Proposed title: “Whither the WGS MA? A Community Dialogue”

Hundreds of universities in the United States offer an undergraduate WGS major or minor, and according to Smith College’s Program for the Study of Women and Gender website, there are 21 PhD programs in WGS (https://www.smith.edu/academics/swg#academics-swg-ma-programs look for the "Graduate Programs" section near the bottom of the page). The processes, values, epistemologies, and impact of these degrees have received considerable attention. Anthologies like Women’s Studies for the Future, Women’s Studies on Its Own, and Rethinking Women’s and Gender Studies tend to split their attention between the implications of doctoral training and undergraduate program building. We’ve also seen a robust literature emerge about the PhD: Feminist Studies published a special issue in Fall 2018 themed “Doctoral Degrees in W/G/S/F Studies: Taking Stock,” which continues a conversation from 1998 when the journal published another special issue: “Disciplining Feminism? The Future of Women's Studies.” Further emphasizing the significance of the WGS PhD, current NWSA members can join the Gender, Women's, and Feminist Studies (GWFS) PhD Interest Group.

Alongside these important dialogues, there has not been as much attention to the WGS MA degree. Smith College lists about 29 MA programs in the United States, no small number. Yet rarely do publications or conferences feature a sustained consideration of these programs, their curricula, their structure, or the students who enroll. Therefore, in this roundtable I’m interested in exploring the WGS MA and its location within WGS as a field, within our specific institutions, and in relation to other WGS degrees. I’d like to include folks who direct M.A. programs and also welcome people who teach and advise WGS MA students as well as WGS MA students themselves.

Some questions this roundtable might consider: What function do MA programs play in the field today, and how is the MA related to other degree programs in WGS? How can MA programs meet the current and emerging needs of students and the field? What similarities and variations do we see across different MA programs? What attracts students to the MA degree and to specific MA degree programs? How do students and faculty envision the purpose (or utility) of the MA degree?