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## Students' Perceived Value Of Women's And Gender Studies And Chicana/o Studies At A Hispanic Serving Institution: A Quantitative Analysis Of "The Studies" In Higher Education

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STUDENTS' PERCEIVED VALUE OF WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES AND  
CHICANA/O STUDIES AT A HISPANIC SERVING  
INSTITUTION: A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF  
"THE STUDIES" IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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2022

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CHICANA/O STUDIES AT A HISPANIC SERVING INSTITUTION: A  
QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF "THE STUDIES" IN  
HIGHER EDUCATION

By

Hilda Ontiveros-Arrieta, M.A., M.Ed.

DISSERTATION

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for the Degree of

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## **Dedication and Acknowledgments**

This work is dedicated to all of those that let me stand on their shoulders for me to complete this doctorate and study. I was preceded by many trailblazers, fighters, and lovers of life. My spouse Jesse held my hand through the best and toughest of moments with her unwavering strength and support. Jesse is my best-friend and soul mate. She held me up when my sister's passing left a hole in my heart, and I felt like I couldn't go on. She re-ignited a fire in me that I thought was extinguished as I saw my beloved sister laying on the floor, breathless and lifeless. I owe her every drop of love that I have to give. My children proudly held my hand, even when I couldn't give them all the attention that they needed at the time. Somehow, they understood that it was all for them and necessary to spend countless hours at my laptop. They sat with me at coffee shops, the dinner table and oftentimes fell asleep by my side. Their company during my writing frenzies mean more to me than they will ever know. This is all for them...

To my grandmother, Juana Jasso, who helped raise me after arriving to the U.S. from Aguascalientes, Mexico, to work in fields across America so that those who followed, including myself, could fathom a dream like the one I am living. She gave birth in beet fields and lost some infants to malnutrition along the way; for this reason, I do not live my life in vain, but rather, I live every day filled with gratitude and love, knowing that without her sacrifice and painful moments, my success would be impossible, unfathomable.

My parents Benjamin and Mary were instrumental in raising me with good habits and the drive to keep learning. They gave me everything, including the swift kicks in the rear that were essential to my formation into the woman I have become. My father worked tirelessly for many years, without taking vacation time, to give us everything we had; It taught me about hard work, fierce determination, and commitment. He never let me forget that I could be anyone or anything

in this life. I owe them everything I have and everything that I will become. Together with my parents, my two aunts Teresa and Antonia helped me to raise my children upon starting the doctoral program. They fed and reared my children while I was away and so they wouldn't have to attend day care. They taught me and my children humility and love, one bowl of rice and beans at a time. They didn't have much, but what they did have, was given to us without hesitancy.

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Jessie, Benjamin Jr., and Melissa. Thank you for making me tough enough to withstand this world and your unrelenting support in life. Sister, you stood-up for me when I had no one else to turn to. You never let me fall--you watched my children and took them for walks so that I could write this dissertation. You rented the home down the street from me so that we could be close, just as we were growing up. I miss seeing you walk your dog every day and dropping in to say, "Hi dudes!"--more than you will ever know. I miss your daily texts, phone calls, and physical presence. The shedding of your physical body has taught me many important lessons about the impermanence of life on Earth, the connection between souls, the beauty of the afterlife, but most importantly, the lesson of kindness and compassion. Your passing has reinforced the belief that we should all be kind to others, for we know not what they are going through. All our pain has a root; I am sorry for the roots you couldn't fight on your own--they had a tight a grip on you. And if I could've fought the battle for you, I would have. You were my

first best-friend and although I feel a gaping hole in my life, an ache for what will never be--I know you're standing right next to me through this. I feel your presence urging me to push forward during the hardest of times. I smell you, hear you, and feel you--it gets me through the days. I have faith that you are vibrating to a different measure in paradise, where your vision is not clouded, and you are no longer shackled by pain and addiction. Thank you for teaching me the lesson of faith. I will carry your light with me and share it with the world.

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*"I can do all things through Him that strengthens me"*

*-Philippians 4:13*

*"Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no danger because you are with me."*

*-Psalm 23*

## **Abstract**

Previous research indicates that "The Studies" are helpful to students at both K-12 and higher education levels. Most of these studies focus on K-12 schools, fewer are at the higher

education level, and few use quantitative methods to examine students' perceptions of "The Studies." The purpose of this study is to research students' perceived value of Women's & Gender Studies and Chicana/o Studies at a Hispanic Serving Institution. This quantitative study employed a feminist framework and methodology to develop a survey instrument and to analyze the survey responses from students who took courses in Women's & Gender Studies and Chicana/o Studies in the Fall of 2020. Separate analyses were conducted for Women's & Gender Studies and Chicana/o Studies to review data for each program. The findings demonstrated that both women and men highly value Women's & Gender Studies and Chicana/o Studies at this HSI in West Texas. These results contrast with a similar study (Horwath & Diabl, 2020) that found while both men and women admitted to the value of Women's & Gender Studies courses, men who were required to take the courses expressed resistance and negative judgements. The present study adds to the limited research on "The Studies" in higher education. This study is student-focused and quantifies students' perceived value of "The Studies," two contributions that aimed to merge both classical feminist methods and quantitative methods. I sought to make this contribution to the field of feminist-centered methods of research through a paradigm shift addressing concerns in both feminist and positivist approaches.

## Table of Contents

Dedication and Acknowledgements.....	iv
Abstract.....	vii
Table of Contents.....	viii
List of Tables.....	ix
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2: Literature Review .....	8
Chapter 3: Methodology .....	34
Chapter 4: Results .....	47
Chapter 5: Discussion .....	61
References .....	75
Vita .....	89

## List of Tables

Table 3.1 Chicana/o Studies Courses and Enrollment for Fall 2021.....	37
Table 3.2 Women’s and Gender Studies Courses and Enrollment for Fall 2021...	37
Table 4.1 WGS Sample: Agreement Crosstabulations for the Horwath & Diabl Measure by Gender .....	49
Table 4.2 WGS Sample: Agreement Crosstabulations for the Self-Developed WGS Measure by Gender .....	50
Table 4.3 CST Sample: Agreement Crosstabulations for the Horwath & Diabl Measure by Gender .....	55
Table 4.4 CST Sample: Agreement Crosstabulations for the Self-Developed CST Measure by Gender .....	50

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Women's and Gender Studies, Chicana/o Studies, African American Studies, along with other ethnic programs of study have long been part of "The Studies" that were established in the 1960s and 70s as a response to social unrest (Boxer, 1982; Boxer, 2002; Ginsberg, 2012; Nance, 2008; Olzak & Kangas, 2008). The Civil Rights Era in the United States ushered in calls for inclusive education, social equality, and the end to systemic racism and sexism (Boxer, 1982; Cabrera, 2019; Casso & Roman, 1996; Guerra, 1970; Hu-DeHart, 1993; Nance, 2008). The Women's Rights Movement, Chicano Movement, and African American Rights movement at times converged to meet the collective goals of gender and racial minorities. One of these moments was during the nationwide student movement of the late 1960s and 1970s. The nation's youth were calling for a more culturally relevant curriculum, more educational opportunities and access, the end of de facto segregation, and representation within schools and colleges (Casso & Roman, 1996; Guerra, 1970; Hu-DeHart, 1993; Hu-DeHart, 2000; Hune, 1994). With this said, "The Studies" are an umbrella term for the programs of study that address race, culture, gender, and ethnicity that were a product of the civil rights student movement. Women's and Gender Studies addresses historical and contemporary issues as they relate to women, power, and oppression. The "gender" in Women's and Gender Studies indicates that the intersections of gender, femininity, and masculinity are also a focus. Chicano Studies is defined as an interdisciplinary analysis of Mexican Americans in the U.S. Chicano Studies takes a closer look at the history of Mexican Americans and their position within the nation's power structure (Bixler-Marquez & Ortega, 2014).

The goal of this study is to investigate the perceived value of "The Studies" or more precisely, the Women's and Gender Studies and Chicana/o Studies university coursework. The

primary research question is: what is the perceived value of Women's and Gender Studies and Chicana/o Studies for university students taking courses in either program? I plan to collect quantitative survey data to capture students' perceived value at the end of the course. This study is important for examining students' perceived value of "The Studies" in a large university setting. There is a lack of both qualitative and quantitative data that examines the value of these programs of study for students, especially in higher education settings.

### **Problem and Significance**

There is a lack of quantitative studies on the value of women's and ethnic studies in higher education settings (Harnois, 2013). This lack of quantitative data available to colleges and universities is troublesome as most use quantitative data to make important funding, staffing, and course decisions (Leung et al., 2019; Marina et al., 2015). The legitimacy and thus, survival of the program and courses depend on the collection and analysis of such data. Take for example a Dean of the College of Liberal Arts asking for data to justify hiring full-time faculty and funding a Women's and Gender Studies (WGS) program. Administrators ask for data beyond student enrollment in program courses. Richer data helps to underpin enrollment numbers and the legitimacy of an ethnic studies or women's studies program. The problem is: the data does not exist. For women's studies, this is in part due to the traditional feminist rejection of positivist approaches, which utilizes statistics or experiments to explain social phenomena (Harnois, 2013; Sprague, 2005; Sprague & Zimmerman, 1985).

According to feminist researchers, the positivist approach denies women and others, including subaltern populations, a voice in research studies (Harnois, 2013; Sprague, 2005; Sprague & Zimmerman, 1989). Positivism objectifies the sample/subjects via scientific

objectivity, and this goes against the feminist grain of privileging the voices of women (Farganis, 1986; Sharma, 2019). Consequently, a positivist approach is equated with power, domination, and social inequalities (Keller, 1982). So then, quantitative data collection has the propensity to recreate cycles of social domination, like patriarchy. The problem seems to be that while feminist scholars are suspicious of positivist approaches, quantitative researchers view feminist work as “biased or activist” or “substantively marginal” (Harnois, 2013, p. 2). Related to this, Sprague (2005) observed that:

Because feminists and other critical researchers have tended to assume that quantitative methodology cannot respond to their concerns, there are relatively few analyses of specific procedures that are problematic in mainstream quantitative methodology and there is even less written on feminist ways of implementing experiments or surveys. (p. 81)

Current ethnic and women’s studies programs are under threat, mostly due to political threats from the right (Baker & Rodrigues-Sherly, 2021; Chamberlain, 2006; Pollack, 1985). Some states are currently banning the teaching of critical race theory (CRT) and defunding schools and courses that include teaching CRT, Queer theory, Marxist theory, and Identity theory (Baker & Rodrigues-Sherly, 2021; Texas Legislature Online, 2021). This is a problem as many ethnic studies and WGS courses are either directly or indirectly threaded with the theoretical underpinnings of CRT, Queer theory, and other social theories (Baker & Rodrigues-Sherly, 2021; Florido, 2021). The domino effect here seems to be the threat of defunding ethnic and WGS programs and at the very least, cutting course availability. In a letter to the University of California San Francisco, proponents of ethnic studies at UC San Diego stated that the defunding

of ethnic studies at UCSF, in part, stems from a “divisive culture war rhetoric” (The University of California San Diego, 2016, p. 1). In addition, the letter states that:

Notably, in the past several months, student activists and faculty at institutions including Yale University, University of Missouri, and Emory University have stirred national conversations on matters concerning race, gender, and class on university campuses, pressing for administrators to support and initiate institutional change around issues of diversity and inclusion. One of the many demands that echoed across these campuses was the creation of a university-wide Ethnic Studies curriculum. This progressive work has been concurrent with the tremendous influence of Black Lives Matter networks and in coalition with many other concerned student movements. (p. 2)

This speaks of the timelessness of ethnic studies programs across the nation as we have not resolved our racial tensions and in some cases have unraveled the progress of the 1960s. Further, the faculty and graduate students that produced the letter stated that the defunding of ethnic studies sets a dangerous precedent as UCSF, the first to usher in “The Studies” in the 1960s, will set the example of just how easily financial and political forces can destroy programs across the country (The University of California San Diego, 2016).

The End CRT Act, introduced in part by Senator Ted Cruz in 2021, further puts “The Studies” in peril as the policy seeks to ban and limit the way teachers and professors teach racism, sexism, and homophobia (Baker & Rodrigues-Sherly, 2021). The trend has spread across conservative areas of the United States and oftentimes echoes Donald Trump’s language in the original executive order banning diversity and inclusion training (Baker &

Rodrigues-Sherly, 2021). The endangered status of critical race theory is almost a direct attack on “The Studies” as the focus and purpose of these courses is to critically assess racism, society, and gendered intersections.

### **Research Objective**

In my literature search for this study, most literature I found was historiographical in nature, commentaries on the state of “The Studies,” or first-person narratives. Fewer studies were available on the value or success of programs from the perspectives of those who *take* the courses: students. I will elaborate on this further in the next chapter.

Therefore, the obvious gap to fill ethnic and women’s studies literature are quantitative studies; even more so, studies conducted in higher education settings. In my study, I intend to investigate whether men value WGS less than women while I examine the perceived value of Women’s and Gender Studies and Chicano Studies among undergraduate students at a university on the U.S.-Mexico border. The objective of this study is to generate quantitative data on the perceived value of these courses.

### **Relevant Context and Background of the Researcher**

My interest in this research stems from my twelve years of teaching experience in Chicana/o Studies and Women’s and Gender Studies at a four-year public university on the U.S.-Mexico Border where this study takes place. My experiences include feeling like the programs were constantly on the “chopping block” at the first sign of economic and political upheaval. I constantly had to justify teaching my courses to administrators and provide some kind of “proof” that the courses were useful to students. Mostly, the proof that was given was the solid enrollment numbers in both academic programs, especially for Liberal Arts students that have a

three-course block elective requirement at the University. There were deep feelings of job insecurity from semester to semester since the two programs were always a target in our conservative state and hence, subject to intense scrutiny. However, anecdotally, students appeared to appreciate the courses. Also, the solid enrollment numbers and positive course evaluations for our faculty members were indicative of a successful program.

As a Microbiology and Chemistry undergraduate student with no previous knowledge of Chicano Studies (CST) or Women's and Gender Studies (WGS) programs, I found a new sense of community engagement, value for my heritage, belonging at my university, and renewed motivation to continue my studies after taking several electives in both programs. One can say that my academic development was science oriented and narrow-minded; a panoramic view of human existence was missing in my field of vision. I pursued a master's degree in Latin American history and women's history and attended medical school where my focus was on women's and Latino health concerns. These experiences together with my experiences teaching CST and WGS at the university level for the past thirteen years have influenced me to pursue a quantitative study that will inform me of student perspectives about feminist studies and Chicano Studies. Collectively, these experiences compelled me to think about collecting quantitative data to determine the extent to which students value the two programs, starting with courses in the undergraduate curriculum.

While gathering research literature for this dissertation, my challenge has been finding empirical studies on either ethnic or women's studies. Even more rare is the availability of quantitative data to build on. My research will build on the few studies available and hopefully inspire larger-scale data collection. My study can be set apart from the other relevant quantitative studies (Horwath & Diabl, 2020; Marchbank & Letherby, 2006) in that the ethnic and women's

studies courses involved are not required, and it is not set in Europe, where one can argue that cultural differences exist. The next chapter will discuss the history and current state of ethnic studies and women's and gender studies in higher education, as well as the research and frameworks guiding my study.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

To provide a proper historical context for this study, I will discuss the history of “The Studies” in higher education, which includes Chicano Studies and WGS. I have organized this literature review to start with the history of “The Studies” in general, then Chicana/o Studies, and lastly, WGS.

### **From Ethnic Studies to “The Studies” in Higher Education**

After the Supreme Court’s 1954 landmark decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* and strike down of the “separate but equal” doctrine established by *Plessy v. Ferguson* 1896, the education civil rights movement turned its attention to higher education. The campaign called for equal access regardless of race, gender, or class and promised to “deliver higher education as the first truly democratic, nondiscriminatory American institution” (Hu-DeHart, 2000, p. 1). In the Fall of 1969, shortly after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy and at the peak of the Vietnam War, the Third World Liberation Front led a strike at San Francisco State College (now San Francisco State University/SFSU) to hire more faculty of color, admit more students of color, and implement ethnic studies in the curricula (Nance, 2008). This strike, which eventually spread to other universities and colleges such as U.C. Berkeley, Columbia University, and The University of Texas at El Paso, is credited with the establishment of the first Ethnic Studies programs, with the School of Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State College being the first of its kind. The School of Ethnic Studies ushered in a new era of education that was focused on racial and ethnic equality and highlighted the contributions of groups other than the white male (Ward, 2019). Ethnic studies courses soon developed into Black (African American) Studies, Asian American Studies, Chicano Studies, and Women’s Studies, among others. The first college to offer Black Studies courses was Merritt Junior

College in Oakland, California, and the first fully developed program in Black Studies was at SFSU (Ward, 2019).

The “strike” at SFSU was more of a takeover of the campus by activist groups including Black activists that demanded dormitories, a Black Studies program, and accessibility to the college in what Ward (2019) called an “affirmative action philosophy” (p. 1). Similarly, Nance (2008) characterized the strikes as paving the way for “equity and social justice on campuses nationwide” (p. 14). Racism, exclusion, and systemic discrimination were the issues at hand both during the campus takeovers and the broader civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s (Hu-DeHart, 2000; Nance, 2008; Ward, 2019).

Evelyn Hu-DeHart (1993, 2000) explained that the university faculty and student demographic of the time was predominantly male and white, and the curriculum reflected that demographic and continues to do so. Hence, the multicultural reform movement for higher education called for changes in the curriculum, access to education, and more faculty and students of color (Hu-DeHart, 1993). In other words, this was a movement that had in mind educational equality, which in turn would reflect democratic pluralism and give the youth of color an opportunity for social mobilization. However, ethnic studies were a challenge to the status quo and the imbalance of power that ensues. The above-named calls for justice were naturally met with push-back and a struggle for mainstream legitimacy ensued. The struggle for legitimacy was evidenced by the inability of ethnic and women’s studies programs to fully integrate into the academic structure (Boxer, 2002; Hu-DeHart, 1993). Denying legitimacy can be expressed in various forms such as reducing funding to a program to disable it or placing exaggerated demands on a program that cannot be made. Since “The Studies” were perceived by the mainstream university faculty and student body as subversive, culturally nationalistic, and

even violent to white males, the stereotypes functioned to discourage faculty and students from participating in courses, further delegitimizing the programs (Boxer, 2002; Ginsberg, 2008; Hu-DeHart, 1993).

## **Chicano Studies**

For Mexican Americans participating in the struggle for ethnic studies and more precisely, Chicana/o Studies, in the late 1960s, questions of power led them to rise against the educational system (Cassio & Roman, 1976; Guerra, 1970). The student movement, it was decided, was collectively called Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan or MEChA and represented the ideas and struggles of Chicanos in mostly higher education although Mechistas were also active in the community outside of education (Mecha Nationals, 2019; Urrieta, 2004). One of the key goals of MEChA was to revolutionize the curriculum, which at best, provided a stereotypical image of Mexican Americans within a historical context (Mecha Nationals, 2019). In the *Dilemmas of Ethnic Studies*, Arturo Pacheco (1980) illustrates this idea further by writing that:

prior to the existence of ethnic studies, the great bulk of the knowledge that we found in the university reflected little more of our lives than the recognition of us as deviant and sometimes exotic groups that existed on the margins of society. (p. 1)

It is these institutionalized practices that taught and maintained the culture of power in universities, and hence motivated the student movement.

One of the first ethnic studies programs that focused on the history and culture of Mexican Americans was created in March 1969 at San Fernando Valley State College (now CSU Northridge) (Bixler & Ortega, 2014). A few weeks later, in April of 1969, MEChA activists

gathered at The University of California Santa Barbara for a symposium on higher education and the development of a formal manifesto, or common goals. El Plan de Santa Barbara outlined their movement against “those forces which have denied us freedom of expression and human dignity” (Guerra, 1970, p. 3). In the manifesto, Chicanos called for equality in education in the form of content integration and equity in pedagogy. In it, Chicanos realized that:

without a strategic use of education, an education that places value on what we value, we will not realize our destiny...the central importance of institutions of higher learning to modern progress, in this case to the development of our community...we believe that higher education must contribute to the information of a complete person who truly values life and freedom. (Guerra, 1970, p. 2)

The students of MEChA comprehended an important reality about the power structure in the U.S.: that there are rules and codes for participating in power and the attainment of an education was one of them.

California is widely recognized as the pace setter for ethnic studies and progressive educational policy, as it was the epicenter of the Chicano and Black student movement. During the historic meeting at UC Santa Barbara where El Plan de Santa Barbara was drafted, a list of educational demands by the Chicano Community was outlined:

1. The recruitment and retention of Chicano Students and faculty, administrators and staff;
2. The formal study of Chicano culture and history in all of its unity and diversity in terms of recognizable cultural categories;
3. Support programs for Chicano students;
4. Chicano research programs;

5. Chicano publications programs;

6. Cultural and social action centers in the Chicano community (Macías, et al., 1970, p. 3).

Much like Boxer (2002) and Hu-DeHart (1993), Macías et al. (1970) documented the need for “institutionalizing” programs like Chicano and Black Studies in higher education so that they would remain legitimate within the educational system. One strategy mentioned was the creation of parallel academic units “that will have the freedom and latitude to carry on the above objectives” (Macías et al., 1970, p. 3). Despite being met with adversity, ethnic studies and women’s studies programs sprouted across the nation.

In the Fall of 1971, the Chicano Studies Program (CSP) at UTEP (where I will be conducting my study) began with controversy that catalyzed the first campus demonstrations including boycotts, walk-outs, sit-ins, and marches (Bixler & Ortega, 2004). Chicanos and their supporters were challenging the vote of a curriculum committee that rejected their proposal for a program that would evolve the University into a “bilingual-bicultural institution serving the needs of both countries with Chicanos as mediators” (Vasquez, 1974, p. 1). The objectives of the CSP proposal were to create a program that would raise consciousness about Chicanos on campus and “establish a base to combine their dreams with reality” (Vasquez, 1974, p.1), and which would eventually become a major degree program and independent department at UTEP.

On a technicality, the advocates of the CSP were able to overturn the decision made by the curriculum committee, but the goals of the proposal were modified and significantly scaled back. The Chicano group was no longer able to adhere to the goals outlined in their proposal; and thus, with the approval of a Chicano Studies Program, their hopes faded for an autonomous department, major degree program, community information program, bilingual-bicultural teacher training program, and Chicano advisory board. Instead, the committee replaced their goals with

other, arguably less ambitious objectives: 1.) Study the contributions of the Mexican American to American culture and society; 2.) Promote better understanding among all Americans and enrich their range of society; 3.) Aid professionals to work more effectively with American problems which have been aggravated by the alienation of the Chicano; and 4.) Encourage Chicanos to seek higher education (Vasquez, 1974). Although these goals were innovative in comparison to the subtractive practices and policies of earlier years, their aims evolved from definite and detailed to vaguer ideas that could theoretically assist resistant administrators to delegitimize the new program.

By the Fall of 1972, the program had 392 students enrolled in Chicano courses taught by 12 faculty members. The UTEP catalog of courses listed 18 core courses and 22 related courses in the Chicano Studies Program. Also, in October of 1974, the CSP submitted a Bachelor of Arts degree program proposal to the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee that was designed to “prepare students for work with Chicanos in the schools, the community, or for graduate work in the field” (The Prospector, 1974, p.1). Outside of the CSP, the Chicano Activities Program and other University entities made significant progress toward educating El Paso’s minority youth. In 1972, two out of ten total Chicano Ph.D.’s in Political Science in the U.S. worked for the University of Texas at El Paso. Several programs were introduced to UTEP including the Upward Bound Program, “Chicano Month,” Special Services Program, BETO (Bilingual Educators Training Opportunities) Program, and the Higher Education Migrant Program (now CAMP). The Upward Bound program at UTEP was a bridge program to address the gap between K-12 education and higher education for bilingual youth from minority backgrounds by improving their “communication, study and reading skills” (The Prospector, 1972, p. 1). Participants of the program were given the opportunity to attain up to 8 hours of advanced

placement hours by taking a Spanish achievement test and took summer credit courses that prepared them for college. In 1972, the national branch of Upward Bound at UTEP had a retention rate of 70 percent and most of their alumni were in graduate school or already had received a master's degree.

The BETO grant-funded program served as an in-service training program for teachers, provided institutional improvements in the form of “more faculty for bilingual education, increased education library facilities, and improved departmental instructional materials” (“Training program forms new idea”, 1975, p. 6), and funded six fellowships that led to a graduate degree in bilingual education. Another significant program for Chicanos was the Higher Education Migrant Program (H.E.M.P.) which according to a letter written by the program manager, Julian Encina, was an “opportunity for anyone coming from a migrant or seasonal farmworker’s family to continue a post-secondary education” (“Training program forms new idea”, 1975, p. 6). The program enrolled students on a full-time basis, paid for tuition and books, provided tutorial services and career, personal, and academic counseling. H.E.M.P. also provided job placement services for their students, which allowed them to pay for other expenses. The most remarkable aspect of this program was that it recognized that Chicanos from migrant backgrounds did not attend college in proportional numbers, in part because of the financial strain it placed on families. To palliate this issue, the program paid for tuition and books and paid for ten hours of work per week, which was part of their job placement services.

Although popularity for Chicano Studies grew in states such as California and Texas, organizations and students tied to Chicano Studies programs encountered resistance from administrators. On December 3, 1971, one of the first demonstrations at the University of Texas at El Paso occurred, which resulted in the arrest of 34 students by the El Paso Police Department.

The demonstration was in opposition to Dr. Gary D. Brooks' appointment as vice president for student affairs (The Prospector, 1972). MEChA asserted that Dr. Brooks was prejudiced against Chicanos and had a record of discriminating against them. MEChA accused Brooks of not paying their office phone bill so that telephones would be removed and influencing the removal of ally Dean Alvin Rivera because of his "disruptive influence" without the consultation of MEChA (The Prospector, 1972, p. 1).

Elsewhere in the University, The Prospector (1972) headlined that the "School of Education Continues Dismissals; All Supported Mexican American Programs." The article confirmed that one dean and three educational program chairmen were dismissed and that all were supporters of Mexican American programs. One of those dismissed, Dr. Thomas Arciniega, charged that the "climate at the University was repressive to innovation and new conceptual approaches" (The Prospector, 1972, p. 1). In April of 1973, Chicanos charged the Top 10 Seniors selection committee of being discriminatory because no Mexican Americans were selected for the Top 10, despite having a 40 percent Chicano population. An editorial in the *El Paso Times* submitted by the Chairman of the El Paso Civic Association affirmed that:

there is a certain possible prejudice at the University regarding the appointments of the various top echelon administrators. It seems that there has been little attempt to consider Chicanos for the various positions which have been vacated and filled recently at the university...UT El Paso is not only at El Paso but also of El Paso and should be by El Paso and for El Paso. (El Paso Times, 1973, p. 12)

## **Women's Studies as Part of "The Studies"**

Out of the trunk of the education civil rights movement grew Women's Studies, Gender Studies, and Women's and Sexuality Studies in the late 1960s. Tired of being marginalized and peripheral in the civil rights movement, including the Chicano Movement and Black Movement, women of color and their supporters aroused the second wave of feminism (Garcia, 2014; Orozco, 2010). The Chicano and Black movements did not seek to end female oppression, patriarchy, machismo, male domination, or address issues such as equal pay, sexual assault, or gender discrimination (Orozco, 2010). Instead, sexist stereotypes emerged from the movements, such as the idea that Chicana feminists were *vendidas* (Orozco, 2010) or sell-outs for being feminist since feminism was an Anglo and middle-class idea (Garcia, 2014; Hernandez, 2010; Orozco, 2010). Furthermore, feminism was typecast as a bourgeois movement that sought to destroy the nuclear family and encourage lesbianism. From this branch, Chicana loyalists were formed to oppose Chicana feminist thought and to promote the idea that Chicanas did not want to be "liberated." To the loyalists, feminism was divergent from the patriarchal and traditional family structure of Chicano and Black families. However, authors describe the lives of women of color as plagued by triple oppression; that is, racial, gendered, and class oppression (Garcia, 2014; Hernandez, 2010; Orozco, 2010).

Justine Hernandez (2010) described the Chicano movement and its resulting manifestos such as *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* and *El Plan de Santa Barbara* as evoking *carnalismo* or brotherhood. *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* is a Chicano nationalist manifesto drafted in 1969 at the Chicano Youth Conference in Denver, Colorado, that proclaims and embraces indigenous roots. *El Plan* outlines what Chicanos need to accomplish to achieve liberation in a racist and oppressive America (Bixler & Ortega, 2014). As mentioned earlier, *El Plan de Santa Barbara*

outlined the goals for Chicano activists during the education civil rights movement. It was named after the meeting at UC Santa Barbara in 1969. Neither of the manifestos mention gender oppression or the specific struggles of Chicanas in the U.S. Feminism was thought to weaken this brotherhood in the movement and in communities of color as it was considered a middle class, white woman's movement. Oftentimes, feminists of color were known as sellouts or *vendidas* for not submitting to the men's movement (Garcia, 2014). Women of color were publicly and systematically silenced by their own communities. But the irony is that the silencing of the voices only encouraged a separate feminist movement that likely weakened the broader Chicano and Black movements. Instead of remaining voiceless and marginalized, Chicanas organized their own caucus at the first Chicana Conference of 1971 in Houston, Texas (Hernandez, 2010). Black women established the National Feminist Black Organization and the Combahee River Collective among other feminist caucuses around the same time. On the list of issues being addressed by these organizations were forced sterilization, equal pay, childcare, employment discrimination, domestic violence, and sexual assault (Garcia, 2014; Hernandez, 2010; Orozco, 2010). Interestingly, at the very core of the feminist caucuses were items that threatened traditional womanhood.

Out of the struggle for equality within the Black and Chicano movements eventually grew a discipline that called for the review and discourse of women's societal issues. In May of 1970, San Diego State College (now San Diego State University) founded the first women's studies program in the U.S. (Boxer, 2002; Ginsberg, 2008; Guy-Sheftall, 2008; Martin, 2012). One can say that women's studies in higher education institutions were the "academic arm" of the feminist/women's movement. In a space where women were traditionally marginalized, especially regarding the university curriculum and enrollment numbers, installing a women's

studies program or even a women's studies course was vanguard. Ginsberg (2008) noted that "women's studies grew naturally out of the politics of the time-mainly the women's liberation movement, the Civil Rights movement, the movement for gay and lesbian equality, and the protests against the Vietnam War" (p. 10). Thus, from its inception, the purpose of women's studies was to merge theory with practice and not only learn women's history but to also catalyze change for the status of women as a subaltern group (Ginsberg, 2008; Guy-Sheftall, 2008; Martin, 2012). Establishing a program was only the beginning of the struggle. A troublesome cloud of suspicion and stigma floated over women's studies programs and courses; as Boxer (2002) put it, "merely to assert that woman should be studied was a radical act" (p. 10). Courses were oftentimes taught for free, just as in Black Studies and Chicano Studies programs and female faculty were wary of teaching such courses for the fear of losing a tenure or employment opportunity (Jaschik, 2009). Women's studies courses and organizations met in marginalized places such as bathrooms, faculty homes, or buildings that were never meant for teaching or housing academic programs (Jaschik, 2009). Elenes (2008) wrote about her experience in the 1990s at Arizona State University-West Campus:

When the inaugural chair was hired, Women's Studies was moved to Inter Unit Programs. When I came to my campus interview in 1992 and realized that Women's Studies was housed outside traditional schools and colleges, I thought this was a strength because it seemed to give Women's Studies an autonomous space. However, once I arrived on campus and was aware that we were the only academic program in the unit, it became clear to me that the structure was more akin to marginalization or ghettoization. Women's Studies' position within the organizational structure was very tenuous; it had a

coordinator/chair but no dean to report...thus we did not have an advocate for the program. (p. 167)

Elenes is not the only one who documented the struggle for legitimacy of women's studies within higher education bureaucracy. Others described attempts by administrators to sabotage funding and qualified faculty hires, and even the installation of a non-feminist, conservative agenda (Boxer, 2002; Hu-DeHart, 1993; Jaschik, 2009; Launius, 2005; Pollack, 1985). In turn, these actions keep many programs in just that, program status, as opposed to full departmental status, allowing women's studies to be perceived as lacking rigor. Oftentimes, they are the first to be cut back or axed in times of economic struggle, once again diminishing legitimacy (Hu-DeHart, 1993). Hu-DeHart (2000) described the challenges for ethnic and women's studies programs:

Common practices include installing weak and pliable program directors and department chairs, sometimes after rejecting strong scholars selected by the faculty. They also involve refusing to hire more than a handful of full-time faculty members in an ethnic studies department and then swelling its ranks with part-time professors or non-ethnic studies-oriented personnel who may dilute the voting strength of the legitimate, full-time ethnic studies faculty. (p. 3)

Nancy Schniedewind, a women's studies program director at the State University of New York, New Paltz, categorized the "attacks" as moral/political and bureaucratic/academic (Pollack, 1985). She explained that the conservative Reagan administration harmed programs for women and minorities in the 1980s by swaying education administrators to transform women's studies to the point that it was no longer feminist or "political." Women's studies is

inherently interdisciplinary and “political,” rendering it to some as non-academic (or partially academic), non-objective, and thus, illegitimate (Pollack, 1985).

### **De-legitimacy, Conservatism, and Policy**

Denying legitimacy to “The Studies” eventually came under full assault by the conservative right in the 1980s under the Reagan administration (Chamberlain, 2006). Pundits argued that Mexican American studies, African American studies, and Gender studies cause divides within a population instead of bringing the nation together as “Americans” (Chamberlain, 2006). Furthermore, political organizations such as Students for Academic Freedom, Accuracy in Academia, and others argued that instead of identifying as “Mexican American,” “African American,” or “male/female” we should all be identifying as American (Chamberlain, 2006). In other words, “The Studies” undermines a nationalist, American exceptionalist agenda.

Despite the popularity and growing demand for ethnic studies in education, political challenges from the right have persisted. Chamberlain (2006) wrote that “Today, the Right seeks no less than to roll back the progressive gains in higher education of the past 40 years. Targets include such curriculum reforms as ethnic, labor and gender studies” (p. 2). Conservative groups such as Accuracy in Academia (AIA), Students for Academic Freedom, and the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) seek to unravel curriculum reforms in the social sciences and humanities and revert to traditional Western curriculum (Chamberlain, 2006). ACTA has gone as far as to publish the names of faculty and administrators with unpatriotic views or quotations. And others have published material such as “The Professors: The 101 Most Dangerous Academics in America” in an attempt to

diminish support and funding for institutions that allow liberal “indoctrination” (Chamberlain, 2006, p. 2). Even more frightening is the mention that:

Threats to women’s, ethnic, sexuality or cultural studies are attempts to diminish the power that come from studying these topics. Looked at from the Right, it follows that controls on the curriculum would help to ensure not only the development of conservative students but also the maintenance of both a conservative voting base and the Right’s national power. (Chamberlain, 2006, p. 5)

In recent years, there were attempts by the Texas Legislature under Governor Rick Perry to attack ethnic studies in Texas at the higher education level. In 2013, Perry vetoed funding to expand UT Austin’s Center for Mexican American Studies that would have made it a full department with \$1.5 million in funding (Planas, 2013). In the same year, then Senator Dan Patrick (R-Houston), now Lieutenant Governor of Texas, wrote a bill to effectively ban higher education students from taking ethnic studies and WGS courses to fulfill history requirements (Planas, 2013). The bill was unsuccessful, but nevertheless demonstrates the type of attacks launched by conservatives in Texas. Scholars like Boxer (2002), Guy-Sheftall (2008), and Hu-DeHart (2000) maintain that these types of attacks seek to keep “The Studies” quietly subdued under program status and thus delegitimize “The Studies” without having to dissolve programs. Hence, political attacks are never in the distant future in a state like Texas, but rather, consistently knocking at our front door (Lopez, 2021a; 87<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature Third Called Session, 2021).

As one example of how this has manifested as policy, Arizona law states that any course that "encourages resentment toward a race or class of people," and is designed "primarily for one ethnic group," is unlawful (HB2281 - 492R - House Bill Summary, 2010). Similarly, Texas House Bill 3979 (87<sup>th</sup> Legislature Third Called Session, 2021), signed by Governor Gregg Abbott, bans the use of critical race theory in public classrooms (87<sup>th</sup> Legislature Third Called Session, 2021). Critical race theory (CRT) is the interrogation and analysis of the role of race and racism in society and in social phenomena (American Bar Association, 2021; Delgado et al., 2017). CRT is rooted in legal reasoning stemming from the civil rights era when America witnessed legal cases such as *Mendez v Westminster (1947)* and *Brown v Board of Education (1956)* (Delgado et al., 2017). Although the bill does not directly ban ethnic and women's studies, it does attack the way these subjects are taught in the classroom. For example, teaching about White supremacy/privilege, male privilege, or slavery in the classroom is now illegal as it places blame on a group of people for historical events or societal issues (American Bar Association, 2021; 87<sup>th</sup> Legislature Third Called Session, 2021). This ban is specific to K-12 classrooms; however, the legislative trends in Texas indicate that successful attempts in K-12 conservative policy may lead to the same attacks on higher education (Baker & Rodrigues-Shirley, 2021). A move to ban CRT in higher education classrooms would harm instructors' ability to properly address gender, racial and ethnic history, and societal issues and dynamics; essentially, this would render "The Studies" useless as they would be unable to address what they set out to teach in the 1960s and 1970s civil rights era.

Currently, with Texas HB3979 signed into law and active as of September 1, 2021, it is increasingly difficult to teach the necessary objectives of WGS as outlined by the program and the feminist education movement of the 1960s. Critical Race Theory allows instructors to

explain the experiences of women of color and the power dynamics between women and a patriarchal society. If one removes the racial component of feminist analysis and praxis, then essentially, we revert to the white, middle-class feminism of the early 1900s.

### **“The Studies” and Student Outcomes**

Some recent studies suggest “The Studies” yield positive outcomes for students. Work by Sueyoshi and Suitparapitaya (2020) found that ethnic studies majors graduated at a 20% higher rate than other majors at San Francisco State University (SFSU). Ethnic Studies majors or minors graduated within six years at rate of 92%. Those who took at least one course in Africana, Latina/o, Asian American, American Indian, or Race and Resistance studies boosted their graduation rates by 72%. The graduation rate increased with the number of ethnic studies courses completed (Sueyoshi & Suitparapitaya, 2020).

Comparably, in a study using a quasi-experimental regression discontinuity design, positive outcomes emerged in a study with high school students (Dee & Penner, 2016). Improvement was seen in attendance, course credits toward graduation, and grades. The study was based on a pilot program that emphasized critical consciousness, self-love, and action for 9<sup>th</sup> graders at four San Francisco area high schools (Dee & Penner, 2016). The self-love and critical consciousness components were based on an ethnic and racial identity curriculum. Eighth grade students with a low-threshold GPA were recruited to participate in the pilot program in ninth grade. The pilot program involved 1,405 students in the San Francisco Unified School District. Researchers studied cohorts over several years to examine the effects of ethnic studies on student outcomes (Dee & Penner, 2016). The large positive effects

included a 21% decrease in unexcused absences, an increase in GPA by 1.4 points, and earned credits increased by 23 credits.

Research shows that ethnic studies programs help students to understand an otherwise marginalized history, which leads to academic empowerment in the form of higher education rates, higher GPA, increased attendance, and community/civic engagement (Cabrera, 2019; Sleeter et al., 2020). Although most of this research focuses on K-12 classrooms, Sleeter et al.'s (2020) report to the National Education Agency lists similar results for studies conducted in higher education settings. Further, much of the data that shows "The Studies" benefit students in important ways is qualitative and is often ignored (Cabrera, 2019; Dee & Penner, 2016; Sueyoshi & Suitparapitaya, 2020; University of Arizona, 2012). This has motivated researchers such as Dee and Penner (2016) (higher education) and the Tucson Unified School District's Mexican American Studies Program (high school) (University of Arizona, 2012) to conduct large-scale quantitative studies. The studies, although based on different educational levels, showed improved attendance, GPAs, graduation rates, and civic engagement (Dee & Penner, 2016; Sueyoshi & Suitparapitaya, 2020; University of Arizona, 2012). What the quantitative studies seem to put forth is that students benefit from greater communalism, achievement motivation, ethnic identity, sense of empowerment, critical thinking, and academic achievement (Sleeter et al., 2020), pointing to the effectiveness of ethnic studies courses at both the higher education and K-12 levels.

### **Student Perceptions of "The Studies"**

Compared to students who have no coursework in “The Studies,” students in African American studies and Mexican American studies courses show a higher level of critical thinking and democratic outcomes (Sleeter et al., 2020, p. 5). Democratic outcomes refer to civic and community engagement. Additionally, a handful of studies have shown ethnic studies students benefit from a higher level of self-identity/awareness, greater higher education enrollment, and lower drop-out rates. For instance, a study on the impact of Pinoy Teach, the study of Filipino American history and culture, found that the curriculum filled the blanks for Filipino American college students (Halagao, 2004, 2010). They learned about their colonization history, identified harmful stereotypes of their community, formed a deeper love and appreciation for their ethnic history and community, and developed a sense of empowerment and a commitment to diversity and multiculturalism. Most importantly, they remained civically engaged as professionals where they lived, as further evidence of democratic outcomes. A case study of 18 Chicano literature students paralleled Halagao’s (2004, 2010) findings (Vasquez, 2005). Eleven of the eighteen students in Vasquez’s study (2005) were Latina/o. The Latina/o students reported feeling like the Chicano-authored texts in the course filled in the blanks in their understanding of history. They too developed a sense of connection to their community and its struggles, ethnic and personal affirmation, and empowerment. The seven non-Latino students identified with some of the issues and struggles in the texts (Vasquez, 2005). They also reported learning to recognize differences in other groups, which I found particularly important because it points to the possible value of such courses for non-Latinos. Missing from the literature are larger studies that survey more students, including a diverse population of non-Latino students.

Wiggin and Watson-Vandiver (2017) conducted a single-case design study on an “African-centered perspective” curriculum at a high-performing African American high school academy. The interviews with 15 students, four teachers, and one administrator revealed that students valued the curriculum that linked them to their ancestors. The African-centered curriculum culturally empowered the students, taught them that their culture was valuable, and produced “organic intellectuals who were able to critically examine the world around them as well as achieve academically” (p. 16). Like Halagao (2004, 2010) and Wiggin and Watson-Vandiver (2017), Vasquez’s (2005) qualitative study on 18 higher education Chicano literature students found that the literature filled in the cultural blanks for the students; they felt a sense of confidence and empowerment, personal affirmation, cultural competence, and even reported feeling more American. The non-Latino students were able to find commonalities with other cultures and identified differences that may spark conflict.

Similarly, studies on WGS programs show that women appreciate the sense of empowerment, historical knowledge, awareness of discrimination and inequality, and assessment of societal problems offered by the programs (Horwath & Diabl, 2020; Lanius, 2005). However, regarding the value of the program studies course, there is a gendered divide. In a mixed-methods study of 1,406 participants (770 women and 636 men) at an Austrian university, 57.9% of women and 18.2% of men reported very high value of the women’s studies course (Horwath & Diabl, 2020). Clearly, there is a break along gender lines. In this study, self-selection into courses was not possible because the course was mandated at the university. This may explain the apprehension and outrage that male students reported in the study. Most men (67.5%) and women (58.8%) agreed that students do not take WGS seriously at their university. The authors put forth that according to

previous research on men and feminist knowledge, “their resistance and disengagement serve to protect male privileges including the privilege not to care about equality issues” (Horwath & Diabl, 2020, p. 1124).

Marchbank and Letherby (2006) used a mixed methods questionnaire to study the perceptions of women’s studies students and non-women’s studies students at five English universities. Like Horwath & Diabl (2020), Marchbank and Letherby (2006) found that men were much more likely to perceive WGS as a negative field of study or value it much less than women. Marchbank and Letherby (2006) noted that although there is extensive literature about the history and purposes of WGS, there is not much about student experiences. Regarding this lack of representation, the authors claimed:

This anecdotal evidence is supported by the observations of Price and Owen (1998, p. 185) who note that women’s studies ‘languishes toward the bottom of the hierarchy of regard and status of academic disciplines’; such negative discourses regarding women’s studies and feminists in academia derive from the relatively powerless position of women’s studies students compared to others, and the power and legitimacy given within our society to both ridicule and misrepresentation of feminist work. (p. 1)

The negative perceptions of WGS delegitimize students and programs of study in academia. Since WGS is in opposition to the stereotypes that men create, it is essentially in conflict with men. This causes men and women to further stereotype and hold negative value judgments of WGS (Marchbank & Letherby, 2006).

### **The Studies and Research Methodology**

Ethnic and women's studies literature is largely comprised of personal narratives and testimonials, which stays true to traditional feminist research methods and ideals. Sprague and Zimmerman (1989) explain that there are two themes in radical feminist critiques: "First, the rejection of the notion of scientific objectivity. Second, there is a critique of the power relations embedded in the social organization of research" (p. 71-72). They go on to implicate classical feminist methodology, which is described as finding alternate ways of knowing and "privileging the perspectives of women" (p. 74). Women have developed a unique understanding of the social phenomena around them, as they must learn about their own perspectives and those of their oppressors (Sprague & Zimmerman, 1989). Classical feminist methodology acknowledges that women may have a bi-angular perspective on the world. With this said, traditional feminist methods favor qualitative methods which allow one to conduct participant observations or personal interviews to capture the narratives or actions of the object of research.

### **Conceptual Framework**

As described in previous sections, feminist methodologies are centered on the expertise, knowledge, and narratives of the researcher. Below, I discuss my approach to using feminist methodology, feminist praxis and epistemology, and a multicultural feminist framework to fill a gap in the research literature. A feminist methodology honors the expertise and experiences of the researcher and subjects. If we are to move beyond the unfavorable view of positivist approaches to scientific inquiry, then feminist scholars must find new ways to merge both classical feminist methods and quantitative methods. I seek to make this contribution to the field of feminist centered methods of research. Leung et al. (2019) described how merging these approaches is possible:

Valuing qualitative and practice-based learning is very important. But we seek in this article to compliment the value of feminist-orientated qualitative approaches by doing something different. We argue that quantitative research and feminist research approaches are not mutually exclusive-rather, they can and do overlap-and quantitative approaches have a valuable contribution to make to feminist research (p. 430).

Similarly, Stauffer & O'Brien (2018) write that:

A feminist perspective demands that researchers consider how various components of the research process are themselves gendered and that the gendered nature of research can perpetuate existing power imbalances. Decisions about what topics to research; what evidence to prioritize; how to collect and evaluate evidence; and even who participates in the design, implementation, or research; and the ways in which research findings are framed, communicated, and disseminated, can all have ramifications for the research process. (p. 432)

Hence, feminist epistemologies “recognize women’s lived experiences as legitimate sources of knowledge. Feminist methodologies attempt to eradicate sexist bias in research and find ways to capture women’s voices that are consistent with feminist ideals” (Campbell & Wasco, 2000, p. 773). In classical feminist methodology and multicultural feminist research, my expertise and voice in the fields of inquiry matter (Harnois, 2013; Leung et al., 2019; Lykke, 2010). Additionally, one of four characteristics of feminist research is “expanding feminist methodology to include both qualitative and quantitative methodologies” (Campbell & Wasco, 2000, p. 773). A feminist approach to research is one that should deliberately challenge existing power structures in the research process and embed feminism into every

aspect and step of the process (Leung et al., 2019). “Genuine commitment to taking a feminist approach to research begins by applying a feminist lens to all stages of the research process—from study design all the way through to communication and dissemination of findings” (Leung et al., 2019, p. 433).

In the following sections, I will argue that quantitative data can be achieved with a feminist perspective by employing a paradigm shift. With a multicultural feminist theory lens, one can insert feminist literature and interpretation into the data collection and analysis phases; one can name this practice feminist praxis (Leung et al., 2019). Leung et al. (2019) expressed the conflict and concern over conducting quantitative research on the topic of gendered violence where solutions, advocacy, and activism require numerical data. Donors, NGOs, and government agencies rely on numerical data to ameliorate or address violence against women and girls (VAWG) in communities. I argue that programs in the liberal arts function in a similar way. A feminist approach is necessary for social phenomena where gender and social inequalities are at the crux of the issue, as they are in ethnic studies, gender studies, VAWG and other areas. The article puts forth that:

Gender inequality intersects with other forms of oppression, such as racism, neo-colonialism, and discrimination against ethnic, religious, and/or sexual minorities, to create hierarchies of advantage and disadvantage, both between the sexes and among different women and different men, which shape and affect diverse experiences of violence. (Leung et al., 2019, p. 429)

In these instances, the authors of the study argue that methods that are not historically informed by feminist praxis can be addressed by feminist research approaches that “are not

mutually exclusive, but rather, they can and do overlap” (Leung et al., 2019, p. 429). Using the example of VAWG, Leung et al. (2019) write that “this epidemic cannot be understood properly or eradicated without a feminist analysis to underpin research, policymaking, and programming. In addition, feminist research aims to empower women and girls and challenge prevailing inequalities through the research process itself” (p. 430). Hence, the “absolute truths” of scientific inquiry--numerical data and a positivist approach--can be executed with a feminist praxis and approach to describe phenomena quantitatively.

Fonow et al. (2005) write about feminist methodology and how it is sensitive to issues of power at play in the research process. They put forth that, “who asks the questions, feminist methodologists argue, determines what questions get asked, how and of whom. Feminist research seeks to challenge prevailing epistemology...through the production of knowledge that empowers women and other marginalized groups” (p. 432). A feminist methodology and praxis address not only issues that pertain to women, but also those that affect subaltern, marginalized groups such as Mexican Americans in Chicana/o Studies programs.

Similarly, Harnois (2013) argues that feminist theorists and feminist scholarship challenges gender bias and sexism in the research process to legitimately address issues that concern gender and women. Feminist scholars must consider how the knowledge-making process and research perpetuate social inequalities. And even more precisely, multicultural feminist scholarship or multicultural feminist theory is an important contributor to Ethnic and Women’s Studies, as it described as an “interdisciplinary project” (Zinn & Dill, 1996). Zinn & Dill (1996) describe multicultural feminism as a perspective that:

encompasses several emergent perspectives developed primarily by women of color; African Americans, Latinas, Asian Americans, and Native Americans, women whose analyses are shaped by their unique perspectives as ‘outsiders within’ -marginal intellectuals whose special locations provide them with a particular perspective on self and society. (p. 324)

Harnois (2013) adds that “multicultural theorists highlight the way in which knowledge is structured by inequalities of race, gender, and class. It is not simply that some voices are given more credibility or legitimacy than others, but that some groups have more access to the resources (academic credentials, time, administrative support, money) required to produce ‘academically legitimate’ knowledge” (p. 30). For this reason, women of color intellectuals create and disseminate their work in non-traditional spaces, as was the case in the 1960s, 70s and 80s when feminists of color largely depended on their own newsletters and magazines to disseminate feminist literature. Take for example the *Regeneracion/Regeneration* magazine of the 1960s-70s and the contemporary Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social (MALCS) annual conference and journal publication. They both provided Mexican American feminists a space for dissemination of academic work and feminist literature to legitimize their own work and spaces.

Harnois (2013) also explains that “a feminist perspective can inform virtually every aspect of the research process, from survey design to statistical modeling, to theoretical frameworks used interpret results” (p. 2). This, of course, requires a paradigm shift to inform *all* levels of quantitative research. Leung et al. (2019) list six feminist core research principles to follow that were adapted from the International Women’s Development Agency (IWDA). Research should be: 1. Ethical; 2. Collaborative and participatory (valuing local capacity,

researching *with*, not *on* women and men; 3. Transformative (research process and findings); 4. Intersectional; 5. Accountable (to local community); and 6. Accessible and open research findings. With these core principles and other guiding entities, such as the IWDA's feminist research framework, there is no longer an excuse to avoid quantitative methods in feminist research.

In this study, I will bridge the gaps between classical feminist methodology, a multicultural feminist framework, and positivist approaches to research. I can bridge the gaps by using my collective experiences, including 13 years of teaching experience in "The Studies" at the university level, to inform my research process. In classical feminist methodology, my expertise and narratives in the field are valid, without the need to validate my personal voice, expertise, and experiences with the expertise of others (Harnois, 2013). In this study, I have merged my expertise in the field with quantitative research methods of data collection and analysis. It is possible to link the salient features of both methods to birth a new method and expand feminist research from favoring only qualitative methods to incorporating statistical data to serve a purpose. In the next chapter, I will provide more detail on how I designed a quantitative study using a feminist approach and a multicultural feminist framework that acknowledges my capital as an expert and voice in the fields of WGS, ethnic studies, and "The Studies" in general.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

As previously mentioned, there is a lack of quantitative studies on the value of women's and ethnic studies in higher education settings. Moreover, there is a general lack of quantitative data with regards to Women's Studies and Ethnic Studies programs. My research question is focused on the theme of value. I have chosen to define value as the personal value or benefit that students place, or do not place, on taking courses in "The Studies." My research question is: what is the perceived value or benefit for students taking "The Studies" courses, more precisely WGS or Chicano Studies? Perceived value should be an area of concern as it brings one back to the issue of legitimacy of The Studies. Collecting data on the value of The Studies for students can help educators and administrators defend the legitimacy and survival of ethnic studies and WGS programs.

#### **Research design**

This quantitative non-experimental study gathered cross-sectional data from undergraduate students at a four-year higher education institution. Student self-report data from a survey adopted from Horwath & Diabl (2020) and two self-developed surveys (one for WGS and the other for Chicana/o Studies) were collected for statistical analysis to determine the extent of students' perceived value.

#### **Research setting**

The study was conducted at The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), which is located on the U.S.-Mexico border in the state of Texas. Because of its location, situated within yards of the international boundary with Cd. Juarez in Mexico and the community's historically Mexican American population, there is not an ethnically diverse population at the university. In fact,

according to The University of Texas at El Paso (2021), approximately 83% of its student population is Hispanic/Latino, 5.9% White, 2.3% Black or African American, .9% Asian, .1% American Indian, and 1.4% of unknown ethnicity. There is a more diverse faculty composition, but at the same time, one that is not reflective of the student body or regional demography: 43.7% White, 39.2% Hispanic/ Latino, 8.3% Asian, 2.0% Black or African American, .2% Native American or Alaskan Native, and 1.3% of unknown ethnicity (The University of Texas at El Paso, 2021). This may reflect the doctoral completion disparities among White, Latino, and Black populations in the U.S. Statista (2021) publishes the breakdown of earned doctoral degrees by ethnicity and reports the following for 2018-2019: 107,567 White recipients; 21,040 Asian-Pacific Islander recipients; 15,118 Black recipients; 14,182 Latino recipients; and 720 American Indian or Alaskan Native recipients.

However, with an 83% Hispanic/Latino student body composition, the university qualifies as a Hispanic Serving Institute (HSI) and is ranked as the second largest HSI in the United States (The University of Texas at El Paso, 2021). Its strategic plan for 2030, UTEP seeks to be “America’s leading Hispanic-serving university” (The University of Texas at El Paso, 2022). The goals for reaching “inclusive excellence” by 2030 include the following: 1) Teaching, learning, and the student experience; 2) Advance discovery; 3) Community impact and public service; and 4) Shaping the future of higher education (The University of Texas at El Paso, 2022). Garcia et al. (2019) identifies a multidimensional conceptual framework of HSI *serviingness* as: outcomes, experiences, internal organization dimensions, and external influences (p. 745).

Its student gender breakdown is 54% female and 46% male (The University of Texas at El Paso, 2021). In addition, 93% of students at UTEP are minorities or “people of color”

(BIPOC), 64% of students qualify for federal student aid, and 92% are from in-state, with the vast majority (83%) being from the same community or county that the university is in. The university is also classified as a Tier 1 or Research 1 university, meaning that it is a top-tier doctoral university with high research activity, according to the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (The University of Texas at El Paso, 2021).

In relation to Chicana/o Studies and Women's and Gender Studies, the university has a major and minor available in both programs, in addition to an online major in Chicana/o Studies and a graduate certificate in Women's and Gender Studies. Courses are offered face-to-face and online for both programs (The University of Texas at El Paso, 2021). Its Chicano Studies program was established in 1970 and was one of the first of its kind in the nation (The University of Texas at El Paso, 2021). Courses in Women's Studies were available since the early 1970s and it officially became a program in 1981 (The University of Texas at El Paso, 2021b). Both programs are largely interdisciplinary, meaning that the courses are cross-listed and taught by faculty across many disciplines such as History, Languages and Linguistics, Political Science, Education, Sociology, Anthropology, among others.

African American Studies courses are also offered at the university; however, there is no degree offered by this small program that only has associated faculty and none that are exclusive to African American Studies. I made the difficult decision to omit African American Studies from this study. Since African American Studies at this university is not a program, but rather a course offering, it has substantially lower enrollment with courses cross-listed with U.S. History courses. This would potentially affect the data in this study. With the university having a population that is 83% Hispanic/Latino and 54% female, it is fitting to study the perceived value

of Chicana/o Studies and Women's and Gender Studies in this Hispanic Serving Institution with a female student majority. The nature of the demographics fits the focus on CST and WGS.

### **Sample and Participants**

Convenience sampling is a sampling method typically employed in qualitative studies (Lavrakas, 2008). However, since this quantitative research was conducted at a local university where I am currently employed as a lecturer in the Women's and Gender Studies Program with access to other faculty across the university, convenience sampling was a logical choice.

Convenience sampling is an efficient way to collect data in a setting where the researcher has access (Lavrakas, 2008). Although it can be problematic to generalize ideas that apply to an entire population based on a convenience sample, initial data collection and analysis are feasible given the resources available to me and the scope of my research.

The sample was derived from volunteer participants among students of all genders and ethnicities enrolled in Women's Studies courses and Chicana/o Studies courses during Fall 2021. Students must take three block electives to graduate from UTEP with a Liberal Arts degree. However, students are not required to take classes in either the Women's Studies or Chicano Studies Program; there are other block electives in other programs that will fulfill the requirement. Students have a vast selection of courses to choose from to fulfill their elective requirements. For example, there are courses in Jewish American Studies, Religious Studies, African American Studies, Western Cultural Heritage, Asian Studies, and the list goes on. In addition to students taking electives, the sample also included students majoring or minoring in either the Women's Studies or Chicano Studies Program who must take courses corresponding to their program.

The tables below show the enrollments in each course with eligible participants for the study. In the Fall 2021 semester, there were 666 students enrolled in Chicana/o Studies courses and 812 enrolled in WGS courses at the university.

*Table 3.1 Chicana/o Studies Course and Enrollment for Fall 2021*

3311: Societal Issues 169 students	2302: Latina/o Presence in the U.S. - 35 students	3301: La Chicana - 87 students	3302: Chic Cinema 65 students	3304: Chic/Lat music in the U.S.- 40 students	3305: Chicano ID Formation- 15 students
3339: Culture, Youth and Diversity- 114 students	4301: Chic Legal History- 41 students	4304: Env. Justice - 35 students	4308: Chic Thought- 35 students	4309: Am. Immigration, social justice- 30 students	Total: 666 students

(The University of Texas at El Paso, 2021)

*Table 3.2 Women's and Gender Studies Enrollment Fall 2021*

2300 Intro to WS- 115	2350 Global Feminisms- 112	3321 Fam. Violence- 39	3331 Gender and Pop Culture- 156	3340 Gender and Tech.- 40	3351 Gender and Religion- 44	3372 Women, Work and Sex Ind.- 44	3375 Women's Health- 117	
3382 Gender Issues in the Arts- 10	3382 Gender Issues in the Humanities- 31	3384 Gender Issues in the Social Sci.- 26	3390 Queer Theory- 33	3393 Feminisms of 60s and 70s- 26	4310 Fem. Theory- 13	4314 Women, Power and Politics- 3	4360 Jr/Sr Seminar- 3	Total: 812 students

(The University of Texas at El Paso, 2021)

Upon approval from the university's institutional review board (IRB), an announcement regarding the survey was emailed to face-to-face and online students enrolled in the courses. The email contained a link to the online QuestionPro survey. The email also explained that random winners will receive an Apple Watch, Starbucks gift card or AMC Movie card. The winners were chosen randomly through a QuestionPro raffle tool.

The first screen for the online survey displayed the statement of informed consent which outlined each participant's right to withdraw or not participate in the survey. In the statement, students were assured that their participation or lack of participation would not impact their grade or standing in the course. Students were informed that no identification numbers or names would be collected through the survey. QuestionPro randomly selects participants that fully completed the survey for the raffle. A personal email address is entered by the participant if they wish to be entered into the raffle. Users of QuestionPro never see the email addresses, only for those that win the raffle.

I encouraged periodic reminders to the instructors of the 11 Chicano Studies courses and 16 WGS courses to secure a high response rate and representative sample. After I received a university approved list of student emails from the university's research department, I sent an email reminder to students once a week until the survey closed on February 13, 2022. Survey responses were gathered over a period of approximately four weeks.

### **Instrumentation**

I utilized three survey instruments to gather data on students' perceptions of value of the WGS and Chicana/o Studies courses. The first instrument administered to students in both WGS and Chicana/o Studies courses was adopted from the survey used by Horwath & Diabl (2020) in

their study of WGS course requirements at an Austrian university. The Horwath & Diabl (2020) instrument is centered on the founding values of WGS, which is why it could be applied in other regions beyond Europe. Also, it is “global” in nature in the way that it applies to a variety of diversity courses, given the wording of the survey items. Take for example a survey item that refers to “increased social activism against inequality and discrimination,” which hits at the heart of “The Studies” on a universal scale and beyond the “American” experience (Horwath & Diabl, 2020, p.1121). Discrimination and inequality are everywhere, in all cultures and geographical locations, not only in the experiences of Mexican Americans and women in the U.S. Although Horwath & Diabl (2020) used this instrument to assess the perceived value of WGS, it is clearly useful to gauge the value of ethnic studies courses. Ethnic studies courses do address gender at the university where I am conducting my study.

From their instrument (Horwath & Diabl, 2020), I adopted the fourteen survey questions listed below because of their previous use to determine students’ value of diversity courses. Thus, the instrument has already been piloted and refined. I adopted the questions from the survey after carefully examining how they fit my research question. The survey questions were answered on a 7-point Likert scale from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. On an odd Likert scale, there is a neutral point to provide a midpoint and unbiased response option for the participant (Ayiro & Mibey, 2012; Singh, 2007).

1. The course provided me with valuable and professional knowledge.
2. The course provided me with valuable knowledge for life.
3. The course provided me with an increased ability to represent my interests.
4. The course advanced my ability to assess societal problems.
5. The course increased my ability to assess the relevance of gender issues.

6. The course enhanced my ability to act in a self-assured manner.
7. The course supported my personal development.
8. The course improved my skills for social interactions.
9. The course provided no benefits.
10. The course increased my awareness of inequality and discrimination.
11. The course increased my social activism against inequality and discrimination.
12. The course increased egalitarian attitudes.
13. The course enhanced my self-confidence.
14. The course increased my competence in equality and equal opportunity management (for present or future employment).

An advantage to adopting the instrument by Horwath & Diabl (2020) is that it has been previously tested. Also, it uncovered important findings about gender differences in the value of WGS. The study found that women reported benefits in nearly all categories, while 45% of men reported none. However, an important distinction is that the Austrian students in the study were required to take WGS as part of any degree program, which may have affected the results. The authors noted that “these findings suggest that female students start classes with more openness, which may enable them to engage and benefit more; among male students, in contrast, the outrage over the requirement appears to impede serious engagement” (p. 1121). Consequently, the lack of engagement may have impacted the measure of value. I was interested in asking these survey questions of male and female university students who were enrolled in WGS and Chicano Studies courses that are *not* required.

The second and third surveys were developed using a feminist approach that acknowledges my capital as an expert and voice in the fields of WGS, ethnic studies, and “The

Studies” in general. As I thought through the questions that would address student perceptions of value, I examined all the historical documents that I use to teach my courses and considered the goals that the Feminist and Mexican American movements laid out for future programs and students. I examined the historical and current objectives of these programs and considered how to quantify the extent to which undergraduate students leave these courses having met such objectives. I combed through primary documents from the U.S. Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and 70s. By analyzing founding documents for Chicano Studies and WGS, I was able to construct instruments to capture the objectives of both programs. The objectives are well documented in primary sources such as El Plan de Santa Barbara and women’s movement manifestos. I operationalized a series of questions based on the matter of “value” or perceived benefit and the objectives set forth in the primary documents. The questions integrate the values of U.S. education and the civil rights movement. Before releasing the survey online, the instruments were piloted by five former WGS and Chicana/o Studies students to assess the diction, comprehension, quality, and relevance of questions. Suggestions made by the former students were used to finalize the instruments.

As a result of this process, two original instruments were completed: one for Women’s Studies students and one for Chicana/o Studies students. The survey questions would be answered on a 7-point Likert scale from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. A brief introduction at the start of the surveys conveyed that this study is NOT an evaluation of the course, instructor, or program, but rather a study to gauge the value of WGS and Chicana/o Studies to university students.

### **Women’s Studies Questionnaire**

1. The course provided me with insight to value the culture of women.

2. The course addressed the individual and collective responses of women to inequities and the distribution of power in society.
3. The course evaluated the impact of the role of women in society.
4. I was familiar with women's studies before taking the course.
5. I learned about the goals and purpose of women's and gender studies after taking the course.
6. The coursework inspired or empowered me to seek solutions to social inequalities and sexism.
7. The course was personally empowering.
8. The course was valuable to me in terms of having a well-rounded education at this university.
9. The course contributed to the value of my university education by expanding my knowledge about power distribution, gender, and sexism.
10. Taking this Women's Studies course has changed the way I view interactions with women.
11. I am more aware of the contribution of women to society after taking the course.
12. I am more aware of the differences between white women and women of color after participating in a Women's Studies course.
13. The course was valuable to me in terms of the "bigger" picture in my college education.
14. The course stimulated my inquiry of the understanding of women and the contributions which their members have made to the totality of American life.
15. The course helped me to examine the causes and effects of institutional racism and sexism in Western culture.
16. In the course, I learned about the policies, plans and solutions to discrimination of women in the workplace and society.
17. The course cultivated a more probing and insightful education than conventional programs seem to permit.
18. The course successfully dispelled stereotypes of feminism or gender equality.
19. I viewed feminism more favorably after taking the course.
20. I identified as feminist BEFORE taking the course.
21. I identify as feminist AFTER taking the course.

22. The course raised my critical consciousness by provoking me to think of possible solutions to the issues facing women today.
23. Is there anything you would like to add about how the course may have complemented your experience at a Hispanic Serving Institute?
24. Is there anything else you would like to add about how you value the course content?

The Women's Studies Questionnaire was slightly edited to incorporate cultural and racial components for the development of the Chicana/o Studies Questionnaire.

### **Chicana/o (Mexican American) Studies Questionnaire**

1. The course provided me with insight into the Mexican American culture.
2. The course addressed the responses of Mexican Americans to inequalities and the distribution of power in society.
3. The course evaluated the impact of the role of Chicana/os in society.
4. I was familiar with Chicana/o (Mexican American) Studies before taking the course.
5. I learned about the goals and purpose of Chicana/o Studies after taking the course.
6. The coursework inspired or empowered me to seek solutions to social inequalities and ethnic bias/racism/discrimination.
7. The course was personally empowering.
8. The course was valuable to me in terms of having a well-rounded education at this university.
9. The course contributed to the value of my university education by expanding my knowledge about power distribution, ethnicity, and racism.
10. Taking this Chicana/o Studies course changed the way I view interactions with Chicanas/os/Mexican Americans.
11. I am more aware of the contributions of Mexican Americans to society.
12. I am more aware of the differences between Chicanas/os and other ethnic groups after participating in Chicano Studies course.
13. The course was valuable to me in terms of the "bigger" picture in my college education.

14. The course stimulated my understanding of the contributions of Mexican Americans have made to the totality of American life.
15. The course helped me to examine the causes and effects of institutional racism and inequalities in Western culture.
16. In the course, I learned about policies, plans and solutions regarding the racism and discrimination of Latinos in the workplace and society.
17. The course cultivated a more probing and insightful education than conventional programs seem to permit.
18. The course helped to dispel stereotypes of the culture and ethnic group (Chicanos/Mexican Americans).
19. I identified as Chicano or Mexican American BEFORE taking this course.
20. The course raised my critical consciousness by provoking me to think of solutions to the issues that Mexican Americans face.
21. Is there anything you would like to add about how the course may have complemented your experience at a Hispanic Serving Institute?
22. Is there anything else you would like to add about how you value the course content?

In keeping with a feminist methodology which recognizes people’s lived experiences as legitimate sources of knowledge, students were given the opportunity to add input beyond responses to the instruments through two opened-ended questions. Respondents were asked: Is there anything you would like to add about how the course may have complemented your experience at a Hispanic Serving Institution? Is there anything you would like to add about the value of the course content? Finally, demographic information was collected from the survey to observe the background characteristics of undergraduates in the sample.

### **Demographic Questions**

*Table 3.3 Demographic Questions Included in the Survey*

Gender	Male, female, non-binary, no answer
--------	-------------------------------------

Courses	Women's and Gender Studies or Chicano Studies?
	How many courses in WGS or Chicano Studies has the participant taken at the University?
Age	Numeric age range
Ethnicity	Caucasian or White, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Asian, Pacific Islander or Hawaiian, American Native or Alaskan Native
College of study	Health science, engineering, science, liberal arts, business, education?
Why did you take the course?	Elective, major requirement, personal interest?
Other Women's Studies or Chicana/o Studies courses	First class in either WGS or Chicana/o Studies? Taking another WGS or Chicana/o Studies course at the same time?

## Data Analysis

Survey data was imported from QuestionPro into SPSS for statistical analysis. Since a Likert Scale produces ordinal data when collected as with the instruments described, measures of central tendency and other descriptive statistics were reported to summarize patterns in the data (Ayiro & Mibey, 2012; Singh, 2007). Separate analyses were conducted for Women's and Gender Studies and Chicana/o Studies to review data for each program. The next chapter

describes the analyses and findings that address my research question: What is the perceived value or benefit for students taking WGS or Chicana/o Studies courses?

## **Chapter 4: Results**

In this study, the research question is: what is the perceived value of Women's and Gender Studies and Chicana/o Studies for university students taking courses in either program? I collected quantitative data by administering two surveys. The first was adopted from the study by Horwath & Diabl (2020). The other survey had two versions, one for WGS and the other for Chicana/o Studies. As mentioned previously, those were self-developed after researching primary sources and literature from the 1960s and 1970s Civil Rights Era and determining what the foundational and evolving goals were for each program. Also, two opened-ended questions were asked for the WGS survey and the Chicano Studies survey. Respondents were asked: is there anything you would like to add about how the course may have complemented your experience at a Hispanic Serving Institution? Is there anything you would like to add about the value of the course content? In this chapter, I will present Women's and Gender Studies data first, followed by the Chicana/o Studies data.

### **Women's and Gender Studies Sample**

As shown in Question Pro, 567 people viewed the WGS survey, 201 people responded, 146 completed the survey, and 56 partially answered and then dropped out of the survey. Survey data was downloaded from Question Pro and analyzed using SPSS. The data were reviewed for missing responses and outliers. No problematic issues emerged from the dataset.

### **Participants**

Ninety percent of participants logged on from the United States and 9.5% from Mexico. Since the university is on the U.S./Mexico border with a significant population of students that are Mexican nationals, I expected to have participants in Mexico. Since students were surveyed

about the course they took in the Fall of 2021, the pandemic affected the number of participants that took a WGS course online, such that a large majority of respondents (71.8%) were online for the course. Eighty-six percent of respondents identified as Hispanic/Latino, 4.9% identified as Caucasian/White, and very small percentages identified as Asian, Pacific Islander, and Black/African American. Most participants (82.2%) identified as female, 14.8% identified as male, and about 3% identified as non-binary or other. For the college of study at the university, 62.9% were in the College of Liberal Arts, followed by 11.4% from the College of Science, 10% from Engineering, 9.3% from the College of Health Sciences, and small percentages from Education, Nursing and Business. Sixty-eight percent of respondents were aged 18-24, followed by 20.3% aged 25-34. Roughly 11% were 44 and above. Sixty-one percent reported this as being their first WGS course. Similar percentages of students reported taking the course out of personal interest (39%), taking it as a requirement (33%), and taking the course as a major or minor requirement (28%). Most (58%) reported having taken only one WGS course in their university career.

In the following sections, I will report the results for the Horwath & Diabl (2020) survey and the WGS self-developed survey in terms of descriptive statistics, correlation analyses, reliability tests, crosstabulations, and independent samples non-parametric tests, followed by results for open-ended responses. Data was analyzed only for male- and female-identifying participants since the non-binary and “other”-identifying participants were too few to include in the analyses. Note that there is some discrepancy in sample size across analyses due to different numbers of participants completing all items on the surveys.

## **Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analyses**

Participants responded to items on both the Horwath & Diabl (2020) survey and the WGS self-developed survey on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Only one item (“The course provided no benefits”) from the Horwath & Diabl (2020) survey needed to be reverse scored. Mean scores were computed across items on each instrument. Descriptive statistics are provided for male ( $N = 21$ ) and female-identifying participants ( $N = 116$ ). On both the Horwath & Diabl and the WGS self-developed survey, mean scores for female-identifying participants ranged from 1 to 7, while means for male-identifying participants ranged from 4 to 7. Also, for both the Horwath & Diabl and the WGS self-developed survey, the means were nearly the same for female participants ( $M = 5.74, SD = 1.08; M = 6.00, SD = 1.17$ ) as for male participants ( $M = 5.65, SD = .69; M = 5.97, SD = .88$ ), respectively. This indicates that both women and men valued WGS nearly equally. The data shows that although standard deviations from the mean were fairly low for men’s and women’s scores, somewhat more extreme values were recorded for women than men.

Results from a Pearson correlation analysis to assess the relationship between the Horwath & Diabl survey and the WGS self-developed survey showed a strong correlation,  $r(146) = .81, p < .001$ . This suggests the measures are closely related to each other.

## **Internal Consistency and Reliability**

Cronbach’s Alpha is a measure of internal consistency of a scale and thus, a measure of scale reliability. The  $\alpha$  coefficient of reliability ranges between 0 and 1. The closer to 1 or higher the  $\alpha$  coefficient is, the “more shared covariance and probable [that the items] measure the same underlying concept” (Goforth, 2015, p. 1). A value greater than .9 indicates excellent internal

consistency (Zack, 2021). The Horwath & Diabl survey consisted of 13 items and showed high internal consistency, Cronbach's  $\alpha = .95$ . The WGS measure consisted of 21 items and showed high internal consistency, Cronbach's  $\alpha = .97$ .

### **Crosstabulations in the Horwath & Diabl and Self-Developed WGS Measure**

To examine more closely the perceived value of Women's and Gender Studies courses, crosstabulations were run in SPSS for all items on the Horwath & Diabl survey and the WGS self-developed survey. First, responses to all items were recoded into an overall agreement score. Responses on the Likert scale indicating agreement (*strongly agree*, *agree*, and *somewhat agree*) were aggregated. The percentage of agreement with items on the Horwath & Diabl survey and the WGS self-developed survey was cross tabulated for female and male respondents (see Table 4.1 and 4.2). Overall, a great majority of men and women agreed with statements about valuing women's studies on both the Horwath & Diabl and WGS self-developed measure. On the Horwath & Diabl measure, the highest percentage of agreement among women was for the item "The course increased my ability to assess the relevance of gender issues." The highest level of agreement among men was for the item "The course provided me with valuable knowledge for life." Apart from the item the "course provided no benefits" which generated the lowest agreement, the next lowest percentage of agreement was recorded for the item "The course increased egalitarian attitudes" among both men and women.

In response to the WGS self-developed measure, women agreed most with the item "The course addressed the individual and collective responses of women to inequities and the distribution of power in society." Women and men agreed least with the item "I was aware of WGS BEFORE I took the course." The highest agreement among men was for the statement "The course successfully dispelled stereotypes of feminism or gender equality."

**Table 4.1***WGS Sample: Agreement Crosstabulations for the Horwath & Diabl Measure by Gender*

<b>Question</b>	<b>Women in Agreement</b>	<b>Men in Agreement</b>	<b>Total Agreement</b>
1. Valuable and professional knowledge	94%	90.5%	92.9%
2. Valuable know. for life	93.1%	100%	94.3%
3. Ability to rep. my interests	89.7%	85.7%	88.7%
4. Ability to assess soc. prob	92.2%	95.2%	92.9%
5. Assess rele. of gender iss.	94.8%	90.5%	93.6%
6. Ability to act in self-assured	89.6%	85.7%	89.2%
7. Supported my pers. develop.	88.7%	85.7%	88.5%
8. Skills for soc. inter.	80.9%	76.2%	80%
9. No benefits	1.8%	9.5%	2.9%
10. Awareness of ineq. and disc.	91.4%	95.2%	92.1%
11. Increased soc. activism	80.2%	81%	80.7%
12. Increased egal. att.	79.1%	61.9%	76.3%
13. Enhanced self-conf.	89.7%	90.5%	89.4%

**Table 4.2***WGS Sample: Agreement Crosstabulations for the Self-Developed WGS Measure by Gender*

<b>Question</b>	<b>Women in Agreement</b>	<b>Men in Agreement</b>	<b>Total in Agreement</b>
1. Value the culture of women	91.4%	90.5%	91.4%
2. Addressed ineq. and dist. of power in society	94%	90.5%	92.9%
3. Eval. the impact of the role of women in society	92.2%	90.5%	92.1%
4. Familiar with WS before course	52.6%	57.1%	53.6%
5. Learned about goals and purp. of WGS	91.3%	90.5%	90.7%

6. Empowered me to seek sol. to sexism	87.8%	71.4%	85.6%
7. Personally emp.	89.5%	76.2%	87.7%
8. Contributed to a well-rou. education	90.4%	81%	89.2%
9. Know. of power, gender, and sexism	92.2%	81%	90.6%
10. Changed interactions w/ women	78.3%	90.5%	80%
11. Aware of cont. of women	93.1%	90.5%	92.1%
12. Differences between white women and WOC	88.8%	85.7%	88.6%
13. Bigger picture in college ed.	87.9%	81%	87.1%
14. Understanding of women/American life	88.7%	85.7%	87.8%
15. Causes and eff. of racism and sexism in WC	89.7%	90.5%	90%
16. Policies, plans, sol. to discrimination	87%	90.5%	86.4%
17. More insightful ed. than conv. prog. seem to permit	87%	90.5%	87.8%
18. Helped to dispel stereo. of feminism and sexism	88.7%	95%	89.9%
19. ID as feminist BEFORE	65.2%	70%	66.7%
20. Raised crit. consciousness	90.5%	76.2%	88.6%
21. ID feminist AFTER	77.4%	85.7%	79.1%

### **Non-Parametric Testing for Gender Differences in Perceived Value of WGS**

To investigate whether a gender difference emerged from participants' responses to the surveys, independent samples non-parametric testing was conducted. Non-parametric testing was used due to the imbalance of female and male participants in the sample ( $N = 116$ ,  $N = 21$  respectively). A Mann-Whitney U test for the Horwath & Diabl measure demonstrated that there was no significant difference between scores for men and women,  $U = 992.00$ ,  $z = -1.35$ ,  $p = .18$ .

A Mann-Whitney U test for the WGS measure similarly indicated that there was no significant difference between females' and males' perceived value of WGS,  $U = 1124.50$ ,  $z = -.56$ ,  $p = .58$ .

### **WGS Open-Ended Responses**

Following the Likert scale survey items, participants were asked two open-ended questions: 1.) Is there anything you would like to add about how the course may have complemented your experience at a Hispanic Serving Institution? 2.) Is there anything you would like to add about the value of the course content? Responses to these open-ended questions were reviewed for relevant comments which were then sorted and coded by theme.

Participants reported feeling “confident”, “empowered”, and “enlightened” by the WGS course content. Others mentioned being taught about Hispanic culture and the consequences of gender roles and machismo in the culture. Access to knowledge of one’s history and intersectionality led to a better understanding of the world around them, specifically to life on the U.S.- Mexico border. “Grateful”, “eye-opening”, and “impactful” were other terms listed by participants. One comment that stood out mentioned the high value of the community engagement component for his or her WGS course. Another participant made a salient point: “I had no concept of feminist in the truest sense prior to taking this course and was very resistant to the material initially. After completion, however, I can say that this was one of the most valuable learning experiences of my college career.” Several other participants wrote about their resistance to feminism as it was something that they “did not understand completely,” however, after taking a WGS course, they understood the value of the course, feminism, and the need to teach their daughters and younger siblings about gender issues and equality. One participant wrote about feeling silenced as a woman from a

Mexican background but being empowered by the course to teach those around her, including friends and family in Mexico about feminism and the importance of equality. Another participant wrote that their HSI experience was complemented by being educated in intersectionality and identity formation as a Hispanic woman.

The comments made in the open-ended section of the WGS survey point to an overall valuable experience for participants. Participants felt empowered, grateful, confident, understood, and felt that they were given a voice in the curricula. They describe an eye-opening experience and the feeling of being “aware” of the bigger picture. In addition, there are several mentions of WGS being the “best” course they’ve ever taken at the university and that WGS should be a requirement for all students.

### **Chicano Studies Sample**

Parallel to the Women’s and Gender Studies sample, Chicana/o Studies participants completed the Horwath & Diabl measure and a self-developed Chicana/o Studies (CST) measure. Question Pro indicated that 296 people viewed the survey, 97 students participated in the survey, 16 participants dropped out before completing the survey, and 81 completed the entire set of measures. The data was checked for outliers and missing responses. No problematic issues emerged from the dataset.

### **Participants**

Most of the participants logged on from the U.S. and 4.2% logged on from Mexico. The participants’ ethnicity and race were 86.25% Latino or Hispanic, 3.75% Caucasian or White, 2.5% multiracial, and a very small number identified as Black, Asian, American Indian, Pacific Islander, or other (1.25% each). Participants aged 18-24 composed 67.5% of the sample,

followed by 18.75% aged 25-34. Ages 35-64 made up a very small percentage of the sample. Most participants (73.75%) identified as female and 20% identified as male. Again, a very small number identified as gender neutral or other (2.5% and 3.75%, respectively). An overwhelming number of participants study in the College of Liberal Arts (74.68%), followed by the College of Education (10.13%), and a very small number in the remaining colleges. When asked if the course was taken online, face to face or both, the answers were almost evenly split. Most (34.44%) took the course face to face, closely followed by online (34.18%) and both (30.38%). Most participants took CST for the first time in the Fall of 2021 (58.23%). Over a third took the course out of personal interest (37.69%) and somewhat fewer took it as an elective (32.31%). Fifty-three percent have taken only one CST course and 20.25% have taken two courses in the program.

### **Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for the Horwath & Diabl and the Chicana/o Studies Self-Developed Measures**

As with the Women's and Gender Studies sample, mean scores were computed across items on each instrument. Descriptive statistics are provided for male ( $N = 16$ ) and female-identifying participants ( $N = 59$ ), given that the number of those who identified as non-binary or other was too small to include in analyses. On the Horwath & Diabl survey, mean scores for female-identifying participants ranged from 4 to 7, while means for male-identifying participants ranged from 5 to 7. Mean scores on the self-developed CST measure ranged from 3 to 7 for women and from 6 to 7 for men. For the Horwath & Diabl and the CST self-developed measure, respectively, the means for women ( $M = 5.85$ ,  $SD = .64$ ;  $M = 6.18$ ,  $SD = .62$ ) were similar to those for men ( $M = 6.12$ ,  $SD = .43$ ;  $M = 6.52$ ,  $SD = .45$ ).

Results from a Pearson correlation analysis to assess the relationship between the Horwath & Diabl measure and the CST self-developed measure showed a strong correlation,  $r(73) = .75, p < .001$ . This suggests the measures are closely related to each other and indicate that they are capturing similar perceptions.

### **Internal Consistency and Reliability**

The 13 items on the Horwath & Diabl measure administered to the Chicana/o Studies sample resulted in Cronbach's  $\alpha = .81$ , indicating high internal consistency. The self-developed CST measure consisted of 21 items and Cronbach's  $\alpha = .91$ , also indicating high internal consistency.

### **Crosstabulations/Recoded Frequency Tables for the Horwath & Diabl and CST Measures**

Crosstabulations were generated in SPSS to examine the perceived value of Chicana/o Studies courses for university students. For each question on the surveys, total agreement was calculated by aggregating *strongly agree*, *agree*, and *somewhat agree* responses to the Likert Scale items. The percentage of agreement was high among women and men across both surveys. Also, across both surveys, women appeared to show lower levels of agreement overall than men.

The statements on the Horwath & Diabl measure that the course increased one's "ability to assess social problems" and raised "awareness of inequalities and social problems" had the highest agreement among women. Among men, eight items showed 100% agreeability (see Table 4.3). For the CST self-developed measure, items one, eleven, and fourteen had the highest agreement among women. Among men, eighteen items showed 100% agreeability (see Table 4.4). The lowest percentage of agreement among men and women was for the item that asked if students identified as Chicana/o or Mexican American BEFORE taking the course.

**Table 4.3***CST Sample: Agreement Crosstabulations for the Horwath & Diabl Measure by Gender*

<b>Question</b>	<b>Women in Agreement</b>	<b>Men in Agreement</b>	<b>Total Agreement</b>
1. Valuable and professional knowledge	89.8%	93.8%	90%
2. Valuable know. for life	93.2%	100%	93.8%
3. Ability to rep. my interests	94.9%	100%	95%
4. Ability to assess soc. prob	98.3%	100%	97.5%
5. Assess rele. of gender iss.	88.1%	100%	90%
6. Ability to act in self-assured	93.2%	100%	93.8%
7. Supported my pers. develop.	91.5%	93.8%	91.3%
8. Skills for soc. inter.	82.8%	100%	83.5%
9. No benefits	13.6%	25%	15.2%
10. Awareness of ineq. and discr.	98.3%	100%	98.7%
11. Increased soc. activism	88.1%	93.8%	88.6%
12. Increased egal. att.	84.7%	87.5%	84.8%
13. Enhanced self-conf.	91.5%	100%	93.7%

**Table 4.4***CST Sample: Agreement Crosstabulations for the Self-Developed CST Measure by Gender*

<b>Question</b>	<b>Females in Agreement</b>	<b>Males in Agreement</b>	<b>Total in Agreement</b>
1. Insight Mx Am culture	96.6%	100%	96.2%
2. Addressed ineq. and dist. of power in society	94.9%	100%	94.9%
3. Eval. the impact of the role of Chic. in society	92.8%	100%	97.4%
4. Familiar with CST before course	62.7%	75%	65.8%
5. Learned about goals and purp. of CST	96.5%	100%	94.8%
6. Empowered me to seek sol. to racism	94.9%	100%	94.9%

7. Personally emp.	94.9%	100%	96.2%
8. Contributed to a well-roun. education	93.2%	100%	94.9%
9. Know. of power, ethn., and racism	93.2%	100%	94.9%
10. Changed interactions w/ Mx Am	84.7%	100%	88.4%
11. Aware of cont. of Mx Am	96.6%	100%	96.2%
12. Differences between Chic. and other ethn.	93.2%	100%	93.7%
13. Bigger picture in college ed.	93.2%	100%	94.9%
14. Understanding of Chic/American life	96.6%	100%	97.5%
15. Causes and eff. of racism in WC	93.1%	100%	94.9%
16. Policies, plans, sol. to discrimination of Lat.	93.2%	100%	94.9%
17. More insightful ed. than conv. prog. seem to permit	94.9%	93.8%	94.9%
18. Helped to dispel stereo. of cult and ethn group	91.5%	100%	92.4%
19. ID as Chic /Mx Am BEFORE	76.3%	68.8%	73.4%
20. Raised crit. consciousness	93.2%	100%	93.7%
21. ID Chic/Mx Am AFTER	72.2%	100%	77.2%

### **Non-Parametric Testing for Gender Differences in Perceived Value of CST**

Independent-samples non-parametric testing was conducted to test whether female and male students differed in their perceptions of Chicana/o Studies. A Mann-Whitney U test was used due to the unbalanced sample sizes for gender ( $N = 59$  women,  $N = 16$  men). The results for the Horwath & Diabl measure showed no significant difference between female and male perceived value,  $U = 563.00$ ,  $z = 1.18$ ,  $p = .24$ . For the CST measure, results showed that a gender difference in participants' responses was nearly significant,  $U = 622.00$ ,  $z = 1.94$ ,  $p = .05$ .

The mean rank for women (35.5) was lower than that for men (47.4), indicating that male students may have perceived somewhat more value of Chicana/o Studies.

### **CST Open-Ended Questions**

Participants in the CST sample received the same two open-ended questions administered to the WGS sample: 1.) Is there anything you would like to add about how the course may have complemented your experience at a Hispanic Serving Institution? 2.) Is there anything you would like to add about the value of the course content? For the open-ended responses, the relevant comments were sorted and then coded by theme.

Among the common descriptors used by participants were “eye-opening,” “empowered,” “impactful,” “informative and useful,” “thankful,” and “newly aware.” Participants reported feeling enlightened, acknowledged, represented, a sense of belonging, and empowered by the courses. The curricula introduced them to a history that they were previously unaware of and that was largely ignored in school textbooks. One participant wrote that he or she “felt more represented. The idea of learning about my heritage at a higher learning institution made a large difference in my want to continue my education.” Another participant wrote that they “felt seen and heard.” Others felt that they were “erased” from history but then felt “included” after taking a CST course and “acknowledged” in a way that general history courses do not permit. Several wrote that they feel empowered to share the knowledge and history with their peers and family.

### **Conclusion**

WGS data showed that women and men have nearly the same perceived value of WGS. The Horwath & Diabl and self-developed WGS measures were significantly correlated, and there

is high internal reliability for both measures. A crosstabulation for each measure showed most participants agreed with the statements; this means that there is high perceived value of WGS among female and male participants.

Data for the CST population yielded nearly identical findings: the Horwath & Diabl and self-developed CST measure were significantly correlated; each demonstrated high internal reliability; and most women and men agreed with the statements in both measures. Interestingly, there was a slight tendency for men to report higher perceived value of CST than women, which approached statistical significance. In sum, most female and male participants demonstrated that they value both WGS and CST in the ways described on both measures.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to evaluate students' perceived value of Women's and Gender Studies and Chicana/o Studies at a Hispanic Serving Institution. In examining the survey data, attention was given to gender identity and any differences that may arise because of it. Also, data was collected from two opened-ended questions in the WGS survey and in the Chicano Studies survey. In this chapter, I will address the implications of the findings, the limitations and strengths of the study, and recommendations for future research.

### **Women's and Gender Studies**

The participation for males was much lower than for females in the WGS measure ( $N = 21$ ,  $N = 116$ ). The number of those who identified as non-binary or other were too small to include in the statistical analysis. However, in keeping with a feminist methodology, the options of non-binary and "other" were included in the demographic section of the surveys. Denying alternative gender options is not aligned with a feminist approach. Leung et al. (2019) state, "Genuine commitment to taking a feminist approach to research begins by applying a feminist lens to all stages of the research process-from study design all the way through to communication and dissemination of findings" (p. 433). Similarly, Harnois (2013) explains that "a feminist perspective can inform virtually every aspect of the research process, from survey design to statistical modeling, to theoretical frameworks used interpret results" (p. 2).

The results for both the Horwath & Diabl measure and the self-developed measure showed nearly identical means for female and male participants indicating that they value WGS courses similarly. For the Horwath & Diabl measure, something worth noting is that among women, there were a few more extreme values of disagreement that were not present

among men. This is contrary to what Horwath & Diabl (2020) found in their study of university students in Austria: men had mostly unfavorable perceptions of WGS and even reported resenting having to take the courses. Perhaps the findings in this study indicate that some women were slightly more likely to be critical of a WGS course. In addition, it is important to point out that university students in this study are not required to take WGS courses and can opt for a handful of other options. Most students reported taking WGS out of personal interest or as an elective.

For both the Horwath & Diabl measure and the self-developed measure, the crosstabulations revealed that an overwhelming majority of participants agreed with statements indicating the value of Women's and Gender Studies. Among the highest in agreeability were the statements: "The course provided me with valuable knowledge for life"; "The course provided me with valuable and professional knowledge"; and "The course increased my ability to assess the relevance of gender roles".

While overall, there was not a statistically significant difference between the mean scores for men and women, the frequency data revealed a few interesting gender differences on specific items, where men agreed more with some statements than women. For example, for the following statements on the Horwath & Diabl measure, more men reported agreeability than women: "The course increased my awareness of gender inequalities and discrimination"; "The course enhanced my self-confidence"; and "The course increased my social activism against inequality and discrimination".

For the WGS self-developed measure, more men reported agreeability than women in response to the following statements: "I was familiar with WGS BEFORE taking the course"; "The course cultivated a more probing and insightful education than conventional programs

seem to permit”; “I identified as a feminist BEFORE taking the course”; and “I identified as a feminist AFETR taking the course”. Interestingly, more men than women (70% vs 65.2%) agreed with identifying as a feminist BEFORE taking the course and AFTER taking the course (85.7% vs 77.4%). This could indicate that men that tend to identify as feminist take WGS courses because they identify with the content. For both men and women, the percentage of agreement was greater for the statement “I identified as a feminist AFTER taking the course,” than for the statement about identifying as a feminist before taking the course. More males than females also reported being aware of WGS before taking the course and valuing the insight that the course permits as opposed to “conventional” academic programs. A possible explanation for why this occurred is that a much smaller group of men than women ( $N = 16$  vs.  $N = 59$ ) took the survey, leading to less variability in their responses.

The findings for the open-ended responses oppose what Horwath & Diabl (2020) reported in their study. They noted that “prejudiced views were one main reason for students’ disengagement, particularly male students. In the context of a requirement, it intensifies resistance in the classroom, and students may restrain from engagement and critical reflection” (p. 1122). In the same study, males consistently valued WGS less than female participants. Horwath & Diabl (2020) found that “the overwhelming majority of female respondents perceive WGS as important, while most men seemingly struggle with its relevance” (p. 1120) This has not been the case in this study. In fact, men valued WGS almost equally and even scored higher on agreeability on a handful of the items.

In their framework for conceptualizing HSIs and *serviingness*, Garcia et al. (2019) uncovered a description of themes found in the empirical literature on HSIs. Several of the themes include non-academic outcomes, student experiences, culturally relevant pedagogy or

curriculum and culturally relevant practices. UTEP's strategic goals for 2030 echo the themes described by Garcia et al. (2019), but also indicate that the institution should take a closer look at culturally relevant programs such as WGS and Chicana/o Studies, among others. Without explicitly saying it, the work by Garcia et al. (2019) implicate the need for "The Studies" in higher education. After all at this HSI, the findings for the agreeability crosstabulations and open-ended responses reveal that both WGS and CST are highly valued. Take for example one student who wrote that their HSI experience "was complemented by being educated in intersectionality and identity formation as a Hispanic woman." Additionally, students reported feeling grateful for the eye-opening and empowering course content. In their strategic plan, UTEP writes that it "will be known not by whom we exclude, but by whom we include and their success" (The University of Texas at El Paso, 2022). Advisably, to deprive in any way or at any point a Hispanic female majority of the curricula that supports and empowers them would go against the institution's intentions to evolve into "America's Leading Hispanic University" and contradict the idea of servingness.

### **Chicana/o Studies**

Much like the findings for WGS, the results for the Chicana/o Studies sample showed no significant differences between women's and men's perceptions of the value of The Studies, although men's slightly higher valuation approached significance. As in the WGS sample, those who identified as non-binary or other were too few to be included as a separate group in the analysis of the Chicana/o Studies data.

Although on the Chicana/o Studies measures, mean scores for men and women did not differ significantly, some gender differences were reflected in frequency data for individual survey items. For every item on the Horwath & Diabl measure and for all but three items on

the self-developed measure, men indicated higher agreeability than did women. However, there were only 16 men in the sample, which indicates that statistically, there was less variability in the smaller group than in the larger group of women. Another idea to consider is that in the past, Chicano Studies has been inherently sexist. For example, throughout the Civil Rights Movement, Chicanas were consistently oppressed and relegated to the “woman’s place” within the movement. They were discouraged and even prohibited from publishing ideas, art, commentary, and work to the extent that Chicanas had to establish their own publications and feminist movement (Garcia, 2014; Orozco, 2010). Sexist stereotypes emerged from the movements, such as the idea that Chicana feminists were *vendidas* (Orozco, 2010) or sell-outs for being feminist since feminism was an Anglo and middle-class idea (Garcia, 2014; Hernandez, 2010; Orozco, 2010). If one closely examines primary documents from the Chicano education movement, such as El Plan de Santa Barbara, women were left out of the discussion and goals of the movement (Guerra, 1970). To them, there was no need to address the oppression of women, because it didn’t exist. Is this still occurring in Chicano Studies for women? Another finding that relates to this notion is that 76.3% of women identified as Chicana/o BEFORE taking the course, but only 72.2% identified as Chicana/o AFTER the course was taken. This brings up the same notion that was mentioned above: Is Chicano Studies still struggling to include women in the curriculum?

The last item on the self-developed measure, “I identified as a Chicana/o/Mexican American AFTER taking the course,” generated 100% agreement from men and 72.2% agreement from women. What makes this item interesting is that this result does not exactly match participants’ ethnic identification (86.3% Latino or Hispanic, 3.8% Caucasian or White, 2.5% multiracial, and small numbers identified as Black, Asian, American Indian, Pacific

Islander or other, 1.3% each). One possible explanation is that course had such a profound effect on the students that took the survey, that they somehow related to Chicano identity. Another explanation is that perhaps those that did not identify as being Latino or Hispanic may have simply agreed with the statement to complete the survey.

The results of the open-ended questions echo those of other qualitative and quantitative studies conducted at the K-12 and higher education levels. Again, what The Studies seem to put forth is that students benefit from greater communalism, achievement motivation, ethnic identity, sense of empowerment, critical thinking, and academic achievement (Sleeter et al., 2020), pointing to the effectiveness of ethnic studies courses at both the higher education and K-12 levels. Similar language was reported by participants in the open-ended section. Research shows that ethnic studies programs help students to understand an otherwise marginalized history, which leads to academic empowerment in the form of higher education rates, higher GPA, increased attendance, and community/civic engagement (Cabrera, 2019; Sleeter et al., 2020). Garcia et al. (2019) identified four major themes used by researchers to frame servingness: outcomes, experiences, internal organization dimensions and external influences. In terms of outcomes, the authors identified non-academic or personal outcomes that included self-concept, civic-engagement, social agency, and racial/ethnic identity salience; all of which apply to the results of this study in both the agreeability crosstabulations (see Tables 4.3 and 4.4) and open-ended responses. In addition, Guàrdia and Evans (2008) and Garcia et al. (2018) reported that HSIs provide Latino men with “curricular and cocurricular opportunities that enhanced their racial/ethnic identity development” (p.763). Together, all these conceptualizations of HSIs and servingness should

further compel institutions to embrace Chicana/o Studies, Latino Studies, or Mexican American Studies, alongside WGS.

### **Limitations and Strengths of the Study**

Since the year 2020, we have experienced unprecedented change in the higher education classroom. Since the COVID-19 pandemic forced university students out of the classroom and into quarantine for several semesters at UTEP, most courses transitioned to an online format. The university formally opened to 100% capacity this Fall (2021), but some students and faculty have chosen an online schedule. With the pandemic comes stressors such as the effects of quarantine, social isolation, illness, anxiety, and even death in many families. In the Fall of 2021, two of my students lost a parent, one became homeless due to COVID-19, and many had children or spouses fall ill. All these stressors have affected the learning process and, thus, could have presented limitations to the study, perhaps by directly influencing students' responses to the survey or indirectly through students' experiences in their courses which in turn could have impacted their responses to survey questions.

Factors such as the professors' delivery of the curriculum or effectiveness may play a role in how a student perceives the courses and answers a survey. There is also the current trend of online coursework that could have presented a limitation. Within the sample, students were enrolled in a mix of face-to-face and online sections, which may present a limitation due to differences in the delivery of the coursework. For WGS participants, 71.8% reported taking the course online. For CST, almost an equal percentage of students took the course online and face-to-face. If the participants in online sections of both programs were to be omitted, the sample size would have been much smaller than desired.

Another limitation is related to the representativeness of the sample. While the size of the sample was large enough for quantitative data analysis, it was small relative to the total enrollment in WGS and CST courses. One hundred and forty-six students participated in the WGS survey out of 812 students enrolled in Fall 2021 WGS courses (or, 18% of the population), and 75 students participated in the CST survey out of 666 enrolled in Fall 2021 CST courses (or, 11%). However, the number of students enrolled in Fall 2021 courses does not account for those who graduated and thus, did not receive the survey. Moreover, there are students who drop courses throughout the semester that were not accounted for in the number of enrollees.

The strongest element of this study is that it helps to fill the gap in quantitative research on “The Studies” in the U.S. As previously mentioned, two large scale quantitative studies on WGS were conducted in Europe and no large-scale studies on CST courses in higher education were found. In-depth research on Mexican American Studies has been conducted at the K-12 education level. This study found that both women and men have a high perceived value of WGS and CST in higher education, in opposition to what the research conducted in Europe reported. As discussed in Chapter Two, Marchbank and Letherby (2006) noted that although there is extensive literature about the history and purposes of WGS, there is not much about student experiences. Regarding this lack of representation, the authors claimed:

This anecdotal evidence is supported by the observations of Price and Owen (1998, p. 185) who note that women’s studies ‘languishes toward the bottom of the hierarchy of regard and status of academic disciplines’; such negative discourses regarding women’s studies and feminists in academia derive from the relatively powerless position of women’s studies students compared to others, and the power

and legitimacy given within our society to both ridicule and misrepresentation of feminist work. (p. 1)

The methodology of my study focused on measuring students' self-reported perceptions of the value of "The Studies". Other studies measured GPA, graduation rates, and attendance in K-12 institutions to examine the benefits of The Studies. This study offered a description of *how* students perceive and value "The Studies" through analyses of agreement with specific survey items, coupled with analyses of the open-ended responses.

Secondly, a feminist methodology honors the expertise and experiences of the researcher and subjects. If we are to move beyond the unfavorable view of positivist approaches to scientific inquiry, then feminist scholars must find new ways to merge both classical feminist methods and quantitative methods. This study was designed to adhere to a feminist methodology and framework, while capturing quantitative data and thus merging two often opposing approaches. In this study, I bridged the gaps between classical feminist methodology, a multicultural feminist framework, and a positivist approach (quantitative). Again, "Genuine commitment to taking a feminist approach to research begins by applying a feminist lens to all stages of the research process—from study design all the way through to communication and dissemination of findings" (Leung et al., 2019, p. 433). A feminist approach to research is one that should deliberately challenge existing power structures in the research process and embed feminism into every aspect and step of the process (Leung et al., 2019). The capturing of subaltern voices at a Hispanic Serving Institution through survey data is also aligned with a multicultural feminist framework. This study acknowledged and assessed the perspectives of many Hispanic/Latina/Mexican American female, male, and non-

binary students. Moreover, it collected data that indicates a largely valued set of courses across two programs at the university. “The Studies” often find themselves on the chopping block when economic instability or political conservatism are at the forefront of society. Garcia et al. (2019) identified two themes to conceptualize servingness that explain this phenomenon: internal organization dimensions and external influences. In the case of UTEP, it is strongly influenced by conservative ideals in a conservative state. Those ideals have historically discredited and denied the legitimacy of “The Studies”. The most recent attacks are on Critical Race Theory, ethnic studies, and women’s choice (and, indirectly, feminism). Adding new and expanded research on “The Studies” would help to provide research-based legitimacy for programs facing dissolution or declining support.

### **Recommendations for Practice and Future Research**

Recommendations for practice in higher education include expanding access to programs in “The Studies.” Expanding access would include making more programs permanent departments. This study was conducted at a university that has a female *and* Mexican American majority; even so, the WGS and CST courses are part of a program, not a department. Denying department status to an academic program affects its funding, course offerings, faculty positions, and thus, legitimacy. When a program is limited to hiring part-time, adjunct, or shared faculty appointments, course offerings are constrained, leading to diminished funding and a treacherous cycle that submits those with program status to perpetual uncertainties. Since students clearly value both programs, they would make an even greater impact as departments that offer graduate courses or degrees. Expanding programs to include graduate degrees and not only elective courses would also strengthen the legitimacy of “The Studies.” Locally, UTEP has outlined four goals to execute its strategic plan for 2030.

Goals one and two are: 1) Teaching, learning, and the student experience; and 2) Community impact and public service. Under goal one are the strategic initiatives 1.1 and 1.3, which are to “implement a comprehensive enrollment strategy that broadens access” and “redesign key core curriculum courses to provide high-impact, engaged learning experiences” (The University of Texas at El Paso, 2022, p. 55). For goal three, initiative 3.1 reads that UTEP will “increase cultural and education activities that enrich community life” (The University of Texas at El Paso, 2022). It makes sense that an HSI that is over 80% Hispanic, 54% female, and seeks to not only be Hispanic-enrolling but America’s leading Hispanic-serving university should implement full-scale departments in both WGS and Chicana/o Studies, as the data clearly shows that students highly value both programs. Moreover, the data demonstrated that students highly value the professional and personal outcomes of the courses by agreeing with items such as: the course enhanced my self-confidence; the course increased my social activism against inequality and discrimination; the course provided me with valuable knowledge for life; and, the course provided me with valuable and professional knowledge.

Circling back to the literature review, research on Mexican American Studies has found benefits from The Studies for students of color, including improved attendance, higher GPAs, higher graduation rates, academic empowerment, and civic engagement, to name a few (Cabrera, 2019; Sleeter et al., 2020). Considering the research in K-12 ethnic studies programs, wouldn’t it make sense to require pre-service educators to take courses in “The Studies,” even if only as an elective block? Presently, the College of Education at the university where this study took place does not require pre-service teachers to take any such courses. My last recommendation would be to require these courses for pre-service teachers, thereby raising consciousness about the students that they will eventually serve. Currently, the

University of California Los Angeles is piloting an ethnic studies pathway program for pre-service teachers, which prepares them to teach the demographics they will eventually serve in the state of California (UCLA, 2022). A similar approach in the studied community could in turn provide a holistic, well-rounded education that provides cultural continuity. The value of this recommendation is underscored by research showing that schools are unable to meet the academic needs of their students due to a mismatch of the students' culture and that of the school (Taylor et al., 2015). To combat the mismatch, institutions in both K-12 and higher education must participate in a process of decolonizing the curriculum. Under UTEP's 2030 Strategic Plan goals three and four (Community impact and public service and shape the future of higher education) are the strategic initiatives 3.1, 4.1, and 4.3 that explain the institution must "increase cultural and educational activities that enrich community life, advance the development of knowledge to improve higher education for underrepresented students and under-resourced regions, and to become the national leader in teaching and research in bilingualism, bilingual education, and second language learning" (The University of Texas at El Paso, 2022, p. 55). Considering these outlined initiatives, my recommendation would be for the institution to implement a WGS and Chicana/o Studies department with full-time faculty and resources. How can the institution meet these goals of cultural inclusion and diversity without their implementation, if it is to indeed become "America's Leading Hispanic University" (The University of Texas at El Paso, 2022)? To produce research and teachers that are experts in bilingual education, don't we need to become experts in the culture? This is where UCLA's pilot program can be a valuable resource for developing courses or a program to meet the needs of a bilingual and bicultural community.

Recommendations for future research include expanding this study to include African American Studies. At this campus, the program consists of elective courses and a minor, but not a major. Course participation is less than that of WGS and CST, as the latter two have more course offerings both online and face-to-face (The University of Texas at El Paso, 2022). Now that the survey measures have been used to study the perceived value of WGS and CST, it would be interesting to expand the study and see if African American Studies is also valued in a similar way at a Hispanic Serving Institution. It would be interesting to study the value of these courses at an institution that is over 80% Hispanic or Latino. Is CST valued at this institution because of its Hispanic majority or does this value extend to other ethnic studies courses?

Research that includes additional quantitative data such as graduation rates, GPAs, and other achievement or persistence data for students that have taken courses in “The Studies” would add to this study. Aside from being personally valuable to students at this HSI, do the courses raise academic achievement in the form of GPA and graduation rates? It would be interesting to compare these findings with the work of others (Cabrera, 2019; Sleeter, 2020; Vasquez, 2005). A second recommendation is to expand the study to include the El Paso Community College, a two-year HSI that has five campuses across El Paso County, Texas, and serves approximately 29,000 students (EPCC, 2022). EPCC has a Chicanx Studies Program and some course offerings in Women’s Studies. It is worth studying the perspectives of the students belonging to an institution that is above 90% Hispanic, 57% female, and 46% first generation college students (EPCC, 2019). EPCC has a very similar demographic to UTEP as they are situated in the same city. Studying it would help us to understand a potential trend in the value students perceive of “The Studies.”

This study, along with others conducted in Europe and in some U.S. K-12 schools, show that “The Studies” are valuable to students. Further work is needed to generalize the findings of this study to other Hispanic Serving Institutions. Collectively, the research indicates that students at both levels have a positive experience with “The Studies,” which is a good starting point as it is important to take into consideration what students value in their own education. Moreover, “The Studies” has always been about putting education in the hands of the community (Hu-DeHart, 1993). Garcia et al. (2019) states that “the availability of culturally relevant curriculum may be a sign of servingness at HSIs, particularly when the curriculum is ethnocentric, historic, embedded within the normal structures of the institution, and part of the learning goals of the institution” (p. 763). In the systematic literature review by Garcia et al. (2019), 22 articles and chapters highlighted culturally relevant curricula or pedagogical practices at HSIs. The data in my study underscores the need for an expansion of “The Studies” at this HSI and are aligned with both the mission and strategic goals of the University, previous research on servingness at HSIs, and the framework outlined by Garcia et al. (2019). This alignment of data and strategic goals strengthens the call for an expansion of academic programs that serve UTEP’s population. Afterall, we are seeking to be not merely a Hispanic-enrolling but a Hispanic-serving university.

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## **Curriculum Vita**

Hilda Ontiveros-Arrieta is a native of El Paso, TX. She earned her undergraduate degree at The University of Texas at El Paso, where she focused on Microbiology, biology, and Chicana/o Studies. Hilda attended medical school at a Medico Cirujano program in Mexico and completed coursework at La Universidad Ibero-Americana in Mexico City and Spain. She earned two master's degrees: one in Higher Education Administration and the other in Latin American and Border Studies with a focus on political science and history. She earned her doctorate in May of 2022 in Educational Leadership and Administration in Higher Education at UTEP, where she has also taught for approximately thirteen years.

Her research focus includes the femicides on the U.S.-Mexico border; she has presented her work at several national and international conferences. Her other research interests include, girls' STEAM education, gender issues in education, culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy, ethnic studies and global health issues in Women's and Gender Studies.

Hilda has thirteen years of higher education teaching experience and is currently a faculty member in the Women's and Gender Studies program at UTEP where she teaches courses in feminist theory, queer theory, global feminisms, and civil rights movements. In the past, she has been affiliated with UTEP's Chicana/o Studies program, where she taught for six years. Hilda started her higher education career as a doctoral research associate in 2008. She serves on several committees including the annual Women's History Month Conference and is the faculty advisor for several student organizations on campus. Hilda is affiliated with the Borderland Rainbow Center and the Diversity and Resiliency Institute of El Paso. Along the way she has raised four children with her spouse and is a volunteer volleyball and basketball coach for children in her community.