Final Report
Academic Program Review
Department of Sociology

Review Process

The Department of Sociology prepared a self-study following program review guidelines. An external review team visited the campus, reviewed the self-study documents, interviewed unit personnel and University administrators and submitted an external review report. The Program Review Committee (PRC) read the self-study and the external review, and met with the chair of the department and the Dean of Arts & Sciences. This document reflects the PRC’s findings and recommendations.

Self-Study

Mission

The mission of the Department of Sociology is “…to contribute to the liberal education of all students by providing a broad understanding of human behavior and social institutions; to prepare master’s and doctoral students for critical roles in research, administration, and higher education; and to contribute to the advancement of knowledge of human behavior through research and the application of this knowledge through public service.”

Facilities, Resources and Financial Resources

The department occupies the entire second floor of Williams Hall, which includes faculty and staff offices, a library/conference room and graduate student computer lab. The basement of Williams Hall has graduate student offices and another computer lab that the department can access. All faculty have desktop computers in their offices.

The department’s operating budget has fluctuated over the last seven years. After adjusting for central computing charges and carry-over, the self-study reports the current operating budget to be about $47,000. The College of Arts & Sciences reports Sociology’s operating budget to be $56,423 for that period. The budget is judged adequate for the current level of activity in the department.

Faculty and Staff

In 1992 the department had 21 full-time faculty members. For the 1999-2000 academic year, the number is 17.5, which includes one temporary full-time instructor. As of the writing of the self-study, six faculty were full professors, four
were associate professors, six were assistant professors, and one was a lecturer. It is noteworthy that three new full-time faculty have been recruited for the 2000-2001 academic year. The faculty are distributed among four core research concentrations: Criminology/Deviance; Demography/Population Studies; Family Studies; and Social Psychology.

The department has 28 graduate assistants, but only a few of these graduate assistants make a substantial contribution to the undergraduate teaching mission of the department.

The staff currently consists of two full-time secretaries, an administrative secretary and a secretary 2.

Undergraduate Majors

As of the fall of 1999, the department had 108 undergraduate majors. This compares with a maximum of 156 in the spring of 1995. The variation in number of majors, the self-study reports, is in part influenced by admissions criteria for the Criminal Justice program in the College of Health and Human Services. When their admissions standards are lowered, as they have been recently, Sociology loses majors.

The average high school GPAs of the majors have varied between 2.78 in the spring of 1998 to 2.93 in the fall of 1999. For the fall of 1999, the average ACT score of majors was 20.4, which compares to a recent high of 21.4 in the spring of 1996.

The quality of instruction is characterized in part by student course evaluations. The self-study reports that on a 0-4 scale, with 4 being the highest rating, students generally rate instructors around 3.25 and courses around 2.75. Students appear to be generally satisfied with the instruction they are getting.

A second view of program quality was obtained through a survey, using data collected from 67 previous graduates (1992-1999; an attempt to get data from 112 graduates was made). Forty-one claimed to be working in an area related to their sociology training. Virtually all of the respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied with their sociology education.

These sources of information suggest that the primary weakness in the undergraduate program is that the department does not consistently offer a comprehensive array of courses.

Assessment of student learning outcomes identified additional insight into program effectiveness and quality. The SAAC (appendix F) notes that “the diversity of your assessment strategies is a definite strength…” That letter also comments on “…the interesting and useful finding that students lack opportunities to write in the sophomore and junior years.” The letter concludes with encouragement to “broaden the involvement in assessment among your faculty…”
Graduate Program

Currently, there are 49 graduate students actively pursuing degrees. These students averaged 510 (58\textsuperscript{th} percentile) on the verbal portion of the GRE and 550 (47\textsuperscript{th} percentile) on the quantitative portion of the GRE. More recent admissions tend to score higher on these tests.

From 1992 through August of 1999, 35 students received their doctoral degrees from Bowling Green. On average, these students took 5.3 years to get their degrees from the time they began their Ph.D. work (post-Masters). The 19 alumni who earned both their MA and Ph.D. at Bowling Green took an average of 7.3 years to complete the entire program. Nearly two-thirds of the graduates are currently employed in tenured or tenure-track faculty positions. As of fall semester, 2000, all have found employment directly related to their doctoral training. Many of the graduates continue to be active in research as demonstrated by published articles.

The number of applicants to the program for the 1999-2000 academic year had fallen to 72 from a comparative high of 123 for 1992-1993. However, a high percentage of the more recent applicants (81\%) were domestic. Generally, the number of minority students is low, which is a source of concern for the department.

As a program assessment device, the department conducted a survey of 28 responding Ph.D. recipients, all of who were employed at the time. Two-thirds of the respondents were satisfied with their graduate studies, while 20\% were very satisfied. There was some tangible dissatisfaction with coursework and advising, while a large number of respondents, more than 50\%, were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with opportunities for publishing. Other measures were examined, and in general, respondents were satisfied with the program. However, there was a sufficient amount of dissatisfaction to warrant concern.

Research Productivity

At the time of the self-study, the department had four active grants, and a number of grant proposals were under review. The self-study acknowledges that too few of the faculty are participating in the grant process.

As a whole, the department research publication record is a good one, with faculty averaging about two papers a year since 1992. About a third of the published papers have appeared in journals with an impact factor of 1.0 or more. A total of eight articles have been published in the field’s leading journals.

Comparative Advantage

The uniqueness of the program compared to those offered by other institutions in the region and nation stems from the particular combination of four
substantive specialties. Also, the demographic perspective that at least partially connects the four specialty areas helps convey a consistent and interrelated body of knowledge that promotes the uniqueness of the department.

**Strengths and Weaknesses**

*Strengths*

The self-study does not explicitly summarize departmental strengths. What can be gleaned from the self-study is that this is a healthy department, which takes its undergraduate teaching mission seriously. There are numerous faculty that are actively and successfully involved in graduate education, and there are several faculty with impressive research publication and external grant credentials.

*Weaknesses*

The self-study is much more explicit about weaknesses. The department recognizes that the number and quality of undergraduate majors needs to be improved. Similarly, the number and quality of graduate students also needs improvement. Finally, a disproportionate amount of the research and grant success in the department can be attributed to a relatively small number of faculty. Too many faculty are not involved in research activity at a satisfactory level.

**Strategic Plan**

*Undergraduate Program*

1) Attract more and better students.
2) Revise the undergraduate curriculum.
3) Staff General Education courses with regular faculty.
4) Require SOC 302 (Theory) and SOC 480 (Senior Seminar) for majors.
5) Increase undergraduate involvement in research.

*Graduate Program*

1) Attract more and better graduate students.
2) Revise the graduate curriculum.
3) Offer Advanced Theory and Methods course more regularly.
4) Increase graduate students’ participation in research.
5) Drop the Criminal Justice MA concentration.

*Faculty Enhancement*

1) Increase travel allotments.
2) Develop a program that awards release time for writing grant proposals.
3) Fund travel for proposal development separately from travel to professional meetings.
4) Continue faculty mentorship committees.
5) *Revitalize the Population and Society Research Center.

**Desired Faculty Hire Specializations**

1) *Director of the Population and Society Research Center (senior, 12-month).
2) Theory.
3) Inequality/Stratification.
4) *Senior position in substantive specialty.
5) Social Psychology.
6) *Senior Demographer
7) Cultural Anthropology (0.50).

**Space and Facilities**

1) Noting the inadequacy of the existing small groups laboratory, the self-study proposed that suitable space be found “elsewhere on campus” for a new facility.
2) Renovation of the space for graduate students is desirable, but changes proposed in the self-study would decrease the number of students who could be housed in the present space.

*During his meeting with the PRC, the Sociology chair suggested that the number one hiring priority should be changed to a senior demographer and that the fate of the Population and Society Research Center should be decided by a departmental committee, which would determine the viability of the Center and the level of investment, if any, that should be put into the Center.

**Seven Year Timetable**

No explicit timetable for the unfolding of the Strategic Plan was provided.

**External Review Team’s Report**

In general, the external review team was favorably impressed with the department, and their recommendations only deviated from the strategic plan of the department in one or two important areas The sentiments of the external review team can be best captured by their statements, “The department is underrated nationally,” and “…Bowling Green Sociology is a well kept secret – not only for other sociologists, but for people within the university itself.”

**Strengths**

1) Limiting specializations to a few growth areas (criminology, demography, family, and social psychology) is prudent. These specializations represent growth areas in the field of sociology. This combination of specializations allows the department to provide both comprehensive and in-depth training.
2) Many of the faculty have areas of expertise that fall within more than one area of specialization.
3) The minor in demographic studies should attract well-qualified undergraduates.
4) The masters degree in Applied Demography is only one of a few in the country and is likely to attract graduate students.
5) The research and grant records of several faculty are outstanding.

**Weaknesses**

1) The Undergraduate program has too much redundancy in the content of different courses.
2) There is a delay in getting incoming graduate students together with their research advisors.
3) Too many students with low GRE scores are admitted to the graduate program.
4) The graduate program’s requirement for registration for 12 hours of courses each semester impedes research and degree progress.
5) The recent research productivity of some faculty is poor.
6) The amount of research dollars generated is relatively small given the number of active researchers in the department.

**External Review Team’s Recommendations**

**Research Program/Faculty Staffing Issues**

1) Recruit a senior demographer as soon as possible. However, “senior” is interpreted here as not necessarily a full professor, which Bowling Green may not be able to afford, but as an associate or advanced assistant professor who could provide leadership for the existing faculty in demography.
2) Recruit a social theorist.
3) Recruit a faculty on a fixed term appointment to teach in the area of inequality/social stratification/minority groups. *Ideally, recruitment for these three positions should occur during the next academic year.*
4) Consider a joint hire with American Culture Studies or Women’s Studies to teach Cultural Anthropology.
5) Plans for the Population and Society research Center or a Population Survey research Center should be deferred until a systematic study of similar Centers is undertaken and potential ongoing funding sources can be explored. Current plans may be overly ambitious.

**Graduate Program**

1) Potential graduate students should be recruited more aggressively and a graduate student recruitment weekend planned.
2) Special recruitment efforts are needed for minority students.
3) Reduce the 12-hour course requirement and increase graduate stipends. The external team advocates for a strenuous lobbying effort to accomplish these ends.

4) Advanced courses in theory and methods should be given more regularly and the existing limit on independent study hours should be raised.

5) Students with poor entry attributes (e.g. low GRE scores) should no longer be admitted to the program.

6) Graduate students should be assigned to an advisor as soon as they enter the program.

7) The MA in Criminal Justice should be discontinued.

Undergraduate Program

1) Develop a more intensive program to recruit majors.
2) Explore developing other undergraduate minors, such as demography.
3) Consider a 2.5 GPA requirement for admitting majors.
4) Require a senior seminar or other capstone experience for all senior majors.

Overall Recommendation

The external reviewers concluded that “a long term and systematic public relations program” is needed to get the message out about the quality of the department.

Program Review Committee Findings

The PRC was favorably impressed with the potential for future growth of the Sociology Department. There appears to be a critical mass of energetic faculty who can be successful in research. Among them are a few senior faculty who can provide leadership. Whereas the outlook for research success is high, there clearly are concerns about the undergraduate and graduate programs. The issue of number and quality of students is paramount. The PRC acknowledges the self-study’s expression of intent to address these concerns. However, we remain concerned that there is conscientious and consistent action taken on the plans.

The reduction in number of graduate students and undergraduate majors is a fundamental concern. Attributing some causality to shifting requirements in other majors (although possibly true) is not a justification to be complacent about recruitment. The department’s assessment report suggests that greater time and effort needs to be directed to the undergraduate major. The PRC views the number, quality and diversity of graduate students and the overall state of the undergraduate major as weaknesses in the department.

Despite the considerable faculty research talent, the department is not consistently recruiting the quality of graduate student necessary to build a reputation of excellence in graduate education. This is even more surprising when one considers that most funded graduate students are on research assistantships...
rather than teaching assistantships. We agree that graduate stipend levels are an impediment, but there are other problems as well. The PRC believes the enforced 12-hour course load requirement with limited opportunity for independent study, and the often excessive amount of time taken by students to reach their terminal degree, to be as important as low stipend levels in hurting recruitment. Also, the current policy of identifying research advisors appears slow and a possible impediment to getting a quick start on research. Thus, the relatively poor success in graduate recruitment is the PRC’s second-most significant concern.

The PRC finds that the number of graduate research assistants in the department is large compared to other departments.

The PRC believes the four identified specialization areas to be appropriate and encourages development in all four areas, particularly with new faculty that can interact synergistically across specializations. For example, the suggested hire in inequality/social stratification/minority (see below) could be an ideal person to straddle two or more specialization areas. However, the PRC also notes that the number of senior leaders in the department is small, and that more of the faculty should be publishing in the best journals. Indeed, too many faculty are not participating in the research process at a satisfactory level.

The proposal for new faculty lines is based on building the research productivity of the department, as it should be. The argument for new lines could be given even greater force, however, if it was integrated with programmatic needs at the graduate and undergraduate levels. In the absence of an increase in the number of majors and/or a larger commitment to general education, the department does not have as strong a justification for growth in the number of faculty it might expect based on research productivity alone.

During the course of this review, the Population and Society Research Center has been reconstituted as the Center for Family and Demographic Research.

**Program Review Committee Recommendations**

Sociology is a good department that could be excellent. The PRC recommends an aggressive effort to address the weaknesses in the program identified in the program review process.

1) Enhance the research productivity and visibility of the faculty.
   a) Involve a greater proportion of the faculty in active research. Those tenured professors not active in research should be given correspondingly greater responsibility in teaching (consistent with the previous recommendation).
   b) Develop departmental goals for the number of publications in high visibility journals.
   c) Develop departmental goals, approved by the Dean of Arts & Sciences and the Vice Provost for Research, for increased number of grant applications.
2) Efforts to improve the quality and size of the graduate program should proceed along several avenues. Sociology must have an aggressive and approved plan to improve the number, quality and diversity of graduate students. Progress in the following areas should be reported annually.
   a) Review course load requirements. The current requirement for registration in 12 hours of classes is an impediment to degree progress. Sociology should develop a responsible and flexible plan for dealing with the 12-hour requirement, including consideration of increased availability of independent study opportunities and use of five-hour, instead of three-hour, courses.
   b) Work diligently with the Dean of the Graduate College, the Dean of A&S, and the Graduate Council to increase stipends.
   c) Advanced courses in theory and methods should be given more regularly.
   d) Graduate students should be assigned to a research advisor as soon as they enter the program.
   e) The PRC supports the plan to implement a graduate student recruitment weekend.
   f) Develop a special recruitment program for minority students.
   g) Discontinue the practice of admitting students with poor entry qualifications, immediately.

3) The department must develop innovative ways to enhance undergraduate recruitment. By the end of spring semester, 2001, the department should develop a recruitment plan in consultation with the Dean of A&S and the Vice Provost for Academic Services.

4) Several efforts should be pursued to improve the quality of the undergraduate program. The PRC views all of the following as viable initiatives, but would prefer to leave the responsibility for the final course of action up to the department. Progress on improvements to the undergraduate program should be reported in the annual report to the Dean of A&S and the Vice Provost for Academic Programs.
   a) Review and revise the undergraduate curriculum to reduce redundancy among courses and insure availability of offerings.
   b) Consider the addition of a capstone course or senior seminar.
   c) The department has a large number of graduate students on research assistantships. Consider using those students to support the undergraduate teaching mission. For instance graduate students could be assigned to help teach Introductory Sociology discussion sections.
   d) Consider using the pool of graduate student assistants in a course/program to give majors a greater opportunity to write.
   e) We urge the department to consider more specialized minors such as the one in demography.
   f) Given the general education needs of the university, the PRC believes the department should offer its Cultural Diversity course more often.
   g) We do not support the External Team’s recommendation for a GPA entrance requirement for the major.
5) Discontinue the MA in Criminal Justice.

6) During the fall semester, 2000, the Chair in consultation with the Dean should devise a differential teaching load system for the Department. This system should be designed to create equitable workloads, take into account that workload typically changes throughout a career, protect the career development needs of the faculty with reference to criteria for promotion and tenure, encourage only those service activities that are in the best interests of the department and University, and make efficient use of the department’s personnel resources. The new system should be implemented beginning in the fall semester, 2001.

7) A departmental committee should be charged to decide the fate of the Population and Society Research Center (renamed, during the course of this review: the Center for Family and Demographic Research). The committee should be clear as to whether the Center is a University Research Center (in which case it reports to and is evaluated by the Vice Provost for Research) or a departmental center. If the latter, the goals, objectives and evaluation process must be stated, and the Chair and Dean of Arts & Sciences must be involved in annual evaluation. A recommendation of continuation in any form must be justifiable with respect to the cost of such a center as well as its impact on research productivity, graduate recruitment and university prestige. A recommendation and plans for discontinuation or continuation of the Center should be submitted to the Vice Provost for Research for his approval, by January 1, 2001.

8) The immediate faculty recruitment needs of the department appear to be: a) a “senior” demographer, b) a theorist; c) someone in the area of inequality/social stratification/minority groups. The development of these requests should integrate the teaching needs of the revamped undergraduate and graduate programs. When the department has made reasonable progress on the preceding recommendations, including approval of plans for improving the quality of research and graduate program, the PRC recommends that the Dean of A&S consider authorizing these positions, as warranted in the context of other needs within the college.

9) The PRC recommends that the Department of Sociology implement at least one new assessment activity for the undergraduate major by the end of Spring Semester, 2001, and that a new assessment activity for graduate programs be implemented by the end of Spring Semester, 2002. The Department of Sociology should engage in assessment of all its programs as part of its regular functioning. This includes responding to information obtained from assessment about student achievement (e.g. more writing opportunities for sophomores and juniors). Assessment reports should be made yearly to the Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences and the Vice Provost for Academic Programs.
10) The external reviewers recommended that the department “get the message out” about the quality of the department. The PRC feels that this can best be accomplished through increased publication, grant funding, professional service, and improvement of the undergraduate and graduate programs, by means addressed in other recommendations. However, we also recommend that the Department develop a plan for regular communication of their successes to the internal and external communities.

*The Department of Sociology should report annually to the Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences, with a copy to the Provost, on the implementation of these recommendations.*