

May 3, 2012

Dean's Response to the Program Review of the Sociology Program

I appreciate the thought and effort that went into the Program Review Team's report, and the Sociology faculty's self-study and response to the report.

The Review Team found that the Sociology Program has considerable strengths. The Team's report emphasized the collaborative, collegial, student-centered environment of the department; the rigorous education, including statistics and research methods training and experiential learning, that students receive; and the high-quality faculty of the Program. The reports did identify a number of challenges faced by the Program, and made consequent recommendations, to which the faculty were responsive in their answering document.

Mission and curriculum: In response to a recommendation, the Sociology faculty will hold a retreat this summer to assess and revise their mission statement. They will then go on to reassess and revise their curriculum in light of the mission statement, emphasizing measurable learning outcomes.

Student success and employability: The Team recommended posting a 2- to 3-year course schedule. The faculty responded that there is an existing 2-year course rotation (which will be posted for students), and that with the faculty now up to six, it will be more practicable to meet the schedule.

The Team expressed concern that more could be done to prepare students for employability after graduation (as opposed to entering graduate school, for which preparation was judged very good). The faculty agreed with this analysis, and will discuss strategies to enhance employability skills and raise student awareness of the issue. The faculty will also discuss the Team's recommendation that they consider an Applied Sociology track, major, or emphasis. I would suggest that it would be useful in doing so to examine the experience and success of Applied Sociology programs nationwide.

The report recommended that the capstone course be standardized, to which the faculty responded that it already is. The chair may wish to ask for clarification from the Team as to why they felt change was necessary.

Assessment: The report recommended that, as part of its assessment plan under development, the faculty assess needs at the program level, rather than merely the course level. The faculty agreed to do so.

Advising: The Team report noted that the chair seemed do most student advising, and recommended implementing a strategy for all faculty members to advise students. The faculty acknowledged that the chair did most advising. The faculty response noted that the self-study recommended having a designated faculty member as student advisor, who would receive a course release. The faculty will discuss this further, and I look forward to seeing what they propose.

The report also forwarded several recommendations to improve advising, such as helping students review their “Cat Tracks.” The faculty responded that these steps are already being taken, but said that they will discuss developing a student advising checklist. I think this is a good idea that should be implemented.

Faculty issues: The report recommended that the chair meet at least annually with adjunct faculty members, and give them feedback on their performance. The faculty agreed to do so, and to develop better orientation materials for new adjunct faculty.

The Evaluation team recommended that all Program faculty teaching online receive WSU training and follow University and College online standards. The response noted that all such faculty have been required to receive the basic training, and some have gone on to complete the WSU Master Online Teacher course. It affirmed that both University and College best practices will be followed. I might add that College best practices have been drafted by the Online Teaching Committee, but not yet adopted.

The report recommends, with faculty concurrence, that faculty “vacancies” in Sociology be filled to support curriculum delivery. There is actually only one faculty vacancy in the program, created by the departure of Dr. Kearin in 2009; another vacancy was filled by Dr. Glass’s arrival at WSU in 2011. There are several other such vacancies across the College, due primarily to the budget cuts of recent years. As resources become available, I will consider which vacancies should be filled first, based on assessment of the where the strongest needs lie.

I believe that the Review Team report correctly identified and stressed the considerable strengths of the Sociology Program, while making a number of useful suggestions. I support the positive responses of the Program’s faculty to these suggestions.

Francis B. Harrold

Dean, College of Social and Behavioral Sciences