

# Women's Studies

2012 Chief Assessor's Report



Government  
of South Australia

**SACE**  
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# WOMEN'S STUDIES

## 2012 CHIEF ASSESSOR'S REPORT

### OVERVIEW

Chief Assessors' Reports give an overview of how students performed in their school and external assessments in relation to the learning requirements, assessment design criteria, and performance standards set out in the relevant subject outline. They provide information and advice regarding the assessment types, the application of the performance standards in school and external assessments, the quality of student performance, and any relevant statistical information.

This year saw some outstanding work in Women's Studies, with a number of students performing at a high level — showing the ability to investigate topics using the tools of gender analysis, evaluate strategies to remove gender discrimination against women, and use language appropriate to the subject. Most students were able to discuss gender construction for women and men in society and point to examples of gender bias. Teachers have designed stimulating and thought-provoking assessment tasks which enabled their students to investigate many issues for women in Australia and around the world, currently and in the past.

When designing tasks, it is important for teachers to consider how students will be able to achieve at the highest levels of the performance standards. Students need to be encouraged to pay more than glancing attention to the specific features being assessed, particularly the ways of effecting change to address gender bias and evaluating a range of strategies for empowerment. These are often addressed in a superficial way as a tacked-on afterthought. Students can identify ways of effecting change to address gender bias in text-analysis tasks which ask them to reconstruct texts to remove gender bias, or to find texts which have already been reconstructed and discussing their effectiveness. To evaluate strategies means to comment intelligently on the success or failure of the strategies employed. Some teachers have made this more accessible for their students by looking at topics like the women's movement and the strategies feminists have used in the past to achieve voting rights and equal pay for women.

### SCHOOL ASSESSMENT

#### Assessment Type 1: Text Analysis

Teachers in 2012 designed a range of interesting tasks to enable students to meet the performance standards. Most teachers considered one task sufficient to do this, but others gave students a chance to meet the standards across two tasks. A number of interesting texts were chosen ranging from films to anime, to famous paintings. It is important for teachers to encourage students to discuss how gender is being constructed in the texts, how texts display gender bias, or how gender relations operate to give one gender power over the other, and to use appropriate communication skills to do so. Students must not assume that in talking about women they have addressed the issue of gender construction. It is important that they directly state how gender is being constructed in the texts. If the specific feature of analysis of gender relations is being assessed, students must look at a *diversity* of women from different times, contexts, or cultures.

## Assessment Type 2: Essay

The persuasive essay is sometimes the weakest task for students and the task design requires careful consideration from teachers. Rather than just writing a report, students need to be able to choose a topic and format in which they can construct an argument and attempt to persuade their audience to their point of view. Teachers can help by setting a question, or statement and question, which directs students to argue a position. Most teachers have set a task that asks students to investigate situations where social, cultural, and economic practices disempower women, and where gender bias and gender relations encourage a severe imbalance of power between men and women. Students are then able to argue for change. The situations can be in developing countries today or in Western nations in the past or present.

## Assessment Type 3: Folio

The folio enabled students to perform across a broad range of tasks and topics. The tasks ranged from talks to reports, to visual pieces accompanied by a written summary. Some teachers constructed source-analysis tasks which were most successful in addressing the performance standards. Some tasks were very imaginative, with less emphasis on lengthy pieces of writing, but teachers must ensure that the task meets the performance standards. Moderators suggest that when all three folio pieces have been completed, teachers assess against the performance standards across all tasks to derive a grade level for the folio.

## EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT

### Assessment Type 4: Issues Analysis

This year saw some excellent papers with interesting and diverse topics ranging from the influence of Disney movies on young children to the gender construction of raunch culture. There were some noteworthy papers on issues such as women in politics, women in the music industry, and arranged marriages. Some students presented well-researched and well-written papers but with little attention to the performance standards and so were unable to achieve at the highest grades.

It is important that students identify gender construction in their chosen issue very clearly, as students often consider that in having chosen an issue which involves women, they need say no more about gender construction. There is a tendency to become so involved in describing the issue and how it disempowers women that the students do not analyse gender and its construction, or gender relations, or gender bias within the issue. Teachers need to guide students by asking them to examine how women and men are constructed by society to look and behave, and how that limits their self-expression and freedom. This year a number of students tackled the issue of gender construction in regard to masculinity very successfully, but this led to problems in addressing the gender analysis, and investigation and evaluation assessment design criteria where students are required to address how *women* are affected by gender relations and gender bias, and how social structures, cultural practices and ways of thinking can disempower *women*.

Some students were able to show how their issue impacted upon a diversity of women by looking at different races, classes, or contexts. Others were able to bring

in a diversity of opinions of feminist theorists, but many missed the necessity of addressing a diversity of women's experiences across contexts, times, and cultures. It would be pleasing to see more references to feminists and feminist theory. While Germaine Greer and Naomi Wolf received a number of mentions, few other feminists were quoted.

It is important that teachers note any changes in the specific features that are required to be addressed in the issues analysis. The required specific features are always listed in the subject operational information available on the website. In 2012, identification of ways of effecting change to address gender bias and evaluation of strategies for empowerment were not required. While students are free to address these areas, a number of students wrote many words on them which could have been used to address the specific features that were required.

While most students were able to write at length using the language of gender analysis, some used the terms without any real understanding of their meaning. Many used 'patriarchy' very freely, but did not seem to understand that it means a system where fathers rule as the heads of families and men rule as the heads of state. Other terms like 'gender bias', 'disempowerment', and 'gender relations' were frequently used, but sometimes with little understanding of their meaning. Teachers could help students by providing them with a glossary which explains these terms in accessible language. The differentiation of women's roles in the private and public spheres could have been more thoroughly examined and used to explain gender bias and gender relations.

Presentation of the issues analysis was generally good, but students should consider readability, e.g. font size, line spacing. Students who demonstrated consistent use of one form of referencing (that is, footnoting or in-text referencing) were generally more successful than those who used a combination of both forms.

The issues analysis should be a continuous piece of writing of 2000 words. Graphs and illustrations, unless vital to the substance of the paper, need not be used.

Students often set themselves excellent questions but then failed to answer them. The question should help to give the paper structure and coherence. Teachers can help students to frame their questions so that they are able to narrow their focus, rather than flounder in broad generalities responding to their topic. Using the language of gender analysis in the wording of the question can help to keep students focused on the performance standards for the whole of the paper. Some suggestions might be: 'What are the implications of this for gender relations?', or 'How does the need for women to fit feminine gender construction explain this issue?', or 'In what ways is gender bias limiting women's opportunities in this area?' Quotations were well used in general, but it is worth spending time teaching students to analyse them, as well as using them as supporting evidence.

## **OPERATIONAL ADVICE**

In the presentation of materials for moderation, teachers are asked to label all pieces of work clearly, so that each piece identifies the student (by SACE registration number), the task, the assessment type, and which of the key issues were explored. Those students who wrote close to the word limit for a task were generally more successful at providing evidence against the performance standards. Shorter answers tended to result in lower students' grades.

## **GENERAL COMMENTS**

It was pleasing to see a number of students discuss the work of early feminists like Mary Wollstonecraft and Emmeline Pankhurst. Naomi Wolf and Germaine Greer were mentioned, but teachers should introduce their students to more feminist theories and it would be good to see more quotations from women like Gloria Steinem, Simone de Beauvoir, Natasha Walter, Betty Friedan, Chilla Bulbeck, and Jessica Valenti. This would enable students to analyse and evaluate the issues raised in this subject with an understanding which goes beyond their own experience and taps into the wealth of knowledge and experience of great feminist thinkers.

Chief Assessor  
Women's Studies