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To: Su Swarat, Associate Vice President of Institutional Effectiveness

From: Sheryl Fontaine, Dean, and Jessica Stern, Associate Dean of Student Relations, College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Date: April 10, 2022

Subject: Dean's Summary and Evaluation of the Sociology BA and MA

The Sociology programs are some of our most popular programs in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. As of the Spring 2022 census, there are 908 Sociology majors, 106 Sociology minors, and 46 graduate students. The self-support Online Degree Completion Program in Sociology currently has 85 matriculating students. Undergraduate Sociology majors may choose either to receive a general Sociology BA or complete a concentration in Social Inequalities, the Sociology of Deviance and Crime, or Health and Social Welfare. The department also offers a master's degree that prepares students for careers in research and non-profit, community college teaching, or Ph.D. programs. The Sociology Department consists of 17 tenured/tenure-track faculty and 27 lecturers. In addition to their teaching and service obligations, the faculty maintain rigorous research agendas.

With the external committee, we applaud the tremendous improvements that Sociology has implemented since their last PPR. In the course of making changes, the department's carefully crafted mission statement has served as an important touchstone. In particular, they have demonstrated their commitment to collegial department governance, inclusive and equitable practices, student success, and assessment.

### **Student Recruitment, Retention, and Graduation**

Thanks to the leadership of recent chairs, the commitment of several faculty leaders, and the support of their faculty-at-large, the department has become exemplar in the area of Student Success in several important ways. They have: crafted advising materials that position students complete self-advising that allows them to enter advising meetings with a baseline of knowledge; made themselves accessible through a variety of modes and appointment types; embedded advising in their Transfer Student Learning Community; and published/are publishing their findings to disseminate their success and engage with a large literature about Student Success. Members of the department have also invested in preparing their students for post-graduation success by developing courses and re-designing their internship course to give their undergraduate and graduate students



exposure and experience in teaching, educational institutions, research, and community-engaged work. The results of their Student Success efforts have paid off, particularly with transfer students. In a GI 2025 analysis that the College completed in S21, the Sociology department was at the college-average in terms of first-time student 4-year graduation rate for the F16 cohort (39.6%), and significantly higher in the F18 transfer-student 2-year graduation rate (57.7% versus 45.7%).

As the self-study notes, to this point, the department has largely committed itself to serving its upper-division student population. We are glad to see that they are now focusing on developing their support of the growing number of lower-division students. Of the applicants admitted as Sociology majors for Fall 2022, 51% are first-time students. Developing and articulating their support of first-time students not only promises to bring the retention and graduation rates of that student population up to the impressive rates they achieve with their transfers, but it may also increase their yield of admitted freshmen. Success with yield is likely to become particularly important if the College and department transfer student yield rates continue to decrease as they have in the last two years (see the Institutional Research Tableau Admissions Dashboard). The number of Sociology majors and minors has decreased by 7.6% in Spring 22 compared to Spring 21, the fifth largest decrease in the College. This may be blip (and still leaves the department with significantly more students than their last PPR), but the department should monitor and adjust their outreach strategies if necessary. The graduate program has also seen a decline in graduate student enrolment. While the External Review Team notes reflects a national trend in the field, the department as the Self Study states, also manages their graduate program cohort size to allow ample time for faculty mentorship. Their MA student post-completion success is strong, and the department has been able to leverage their alumni placement in local community colleges to create prospective transfer student interest in joining the CSUF Sociology BA program.

As the department Self Study, External Review Team, and department response indicate, the addition of professional staff advisors would be transformational for the Sociology department. The findings of a College working group on advising confirmed that incorporating staff advisors in programs to work in tandem with faculty advisors would benefit students and faculty greatly. The College is piloting such a tandem advising position with four programs in the Fall and working to identify and apply for monies that would allow an expansion of this model to Sociology. We appreciate your willingness to utilize GAs until we can hire professional advisors.

## **Curriculum and Pedagogy**

As the Self Study makes clear, the Sociology department uses assessment very effectively to reflect on their programs and determine if any revisions are merited. The department regularly provides detailed assessment reports to tenured, tenure-track, and lecturer faculty and use these reports to guide on-going discussions and department meetings and retreats. Sociology has “closed the



assessment loop” by: asking faculty to explicitly direct students to critique social theories in SOCI 410, developing core competencies for SOCI 308, communicating more clearly the new SLO on power and multiple perspectives, and revising comprehensive exam reading lists and preparation to include more research methods.

While Sociology has more faculty trained in online pedagogy than most departments have, all of our academic programs find themselves in need of discussions on course modality, the appropriate online footprint for an in-person degree, and how to determine which courses are best conducted online and which in-person. The External Review Team determined that the department is not making modality decisions using pedagogical rationale. We note that for Fall 2022 only 40% of the courses have been scheduled as fully in-person, the second-lowest percentage in the college. Along with all of our departments, we expect that Sociology will engage in discussions about course modality, a discussion that can be informed by the guidance we expect to receive in the Fall from the College Modality working group.

We also commend the department on starting conversations about the value of concentrations, 400-level course requirements, differentiating between 300 and 400 level courses, adding SOCI 356: Social Inequity, creating core competencies for more courses, and evaluating course sequencing in the master’s program.

## **Faculty**

The College commends the department on successfully hiring seven new tenure-track faculty since the last PPR, maintaining a high retention rate, and successful promotion and tenure rate for their faculty. The department is a college model in their use of UPS 100.007: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Social Justice when revising their Lecturer Department Standards and their commitment to use UPS 100.007 when revising their Department Personnel Standards in Spring 2022. As the External Review Team notes, the department has also incorporated part-time faculty into coordinator student advisor positions, helping lecturers feel more involved in, and committed to, the department. The department is also mindful of workload equity, as evidenced in their revisions to their graduate program faculty rotation strategy and their monitoring of how many graduate students each faculty is mentoring. We encourage the department to continue working on the complicated issue of workload equity in other areas as well.

We note that the External Review Team recommends two new tenure-track hires. As the department response notes, this need will be met by the hire they will complete next year and by the addition of Dr. Ed Collom who will retreat to the department in fall 22 from his position in FAR.



The External Review Team recommended that the college provide additional course releases and summer support for faculty research. Even during recent budget reductions, the College has continued to provide competitively available summer research support that adds opportunities beyond the University research awards. We commend the department for using some of the revenue generated by their self-support program to fund summer research grants for assistant and associate professors, and we will continue to help facilitate this practice as they expand this support to full professors and, if possible, graduate students.

### **Staff**

We appreciate the department's attentiveness to staff. As the department noted in their response to the External Review Team, the department has hired a new ASC I, which the External Review Team noted as critical. We acknowledge that the training of new staff diminished during COVID. With so many new hires across the College, we recognize the need to revitalize and formalize this training and expect that our HR specialist, Joanna Rowe and Administrative Analyst, Cindy Togami will begin this process in the summer. Regarding a pilot that would allow Chairs to have greater direct supervisory authority, we want to clarify that this would be a change that is outside of the purview of the College and would need to be made at the University level.

The University and College are investing much effort in determining how to improve the working conditions of staff at CSUF. To this end, Academic Affairs is in the process of reevaluating the telecommute policy. HRDI has recently announced their support for the review and approval of staff additional pay. We will be looking to align the HRDI process with additional work that deserves compensation and College and department budgets. In addition to the benefit that our plan to hire additional tandem advisors (SSP IIs) would have for our students, we also see these positions as providing a professional ladder for aspiring staff, as advocated for in the department response. We hope we will have news to share in the coming months.

### **Classroom Space and Online Degree Program Revenue**

We hear the department's and External Review Team's call for more dedicated classroom, and in particular lab, space. Academic Programs is in the process of evaluating the process by which classrooms are assigned, and under Interim Assistant Vice Provost James Hussar have begun an analysis of classroom space use. We hope that out of this analysis will come new processes that will lead to a more equitable and efficient distribution of classrooms. The External Review Team recommended exploring offering courses at other times, such as Fridays. While the department was previously able to fill Friday classes, interest was minimal in Spring 2022, leading to one class cancellation. Across the College, the 16 Friday classes in the Spring filled, mostly, to capacity. We



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urge the department to see if there is anything they can learn from chairs of departments who have had success with Friday classes, and try that option again in the future. This topic could also be part of the larger conversation on course modality.

As the department and External Review Team notes, the department has generated a significant funds (\$470,000 over the last four years) from their Online Degree Completion Program. The restrictions on these funds makes them difficult to use effectively. We are actively working on a solution to this problem, which the College also faces with revenue from the HSS Online Degree Completion Program. In addition to an anticipated new funding model from Dr. Debra Leahy, the recently hired Dean of Extension and International Programs, the University has plans to change the revenue distribution from self-support program. Currently, the College is drafting an MOU for the HSS Online Degree Completion Program that will serve as a model for the Sociology program and create a way to more easily and predictably utilize these funds. We are optimistic that under the leadership of Dr. Leahy a solution will be reached quickly.

In summary, we highly commend the faculty and leadership in the Department of Sociolgoy on the intentional and steady progress they have made in the areas of curriculum, student support, faculty hiring and support, and equity and inclusion since their last Program Performance Review and look forward to seeing the plans and goals identified in this Program Performance Review take shape.