

Date: April 10, 2017

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SOCIOLOGY PROGRAM REVIEW EVALUATION TEAM REPORT

This report is based on the Program Review Evaluation Team reading of the Department of Sociology 2011-16 Self Study and related online documents, as well as team interviews conducted on March 3, 2017. The Team met with all currently employed tenure-line and visiting faculty members; a past faculty member serving as Associate Provost; the Dean of the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences; support staff including the department administrative specialist, the social science librarian and the social science career counselor; three community partners; three current students; and four alumni.

Overall the team found a cohesive and supportive academic community. The faculty was committed to the success of their students. The students and alumni were enthusiastic about the curriculum and classroom experiences, relationships developed with their peers, and lasting relationships and accessibility of their faculty. Community partners were complementary regarding their collaboration with Sociology faculty and the Center for Community Engaged Learning (CCEL) and experiences working with Sociology students. In the following subsections the team addresses in more detail our assessment of the Department around the program review criteria.

A. Mission Statement

Since the last department program review, the faculty revised their mission statement and designed and implemented an extensive assessment (Section C) linked to the mission and goals. The new mission is aligned with college and university missions and focuses the delivery of their program on three areas: curriculum, research and community engaged learning. Through these activities the department delivers analytic and evaluation skills to students in one of two majors, the minor, and to those enrolling in courses as general education or electives. Their goals are aligned with the delivery of a sociological perspective in critical thinking and writing that links systems, institutions and individual identity and agency. In addition, the goals highlight the work around

multiculturalism and a global perspective. They specifically highlight their commitment to pedagogies of engaged and active learning from the classroom and into the community.

B. Curriculum

Program Strength

The Department of Sociology at Weber State University offers a particularly impressive curriculum given the size of the faculty. The curriculum reflects the American Sociological Association recommendations for core research methods and theory sequences, as well as a capstone experience. In addition, the department offers, on a regular rotation, 20 specialized and mostly upper division courses from expected courses related to gender, race and class. Courses in less common topics such as religion, medicine and consumers and society are also offered. The Department also offers the high impact student success experience of study abroad in China.

The Department delivers the curriculum across times of day from early morning through late evening and across campuses. In addition, they make good use of adjunct instructors and modes of delivery offering two general education courses regularly both face-to-face and online. Based on student and alumni interviews, the team also finds the quality of teaching and learning to be particularly high. Students noted that, with class sizes usually between 10-15, instructors structured much of class time around discussion, analysis, and application of readings and lecture. These are learning environments akin to those found at small liberal arts colleges.

Community engaged learning and undergraduate research, both high impact retention and student success practices, are integrated into the sociology curriculum. The focus on research is particularly strong and carried into the capstone experience. The senior thesis has been an especially important experience for alumni who have continued on into graduate education. In addition, faculty members have also done an outstanding job working with the CCEL in two classes (Social Problems and Sociology of Education) providing students the option of a short 15-hour engagement experience.

Program Concern and Recommendations

In the last review (Section H) the Program Evaluation Team recommended the development an “applied track.” Within the discipline, “applied sociology” has a fairly narrow definition often associated with program evaluation and assessment work. The Sociology faculty discussed that direction, but there was not enough interest to launch that level of programmatic and curricular change.

The current Program Evaluation team also identified a gap in more intensive experience-based opportunities that would support the career exploration and pathways for a broader range of students. Sociology now has two solid classes that support community engaged learning (Section B). This Program Review Team recommends the development of a “community engagement pathway” through the major working with existing CCEL courses, expanding into other classes, and most significantly culminating with a capstone internship.

While offering a separate internship class may stretch the faculty resources, it is possible to manage internship and thesis students in the same “capstone” course. Developing a capstone internship option will create a stronger structure for professional networking and evidencing of professional skills outside the academy. These networks and experiences can be very helpful to students who plan to move directly into professional positions after they graduate. In addition, engaged experiences in the middle years of the college career address the slump and attrition experience for groups of students who struggle to find purpose for their academics. First generation and underrepresented groups (URG) of students are particularly susceptible to leaving school at this stage. Engaged experiences are directly correlated to better retention of current students.

This additional focus on community engaged learning across the curriculum better aligns the program with the department’s stated mission, of which engagement is one of the three focal points (Bb). Furthermore, the branding of the pathway as “community engagement” would align with existing structures and open the doors to a wide range of experiences approved by Sociology faculty. The faculty should agree on the types of placement that would be appropriate for sociology students spending perhaps 90-100 hours in the field. In addition, to maintain the academic integrity of this capstone experience, they might require students to read and write about the research literature that informs the work in which they participate. For example, a student helping with community organizing efforts with a local environmental policy group might also be reading and writing about the sociological literature related to environmental justice in poor communities of color. Students completing internships might poster their experiences or present them in the same forums as students who completed original research for their capstone theses.

Finally, the team encourages the department to make the “professional development 1-unit seminar” a requirement for students holding between 60 and 90 credit hours. This seminar could be the introduction for students planning to intern in their final year in the program. Additionally, the college career counselor was also willing to be more engaged with the department across classes and might collaborate with faculty teaching the professional development seminar.

C. Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment

Program Strength

The Department has done extensive work developing learning outcomes, linking the outcomes to classes and assessing the outcomes through specific assignments and questions within the classes. In response to assessment around writing, the faculty adopted a common writing text used across upper division courses.

Program Concern and Recommendations

The team is concerned that the amount and intensity of assessment in the department. While clearly meeting university expectations, this model leaves little time for collective meaningful discussion and data driven decision-making. It is important for leadership at institutions of higher education to temper the assessment tidal wave experienced by academic departments by establishing a reasonable and meaningful assessment cycle. Accrediting bodies such the Western Association of School and Colleges (WASC) set standards for assessment processes that inform planning and decision making. A more reasonable long-term assessment plan for sociology would include annual assessment of “one” learning outcome as part of completing an assessment cycle in “six” years. These more measured processes allow for more focused attention and change related to a single outcome, rather than making too many programmatic changes at once (Cd).

In addition, the department might discuss scaffolding of learning outcomes related to research and academic writing across core required and sequenced classes, breaking down the building blocks. For example, introducing article annotation in an introductory class and teaching synthesis across readings in theory. This scaffolding takes the pressure off courses like research methods and capstone to accomplish all outcomes.

D. Academic Advising

The students receive extensive advising if they come in for advising. The department has a plan for comprehensive advising, developing degree plan maps and maintaining records for students. The faculty support for graduate education advising is particularly strong.

Program Concern and Recommendations

The team recommends a more intrusive advising protocol. The department could require that the department chair advise students before they can officially declare the major. The development of a semester-by-semester long-term course-taking (degree) plan is particularly important for departments that rotate classes less frequently than every other semester. CatTracks supports the planning for classes within a given term and over a multi-year period. Regular degree planning and advising supports retention and graduation targets (Da).

E. Faculty

Program Strength

The current faculty is a demonstrable strength for the department. In Fall 2017 they will have six tenure-line faculty members who are committed to the students and the programs. The faculty members maintain professional connections through frequent conference attendance. Most also maintain continuous involvement in research even though they have heavy teaching loads (Ea and Eb). The department might consider recruiting adjuncts who identify as scholar/activists or public sociologists to develop broader support and connections for the development of any potential community engagement pathway. They mentor new faculty in teaching the capstone course. The chair also mentors new faculty on the formal review process and new faculty may request ongoing mentoring. Adjuncts are invited to retreat and they were all recently evaluated including peer observations in which all tenure-line faculty members were involved. The faculty reported adequate funding for travel and additional support for workshops and development.

F. Support (Staff, Administration, Facilities, Equipment, and Library)

Program Strength

The current department administrative specialist brings a broad range of institutional experience as an alumni and past employee in other campus offices. She reported that she can manage current workload well and enjoys her work. The chair and other faculty members lauded her value to the department. She has actively participated in professional development and is a real asset to the department. The library resources and support were also strong (Fa, Fb, Fc).

G. Relationships with the External Communities

Program Strength

Community partners and Sociology faculty work through CCEL to apply the “best practices” related to placing students with community organizations. Sociology students are screened and trained when necessary and are least likely then to encounter problems with their placements. The community partners interviewed were very happy with the students from Sociology who work with their programs: within the schools, in a highly structured after-school program and with a community food program. The community partners also reported their capacity to absorb more students on longer placements that would support their needs for larger project support and potentially grant writing assistance (Ga, Gb).

If the department develops the option for a capstone internship, an advisory board could be helpful to facilitate conversations about community needs and the ways that interns might meet those needs. Alternatively, and given the strength of CCEL, the department might rather work with CCEL to develop larger project-based internship experiences across areas of interest to students, and in collaboration with other departments.

H. Results of Previous Program Reviews

The faculty in the department of sociology responded to all the recommendations of the last program review team. In most cases, they implemented changes and/or responded that recommendations were already in place. Below we have highlighted those actions where this Program Evaluation Team has further or related recommendations.

<p style="text-align: center;">Recommendation Last Program Review</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Department Response or Action</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Assess mission statement 2. Develop a rotation plan 3. Assess program level needs 4. Hire faculty member and chair take course releases 5. All faculty should advise 6. Develop a strategy for job placement. 7. Improvements to advising 8. Incorporate an applied sociology track and internships. 9. Standardize the capstone experience 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Assessed and revised 2. Completed and distributed 3. Extensive assessment related to mapped learning outcomes (Section C recommendations) 4. Hire made for Fall 2017 and current chair is not teaching beyond two courses each term 5. The department has located advising in the responsibilities of the chair 6. Some lower division inclusion of PowerPoint about career pathways. Piloted an elective career-planning seminar (Section B recommendations) 7. The department has a clear advising plan (See Section D) 8. Not developed (See Section B recommendations). 9. The department responded it was standardized

<p>10. Adjunct evaluation and feedback.</p> <p>11. Training for faculty in online instruction.</p>	<p>10. All the adjuncts were recently observed and evaluated</p> <p>11. The department indicated all were trained.</p>
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