

**Report of the Review Committee**  
For the Law, Societies & Justice Program  
University of Washington  
17 May 2016.

**Introduction**

The Law, Societies & Justice (LSJ) Program at the University of Washington is one of the most successful programs in the social sciences. The Review Committee finds that LSJ is a jewel in the crown of social sciences, and a model for highly effective liberal arts education at a major public university.

Among the many stellar aspects of the program is its astonishing success in attracting and keeping students at a time when most other social science units are confronting declines. Despite falling numbers in the social sciences at the UW, LSJ is a growing major that went steadily upwards from 157 majors in 2007 to a projected 222 majors in 2016. Applications to this competitive major have rocketed during the same time period, going from about 96 to over 215. Acceptances to the program have become ever more competitive, making it more difficult for even repeat applicants to get in. LSJ admitted over 80 percent of applicants in academic year 2007-2008, but in the latest round of applications that number dropped to 45 percent in 2014-2015. While LSJ admitted more than 80 percent of those who applied in the 2007-08 school year, that number dropped to 45 percent in 2014-15.

Students say it all, with their uniform enthusiasm for the social justice orientation of the program, its integrated courses, and its dedicated faculty. While they do raise important issues of concern – such as the necessity of having people of color and LGBTQ on the faculty – those that are lucky enough to get into the undergraduate program have nothing but praise for the transformative force of the program in their lives. One spoke well for all: “LSJ has helped us be reflective about how the world is, but also self-reflective about what we really want to do and how we can create that change...they are giving us tools for self-reflection, which I think employers really want...to take critique, reflect, and push to make that better.” Another said, as other students nodded in agreement that “LSJ has allowed me to really explore what I think about the world...what I think about humanity...LSJ has really pushed me to think about things on a micro-level and why things are the way they are.”

Both the undergraduate and graduate students remarked on the quality and dedication of the faculty in classes and course. Students appreciate the intellectual flexibility of the major, saying how LSJ helps them “explore the REAL reasons behind inequalities.” Despite the intellectual flexibility, however, LSJ students also spoke of how themes and instruction resonated across the courses, making for an integrated curricular experience that is often a central, but practically difficult, goal of social science training. The general student perspective is that, “everything in LSJ is super connected, so I could see how human rights was connected to criminology and vice versa.” Students also spoke of how the courses helped them hone their “analytical skills,” “read complex texts,” and have “really engaged conversations about extremely difficult societal issues.”

The Review Committee was also impressed with the quality of mentoring and advising that is a prominent feature of the program. To say that the students are wildly enthusiastic about the advising team is putting it mildly. Many expressed the opinion that LSJ advising is nothing short of miraculous compared to their friends' experiences in other majors. The advising team checks in with them about how things are going, advocates for them, knows their interests and sends things their way. It helps figure how to make what they want to do possible – and so helps make the university system tractable. It also does a great job of connecting graduating students to the alumni base to expand their opportunities. Students point out that the advising team gives them opportunities they were not aware of, and not just what they are interested in and asking about. Students “love” the weekly email blast to undergrads for talks around campus, internship information, and the LSJ team building activities – they read the whole thing every week.

The Review Committee also finds that LSJ is on the right track with regard to fund-raising, reaching out to work with University Advancement to cultivate a potential donor base. Although the donor base is still young, this is a critical and necessary step for sustaining the LSJ program and for promoting its visibility to external stakeholders.

### **Review Process**

On 15 May 2016, the LSJ Review Committee put together a preliminary framework to guide the processes. The committee focused on hammering out sets of questions and discussion points that stemmed from both the 2009 Review Report as well as the 2016 Self-Study by the program.

On 16 May 2016, the Review Committee conversed with 9 of the 10 voting faculty in the program including both LSJ appointees and LSJ adjuncts. We also met with the full time senior advisor as well as the administrator in LSJ. In addition, we met with groups of both undergraduate and graduate students in the program. The Review Committee made clear that comments were not for attribution to any one person.

On 17 May 2016, the Review Committee had an Exit Discussion with LSJ program representatives along with UW representatives. It then also had a meeting with UW representatives alone.

The Review Committee then deliberated on its findings and recommendations.

### **Interdisciplinary Undergraduate Curriculum and Graduate Certificate**

LSJ has established itself as one of the top interdisciplinary, socio-legal programs in North America. It is especially well-known for its comparative/global approach, stellar faculty and students, intellectual rigor, and creative and innovative pedagogy. Taken together, its faculty are among the top scholars in the field of law and society and have made important contributions to multiple allied fields, especially anthropology, social and political geography, political science, and sociology. Several LSJ faculty members continue to be involved in developing an

international coalition of undergraduate interdisciplinary law/justice programs, and have presented at national and international conferences on curriculum development and innovation in undergraduate and graduate education. In short, LSJ is an important hub of innovation in research and teaching in socio-legal studies.

LSJ offers an undergraduate major and minor, and a graduate certificate. It also supports the Disability Studies Major and the Human Rights Minor. The LSJ undergraduate major seeks to train students in critical approaches to the study of law and its relations to societies and justice. As such, LSJ is not a “pre-law” major per se, although a healthy percentage of LSJ majors do go on to law school. Instead, LSJ approaches legal studies as an independent and autonomous field of social science and humanistic inquiry that is both multi- and interdisciplinary. This approach facilitates students using the major to prepare for graduate school in the social sciences (e.g., an LSJ student currently enrolled in the doctoral program in Jurisprudence and Social Policy at UC Berkeley), public policy, and social work. It also enables students to embark on a variety of careers after graduation in the non-profit, governmental, and private sectors.

LSJ developed and continues to administer the first required undergraduate internship in the College. The internship is important on a number of dimensions, including enabling students to apply concepts learned in LSJ classes in working environments and make connections with potential employers.

The LSJ curriculum consists of two tracks built around the following substantive thematic areas: “Comparative Legal Institutions” and “Rights”. Students must have a primary concentration in one area and a secondary concentration in another area, although most students reportedly end up taking courses in both areas. This structure provides flexibility for students and greater ease in progress toward graduation, as well as opportunities for those students wishing to double major. Through the wide-ranging expertise of its faculty and its innovative pedagogy (e.g., collective projects, mixed-enrollment courses), the LSJ curriculum offers courses that are substantively diverse, yet coherent, and methodologically distinct. Indeed, one of the strengths of the program is the way courses build on each other conceptually. Many of the undergraduate students we spoke with remarked on the conceptual synergies among courses, expressing their views in very sophisticated ways.

The LSJ curricula, in the words of one student, teaches one how to “think in a deeply critical way about social justice, power, and change.” Another student remarked that the program “transformed the way” she thinks about law, “offering a sense of how one might use law for pro-social change.” One of the significant outcomes of this approach is that students encounter and explore social issues from multiple perspectives. As one student put it, “the faculty don’t teach you what to think but how to think about issues from all sides.”

At the graduate level, LSJ administers the Comparative Law and Society Studies (CLASS) interdisciplinary graduate certificate. Graduate students from the social sciences, Evans School, and Law School are eligible to apply to the certificate program and become CLASS Fellows. To complete the certificate, students must complete three CLASS-approved courses. The CLASS certificate thus augments and supports existing PhD training in a variety of

other departments, especially political science and sociology, from which the bulk of the CLASS Fellows are drawn.

Nationally, CLASS is well-known in the fields of law and society and political science for its emphasis on comparative socio-legal studies. The analytic shift among socio-legal scholars to the comparative/transnational/global in the field of law and society has been occurring for the past two decades, and CLASS continues to be on the cutting edge of this movement. Because of its interdisciplinary character, CLASS is a natural linkage with other PhD programs on campus. Moreover, in an era when doctoral students face ever-more challenges and stress in securing post-doctoral employment in their fields (especially tenure-track jobs), students report anecdotally being heartened by the job-search successes by their peers in CLASS.

Students report that the training and professional connections they make with peers and faculty in the program are extremely important to their intellectual development. As one student put it, “CLASS makes me more confident in going out on the job market. The skills and connections I’ve developed through it will be really important in getting a good job.”

### **Reflections on Challenges**

LSJ is a strong program that is thriving since its 2009 review. It has prospered through leadership change, promotion and new roles of its core faculty, and addition of new faculty. This said, we identify four areas of challenge facing the program in the years to come:

**First**, the faculty are stretched nearly beyond reasonable limits to deliver this outstanding program. The depth of mentoring, experiential learning opportunities, and undergraduate involvement in research that define LSJ’s pedagogies are extremely time and labor intensive for faculty. They are a total of 4 faculty FTE (divided across 7 core faculty), 3 adjuncts and 1 lecturer. Nearly all have service responsibilities to units where they are jointly appointed or hold leadership roles (UW Human Rights Center, Middle East Center, Director of CLASS). Simply put, there are too few faculty doing too many things. By their own admission, they are stretched nearly beyond capacity – yet are still delivering an outstanding program. Additional faculty resources are needed, especially at assistant professor level. Our deliberations with faculty, undergraduates, and graduate students indicated some key directions for future faculty hiring. They note and applaud the strong representation of women on the faculty, yet pointed to need to prioritize increasing faculty of color and LGBTQ faculty. Some called for prioritizing a wider range of social science backgrounds in future faculty hiring, noting that representation of faculty with disciplinary backgrounds in political science and sociology is quite strong. Finally, others pointed to a concentration of faculty research and expertise in the Americas, rightly noting that focus on building additional resources in Asia or Africa could strengthen the transnational comparative lens that is foundational to LSJ’s intellectual framework and its commitment to decentering the North American context.

**Second**, the faculty that LSJ accepts only 45% of applicants to its major indicates strong potential to growth in the number of majors. Our discussion with faculty and advising staff

suggest that modest growth in the number of majors could allow them to admit extremely well qualified students who have applied to the program multiple times. We believe that institutional support for modest growth would be beneficial in the long run. Given the extreme demands on faculty described above, we are mindful of expanding too much. Faculty are already stretched, and major growth would change the core aspects of LSJ teaching and learning that are demonstrably treasured by all in their community: The intimate experiential nature of the undergraduate program, strong student access to faculty, and creative intensive pedagogies (e.g. mixed enrollment classes, alumni outreach, collaborative student projects, mentoring etc.).

**Third**, LSJ faces an immediate challenge from budget cuts (specifically, loss of temporary instructional funds that have supported TAs and graduate student instructors), and potential future competition for majors from new undergraduate programs proposed by professional schools seeking sustainability under ABB. While neither of these yet portends severe harm to LSJ, both developments need to be discussed and thought through by all the faculty in the program in the near future, with a view to best positioning the unit now and sustaining it into the future. This is the first time that LSJ has faced a budget cut, and because the cut affects instructional dollars the program will experience an immediate reduction in teaching and mentoring capacities. These trends could, if continued into the future, diminish the high quality of undergraduate and graduate experiences.

**Fourth**, we heard some expressions about the need for greater deliberative processes as a faculty. We recognize that this must be balanced against the already-high demands on LSJ faculty. Yet it is clear in reading the 2016 Self Study that the LSJ program is at its best when it involves the full faculty in deliberating about curriculum, pedagogies, scholarly collaboration, and institution building.

### **Recommendations**

We applaud the program to its dedicated effort to implement many of the recommendations from the 2009 review report. They have expanded community engagement on multiple levels, regularized faculty meetings, and revised the tracks in their major (“Rights” and “Comparative Legal Institutions,” former Criminal Justice track now integrated across the curriculum). The program has also expanded advising and administrative staffing, and prospered through leadership transition.

**First**, given the challenges confronting the unit – reduction in instructional funds and potential competition for undergraduate majors – we encourage the faculty to collectively explore strategic collaborations with other UW units, to go after alternative revenue streams, and to also continue the focus on advancement.

**Second**, the university needs to find a way to, at minimum sustain the number of FTEs dedicated to the LSJ program, and ideally, expand this number of FTEs. Leadership demands on these outstanding faculty will only continue grow. As both the faculty and graduate students made clear, one unexpected leave, unsuccessful retention, or unfilled retirement would be catastrophic to their ability to deliver this high quality of the undergraduate and graduate

program.

**Third**, we recommend prioritizing the following for faculty hires: underrepresented minorities, LGBTQ people, diverse disciplinary origins, and regional expertise outside the Americas.

**Fourth**, we agree with the program's decision not to pursue the Ph.D. as originally envisaged. Yet given strong mentoring and professional development that is happening for graduate students in the CLASS program, we encourage the faculty to continue to think creatively about ways to link with other Ph.D. programs on campus as all face challenging budget times.

**Fifth**, we strongly support the program's justification for a move to a department status. As not all programs at UW have a dedicated graduate program we do not consider this a barrier especially in light of the healthy graduate certificate program. We do, however, urge the faculty to deliberate carefully on potential tradeoffs and implications for students and relationships with other units on campus.

**Sixth**, we recommend the program sustain and expand its strong advancement efforts. Two key forms support for the program would enable this expansion. First, the department administrator position (now at .5 FTE) could be expanded to .65. Second, support from the college level advancement resources to support LSJ advancement activities (such as phone banking) could remove some of the burden from LSJ administrative staff. As part of this, we recommend the program expand their efforts to systematically track the professional placement of both undergraduate students and CLASS graduates. These data are critically important and will further strengthen the program's mentoring networks and its advancement efforts.

Respectfully submitted,

The 2016 LSJ Review Committee

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