours total**. In the 6-week and 7-week summer sessions and in Maymester, GAs must be registered for at least **9 credit hours**. *WGSS 8990 (and WGSS 8999, thesis research) does not count as part of the 30 hours of course work required for the M.A. degree.*
3. GA students must not hold full-time jobs and cannot hold student assistant positions or other part-time Georgia State University positions. They may, however, hold up to 2 GA appointments. These can be from different departments or units.

## **Tuition Waivers**

All GA positions include tuition waivers. Non-GA students can apply for **out-of-state or international tuition waivers**. All tuition waivers are for one year. The student must inform the WGSS office in advance of registration at the beginning of each academic year that a tuition waiver is needed. See the online Graduate Catalog for more information.

## **Other Sources of Financial Aid**

Information about other possible sources of financial aid is available at the **Office of Student Financial Services** at (404) 413-2400 or <http://sfs.gsu.edu/>. You can also visit the GSU Web Page at [www.gsu.edu](http://www.gsu.edu) for information about housing, financial aid, and registration.

## **General Information**

### **Advisement**

Advisement for graduate students in the Institute for Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies is done by the **Director of the Institute for Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies**, the **Director of Graduate Studies**, or another **designated advisor**. Incoming students are assigned an interim faculty mentor until they select their own thesis director. Students are strongly encouraged to meet with the Graduate Director at least once a year to discuss their progress.

### **Course Load**

If a student wishes to complete the M.A. program in WGSS in the recommended two years, they should take approximately 9-12 hours of coursework a semester during the first year. Students holding GAs must register for 9-12 credit hours of course work, using WGSS 8990 to complete the credit total of 12. **WGSS 8990 does not count in the 30 hours of course work** required for the M.A. in WGSS. Many students choose to take summer courses in order to graduate more quickly. Students with summer GAs must register for a total of 9 credit hours, with up to 6 credit hours being WGSS 8990 (Directed Research). Courses taken in the Maymester count as part of the summer course load.

## Grades

WGSS uses a +/- grading system that awards the following grades: A+ (98-100), A (93-97), A- (90-92), B+ (87-89), B (83-86), B- (80-82), C+ (77-79), C (73-76), C- (70-72), D (60-69), and F (<59). For WGSS 8999 the grade of IP (in progress) is given. These IP grades will not be computed in the student's cumulative grade-point average. When the student's thesis has been approved and the student has met all the requirements for graduation, all IP grades will be changed to S (Satisfactory). For WGSS 8990, Directed Research (the course that students holding GAs take), grades given are S (Satisfactory) or U (Unsatisfactory).

A student must have a cumulative grade-point average of "B" or better in order to receive a graduate degree. Students must receive a "B-" (B minus) or above in all core and elective WGSS courses, a "C" or above in all other courses that count toward the degree, and maintain an overall minimum GPA of 3.0. If a student's cumulative grade-point average falls below 3.0 at the end of a semester, an academic warning will be issued from the Office of Graduate Studies. If at the end of the next eighteen semester hours of enrollment a 3.0 or better cumulative GPA is not achieved, the student will be dismissed from the program.

First-year students holding provisional enrollment status must attain a B or higher grade (*not* B-) in each course for which they are enrolled in order to gain regular enrollment status from their second year forward.

## Directed Readings Courses (WGSS 8930)

The Directed Readings course (WGSS 8930) is reserved for advanced M.A. students moving towards a well-defined research topic who are in need of a special course to address themes not already covered in existing WGSS courses. Students who are in their first year of study should not request a directed readings course, nor should students request such a course to study material already covered in an existing course (for example, because the student wishes to take the course in a different semester than the course is normally offered). The only exception is for M.A. students who wish to create a custom graduate component for a specialized course that is only offered at the undergraduate level. Such students, in consultation with the instructor of the undergraduate course, and with approval of the Graduate Director, may establish a directed readings course which mirrors, but goes significantly beyond, the material presented in the syllabus for the undergraduate course in question.

The procedure for setting up a directed readings course is as follows: 1) The student should discuss the course desired with an interested faculty member and, together with this faculty member, plan the list of readings, the timeline, and the measurable outcomes (e.g., a paper, a conference presentation, etc.). 2) Using the Directed Readings Form (available online), the student should obtain signatures of the faculty member with whom the course will take place as well as the WGSS Graduate Director. 3) The student should leave a signed copy with the

Graduate Director, and keep a photocopy of the signed form for her/his own records. 4) The student will need to apply for directed reading directly from the college once the course is approved by the WGSS graduate director.

Students may take up to two (2) WGSS 8930 courses during their matriculation in the WGSS M.A. Program. These courses will count as electives on the Program of Study.

### **Graduation**

A student must apply for graduation through the Office of the Registrar **at least two semesters** in advance of the expected graduation date. The deadlines for application for each semester's graduation are published in the *Graduate Catalog* and at <http://www.cas.gsu.edu/graduate-studies/admissions/graduate-admissions-college-requirements/>. Students who have completed their course work are automatically placed on the list to graduate by the Graduation Office. If they do not plan to graduate, they must notify the Graduation Office by that semester's announced deadline or they will be charged a graduation fee of \$40.00. Please read the Continuous Enrollment policy below, as it relates to graduation.

### **Petitions**

Students who wish to deviate from any of the College requirements for the M.A. degree may petition the Graduate Petitions Committee of the College to grant a waiver of the requirement.

### **Time Limits for Completion of Requirements**

A student must graduate within seven calendar years of taking their first class applied to the M.A. program in WGSS. Any deviation from this schedule will require a written petition to the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences.

### **Recommended Timeline for Completion of the WGSS M.A. Degree**

The WGSS M.A. degree is designed to take **2 years** for full-time students. Students should strive to complete their studies and defend their theses within this timeframe.

During the first year, full-time students should complete all five core courses (WGSS 8001, 8002, 8003, 8004, & 8005) as well as 3-4 electives. By the time of the first annual evaluation, which occurs near end of the first year, students should have selected a thesis advisor.

By the first semester of the second year, students should have selected all members of their thesis committee. During the second year, students should finish all remaining electives and begin taking thesis hours.

Ideally, students will complete and defend the thesis proposal no later than the first semester of the second year and finish their thesis no later than the second semester of the second year. It

would be undesirable for full-time students to continue beyond the second year in the absence of extreme extenuating circumstances.

As indicated above, GA funding is only available for two years for students to whom it is awarded.

Part-time students will take considerably different trajectories based on their individual circumstances and should consult with the Graduate Director to establish a trajectory for completion.

Forms you will need to complete as you move through the timeline include:

**Annual Student Evaluation Form** (each year by April 1<sup>st</sup>)

**Thesis Committee Form** (beginning of 2<sup>nd</sup> year by Sept 1<sup>st</sup>)

**Thesis Proposal Defense Form** (Fall or Spring of 2<sup>nd</sup> year)

**Final Defense of Thesis Form** (Spring or Summer of 2<sup>nd</sup> year or Fall of 3<sup>rd</sup> year)

Faculty typically are not available for summer thesis or proposal defenses, as faculty contracts do not extend through the summer. All thesis proposals and final defenses need to be scheduled before the end of each semester. Please be mindful that students must send their thesis material to their committee two weeks before the defense is scheduled, and the student must allow time for requested revisions before the final thesis is uploaded for graduation. Please check the College of Arts and Sciences Graduate Services website for information on graduation deadlines <https://cas.gsu.edu/graduation-calendar-deadlines/>

### **Continuous Enrollment**

GSU requires all graduate students to 1) be enrolled during the semester they graduate and 2) to carry a total of 6 semester hours across the 3 semesters including and preceding the semester of their graduation. For example, if you plan to graduate in Spring, you must be registered during the Spring semester *and* have accrued a total of 6 semester hours across the academic year covered by the Summer-Fall-Spring period comprising that academic year. If you fail to meet this requirement, your graduation will be delayed until you meet it. For more information, see <http://www.cas.gsu.edu/continuous-enrollment/>.

### **Re-entry**

Students who fail to matriculate for 12 months or more will be required to file a re-entry application with the Office of Graduate Studies. Re-entry may or may not be granted upon application. Students who are granted re-entry may begin in the Fall and will be subject to the policies and regulations in place at that time, not the ones that were in place at the time of their original matriculation. There is a \$25 fee for filing a re-entry application. For further instructions, see <http://www.cas.gsu.edu/graduate-studies/admissions/reentry/>.

## **Student Health Insurance**

GSU requires 1) all graduate students holding GAs and 2) all international students to carry health insurance. The GSU student health insurance provider is United Healthcare. If you already have health insurance of your own, you may petition United Healthcare for a waiver. Only some group plans will meet the criteria; individual plans and self-employer plans are unlikely to be allowed. Non-international students who are not GAs can opt to purchase student health insurance from United Healthcare. In addition, any student with coverage can obtain insurance, for an additional fee, for a spouse or child(ren), although the plan does not cover domestic partners. Important note: GSU automatically charges all GAs and international students for the health insurance by including the cost in your student fees. *Enrollment is a separate process; just because you have paid does not mean you are enrolled.* To enroll, go to the United Healthcare website for GSU students: <https://studentcenter.uhcsr.com/gsu>. Coverage begins August 1 and is retroactive to that date. The University and College of Arts and Sciences are covering a portion of the fees.

## **Appendix A: Guidelines for Writing a Thesis Proposal and a Thesis in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies**

Because WGSS has developed as an interdisciplinary field of study, many different research methodologies and approaches to scholarship are available. These include feminist approaches using traditional disciplinary methods as well as interdisciplinary methods. In deciding which methods and approaches to use, consider the question you are asking and how best to answer that question.

One of the most difficult issues to engage in an interdisciplinary field is how to translate meanings of concepts from different disciplines into new interdisciplinary meanings. There are no easy solutions. In the still emerging field of women's, gender, and sexuality studies, the major research methodologies that serve as starting points include those coming from the social sciences, the humanities, and the fine arts. Each area approaches the development of knowledge in different ways, using different language; and, therefore, we present these guidelines in three modes. Remember that there is no one correct way to approach research; there are many ways; and the student researcher must work with the faculty thesis director and committee to arrive at the best solution for the particular project. Remember, also, that this document presents guidelines, not rigid rules.

Based on your reading in WGSS, you are familiar with the variety of questions that feminist scholars and activists have asked, the purposes of their endeavors, and the methods they have used. As you write your thesis proposal, consider how your project will advance the field of women's, gender, and sexuality studies. Search the literature of women's, gender, and sexuality studies and of relevant disciplines for studies and works that have addressed similar questions so that your project will build on the work of others while charting new directions for future scholarship and practice. Having ranged widely in your preliminary reading of the literature on your chosen topic, narrow your focus to a feasible project, considering the time and resources you have to pursue it. Be aware that WGSS allows for three thesis options: research thesis, creative thesis, and action research thesis.

Many questions you may have about writing, including preparing a thesis proposal or thesis, can be answered by the staff of the Writing Studio (<http://www.writingstudio.gsu.edu>), located on the 24th floor of 25 Park Place, Room 2420. Furthermore, various GSU reference librarians (based on their subject specializations) may also be able to answer questions and locate resources for your research. In addition to the GIL and GALILEO search engines, you may try Interlibrary Loan (ILLiad, [www.library.gsu.edu/ils](http://www.library.gsu.edu/ils)) for materials not owned by the GSU library.

## *Guidelines for a Thesis*

### **Definition of the Question**

State the thesis you propose to develop and support and explain how and why you arrived at it. Give the context and theoretical framework in which you will develop your thesis. Please be advised that it may be helpful to refer to the current edition of the *MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing* (MLA stands for Modern Language Association) or the *Chicago Manual of Style* for guidance; both are available on the GSU library website.

### **Review of Literature**

The review should be concise and critical, drawing out the concepts and theoretical approaches relevant to your project and evaluating their illumination of your research problem. Focus on significant ideas and cite the works that address those ideas from the literature related to your project. A review of literature should be more than an annotated list of sources. Such a list can be valuable in making a preliminary assessment of the literature, but a literature review for a research proposal should focus on significant ideas and themes related to your project and should cite the works that address them. Some works are central to your research problem, and it is appropriate to summarize them. Other works touch on areas related to your research only in a contextual sense; you can refer to these works in boundary-setting ways as focused on issues that your project will not address.

### **Research Methods**

State the approach you will take to your scholarly question. Explain *and* justify (using appropriate methodological or theoretical citations) why you have chosen to use this approach or theoretical lens and why it is relevant to the question you intend to explore. Present your main points and the overall strategy in which they will figure as you attempt to answer your question. Include a description of the text(s) you will analyze in your project, if relevant.

### **Significance of Your Research Project**

Explain why your scholarly thesis is significant for women's, gender, and sexuality studies. This section is a place for you to state your own philosophy or theory of women's, gender, and sexuality studies and the ways you believe your scholarly essay will contribute to the knowledge base of the community of feminist scholars. You should present not only your theory of women, gender, and sexuality studies but also your theory of the discipline or disciplines in which you are working.

### **Institutional Review Board Process**

Georgia State University Institutional Review Board approval is necessary *before* engaging in research that involves human subjects. The approval process happens online at <http://www.gsu.edu/ursa/compliance/human-subjects/>. The student's thesis advisor will assist students in preparing the forms. Please note that your thesis director and you must both become certified by completing an online training module related to IRB principles and procedures before IRB will grant approval for your project. Once all forms have been submitted to IRB, approval can take anywhere from two weeks to two months and may involve meeting with the IRB board, depending on the nature of your project. For legal reasons, *IRB approval must be awarded before any data collection involving human research participants can be collected.*

## *Guidelines for a Creative Project*

### **Definition of the Creative Project**

A creative project may be a piece of creative writing, a mixed-media work, a dance or musical performance, or a short film or video (to name a few possibilities). A creative project will have two parts: 1) **the creative work itself**, and 2) **a detailed, documented essay** describing the purpose, approach, theory, methods, techniques, and process of creation. The essay should show how the creative project fits into a context of women's, gender, and sexuality studies theory and practice, as well as other creative work, especially that informed by feminism. If other persons are to be involved in the project, include a detailed description of each person's role and function (for example, actors, stage technicians, musicians).

### **The Creative Work**

Present an idea for a work that you propose to create. The creative work should give voice to issues relating to, but not necessarily limited to, women, sex, gender, sexuality, and/or feminism. It should be informed by a feminist perspective and treat a significant theme of sufficient complexity. Describe the work in detail, and, as appropriate, offer a sample of what it might look like. The point is to offer your committee a good idea of what your project will look like when completed.

The work may be created by you as a single individual or it may employ others in the case of a collaborative project such as a play or a dance or musical performance. You, however, are the one who is finally responsible for the work, for good or ill, since you are submitting the work for a degree.

### **The Documented Essay**

The creative work should be accompanied by an essay that recounts your process in creating the work, discusses the theory and concepts involved, and gives a context in which the work can be viewed. The proposal for a creative work, similar to a proposal for a scholarly project, should contain a statement of the question or theme guiding the creation; a review of the literature that analyzes both theoretical and creative works relevant to your project; a brief description of the process you envision using in your creation; and a statement about the significance of your proposed work for women's, gender, and sexuality studies, including your theory of women's, gender, and sexuality studies and your own aesthetics or poetics. For more detail, see the preceding guidelines for a scholarly project.

## *Guidelines for an Action Research Thesis*

### **Definition of Action Research Thesis**

Some students enter the WGSS M.A. program with the professional objective of rendering service or exercising leadership within an activist or community service oriented organization emphasizing issues related to gender, sexuality and/or social justice. In addition, some students enter this program with an interest in law, public policy, judicial activism, or representational politics. Given that service or leadership in such areas rarely requires the Ph.D. but can benefit from education beyond the B.A. or B.S., our program offers an option for students so interested. Such students are required to complete courses and a thesis just like all students in the WGSS M.A. program, however, the program allows for an activist/ community leadership thesis option, called an action research thesis, as described below.

Like the creative project, the action research thesis will have two distinct parts: 1) **the action research project**, and 2) **a detailed, documented essay** describing the purpose, approach, theory, methods, techniques, and process related to the action research project. Please note that the action research project is something you “do” or produce out in the community, and the documented essay (thesis) is a scholarly paper that you write about it.

### **The Action Research Study**

Action research, also referred to as participatory or collaborative research, is research in which an academic researcher works together with a group of people, typically outside academia, to assist with the goals or needs of the group. These goals/needs may include (but are not limited to) the pursuit of policy change, social justice, education/consciousness-raising, health/wellness, or basic needs (food, shelter, medicine, etc.). In your research, you will connect academic knowledge with community-based knowledge to create an integrated project that has actual impact within the community. Ideally, you will also evaluate this impact.

Your project may also involve an element of shadowing a leader at an existing activist/community service organization. If so, you will need to present information about the mission and structure of the organization with which you are working, as well as a detailed description and reflexive analysis of your shadowing experiences vis-à-vis your own learning in the activist/community-service sector. If you will be interviewing people on-site, analyzing archival materials, conducting a case study, etc., you will need to procure written permissions from appropriate people at the organization, in addition to IRB approval, before proceeding.

### **The Documented Essay**

To understand how your action research study should be *designed and conducted*, you will need to refer to texts specifically on action/participatory research, as well as qualitative research texts more generally. In order to understand how your action research thesis proposal should be *written up*, it may be helpful to refer to the section above on social science projects. Like those completing social science projects, you will need IRB approval prior to beginning your study. In addition, you will need to explain and justify your methods (using appropriate

methodological citations). Referring to books specifically about action (or participatory) research specifically and qualitative research more generally will also provide guidance, particularly where action research diverges from more traditional social science research.

The documented essay should show how the action research project fits into a context of women's, gender, and sexuality studies theory and practice, as well as the wider arena of activism, community service, social justice, or public policy, especially as it is informed by feminism. The project will include a detailed description of the activist site or organization where or with which the action research project takes place. The final document should be shared with the organization where you worked, if applicable, as well as with the population with whom you collaborated, where relevant.

### *Writing the Thesis: Some General Guidelines for Everybody*

The **thesis proposal** should be written primarily in the future tense – telling what you propose to do and how you propose to do it. You can incorporate into the thesis, from the thesis proposal, the definition of problem or question, review of literature, and description of method or process, with tenses changed appropriately, before you present the results of your research. You can conclude the thesis with a short summary of what you did and how you went about it, followed by the significance of the project. As your project unfolds, you will very likely find additional relevant literature to include in the review of literature section. You also may find your research taking you in a somewhat different direction from your original proposal. The important thing to remember is to stay in communication with your thesis director and committee members and discuss these issues and changes as they arise.

You will do yourself a favor if you examine the GSU thesis guidelines before completing your thesis. These guidelines include recommendations for chapter headings, writing style, and other elements of the thesis. GSU requires electronic submission of all theses and dissertations; see <http://www.cas.gsu.edu/files/2014/08/Revised-Guidebook-11-2014.pdf> for information. Since women's, gender, and sexuality studies is interdisciplinary, future students will benefit from the opportunity to examine your thesis as an example of what a women's, gender, and sexuality studies thesis can or should look like. Your thesis also may be used to help students in WGSS 8005 (Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Proseminar).

At some point in time, you may consider revising your thesis and submitting it to a scholarly journal, feminist magazine, or other venue for wider distribution. Be thinking about this possibility all along, as it will guide decisions you make about style and other matters. You should also strongly consider presenting your research at one or more conferences while you are in the program. WGSS will include opportunities for students to present their research locally through our various programs.

We hope that you find proposing and writing a thesis to be challenging, exciting, and satisfying! As you write your thesis, know that you are not only learning to be a women's, gender, and sexuality studies researcher, but you are also making a unique contribution to the body of knowledge known as women's, gender, and sexuality studies. Regardless of where you go or what you do after you finish the WGSS M.A. program, your contributions are important!

### Recommended Timeline for WGSS M.A. Students

\*Note: This chart does not include Graduate Assistantship (GA) hours.

\*\*Note: This chart may vary for part-time students.

Year 1		
Fall	Spring	Summer
<p><u>Coursework</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WGSS 8001</li> <li>• WGSS 8002</li> <li>• WGSS 8005</li> <li>• Elective</li> </ul> <p><u>Other</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begin thinking about your thesis topic</li> <li>• Begin getting to know faculty in order to find a thesis advisor and thesis committee members</li> <li>• Check in with the Graduate Director &amp; your assigned mentor by the end of the semester to discuss how you are doing</li> </ul>	<p><u>Coursework</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WGSS 8003</li> <li>• WGSS 8004</li> <li>• WGSS 8005</li> <li>• Elective</li> </ul> <p><u>Other</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Select Thesis Advisor &amp; Thesis Committee</li> <li>• Complete CV</li> <li>• Turn in Annual Evaluation materials (April 1)</li> </ul>	<p><u>Coursework</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elective(s)</li> <li>• WGSS 8006: Feminist Pedagogy (required for second year GTAs, and fulfilling an elective)</li> </ul>

Year 2		
Fall	Spring	
<p><u>Coursework</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elective (s)</li> <li>• Thesis Hours</li> </ul> <p><u>Other</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thesis Proposal Defense</li> <li>• File for graduation (2 semesters in advance)</li> <li>• Turn in Thesis Committee Form (Sept. 1)</li> </ul>	<p><u>Coursework</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elective(s)</li> <li>• Thesis Hours</li> </ul> <p><u>Other</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thesis Defense</li> <li>• Graduation</li> <li>• Complete CV</li> <li>• Turn in Annual Evaluation materials (April 1)</li> <li>• Exit Interview w/ Graduate Director</li> </ul>	