Recommendations to Improve the Safety and Functionality of the Vagina Memoirs Process

MOTION: ASB-12-W-46 Table the Vagina Memoirs Facilitator Position Proposal and Job Description pending an assessment of the program’s operation including the ability to ensure a safe experience of student staff, volunteers and participants. The result of this assessment and any related action is to come back to the Board before the third to last meeting in spring quarter, at the latest.

In response to the above motion (March 12, 2012), the following recommendations are the results of the feedback gathered from former and current Women’s Center (WC) Staff Members and Volunteer Vagina Memoirs Facilitators.

Through our meetings with former and current WC staff members and Volunteer Facilitators, we have seen three overall areas that can be improved upon in order to ensure the best possible process for all involved with the Vagina Memoirs: Communication, Support, Logistics, and Alternative Programming for those not selected for cast. The following are our recommendations for those involved in the Vagina Memoirs process in the future. This program has grown exponentially over the last 8 years and is now the largest program on campus, serving over 2,000 students. We believe this is an invaluable program on WWU’s campus and hope that these recommendations will help the process to be sustainable and safe for many years.

Communication:

1. Selection of Volunteer Facilitators

   The process of selecting the Volunteer Facilitators over the last several years has deprived the WC staff of the opportunity to be involved in the process. In order to ensure that the Memoirs process stays intricately connected to the WC and to ensure the best possible individuals are in the position, we believe the process of selecting Volunteer Facilitators should be professionalized. We recommend that a formal job description is created in order to lay-out all the expectations and responsibilities and that the job description is posted on the AS jobs website. The selection process should mirror AS hiring with a search committee (including the ROP Director, Lisa Rosenberg, WC Coordinator or Assistant Coordinator, and the Hired Memoirs Facilitator). This process should occur in the beginning of the quarter and the hiring should occur during the 2nd week of October. Furthermore, the Volunteer Facilitators need to be trained in relevant AS policies. This has caused issues in the past where the Volunteer Facilitators were either unaware of or ignored AS policy to the detriment of the process. We recommend that the ROP Director and Advisor, with support with the WC staff and the Hired Facilitator, train the Volunteer Facilitators in providing safe space and AS Policy.

2. Improving Communication Between Volunteer Facilitators and the WC Staff

   The WC chose to select Volunteer Facilitators for the Vagina Memoirs process two years ago in an attempt to alleviate the intense stress and time commitment for the WC staff. However, it was recognized that a WC staff member still needed to be part of the process in order to keep the program connected to the WC and to ensure all logistical aspects were covered and Associated Students’ policies were fulfilled. Due to the limited
time availability of the WC staff member and the dynamic that has been created in hiring
outside Facilitators, communication challenges have emerged. These communication
issues have created a tense working environment for all the relevant parties. Saraswati
Noel, volunteer facilitator from the 2011 cast, stated “it strained the personal and working
relationships between the Facilitators and the staff.” In order to create clearer
expectations and rectify the communications challenge, we have developed several
proposals.

A. Create an Expectations Contract
This contract, signed by the WC Staff and the Volunteer Facilitators, would outline the
expectations for all parties during the Memoirs process. This would include obligations
for communication check-ins, deadlines for completing logistical tasks, expectations for
resolving potential conflicts, and a commitment to an open and accountable process.

B. Jointly planning and facilitating the Open Casting Call
For the last two years, the casting process has been a point of contention between the WC
staff and the Volunteer Facilitators. As WC Coordinator from 2010-2011 Lizzie Lamb,
commented, “The Volunteer Facilitators started planning the processes without the
involvement of the WC.” Since this is a WC program, the planning process for the
auditions must be a joint effort between the WC staff (Coordinator or Assistant
Coordinator) and the Facilitators (Hired and Volunteer). Later in this document, you will
find our suggestions as to how the WC staff and Facilitators can equally share in the
process of facilitating the auditions.

C. Weekly Meetings between WC staff (Coordinator or Assistant Coordinator),
    Proposed Hired Facilitator, and the Volunteer Facilitators
While the WC staff member that has served as a facilitator or liaison for the past two
years has been responsible for relaying information between the WC staff and the
Volunteer Facilitators, the WC staff has felt very disconnected from the facilitation
process and the Volunteer Facilitators have not had their logistical needs fully attended
to. An uncomfortable “go-between” dynamic has been created that has harmed the
process as a whole. We propose that the WC staff (either the Coordinator or Assistant
Coordinator depending on who takes the “lead” in the Memoirs logistical tasks), the
Hired Facilitator, and the Volunteer Facilitators have weekly check-in meetings to review
the process, to discuss any logistical needs, and to hold each other accountable for the
expectations in the contract. The staff and Facilitators should also check-in about any
safety and emotional needs for each other and the cast members.

3. Auditions Process
   A. WC staff Facilitate Activities
   The auditions process is broken up into two components: introductory
   activities/writing and interviews. In order for the WC staff to establish a connection with
   potential cast members, the WC coordinators should facilitate the ice
   breakers/introduction activities. This could include the “body weather” exercise, or any
   others that the WC staff feel is appropriate and fun. As the interviews take place, the WC
   staff can facilitate the writing exercise and assist those auditioning through the writing
   process. So that the WC staff is not overly stressed by auditions week, we recommend
that at least two WC staff stays each night, so that each coordinator has one night off. We also recommend that the WC invite former cast members and the WC interns to be part of the logistics facilitation of the process.

B. Interview Process

Because the Facilitators will work with helping the cast throughout the entire memoir-writing process, the three Facilitators will be the only ones conducting interviews/hearing each individual’s story. These Facilitators should be one hired AS employee (the Flired Memoirs Facilitator) and two Volunteer Facilitators well trained in AS policy.

C. Activities During Interview Process, Interview Organization

While the Facilitators are interviewing, those auditioning will eventually finish their writing exercises and will want an additional activity to occupy their time and help them cope with their nerves before the interview. We recommend engaging the potential cast members in more “getting to know you” activities. These activities should be fun so that people leave feeling they had a positive experience, even if they don’t make it into the cast. We also recommend that the WC staff and Facilitators consider having those auditioning sign-up for interview time slots. The interviews have lasted until 10:30-11pm every night for the last several years. In order to ensure that those auditioning have their time respected, we believe signing-up for slots so people can do homework meanwhile may help to alleviate some of the stress.

4. Cast Selection Process

We believe that the Facilitators (Volunteer and Hired) should ultimately be responsible for selecting the cast, as they will be the ones conducting the interviews. However, since this is a WC program, we believe having the Facilitators inform the WC staff of the selections before informing the cast would help to keep the process connected with the WC. The WC staff could also be part of the notification process in order to show to the cast that this program is part of the AS, which may reduce some of the tension that has arisen between cast members and the WC.

5. Post-Selection Meeting with WC Staff and Facilitators

In order to ensure the best possible communication and cooperation between the WC staff and Facilitators, we recommend that everyone meet to discuss the preparations for the first December cast meeting, create deadlines and a calendar for completing logistical milestones, and discuss how to best continue with open and direct communication. Facilitating and planning the Memoirs needs to be an intentional process. We believe that the communication norms, available resources, and self-care recommendations should be reiterated in this meeting.

6. First Official Cast Meeting in January

A. The first meeting will also be an opportunity to inform the cast members about what the WC is and what we offer, and relay what the roles of WC staff are in the Memoirs. Over the last few years, a disconnect between the WC staff and cast has developed with the WC staff being perceived as the logistical and policy task-
masters, which has developed resentment. We recommend that the WC will lead activities during the first meeting. These activities will be intended to set the tone of the process, familiarize cast with WC staff, and convey the resources and support available during and after the Memoirs process. These activities will be designed by the Facilitators (Hired and Volunteer) with recommendations by previous Facilitators and WC staff. A meeting to decide on activities should occur as soon as Facilitators are chosen and familiarized with the process. Typically, the first cast meeting in January has consisted of a privilege and oppression training. We recommend that the WC staff works on the curriculum and assists with implementing of this program at this meeting as well.

Support:
The Vagina Memoirs is inherently an emotional process for the cast, Facilitators, and WC staff due to the heavy content discussed. This has had physical, emotional, and mental repercussions for the parties involved. We recognize that the Facilitators are students and not trained counselors and believe that the Memoirs process must create a support structure outside of the cast meetings to ensure that all involved leave the process in a better space and are not re-traumatized or impacted personally or academically.

1. Fall quarter training for facilitators
   a. Hired facilitator trains volunteer facilitators in group and discussion facilitation skills during fall quarter. This includes discussing managing group dynamics, boundaries for cast members and staff. Training should also include creating a schedule and outline of cast meetings, including activities.
   b. The hired facilitator is primarily in charge of maintaining safety for cast, crew and audience members. Fall training is a time to discuss with volunteer facilitators how safety will be ensured, what likely scenarios are, and how best to respond. Communication norms about safety issues should be set. Role-playing scenarios involving boundary management and ensuring safety would be appropriate.
   c. The hired facilitator is responsible for maintaining compliance with AS policy throughout the entire Memoirs process. Train volunteer facilitators on main points of policy.

-FT F ir st Official Cast Meeting
  a. Many students on campus are unaware of the different resources available on campus and in our community to provide support. We recommend that the Facilitators and WC staff bring representatives from the Counseling Center and CASAS to the very first cast meeting in January in order to familiarize the cast with these resources. We also recognize that some students do not feel comfortable utilizing the services that a counseling center provides and recommend working with the WWU Counseling Center in the Fall to develop a list of different resources in the community that could be offered to the cast.
Facilitators Mandated to Have Meeting with Counseling Center

a. The Facilitators of the Memoirs often end up serving in a supportive role to the cast by default because they believe it is their responsibility as a Facilitator. At times, this support role has moved into a realm where the Facilitators are no longer comfortable or qualified. This has had negative consequences for those involved. Part of this issue stems from the fact that the Facilitators believe it is their duty to help and support the cast in every way possible. We recommend that the Facilitators be mandated to have a meeting with Counseling Center staff prior to beginning the facilitation process in order to gain the tools and skills necessary to discern when cast members should be referred to another group or individual. This could be similar to the training the Resource and Outreach Programs staff receives at the beginning of the school year.

Resources at the Show

a. The audience at the Vagina Memoirs is nearly always strongly impacted by the stories and words they hear. In order to ensure that the individuals who attend the show are able to walk away feelings supported, we recommend that the Facilitators and WC staff provide resources and “action opportunities” at the conclusion of each show.

Logistical:

1. V-Week Planning and Tabling
   Tabling during the week prior to the Memoirs (V-Week) and the week of the shows for advertising is a heavy time commitment for all involved. The cast is frequently at a higher stress level during this time. While we believe it is important for the cast to be involved in the advertising process, it is also important to ensure their time is respected and put to good use. We recommend that the WC staff and Facilitators offer the cast the opportunity to table and that the WC staff recruit volunteers to advertise during the remaining house. All those tabling, including volunteers, cast, staff, and facilitators, should be trained on the appropriate advertising language and “class wrap.” Furthermore, the WC staff should be involved in taking the tabling supplies out every day and bringing them back in and should be responsible for ensuring that all supplies are readily available for those tabling.

2. Improving the Advertising Creation and Distribution Process and Merchandise Purchasing
   A. Advertising, promotion, and merchandise have been one of the biggest logistical issues during the Memoirs process. While the cast’s involvement in designing the “logo” for the posters and merchandise is valuable, there is not enough time for the cast to create and vote on the design and give the Publicity Center sufficient time to modify the work – put it on posters, banners, and handbills – and order the merchandise. We recommend that the WC staff in conjunction with the Hired and Facilitators (Hired and Volunteer) select a “logo” in the Fall before the auditions and use it consistently throughout the entire process – for the casting call posters, the show posters, and merchandise.
T2. Planning for Show Introductions and Speeches
a. We recommend that the WC staff and Facilitators establish who will be saying what at each of the shows in a planning meeting prior.

4r3. De-Brief Meetings with WC staff, ROP Director, Lisa Rosenberg, and Facilitators
a. In order to ensure that the memoirs continues to be a successful program that develops from year to year, we believe that the above mentioned parties should be involved in de-briefing meetings to provide recommendations and examine the success and challenges of the process for that year.

Evaluations Process for Cast
a. The Memoirs process is incredibly emotionally intense and the cast has responded that they often feel a letdown at the conclusion of the process. We believe that in order to gain sufficient feedback from the cast about the process and continue to build on the community experience for the cast, the Facilitators and WC staff should host a follow-up meeting to debrief the process and provide “bonding time.”

Alternative Opportunity for those who are not selected for cast:
Each year, 80 students audition for the Vagina Memoirs and the Facilitators can only select 13-17 cast members. We recommend that the Assistant Coordinator of Creative Programming provide those who audition but are not selected with an alternative venue for expression. Oftentimes the Memoirs is not the perfect fit for people, but we want to provide and implement alternatives. Labyrinth is an obvious alternative—it better fits individuals who are more writing, rather than public speaking, oriented. The Assistant Coordinator for Creative Programming should advertise Labyrinth at the auditions as an alternative or supplemental activity to the Memoirs. Additionally, if Erotic Poetry night is done again, that should be advertised as well. The Assistant Coordinator for Creative Programming is required to come up with expression based events throughout the year; this WC staff member should provide all those who audition with information about alternatives regardless of if they are selected for the cast.
About the Position

The Women's Center Vagina Memoirs Coordinator plans, facilitates, and implements the Women's Center annual production of the Vagina Memoirs.

About the Department

The Associated Student Resource & Outreach Programs (ROP) provides information, advocacy, activities and peer-to-peer education to Western students. The seven centers within the ROP strive to empower and support all members of Western's diverse community. The ROP also provides the opportunity for Western's students to gain valuable work and life experience. The Women's Center is committed to supporting, educating and connecting all people on campus around gender related interests and issues. We provide a safe space to share experiences, resources and referrals, and programs that raise awareness and spark dialogue. The WC promotes gender equality, solidarity against violence and a healthy, inclusive culture for people of all identities.

The AS Women's Center (WC) is committed to supporting, educating, empowering, and connecting all people on campus around gender related interests and issues. We provide a safe space to share experiences, resources and referrals, and programs that raise awareness and spark and foster dialogue. The WC promotes gender equality, solidarity against violence and a healthy, inclusive culture for people of all identities.

Term of Position

This is a two quarter position. This position starts the Monday one week before the start of classes fall quarter and ends the Friday of Finals week Winter Quarter. The position is allotted 85 paid hours in Fall Quarter and will be salaried at the Assistant Coordinator level during Winter Quarter averaging 15 hours per week. Some work may be required during winter break.

AS Employment Qualifications

- Maintain a minimum credit load throughout term of position of 6 credits for undergraduates and 4 credits for graduates.
- Maintain a minimum of a 2.00 cumulative grade point average.
- Ability to complete the entire term of the position.

Preferred Qualifications

- Organizational and time management skills.
- Ability to communicate and work effectively with a wide variety of people.
- Ability to work independently and responsibly.
- Ability to work collaboratively with multiple people and organizations.
- Ability to work within deadlines and problem solve.
• Basic knowledge of department and position specific responsibilities.

® Ability to work flexible hours.
® Knowledge of or experience with event planning.
• Knowledge of issues and identities related to the intersecting forms of feminism
• Experience in group facilitation.
• Knowledge of or experience in coaching and guiding individuals as they process trauma.
• Knowledge of or experience with facilitating creative expression activities.

AS Employment Responsibilities
• Serve the diverse membership of the Associated Students in a professional and ethical manner by:
  o Being familiar with and upholding the AS Charter, all WWU policies, and all AS policies including the Employment Policy, Code of Conduct, and Program Standards,
  o Being knowledgeable of the AS organization and its general operations,
  o Attending staff development events as assigned by the AS Personnel Office.

• Ensure the legacy of this position by:
  o Working with supervisor and Personnel Director to revise and update position job description.

Position Responsibilities
• Deliver educational, social, and community building opportunities and support to the campus community through facilitation of the Vagina Memoirs by:
  o Working with the Women's Center staff to hire volunteer co-facilitators for the Vagina Memoirs.
  o Collaborating with the Women's Center staff and hired volunteer facilitators to create advertising for the Casting Call and Production,
  o Planning and implementing the Casting Call for the production and strategically selecting a cast in consultation with the Women's Center staff,
  o Organizing and facilitating all cast meetings, cast activities, and rehearsal times beginning at the end of Fall Quarter,
  o Providing emotional support and guidance to cast members and making referrals to appropriate campus and community resources as appropriate,
  o Selecting appropriate writing exercises and exploration activities to help the cast in developing their memoirs,
  o Attending and managing all Memoirs performances.
  o Providing legacy documents about the facilitation process including detailed notes about the different activities.
  o Maintaining regular communication through weekly meetings with the Women's Center Coordinator or Assistant Coordinator.
  o Holding 2-4 posted office hours per week in the Women's Center for planning, communicating with Women's Center staff, and being available for discussions with cast members.
  o Providing a confidential, safe and inclusive space for students.
  o Assisting in the logistical development of the production including ordering merchandise, organizing tabling and merchandise sales, event set-up and technical needs, selecting
benefit beneficiaries, organizing community resources at the show, compiling the program, and inputting evaluations after the production,

- During Fall quarter train volunteer facilitators on how to appropriately facilitate meetings (including boundaries), monitor safety of cast and other facilitators, utilize campus and community referrals, and create schedule and outlines of cast meetings,

- Work with Women's Center staff and volunteer facilitators to ensure audience safety, including identifying "safe people" present at performances, follow-up events (if needed), and reinforcing available resources for audience members (taking particular care and consideration for triggered audience members).

Wage

This position will receive a Peer Advisor II wage, which is approximately $9.04 per hour, for up to 85 hours in fall quarter, as well as a $1,491.60 salary in winter quarter.

Reportage

This position reports directly to the AS Women's Center Coordinator.

This job description is subject to change in accordance with the AS Employment Policy.
Vagina Memoirs Facilitator

This document provides rationale for the creation of the Women’s Center Vagina Memoirs Facilitator position.

Recommendation: Make the Vagina Memoirs a required event and hire a two-quarter Women’s Center Vagina Memoirs Facilitator

Description of the Vagina Memoirs

The Vagina Memoirs has become an integral program on Western’s campus and typically serves roughly 2,000 students and community members. The process is life changing for both the cast members and the audience. It has become apparent, however, that the amount of time necessary in order to devote proper attention to the casting, cast meetings, and logistics detracts from the ability of the Women’s Center staff to complete other programs in Fall and particularly in Winter Quarter. Hiring a Women’s Center Vagina Memoirs Facilitator for two quarters as an hourly (for Fall Quarter) and salaried (for Winter Quarter) position would ensure that the best individuals are chosen to carry out this process.

Rationale for Recommending a Facilitator Position

1. Requisite knowledge and experience

   The last few years, one Women’s Center staff member has served as a facilitator with two outside facilitators being selected as volunteers. The Women’s Center staff member is typically unable to complete the breadth of programming and services required of the job description because of the heavy commitment to the Vagina Memoirs process. In addition, it cannot be guaranteed that every year a Women’s Center staff member will have the experience or interest in facilitating the process. For instance, of the three employees in the Women’s Center last year, only one employee had the necessary experience to facilitate the Memoirs—this ended up being the Labyrinth coordinator. Given the limited number of hours that this position works in any given week and their job requirements, there existed a detrimental disconnect between the Women’s Center staff, the volunteer facilitators, and the cast of the performance. It is certainly not a given that any employee of the Women’s Center would have the requisite knowledge and experience to facilitate the Memoirs. This will be particularly pertinent in the 2012-2013 school year, as none of the Hired Women’s Center staff has been a part of the Memoirs process and the only staff member with significant facilitation experience for a program such as the Memoirs is not from a marginalized gender-identity group. Hiring a staff member to facilitate the process along with two volunteer facilitators would guarantee that the best possible experience for all involved in the Vagina Memoirs.

2. Workload

   The number of hours required to facilitate the Memoirs, in addition to the required office hours of every ROP staff member, well exceeds the average of 15 hours per week that the Women’s Center staff is currently salaried at (see section c for additional information regarding hours required to facilitate the program). Currently, the Women’s Center is required to program 4 events per quarter; planning, coordinating, and implementing the Vagina Memoirs in addition to 3 other events is impractical and has proven to be unattainable given the current allocation of work hours in the Women’s Center. If a facilitator position is not created, which we understand is up to the Board, there will be several implications—our purpose here is to notify the decision makers what those implications would be so that a fully informed decision can be made.
Implications of Not Creating a Facilitator Position

1. Reduce Office Hours of Women’s Center staff
Severely reducing the number of office hours of either the Women’s Center Coordinator or Assistant Coordinator, depending on who is capable of facilitating the Memoirs (provided that either one is even qualified). This would decrease the number of hours that the Women’s Center would be able to provide safe space to the campus community. Historically, traffic in the office has increased during the period immediately prior and following the Vagina Memoirs performances. As is evident, cutting hours at precisely the same time that demand for safe space peaks is undesirable. Previously, we have held the Women’s Center staff facilitator accountable for the entirety of their job description in addition to the extra demands placed on them by the Vagina Memoirs. This has had negative mental, emotional, and academic consequences, and we feel that we can no longer in good conscience allow this to continue.

2. Cutting the Number of Events Winter Quarter
Cutting the number of events in half during winter quarter. Currently, the Women’s Center is responsible for holding 4 events per quarter. Realistically, if the Vagina Memoirs is held during winter quarter, the reality is that it is unfeasible to require more than one other event. Unfortunately, this would require cutting events that are highly successful and have proven to be of a large impact to the campus community. For example, V-Week was a series of events that led up to the Vagina Memoirs and enhanced the overall effect of the program. This year, the Women’s Center chose to forego hosting V-Week events due to personnel and time limitations. This deprived the community of valuable social and educational opportunities.

3. Cutting the Vagina Memoirs
Holding 4 events during winter quarter, but cutting the Vagina Memoirs. As has already been iterated, if it turns out that neither the Coordinator nor the Assistant Coordinator have the skills required to facilitate the Memoirs, the event would need to be cut. In our opinion, this is an entirely undesirable outcome, but it is an option that must be considered if this position is not created.

Budget Implications: $2,260 salary
The facilitator position would be put on payroll as a Peer Advisor II position which earns an hourly rate of $9.04 per hour for Fall Quarter. We’ve estimated that the position would require a total of 250 hours over the course of fall and winter quarters. The breakdown of hours is as follows: 25 hours in September (for training with WEAVE and possibly some training with the AS), 52 total hours in October and November, and 173 hours during winter quarter. The total dollar amount needed to support a 85 hour position for Fall Quarter and a Assistant Coordinator salary for Winter Quarter would be $2,260 (this is not including the benefits). To help illustrate the nature of the time commitment of this position, we have included a more detailed breakdown of the hours worked throughout the term of the position.

October: During the month, the facilitator would be responsible for choosing volunteer facilitators, working with the Publicity Center and the Women’s Center staff to develop the
publicity package for the Vagina Memoirs, and plan for the Vagina Memoirs auditions that occur in early November.

**November:** The main commitment during this month will be holding the Vagina Memoirs auditions and then deciding which individuals will be offered roles in the final cast. This process will take approximately 40 hours.

**December:** This month the work load is fairly light; we’ve estimated 3 hours for general planning and 5 hours of cast meetings.

**Winter quarter:** The amount of hours that the facilitator will be working on Vagina Memoirs material significantly increases once the staff comes back from winter break. Every week, the facilitator is responsible for holding cast meetings that, from start to finish, require 6 hours of time—there are 7 meetings in total. In addition, every week for 7 weeks the facilitator will be required to meet with the volunteer facilitators for 2 hours. Throughout winter quarter (10 weeks), the facilitator will be asked to spend 2 hours per week in the Women’s Center performing administrative tasks related to the Vagina Memoirs (i.e. publicity meetings, logistical emails, working on the logistics of the performances, etc.). In addition, the facilitator is responsible for meeting with individual cast members or volunteer facilitators as issues arise related to the nature of the Vagina Memoirs. We have estimated that a total of 40 hours could easily be spent in various meetings with the cast and facilitators. As it gets closer to the week of the event, rehearsals will of course take place. There are a total of 4 rehearsals at approximately 3 hours each for a total of 12 hours. Then, on the days of the actual event (4 days), the facilitator is responsible for approximately 7 hours of work related to the setup, performance, breakdown, and reflection of the event. This sums to approximately 30 hours (2 hours have been added to allow flexibility during the most crucial week of the process). Finally, we have estimated that about 15 hours should be spent in wrap-up activities such as cast debriefs, volunteer facilitator debriefs, event evaluations, audience evaluations, legacy documents, etc.

Given the number of attendees at the Vagina Memoirs and the tremendous impact on our campus community environment, the financial implications of this position result in a $1 subsidy per attendee and the assurance that this will be the best possible experience for all involved.