



WEBER STATE UNIVERSITY

College of Social & Behavioral Sciences

Dean Response to Sociology Program Review

May 12, 2023

General Evaluation

I have read the “Sociology Program Academic Review” plus the “Sociology Program Review Recommendations and Responses”. I would first like to thank the review committee members, Dr. Tracy Ore, Professor of Sociology, St. Cloud State University and Dr. Molly Sween, Professor & Chair, Department of Criminal Justice, Weber State University (WSU), and the self-study WSU Sociology team members (Dr. Pepper Glass, Dr. R.C. Morris, Dr. Marjukka Ollilainen, and Dr. Carla Trentleman) and the Chair, Dr. Huiying Hill, for the time and effort in providing a thorough review of the program. I strongly concur with the evaluation by the external review committee members who stated that the strengths of the program are:

1. A productive and dedicated faculty that furthers the mission of the college and university.
2. A diverse curriculum that serves the needs of students.
3. The active and applied curriculum that helps equip students for life beyond the classroom.
4. Supportive, collegial, and welcoming faculty who are experts in their field and who participate in professional organizations and development programs.
5. Strong leadership from the department chair, who empowers faculty, embraces the concept of servant leadership and focuses on the common good of the program.
6. Rigorous and relevant curriculum that engages students and fosters critical thinking and sociological imagination.
7. Strong support for staff and adjuncts feel supported.

Challenges to the Sociology Program

A number of challenges were identified by the external reviewers that were outlined in detail that dealt with the mission/identity statement, curriculum, student outcomes assessment, more collaborative opportunities, and support for the program from upper administration. The external reviewers had a number of recommendations for continued improvement of the sociology program.

Sociology Program Level Recommendations

I appreciate the thought and time that went into determining the recommendations for improvement as outlined by the external review committee and note the faculty response to their analysis. My comments are summarized as follows:

1. Revision of Program Mission Statement

- a. Mission Statement needs clarity and alignment with current goals and commitments. The American Sociological Association's (ASA) publication was suggested by external reviewers as a guide - please use this guide.
 - b. The Sociology program has already had a retreat to modify their program mission statement to better align with departmental goals and mission. I fully support the program undertaking this alignment as soon as possible so departmental decisions will be guided by this mission statement.
2. Develop a Program Identity Statement
 - a. It was recommended that the department look inward to identify what is unique about the Sociology Program and to create a strategic plan.
 - b. The strategic plan is important to help guide the program into the future in a thoughtful and intentional way. Specify the direction of the department and justify why that direction is important and how it ties into the community. The external reviewers recommended an outside facilitator to guide the program through a workshop to re-vision its future. The college has a "leadership fellow", David Richards, who worked in this capacity for Intel and has offered his services for leadership training and program development to the college. I would recommend using his skills, experience, and training to guide the department through this process. The identity statement and strategic plan should be completed along with the new mission statement in a timely manner - as soon as possible.
3. Curriculum
 - a. Engage in strategic curriculum development as the future of the program is being considered. It was recommended by the external review team to (1) develop an entry class for students to discuss career opportunities, (2) integrate quantitative data analysis skills throughout the major to enhance quantitative literacy, (3) narrow the elective options, (4) review and refresh course titles and descriptions. The reviewers commented that it would be "important for administration to provide additional resources, if necessary, to assist with this planning".
 - b. I fully support the recommendations regarding the four main areas to enhance curriculum and would like the curriculum changes/development to occur in a timely manner. The department response to the external review comments were also in agreement and there is a definite commitment by the department to make these critical changes. Additional resources from the administration to help with the planning would need to be requested with justification.
4. Assessment Plan Revision
 - a. It was recommended to develop formative assessments at "earlier touch points in the program" along with summative assessment.
 - b. The program will be revising its mission and identity statements and making curriculum changes. I support measuring revised student learning outcomes along numerous axes. The department will be revisiting the assessment plan that has previously been used and will update as necessary.
5. Collaborative Opportunities

- a. The external reviewer recommended outreach across the university to collaborate with other entities to offer General Education courses. An example was given to “connect courses to students intending to work in the health care professions through tailoring a section of SOC 1010 to Introduction to Sociology for the Health Care Professions.”
- b. As noted in the response to the review, the Sociology program has offered an Introduction to Sociology for the Health Care Professions in the past and will continue to offer the course in the future. Sociology has been very proactive in collaboration across the university, but they may want to consider other avenues of opportunity such as participating in a WSU GenEd course with another discipline in the college or university. The department may also want to consider incorporating more high impact educational experiences (HIEE), such as field work and study abroad programs to raise the profile of the program.

6. Upper Administration Support

- a. The dean’s office recognizes the value of the program, but wants to ensure that the department is intentionally exploring ways to improve the student experience while also being community relevant - how can sociology better prepare students to engage with their community.
- b. The sociology department has the potential to lead all other departments in the college in being more community relevant and I encourage them to put forth high intention and sincere effort to make that happen.

Finally, I am pleased that the department has already had a faculty retreat to discuss the program review and address the recommendations and challenges. This demonstrates that the faculty recognize the importance of these changes and are willing to use their intelligence, skills and vision to execute the change. I would encourage the chair to have a followup meeting with the dean during fall semester 2023 to discuss the progress made on the recommendations from the program review. Thank you for your contribution of time and energy toward the review. This is a necessary process in order to strengthen and improve the course offerings and programs we offer our students in the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences.

Best regards,



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