



# REPORT

*From the office of the...*

## Women and Gender Equity Network (WGEN) Coordinator

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TO: Members of the Executive Board  
FROM: Yimeng Wang  
SUBJECT: WGEN Report 3  
DATE: October 22, 2020

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### **Year Plan Update**

Since the last WGEN report at the end of summer, and with the beginning of the Fall 2020 semester, there have been significant deviations from the events proposed in my Year Plan. Broadly speaking, I had planned for September to be primarily focused on volunteer training and to open the WGEN space (with a corresponding opening event) near the end of the month. I had also intended to establish physical resource distribution channels by the end of the month. For October, I had wanted to re-launch past WGEN support groups such as Survivors, Black and Gendered, and Disability in Colour. I had also planned a mini-campaign the week leading up to Reading Week and WGEN's regular Halloween event at the end of the month.

Many of these events were not realized or are experiencing significant changes or delays. Most of September was dedicated to a modified, tiered second round of volunteer interviews, to accommodate the mandatory MSU training dates. It was also largely focused on the creation and distribution of WGEN-specific volunteer training, which we attempted to offer in a variety of components to best accommodate for various needs. These ultimately delayed opening the WGEN space to a soft opening 3 days prior to the Reading Week and a (hopefully) full opening this week. Furthermore, plans for our support groups, physical resource distribution channels, and language campaign have been significantly modified. Our plans for events have also been pushed lower as priorities at the moment. Ultimately, due to the shift to online schooling and other factors for reduced capacity, I have not been extremely focused on maintaining timelines.

Unexpected new tasks that emerged which were unaccounted for in my Year Plan included time commitment to the December 6 Committee, a University committee dedicated to organizing the annual December 6 memorial at McMaster. WGEN has sat on the committee since at least 2019-2020; I am unclear about the history prior to that. I am also involved as a student co-convenor for the Gender and Sexuality Working Group of PACBIC. We are also in the process of organizing a WGEN Instagram takeover to introduce the WGEN exec team, followed by a Q&A session. Finally, additional tasks required around proper remuneration have been unexpectedly draining and time consuming.

## **Service Usage**

There is currently no service usage to report, as our Summer 2020 programming has concluded and our Fall 2020 programming has yet to be fully established.

## **Past Events, Projects, & Activities**

Since my last report, we have completed the second round of hiring for WGEN Safe(r) Space and Events Committee Volunteers. This included a tiered process which prioritized interviews for folks available to attend the September 12/13 MSU training. Working around the MSU training sessions meant that our schedule those first weeks looked like: marking apps from September 3-5, interviews from September 7-10, offering training support over the weekend, marking again from September 12-14, interviews from September 15-18, and training support early the next week. Overall, we had 29 Safe(r) Space Volunteer applications and 20 Events Committee Volunteer applications for our second round.

As mentioned, we were present to offer support for volunteers throughout MSU training, and had many volunteers reach out. I was also involved in facilitating questions and updates regarding the confusing changes in content and expectation around MSU quizzes. I also belatedly offered content revisions regarding the quizzes myself and facilitated two group quiz sessions with volunteers.

The majority of the last few weeks have been around creating and offering WGEN-specific volunteer training, which has been a collective effort but primarily involved myself and my Volunteer Coordinator. WGEN training includes content from peer support fundamentals to space facilitation and content regarding different forms of systemic oppression evident at the University. This year, we reviewed the training so that it was suitable for an online context and also updated to match current WGEN values. The result was the creation of approximately 8 hours worth of content. This was presented in a PowerPoint as well as supplementary videos with transcripts (we ran into issues with live captioning). Finally, we requested volunteers attend two mandatory discussion sessions that were collectively 4.5 hours long to debrief content and work through discussion questions and situationals. These sessions were offered 3 times across 2 weeks, with final make-up sessions offered during Reading Week.

Finally, I assisted with a small write-up for Courage To Act, an external organization dedicated to ending sexual and gender-based violence in Canadian post-secondary institutions. The write-up was on the impact of WGEN on the student body and University environment, and how it utilized the student levy.

## **Upcoming Events, Projects & Activities**

This week, we are hoping to finally open WGEN for Fall 2020. Our full time hours are currently projected to be from 12:30 – 5:30pm and 7:00 – 9:00pm every weekday. Currently, we are only offering Zoom and text-based support, but we hope to launch a WGEN Discord channel in the immediate future to potentially add additional hours or replace the evening space hours.

Next week, we hope to launch the Supporting Survivors resource that my Social and Political Advocacy Coordinator has been working on. This resource is meant to offer basis peer support guidance for supporting folks with experiences of sexual violence and increase accessibility of sexual violence response training.

We are also planning on launching our new Community Care Groups in the upcoming few weeks. These groups are specific to needs identified by the exec team for this year and which WGEN has the capacity to host. Specifically, the groups we will be holding will be open to folks with the following identities: Muslim women and non-binary folks; 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> generation East Asian immigrants and international students; and racialized non-cis folks. We are also including Black and Gendered, co-hosted by the Womanists, as a Community Care Group to increase awareness of the group.

We are planning a WGEN Instagram takeover to introduce the exec team and open a Q&A to engage with students.

Finally, I am planning on holding an exec Among Us social night this week and an exec-volunteer social next week for Halloween.

### **Currently Working On**

Currently, my Research Coordinator is working on a collaborative resource with Diversity Services. This is a modification of our initial idea for an Intro to Social Justice Language campaign. While still maintaining important aspects of the initial idea (translation into other languages, emphasis on gender-neutral adaptations of gendered languages, etc.), it will also have a stronger focus on being creates as a resource, which I think adds a really important and strong element!

My Resources Coordinator is also in the process of adapting the way WGEN historically offers resources to fit the needs of an online year. This has involved looking into offering an online loaning library and alternate means of supporting folks in accessing gender-affirming products. She has reached out to our past partners and we are looking into ways of sustaining a long-term partnership rather than one-off donations which would stabilize WGEN resource acquisition. We are also working closely with SHEC to continue attempts to finalize a physical resource distribution process.

I am also encouraging the exec team and, once they begin meeting, the Events Committee, to brainstorm for our annual November campaign, Trans(forming) Mac. I think it is especially important this year for students who may not be in the safest or most comfortable environments physically, and to recognize that a sense of community can be more difficult to create online.

As mentioned previously, I am also engaged in work with University committees. The December 6 Committee involved biweekly meetings to plan for the creation and promotion of a video series for the Day Against Gender-Based Violence. The Gender and Sexuality Working Group for PACBIC is also co-chaired by the PCC Coordinator and a graduate student convener. We are in the process of establishing goals and expectations for the upcoming year.

Finally, I am continuing to work on details for opening the WGEN space and keeping it open, including considerations of how to raise awareness of the space opening, how to make it most accessible for students, how to be as inclusive of disability as we can, and how to mitigate volunteer concerns and burnout.

## Budget

We used part of the budget for the Underground to create a graphic for our Community Care Groups. I expect to spend another part of the budget on promotional material for the upcoming Trans(forming) Mac multiday campaign. Additionally, I am looking into ways which the budget can be used to invest in WGEN resources this year or support new initiatives unique to our current year.

<i>ACCOUNT CODE</i>	<i>ITEM</i>	<i>BUDGET / COST</i>
5003-0308	OFFICE SUPPLIES	
	TOTAL SPENT IN LINE	\$0.00
	REMAINING IN LINE	\$100.00
6102-0308	ANNUAL CAMPAIGNS	
	TOTAL SPENT IN LINE	\$0.00
	REMAINING IN LINE	\$2,800.00
6104-0308	WOMANISTS	
	TOTAL SPENT IN LINE	\$0.00
	REMAINING IN LINE	\$250.00
6103-0308	SPECIAL PROJECTS	
	• Financial Advocacy – Black Women in Motion	\$50.00
	TOTAL SPENT IN LINE	\$50.00
	REMAINING IN LINE	\$700.00
6494-0308	VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION	
	TOTAL SPENT IN LINE	\$0.00
	REMAINING IN LINE	\$750.00
6501-0308	ADVERTISING & PROMOTION	
	• <b>Community Care Groups Promo</b>	<b>\$75.00</b>
	TOTAL SPENT IN LINE	\$75.00
	REMAINING IN LINE	\$1,925.00
6804-0308	TRAINING EXPENSES	
	TOTAL SPENT IN LINE	\$0.00
	REMAINING IN LINE	\$500.00
<b>TOTALS</b>		
<b>TOTAL BUDGETED DISCRETIONARY SPENDING</b>		<b>\$7,150.00</b>

<b>TOTAL ACTUAL DISCRETIONARY SPENDING</b>	\$125.00
<b>REMAINING DISCRETIONARY SPENDING</b>	\$7,025.00

**Volunteers**

Volunteer management has been difficult, given the online nature of the semester. For Safe(r) Space and Events Committee Volunteers, there is a sense (which I also feel) that receiving information through email or Facebook is exhausting because of the sheer amount of communications students need to go through now. I am also personally finding it difficult to keep track of which emails have already been sent to which volunteers, although I believe that challenge will be mitigated now that training has been completed. I also realized that the usual exec-volunteer bonding that would have occurred during training is not present this year – while I think volunteers are quite familiar with myself, my Volunteer Coordinator, and a few other execs, I do think that there is a lack of opportunity for general exec-volunteer interactions. I am hoping to change this with monthly exec-volunteer game nights!

I am finding similar challenges with my exec team. I think it is additionally difficult because I am easily tired by social interactions and Zoom, which makes it less likely that I have the energy to hold exec socials. However, I have been open in my communications with execs, and am trying to respect their expressed desires of having both more planned socials and spontaneous work sessions. I have also continued to offer a socially distanced baked goods delivery, to no avail!

**Current Challenges**

A significant challenge right now is balancing my needs and the needs of my service with the expectations and needs required of my role. One aspect of this has emerged with the new shift to lieu hours, which requires that I pre-emptively predict what work I will need to do and for how long. This is a personal challenge for me for disability-related reasons and is further frustrating for the fact that the work I propose might not even be approved. I have found that the process of trying to have lieu hours approved is both counterproductive to me achieving the work I need to be doing and a detriment to my mental health in needing to justify what work I think should be prioritized or best fits into my role. Additionally, the need to go through the Job Description right as the semester is beginning to pick up, my service operations are beginning to start, and I am in the middle of applying to post-undergraduate programs, is time-consuming and emotionally taxing.

Another challenge has been facilitating communications between volunteers, execs, and other relevant actors. As the most prominent point of contact for volunteers, I am often overwhelmed with questions or concerns regarding actions and changes beyond my control. This often results in me needing to retroactively send emails clarifying information or me being unable to offer information in response to volunteer inquiries, which has been frustrating for me. I am having difficulty finding the balance between respecting that folks have different capacities for work (including communications) at the moment with the stress this might exacerbate on the receiving side when there is a lack of information.

Finally, I am finding that I feel looped out of many MSU decisions and updates which have implications for my service. An example of this includes the new website update, which might have implications on my workload and also where I can host links for the WGEN space. In general, I feel a bit confused about where and how I can stay up-to-date on MSU news.

### **Successes**

I am very proud of my team and myself for getting through the hiring and training process! It was lengthy, stressful, and extremely work intensive. As always, shout out to my Volunteer Coordinator for doing her absolute most while balancing so many other obligations. She has put in a ridiculous number of unpaid hours in getting WGEN ready for the online year. I think we were ultimately able to put forward an application process and training that was explicitly centred around volunteer needs.

I also think it is a success worth mentioning that folks are still here and engaged in WGEN. I know that I have been finding online schooling very difficult, and I think it should be acknowledged that participating in extracurricular activities in this very overwhelming year is truly an accomplishment.

### **Other**

I just wanted to take the space to express my immense gratitude to my exec team and all the folks taking time to volunteer with WGEN this year. It has been an incredibly difficult few months, for some folks more than others, and I am endlessly appreciative of the passion, enthusiasm, and dedication that folks bring to their positions. I want to re-emphasize that always, but especially this year, I want to also ensure folks feel like they are supported in their roles and not see WGEN as an additional source of stress. I think in many cases that is not possible, but as much as I can I want to respect the fact that execs and volunteers are offering unpaid labour and their priorities and capacity come before any delegation of work from me.