



# Cyclical Program Review of the BA and MA in Sociology

## Final Assessment Report

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## PART ONE: EXECUTIVE RESPONSE

### A) EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REVIEW DOCUMENTS

(SELF-STUDY, REVIEWERS' REPORT, UNIT RESPONSE)

#### **Self-Study**

Sociology was first taught as a distinct subject in the Waterloo College of Arts (formerly the Evangelical Lutheran Seminary of Canada) in 1938. Anthropology was added to the Sociology program in 1963. Sociology and Anthropology subsequently split into two departments in 2004-05. In 2011-12, the Department of Sociology had 17 Full Time Faculty; 5989 registrants (intramural and online combined), and a cohort of 7 MA students.

Under "Concerns of the unit" the following issues were raised:

- there has been pressure to increase class sizes (though the Self-Study also notes that in terms of average class size, Sociology comes in around the Faculty mean)
- some members are concerned about demands for Administrative service while others note that administrative service may not be distributed equally within the department

The following points are made in specific regard to the undergraduate program

- the department has developed 13 program-level outcomes that align well with Laurier's Academic Plan and Mission statement, especially given the department's focus on global issues, globalization, social inequality and social justice
- the undergraduate program-level outcomes also accord well with the Undergraduate degree level expectations derived from the Ontario Council of Academic Vice Presidents' Guidelines for University Undergraduate Degree-Level Expectations
- the department understands that financial pressures might make it difficult to raise the minimum entering average for Arts students, but suggests that a writing competencies test might be a required for entering students as a way to identify students who could be required to receive remedial support
- over the period of the review new courses were added to reflect the fact that faculty members with new areas of expertise had joined the program
- over the period of the review, the 2<sup>nd</sup> term first year course in Sociology (SY102) was restricted to Honours Sociology Majors only, and a required writing component added to the course
- a number of other changes to program requirements were made in order to ensure that Sociology Majors have access to the courses they need in order to (1) move through the program in a timely manner and (2) achieve the department's program level learning outcomes.



- Over the next few years, the department would like expand its offerings in the Sociology of Community and the Sociology of Work, to reflect the interests of the new faculty member holding a Professional Teaching Position.
- The department plans to divide some of its remaining full year courses into one term courses
- The department plans to introduce an applied research methods specialization, and in that context will be evaluating its current offerings in methods and statistics.
- The department does a substantial amount of service teaching, especially at the first and second year.
- The undergraduate and graduate programs reinforce each other, partly because of strengths at both levels in Equity and Social Justice and partly because Sociology MA students serve as TAs
- Although Sociology offers a comprehensive program, the addition of new full time faculty would allow the Department to offer courses in some new areas.
- In the Department's view, however, its current offerings reflect the current state of the discipline
- The Department uses their first year classes not simply to provide a general survey of the discipline but also to develop critical thinking and writing skills.
- As part of its commitment to the first year experience, the Department has established a Residence Learning Community
- A community service-learning component has been included in several Sociology courses.
- The Department has established grading guidelines; these guidelines set a range for the average grade in each class by level; grades are forwarded to the Chair, along with a rationale if the average grade in a class falls outside the range specified for courses at that level.
- The Department feels that it has fewer FT faculty members than is justified by the size of its program
- While faculty regularly request multimedia classrooms, the availability of such rooms is limited and this generates frustration and undermines the ability to work with students to the best of the department's ability
- Computer resources for full time faculty have been much improved by the recent Evergreen initiative
- It is the department's opinion that office space allocated to CAS is inadequate.
- Recent reconfiguration of the Departmental Office has been an improvement, though more space for confidential files would be useful
- The lack of undergraduate student study space is a concern
- The department is concerned that their budget for the support of their undergraduate program will be strained as pay rates for instructional assistants and markers increase
- The Department has good relations with support staff in the Library, but are concerned that the library does not provide access to all the journals desired by members and concerned as well about the plans to establish a self-serve reserve section

- The Department has good relations with ITS but are nonetheless concerned about equipment malfunctions in the classroom and office.
- Online courses are taught mainly by CAS instructors; a survey of those instructors revealed no consensus about the advantages or disadvantages of online courses.
- Faculty members have published in top tier journals, and written books that have received accolades.

### **External Reviewers' Report**

The external reviewers were William Carroll, Department of Sociology, University of Victoria; Terry Wotherspoon, Department of Sociology, University of Saskatchewan; and Jonathan Finn, Communications Studies, Wilfrid Laurier University. The review took place over January 30 and 31, 2014.

The reviewers report that several Departmental members shared concerns to the effect that rapid institutional growth, uncertain relationships between the Waterloo and Brantford campus and "the intensification of workloads among faculty" were undermining core institutional values. This led to their first recommendation:

*The University ensure that all planning and initiatives and changes to administrative procedures are conducted through processes that are consultative, collegial and clearly communicated throughout the University community. It is important that members of the Sociology Department are given opportunities to demonstrate how their mandate and activities can best be aligned with institutional priorities*

The reviewers also felt that the proposed new specialization in Applied Social Research is highly promising and would be well-aligned with emerging directions in the discipline:

*The Department is encouraged to proceed with plans to initiate a program in Applied Social Research, though it is recommended further that consideration be given to selecting a title that will ensure its appeal to a broad range of students.*

Overall, the reviewers felt that both the undergraduate and graduate curricula were similar to the curricula found in programs across Canada. They also felt that the department's organization of its first year's offering was a significant strength, and found the program overall to be highly successful given the number of majors.

The reviewers found that the department was conscientious in its assessment of learning outcomes. The one area where significant improvement was needed has to do with the experiences of students who graduate from Sociology degree programs since at the moment there is little systematic information on these experiences:

*The Department undertake a process (perhaps in conjunction with its senior research methods courses) to obtain periodic feedback on the quality of its programs and the post-graduate experiences of its graduates.*

In commenting on resources, the reviewers repeated many assertions that are the same or similar to those made in the self-study: CAS members teach an inordinate proportion of courses; office accommodations for CAS members should be improved; while classrooms are reasonably well-equipped, an under resourced ITS unit can only provide minimal support; the Active Learning classroom is in high demand but more access to well-equipped classrooms is needed. They also note some faculty concerns that emerged after the Self-Study: centralized timetabling has limited flexibility for faculty, especially for CAS members who live in Toronto. The concern with CAS members in Sociology led to the following recommendation:

*The needs of CAS faculty should be addressed, through more flexible class scheduling and provision of more office space (with better access to it).*

The Reviewers find that full time faculty have an impressive record in regard to published research (data on CAS publication was not available). While faculty members have attracted a significant amount of research funding, the total amount of such funding is perhaps a bit lower than the amounts associated with comparator institutions – though this is likely the result, the reviewers point out, of the department’s orientation toward theory-based scholarship (which is typically unfunded).

Although exit surveys of undergraduate students suggest high levels of satisfaction, there is no clear evidence available of achievement of program learning outcomes. The department plans to address this by ensuring that their curriculum aligns with two key learning outcomes – critically evaluating scholarly arguments and developing coherent and effective written arguments. The reviewers support this initiative:

*The Department should continue its current efforts to align curriculum with two key learning outcomes – critically evaluating scholarly arguments and developing coherent and persuasive written arguments – so that it can monitor its effectiveness both in terms of student progress within the program and in terms of Graduating Student Quality.*

### **Unit response to Reviewer’s Report**

In regard to the undergraduate program, the unit generally accepts all the reviewers’ recommendations. In particular, the Department:

- has already begun moving forward with an Option in Applied Social Research
- acknowledges the value of obtaining feedback on students who have graduated from the program but suggests that this is an area where alumni relations should take the lead
- has concrete plans for better aligning their curriculum with two key learning outcomes, namely, critically evaluating scholarly arguments and developing coherent and persuasive written arguments

- would like to address the needs of CAS members by finding them more office space and by having more control over the timetabling process so that, among other things, the “availability of full time and CAS faculty members” could be taken into account in scheduling classes

## **B) IDENTIFICATION OF PROGRAM STRENGTHS**

## **C) OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT AND ENHANCEMENT**

## **D) PRIORITIZATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS APPROVED FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

### **Executive Response from the Dean of Arts**

Program reviews are time consuming for all concerned, and we therefore want to thank both the external reviewers and the internal faculty who contributed to the Self-Study and the Unit Responses for the time they spent on this. We especially want to thank Dana Sawchuk, Chair of Sociology, for ensuring that the Self Study was an exceptionally well-written and coherent document.

The Department is of course correct in suggesting that change be discussed in ways that are consultative and collegial, and that all units – including Sociology – be allowed, even encouraged to align their activities and mandate with institutional priorities. The best way to do this of course is to actively engage with the discussions that take place within the Faculty (both at the Dean’s Advisory Committee and Divisional Council, in particular) and within the faculty-driven processes (like IPRM) charged with envisioning change based on a consideration of systematically collected evidence. In particular the department is encouraged, as part of this collegial process, to engage in a discussion with other members of the University of the contextual variables that are fuelling change in University priorities in Ontario.

Some of the recommendations made by the external reviewers and/or by the department are in effect claims for new resources. These would include requests for more space for CAS members, for retirement replacements, for improvements to library holdings in certain areas, and for classrooms equipped with up to date multimedia resources. Space, in particular, is scarce on the Waterloo campus, and will remain so until the new GIE building is complete. At that time, however, should new space become available, the Dean of Arts will need to balance requests from all departments, and in doing that will take into account the priorities established by the IPRM process (currently underway and which should be finished by that time). Similarly, the priorities established by the IPRM process will guide discussions about faculty replacements in the Faculty as a whole if such replacements become possible. In regard to library holdings, the department is urged to work with the

Library to identify areas where holdings might be improved and to identify existing resources (journal subscriptions in particular) that might be discontinued to finance new acquisitions. The Dean's office will survey Arts faculty generally about the most pressing needs in regard to classroom technology, and on the basis of the results will talk with ITS about what might be done.

The suggestion that departments have control over time-tabling, of course, is a retrograde step given that the University has recently moved to centralized timetabling in order to make the most effective use of available space on the Waterloo campus. Still, the department is reminded that if there is a compelling reason for a particular class or faculty member not to be scheduled at a particular time, they can suggest an "exchange", that is, they can suggest moving another class into that slot and vice versa. What is not possible, however, given the space shortage, is avoiding certain timeslots (e.g., 8:30 AM slots) entirely.

We agree with the reviewers, and the department, that a curricular emphasis on "Applied Social Research" would be appealing to many students and should be incorporated into the Sociology program. Whether this should be done by adding an Option in this area or in some other way is something that the department should discuss among themselves and with the Dean's Office. Whatever strategy is pursued the resulting curriculum would have to be supported mainly by existing resources and would have to rely mainly on teaching by full time faculty. As a result, the development of this new program might need to be accompanied by revisions to the rest of the curriculum in Sociology. The department is asked to address all these issues in its proposal.

Although the department sees value in obtaining more systematic feedback from graduates on the quality of the program and where those graduates end up, they seem predisposed to let Alumni Relations take the lead here. The Reviewers, by contrast, in suggesting that this activity might be undertaken in connection with one of the department's methods courses, seem to be suggesting that the department take a more active leadership role here. We side with the reviewers here, especially given the departments emerging commitment to applied social research. Accordingly, the department is asked to develop a plan for obtaining such feedback.

In its Self-Study, the department expressed concerns about an increase in faculty workload as the result of an increase in administrative activities. A similar concern is one of the reasons that the reviewers recommended that "members of the Sociology Department [be] given opportunities to demonstrate how their mandate and activities can best be aligned with institutional priorities." All faculty, of course, have a responsibility – to draw from the Collective Agreement – "to undertake a fair and reasonable share of administrative responsibilities" in the University. Unfortunately, in the absence of detailed information it is difficult to determine if the Collective Agreement standard is or is not being exceeded in the case of full time faculty in Sociology. Accordingly, we recommend that Sociology work with the Dean of Arts to develop a report that assesses what administrative responsibilities are being discharged by each full time member and how much of each member's time is spent

on these activities over the course of the academic year. Based on that report, the Dean will develop recommendations to ensure that each member of the department takes on a fair and reasonable share of administrative responsibilities in the department and university.

### **Executive Response from the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies**

Many of the recommendations made by the reviewers and addressed by the department in their response are related to the MA program. Below is a summary of these recommendations and comments with responses from the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies.

***1. It is important that members of the Sociology Department are given opportunities to demonstrate how their mandate and activities can best be aligned with institutional priorities.***

The graduate coordinator and one other member of the graduate faculty in the department are members of Graduate Faculty Council and participate in all policy discussions related to admissions, curriculum, student progress and student support. The graduate coordinator also partners with FGPS in planning realistic targets for student enrolment. From the Dean's perspective, it is not clear what the reviewers' issue is.

***2. The Department eliminate the designation of two fields in its graduate program.***

It is not clear why the program would move to delete these fields without having a discussion with the Dean. These deletions will still need to move through the appropriate Senate bodies, but some consultation would have been appropriate before the department made this decision. Students have already been admitted into fields for the 2014/15 academic year. The recommendations of reviewers are just that—recommendations—and were not to be acted upon until the decanal responses were received. In any event, while the program has endorsed this recommendation, it must also be approved by the appropriate bodies of Senate.

***4. Align undergraduate and graduate programs.***

The dean agrees with the department that there does not need to be a strict alignment between the undergraduate and graduate programs. However, the program should also be reminded that not all faculty need to be "members" of a given field, and that students may study within the program but outside a field if that is how the faculty would like to structure the requirements. Currently, however, students must declare a field on admission to the program and fulfill the requirements of that field.

***5. ...obtain periodic feedback on the quality of its programs and the post-graduate experiences of its graduates.***



The first part of this recommendation is curious since that is what the cyclical review does: assess quality. However, there is a need to track the post-degree successes of our students more specifically. The Career Development Centre might also be helpful in this regard. The FGPS Communications Coordinator can provide advice on social media initiatives.

**7. Place MRPs in a digital repository.**

The program has begun discussions with the library to see what is possible.

**8. ..shift one elective to the fall terms and spread the Research and Professionalization Seminar...over both terms.**

The program has endorsed this recommendation, but it must also be approved by the appropriate bodies of Senate.

**9. ..recognize MRP supervision as a teaching achievement....**

Although this a graduate issue, the Dean of Arts is responsible for workload assignments.

**10. Develop a plan to increase graduate funding support.**

The Dean of FGPS continues to lobby for increased scholarship support for graduate students and would be pleased to meet with the graduate coordinator to discuss this issue. However, the program must strive to be more successful in receiving research grants that can support students. The brief mentions that students sometimes decline RA offers because they are not in their field of interest. One solution to this would be to have students matched to an advisor upon admission to ensure a good fit with the program and funding opportunities.

**12. Consider strengthening or removing ties between Sociology faculty at the Waterloo and Brantford campuses.**

The program's response is appropriate. The current ties appear to suit both campuses and all programs.

**13. Reduce the number of courses offered in the second term...**

The current number of courses appears to serve the program appropriately, especially if they are attractive to students in other programs.

## PART TWO: IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Recommendation to be Implemented	Responsibility for Implementation	Anticipated Completion Date	Additional Notes
<p>Develop a proposal for a curricular emphasis on Applied Social Research that does not increase the need for new resources and that relies mainly on teaching and supervision by full time faculty members in sociology or other programs.</p>	<p>Department Chair</p>	<p>January 2015</p>	<p>Once the proposal has been developed, it will be submitted to the Faculty of Arts Curriculum Committee.</p>
<p>Prepare a report listing what administrative responsibilities, within the dept. and within the university, have been assumed by each full time member for the last three academic years. (Each member can presumably provide this easily by drawing from their Annual Reports.) This report will include the approximate (average) number of hours per week during Fall, Winter and Sprummer spent on each administrative activity. If the report suggests that all faculty have assumed more than their fair share of administrative responsibilities, the Chair – in consultation with the Sociology DIC – will propose ways of reorganizing departmental administration in order to lighten the administrative workload. If the report suggests that not all faculty have assumed a fair and equitable share of administrative responsibilities within the Department, or the</p>	<p>Department Chair</p>	<p>January 2015</p>	<p>The Chair will discuss this report with the Dean.</p>

<p>University more generally, the Chair will present the Dean of Arts with recommendations for addressing that situation.</p>			
<p>The Department will develop a procedure for keeping track of its alumni, and – working with Alumni relations – will survey as many alumni as possible at least once a year.</p>	<p>Department Chair and Graduate Coordinator</p>	<p>June 2015</p>	<p>Consult with Career Development Centre, Alumni Relations &amp; FGPS Communications Coordinator.</p>
<p>The graduate program will develop and submit a proposal for the modification or deletion of existing fields.</p>	<p>Graduate Coordinator</p>	<p>Fall 2014</p>	<p>Discuss proposal with FGPS Dean &amp; bring through necessary Senate approval processes.</p>