



UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

The Graduate School

March 31, 2015

To: Robert Stacey, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
Werner Stuetzle, Divisional Dean, Natural Sciences, College of Arts and Sciences

From: David L. Eaton, Vice Provost and Dean

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Rebecca Aanerud, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Planning

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RE: Department of Sociology 2013-2014 Review

This memorandum outlines the recommendations from the review of the Department of Sociology B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. degree programs. Detailed comments can be found in the documents that were a part of the following formal review proceedings:

- Charge meeting involving the review committee, department, and administrators (February 7, 2014)
- Department self-study (December 2, 2013)
- Site visit (April 7-8, 2014)
- Review committee report (June 16, 2014)
- GPSS report (June 17, 2014)
- Sociology response to the review committee report (October 13, 2014)
- Graduate School Council consideration of review (November 20, 2014)

The review committee consisted of:

Malcolm Parks, Professor, UW Department of Communication (Committee Chair)
Linda Nash, Associate Professor, UW Department of History
Kim Voss, Professor, Department of Sociology, University of California, Berkeley, CA
Robert Hummer, Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Texas, Austin, TX

A subcommittee of the Graduate School Council presented findings and recommendations to the full Council at its meeting on November 20, 2014. Specific comments and recommendations regarding the department and its degree programs include the following:

Program Strengths

The review committee noted the department is a “top 20” department with strong faculty—a major strength of the department; it has made high quality junior faculty hires. Since the 2004-2005 review, the undergraduate and graduate programs have undergone major revisions with both going in a positive direction. An innovative practicum was implemented that provides undergraduate students with applied experiences and enhanced opportunities within the community. The honors program is very strong. Overall it is small but attracts excellent

students. The graduate program is also strong and is poised to become stronger due to changes that increased faculty engagement and student opportunities.

Challenges, Risks and Areas of Concurrence

Faculty.

- The review committee indicated the department faces challenges regarding future hiring: it is “top-heavy in terms of rank”; it should be more diverse, in both gender and ethnicity; “two key areas of classic faculty strength (gender and criminology) have weakened in recent years”; and the department needs to strengthen the core areas of the discipline and to maintain current strengths.
- To address these issues, the committee recommended the development of a 10-year hiring plan. In the short term, the department should consider an external chair search with a carefully designed area focus, to try to hire a senior woman.

Department’s Response.

- Gender diversity. Several women have leadership roles in the department and the university, and they also have strong candidates for leadership roles in the future. The faculty noted that on this campus, an outside chair search often signals a problem which is not the situation with the department.
- Diversity in general. The department’s two current searches are in areas that are likely to improve diversity. Concerning weakening in the areas of gender and criminology, at the time of the review, the department was conducting a hire in criminology. It also intends to review its hiring plan.

Graduate Program:

- The review committee indicated the department is weak in sociological theory, which does not prepare PhD students well for top academic positions. Graduate student stipends are too low, compared to the peer institutions, which undermines its recruitment of top students. The department should pursue advancement opportunities to raise fellowship support. Graduate students indicated the department “is less inclusive than it should be” an issue about which the diversity committee could play a role. The department could improve career placement for graduate students, both in academic and non-academic jobs. The committee suggested the department consider “creating a placement committee to track both opportunities and trajectories of recent graduates.”

Department’s Response.

- Curriculum revisions. Recent changes in the graduate program, for example, the removal of the need for a minor, should help ameliorate the “perceived view of technical skills.” Students need not spend time focused on technical skills at the (perceived) expense of theory.
- Stipends. The department’s Development Committee has taken initial steps and will work with the UW Office of Advancement on the stipends issue. Teaching assistant salary raises seem to have helped the situation.
- Inclusiveness. The department diversity committee continues to be active, with its current focus more on undergraduate and graduate students than faculty. The Chair has open lines of communication with the graduate students.

- Placement. The department will identify a person or committee to work on this issue.

Undergraduate Program:

- The review committee noted that enrollments and the number of majors are both declining. The department could do more to advertise its courses and the major. A lack of systematic curriculum planning disadvantages the department in securing classrooms and presents problems for students. Undergraduate students also expressed the desire for more exposure to research opportunities.

Department's Response.

- Declining enrollments. The department is taking concrete steps to address declining enrollments, but noted that classroom availability and TA availability were obstacles that impact their efforts.
- Curriculum planning. As one of its roles, the Executive Committee is assuming responsibility for curriculum planning.
- Undergraduate research opportunities. Although the department would like to maintain a small honors program, they are exploring ways to encourage more students to participate in research, for example, by broadening their practicum program and by establishing connections with additional community partners.

Department Culture and Governance:

- The review committee noted that target-of-opportunity hires have created tension in the department. In recent years, these searches have taken place instead of departmental-directed hires which has contributed to challenges such as the weakening of core areas and sociological theory, and in general, has led to a "corrosive effect" on the department culture. Since some faculty perceive an inequity in teaching loads, the expectations for teaching should be clarified. The department lacks a shared culture and intellectual community and a regular departmental colloquium could help with this situation.

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Department's Response.

- Target-of-opportunity hires. The department has instituted a policy for dealing with such cases. The department has two searches this year, which should help them regain a sense of control. After the searches have been completed, the faculty will revisit their long-term hiring plan.
- Teaching loads. The department has been addressing these issues, which also ties in with their curriculum planning and steps to improve enrollments.
- Intellectual climate. The department has seen some signs of improvement and hope to see more, with the arrival of new faculty and some other upcoming intradepartmental activities. The Diversity Committee has been playing more of a role although its focus has been more on students than faculty.

Graduate School Council Recommendations

- The Council recommended continuation of the undergraduate and graduate degree programs offered by the Department of Sociology with the next review to be in ten years, (2023-2024).
- Further, the Council emphasized the need for the department to abide by the union contract, especially with regard to students' teaching responsibilities and hours per week. They noted the department's efforts to address the need for better student mentoring, including support for students choosing career paths outside academia.
- Finally, the Council recommended that the department place more emphasis on diversity for future faculty hires.

We concur with the Council's comments and recommendations.

cc: Jerald Herting, Professor and Chair, Department of Sociology
Gerald Baldasty, Interim Provost, Office of the Provost
Patricia Moy, Associate Vice for Academic and Student Affairs, Office of the Provost
Sociology Review Committee Members
Graduate School Council
Augustine McCaffery, Senior Academic Program Specialist, Academic Affairs and
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