

Academic Affairs Council Response to the Program Review of Democracy and Justice Studies

I. Introduction

Democracy and Justice Studies at UWGB is a highly active and community oriented program. Inaugurated and restructured in 2011-2012, its students prepare for a wide range of post-graduation undertakings and careers. They are given experiences and instruction examining ethical implications of policy and politics that prepares them to allow them to be effective practitioners and citizens. The program offers core classes and five emphases (American Studies, Law and Justice Studies, U.S. and the World, Women's and Gender Studies, and Individualized Emphasis). It offers development of subject tools, and extensive service to the General Education program. Students engage in original research around questions of democracy and justice.

II. Assessment of Student Learning

The program has spent considerable time and effort in assessment, both qualitative and quantitative. Five student learning outcomes have been identified reflecting core knowledge and abilities related to diverse practices of democracy and justice, information literacy, analysis of political, economic, cultural, and social changes, communication and questioning, and value of diverse cultures. The assessment methods include experimentation with qualitative assessment methods which appear to have had various levels of success, but which still add to the amount of data available to the program. It appears that quite a few courses are assessed, with extensive data presented of the assessment of competencies of students completing the first course in the program, team-taught DJS 101. A number of other upper level courses have been assessed, including "senior seminars" and internships. While the graduating senior survey has some valuable feedback to offer the program, the alumni survey may have limited usefulness at this time due to the tremendous changes that have occurred since 2011. Hopefully, that assessment tool will prove more valuable as time goes on.

III. Program Accomplishments

Perhaps the most notable achievement since the last review has been the re-formation of the department in its current iteration. This involved substantial review of the curriculum and direction the department has taken. As the program has hired several new faculty, DJS has been pleased with the fit and expertise of the candidates they have successfully hired. These junior faculty are making crucial contributions to the unit.

Many students undertake internships as part of their major and the program actively promotes them internships as a means of developing both real world skills and engaged citizens. Considerable thought and effort in shaping and directing internships has resulted in a highly successful internship program. Bi-annual travel courses to South

Africa contribute another impressive dynamic to the program as students engage with real world issues of social justice in the context of important historical developments.

DJS faculty members are prolific scholars and authors and are in frequent demand as expert commentators on social policy and politics, often at the most highly respected levels. Likewise, DJS students engage in research and scholarship which prepares them for graduate school and careers.

IV. Program Strengths and Areas in Need of Attention

Strengths

DJS offers important general education coursework for all majors who are better prepared to contribute as engaged citizens in our increasingly diverse culture. The ethical considerations that they bring to the examination of empirical and qualitative data analysis are essential components of any university. Both Social Change and Development and DJS alumni continue to make important contributions to their professions, and our society. Upon graduation they appear to move very quickly in to positions of responsibility, even if those positions do not pay high salaries in the near term.

Curriculum has been revised and re-structured since the last review, and strong new faculty have been brought in to deliver the important core aspects of the program while effective senior faculty continue to lead the unit. In 2014-15, there were 29 graduates with DJS majors, up from 14 in 2010-11.

Areas in need of attention

Despite several ideas for the future presented in the document, strategic planning at present seems to be more aspirational than purposeful. The desire to recruit more minority students is expressed, however there is no mention of means by which this might be achieved. However there does not seem to have been consideration of whether emerging opportunities and trends might give the program reason to consider the array currently being offered.

The AAC thinks the way in which DJS uses a core of supporting subjects and upper level courses to create five distinct emphases is laudable, yet may be confusing to students. On the graduating senior survey, although DJS students were pleased with the variety of courses available in the major, they rated the “clarity of major requirements” a 3.1 compared to the UWGB senior average of 3.5. Moreover, they rated the “frequency of course offerings in your major” a 2.1 compared to UWGB average of 2.7.

The average number of DJS minors averaged about 5 between 2010-11 and 2014-15.

The DJS program is in the early stages of considering the addition of a Masters Degree in Social Studies that would be marketed to public school teachers. Presumably this is because of the possibility that the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) will require that high school teachers teaching for college credit possess a master's degree in the specific subject they are teaching. However, it appears that much of the market for this degree may have disappeared in Wisconsin, as few school districts currently reward teachers with pay increases for an advanced degree.

V. Conclusions and Recommendations

Democracy and Justice Studies is a highly active and engaged program that makes substantial contributions to UWGB, our region and even the nation as a whole. The faculty is comprised of scholars with both experience and knowledge of contemporary issues and trends. Students and faculty alike engage with the community in meaningful ways and the result is a symbiotic relationship of the university and community in a way that is very much in line with our institutional mission and the Wisconsin Idea.

The committee encourages DJS to examine issues of planning and to consider emerging trends, markets, and community needs that future graduates will encounter. We urge continued expansion of community involvement within courses and internships, as these experiences provide places for students to develop competencies in the DJS learning outcomes.

Leaving aside the individualized emphasis, the AAC believes that the four other emphases may not be distinct enough as currently structured. We believe that the emphases, which offer almost identical arrays of elective courses, should be made more unique and more strongly focused on the subject matter. Students appear to be confused about which courses to select, based on graduating senior survey results. They express concern about not being able to take courses when they want to enroll. Currently, by far, most students enroll in the Law and Justice Studies Emphasis, with low numbers in the others. Could emphases be restructured to clarify things for students and simplify the curriculum?

We encourage DJS to continue to engage in active assessment methods and to examine ways that data collected can help shape, refine and guide curricular and programmatic directions. However we suggest re-focusing these assessments to provide more meaningful, actionable data. How are current assessment data being used to advance the program? It seems that there is perhaps too much assessment, and it could be streamlined and simplified to focus on what students know as they reach the advanced stages of the major. For example, we're not clear the value of assessing students in DJS 101 as a baseline, since many of them will not go on to become DJS majors. This contributes to over-testing, which the unit agrees is undesirable. The DJS "Authentic" assessment is not currently being done, and we felt that this approach may show promise and could be pursued within the upper level portfolio class that is noted. The

“additional survey” does not appear to be implemented. We propose the DJS program consider constructing their own graduating senior survey using Qualtrics and limit the within-course assessment. Finally, the results of the assessments need to be summarized in a meaningful way. As presented, it is difficult to discern whether outcomes have been achieved by students. It was not clear to the AAC that the data is being tied to future planning and initiatives based on current perceived strengths and weaknesses in the current program. Therefore the committee encourages the program to consider what can be gleaned from the data collected and how that might affect future curriculum, planning and coursework. That said, it may be harder than usual to form such conclusions given the relative youth of the program.

There are low numbers in the DJS minor, and this is puzzling due to the interest by young people in service careers and justice. Could more be done to encourage students of other majors to minor in DJS? Could greater collaboration take place with other UWGB programs, such as the PEA unit, with its NP Certificate?

We also wonder whether, given the demographic of likely students, such a degree would best be offered substantially or entirely on line. The AAC encourages DJS to continue to examine potential.

We encourage the unit to continue to explore the possibility of a master’s program but with careful exploration of the requirements and interests of the intended target audience. While the degree aligns well with the DJS unit, does it align with current trends in K-12 education? This should be carefully researched.