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Kevin Briggs
Billy Conley
Michael Ferguson
Shannon Hendrick
Rob Lytle

See next page for additional authors

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Women's Studies
Marketing Research

Prepared For: Dr. Jimmie O. Price
Dr. Dawn Bolton

Prepared By:
- Kevin Briggs
- Billy Conley
- Michael Ferguson
- Shannon Hendrick
- Rob Lylle
- Tara Strode
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Women’s Studies program is one of the newest and most scholarly programs at Western Kentucky University. The program is a response to a nationwide trend by universities and colleges to diversify their educational programs. Western Kentucky University’s program, however, has image and marketing problems. The Women’s Studies Research Group, a group of marketing research students from Western Kentucky University, conducted research on the perceptions, awareness levels and possible promotional methods for the Women’s Studies program. The research also includes secondary data on the enrollment trends for the past five years.

In conducting the research, 269 students and faculty/staff were randomly selected and surveyed by phone. Data shows that only half of the respondents surveyed were aware that a Women’s Studies program exists at WKU. The research also showed many variations in the perceptions of the program. However, of the perceptions studied, the highest mean score on the rating scale was willingness to learn more about the program.

The Women’s Studies program overall is suffering from a lack of awareness and generally poor perceptions based on the research scale. Overall, the Women’s Studies program has an excellent opportunity to excel at WKU, after setting up an effective promotional plan to change awareness levels and perceptions about the program.

The Women’s Studies program should spend considerable time in developing an effective and complete promotional plan that would show its worth to students and faculty/staff. Once the Women’s Studies program achieves an effective promotional plan, it can ultimately be successful.
INTRODUCTION

Wednesday, August 30, 1995, the Women’s Studies research group met with the client, Dr. Jimmie O. Price. Dr. Price described the Women’s Studies program at Western Kentucky University.

The Women’s Studies minor consists of 21 semester hours. Students minoring in Women’s Studies are required to complete WOMN 200 (Introduction to Women’s Studies). WOMN 400 (Western Feminist Thought) or WOMN 499 (Directed Study) completes the Women’s Studies core. A choice of selected courses with Social Science or Humanities emphasis must be completed.

After the initial meeting with Dr. Price, the Women’s Studies Research Group determined the focus of the research would be in four areas. First, the research will measure various perceptions of the Women’s Studies program by WKU students and faculty/staff. Second, the research will study various promotional strategies that could be effective considering the Women’s Studies budget and target market. Third, the research will study the enrollment trend of Women’s Studies courses for the past five years. Finally, the research will show how the Women’s Studies budget compares with selected program budgets at WKU and selected Women’s Studies programs at other universities.

BACKGROUND

A. The Introduction of Women’s Studies

The idea of Women’s Studies began in the late 1960s. The first Women’s Studies program in the United States was formally approved in 1970 at San Diego State University. When the National Women’s Studies Association was founded in 1977, 276 programs existed nationwide. Since then, 621 programs at 68 percent of the nation’s colleges and universities have been developed to focus on issues relating to women.

B. Women’s Studies in Kentucky

The Commonwealth of Kentucky consists of five universities and three colleges that offer a minor in Women’s Studies. They are as follows: The University of Kentucky, Northern Kentucky University, Western Kentucky University, Eastern Kentucky University, Morehead State University, Bellarmine
College, Brescia College, and Midway College. The University of Louisville has the only program in the Commonwealth that offers a bachelor degree in Women’s Studies.

C. Western Kentucky University’s Women’s Studies Program

The Women’s Studies program at Western Kentucky University is now in its fifth year of existence. The program has also had an important role in forming Women in Transition, a support group for nontraditional women students.

Two years after Western began a Women’s Studies conference, Dr. Catherine Ward became director of the program. Dr. Ward served as director for the next five years. During this time, the program expanded and a Women’s Studies minor was developed.

Dr. Jimmie O. Price became Director of Women’s Studies in May 1994. During the past year and a half, the Women’s Studies program has gone through several changes. The former office was very small. She moved to a more spacious temporary office in Wetherby Administration Building. During this period, enrollment increased in the Women’s Studies core courses.

The program received a comprehensive review in February 1995, by Dr. Jean Fox O’Barr, a consultant and Director of Women’s Studies at Duke University. The Women’s Studies Research Group is completing this research project to help Dr. Price better understand and promote the Women’s Studies program.

Why Women’s Studies

While searching for secondary research for this report, the group found the following article. The article was found on the Internet from The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. This article is an excellent definition and explanation of Women’s Studies. The Women’s Studies Research Group included this article for those readers who may not be familiar with Women’s Studies.

Women’s Studies... is an interdisciplinary curriculum that explores the experiences, perspectives, concerns, and needs of women. Courses analyze gender, sex, and sexuality as biological, psychological, social, and cultural phenomena. Particular emphasis is placed on the nature and social construction of gender and gender roles.
as they vary with respect to time, place, and specific social context.

Women's Studies courses also introduce students to ideologies that have been used over time to explain women's and men's natures, as well as their functions and roles in society. Students are exposed to the new scholarship on women that has emerged in the past two decades, to feminist theory, and to critiques of feminism. Finally, courses in Women's Studies revise and redefine scholarship in the traditional academic disciplines.

A major [or minor] in Women's Studies provides a rich and flexible liberal arts education and also demonstrates the integration of knowledge across traditional academic boundaries. A Women's Studies major or minor is useful preparation for training in the [following] professions: education, law, health sciences, social work, policy studies, or management. It is also an appropriate undergraduate degree for postgraduate training in the social sciences and the humanities. On the personal level, coursework in Women's Studies enhances the human potential of both women and men by questioning and redefining societal values.3

The Marketing Problem

The central problem for the Women's Studies program is the lack of awareness by students and faculty/staff. In addition, the Women's Studies program has low enrollment and a lack of sufficient funds limiting significant promotion. This has contributed to the questionable image of the program.

General Research Objectives

The objective of the study is to provide the client with accurate information that will be useful in making informed decisions about strategies for promoting the future directions of the Women's Studies program. This information will allow the client to improve the awareness of the Women's Studies program at Western Kentucky University. In addition, the research will provide the Women's Studies program with an understanding of how it compares with similar universities' Women's Studies programs.
Specific Research Objectives

The following research questions are addressed in this study:

1. What are the students’ and faculty/staff perceptions of the Women’s Studies program at WKU?

2. What are the best possible promotional strategies based on the program’s budget and target market?

3. What are the enrollment trends of the Women’s Studies courses in the past five years?

4. How does the Women’s Studies annual budget compare to that of other programs at WKU and to Women’s Studies programs at other universities?

Procedures

Primary data collection was initiated through two phone surveys and two written questionnaires. The group designed and targeted a phone survey toward the students and faculty/staff. This survey included questions that determined the perceptions and the best ways to reach students and faculty/staff. A second phone survey was designed and targeted toward selected universities Women’s Studies programs. This survey measured annual funding, enrollment trends, effective promotional strategies, and the most popular Women’s Studies courses.

Academic Computing and Research Services provided the sample list for the students and faculty/staff phone survey. The list was a randomly generated list of 500 students and 50 faculty/staff at Western Kentucky University. The sample size was determined to be 269, which the group obtained.

The first written questionnaire was designed and targeted for currently enrolled Women’s Studies minors at WKU. This questionnaire will show the current opinions of the Women’s Studies program and give direction for the future of the Women’s Studies program. The second written questionnaire was designed and targeted for Dr. Catherine Ward. This questionnaire will give insight into the beginning of the Western Kentucky University Women’s Studies program. This
questionnaire could also give direction for the future of the Women’s Studies program.

**Limitations**

Due to the time constraints placed by the nature of this course, only limited research was performed to determine the perceptions of the Women’s Studies program. The research time was cut short, in part, due to the unanticipated time required for the Human Subject Review Board Approval.

The research did not investigate all variables that influence the students’ and faculty/staff perceptions of the Women’s Studies program. A complete promotional strategy or target market was not developed for the program. Limited results were expected because some students and faculty/staff may have no opinion of the Women’s Studies program.

In addition, the research has been limited because of the Women’s Studies department’s request as to how to collect data for the Women’s Studies minors. The Women’s Studies department requested permission to distribute and collect the Women’s Studies minors questionnaires themselves. However, only one completed questionnaire was returned to the department. It was not included in the research. Also, a questionnaire was designed to determine the budget, the best promotional methods, and most popular course offerings from selected universities with Women’s Studies programs. However, due to a break down in communication, the list of universities was not collected from the Women’s Studies department in time to be included in the research.

The sampling size calculated for this population is 269. The group is 90% confident that the results of this study will represent the population with a plus or minus .10 margin of error on a seven-point scale.
FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The primary research objective of this study was to determine the students' and faculty/staff perceptions and awareness levels of the Women's Studies program at Western Kentucky University. The secondary research objectives were to study the levels of effectiveness of some selected promotional methods and to report trends in Women's Studies courses. These objectives were studied by gathering data through a phone survey of 269, which is the sample size. Secondary data was gathered to report the enrollment trends for many of the courses offered by the Women's Studies program over the past five years.

Major Findings
The Major finding of this study are as follows:

- Students' and faculty/staff perceptions of the Women's Study program are not equal.
- Students' and faculty/staff are not equally aware of the Women's Study program.
- The promotional methods in which we studied for use by the Women's Studies program are not equal.
- The enrollment trends for the Women's Studies courses over the past five years are not equal.

Other Findings

- In the study of perceptions that was measured, the research showed a significant differences between males and females on all the perceptions except two. These two perceptions, which were not significantly different between males and females, are knowing what the program has to offer and does the Women's Studies program benefit women.
- In the study of perceptions the research also showed a significant difference in the mean scores of students' perceptions based on their classification. In the data analysis section of this report, these findings are represented in detail.
- In the study of awareness, the research showed there was a significant difference in the level of awareness by student classification.
In the study of awareness, the research showed there was a significant difference in the level of awareness based on the respondent’s sex. Females were significantly more aware of the Women’s Studies program.

In the study of promotional methods, the research showed there was not a significant difference between students’ and faculty/staff opinions of effective promotional methods, with the exception of incorporating Women’s Studies courses as an option in the general education requirements. Faculty/staff thought this method would be significantly less effective than did students.

In the study of promotional methods, the research showed that those who were already aware of the Women’s Studies program had significantly different opinions about the effectiveness of incorporating Women’s Studies courses as an option in the general education requirements, holding Women’s Studies events on campus, and advertising in the College Heights Herald. But, those who were already aware of the program did not have significantly different opinions about letters to existing students and letters to freshmen and transfer students.

In the study of enrollment trends, the secondary data showed enrollment in Women’s Studies courses was increasing over the past five years, but many classes which were cross-listed with the Women’s Studies program had decreasing enrollments.

Conclusions

The conclusions of this study are as follows:

• The research showed that faculty/staff are significantly more aware of the Women’s Studies program than are WKU students.
• The research showed that faculty/staff had higher mean scores in their rating of perceptions of the Women’s Studies program than did students.
• From the research, the conclusion was sending personal letters to incoming freshman and transfer students as well as to existing students had the higher mean scores of all the promotional methods studied. In addition, the lowest mean scores were advertising in the
College Heights Herald, and incorporating the Women's Studies courses in the general education requirements.

* The research showed the general enrollment in Women's Studies courses have been increasing over the past five years. However, the courses cross-listed with the Women's Studies program have decreasing enrollments.

* The perceptions of the Women's Studies program were equally positive between males and females on all the perceptions measured except two. Females showed significantly more positive responses toward knowing what the program has to offer and believing the Women's Studies program benefits women.

* The research showed students are significantly more aware of the Women's Studies program as they progress through their college career.

* The research showed females are significantly more aware of the program than are males. However, there is no significant difference in the willingness of males and females to learn more about the program.

* The promotional methods studied generally did not have a significant difference in the perceived level of effectiveness based on the sex of the respondent or whether the respondent was a student or faculty/staff member.

**Recommendations**

Women's Studies should develop an effective and complete promotional plan. This would allow for several new marketing techniques that could impact the future of the Women's Studies program. An effective plan would include sending personal letters to incoming freshman and sending personal letters to existing WKU students.

Women’s Studies events should be marketed to the entire campus, but not necessarily by advertising Women’s Studies as the sponsor. This could be accomplished by putting more of an emphasis on the content of the event or speaker. People will be more willing to attend if the sponsor is anonymous and will be more attentive during the presentation.

We recommend that the Women’s Studies program create a World Wide Web page, on the Internet. This would inform students of what the Women’s Studies program has to offer and will be offering. Another benefit of creating a web
Another important recommendation is to hire a student worker to create reports on the trends of the Women's Studies program and the courses being offered at Western. This student should be proficient with the use of computers and highly aware of the uses of statistical methods used to analyze trends. Reports could then be generated for the Women's Studies Director on an annual basis.

The director of the Women's Studies program should be in constant contact with the Academic Computing and Research Services in order to maintain valuable information, such as enrollment, number of minors, and trends in the past few years. With this information, the program will be able to track the increases and decreases in enrollment.

In addition, the research group strongly recommends that the last two hypotheses which were not tested due to time constraints be studied in the future. These two hypotheses, which would compare Women's Studies programs at other universities to the Women's Studies program at WKU, and would receive input from Western's Women's Studies minors are a vital part of a complete Women's Studies research analysis. This could possibly be conducted by a marketing research group similar to our group at some point in the near future. Continued analysis by a marketing research class would also analyze changes in the trends of perceptions about the Women's Studies program, and would allow for tracking of the effectiveness of implemented promotional strategies.

The final recommendation is to follow the report Dr. Jean Fox O'Barr reported in February 1995. In that report, she suggested a full-time staff assistant to assist the director in program initiatives. The director should be focused on campus activities, rather than nationwide activities to allow for growth of the program.


3. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Women’s Studies Program. “Why Women’s Studies.” Available World Wide Web: URL:
   http://sunsite.unc.edu/cheryb/women/whyws.html