

Women's and Gender Studies Program  
College of Arts and Sciences  
American University

Syllabus for WGST 491 Internship in Women's and Gender Studies

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This experience presents an exciting opportunity for you to build a bridge between your academic background and your future career. You can use your internship to extend your classroom knowledge by applying what you've learned in the WGS program to an actual work setting. The coming months can also be a time of self-reflection. You have the opportunity to explore a viable work option and validate/repudiate your ideas about a particular career path or work environment.

When you check into your work site you cannot expect an atmosphere that focuses attention solely on you; you may not be at the top of your supervisor's agenda, and she/he may not have the time to give you the fullest explanation you may need about the work. One of your first challenges, then, is to determine who at your work site knows what you need to know and has the patience and personality to be your mentor. Make an effort to anticipate situations and problems you might encounter. Compile a list of pertinent questions, and don't be afraid to ask them. Take the lead in this learning process by asking, observing, analyzing, and doing things you may have never done before.

The WGS Director is generally the faculty advisor for internships. The faculty advisor's main role is to help you reflect on your work experiences and incorporate them into a broader educational perspective. To do this, assignments have been developed that include (1) keeping a journal, (2) meeting with other WGS interns and the director four times over the course of the semester, and (3) preparing a short (about 8 pages) paper on a topic emerging from your internship experience.

No more than 15% of your on-the-job time should be devoted to clerical activities (filing, copying, mailing, data entry, receptionist duties and the like); if your employer regularly asks you to do more than this, please speak with the WGS Director.

**NOTE:** Should a significant discrepancy occur between your job description and your actual duties, or should an intolerable personality conflict arise, should communications break down, etc., bring it to the attention the WGS Director at once, and, if necessary we will bring it to the attention of Marie Spaulding (x1799), internship coordinator at the Career Center. Addressing issues early may prevent major problems from developing and can salvage otherwise disastrous situations.

**The Objectives of this experience will vary depending on your site but include:**

- Applying WGS knowledge to social issues and identify actions
- Developing and refining both critical and abstract thinking
- Employing effective communication skills, speaking and presentation skills
- Exercising essential civic engagement skills
- Organizing and synthesizing material in new and effective ways
- Practicing creative problem solving
- Seizing, promoting and sustaining opportunities for feminist leadership
- Writing clearly and creatively
- Working collaboratively

**Evaluation**

To receive 3 hours of academic credit (required for the WGS major and minor) you must spend 15 hours per week for 12 weeks (during the a regular semester or in the summer) working at an internship site approved by the WGS Director. Each of the following elements will have equal weight in determining your final grade:

- Journal assignment
- Short paper
- Employer evaluation

As soon as possible (and no later than the first group meeting) fill out and submit the attached “Student Contact Information” form. Also attached to the syllabus are the “WGST Student Internship Site Evaluation” (see the Journal Assignment for more information) and the “Employer Evaluation of Intern” form – both are to be completed at the end of the internship.

**Journal Assignment**

Write dated journal entries for every day you go to your job. These should be word-processed, double-spaced and include your name. You will print and turn in a 3-week segment each time we meet during the semester. The meeting schedule will be set up during the third week of the semester for the remainder of the semester.

**Weeks 1-3**

- Give your first impressions of the people and the place. Keep a detailed, daily record of exactly what you are doing on the job.
- Explain the structure and purposes of the organization so the reader will understand the larger picture. Include brochures, newsletters, or other organizational material that clarify this picture.
- Explain your position and its relation to the larger organization, identifying the positions of the others you work for and with; include a diagram if useful.

#### Weeks 4-6

- Keep reporting your activities but in less detail and begin evaluating your work situation – what aspects are most fulfilling to you? Least fulfilling?
- Discuss the culture of your workplace; for example, how is authority managed? How is responsibility assigned? What gender dynamics are operating?
- What are the major WGS-related issues your job and the organization deal with? How do your own attitudes toward these issues compare/contrast with the positions/orientations of the organization?

#### Weeks 7-9

- Keep reporting your activities and begin making explicit connections between what you are doing/experiencing on the job and the substance of your academic program in WGS.
- Identify concepts, theories or insights gleaned from specific courses (for example, in Gender in Society, Feminist and Gender Theory, or any other WGS course) and apply them analytically to your work and the work of the organization *and/or*
- Show how concrete activities in your job or organizational activities illustrate abstract analysis you encountered in specific WGS coursework.

#### Week 10-12

- Keep reporting your activities and making connections between the academic and the applied realms.
- Write a one page description of your job and the organization in which you have worked that would provide information and insights to another student considering this site for an internship. Attach this to the Site Evaluation form.
- Write three compelling sentences that describe your internship – something you might put in a cover letter for a job. The goal for this description is to show that you have valuable experience working for an impressive organization.

#### **Short Paper**

You should begin thinking about the topic for this paper in weeks 4-6 and refine your ideas in weeks 7-9. You should have a clear idea of the topic by the third group meeting (following weeks 7-9). In order to locate your topic in the academic subject matter of WGS you should not only make connections as outlined in weeks 7-9 of the journal assignment but also engage the scholarly literature on the topic. Additional guidelines will be provided, but for planning purposes the due date will be during finals week; the expected length is about 8 pages; and the minimum number of scholarly sources is six.