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## **Integrating Gender and Diversity in Management Education: Finding the Right Balance between ‘Integration and ‘Marginalization’**

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## **Abstract**

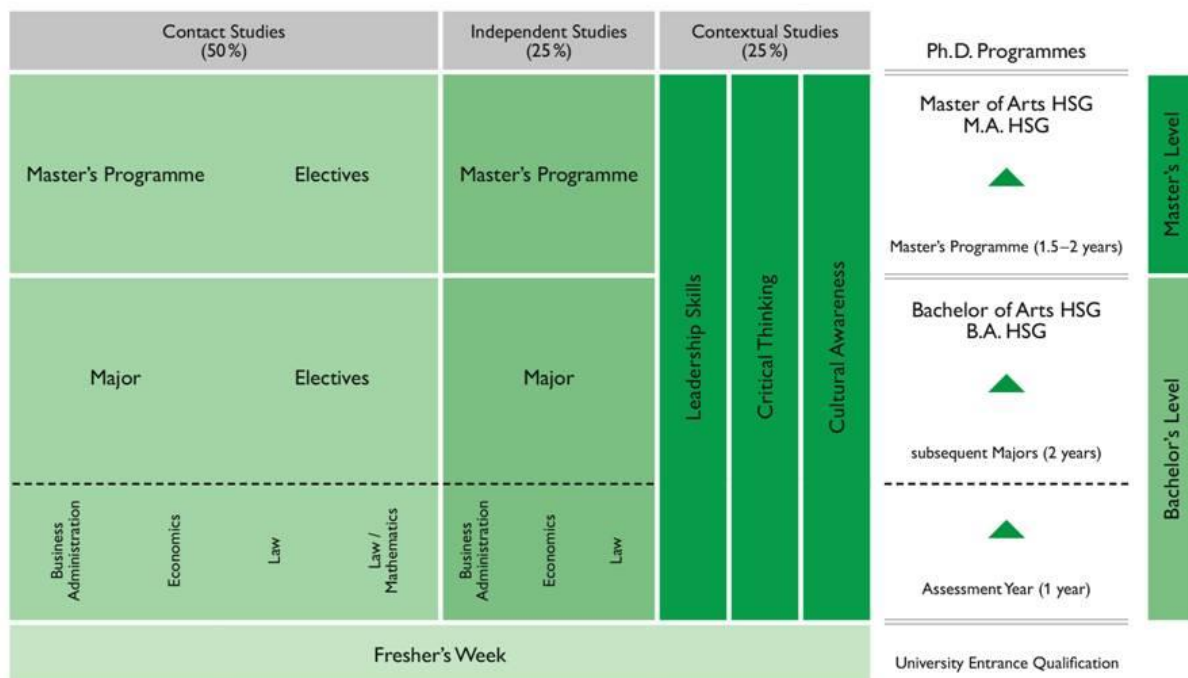
The University of St. Gallen stands out as one of the first business schools in German speaking countries to establish a gender and diversity study program. As this program has become a key part of St. Gallen's curriculum, we could draw the preliminary conclusion that our integration of gender and diversity topics into management education has been successful. However, this is not the full story. As the program is positioned as 'contextual studies', it is not seen as a core management issue and does not yet have a major effect on how we teach strategy, finance, leadership or human resource management. This chapter provides an overview of the Gender and Diversity Study Program and its achievements to date, but also discusses the challenges of 'mainstreaming' gender and diversity issues into management education. Our conclusion points out the need to deal with the balancing act of being integrated and excluded at the same time.

**Keywords:** Gender, Diversity, Management Education, Switzerland, Mainstreaming, Integration, Leadership

## **Introduction**

The University of St. Gallen is an internationally renowned business school ranked in the top tier of European business schools (Financial Times 2013) and a member of the CEMS alliance, an European network of universities offering a joint Master's degree program in International Management ([www.cems.org](http://www.cems.org)). It is well known in German speaking countries for its integrative management model and broad stakeholder orientation. The University of St. Gallen anticipated the current discussion on management education (Colby et al. 2011) at an early stage and in 2001 introduced its vision to become a 'learning space for students and executives' (Bieger 2011: 112). This vision was accompanied by a new teaching concept called 'contextual studies.' All students, regardless of their major, were required to obtain 25% of their credit points at the Bachelor's and the Master's levels from the electives offered under the heading of contextual studies. Contextual studies include courses in traditional social sciences and humanities such as sociology, psychology, history and philosophy as well as interdisciplinary fields such as gender and diversity studies, business ethics and area studies, the latter introducing students to culture, language and societies of Central and Eastern Europe, China and Latin America (See Figure 1.). A second pillar of contextual studies is the development of skills such as communication, presentation and teamworking skills. Contextual studies aim to develop students' personalities as future leaders and managers as well as their practical and interdisciplinary skills (Dyllick 2009).

Figure 1: „Three levels – three pillars: the course structure at the University of St. Gallen” (University of St. Gallen, *Undergraduate Studies Brochure 2013*, p. 9, reprinted with permission)



Contextual studies served as an ideal frame for the implementation of a gender and diversity study program. Originally financed by a national effort<sup>1</sup> to foster university education in gender studies in Switzerland, the University of St. Gallen was able to raise additional funding to develop and design a specific teaching program focused on gender and diversity issues in the fields of management, law and economics. The first courses were taught in the fall term of 2005. The following semesters, the program expanded to a curriculum that now comprises an annual average of ten courses at the Bachelor's level (24 ECTS<sup>2</sup>)

and five courses at the Master's level (15 ECTS). With this broad offering, students can choose to exclusively focus on gender and diversity issues in their contextual studies course load and hence develop a unique competence in this area. As the Gender and Diversity Study

<sup>1</sup> The Swiss University Conference (SUC) launched several programmes to foster equal opportunities of women and men at universities and to implement Gender Studies at the universities. See <http://www.crus.ch/information-programme/programme-cus-p-4-equal-opportunity-gender-studies.html?L=2>, accessed November 30<sup>th</sup> 2013.

<sup>2</sup> 'ECTS' stands for 'European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System'. It was introduced to enhance transparency and comparability of study programmes. One ECTS equals 25-30 hours of work from a student's perspective ([http://ec.europa.eu/education/tools/ects\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/tools/ects_en.htm), accessed June 28<sup>th</sup> 2014).

Program has become an essential part of contextual studies, one could conclude that the integration of gender and diversity topics into management education has been a success.

However, this is not the full story. As the program is positioned in the contextual studies block, the gender and diversity topic is not fully recognized as a core management issue and has yet to have a major impact on how we teach strategy, finance, leadership or human resource management in St. Gallen. In this chapter we introduce St. Gallen's Gender and Diversity Study Program. We then look into the curriculum design and teaching objectives and analyze the advantages as well as the unexplored opportunities. Our analysis sheds light on a best-practice example of implementing gender and diversity topics within management education, while also pointing out some of the challenges of integrating gender and diversity into management education.

### **The Gender and Diversity Study Program**

The University of St. Gallen's Gender and Diversity Study Program was initially introduced as an elective in the contextual studies block. It provided students in all Bachelor's and Master's programs with the possibility to obtain competence in the field of gender and diversity. While the curriculum was designed to make the program a *de facto* equivalent of a minor, only a couple of students per year enrolled in all of the offered courses. The majority of students chose one or two courses from the program. Some students also wrote their Bachelor's or Master's thesis on a gender and diversity topic, adding further gender and diversity competences to their profiles. Overall, the courses in the program have experienced high take-up rates. While some Bachelor's-level courses regularly reached the maximum number of 60 enrolled students, some of the Master's-level courses' take-up rates varied between 15 in one and 50 students in another semester.

The syllabus content and learning objectives of courses in the Gender and Diversity Study Program were jointly developed by the project manager and an interdisciplinary task group consisting of academics teaching at the University of St. Gallen and representing the core disciplines of management, law, international relations and economics. Courses are taught by various St. Gallen faculty members as well as external lecturers with particular practical or academic competences in the field. We also regularly invite international scholars to teach scientifically cutting-edge courses.

The learning objectives are different for courses at the Bachelor's and Master's levels. The objectives also depend to some extent on the association with the three pillars of contextual studies: 'leadership skills,' 'cultural awareness', and 'critical thinking.' Courses that aim to develop leadership skills focus on management techniques and competencies with a practitioner orientation. Topics that are being taught on a regular basis are gender and diversity management, gender mainstreaming, gender and intercultural communication, team diversity, and gender budgeting. (See Figures 2 and 3.) Courses teaching cultural awareness tackle issues of gender and diversity in specific geographical areas from a historical, cultural or literary perspective. Finally, within the critical thinking pillar, students are introduced to the main concepts in gender and diversity studies. For instance, at the Bachelor's level, students become acquainted with gender and diversity as social and cultural constructs (Tienari and Nentwich 2012), are introduced to the concept of 'doing gender' and obtain basic knowledge in feminist theory's perspectives on equality, sameness and difference (Alvesson and Billing 2009). Students are also taught how to apply their knowledge to practical problems.

Figure 2: Bachelor's Courses Offered Between 2005 and 2012 at the University of St. Gallen.

<b>Critical Thinking</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Managing Difference: Diversity and Work Life Balance in an Organizational Context</li> <li>- Gender, Work and Family: A Biographical Perspective</li> <li>- Diversity and Discrimination: Social Psychological Perspectives and Interventions</li> <li>- Sex and Gender: An Introduction to Gender Studies</li> <li>- Ways to Succeed? Economic Elites and Gender</li> <li>- Global Justice from Perspectives of Philosophy and Economics</li> </ul>
<b>Cultural Awareness</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Gender, Sex and Crime: China's Social and Cultural History</li> <li>- City Girls: Images of Women in the City</li> <li>- Peasants, Prostitutes and the Poor: Subalterns Making History</li> </ul>
<b>Leadership Skills</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Communication and Conflict: Gender Specific and Intercultural Aspects</li> <li>- Gender and Diversity Management</li> <li>- Team Diversity: Challenges of Collaboration in Heterogeneous Teams</li> <li>- Responsibility, Leadership and Gender</li> <li>- DiverCity: Gender and Diversity in Urban Planning</li> <li>- Everyday Life and Multiplicity: New Perspectives on Culture</li> <li>- War, peace and gender: Simulation of a United Nations Security Council's meeting</li> </ul>

At the Master's level, courses aim to critically analyze the program's core topics from gender and diversity perspectives. Students learn to reflect on how gender and diversity issues are theorized in their distinctive field of expertise. For instance, in one of our courses, students critically investigate how gender is theorized in the St. Gallen Management Model (Rüegg-Stürm 2003) and reflect upon the conceptual consequences of theorizing gender from the sameness, the difference and the social construction perspective (Alvesson and Billing 2009). Through a co-teaching arrangement this course offers an interdisciplinary perspective that enables the students to dismantle the apparent gender neutrality of mainstream economics and management theory.

Figure 3: Master's Courses Offered Between 2005 and 2012 at the University of St. Gallen

<b>Critical Thinking</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Gender, Managerial Identities and Careers</li> <li>- Gender Issues in the Work Life Context (from Economic and Social Psychological Perspectives)</li> <li>- 'Gender Goes Management': The New St. Gallen Management Model from a Gender Perspective</li> <li>- Social Structure: Gender, Generation and Class</li> <li>- Gender in Management and Law</li> <li>- Gender, Organizations and the Knowledge Economy</li> <li>- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion at Work</li> <li>- Doing Business like a Real Man? Gender and Entrepreneurship</li> </ul>
<b>Cultural Awareness</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Change and Persistence in Gender Relations in Switzerland since 1945</li> <li>- Gender and Modernity (in French and German Literature and Film)</li> <li>- 'Murderous Women' – Gender Positioning in Women's Crime Novels</li> <li>- 'The President's Body': Scripts of Masculinity in Putin's Russia</li> <li>- Gender in China: Femininity and Masculinity Yesterday and Today</li> <li>- Gender and Economics (in Literary and Economic Writings)</li> </ul>
<b>Leadership Skills</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Gender and Diversity Competence as a Leadership Task</li> <li>- 'Enjoy Diversity' – a Theoretical as well as Real Life Expedition</li> <li>- Football Stadiums or Nurseries? Gender Budgeting in Practice</li> </ul>

Communicating the relevance of gender and diversity issues to students has been crucial to create awareness of the program and its contents. In addition to a program website ([www.genderportal.unisg.ch](http://www.genderportal.unisg.ch)) a marketing brochure and postcards with information about the program and courses were offered. One key didactical strategy was to design the Bachelor's-

level courses around students' mundane experiences. For instance, when introducing theory and empirical research on 'doing gender,' we focus on the issue of women in leadership positions and their everyday struggles. As most of our business students envision themselves as future leaders, female students perceive this topic as highly relevant. Furthermore, the course assignment provides a unique chance to interview one of Switzerland's top 100 business women, as portrayed in the Swiss magazine *Women in Business*. Besides the opportunity to study theories of doing gender, this assignment allows students to apply their theoretical knowledge by analyzing the challenges discussed in the interviews.

Although the program's title implies that both gender and diversity are crucial issues, it is important to explain why most courses focus on gender issues. This results from both the program's history as well as the special situation in Switzerland. First of all, the program's objective was to integrate gender studies topics in management education. It was funded by a national effort to foster education in gender studies. In the conceptual phase of the project it became obvious that diversity was developing into an important management topic internationally. Therefore it became crucial to connect the program to this development. In Switzerland, however, diversity management is primarily viewed as an important topic for large and international companies (Nentwich et al. 2010). To the extent that diversity topics are important for Swiss enterprises, gender diversity has usually been the main focus (Müller and Sander 2011). Swiss companies have a lot of experience in integrating foreign employees and managers, but very little experience in integrating women in (top) management positions. 45% of the members of top management teams of the largest 100 companies in Switzerland are foreigners, whereas only 6 % are female. In the boards of these companies 36 % are foreigners and 12 % are female. Almost 50% of the woman in top management do not hold a Swiss passport (Schilling Report 2013).

### **The Balancing Act between Fully Integrating and Marginalizing Gender and Diversity**

Having outlined the major pillars and objectives of the University of St. Gallen's Gender and Diversity Study Program, we can conclude that it was successful in integrating gender and diversity issues into management education. However, taking a critical perspective, it is clear that a major part of the road to be travelled still lies ahead. The program faces challenges that are typical for any social or organizational change process and begs the question: Do special programs for 'marginalized' groups or issues lead to real integration or do they – on the contrary – rather contribute to deeper marginalization?



While the university's decision to distinguish between core and contextual studies was a great catalyst to integrate the topic in the first place, it can also be interpreted as a way of practicing resistance against the integration of gender and diversity issues in management education (Swan, Stead and Elliott 2009). Whereas topics like strategy, banking and finance, human resource management, organizational behavior, leadership, and marketing belong to 'core' and not to 'contextual studies', the topic of gender and diversity was effectively left on the sideline by defining it as 'context only.' The consequence of this is that it is still possible today to graduate from St. Gallen University without ever having engaged with gender and diversity topics. In addition, while cultural differences, corporate social responsibility and international challenges are likely to be addressed within the core subjects, gender role expectations may never be touched upon in the core curriculum. On the road towards mainstreaming gender and diversity issues in the core areas of management, it is probably necessary to go through a series of incremental changes, both in terms of the curricula as well as the university's culture. These are processes that are fraught with challenges (Katila, Merliäinen and Tienari 2010).

What are the obstacles of integrating gender issues into the core areas of management? First, a key problem is to acquire faculty members that promote gender as a relevant topic within the core curricula. As the majority of lecturers and professors are heterosexual and male and gender and diversity issues are not their main research field, this is a major effort that would take extra time and resources. In order to develop the program further, professors teaching the core subjects would have to be competent in integrating gender and diversity issues (Bierema 2010).

A second problem is *how* and *where* to address the topic. Teaching one or two lessons on female leadership styles might inadvertently result in a reinforcement of stereotypes instead of a critical discussion on the complex interdependencies of these topics because of either the limited time or cutting short on theoretical complexity (Amoroso et al. 2010). Thus, one question is how to maintain contextual studies' critical function in the mainstreaming process.

The third problem is directly connected to the issue of quality in teaching gender issues in management education. What is needed are persons that are proficient in both gender studies and management. Without this background in state of the art theorizing on gender and

diversity, lecturers will not cover the subject in sufficient depth. On the other hand, they primarily need to be experts in their research field, as this is obviously crucial for the legitimacy of the topic and the lecturer. Inviting guest lecturers or the possibility of team teaching would be first steps in this direction and would enable mutual learning for the lecturers. For instance, as the University of St. Gallen has strong relations with the business world and a broad executive education program, it has proved to be helpful if CEOs or managers address these topics in their guest lectures and if the topics are brought up by participants in executive education.

It has become clear that organizing management education along two major tracks of ‘core’ and ‘context’ produces a difficult balancing act: what is integrated into business education as contextual studies is integrated and marginalized at the same time. Establishing this firm dichotomy produces a paradoxical relationship as it even reinforces the difference between ‘core’ (important) and ‘context’ (less important) and hence contributes to the marginalization of the context. Although gender and diversity issues are promoted as highly relevant to management education (Bell et al. 2009), they are at the same time placed on the sidelines and defined as ‘not *as* relevant’ as long as they are positioned in the ‘context’ part.

From this perspective, St. Gallen has yet another story to tell. Although diversity management is an important topic relevant to subjects such as human resource management, organizational behavior, leadership, strategic management and change management, the topic was neither dealt with in those core management courses, nor was it offered as an elective. Hence, diversity as a management issue has been left largely untouched by management education’s ‘core’ block. However, as diversity management in Switzerland was too important to be ignored, we started offering courses on diversity management in the Gender and Diversity Study Program and hence within the contextual studies block. Teaching these courses was perceived as difficult at times as this meant to subscribe to a double agenda: First we had to provide students solid knowledge in the *management* of diversity and second we had to teach them how to critically contextualize these freshly learned skills. As a matter of fact, teaching diversity management required subverting the structural binary of ‘core’ vs. ‘context.’ Interestingly, students soon realized the paradoxical nature of this endeavor. In one of our classes they started to discuss why these important issues are not being taught in compulsory courses such as strategic management. Subverting the curriculum’s boundaries hence enabled us to create relevance for a topic that has been largely neglected in mainstream management

education. This example points out the need to address the balancing act of being integrated and excluded at the same time in the process of integrating gender and diversity issues into management education.

The project of integrating gender and diversity issues into St. Gallen's management curriculum might also tell us something about the functioning of contextual studies from an organizational perspective. Regardless of the extent to which we currently consider gender and diversity issues to be integrated into the management curriculum, we have strong doubts that it would have been possible to set the gender and diversity agenda without being able to make use of contextual studies as a door opener. 'Contextual studies' served as an entrance ticket for a marginalized field to enter the field of management education in the first place. 'Contextual studies' allowed us to seriously engage students with a full curriculum in gender and diversity studies. This strategy of building up expertise as a first step is something also found in companies. . For instance, by implementing the position of "head of diversity", or an "office for equality" or a "service center for equal opportunities," management may build up knowledge and expertise within the company. The next step would then be to foster cultural change and engage in mainstreaming activities. However, while creating the position of the diversity manager seems to be crucial for diversity management's impact (Kalev et al), companies starting mainstreaming activities without such a formal position rather engaged in superficial 'window-dressing' activities only. Without the necessary accompanying cultural change that gender and diversity experts are enabled to support, these activities do not unfold their full impact (Müller and Sander 2011).

From such a process perspective of diversity management as organizational change, 'contextual studies' can be depicted as an organizational solution to develop and introduce innovations. Such a setup enables new topics to enter into business education, without having to compete directly with the established core curriculum. As almost anything can be positioned in the context of management education, contextual studies provide flexibility and room to experiment with new and challenging topics, including topics that may be important in the education of the next generation of managers - or prove to be entirely unimportant. As nobody can predict the future, we consider this openness and flexibility as an important asset that allows for the university's future development.

Looking into the future, we are convinced that contextual studies finally served as an entrance ticket. Diversity management is on its way to become a compulsory and central topic within St. Gallen's curriculum. In fact, diversity management has been an elective within the core studies since 2010. The Gender and Diversity Study Program in contextual studies has been granted a permanent lectureship in 2012 and is hence no longer dependent on project funding. We are convinced that the first professorship will follow soon.

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