

The School of Culture, Gender & Social Justice
Strategic Accelerated Review Proposal
Submitted, December 11, 2020

Introduction

The School of Culture, Gender, and Social Justice (SCGSJ) was formed on July 1, 2017 as a result of the decision to combine the programs in African American and Diaspora Studies (AADS), Gender and Women’s Studies (GWST), Latina/o Studies (LTST), and Native American and Indigenous Studies (NAIS). Although the SCGSJ was formed in large part to address budget concerns, the merger of its four constituent programs and the development of the SCGSJ as a whole during the last three years has proven to be a success.

In the short time of its existence, the SCGSJ has successfully struck a balance between maintaining the autonomy and distinct character and important roles of its constituent programs, while still forging a merged identity and shared purpose and mission for the School as a whole. As a result, the merger has served to strengthen and to add value to the constituent programs, but in such a way that the sum is great than its parts.

In the spring of 2019 it was announced that the SCGSJ would undergo extensive program review as part of the regular UW program review process. As part of this process, the SCGSJ submitted a comprehensive self-study in November of 2019. The SCGSJ was scheduled for a site-visit by outside reviewers in spring of 2020, but such visit was postponed until fall 2020 due to the COVID pandemic. The SCGSJ site-visit took place on September 14-15, 2020. In anticipation of that site-visit, the SCGSJ submitted an addendum updating our self-study. The outside reviewers provided their report on October 20, 2020. Additionally, as requested, the SCGSJ submitted a “Budget Reduction Metric Review” report on October 12, 2020. These four documents, all of which are included as attachments with this proposal, provide extensive data on the SCGSJ, its governance structure, its budget, its teaching, its student credit hours, its faculty productivity, its policies and procedures, and similar data. Accordingly, the data contained in those documents is incorporated by reference herein and will not be reiterated extensively here. Instead, this document will focus on what the SCGSJ is currently doing that adds value to UW and supports UW’s strategic vision, particularly with respect to the four pillars articulated by President Seidel. Further, this document outlines what more the SCGSJ could contribute moving forward if strategic investments are made. Finally, this document concludes by providing suggestions for what those strategic investments might be.

Contributions of the SCGSJ

In numerous communications President Seidel has outlined that part of UW’s ability to be a viable university into the future will depend upon its ability to be more digital, more entrepreneurial, more interdisciplinary, and more inclusive. At present, the SCGSJ and its programs contributes to all four of these pillars, particularly the interdisciplinary and inclusivity pillars. As noted below, with continued investment and support, we will be able to contribute substantially to all four.

With respect to interdisciplinarity, the SCGSJ is at the forefront of interdisciplinary work at UW. Each SCGSJ faculty member, whether full-time or part-time, permanent or temporary, and regardless of affiliation with the School, is trained in at least two or more disciplines. Accordingly, all of the work we do within the SCGSJ is interdisciplinary. In fact, our ability to work across disciplinary lines and to establish strong collaborative relationships throughout the university has been the key to our survival and development since our formation. At present, the SCGSJ is responsible for delivering 11 degree programs and one certificate program. Yet, we only have four permanent faculty members with lines 100% within the SCGSJ, two faculty members with 75% lines within the SCGSJ, and two faculty members with 25% lines within the SCGSJ. Although we do hire many temporary instructors, one of the main reasons we are able to deliver our degrees with some consistency is because of the interdisciplinary partnerships we have throughout campus. There are over 28 faculty throughout UW affiliated with the SCGSJ who teach courses for us outright, or cross-list our courses and who otherwise contribute to our work and mission. In addition to helping us deliver our degrees, these interdisciplinary partnerships support our extensive service work, and have allowed us to garner substantial research grants, which in turn have helped us move to the forefront of innovative pedagogy and creative problem solving. A good example is the work currently being conducted between our Native American Studies Program and a graduate student in computer science with respect to Native Language revitalization. This interdisciplinary work has resulted in a \$300,000 NSF grant, which focuses on the use of cutting-edge technology to help with Native language revitalization and acquisition in Wyoming Native communities. This is one of many interdisciplinary initiatives with which members of the SCGSJ are involved.

With respect to inclusion, particularly in regards to underrepresented populations at UW, there is hardly an inclusion related initiative at UW with which the SCGSJ isn't involved. While making sure UW is inclusive is, and should be, an important goal, it is also important that we graduate students with the cultural competency necessary to create and effectively be a part of inclusive environments once they graduate as well. All SCGSJ course offerings are geared towards helping students develop important cultural competencies, accordingly we are the cornerstone of UW's efforts in this regard. Additionally, as is outlined in our self-study and its addendum, as well as the report from our outside reviewers, the members of the SCGSJ provide tremendous amounts of service to UW in order to make it a more inclusive place. Whether it is through our extensive work with underrepresented populations, particularly students, at UW, or our extensive community work at UW, in Laramie, throughout Wyoming and beyond, or our involvement in UW's recruitment and retention efforts, or co-curricular educational efforts such as bringing various speakers and educational opportunities to campus, there is hardly a diversity, equity, and inclusion initiative at UW that we are not involved in in some way. Additionally, the vast majority of the research, scholarship, and creative work within the SCGSJ is focused on issues of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. As a result, members of the school are constantly called upon to help and support DEI efforts in a variety of areas and capacities. For example, one of our faculty members has spent a significant portion of the fall semester providing diversity training for one of Wyoming's regional businesses.

Our interdisciplinary and inclusion work are discussed in great detail in our attached self-study, its addendum, and the report from our outside reviewers and so will not be discussed further here. Rather, the remainder of this document will focus on the SCGSJ's new initiatives and future plans and how modest strategic investments will help bring those plans to fruition.

SCGSJ Future Plans and Initiatives

In the next 3-5 years, the SCGSJ seeks to be one of the top Social Justice programs in the country. We believe we can achieve this goal by leveraging our unique positionality as a social justice school within the rural, mountain west, by capitalizing on our existing interdisciplinary strengths, by using technology to provide cutting-edge educational experiences, and by developing centers of excellence and expertise with a rural focus. As is outlined more fully below, most of this work is already underway within the SCGSJ. Modest strategic investment will ensure that this work continues and expands.

The Creation of a Social Justice Degree and the Potential of a Diversity Certificate

As noted in our addendum to our self-study, present day circumstances have given a sense of urgency to the importance of the education we provide within the SCGSJ. Whether a student plans to pursue a career as an engineer, a scientist, an educator, a medical professional, a business owner, a software designer, a journalist, an artist, a musician, or a career in any other field, cultural competency is a crucial skill to have and social justice issues are likely to arise. At the same time, we have lost several faculty members in the last few years that either haven't been replaced or haven't been replaced with people in their same areas. As a result, the SCGSJ is currently engaged in two major curricular projects during the 2020-2021 academic year. The first is to review the learning outcomes for each of our existing majors and minors to make sure they are in line with the education it is necessary for students to have both now and in the future, and to make sure that our courses are relevant, dynamic, and meaningful for today's students.

The second project is the development of a major and minor degree in Social Justice, the Notice of Intent for which we plan to submit in the spring 2021 semester. As noted in the addendum to our self-study, we are seeing an increasing demand from students for social justice knowledge. Whereas an engineering student, for example, may not see the value in obtaining a degree in one of our existing programs if the goal is to be an engineer, we have found that pairing a degree in social justice with another degree makes a lot of sense for many students. Accordingly, as the attached draft degree plan outlines, we are developing a Social Justice major and minor that can be easily combined with other degrees throughout campus. Despite the significant challenges we face with respect to having sufficient faculty as well as the budget cuts UW is facing generally, we believe that adding these degrees is not only doable at this time, but essential to our ability to grow our majors and minors, and will also be helpful to UW generally as it seeks to attract a diverse student body. Creating these majors now is doable because as the attached draft degree plan outlines, they will rest firmly on the foundation of our existing courses. In other words, the vast majority of the courses required for the Social Justice degrees are already being taught within the SCGSJ. At the same time, as we have added new courses, and as we hire new faculty, we have been careful to make sure that those new courses can be cross-listed across our degrees (including the contemplated social justice degrees) and that any new hires can contribute to the social justice degrees and teach in a minimum of two, if not more, of our existing programs. At the same time, we continue to develop and strengthen our partnerships across UW, and to capitalize on our interdisciplinary strengths. For example, we were able to shore up our course offerings in LTST for spring 2021 by cross-listing three new courses taught by instructors in SPAIS, who are affiliated with the SCGSJ.

In addition to the Social Justice degrees, we have also begun preliminary conversations regarding the creation of an online diversity certificate program. Since the George Floyd killing of this past summer, several of us within the SCGSJ have been asked to consult and help on many initiatives related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Several of those requests have come from business owners and institutions both inside and outside of Wyoming who are looking to diversify their workforces, retain the diversity they have, make their workplaces more inclusive, or help their managers and leaders be more effective and knowledgeable with respect to these issues. Given this, we believe there is a market for the education we provide geared toward business leaders, MBA students, teachers, and other professionals that we could tap into through an online platform and use as a means to generate more revenue for the SCGSJ and UW. We began preliminary conversations in this vein in fall 2020 and the members of the SCGSJ are quite open to and supportive of this idea. We plan to continue these discussions in spring 2021.

The Development of Centers of Excellence

As noted above, and in the addendum to our self-study, being placed in the rural west offers the SCGSJ a unique advantage among schools of our type in the U.S. While many schools across the country may focus on social justice issues, very few do so in a rural context. In addition to the curricular work noted above, during the 2020-2021 academic year we are also working on developing centers of excellence. We launched the Black Studies Center in September of 2020. That center has already hosted a successful webinar series throughout the fall 2020 semester—some installments drawing nearly 100 people. The center has also raised \$5,000 since its launch with a donor committed to giving \$2,500 a year for the next five years. This, without us yet engaging in a targeted, specific, fundraising campaign. We also did a soft launch of our Rural Social Justice Center (RSJC) in October 2020. Although still in the early stages of its development, our plan is for the RSJC to be the structural mechanism that allows us to bring together the scholarship, research, creative endeavors and the community education, engagement, and activism activities that are happening across the School with a focus on rural spaces with a goal of furthering understanding and developing solutions to some of the day's most pressing social justice problems. Finally, we are also in the process of developing a Native Language Center (NLC). The NLC will build on much of the existing language revitalization work already happening within our NAIS program. Work which is using advanced technologies to help with language revitalization and knowledge acquisition.

Use of Technology to Offer Unique Educational Opportunities

Over the last few years our NAIS program has used technology in unique ways to aid in the Native language revitalization work in which it has been engaged. Using some modest seed grant money, and working in conjunction with a graduate student in computer science, NAIS members first developed an app, similar to *Pokémon Go* that helped users interact with and learn the Arapahoe language in real time. Building on that work, the NAIS program recently obtained a \$300,000 NSF grant to further develop the use of virtual reality technology to aid in language acquisition and revitalization. The success of these creative efforts has caused a significant shift within the SCGSJ regarding technology and how it may be used to deliver education within our disciplines. For example, we have one faculty member who has begun exploring the use of virtual immersive games (similar to *Dungeons and Dragons*) designed from a Native world view as an aid to help students understand what it is like to understand the world from a perspective completely different from their own. Similarly, as we develop our Social Justice degrees we are exploring the idea of creating a capstone course where the entire

semester takes place within a virtual world (similar to second city), where students will have the opportunity to interact and engage in that world with avatars that allow them to be different races, genders, ability statuses, etc. (i.e. the technology would provide them the opportunity to literally walk in someone else's shoes and hopefully learn from that experience in a way that cannot be done in a regular classroom). We have currently established a working committee that is exploring these kinds of technologies and grant funding opportunities to support this work. We view these innovative and creative ways to use technology in the educative process as a way to distinguish ourselves and our program nationally, and as a way to contribute to the digital development of UW as a whole. If our efforts in this regard are successful, we certainly plan to share our work with our colleagues throughout campus.

Strategic Investment and Support

Although our goals and plans outlined above are rather ambitious, reaching these goals and supporting this work will require a rather modest investment from the university. To support the continued growth and development of the SCGSJ and its many initiatives the following strategic initiatives/investments are proposed.

- **Ensure the SCGSJ maintains/retains all existing faculty.** The biggest challenge the SCGSJ currently faces is a lack of sufficient human resources to do our current work and to do the work we seek to do as we move forward. Last year we lost two full professors, and one tenured associate professor within our school who took jobs at other institutions. We have received no tenure track lines to replace those losses. It is hard to imagine how we continue if we sustain any more losses of that magnitude. At present, the American Studies program is under consideration for elimination. Two of their faculty hold 25% lines within the SCGSJ and serve as directors of our AADS and LTST studies programs. Additionally, although their lines only lie 25% within the School, due to cross-listing and other agreements 50% and 75% respectively of their teaching goes towards courses within our school. Regardless of what happens to American Studies, it is crucial that the SCGSJ is able to retain these two faculty members.¹
- **Make permanent our five full-time temporary faculty:** As we discuss at length in our attached supporting documents, the SCGSJ does not have anywhere near the faculty necessary to support our classes and degree programs. We are able to offer these programs through our partnerships throughout the university and by hiring a substantial number of temporary hires. While employing a substantial number of temporary faculty allows us to offer our degrees in any given year, such heavy reliance on temporary faculty makes it extremely difficult to build our programs and existing majors. At present we have five full-time temporary faculty with full benefits in our budget. We could make these five faculty permanent and bring them close to market salaries for their positions for an additional \$57,885 in salaries per year and an additional \$24,253 in benefit payments, or \$82,138 a year total. If we were to do so, we would also like to offer modest start-up packages for each of them at \$10,000 total (paid out as \$5,000 a year over two years) to help support their research and scholarship. Such start up packages would require an additional \$25,000 investment a year for only two years.

¹ As we have indicated elsewhere, if it is feasible, the SCGSJ is ready and willing to merge the American Studies Program into the SCGSJ. WE have discussed it as a faculty and have voted in favor of doing so.

- **Continue to Support our Part-Time Temporary Hires:** In addition to the five, full-time temporary hires we employ, we use part-time temporary faculty to teach approximately 30 classes a year for us in any given year. In order to sustain our existing degree programs, in addition to making permanent the five full-time temporary faculty, we also need to continue to hire all of our part-time temporary faculty. Additionally, as we develop the Social Justice degrees, it would be helpful to have the capacity to offer additional courses in support of those degrees. We believe we can do so by being able to offer five additional classes through part-time temporary instructors. This increase in courses would require an investment of approximately \$20,780 per year to cover those salaries and EPB's. We anticipate that all of these additional courses will be taught online and therefore the additional amounts could be funded through distance education revenue.
- **Support the Creation of the Social Justice Degree and the Development of Innovative Pedagogies:** The degrees currently offered within the SCGSJ and the Social Justice degrees contemplated are somewhat unique and hard to quantify in that for most students they serve as enhancements and supplements to other degrees they earn rather than primary degrees. As a result, most who earn our degrees do so as a second or third degree or as a minor. Many students take several of our classes, but don't actually major in our degrees. At the same time there is rarely a direct line between a degree in Native Studies, for example, and a job in Native Studies. How does one quantify and analyze the value added of seeing the world differently and developing the ability to understand and work better with others unlike one's self? Similarly, when one is at the forefront of a field, as the SCGSJ has been in using technology to enhance pedagogy, one doesn't know for sure whether each attempt at innovation and creativity will work. Over the next few months we will be submitting our Notice of Intent for our Social Justice Degrees and we will be seeking funding to support further technological innovation in regards to pedagogy. As we move forward in these areas we do so hoping/asking that our proposals will be greeted with open minds and a willingness to engage in meaningful dialogue. In the past that has not always been the case, because what we do does not readily fit establish molds and the monetary value and return on investment are not as easily quantifiable in our area as in others. This does not mean these ideas and innovations don't have value, it just means we may have to work to understand and assess them differently.
- **Provide additional web and marketing support:** While, as noted above, direct financial investment from the University would certainly help, a big part of our future plans is to raise our own money as well. Part of our current ability to do so is hampered by the fact that we need more web and marketing help. Our efforts at drawing majors and minors to our program, and developing relationships with donors would be helped significantly if we could keep our website up to date, better develop and manage student, alumni, and supporter lists as well as communicate with the same, and develop and enhance our social media presence. Right now most of this kind of work isn't being done, or is primarily being done by our director when she can squeeze in the time. Through conversations we have had with our various partners throughout campus, many units are having similar problems. Perhaps one solution is to pool resources across units and/or invest some resources in building up UW's capacity in this regard.

Conclusion

As has been noted, the future of UW lies in its ability to become more digital, more entrepreneurial, more interdisciplinary, and more inclusive. As detailed above, the SCGSJ is an interdisciplinary program with a strong commitment to inclusivity. With the strategic investments noted, the SCGSJ is well-positioned to expand its work and continue to contribute significantly to UW's mission in these two areas. Additionally, through its innovative use of technology to expand its educational offerings, and its willingness to explore certificate programs and other avenues for new revenue streams, the SCGSJ will also contribute positively to UW's commitment to become more digital and more entrepreneurial.