

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Academic Program Review
College of Arts and Sciences**

DEPARTMENT/PROGRAM

Department of Sociology

EXTERNAL REVIEWERS

Professor John Boli, Emory University
Professor Lynne Haney, New York University
Professor and Chair Jodi O'Brien, Seattle University

CAMPUS VISIT

April 17-19, 2013

The review team read the self-study written by the faculty in the department; reviewed the curriculum, course syllabi and evaluations; conducted class visits; interviewed faculty, students and staff; and met with the Dean, Associate Deans and other relevant members of the campus community. Prior to their visit, the reviewers were provided with USF's Vision, Mission, Values Statement, the department's self-study and other university materials.

1. How did the external review committee rate the quality of the program – excellent, very good, good, adequate, or poor? How does the program compare with benchmark top-tier programs nationally? Please provide a brief rationale for the external review committee's rating.

The committee gave the Sociology Department an overall rating of VERY GOOD to EXCELLENT. They noted that “this is a rigorous major with thoughtful, well-prepared, and dedicated teachers” and the faculty are “without exception” “excellent teacher-scholars” with a “record of sustained and relevant scholarship”. In addition, the department is doing an excellent job of serving the mission of the university. The reviewers did have suggestions to help the department fully move into the “excellent” category.

2. What are the most important general issues that emerged from the external review process?

- The department is a collegial, diverse group of outstanding teacher-scholars.
- The interdisciplinary focus of the department members' research is an important strength.
- The major has been growing steadily at a rate of 5-10% per year.
- Students commented on the amount of writing and the overall rigor of the coursework. The reviewers agree that the major is rigorous.
- Most challenges to the program are institutional.
- External commitments are both “a source of personal and professional fulfillment” for faculty and eroding “the intellectual core and identity of the department.”
- Despite the many benefits of the CBA, the agreement has unfortunate consequences for the the department culture of scholarship and faculty professional development

3. What specific recommendations for improving the program's quality has the external review committee made to the Dean?

According to the committee, the four main areas that warrant attention are: curriculum, advising, over-extended faculty commitments, and governance and faculty engagement. The reviewers provided recommendations for improvement in each area by having the department “play to its strengths”.

Curriculum:

- Research Methods:
 - The “Statistics for Social Sciences” course should be open to Sociology majors and be a required prerequisite course for their research methods class in order to cover both qualitative and quantitative methods.
 - Develop a “logic of inquiry” course that will replace the writing course to familiarize students with social science research paradigms.
 - Add more focus to the “Doing Research” course in order to give students an opportunity to put into practice the knowledge they have gained in previous courses
 - Stop rotating the research methods course and allow 1-2 faculty to teach the course in order to provide more consistency and fine-tune the class.
- Inequalities Requirement: Change requirement to a “Global Inequalities” and take advantage of the fact that interpersonal, everyday forms of inequality are already embedded in the curriculum.
- Departmental Emphases: Drop the emphases because they will create “a good deal of administrative work with little reward for the students.” Non-major students can still take advantage of the many related minor programs.
- Departmental Honors:
 - Change the current structure so that all students take the Capstone course and treat Honors as a stand-alone program instead of giving students the choice of the Capstone or Honors class as their final course.
 - Have Honors students take the more structured Capstone in the fall semester as a way to begin preparing for their Honors theses and then take the Honors course to complete the theses.
 - To assist the department in developing an “honors culture” and to recognize the extra labor accompanying the supervision of Honors students, the administration should allow the enrollment to be lower than 12 students.
 - Strongly support the development of a Student Research Office that can provide small grants for honors students to do their research.
- The department should add a course on social movements, with a large component on transnational movements.
- The department needs to prepare for the overhaul of the Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT) that will now have a significant social and behavioral sciences component in 2015.
- Recommend hiring a colleague with expertise in quantitative methods.

Advising:

- Department should establish a peer mentoring program. It would provide valuable information to students and generate engagement.
- Department could develop a more complete website for majors and minors and publicize it regularly.
- Recommend the creation of a centralized advising center that will organize course offerings and provide support to pre-majors.

Service/Over-Extended Faculty:

- The department needs to work on a long-term strategic plan that will ensure equitable distribution of faculty service engagements.
- Administration should consult the chair before making service requests of faculty or request should be re-routed through the chair.
- The chair should be charged with overseeing the implementation of the strategic plan.

Governance and Faculty Engagement:

The governing structure means that faculty members do not read each other's scholarship and, therefore, do not know each other's work, do not provide feedback to help improve it, or do not collaborate on research projects. The committee recommends the formation of a "professional development committee" which would be charged with providing opportunities for faculty advancement.

4. In the opinion of the external review committee, is the program following the University's strategic initiatives?

a) Recruiting and retaining a diverse faculty of outstanding teachers and scholars.

The department has "recruited and retained faculty that is diverse in areas of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and nationality" and are "without exception" "outstanding teacher-scholars".

b) Enrolling, supporting and graduating a diverse student body that demonstrates high academic achievement, strong leadership capabilities, a concern for others, and a sense of responsibility for the weak and vulnerable.

The faculty members are regarded as "outstanding teacher-scholars who contribute significantly to the University mission of educating students for leadership in a diverse society." The curriculum is strengthened by its attention to intersectionalities and inequalities, which are embedded throughout the curriculum and "are significant learning areas for sociology".

c) Providing the environment necessary to promote student learning in the program.

The review team noted the high collegiality among the faculty members, which benefits the students and the College as a whole. One faculty member remarked, "my colleagues are good, balanced, people" and "we're like a family". Sociology Department alumni data indicate that the curriculum and faculty prepare students for graduate and professional programs post graduation. After a review of department syllabi and course eval comments, the committee is in accedence with the notion that the coursework is "rigorous".

5. In what way is the program contributing to the goal of making the University of San Francisco a premier Jesuit, Catholic urban university with a global perspective that educates leaders who will fashion a more humane and just world?

The committee noted that the commitment to social justice is evident in many areas of the department and that "both the curriculum and faculty research projects indicate a strong, self-reflective commitment to this mission and to service to the broader University community" which have "expanded considerably via their engagement in many extra-departmental programs devoted to social justice." The curriculum includes courses addressing "mission centric" topics like "globalization", "urbanization", and social justice related issues.

6. What is the timetable for the response to the external review committee's recommendations for program improvement? What can the Office of the Provost do to appropriately respond to the review?

The Chair and the Dean will meet during the Fall 2013 semester to discuss initial plans to address issues. Due to the large number of faculty on leave Fall 2013, the Dean and the Department will meet Fall 2014 to discuss the long-term action plan and discuss resources. The Office of the Provost may be asked to support some of the following activities: 1) suggested curriculum changes, 2) development of a strategic plan, 3) a new advising model, and 4) professional development.

7. What general comments or issues, if any, are crucial to understanding the reviewers report?

The reviewers were greatly impressed with the Sociology program and the faculty. They were praised for their commitment to the Mission and excellence in teaching, scholarship, and service.