

Review of Undergraduate Sociology Program

Oregon State University

April 7-9, 2019

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1. Overall Recommendation: (check box)

<input type="checkbox"/>	Expand
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Maintain
<input type="checkbox"/>	Restructure
<input type="checkbox"/>	Reduce
<input type="checkbox"/>	Suspend
<input type="checkbox"/>	Discontinue
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (include brief explanation)

In general, the review committee is impressed with the Sociology Program. The student experience is of a high quality and the students expressed both admiration for the faculty and a genuine appreciation of the faculty interest and engagement in their education. The faculty are collegial and committed to undergraduate education and seek to provide their students with a meaningful and challenging experience. The professional advisors are committed to the highest level of advising to both e-campus and on campus students and they work hard to maintain the integrity of the program, while recognizing the interests and needs of students. The program leadership works well with the School and the College, while also providing a democratic atmosphere in which the program faculty are involved and engaged with decision-making. We are impressed with the program and any recommendations below are relatively minor tweaks to be considered to improve upon an already strong program.

2. Objective, Logistics and Participants for this Review Process

a. Objective of the review and brief summary of the logistics of the site visit:

The purpose of the review is to provide a detailed assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the OSU Sociology program, to outline program challenges, and to provide suggestions for how to capitalize on program strengths while addressing weaknesses and challenges. The review team consisted of two external team members (Chad Smith and Lisa Broidy) and two members of the OSU curriculum council (Jeff Reimer and Carol McKiel) with support from the Vice Provost Alix Gitelman and Caryn Stoess from the Office of Academic Programs and Assessment. Prior to the meeting on the OSU campus, the team read the program self-report on which Dr. Mark Edwards was the point person. The team had an informal introductory meeting on April 7 and

then began the formal review process on the morning of April 8. The formal process involved a series of meetings with key program stakeholders including relevant administrators (the Dean of Liberal Arts and Head of the School of Public Policy), faculty, students, and advisors. After a day of stakeholder meetings, the committee then convened to draft a report outlining the relevant findings and recommendations. It then met with stakeholders on the morning of April 9 to present and discuss their findings.

b. Overview of Program (brief description)

See introduction and context section of Sociology Program Self-Study, which summarizes the Program in detail.

c. Participants in the site visit

The external review team members are:

Dr. Lisa Broidy, Regent's Professor and Graduate Director, Sociology, University of New Mexico
<http://sociology.unm.edu/people/faculty%20profile/Lisa%20Broidy.html>

Dr. Chad Smith, Professor and Chair Department of Sociology, Texas State University
https://www.soci.txstate.edu/People/faculty/c_smith.html

The internal review team members (from OSU's Faculty Senate Curriculum Council) are:

Dr. Jeff Reimer, Professor, Department of Applied Economics, College of Agricultural Sciences

Dr. Carol McKiel, Coordinator of Graduate Education Programs

3. Detailed Program Evaluation and Assessment

a. Programmatic Strengths

- **The Student Experience**

1. access to smaller classes in which students can easily participate
2. students feel the faculty are approachable and engaged in their learning
3. many faculty are excellent teachers and really care about their students and the learning environment
4. students participate in research with faculty who promote the experience
5. the program offers various opportunities for financial support so that students can attend conferences
6. strong online program and concerted effort to align on-line and on-campus offerings to ensure the learning outcomes are similar
7. effective advising both online and in person - students felt supported
8. faculty as a whole are very focused on student learning experiences and outcomes and put a lot of effort into curriculum and assessment in support of undergraduate education.

9. inside out program - brings sociology students together with incarcerated men and women to study as peers behind prison walls.
 10. high level of student diversity
 11. students appreciate faculty efforts to make sociology relevant and noted that faculty go out of their way to detail the real world applications of sociology topics
- **Culture of Collegiality**
 1. faculty morale seems relatively high and faculty appear to get along well and collaborate closely on issues related to undergraduate education
 2. high level of respect was evident between faculty and advisors
 3. high level of respect of students toward the faculty, who they feel are engaged in their learning and success
 4. junior faculty feel supported and mentored in the tenure process
 5. faculty report feeling that the School supports the sociology program and that the programs within the school do not compete amongst themselves for scarce resources, but rather collaborate to share resources effectively
 - **Mindfulness or Consideration of Curriculum**
 1. faculty annually evaluate student learning and make changes to improve weaknesses
 2. faculty are aware of and actively engaged in wrestling with curriculum challenges (e.g. the challenges of the Methods sequence (SOC 315/316), infusing qualitative methods into the curriculum...etc.)
 3. curriculum decisions primarily guided by commitment to student learning experiences as opposed to more instrumental considerations (SCH, financial concerns,...)

b. Programmatic Weaknesses

1. Proliferation and lack of coordination of electives
2. Curricular drift - instructors may deviate from learning outcomes set by program (for example decision to teach interpretation of tables and figures across the curriculum eventually was abandoned as this goal was not reinforced over time)
3. Many upper division courses are slash classes (undergrad and grad)
4. Role of pre-requisites in restricting access to sociology electives, especially for non-majors

c. Programmatic Challenges

1. Distribution of faculty across areas--fewer faculty in C and J relative to proportion of students in that option
2. Very few junior faculty relative to tenured faculty--this could pose a problem down the line if the program does not get new hires in the coming years
3. Addressing future budget and hiring needs of program within the school context
4. Methods sequence--too much for a 2 course sequence? (WIC, Assessment, methods/stats, unprepared students)--how to address this?
5. Advisors do not have easy access to data about student GPA and other details relevant to advising and student success
6. How to increase internship opportunities for students beyond the limited opportunities available in Corvallis
7. Teaching to a student population that many described as "bimodal" with some very

strong and well-prepared students and other students with limited college readiness.

4. Summary of Findings (inputs of resources and outcomes of program performance)

- a. Undergraduate Degree Programs Offered (Mission of the program, and its relationship and alignment with the mission of the academic college(s), and that of the University)

“The OSU Sociology Program:

1. Provides a rigorous curriculum and inclusive learning environment for OSU students, including unique opportunities for experiential learning;
2. Supports the continuous exploration of sociological knowledge with particular focus on social relations, inequality, the environment, and crime;
3. Serves the people of Oregon, the nation, and the world by informing solutions to current and future social problems.”

As noted in the self-study, “This mission aligns well with the university’s commitment to teaching, research, outreach and engagement that promotes economic, social, cultural and environmental progress for the people of Oregon, the nation and the world. (See OSU’s Strategic Plan 4.0 at <https://leadership.oregonstate.edu/provost/university-strategic-planning>.) While the university is most often known for its technical expertise, we contribute to its broader mission of addressing social and not only technical problems, a commitment that aligns perfectly with the purposes of the College of Liberal Arts, the unit in which our School resides.”

- b. Administrative Structure (Quality of organizational support)

The program is housed within the School of Public Policy (SPP includes Sociology, Economics, and Political Science), which is part of the College of Liberal Arts. The program is administered by the Sociology Program Director, Dr. Lori Cramer. The e-campus is coordinated by Dr. Scott Akins and advising is overseen by two professional advisors (Helen Fleming (e-campus) Robin Fifita (on campus)). There is effective shared governance within the program.

- c. Faculty (Quality of personnel and adequacy to achieve mission and goals)

The program staff includes eighteen faculty (including 2 instructors and 16 tenure track assistant, associate and full professors) who are actively engaged and invested in teaching and in student success. This is enough to offer a broad range of courses and to keep course caps reasonable. The program could benefit from more faculty in the Crime and Justice track given the high percentage of majors in that track.

- d. Students (Recruitment and enrollment trends of students, admissions selectivity and other indications of selecting high quality students)

From 2007 to 2016, student enrollment in the on-campus program increased by 67%. The e-campus program grew from 20 students in 2011 to a peak of 106 in 2014 before declining to 79 students in 2016. While the number of e-campus students has since declined from its peak, its number still quadrupled from its beginning. The number of minority students in the on-campus program has steadily grown since 2007 and in 2016 was 32% of the total student population; students from URM populations grew from 13% to 23% of the total population. The number of minority students in the e-campus program also steadily increased from 17% in 2007 to 27% in 2016 with students from URM populations growing from 8% in 2007 to 11% in 2016. 85% of the students meet the program’s learning objectives even though about half of them transfer into the program in their junior year. According to the self-study, “40% of students complete their degree in under four years and another 46% complete their degrees in 4 to 6 years.”

- e. Facilities and Resources (Level and quality of infrastructure)
Bexell Hall is an older building but was remodeled in 2016 to incorporate modern spaces for both faculty and classrooms. The majority of SPP faculty are now located within this building and the offices of sociologists, economists, and political scientists are in close proximity.
- f. Degree Program Structure, Courses, Curricular Innovations
Undergraduate classes include classes that serve a broad population of majors and non-majors, as well as upper-level courses that are consistent with mainstream sociology offerings at most major U.S. research universities. In terms of innovation the Inside-Out program brings sociology students together with incarcerated men and women to study as peers behind prison walls. Students have opportunities to engage in research with faculty and to attend research conferences and present their work and learn about the work of others.
- g. Program Assessment Practices (Curriculum and assessment strength)
The general faculty discuss and decide what learning outcomes will be assessed on an annual basis. The program's assessment committee is then tasked with collecting the necessary data and compiling the results in a report. The program currently assesses outcomes tied to its two sequence methods courses (SOC 315/316), but is implementing changes to this process to include outcomes from SOC 413.
- h. Outcomes and Impacts (Student learning outcomes and assessment of learning, placement and success of graduates, satisfaction of students and graduates with their education, Professional or national rankings/ratings, etc.)

The outcomes that are assessed include the following items:

- “ 1. *Comprehend*: be able to recognize and interpret existing sociological knowledge
- 2. *Conceptualize*: be able to construct sociological explanations for social phenomena
- 3. *Analyze and Compute*: be able to conduct sociological inquiry with quantitative data, using appropriate software
- 4. *Interpret*: be able to make sociological sense of relevant quantitative data, and articulate findings”

Although the data on assessment spans back to 2007-2008, there are a few years in which data was lost. Going back the past three years to the 2015-2016 academic year, the department has assessed outcomes 1 & 2 (2015-2016), outcome 4 (2016-2017), and outcome 2 (2017-2018). In each of those years large percentages of students (ranging from 69%-89%) of students have “achieved mastering” on the outcomes being measured for that academic year. The program is mindful of assessment and indicates the process is useful. They continue to consider new means of collecting data and measuring outcomes as several new measures and types of data are in development.

- i. Key Issues

5. Recommendations

- 1. Be forward thinking about the budget: How will budget cuts affect faculty morale? How will

student credit hour be affected? What are the most efficient and least disruptive ways to respond to budget cuts?

2. Think about decoupling the research methods series to teach relevant skills separately. Consider using an earlier course for WIC, consider a separate statistics course independent of methods (note that this might also allow for a broader range of methods coverage in the methods sequence--more time for qualitative and other research methods)
3. Advisors need timely access to data about student progress in order to support student retention.
4. Students appreciate research opportunities but are often unaware of how to access them and could benefit from a more coordinated effort to to inform students about opportunities for undergraduate research.
5. Create an option focused on social justice and inequality to reclaim sociology topics that have been siphoned off to/by other programs and schools--maybe "social justice and social institutions" to address student demands for an option that covers topics related to education, social service, and inequality (among others).
6. Curriculum committee may consider taking a larger role in curriculum oversight. They can particularly help address the program weaknesses outlined above in regards to reconsidering the proliferation of elective options, the number of prerequisites, and the high number of graduate/undergraduate slash courses.
7. The Assessment committee can address issues of curricular drift in which the assessment recommendations (i.e., all courses should reinforce interpreting tables/figures) are evaluated and reinforced over time.
8. The program faculty should continue to find ways to support the students who are not easily transitioning into a bachelor's program. This support can be in the form of providing tutoring, restructuring the research methods sequence, and evaluating student outcomes to strengthen strategies for developing students skills. For example, students mentioned that they would like to learn how to develop skills for reading the sociology literature.
9. Both students and faculty stated the positive impact of internships on student and career development. The faculty may want to expand the number of internships by finding partnerships beyond the Corvallis area, i.e. Portland and outside Oregon.

6. Conclusions

The Program Review Committee is impressed by the many strengths that currently exist in OSU's School of Public Policy Sociology program. There appears to be great collegiality and enthusiasm among faculty, staff, and students. Sociology takes the teaching of students seriously and there are many examples of how students and staff "go the extra mile" for students to support their success. There is greater diversity among students and faculty than at many programs at OSU.

Along with these strengths, the program is presently challenged by budget pressures. However, budget issues have come up periodically over the years and the program appears able to adapt to them without major disruptions to the quality of programming. A challenge will be to continue to be vigilant about ensuring that current curricula is aligned with student abilities and interests, as well as making hires in the future that allow faculty expertise to be aligned with the direction of the program.