



REPORT

From the office of the...

Associate Vice-President (Services)

TO: Members of the Executive Board
FROM: Veronica Larrazabal Zea, AVP (Services)
SUBJECT: WGEN Review
DATE: March 27th, 2024

Introduction

To the esteemed members of the Executive Board,

The following report is a review of the McMaster Students' Union (MSU) service known as the **Women and Gender Equity Network (WGEN)**.

The aim of this review is to give an overview of how successful the service is in fulfilling its purpose and mandate. Surveys were conducted of the general student body as well as volunteers and employees of the service to gain an understanding of how the service functions, how it is perceived, and what programming/services it delivers to the student body. This review contains an analysis of those results, as well as a summary of external research that has been done. The external research took a focus on other university student unions in Ontario to understand if they offer clubs or services with strategies which can be adopted by WGEN. The result of this internal and external research is summarized to give a series of recommendations made in concert by the Services Committee, VP Administration, and AVP Services.

Service Overview

Please see [Operating Policy – MSU Women and Gender Equity Network \(WGEN\)](#) for a full service overview.

The purpose of WGEN is to advocate for a campus free from rape culture, sexual violence, and prejudice/discrimination based on gender expression and/or identity. The team supports survivors of gender-based oppression or sexual violence and provides a safe(r) space for students who identify as women, gender-nonconforming/transgender, and survivors of gender-based and sexual violence. This is done by an executive team and peer-support volunteers.

Internal Research

Executive and Volunteer Survey

Insufficient data (3 responses). However, the available responses do mention that awareness of the resources and supplies within the WGEN space could be better advertised.

General Student Body Survey

There were 63 responses to the general student body survey. The purpose of this survey was to determine feedback regarding the efficiency and role of the service. 22% of respondents had previously interacted with the service.

The majority of respondents were in their first year (34%), followed by third year (30%) and fourth year (16%). 31% of students were in engineering, followed by 18% in science, 13% in health science, 12% in social science, and 10% in humanities.

Responses agree that the purpose of the service is fulfilled, as shown in Figure 1. An overwhelming majority of responses are 'Agree/Strongly Agree' for each option.

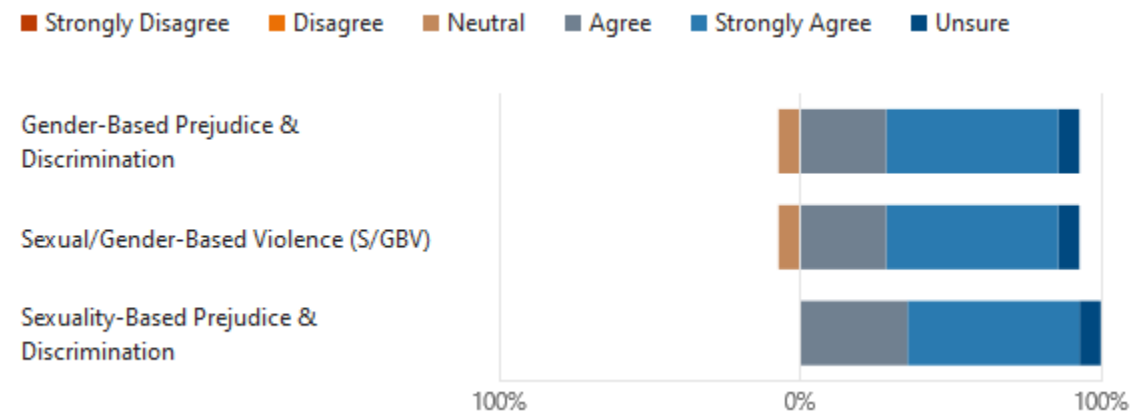


Figure 1. Responses to the question 'I feel that MSU WGEN advocates for a campus that is free from.'

Responses to questions regarding events hosted by WGEN are also positive, except regarding promotions, where 71.4% responded 'Neutral' or 'Disagree.' Distribution is shown in Figure 2.

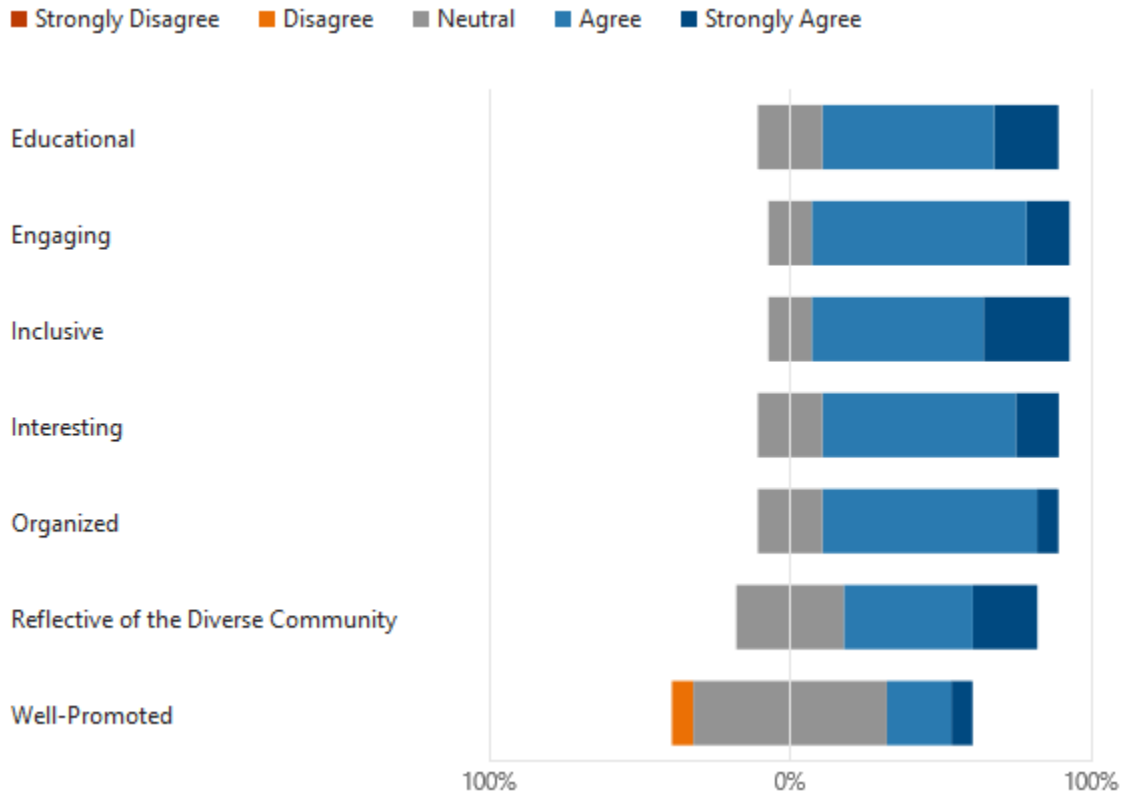


Figure 2. Responses to the question 'I feel that MSU WGEN hosts events that are.'

Most students have accessed the WGEN space for social events (71.4% Agree/Strongly Agree). Distribution is shown in Figure 3. Most students (64.3%) are comfortable entering the space during open hours, and 52.7% are comfortable entering the space after passing by.

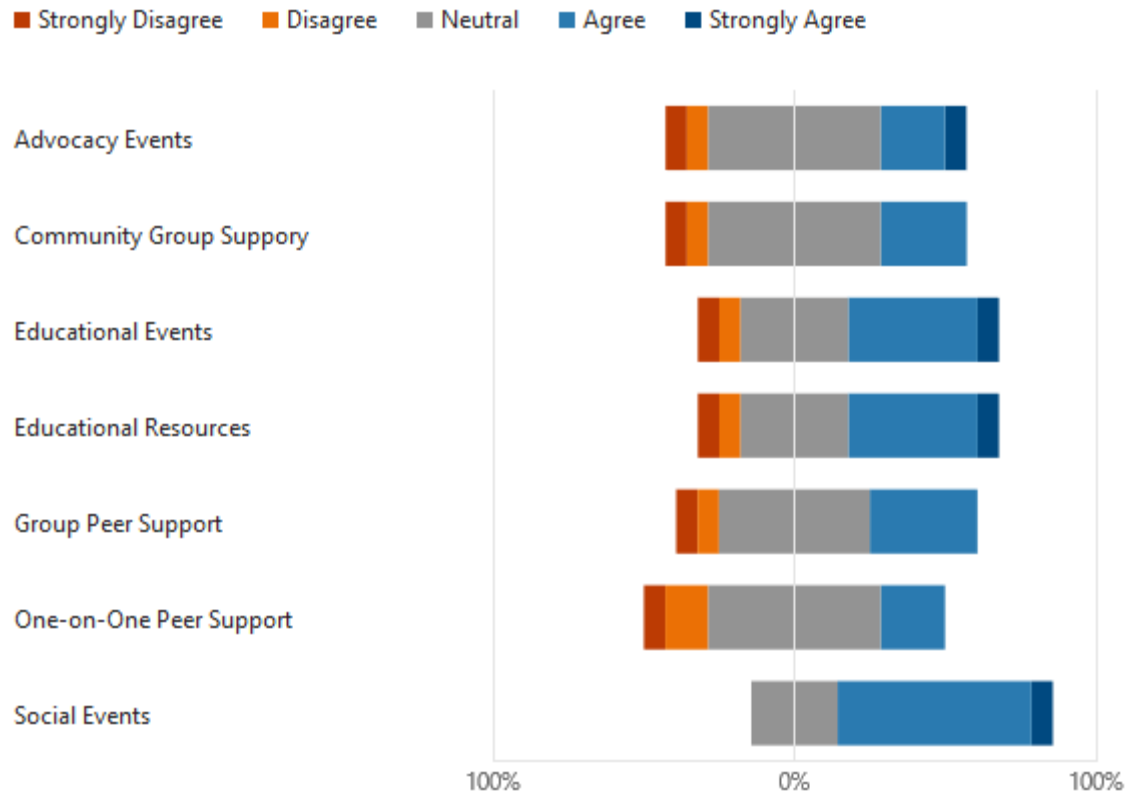


Figure 3. Responses to the question 'I have accessed the MSU WGEN space for the following reasons.'

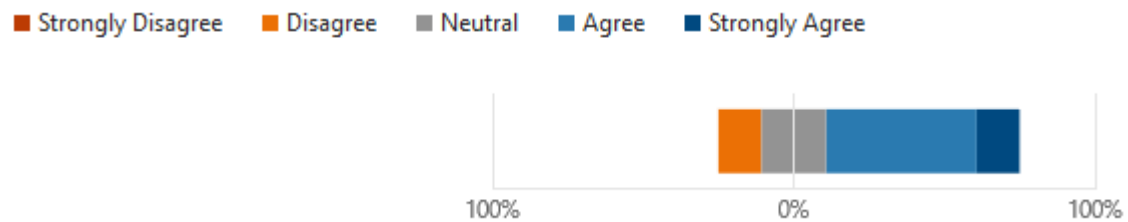


Figure 4. Responses to the question 'I feel comfortable going to MSU WGEN during open hours.'

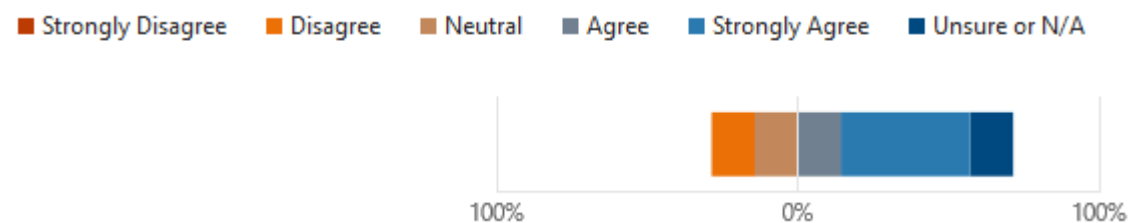


Figure 5. Responses to the question 'When passing by the MSU WGEN space, I am comfortable entering the space.'

35.7% of respondents believe the service is appropriately funded, with 57.1% being neutral, 42.8% believe it is appropriately staffed, with 50% neutral, and 57.1% believe it is appropriately supported, with 35.7% neutral. 14% of respondents have accessed the

service for peer support. 50% feel comfortable going to WGEN for peer support, as shown in Figure 6. 50% of respondents would recommend a peer to WGEN for peer support.

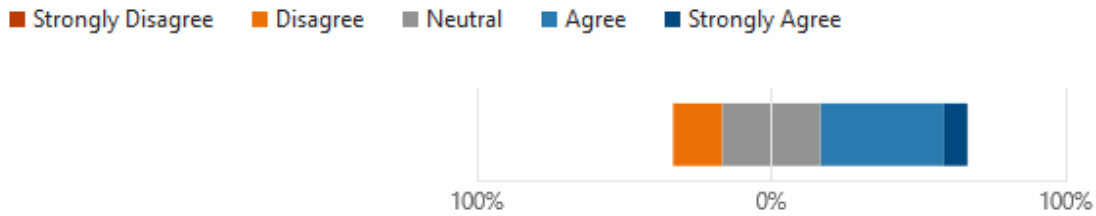


Figure 6. Responses to the question 'I feel comfortable going to MSU WGEN to receive peer support.'

Of the students who haven't interacted with the service, 27% have considered interacting before. An overwhelming majority of written answers say they were unaware of the service and what it provides, leading to lack of interaction.

Most responses regarding the physical space are positive, as shown in Figure 7.

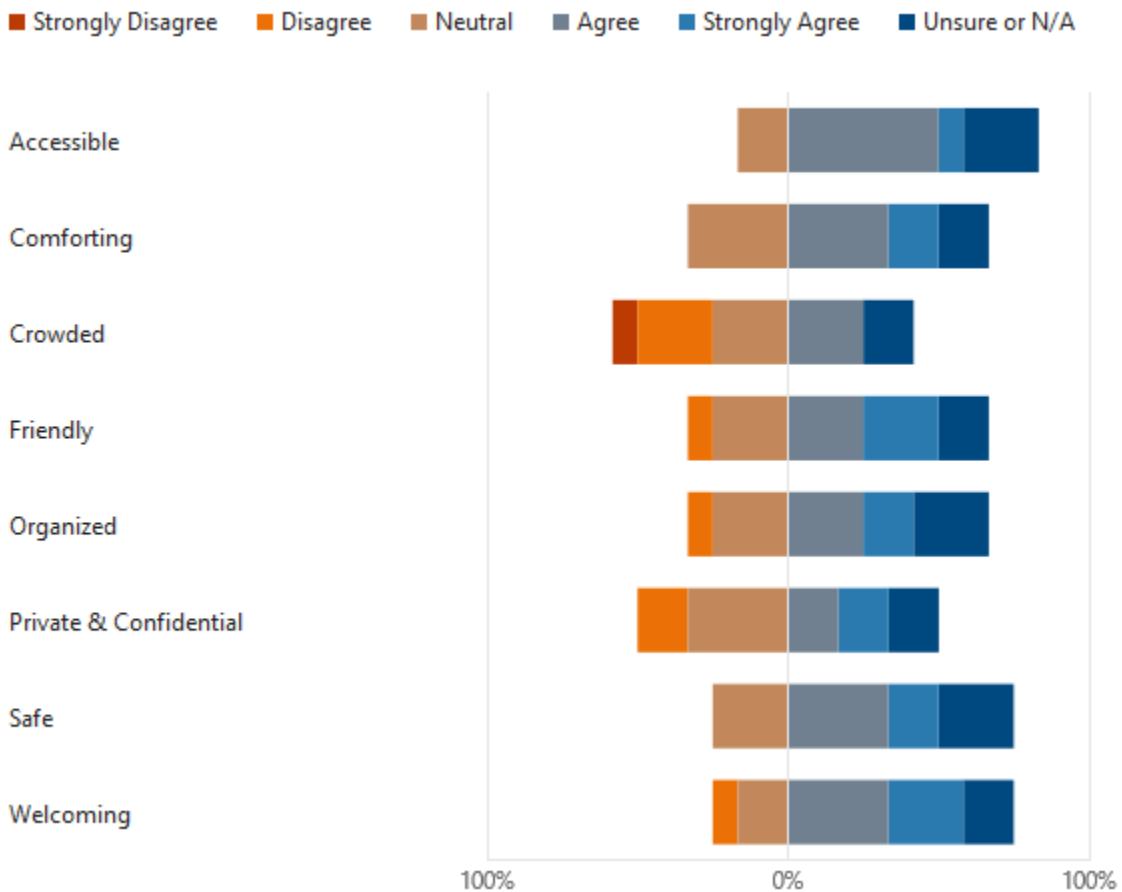


Figure 7. Responses to the question 'The MSU WGEN campus space felt.'

Most respondents (71.5%) are comfortable accessing menstrual products from WGEN, while 50% are comfortable accessing safe(r) sex products and 28.5% accessing gender-affirming products.

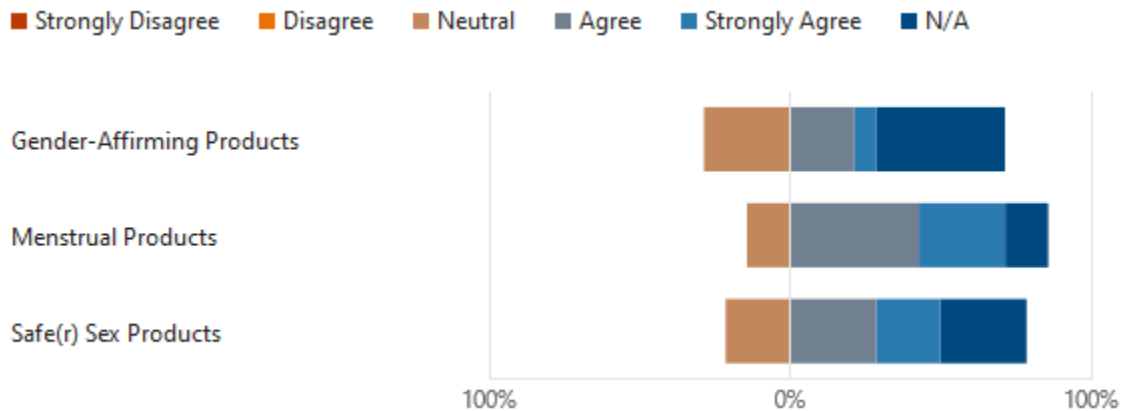


Figure 8. Responses to the question 'I felt comfortable accessing the following resources from MSU WGEN.'

External Research

The following services have similar mandates and purposes to MSU WGEN:

- Algoma University Students' Union has a Woman Affairs rep and a Queer and Trans Rep in their Board of Directors.
- Carleton University Students' Association has a Women's Centre, a dedicated space that provides support, education, and resources for women-identifying folks and those who face gender-based issues.
- Lakehead University Student Union has a Gender Equity Centre, which supports all Lakehead students through educational workshops, discussion groups and panels, conscious-raising caravans, and community events such as National Day of Action on Violence Against women, Take Back the Night, etc.
- Ontario Tech Students' Union has a Period Bank, and a project called the Period Project where students can access menstrual products.
- The Alma Mater Society of Queen's University has a general Peer Support Service that provides support to all undergrad students regarding personal grievances, mental health, discrimination and/or instances of oppression, and sexual violence. As part of the service management team, they have a Queers 4 Peers Assistant Manager. The society also started Gender Affirming Medical Care for students who have been diagnosed with gender dysphoria.
- The Guelph Central Student Association does not have a WGEN-equivalent service but did have a campaign called United for Equity that educated students on barrier-free access to post-secondary education regardless of race, sexual orientation, ability, gender identity, religion, age and socio-economic background.
- The University of Ottawa Student Union has a Feminist Resource Centre which advocates for gender equality on campus through fundraising, events, workshops, and more.
- The University of Toronto Students' Union has a Centre for Women and Trans People which offers events, programs, training, and mental health services to

- students, including peer support. It also has a Sexual Education Centre which provides safer sex supplies and services as well as peer support.
- The University of Toronto Mississauga Students Union has a general Peer Support Program for students.
 - The Waterloo Undergraduate Student's Association offers a Women's Centre which provides peer support, workshops, events, and campaigns to educate and support students.
 - The University of Western Ontario Students' Council offers a Gender Equity Network which works to support students of all gender identities through programming, events, advocacy, research, and social media. It also offers a general peer support service and a service called Free the Dot, which focuses on providing menstrual products to students.
 - The University of Windsor Students' Alliance has a Womxn's Centre which provides students with resources and information as well as a supporting environment.
 - The York Federation of Students has a group called Trans Bisexual Lesbian Gay Asexual at York, which provides a safer space for the queer, trans and asexual community.

Conclusion

1. Increase physical and social media promotions.

Most students who had not interacted with the service have done so because of lack of awareness. Further promotion of events through Instagram and physical posters around campus, coupled with collaborations with other groups, could help increase awareness. Making interactive content online (giveaways, Q&As on Instagram stories, for example) could be a stronger way to drive engagement since students can actively participate and share with their peers.

2. Promote access to educational resources and supplies.

Many students and executives agree that there is a lack of promotion surrounding resources and supplies in the space. Consider signage around the space and online promotions to ensure this aspect of the service is more well known. This could look like Q&As/Fact or Myth posts or weekly Instagram stories. One way to start would be to time promotions with the availability of these resources. Another way would be to create more initiatives like the current WGEN Library Project, where students can request resources.

3. Continue/expand collaborations with other MSU services.

Community circles and event collaborations are great ways to grow the community and create relationships with other services. Since WGEN has similar mandates to services such as Pride Community Centre, Student Health Education Centre, and Diversity + Equity Network, continue growing these collaborations and working together with these events. Consider more event collaborations and if feasible, start community circles in the fall semester.

Best,



Veronica Larrazabal Zea
Associate Vice-President (Services)
McMaster Students Union
avpservices@msu.mcmaster.ca