

TO: Mike Mahon
President and Vice Chancellor

DATE: October 3, 2018

FROM: Alan Siaroff
Chair, Academic Quality Assurance Committee

RE: Department of Sociology Academic Quality Assurance Review

In accordance with the U of L *Academic Quality Assurance Policy and Process*, the Academic Quality Assurance Committee approved the review of the Department of Sociology at its September 28, 2018 meeting. The Self Study Committee for this review comprised Reginald Bibby (Program Review Coordinator), Trevor Harrison, and Jason Laurendeau.

The review produced four documents:¹

1. *Sociology Self Study Report* (received March 1, 2018) – Self Study Report, developed by the Department of Sociology Self Study Committee.
2. *External Review Report, Department of Sociology, University of Lethbridge* (received May 16, 2018) – by Barbara Marshall (Trent University) and Terry Wotherspoon (University of Saskatchewan) based on their site visit of April 16-17, 2018.
3. *Response: External Review Report* (received June 15, 2018) – response of the Self Study Committee to the external review.
4. *Dean's Response to the Academic Quality Assurance Review, Sociology* (received August 27, 2018) – response to the review, written by Craig Cooper, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science.

¹ All documents are available upon request.

Self Study

The Self Study Report identified the following strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the Department of Sociology:

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| Strengths: | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The department is strong and productive.• Administrative support is very good.• The department makes extraordinary contributions to serving non-majors and graduate education. |
| Weaknesses: | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The department has an insufficient number of faculty members due to departures, secondments, and course relief.• There are challenges with morale and communication. |
| Opportunities: | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• There is the potential for congeniality and good interpersonal ties.• Faculty replacements can revamp the department. |
| Threats: | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Faculty may not be replaced.• There is the potential loss of senior personnel. |
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Strengths of the department mentioned in the body of the report include:

- The department has several unique affiliated research entities and programs, including the Prentice Institute, the Parkland Institute, and the Institute for Child and Youth Studies.
- Faculty members in the department have extensive administrative, research, and teaching ties both within and external to the U of L community.
- The department adheres to the principles and goals in the U of L's key planning documents and mandate.
- The department has the flexibility to allow Independent Study courses to meet senior-level requirements.
- A curriculum review and revision boosted the rigour of the undergraduate degree program.
- There are repetitive interactions between faculty and students made possible by the small size of the department and of the student body.
- Student satisfaction with advising appears to be high.
- Faculty members are active in supervising M.A. and Ph.D. students.
- The student retention rate has trended upwards over the past seven years.
- Student satisfaction with the program and the quality of teaching in the program are both high, as measured on the Graduate Outcomes Survey.
- Sociology graduates have very high rates of employment, ranging from 87.5% employed to 100%.
- All faculty members have ongoing research programs.

Weaknesses and challenges mentioned in the report body include:

- The department does not offer a minor in Sociology.
- The revised curriculum has produced some unanticipated consequences for students.
- The department is constrained in its ability to offer courses beyond those required for majors. This constraint results from the large number of specific courses that have to be offered annually and the decreasing teaching capacity from faculty member departures, secondments, and course reliefs.
- There is no formal co-operative, internship, or practicum element to the program.
- The department has experienced significant polarization among its faculty members.
- There is a downward trend in credit hours taught, even as student numbers have increased.
- The department is asked to expand graduate course offerings without being given additional resources.
- There is a lack of academic diversity among the faculty members.
- There is no annual budget for student markers.
- There are no funds for guest speakers.

The report noted future initiatives to improve the department:

- Advocate for required personnel.
- Make a strong case for servicing non-majors.
- Revise the curriculum to rebalance the focus on majors.
- Develop broader visioning, mentoring, and succession planning.

The report listed four issues on which the department seeks the advice of External Reviewers:

1. For curriculum, how can the department best balance serving majors and non-majors?
2. What is a reasonable level of resources regarding curriculum and personnel?
3. What can be done to enhance morale?
4. What are future directions for the department?

External Review

The External Review Report noted the strengths of the department:

- Faculty members are actively engaged in research and scholarly work across diverse areas.
- The program aligns well with the Mandate, Strategic Plan, and the Arts and Science Academic Plan.
- Department faculty have been key in developing and delivering the M.A. and Ph.D. in Cultural, Social, and Political Thought.
- The Sociology program provides a rigorous curriculum with a focus on theory and methods.
- Many Sociology courses offered are at or near capacity.
- The department takes pedagogy seriously and faculty are passionate about what and how they teach.
- The fundamental resources are in place to support high quality educational experiences.

The report mentioned several challenges for the department:

- There are several existing elective courses that appeal to students but that the department can sometimes not offer due to a lack of staffing resources.
- There are some areas of the discipline that are underrepresented or not represented in the curriculum, despite the presence of faculty with relevant expertise. Examples of these areas are sport, media and communications, and food. Some areas of the sociological curriculum are unavailable due to staff shortages.
- The array of courses reflects faculty research interests in a way that appears to offer little cohesion across the program.
- The designation of ten courses as required in the major is high, and restricts the range of elective courses that can be offered.
- The requirement of five research methods and statistics courses has likely contributed to a sharp decline in the number of Sociology majors.
- Few students are taking up the options for independent study, experiential learning / co-op, and honours thesis.
- There is no option for a minor in Sociology.
- There are limited elective courses that would appeal to non-majors.
- The department does not have an overall curriculum map that views the curriculum and its delivery as a whole.

The following recommendations were included in the External Review:

1. Reduce the number of required research methods/statistics courses for the degree, and/or offer distinct degree programs in which requirements are differentiated for students seeking a more general degree versus those seeking advanced studies.
2. Consider developing a minor in Sociology.
3. Encourage students to consider the options for independent study, experiential learning/co-op, and thesis.
4. Consider hosting a faculty-student event in the Spring term that provides information on the degree program, courses available, and independent study opportunities.
5. Engage in a more sustained curriculum revision that aims to develop a coherent vision for the department and the program.
6. The university should consistently and adequately compensate the department for the loss of teaching capacity due to administrative secondments.
7. Initiate a seminar series where graduate students and faculty have opportunities to present and discuss their own research and to engage with external scholars.
8. Undertake informal initiatives to facilitate more regular engagement and interaction between students and faculty.
9. Consider developing periodic newsletters to share departmental activities and accomplishments.
10. Where they do not exist, develop guidelines to guide annual workloads, the interpretation of standards for tenure and promotion, committee membership, and the allocation of departmental resources.
11. During curriculum planning, consider departmental involvement in and contribution to emerging interdisciplinary initiatives and U of L priority areas.
12. Undertake periodic surveys of students and recent graduates to gather data for planning and to assess program outcomes.
13. Plan a departmental retreat to articulate a department identity and program and course outcomes.
14. Develop a faculty complement plan to support departmental priorities in research and curriculum.

Program Response

In their Program Response, the Self Study Committee summarized the External Review Report and noted that they view the observations and recommendations contained in that report as thorough, fair, and helpful.

The Self Study Committee responded to the various recommendations in the External Review Report:

Curriculum recommendations:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. In 2018-19 the department will revise the curriculum to give greater flexibility for majors and non-majors. This will include revisiting course requirements and finding ways to increase course offerings to students who are not planning advanced studies in sociology.2. The department will establish a minor in sociology.3. The department will promote opportunities to pursue independent and applied studies and experiential learning.4. The department will explore ways to better promote the sociology program and sociology courses.5. The department will organize a spring 2019 retreat to reflect on a departmental identity and on program learning outcomes that can inform curriculum planning and staffing.6. The department will collaborate with the Dean of Arts and Science and Institutional Analysis to explore how to collect improved data on student perceptions of program quality and outcomes.7. Through meetings and a retreat, the department will reflect on how to optimize the integration of research activities and program needs.
Departmental culture recommendations:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The department will: present at least one guest speaker in 2018-19; task a department member with promoting to faculty and students the existing public lectures on campus; and discuss the establishment of a regular seminar series for faculty and students to present their research.2. The department will increase the number of informal opportunities for students and faculty to gather socially on campus, and will organize some off-campus events.3. The department will strive to be highly transparent and interactive on workloads, administrative roles, and departmental resources.4. The department will explore resurrecting a newsletter, based on the model used in other sociology departments.
Institutional support recommendations:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The department looks forward to the Dean's response to the external reviewers' recommendation for compensation for the loss of teaching resources from secondments and graduate teaching.2. The department will pursue with the Dean resources for an off-site retreat.3. The department will pursue with the Dean resources for hosting one speaker in 2018-19. <p>The department will continue to pursue adequate faculty member numbers.</p>

Deans' Response

In his response, the Dean of Arts and Science addressed the review recommendations:

	Recommendation:	Response:
Curricular and learning environment:	1. Reduce the number of required research methods/statistics courses for the degree, and/or offer distinct degree programs in which requirements are differentiated for students seeking a more general degree verses those seeking advanced studies.	Agreed. The department can recommend that students who are considering graduate studies can complete an honours thesis or a research practicum. Moreover, the department can consider adding additional requirements for those pursuing an honours thesis, such as taking an independent study to prepare for a thesis or seminar.
	2. Consider developing a minor in Sociology.	Agreed.
	3. Encourage students to consider the options for independent study, experiential learning/co-op, and thesis.	Agreed. This could be linked to how the department differentiates their program from other sociology programs.
	4. Consider hosting a faculty-student event in the Spring term that provides information on the degree program, courses available, and independent study opportunities.	Agreed.
	5. Engage in a more sustained curriculum revision that aims to develop a coherent vision for the Department and the program.	Agreed. The Dean also supports a departmental retreat.
Faculty and staff:	6. The University should consistently and adequately compensate the Department for the loss of teaching capacity due to administrative secondments.	As a result of various budget constraints it is difficulty to even partially backfill the cost of secondments. Currently the Faculty of Arts and Science does not have the financial capacity to address this recommendation.
	7. Initiate a seminar series where graduate students and faculty have opportunities to present and discuss their own research and to engage with external scholars.	Agreed. As the department suggested in its Program Response, it should also task a department member with promoting to faculty and students the existing public lectures on campus.

	Recommendation:	Response:
	8. Undertake informal initiatives to facilitate more regular engagement and interaction between students and faculty.	Agreed.
	10. Where they do not exist, develop guidelines to guide annual workloads, the interpretation of standards for tenure and promotion, committee membership, and the allocation of departmental resources.	The Program Response indicated a willingness to be transparent regarding workloads, administrative roles, and department resources. Guidelines may also be helpful.
Students:	11. During curriculum planning, consider departmental involvement in and contribution to emerging interdisciplinary initiatives and U of L priority areas.	Agreed. One example is using the cohort program at the undergraduate level to introduce more students to sociology.
	12. Undertake periodic surveys of students and recent graduates to gather data for planning and to assess program outcomes.	Agreed. The department can work with the Dean's office and Institutional Analysis.
Research and scholarship:	14. Develop a faculty complement plan to support departmental priorities in research and curriculum.	Agreed. The department's planning should include areas to be developed and/or gaps to be filled should vacancies open up.

The Academic Quality Assurance Committee is satisfied that the Department of Sociology Academic Quality Assurance review has followed the U of L's academic quality assurance process appropriately, and acknowledges the successful completion of the review.

Sincerely,

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY:

Alan Siaroff
Chair, Academic Quality Assurance Committee

Cc: Andrew Hakin, Provost and Vice President (Academic)