



## DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON

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Date: October 13, 2014

To: David Eaton, Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School  
Rebecca Aanerud, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Planning, Graduate School

From: Jerald R. Herting, Professor and Chair, Department of Sociology

Re: Response to the June 16<sup>th</sup> 2014 report on the Department of Sociology

The Department of Sociology, first, wishes to thank the Review Committee (Parks -chair, Nash, Hummer, and Voss) for their time and efforts in their thoughtful research and evaluation of the department. The department as a whole was struck by their balanced inquiry and general approach to our program. We also appreciated the general ability to focus on ourselves through the self-study in preparation for the review. As was indicated in the mid-June report, we had begun making changes in key elements of our graduate program prior to the review that were seen as positive by the committee. We are currently monitoring those initial changes and implementing additional changes to other features of the Department that were being discussed prior, as well as, in response to the committee's review.

Below we address each of the key program areas found in the report: graduate program, undergraduate program, culture/governance, and faculty. Each section summarizes what the Review highlighted and identifies concerns raised. There are times where we clarify comments made in the report and also indicate our response (proposed response) to recommendations, as well as actions taken that were in process, at times, even before the report was made available.

While we acknowledge not all functions in the Department may be working at a level we would like, we have in the recent past been pleased with actions taken by the Department and by the general sense of progress and direction. Examples of this include our changes in the graduate program, a greater attempt to engage undergraduates in research, promotion actions moving assistant professors to associates, and the overall sense of engagement, collegiality, and productivity of a set of recent junior hires.

Importantly we believe our own self-assessment, our current initiatives, and continued progress are mirrored by the Review Committee's initial statement that their ..."overall assessment of the Department of Sociology is quite positive."



### Graduate Education/Program:

The Department had embarked on a review of and reorganization of the graduate program over the past 3-5 years---ably lead by Professor Stovel (until recently Chair of the GPC) and various members of the Graduate Program Committee. Efforts in this area were driven by changes in the general academic market and views of what it takes to be a successful candidate and professional in the discipline. The reform also acknowledges shifts in the internal make-up, research directions, and specialties of the department. This reform was acknowledge by the Review Committee as impressive in its design and content and in the process by which the reform, and consensus over the reform, was executed.

While generally positive, issues raised by the Review included the role of theory in the graduate training and the perceived emphasis on statistical technology ("technical skills"), general inclusiveness, funding of students, and job-market search and placement.

It is important to not the Department acknowledges that the graduate program reform is yet to be tested fully and cannot be deemed necessarily successful at this early stage. To this end at each faculty meeting (since the initiation of the reform) we have set time aside to review implementation progress, to address the intent/content of changes, and to maintain the underlying consensus remarked upon by the Review Committee.

*Theory training/technical skills.* The set aside reflective time at faculty meetings, and within the GPC itself, is a logical place to revisit the concerns raised by the Review regarding the theory training/content of the graduate program. First, the core graduate theory course is being taught by individuals well-known for their theoretical approaches to empirical research and we see that course continuing. Further, we anticipate the "student/research" focus and the individualized course of study program of the current reform providing additional room for students to focus on theory relevant to their planned course of study. The "course of study" feature will generate an increase in the hands-on mentoring at this early stage by faculty (acknowledged by the Review as successful in the discipline) to insure theory is present in the student's course of study.

The perceived view of technical skills may be partially driven by our strong partnership with the CSSS (Center for Statistics and the Social Sciences) in which about 50% of our students obtain their "minor" certification (4-courses). Having removed the need for a minor (replaced by an approved "course of study") we anticipate a more focused use of CSSS courses germane to a student's area compared to simply taking any 4 CSSS courses to achieve the minor.

We anticipate these two features of the new program will keep the program honest about the theoretical content of our program and broaden the skill set that students will see as available in their training and not relegate training to a simply menu of quantitative/statistical courses.

*General inclusiveness.* The Review discussed briefly (page 14) the graduate students' general view of inclusiveness in the Department. While nothing was directly negative or openly hostile, there was a general sense of the Department could do better. This included a statement that the "diversity" committee in the Department appeared inactive.

We would like to make note that in the Winter and Spring of last year the diversity committee was quite active and took on a number of tasks among them insuring a member of the diversity committee was on the graduate admissions committee and initiating a graduate student run Wiki page to share general useful



information (a “survival guide to graduate school, the department, Seattle”). At the beginning of this year the diversity committee is evaluating a peer mentoring initiative to connect first year graduate students to older cohort members to help, in general, welcome the new cohort and be a source of additional information. In addition, the Chair has a “legs of the chair” committee of two graduate students that meet informally with the Chair over issues/concerns within the department (this is roughly a quarterly meeting and can be convened as needed). The GPC Chair and the Department Chair call for a “town hall” meeting twice a year to discuss broad issues and concerns raised by graduate students.

*Funding of students.* The Department is fully aware of the impact of graduate funding (lack thereof) on graduate student lives and, to some extent, the additional impact it has on the quality and diversity of students we can attract. The Department’s Development Committee has taken some initial steps, and will take more to work with the UW Development Office. One incipient plan is to reconstitute our Friends of Sociology committee (already in discussion) that includes, as part of its board, members of the community. This committee and our part-time development staff member were lost to the budget cuts in 2008, 9 and 10; restoring this development person is unlikely in the near term.

It is clear that the recent round of raises (roughly 20% over the 2 years) helped improve the funding situation for students. From a simple anecdotal point of view our cohort of 2013-14 (recruited pre-raises) had one of our lowest acceptance rates ever. One consistent statement, though not the only statement, was the students were receiving more monies from our competitors. The most recent cohort of 2014-15, while concerns about their wage remained, expressed that the 10% raise with the promise of an additional 10% reduced the wage gap with our competitor programs and simply made the wage a “livable” wage. This past year’s acceptance rate was one of our higher rates.

*Job market search/placements.* The Review suggested broader support for academic and non-academic placements for graduate students and suggested a placement committee/chair be constituted. The Review Committee acknowledged an overall improvement in our placement of graduate students since the prior 10-year review but suggested that the graduate students would like to insure non-academic, as well as academic positions/placements are valued. In addition the committee indicated graduate students could use more systematic placement support.

Creating a more systematic level of support than present can be accomplished. We will either identify a specified faculty member as “placement lead” or embed the role as a subcommittee within the Graduate Program Committee (i.e. the faculty member in charge of placement will also be part of the graduate program committee to facilitate information about the market to members of the committee/department). We would like to point out that a set of our recent placements (since 2010) included a number of non-academic placements including the US Census, World Bank and Houston Unified School District. It is clear the Department is oriented towards the academic market. In part, it is these academic placements that help define our academic status/position –the US News and World Report– thus a natural focus for the Department and, in part, it is the only market that a majority of faculty have been exposed to during their own careers. We do believe, however, this orientation is changing in recognition of the changing academic market and areas of specialty change.

### **Undergraduate program:**

The Review Committee identified four key strengths of the Department’s undergraduate program. These are: our simplified and streamlined pathways to a major; the improved honors program; a set of influential service courses; and our three pronged practicum group which includes a strong link to our surrounding local



community (schools, government, and community agencies). As a Department we are particular proud of the change in our honors program and in how well our practicum is working and how we are currently building strong connections to the City of Seattle for intern placements, as well as for active applied research experiences. The honors program and our research practicum, as well as individual faculty/student research projects, have led to a high level of participation in the Mary Gates Undergraduate Research Symposium and in our own Spring quarter Sociology Undergraduate Research Symposium. We will actively expand this participation.

Concerns identified included: declining enrollments and active plan/procedures to stem this trend; curriculum planning process; and encouraging undergraduate research with faculty/graduate students. We started some new initiatives last year and this Fall that address these issues and recommendations brought forth in the review.

*Decline in enrollment in the Department.* We have taken seriously the decline in enrollments and have initiated some additional outreach from our advising/student services office including holding quarter informational sessions for majors. We have initiating some "self-advertising" within each undergraduate sociology class in which faculty will list the next set "of good classes to take" (i.e. "if you liked this course and topic also try..."). In addition we have taken the Dean Stacey/Vice-Provost Baldasty's initiative seriously and will be demonstrating broader skill sets gained for each of our undergraduate classes; currently faculty are creating templates for all classes on how to insure undergraduates see the applied relevance of sociology/social science to their general skill set.

Another overall strategy to increase our enrollment and enhance the undergraduate experience is to have all faculty teach at least one/two medium sized classes (100-200) at the introductory level. These courses are than designed to be paired to smaller sized 300-400 level advanced courses that present more detailed looks at the topics from the larger classes. We see the introductory level courses building a natural constituency to fill the advanced courses and eventually satisfying both the lost enrollment (due to not having instructors for or classroom access to very large 300+ classes) and the demand for smaller in-depth advanced courses that may include greater access to research. Examples of this strategy are Professor Lee's Soc 230 which introduces the sociology of health and health disparities and her Soc 430 which goes into more detail and Professor Crowder's Soc 215 which is a basic introduction to Urban Sociology and his Soc 415 with an in depth look at dynamics of neighborhoods and land use. A recent example of how we are doing this is the growth in Professor Clark's African Population and Societies moving it from 50 to 100 students and the development of a 400-level course that looks specifically at the role of HIV/AIDS in Africa.

At the same time there are, in fact, some structural impediments to expanding enrollment rapidly. Part of our lost enrollment has been loss of access to large (500+) classrooms (either no access or access at time of day where the enrollment drops---middle-late afternoon times). Another feature is having to limit classroom size due to availability of TA's; we are trying to keep to a 100/1 student/TA ratio and are placing limits of courses that may have the ability to reach between 130 – 160 to 100 or from 230-260 to 200.

*Curriculum planning.* There are a number of factors that are changing our undergraduate curriculum that have been on the faculty agenda the past year. Among these are changing faculty areas and retirements among faculty who teach large service courses; a necessary reduction in the number of graduate students that are available as Teaching Assistants (a result of funding cuts) which affects the content and contacts in undergraduate courses; and the general nature and size of the graduate program due to our graduate program reform.



The last few faculty meetings this past Spring provided consensus to pilot a system in which curriculum planning is embedded in the Executive Committee. This extends the responsibility of the curriculum to include an additional five faculty members in evaluating curriculum plans and engaging in a general discussion of the curriculum including the assignments of faculty to courses. This proactive evaluation of our curriculum planning directly addresses the Reviews concerns about transparency in assignments and need for a broader group of faculty engaged in planning. One key element of these recent discussions has been a realization and commitment of faculty to altering the typical three undergraduate/one graduate course load. Faculty acknowledged that some years they will only be teaching undergraduate courses. This, in part, acknowledges the size of the graduate program will be smaller and, in part, a response to declining enrollment at the undergraduate level. (This change in undergraduate/graduate ratio will lead to a wider range of undergraduate courses and more upper division courses.)

*Encouraging research/student to faculty research connections.* As a Department we have been quite pleased with the resurgence of our honors program and the reception of our 3 key practicums. There is some desire to keep the honors program small 10-15; the goal is to keep this course a small intimate cohort experience. At the same time there are plans to expand the practicums to include an additional research practicum(s). This has been started by our move to create a consistent relation with the City of Seattle; this year and last year our research practicum has been grounded in research sponsored/identified by the City and we expect this to continue and expand. This leaves other community partners to be serviced by an additional practicum; past partners have been the ACLU and Seattle Municipal Courts and Noel House (a housing transition shelter for women). This orientation to expand research is also bolstered by discussion of creating a research certificate/specialization as part of the major. Such a certificate would include both classroom skill development (quantitative, qualitative, policy approaches to research) and also experiential “apprenticeship” activities of doing research 1:1 or in small groups with faculty; one discussed possibility is to develop a Bachelor’s of Science track. Some of these activities are already engaged in by faculty and the attempt will be to routinize these activities as part of the undergraduate program. For example, Professor Crowder is linking students to agencies in Seattle as part of his urban sociology course and Professor Quinn has an active research group of 4-6 undergraduates working alongside graduate students as part of a historical project on the development of Federal credit programs in the US. We also believe moving in this direction addresses the College’s initiative for generating marketable social science skills.

### **Governance and Culture:**

The Review indicated the Department has been on a very positive trajectory and pointed to a general greater collegial atmosphere, greater transparency, new exciting research directions, a new group of exciting assistant professors/early associates, and better connections to outside entities/partners (i.e. CSDE and CSSS).

There remain issues. The Review pointed to the role opportunity hires have had on the department, a need to insure fair teaching loads, to develop a shared intellectual climate, and continued striving to insure diversity.

*Opportunity hires.* The Department has both benefited by opportunity hires which have brought new dynamics, as indicated in the Review, to the department in a set of excellent assistant/associate professors, but at the same time the sense of self-control and process by which these hires occur can play a role in generating conflict and lack of control in the department.



As a result of these opportunity hires the department did develop, vote upon, and adhere to a policy that has been followed in five cases since its inception. This included a successful partnering with the eScience Institute to hire an Assistant Professor. Currently we have two searches granted to the department and it is expected these searches help with the sense of self-control for the department. Once the two new searches are completed the department will revisit both a long-term hiring plan and the role/policy of opportunity hires. As the Review acknowledged it is not likely that such opportunities will disappear and the department should be in a better circumstance to incorporate these. Though it should be acknowledged that some opportunities might present themselves to the department that are, in fact, valuable though in unexpected areas. In this case, the policy in place, albeit perhaps not perfect, has worked to evaluate recent options.

*Teaching loads.* As part of the changes in the graduate program (funding, size) and undergraduate shifts in enrollment (retirements, classroom availability) there are a number of factors affecting teaching assignments and numbers of faculty teaching. As indicated in the section above regarding our undergraduate program the Department has been actively addressing these topics this past year. This includes a recent move to place the final curriculum and teaching assignments within the Executive Committee to provide greater input into this process.

*Intellectual Climate.* The department's ability to shape a consistent level of participation in department colloquia has undergone a number of up-down cycles over the past 10 years. The Department colloquium activity/attendance is on the down side in the past few years, but recently there are a number of events that point to a general re-emerging of a better intellectual climate. This included a very successful new graduate student recruitment event last Spring demonstrating the breadth and collaborative nature of the Department and a new initiative to provide funds for colleagues to bring outside collaborators to campus (for a limited time) to pursue and present their joint work to the Department. But there is room to do more. A feature of this can be derived by a number of proposed and current activities, including a focused discussion on a hiring plan, the more shared decision making in the undergraduate curriculum, and arguably from the new exam content of the graduate program that, by its nature, bridges what have been in the past isolated subject areas. In part, as indicate in the Review some of the general excitement resident in a set of new faculty, which will be added to this coming year, is also fostering a greater sense of shared and exciting intellectual activity.

*Diversity.* As the Review points out the Department, like many on campus and in the discipline, is not optimally diverse. We agree with the need to address this and there are significant processes in action within the Department in the form of successful promotions/retention of women to and at associate levels that will create leadership in the near future and a current active promotion from Associate to Full (Stovel). It is also important to characterize the connections that appear on first read of the Review as weak are actually reasonably strong. For example, female faculty members from the Department have been selected for important leadership positions on campus (Stovel as Director of CSSS) and, even if part-time in the Department, are actively engaged in the Department; for example Beckett is currently Associate Chair. This is not to dismiss the need to move forward on these diversity issues but does identify that some features of change are in process.

As also indicated above (under the graduate program) the role of the Diversity committee has been reinvigorated and is actively engaged, albeit current focus is more at graduate and undergraduate students than faculty.

It is also likely that both searches currently underway should provide additional opportunities to improve upon the general diversity of the faculty.



## Faculty:

The Review expresses high regard for the quality of the faculty and was equally complementary about the set of recent hires (primarily assistant positions) in the past 5 years (both opportunity hires and actual searches).

Concerns raised by the Committee Review include the top heavy nature of the department; the gender distribution of full faculty; the general diversity of the faculty; and the need to strengthen core areas and establishing a say in the hiring direction of the Department. In addition, there was an expressed concern to establish mechanisms for creating a common identity and shared intellectual focus.

*Position distribution of the faculty.* The top heavy, Full Professor distribution is not extraordinary for the Social Science division or for many major universities. Clearly it poses a problem for planning to insure a good transition in the Department as retirements occur. Appropriate planning both maintains the visibility of the Department achieved by the current faculty and for continued strength in key research areas. There have been discussions of this circumstance and it is broadly acknowledged by the Department that planning for such transitions is an important need. In fact, one of our two current assistant professor searches is based on advance planning for retirements in an area deemed a long-standing strength of the Department, Criminology and the second search areas were identified from the prior work of a committee tasked to identify areas of interest/need in the Department.

*Gender representation.* As the Review notes gender representation in Sociology departments is heterogeneous across strong departments at various institutions. Our department has unique features in that women faculty have been recruited to serve in administrative posts (Howard as Dean and now Stovel as Director of CSSS) and others are joint positions. Stovel is currently being promoted to Full which helps this representation and Beckett, while only 50% in the Department, is serving as Associate Chair. While we agree the distribution could be better we do have strong candidates for leadership positions in the future and current associates and assistants are recognized to be on strong trajectories for promotion. The departure of Pettit was a significant loss, however there are potential women faculty to take on leadership roles and given the Reviews concern with the Full Professor distribution it seems prudent to focus on bringing new faculty in at either the Assistant (or advanced Assistant) level. Doing so is likely given the two searches in progress, both in areas that should promote diversity in the faculty. We do worry that searching for an outside chair, as recommended, has historically signaled on this campus a much greater problem with a department than what the content of this Review indicates.

*Strengthening core areas and hiring direction.* The Review noted the faculty is concerned about self-direction and maintaining a core persona in the face of hires that by their nature generated joint appointments and distinctive specialties. The need to take stock and plan has occurred in the Department and our the recent content of the two new searches is a result of both a discussed initiative to strengthen the Criminology core in the department (in face of key retirements) and from a previous "ad hoc" or "faux" search committee that reported on faculty interviews as to the direction hiring might take in the department. As indicated above additional planning will be acted upon as part of a general hiring plan. These actions in general, plus a review of our targeted hires policy should give the Department a greater sense of self-determination.

*Mechanisms for shared intellectual community.* As indicated above the Department is trying alternatives to engage as a group in a general collective intellectual activity. There has been some general excitement and engagement brought forward (as acknowledged by the Review) by the group of new Assistant/Associate professors that are leading to a general shared sense of activity and purpose. In part, this recognizes the general role new faculty and active junior colleagues play in promoting such discussions in any given

department. For this year, we are engaged both in the new searches and in a set of activities that brings outside collaborators into the department to facilitate faculty work. The latter should serve to share work of their colleagues within the Department, as well as expose the Department to outside ideas/colleagues in the discipline. We anticipate a continued focus on such activities.