

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

Program Performance Review Department
of Sociology
B.A., Minor, and M.A.

Dean's Summary Report and Recommendations

May 14, 2014

In the Department of Sociology's last Program Performance Review (2005/06), the program's self-study, the reports of the external reviewers, and the recommendations of the Dean of H&SS noted several problems facing the department. These included the low ratio of tenure-track faculty; the need to bring their curriculum in line with changes in the discipline and the academic and professional interests of CSUF students and to further develop its structure and sequencing; the need to work on building faculty engagement, create a stronger sense of community, and increase faculty/faculty and faculty/student interaction to address the problems created by life on a commuter campus and the growth of online courses; the shortage of faculty mentors to supervise MA projects and theses; problems with advisement; and the need to create and implement a program-level assessment plan. It is clear that since the last review the department has, in large part, successfully addressed some of these problems, yet some have persisted.

On February 7, 2014, after reading the department's self-study a team of external reviewers, which included Judith Treas (Professor of Sociology at the University of California, Irvine), Dennis Loo (Professor of Sociology and Criminology at Cal Poly Pomona), and Eliza Noh (Associate Professor and Chair, Asian American Studies Program, California State University, Fullerton) visited the CSUF campus and met with various members of the Sociology department, including full and part-time faculty, undergraduate and graduate students, and staff. The reviewers' recommendations, the department's responses to the reviewers report and plans for the future as reflected in their self-study, and my recommendations are outlined below.

I. FACULTY

TENURE-TRACK AND TENURED

External Reviewers

The reviewers note that the large number of recent retirements have depleted the ranks of the department's senior faculty, so much so that there is only one full professor among them, and he has substantial administrative duties elsewhere. This, along with a series of short-term department chairs, has placed a burden on mid-level faculty (associate professors) and even junior, untenured faculty (assistant professors) who have been shouldered with most of the department's administrative tasks without much guidance. Since both groups are currently engaged in the RTP process, the reviewers worry that such responsibilities will hinder their progress toward tenure and promotion.

All of this is compounded by several concerns mentioned by faculty, such as the recent turnover in University administrative personnel, the implementation of new strategic plan, increased requests for assessment activities, the new demand for the creation of more High Impact Practice experiences, and the implementation of a new budgeting model based on performance-based funding.

The reviewers also fielded complaints from faculty who feel that the lack of senior leadership has led to changes in the department's culture. Without senior faculty "to set expectations and

maintain internal discipline,” for example, there has been an increase in the number of faculty who spend little time on campus, thus limiting their availability to attend meetings or meet with students. Finally, the reviewers noted that faculty do not feel that their research agendas are sufficiently valued and supported with assigned time and professional development funds.

The external reviewers conclude that “the high attrition among junior faculty and heavy faculty workload suggest that retaining and supporting faculty through tenure and promotion is a possible weakness,” and they speculate that all of these factors—the lack of senior leadership, increased workload, which faculty feel is not sufficiently rewarded with assigned time or valued in the RTP process— could be responsible for the substantial loss of members of their junior faculty. They recommend that the administration provide current and future faculty with a clearer sense of “what the new normal for teaching and research” will be in the future.

Department

In their self-study the department acknowledges its current predicament with regard to the absence of a cohort of senior faculty to provide leadership to the department as well as their need to hire a new generation of tenure-track faculty to replace those who left. They do not, however, explore the reasons for the high-rate of junior faculty attrition in their self-study or in their response to the reviewers’ report,

Dean

Clearly the situation since the last PPR, when the department had an almost equal ratio between faculty in the FERP and non-FERP tenure-track faculty (8:10), has improved. Since 2006 they have hired nine new tenure-track faculty. During the same period, however, they lost 5 of them.

Currently, they have 4 assistant professors, 7 association professor, 1 full professor, 2 faculty in the FERP, and 1 full-time lecturer. This AY (13/14) the department has been allocated 26.0 FTEF. With 13 FTEF dedicated to tenure-track positions, this leaves the department with a 50% tenure-track faculty ratio. The department has submitted requests for two searches in AY 14/15 in the areas of Education and Immigration and one search in AY 15/16 in the area of Criminology, with subfield specializations in the following areas: Latino/a experiences, family, theory, and research methods. If these searches are successful, with one faculty member leaving the FERP in spring 2015, they will be at 56% in AY 15/16 and as 60% in AY 16/17. For the period under review, they have met or surpassed target since AY 2005/06, so they can easily accommodate these three searches and should, in fact, think of conducting more.

The loss of 5 new hires, however, is disconcerting. The department’s self-study does not address why this occurred. The external reviewers argue that the lack of senior leadership and increased workload could be responsible for the substantial loss of members of their junior faculty. Before the department enters into a new round of hiring, the possible causes of this high-level of faculty attrition should be explored, and plans should be devised to prevent this from occurring in the future.

The department personnel committee should make every effort to ensure that service, including work on assessment, the integration of new High Impact Practices experiences into the

curriculum, and graduate student mentoring, are evenly distributed and rewarded in the RTP process.

It should be noted here that tenure-track faculty in Sociology currently teach a 3/3 load. In spring 2014, tenure-track faculty (excluding the chair, who has a reduced teaching load) taught on average 81 students. With an SFR of 27.7, they need to teach nearly 139 students each to make target, so a sizeable portion of their workload is being covered by others. Further, while the lack of senior faculty leadership is perhaps unique to their department, the administrative and teaching workload demands are not. We are funded to teach 5 classes (15 units) per semester. Faculty receive assigned time for one of those classes (3 units) to perform administrative tasks, such as department, college or university committee work. Administrative work, then, is already part of the faculty's compensated workload.

ADJUNCT FACULTY

External Reviewers

The reviewers complemented the department's part-time faculty, noting they are current in their fields and that their dedication to their students easily matches that of the full-time faculty. They did, however, relay some concerns expressed by part-time faculty. The reviewers mentioned that, because the department is concerned collective bargaining issues, part-time faculty are not given assignments in a timely manner. Part-time faculty also noted that, in their faculty evaluations, too much emphasis is placed on their SOQ's. This discourages innovative teaching and classroom rigor. They also want the write-ups from faculty assigned to observe their teaching, along with self-reflective statements on their teaching philosophy and practice, be included in the evaluation process. Finally, they recommend that adjunct faculty be provided with more opportunities for professional development, such as access to Miscellaneous Course Funds and workshops.

Department

In response to the issues raised by the reviewers, the department has committed itself to improving the way it evaluates part-time faculty by increasing the frequency of classroom visits, and including syllabi and assignments in their evaluation procedure. They also plan on developing and an implementing a new SOQ.

Dean

While I understand the department's concern that it meet the requirements established by the Collective Bargaining Agreement, its hesitancy to hire is misplaced. All part-time hiring is dependent on funding, enrollment and performance. This information should be provided when adjunct faculty are hired, but hiring and setting schedules should be done as soon as possible. This ensures the timely submission of book orders for all classes, and it provides part-time instructors with sufficient lead time to plan their courses and their teaching schedules. In addition, because part-time faculty teach a substantial number of students, their evaluations must be carefully constructed in order to ensure their professional development and maximize their strengths as classroom instructors. To that end, the department's SOQ should accurately measure their performance in the classroom, and the evaluation process should integrate many

forms of evidence into the evaluation process, including syllabi, exams and writing assignments, self-reflective statements, and classroom observances. With regard to professional development opportunities for part-time faculty, the College of H&SS has begun holding annual professional development events, and it is planning to distribute funds for some to attend conferences and engage in other activities that will strengthen their teaching proficiency. Part-time faculty should be encouraged to take advantage of these opportunities.

II. STUDENT SUCCESS

CURRICULUM

External Reviewers

The reviewers noted that Sociology department's undergraduate program is "running smoothly." They saw no bottlenecks to limit the timely progression of students toward graduation, and commended the department for the variety and quantity of opportunities they provide for students to pursue internships and engage in experiential learning and student/faculty research projects. They did, however, report student complaints of the lack of rigor in Sociology General Education courses and the lack of opportunities to participate in learning community experiences. Fearful that the administration's efforts to increase graduate rates will lead to grade inflation, the reviewers advised the department to carefully monitor course grade distributions.

The reviewers lauded the improvements in the department's MA program, which include more selective admissions criteria, smaller cohorts, and an improvement in the alignment between faculty research strengths and student interests. The reviewers did, however, refer to the dissatisfaction expressed by some students over the sequencing of their graduate courses, arguing that the statistics course should be required during their first rather than their second year. Students also expressed dissatisfaction with SOCI 585, asking that the course be made more substantive. They specifically asked that more time be spent developing student research projects rather than merely providing them with the opportunity to learn about those of the faculty.

Department

The department has made several significant changes to their undergraduate curriculum. They replaced their capstone course with SOCI 308—Writing for Sociology Students, making it a requirement for the major. They have developed new undergraduate courses on globalization and on specific social issues, such as violence, immigration, and drug use. The course requirements for their concentrations, which provide specialized fields and high-impact practice learning communities, have been updated and the range of possible electives has been narrowed. They have created more writing-intensive courses and seminars, and they have increased the number of courses that encourage civic engagement and community outreach. Most notably, through University Extended Education, they have created a Sociology Online Degree Completion Program.

The department also notes shortcomings in their curriculum, such as the fact that not all of their concentrations include a 400-level course, and relatively few majors (fall 2012 = 20%) are selecting concentrations. Further, they are looking for ways to make their 400-level courses more rigorous and to embed assignments that emphasize data analysis in all of their undergraduate courses. They also want to integrate more high-impact practice experiences into their courses that would enhance students' understanding of "theory, method and research design." Finally, the department wants to strengthen and expand their internship programs, create a "terminal option" for majors—which would include service learning, internships, or an empirical research project—and perhaps reinstate a capstone course as a major requirement.

The department of Sociology has also substantially revised its MA program. They created a cohort model, where an entering class takes essentially the same courses with minor variations in electives. They have provided a sequencing of course work that builds on previously gained knowledge and skills. They eliminated spring admissions and reduced the number of students admitted to 20 in order to improve the SFR between mentors and students and increase student graduation rates. They also worked to improve graduation rates by identifying students who need help and sending them to workshops and special advisement opportunities in order to meliorate problems and difficulties. They added a new course to their curriculum, SOCI 585 – The Practice of Sociology, which is a first semester class that provides new graduate students with an understanding of the link between theory, research, and professional life. They also revised SOCI 596 – Teaching Symposium, which expanded the number of schools and mentors involved and added a seminar component, a mock interview, and a teaching demonstration to the course to better prepare students for a career in college teaching.

The department also plans on formalizing the areas covered by the comprehensive exam, creating bibliographies and providing students with samples questions to help them prepare for the three exam areas in which they are tested.

Finally, the department provides opportunities for their MA students to engage in several high-impact practice experiences. They can work as graduate assistants who collaborate with faculty on research projects. They are encouraged to present their own work at regional professional meetings. And in SOCI 596, students find placement with mentors in courses at community colleges or universities where they gain professional experience as college instructors. The class provides reading assignments that cover pedagogy, course and syllabi construction, and experience presenting lectures, leading discussion sessions, and grading courses assignments.

Dean

Because of the substantial growth in the percentage of the FTES they derive from majors as well as the substantial increase in majors, the department's efforts to revise their undergraduate curriculum was time well spent. I would encourage the department to pursue their current plans to remedy weaknesses in their undergraduate curriculum by integrating more data-driven assignments into their courses, developing a capstone experience requirement for the major, and expanding their high-impact practices by creating more learning communities, internships, experiential learning opportunities and student/faculty research projects. They should also carefully hire new faculty whose areas of specialization will expand their current curricular

offerings in a way that reflects changes in the discipline and matches the academic and professional interests of their students.

Building on their current efforts to reshape their MA program, the department should also enact the changes suggested by the external reviewers. They should, for example, rethink the sequencing of their required graduate courses as well as the content and goals of SOCI 585. They should also work to improve their time-to-degree rates. In particular, they should analyze why 71.4% the fall 2009 cohort managed to graduate in three years and duplicate this as often as possible.

ADVISEMENT

External Reviewers

Except for the summers, the reviewers saw no problem with undergraduate student advisement.

The reviewers also noted that graduate students appreciated the advisement efforts of faculty and the graduate coordinator. Yet some problems persist, most notably the gap between number of students working on their culminating projects or theses and the number of faculty willing to mentor them. And even when a mentor is assigned, some students complained there was not always a match between their research interests and their mentors' areas of expertise, specifically mentioning the dearth of advisers who were able to supervise quantitative research projects. They recommend that the department work to ensure a more equitable distribution of mentoring responsibilities among the faculty, further reduce the size of each cohort, and hire more faculty who are able to supervise quantitative research projects.

Department

The department currently has assigned two full-time faculty to the task of undergraduate advisement. They provide information on graduation policies and procedures, major and minor requirements, supplemental instruction, student support services, internships, career guidance, and graduate school placement. The graduate coordinator is responsible for M.A. advisement.

Dean

In spite of the large number of majors, the department seems to have undergraduate advisement in hand. The time-to-degree rates for first-time freshmen and even transfer students, however, speak to some weaknesses in their advisement efforts. And since Titan I for fall semesters occurs in July, the problem with summer advisement mentioned by the reviewers needs to be addressed. The increase in the number of majors should be matched by a reallocation of department resources to cover the enhanced advising needs of this growing population.

Moreover, the complaints with regard to faculty supervision of MA theses, projects or comprehensive exams need to be addressed. Mentoring and committee responsibilities need to be more equitably distributed. Further, the admission of new graduate students to the program should align with faculty areas of expertise, so that there is no disparity between students' research and professional interests and faculty availability and skills.

GRADUATIONS RATES AND RETENTION

The number of undergraduate Sociology degrees awarded has steadily increased from 152 in 2005/06 to 245 in 2012/13. Except for substantial dips that occurred in AY 07/08, 08/09, and 11/12, the number of graduate degrees awarded has remained relatively constant (05/06 = 21; 12/13 = 23).

The University average for first-time freshmen graduating in 6 years or less “in major” grew during the period between fall 2000 (21.5%) and **fall 2006 (24.0%)**. The average for the College of H&SS declined slightly during the same period (fall 2000 – 27.6% and **fall 2006 – 27.2%**). The average for Sociology went up from 28.6% in fall 2000 to **34.8% in fall 2006**. Sociology’s 6 year or less graduation rate for first-time freshman “in major” has exceeded that of the College and the University.

The University average for transfer students graduating in 6 years or less “in major” declined slightly during the period between fall 2000 (63.1%) and **fall 2006 (62.5%)**. The average for the College of H&SS also declined slightly during the same period (fall 2000 – 61.8% and **fall 2006 – 60.7%**). The average for Sociology, however, grew during this period (60.8% in fall 2000 to **72.4% in fall 2006**). Overall, Sociology’s 6 year or less graduation rate for upper-division transfer students “in major” has exceeded that of the College and the University.

While Sociology is essentially an upper-division major, and their students take the vast majority of their courses in their junior and senior years, in order to improve retention rates the department should consider forms of outreach to lower-division majors (especially FTF), providing them with enhanced advisement and integrating them into the social networks of the major. In addition, they should continue to create opportunities for “high impact” experiences for students who are just beginning to proceed through major requirements.

Even though their 3 and 4-year MA graduation rates for students “in major” for the fall 2006 cohort are substantially below the rates for H&SS (42.5% and 53.3%) and the University (52.3% and 60.5%), the department of Sociology has done a good job decreasing the average time to degree for their Masters Degree students in the past few years. They substantially increased their 3-year graduation rates from fall 2006 (12.5%) to fall 2010 (41.2%). The percentage of those who graduated in 4 years rose as well, from 29.2% in fall 2006 to 61.1% in fall 2008. Even though the average time-to-degree for Sociology graduate majors is still too long, however, it should be noted that while the 3-year graduation average for the fall 2009 cohort for H&SS was 45.8% and 58.7% for the University, the rate for the department of Sociology was 71.4%.

III. STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES AND ASSESSMENT

External Reviewers

The reviewers made no recommendations with regard to assessment

Department

The department has established well defined learning goals and has begun to implement efforts to assess them. In 2012, the department assessed students' understanding and mastery of specific student learning outcomes in a 100-level course and a 400-level courses. This included all students, not just majors. Another SLO was measured in 2013 by assessing 167 students in 300 and 400-level courses. The department also relies on indirect forms of assessment, such as surveys of graduating seniors and alumni, as well as embedded assessments in each course that align with the department's SLO's. In addition, the department created a cohort of faculty who work in select areas of concentration. They direct students to mentors and research opportunities; coordinate meetings with part-time faculty to ensure that their courses align with department and course SLO's; and review syllabi for core courses to ensure that their SLO's align with department SLO's. As the department reports, the "results are shared with the faculty."

The primary form of assessment for the MA program is the culminating experience for the degree—the thesis, project or comprehensive exam. The quality of a project or a thesis is maintained by the Graduate Committee, which ensures that it is well designed and that the student is qualified to complete it. If a student fails a portion of the comprehensive exam they can work with the graduate adviser, who will devise a study plan to help them pass.

Dean

The department has made great strides in creating and implementing their assessment plan. As reflected in their self-appraisal of their assessment activities in Appendix III. Documenting Academic Achievement, however, it is clear they need to do more work in category V—Utilization for Improvement. That is, they need to demonstrate how assessment evidence is shared with faculty and used to reshape their curriculum and teaching practices. Further, the department should think of creating program-based forms of direct assessment that reflect on students' mastery of student learning goals and outcomes at the end of their careers in the major. This could best be done if they reinstated a capstone course or experience for the major.

Sociology's Online Degree Completion Program began in fall 2012, so its effectiveness is untested with regard to retention and completion rates. The department, if it is responsible for assessing this program, should pay special attention to these factors as it matures and develops.

IV. BUDGETS AND TARGETS

External Reviewers

The reviewers do not make any specific recommendations with regard to the department's budget and targets.

Department

The department notes that while the number of Sociology majors has increased during the period under review, there has not been a commensurate increase in their FTEF. They also mention that while their SFR has remained relatively constant, it is too high and wonder if an increase in their FTEF would lower their SFR.

Dean

Their department's FTEF grew slightly during this period, with 25.4 in AY 05/06 and 26.6 in AY 12/13. They are currently budgeted at 26.0 FTEF (AY 13/14). Their FTES target grew as well, with 691 in AY 05/06 and 749 in AY 12/13. They are currently budgeted at 721 FTES (AY 13/14).

While their FTEF grew up by 2% and their FTES grew by 4% between AY 05/06 and AY 13/14, during the period under review the department's SFR has remained fairly constant. In AY 05/06 their SFR was 27.2. In AY 12/13 it was 27.5. It currently (AY 13/14) is 27.7, which reflects a 2% increase. While their SFR is higher than many departments and programs in the College, and certainly higher than the College average of 25.1, there are others that surpass it. Several departments, for example, have an SFR of 28.1. Further, there is no essential link between FTEF and SFR, so raising the former would not necessarily lower the latter.

V. FACILITIES

CLASSROOMS

External Reviewers

The reviewers supported the department's request for more computer lab space or the adoption of a more efficient system for student remote access to frequently used software programs.

Department

The department has requested access to more large classrooms. They also want their own computer lab. They have also requested the creation of lab space at the Irvine Campus that will allow them to teaching interviewing skills in their research methods courses.

Dean

Access to classroom space continues to be a problem for the College of H&SS. As new classroom and lab space become available the department's needs and capacities will be evaluated space will be distributed accordingly.

VI. STAFF

External Reviewers

The reviewers noted conflicts between the department's administrative staff and its faculty, specially referring to a "power struggle" between the ASC and the department chair. They specifically mentioned the staff's concern that faculty are seldom on campus, and the faculty's concerns that their travel requests are not being processed in a timely fashion by staff. The reviewers argue that staff are reflecting the concerns of a previous generation of department leadership, and are not responding to the requests of current leadership. They recommend the reassignment of the ASC or, failing that, ask that the Dean's office take a more active role in supporting the current chair and resolving boundary disputes between the ASC, the chair, and the faculty.

Department

While the department did not mention problems with their staff in their PPR self-study, they do address the problems raised by the external reviewers mentioned above. As the department chair notes in her response to the reviewers' report, faculty "do not feel supported by staff," and staff members, who have a different set of priorities, feel under utilized and under appreciated. Further, she emphasizes the problems created by the relatively high turnover of department leadership.

Dean

Clearly the the gap between faculty and staff interests is an important problem, and it is likely tied to the lack of sustained leadership in the department noted in the reviewers' report and in the department's response to it. Both problems need to be addressed. The Dean's office will do its best to work with the department to encourage stable and enduring leadership as well as to meliorate the tensions between faculty and staff.

VII. DEAN'S SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

During the period under review the department of Sociology has demonstrated the many ways it has substantially contributed to the mission of the University. The high-level scholarly and professional accomplishments of its faculty as well as their service to our students and the community are well documented and valued. I concur with the external reviewers' conclusion that the department of Sociology is made up of well-trained and "first-rate" faculty who are, in general, very "productive as teachers and scholars." It is indeed a strong academic unit that does an excellent job of meeting the academic and professional needs of their undergraduate and graduate majors. Further, as the reviewers observed, they are to be commended for the high degree of collegiality they have achieved, their commitment to their students and their department, and the "admirable diversity [in their] backgrounds and interests." As they also conclude, however, "as things now stand, one gets the impression of a strong and conscientious Department exhausting its resources in efforts to meet vague and shifting priorities." In order to build on these accomplishments and address the challenges the department faces I would like to make the following recommendations. The department should:

- continue to hire faculty in targeted areas outlined by the external reviewers and the department's self-study, especially those who engage in quantitative research projects, in order to enhance the strengths of their undergraduate major and graduate program;
- utilize department resources (assigned time and professional development funds) to reward department service, and make every effort to note this service in the RTP process;
- examine the causes of the substantial attrition rate of new faculty hired after 2006;
- hire part-time faculty in a timely manner, and utilize a variety of resources to evaluate them beyond their SOQ's;
- encourage part-time faculty to take advantage of professional development opportunities offered by the department of Sociology, the College of H&SS, and the Faculty Development Center;
- continue to revise their undergraduate curriculum and integrate more high-impact practice experiences into their courses, and consider reinstating a capstone course or experience as a major requirement;
- rethink the sequencing of their required MA courses;
- ensure that undergraduate advisement occurs in the summers;
- ensure the equitable distribution of mentoring and committee responsibilities for MA projects, theses, and exams;
- improve on the graduation rates of their first-time freshmen through mandatory enhanced advisement and by integrating them into the social networks of the major;
- work to decrease the time to degree rates for M.A. students;
- build on current assessment efforts by demonstrating how evidence is used to reshape their undergraduate and graduate curriculum, and create a program-based assessment experience that measures undergraduate mastery of student learning goals and outcomes;
- work with the Dean's office to create departmental leadership that is a stable, enduring, and informed;
- work with the Dean's office to resolve the current tensions between faculty and staff.