

## SOCIOLOGY PROGRAM REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESPONSES

Reflecting on the above, we have the following recommendations for the continued improvement of the program:

### ***1. Revision of Program Mission***

The mission of the Sociology Program as included in the self-study lacked the clarity that we heard when speaking with faculty. We would recommend that the program revisit their mission and develop language that reflects the current goals and commitments of the faculty. The American Sociological Association's publication *The Sociology Major in the Changing Landscape of Higher Education: Curriculum, Careers, and Online Learning* (Pike, et al. 2017) would be a helpful resource for this work.

Response: We concur with this assessment and are going to revise the program mission statement to better align with the current ASA outcomes. We have scheduled a program retreat on May 8, 2023 to begin our work on the Sociology program mission. To prepare for efficient collaboration, each faculty member has been asked to read the recommended publication, *The Sociology Major in the Changing Landscape of Higher Education: Curriculum, Careers, and Online Learning* (Pike, et al 2017).

### ***2. Development of a Program Identity Statement***

Once the program has revised its outward-facing mission statement, it would be very beneficial to develop a departmental "identity statement." Such a statement is intended to be inward facing, incorporating critical aspects of your mission and vision in a way that describes who you are at this moment in time. It can be helpful to the program in identifying what is unique about your program and highlight what is the potential signature experience for participating students.

Response: We agree that this is a good task to undertake and we will move forward to discuss this during the Sociology Program retreat. Our plan is to work on our program mission statement first, after which we will come up with the identity statement. In light of the near future retirements of some of the program's faculty, it might be challenging to plan for the long term, but our goal is to outline areas of aspiration and strength that can be addressed in the hiring process of new faculty.

### ***3. Creating a Strategic Plan for the Sociology Program***

Many of the challenges that the Sociology Program currently faces could be addressed by creating a strategic plan. While the program offers many unique elements to students' educational experiences, a lack of identity and focus of the program can contribute to student attrition. For example, a significant component of the program is its high impact learning (HIEE) curriculum, incorporating Community Engaged Learning classes utilizing the very valuable relationships and networks some faculty have built with the local community. However, this is

not significantly reflected in the program's mission or any other program documents. After all, if there is not some clarity about the uniqueness of the Sociology program at Weber State University, how can a student build an identity as a Weber State Sociology major?

In order to accomplish the above, including the changes to the curriculum that we outline below, we strongly advise Dean Rich to fund an outside facilitator to lead the program faculty through a workshop to re-vision its future. While the faculty currently work exceptionally well together as collegial and professional teachers and scholars, there is a need to establish a succession plan due to impending staff changes in order to continue the key elements that make this a successful program, including its HIEE curriculum. Bringing in an outside consultant to help reconfigure program dynamics—by having the kinds of frank conversations that typically accompany organizational change—may help the program and its future direction. The goal would be to help them identify the “signature experience” of being a Sociology major at Weber State University, creating a greater sense of belonging for not only the students but the faculty as well. The timing of such a strategic visioning retreat fits well within changes happening at Weber State University and higher education in general.

Response: We concur with this goal. In fact, we have had a program strategic plan in place since 2018, which is also listed in our review report. But based on our new mission statement, we will update the strategic plan and revise with appropriate articulation of our vision for the program in light of upcoming retirements and positioning our students for success in the 21st century.

#### ***4. Curriculum Revision for Sociology***

While the program has made changes in curriculum in response to previous external reviews, we encourage the faculty to continue to engage in a process of strategic curriculum development as they consider the future of the program. With likely revisions in the General Education Curriculum, and of new and existing opportunities for partnership at the University, it is clear that there are possibilities for creating signature experiences for Sociology majors at Weber State University. Once again, we would encourage the faculty to utilize the ASA publication *The Sociology Major in the Changing Landscape of Higher Education: Curriculum, Careers, and Online Learning* as well as the Curriculum Mapping Toolkit for Sociology (CMTS).

##### **Some suggested changes include:**

- Develop a 1 or 2 credit entry experience for students in the major: We encourage the faculty to develop a 1 or 2 credit course explicitly oriented toward the Sociological Career. Offering such a course during the sophomore year provides an opportunity to focus on the career pathways for students early in the curriculum sequence and would help orient students to the major, help prepare them for the professional applications of the discipline, and help students identify their career pathways (all fostering student retention and success). This should be a required course for the major.

Response: The program agrees with this assessment. We are working on an online course to orient Sociology majors toward careers and jobs as well as graduate studies earlier in their

program coursework. We currently offer the information in the Senior Capstone course and through a Sociology Careers Sandbox in Canvas. That said, it is a good idea to provide this information for students earlier than at the end of their studies. This class will specify sociological careers and job potentials.

- Greater integration of data analysis: Integrating quantitative data analysis skills throughout the major, particularly in the Senior Seminar is in line with ASA's recent publication *The Sociology Major in the Changing Landscape of Higher Education* and its "Sociological Literacy Framework." Tweaking existing courses to involve greater emphasis on quantitative literacy and more focus on data equips undergraduates to better navigate a labor market increasingly dominated by Big Data.

Response: We concur with the reviewers and view quantitative analysis skills as an important part of sociology course content. In addition to quantitative data analysis, we also regard collecting and analyzing *qualitative* data as an important skill. It is likely that our students will be interacting with and using "Big Data" in their future work. Therefore, integrating more opportunities to practice their data analysis skills into the curriculum is a worthy objective. Furthermore, in this age of AI and Chat GPA, we need to stay abreast of the ways in which these technologies shape students' higher education experience and future career prospects.

- Focus Curriculum: We recommend that the faculty narrow the elective options for the Sociology major and conduct a review of course titles and descriptions to ensure that they accurately reflect contemporary trends in sociology.

Response: All these suggestions will line up with our strategic plan and mission statement. After we work out our mission statement and strategic plan, we will re-examine our curriculum thoroughly and make appropriate changes that align with the updated emphases.

It will be important for administration to provide additional resources, if necessary, to assist with this planning.

Response: We agree and will certainly appreciate additional resources, but it is not our call.

## ***5. Revision of Assessment Plan***

As stated above, it will be important to develop a more comprehensive plan that includes formative assessment at earlier touchpoints in the program as well as summative assessment. Additionally, it is likely that the above strategic planning and curriculum revision will lead to revised student learning outcomes. With revised learning outcomes, it will be especially important to revise the existing assessment plan, with an eye toward creating a sustainable plan that will help the program foster the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum offered.

Response: In our program discussions of this report, we struggled with how exactly we should interpret this recommendation. For the past decade, our program assessment plan has been

specified and clearly stated in the review report. After our previous 5-year self-study and program review, we were encouraged to report our biennial assessments on each program outcome across various courses (rather than assessing each course by each outcome, which we had been doing). Because our assessment plan has been clearly laid out and implemented in these reports, we are confused about how to respond to this suggestion. When we work on our revised strategic plan, we will revisit the assessment plan and update, if needed. We are not sure about what else needs to be done.

## 6. *Seek Additional Opportunities for Collaboration*

The faculty in the program have long served the university through their contributions to University Faculty Senate Committees, campus-wide service, and other areas. As they work to assess their existing partnerships, there may be additional opportunities for collaboration for the program, similar to those already in existence. For example, there may be opportunities to collaborate with other units in the university to offer courses in General Education that are specifically designed for specific majors. Such courses offer an opportunity to expose the general student body to the disciplines of the program, thus offering opportunities for recruiting additional students. For example, there may be opportunities 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. This example is especially relevant given that pre-medical students, beginning with the 2015 MCAT, are required to have significant training in the social and behavioral determinants of health. With the existence of majors such as nursing, the sociology program has particular relevance here. In his 2011 Hans O. Mauksch address, John F. Zipp posed several questions related to the existing curriculum for Introductory Sociology and the current population of students. Specifically, he argued that Introductory Sociology is the “public face” of sociology, as most students who enroll in these courses do not go on to careers directly in the field. Rather, because of its large presence in general education curriculum as well as serving as a prerequisite for many professional disciplines (e.g., health and human sciences professions), the only contact that students have with the discipline of sociology is in the introductory course. As a result, sociologists need to reflect on the ways in which our public face accurately represents the discipline and whether or not the curriculum of the introductory course adequately meets the needs of the students. By targeting SOC 1010 to students in other programs, the program can provide not only a much-needed service to future healthcare workers, but also raise campus-wide awareness of the relevance of sociology to fields not immediately associated with the social sciences. Moreover, this may lead to future connections with other programs (e.g., through course offerings such as “Introduction to Sociology for Business Administration”).

Response: We agree with the suggestion and will work on creating more collaborative courses. We also note that we have already collaborated with many programs, and our faculty has taught interdisciplinary courses, as reported in the self-study. For example, we have offered an Introduction to Sociology for Health Professions course in the past and we plan to offer it again. All of our faculty members have taught courses across disciplines and will continue to do so. For

a small program, collaborations must be sustainable, as we need to first cover our own curriculum. In our program retreat, we will work on this item.

### ***7. Support from Upper Administration***

Clearly, members of upper administration recognize the value of the program to Weber State University. The recommendations in this report offer several specific opportunities to demonstrate this support. Above and beyond suggestions mentioned above, the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences can work to help promote the Department of Sociology through a large marketing push as has been done for other programs in the college. Additionally, the facilitated faculty retreat mentioned above will take financial support either from the College or University.

Response: We will have several retreats to plan for the future and to think of ways to promote our program. We certainly welcome any support from the upper administration in that endeavor.