

Sociology Program Review
Dean's Review: Vandana Kohli
March 2023

INTRODUCTION

This is the Dean's response to the Sociology program review conducted between 2021 and 2022. Any issue that emerged during the program review that needs to be addressed at the University level is not included in my summary observations and recommendations. Rather, the Dean's office will work with the appropriate academic support units to address the issues noted by the external reviewers as part of the MOU development and implementation process.

The Sociology external reviewers conclude that, at this stage, Sociology should not consider developing a graduate degree in Sociology. Further, they conclude that a degree in Criminology and/or its variant should not be housed under sociology. I too, support, both of these conclusions given that the faculty is not supportive of either of these initiatives.

COMMENDATIONS

The department is to be commended for doing an excellent job in engaging students. The sociology curriculum provides numerous opportunities for student to participate in community-based research in senior seminar and applied research courses. In addition, there are summer research opportunities and research assistantships. Students can also avail of leadership opportunities through an active Sociology club and be inducted into the local chapter of the discipline's honor society.

Sociology is a strong department whose mission aligns with the University's strategic priorities. For example, as reported in the self-study, "The central university goal is to provide a quality education to all of our students, most of whom come from underserved backgrounds as low income, Latinx, first-generation college students. In particular, the Sociology program is at the forefront of our role as a Hispanic Serving Institution. Only the largest program on campus (Psychology) has a larger number of Latinx students (although much smaller by percentage), while only Chicana/o Studies has a higher percentage of Latinx students (although much smaller in number)." This is absolutely fantastic. In addition, the department's curriculum aligns seamlessly with several areas in the University's general education program.

The faculty serve or have served in pivotal leadership roles around the campus in the Teaching and learning center; interim AVP in the office of Academic Programs; directors of the mission pillars; director of Undergraduate Research; and the Asian American and Latinx affinity groups.

I commend the Sociology faculty for their service to the discipline, and their commitment to research. They have published in high quality disciplinary journals including: *Journal of Developmental and Life-Course Criminology*; *Deviant Behavior*; *Social Problems*; *Sociological Perspectives*; *Teaching*; *Current Perspectives in Social Theory*; *Sociological Inquiry*; *Journal of Immigrant Mobility and Integration*; *Rural Sociology*; *Journal of Peasant Studies*; *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies*; *Journal of World-Systems Research*; *Journal of Labor & Society*; *Poetics*; and *Sociology Compass*; and *Social Currents*, *Social Networks*. This select list of journal article outlets is augmented by several books and textbooks; book chapters; and public writings. The external reviewers note of the faculty that, "they are incredibly successful in

terms of research, scholarship and creative activities, despite high teaching and service load. Not only do faculty have an impressive record of scholarship, but they also serve in numerous capacities at the university level, professional organizations like PSA and ASA, and are heavily involved in community engaged scholarship and activities.” I concur.

The department has recently revised its curriculum and the external reviewers note that it exceeds standards in the discipline. I discuss this aspect of the program review in greater details, below, however it is worth noting that the current curriculum is predicated on a progressive learning paradigm where concepts are introduced, reinforced, and eventually mastered by students in the program.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The external reviewers provide extensive feedback on the new Sociology curriculum, praising it while highlighting several areas requiring critical examination. Although detailed thoroughly in the report, their main areas of concern are that the new curriculum is overly structured, prescriptive, and does not address what students want which is more electives, and internships. Four (4) research methods courses; two (2) theory courses; and two (2) senior seminar courses may be too many. In addition, the curriculum may prove to be very difficult for students to navigate because many courses need to be taken in sequence. Faculty have developed the curriculum in this manner because they believe it will improve student learning, however, I concur that more electives and internship opportunities should be prioritized. It should be pointed out that ‘broadening electives’ was also recommended in the last program review in 2013.

I concur with the external reviewers’ observation and recommend that the department faculty come together and develop a new and holistic assessment plan. This should start with the creation of measurable program level learning outcomes that may be structured as goals and objectives. This was also recommended in 2013. Subsequently, each course in the program should be mapped against these learning goals and objectives to indicate where students are introduced to learning components and where these components are developed and, eventually mastered (curriculum map). This step will help the faculty in developing course specific learning outcomes which should be formally assessed through direct assessment using an assessment tool and evaluation rubrics. The results of this formalized assessment should be used by the faculty to implement curricular and pedagogical modifications to improve student learning where necessary. Finally, a program assessment plan should be developed to navigate when a particular program learning outcome will be assessed. Helpful sources may be found on the American Sociological Association, as well as the WSCUC (WASC) web sites.

The self-study, external reviewers’ report, interviews with faculty and administrators all point to an urgent need to addressed vexing issues related to department climate. This situation needs to show marked improvements so that Sociology can secure more resources and grow. According to the self-study, department culture has had grave consequences: “Some faculty have stepped away from active governance and leadership roles. Others have shown less willingness to “go above and beyond” on behalf of the program. This has resulted in the discontinuation or lack of forward progress in areas that have in the past been program strengths in best serving our students. Beyond that, meetings and interactions among faculty have been a source of anxiety rather than support and goodwill. That continues to be a central concern to many faculty members, individually and collectively.”

I would like to recommend that the Sociology program explore avenues for expanding its resource base through increased philanthropy and grants. I concur with external reviewers that there is such excellent community engaged research underway which could easily be turned into grant proposals. I stand ready to help with this initiative.

I concur that the department must find a way to communicate more effectively with its current students and alumni using advanced technological tools. Again, the dean's office can provide some funds to assist with this goal.

CONCLUSION

The Sociology program is commended for engaging in a meaningful program review experience. I deeply appreciated the addendum to the self-study since it took longer than expected to bring the external reviewers to campus. The program is encouraged to work with my office to identify and garner more resources so that it can function at its highest potential.