

SOCIOLOGY PRORAM RESPONSE TO EXTERNAL REVIEWERS' REPORT

Program Faculty:

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Program Strengths

The Sociology Program faculty agree with the strengths listed by the external reviewers. The Sociology Program strives to be a collaborative, collegial, and student-centered program where students are given an active learning environment. Students are taught by terminally degreed faculty who utilize the best practices of a liberal arts education, including teaching upper division courses in seminar style formats, and giving students many opportunities for community-based learning and research.

Program Challenges and Recommendations

The Sociology Program faculty response to the challenges and recommendations is made on a point-by point basis.

- It is unclear that there is a process by which the faculty periodically assesses the mission statement based upon the constituencies served by the program. The review team recommends that the department reassess its mission statement....

Response: The Sociology Program faculty agree that periodic assessment of the program mission statement, learning outcomes, and curriculum is important and needed. In the Sociology Program Self-Study, the faculty made this the first point of the strategic plan for ongoing assessment. The program plan is to start with a faculty retreat this summer to assess and revise the current program mission statement and then assess and revise the program curriculum to bring it into line with the revised mission statement. A goal of the revisions will be to create measureable outcomes.

- ... To help students better plan their educational future, the review committee suggests posting a departmental two- to three-year plan.

Response: There already exists a two-year rotation of courses for the Sociology Program. Now that there are six full-time faculty in Sociology, we will be better able to meet the two year rotation schedule. We will include the two-year rotation schedule in the packets given to majors and minors and also post it on our bulletin board.

- The assessment process of course outcome is an area of concern and should be strengthened.... The review committee recommends developing a mechanism to assess needs at the “program level” that are clearly defined and can be appropriately applied.

Response: The Sociology Program faculty agree that more conversations of course outcomes be done on the program level, so that courses are better integrated into the program mission. As we implement the course learning outcomes assessment started this academic year, we will incorporate program level discussions in program meetings.

- The faculty member vacancies need to be filled to support curriculum delivery that is consistent with the mission of the program. Filling the vacant faculty positions will address the shortfall in teaching capacity that the Department chair tries to compensate for by taking on extra courses.... The review committee recommends that the chair take course reductions that come with the position and focus energies on department needs and building toward the future.

Response: The Sociology Program faculty agree with this recommendation, and the current and future chairs will endeavor to take the course reductions.

- The Department Chair appears to do the majority of student advising regarding course selection in collaboration with the College General Education advisor even though the procedure is to assign faculty advisors. The committee recommends implementing a strategy for all faculty members to advise students in some way.

Response: The Sociology Program faculty agree that the Department Chair should not do all of the student advising. The current program advising does call for advising to be done by all full-time faculty. However, in practice this has not occurred. In the Sociology Program Self-Study, the faculty made the recommendation for the creation a faculty student advisor, a position separate from the coordinator/department chair position. This position should be compensated with a reduction of teaching load. The goal is to implement the position in 2012-13. This position should be rotated among the full-time faculty. Specifics for compensation and faculty rotation will be discussed Fall semester 2012 within the program and with the college dean.

- ... It is unclear what “applied” competencies are developed and what assistance students receive to successfully enter the job market after graduation.... It is recommended that an improved or new strategy for job placement could serve as a mechanism to attract majors and build the program.

Response: The Sociology Program faculty agree that the program needs to address the employability of its graduates. Part of this can occur by faculty emphasizing to students how course materials and assignments translate into skills used in various occupations. In Soc 1010 and Soc 1020, the two social science general education courses, a section on “What you can do with a sociology degree” needs to be included by all faculty teaching these courses. Additional strategies will be discussed and developed in program meetings over the coming year.

- Student advising could also improve by 1) informing students wanting to teach sociology that they also need a teaching certificate so they can plan schedules and budgets accordingly, 2) periodically check students “self advising” to ensure they are making appropriate progress, 3) encourage students to utilize college-level advising, and 4) help students review their “Cat Tracks” so they can plan a timely graduation.

Response: All of the points recommended are being done in the one-on-one faculty advising of students. The development of a checklist for use in student advising, so that these and other points can be systematically covered by the faculty advisor is something that will be discussed in Fall semester 2012 as part of the larger discussion on program student advising.

- The review committee recommends the Sociology faculty discuss the relevance and need to incorporate an Applied Sociology track, major, or emphasis area. If there is interest a thorough discussion should follow on the possible structure for this new approach. Regardless of the decision, the committee recommends increasing the number of community partners for internships and/or service learning to provide students with an “applied” experience.

Response: The applied sociology track will be discussed as part of the larger discussion of mission statement and curriculum as stated above. With regard to community partners, while there were only three community partners listed in the program self study with whom members of the program have recurring and current partnerships, students in the program volunteer with numerous other partners through community-based learning activities. While these are not always recurring relationships, students are given many opportunities to gain applied experiences. Faculty often have students utilize the WSU Community Involvement Center in placing students in these positions.

- ...The committee recommends standardizing the [capstone] course and sharing best practices among faculty who teach the class so all who enroll may have a positive educational experience.

Response: The capstone course is already standardized, in that all faculty who teach the course cover the same material, follow the same basic course schedule, and even use the same core books. Faculty who are teaching the course for the first time are informally mentored by faculty who have taught the course before, being provided with syllabi, assignments, books, etc. Even faculty who have previously taught the course consult with each other to see what is working and isn’t working in teaching the course. It is felt by the Sociology Program faculty that capstone students are being given a positive educational experience.

- Adjunct faculty are regularly assessed but the only follow-up is when there is a problem. It would be beneficial to the program for the Chair to meet with adjuncts at least once a year to assess the courses taught and find out what teaching practices are successful and if there are any challenges. Adjuncts should get regular feedback in addition to student evaluations.

Response: The Sociology Program faculty agree with this recommendation and will implement it in the coming academic year. Additionally, better orientation materials for adjunct faculty new to teaching in the program will be developed.

- As additional classes move to an online format, we recommend that all faculty who teach online be trained by the university and implement the standards that have been established by Weber State University and the College Online Standards Committee.

Response: All Sociology Program faculty who teach online have gone through the basic online training at WSU. Additionally several program faculty have participated in the WSU Master Online Teacher Training course. The Sociology program coordinator/department chair will follow up on ensuring that WSU and college-level best practices are implemented and used in online courses.