Writing in the Discipline: Gender and Women’s Studies

In order to achieve the stated goals of the interdisciplinary Gender and Women’s Studies Program at Rhode Island College—to discover and communicate new knowledge about women and gender, to reexamine and reinterpret existing knowledge about women and gender, and to synthesize and integrate this understanding into the traditional disciplines—we must teach our students how to use the tools of multiple fields, including those of the social sciences and the humanities. Teaching students to write in this field, then, requires teaching a complex set of analytical skills and is spread across three courses required of all majors. Our offering in the General Education program, GEND 200: Gender in Society, is also required of all majors and minors. This course introduces the fundamental skill of interdisciplinary writing through the project of intersectional analyses (employed in a written critical analysis of cultural objects through the lens of gender) and also teaches self-reflective writing through response papers, journal entries, and other informal writing. Students are taught to think of the writer as observer, analyzer, and critic, and learn to write from that stance. The courses that we are identifying as our WID courses—GEND 201: Introduction to Feminist Inquiry and GEND 352: Feminist Theory—build upon this foundation at first the sophomore level (201) and then the junior level (352). Both courses are required of all GEND majors.

GEND 201 addresses the Written Communication (WC) outcome by moving toward more formal analytic written work than what is produced in GEND 200, with students learning the different purposes of writing in GEND, including persuasion, explanation, and information. Students learn what constitutes evidence in the social sciences and in the humanities and how to employ the conventions of both areas in their own interdisciplinary writing (WC goal: writing that is supported by evidence). They also learn to synthesize ideas from different texts and artifacts in their writing; and they continue to use self-reflective writing when appropriate. Students produce writing that is well organized, demonstrates correct usage of grammar and the terminology of the field, and is appropriate to the academic context of Gender and Women’s Studies.

GEND 352 addresses the WC outcome at a higher level, as students learn how to construct and complete a major research project, from prospectus to final paper. In this course it is assumed that students have mastered the writing instruction given in GEND 200 and 201 and are able to employ the writing conventions of the field. At this level, students learn to enter the academic dialogue of Gender and Women’s studies in their research writing. They assess theoretical perspectives that are elaborated by professional writers in the discipline and begin to offer their own contributions. Students also complete shorter written assignments in which they may respond to or critique single or multiple texts. Self-reflective writing at this level is expected to be used strategically the context of elaborating ideas.