SEXUALITY, MARRIAGE AND FAMILY STUDIES

Review Process

This was the second formal review of the undergraduate program of the Department of Sexuality, Marriage and Family Studies (SMF). The first review was in 2003.

The main findings of the first review were stated as:

“We found a small but vibrant program with many strengths. The students and faculty are enthusiastic about the program and speak very positively about it. This is remarkable given the number of disciplines represented.”

The review team made recommendations related to: internal governance such as the need for an Advisory Board with broader representation especially students; the necessity of including courses in statistics, methodology and advanced theory in a possible Honours degree program; the need to consider in future curriculum design the need for a practicum and materials that would give greater inclusivity of certain groups; give consideration to a more equitable distribution of student advising and limiting the number of courses taught as overload.

SMF has addressed all of the above issues and has hired two tenure-track professors (one in 2007, the other in 2009) to teach the courses and establish the Honours program approved in 2009.

The present self study was initiated by Dr Rye and completed by Dr Vanin. The revised draft was commented upon by all members of faculty as well as the Vice President and Academic Dean. Student input was focused in the strengths, weaknesses and future hopes of the program. These were included as an appendix.

The self study was submitted February 2011; the site visit occurred 11 and 12 May, 2011; the review team’s report was submitted 5 July, 2011; and the response from SMF and the Academic Dean was received 1 September, 2011.

Characteristics of the Program

Historical Overview

SMF has had a long history dating back to 1972 when it was first offered at St Jerome’s College to meet the growing demand for the Family Life education of teachers within the Catholic school system. During its first decade, SMF was solely taught on-campus during the summers with numbers often exceeding 200 students per summer term. It was a huge financial asset to St Jerome’s University.

During the mid-80s the program shifted from a summer institute aimed at educational professionals to an on-campus program providing regular courses in Fall and Winter terms. Options (General and Honours), a Minor and a Diploma were created.

In 2000, a Three-Year and a Four-Year General degree were approved necessitating changes to the Minor, Options and Diploma plans. These degree programs were first offered in the 2001-02 academic year.

In 2009, a SMF Honours plan was launched. The first students graduated in June 2010.
Program Objectives

SMF resides within St Jerome’s University and therefore the objectives of St Jerome’s are important to SMF.

The mission statement of St Jerome’s University states:

“We are committed to learning and academic excellence, the gospel value of love, truth and justice, and the formation of leaders for the service of the community and the Church. In all of our activities and practices, St Jerome’s University functions within the context of the Roman Catholic tradition and the principles of academic freedom.”

The objective of the Sexuality, Marriage and Family Studies program is to promote interdisciplinary scholarship and research in fields such as gender, reproduction and relationships. The program addresses human interactions within relational and sexual contexts.

Distinctiveness/Benchmarking

Relative to other Family Studies- and Human Sexuality-based programs, the SMF program is the only one in Canada to have combined sexuality and family studies into one program that is available as an Honours major, has a practicum or thesis option, and core courses in research methods and statistics.

Academic Programs Offered

Sexuality, Marriage and Family Studies offers the following plans:
Honours BA, Sexuality, Marriage and Family Studies
Honours BA, Sexuality, Marriage and Family Studies (Arts and Business, Regular and Co-op)
Joint Honours BA, Sexuality, Marriage and Family Studies and Discipline X
Four-Year General BA, Sexuality, Marriage and Family Studies
Three-Year General BA, Sexuality, Marriage and Family Studies
Minor, Sexuality, Marriage and Family Studies
Option, Sexuality, Marriage and Family Studies
Diploma, Sexuality, Marriage and Family Studies

Students

The entrance average to SMF over the six year period, 2003-04 to 2008-09 inclusive, was 81.2%. However this has ranged from 74.9% in 2007-08 to 88.9% in 2004-05.

The number of students who have declared a minor or major in SMF has increased from 70 in Fall 2006 to 97 in Fall 2010, an increase of 39%. Of these students, nearly half are registered at St Jerome’s University, the remainder registered through the University of Waterloo (UW). The total student enrolment in SMF courses has varied from 1,400 in 2006-07, decreasing the following year to 535 and finally settling, over the last two years, at about 1,100 students. Average class size for third-year courses increased steadily from below 30 in 2002 to between 40 and 50 students in 2007 and 2008.

Of the seven second-year courses, three have, on average, an enrolment of 169 in both Fall and Winter terms, while the remainder have, on average, 49 students enrolled in both Fall and Winter terms. The average enrolment of the 13 third-year classes is 30 with a low of one to a high of 66. The 10 fourth-year courses have enrolments from one to 10 on average.
Student evaluation of SMF courses, from 2004 to 2010 inclusive, range from 3.9 to 4.2 on a five-point scale where five is the highest value. SMF course evaluations were higher than the mean for St Jerome’s from 2004 to 2010 inclusive, except for 2007 and 2010. The student evaluations for SMF instructors have always been higher than the St Jerome’s average, being in the 4.25 to 4.5 range.

Service learning is very heavy in 200-level courses. Community service learning is an important part of SMF and the Department is increasing opportunities for students to participate in it prior to the capstone practicum course. During the period of the review, students participated in the Beyond Border Program, a St Jerome’s University international service learning program. Presently, the Department is working closely with Career Action, Co-op Education and St Jerome’s University’s Centre for Responsible Citizens to create opportunities for community service learning.

There is no SMF specific co-op program. However, students enrolled in the Arts and Business program have the option of being in co-op. Since 2004, five students in an SMF Major or Minor plan have been in Arts and Business and, of these, three were in the co-op stream.

Of the student cohorts from 2002-03 to 2005-06 inclusive 75% graduated in SMF and the remainder graduated from another Department.

Eighteen SMF students were surveyed in September 2009. They commented on the great communication there was in the program between faculty members and students. They also commented favourably on the small size of the courses and that professors’ doors were always open and that students were always welcome.

For the future, students were hopeful for a master’s program, more Spring courses and a greater variety of topics in the senior courses.

The Department intends to introduce a first-year transition course which will be cross-listed with HUMSC 101 for potential SMF students. The purpose of such a course is to introduce ethics in a first-year course and at the same time provide students with transition activities and skills-building necessary for success at university.

Most students after finishing their SMF degree enter graduate school to take a master’s degree generally in one of Social Work, Counselling, Dispute Resolution, or Couple and Family Therapy. Most of the remaining graduates enter either the teaching profession or find a career in social services.

**Faculty**

At the time of this review there were four individuals in the Department of Sexuality, Marriage and Family Studies—two full-time tenure-track assistant professors; one adjunct professor; and one full-time associate professor from the Department of Psychology at St Jerome’s University who teaches 60% in SMF. Other faculty members from Psychology, Religious Studies, History, and Sociology and Legal Studies teach SMF courses and courses relevant to SMF students.

There are no pending retirements among the SMF faculty members in the near future.

The work load for faculty members at St Jerome’s University and SMF is five courses per year with most of the teaching occurring in the Fall and Winter terms.
In the 2003 and 2004 academic years, the overall student course evaluation averages were in the 4 to 4.1 range on a five point scale where five is the highest grade. By the end of the academic year 2008, the annual average course evaluation grade had risen to 4.2 to 4.3.

Three members of SMF, excluding the adjunct faculty member, have had the following research output since 2006: 18 referred journal papers, three books, four book chapters and 37 conference presentations.

These four faculty members are heavily involved in professional and community service. They are: Affiliated Scientist to the Centre for Addition and Mental Health; Associate Member, Board of Examiners of Sex Therapists and Counsellors of Ontario; Supervisor in Training, Ontario Association of Marriage and Family Therapists; Editorial Board Member of the Journal of Online Learning and Teaching; Board Member of the Association for Authentic Experiential or Evidence-based Learning.

Concerns/Opportunities for Improvement

The reviewers saw Sexuality, Marriage and Family Studies as a strong program with great potential. Faculty members and students have passion and enthusiasm for the program. Although there are some “growing pains” associated with the implementation of many of the changes that emerged from the previous review, the reviewers are confident that they can be worked out. Other challenges emerge from the ongoing issue of SMF as a stand-alone Department, which results in less administrative support compared to other St Jerome’s programs that have a counterpart at UW. Thus, the recommendations focus not only on the Department but also on how St Jerome’s and UW can support the Department as it pursues “controlled growth”. While faculty members have put considerable time and energy into curriculum revision that focuses on articulating the distinctiveness of this program, the role and functioning of the three streams (sexuality; couple and family relations; and counseling/therapy) within this vision, and that sets strategic goals and priorities to further the vision is desirable.

The reviewers do not think that the development of a graduate program is feasible. Effort should be placed on research productivity of junior faculty members and the hiring of a senior level Chair if a graduate program is to be developed.

The reviewers make seven recommendations for the SMF program:

1. Program Focus and Curriculum: faculty members and “allies” need to engage in a visioning and strategic planning exercise. This would include identifying a vision for the future; a specific focus/distinctiveness of this program; articulation of how the three streams work within this focus; greater commonality between the Four-year General program and the Honours program; and a strategic plan for achieving the vision (including targets for enrollment, faculty complement, research, new courses, potential accreditation for various counseling programs).

Response: This recommendation is clearly in line with the Department’s own understanding of what is needed. SMF is aware of the value of identifying its vision for the long-term focus and distinctiveness of the program; clarifying what form specialization might take; reviewing the overall learning outcomes for SMF graduates; and developing a strategic plan for achieving its vision. In engaging in such a visioning and strategic planning process, SMF is committed to upholding the important and unique interdisciplinarity of the program, both in its faculty members and in the courses that are made available.

2. Visioning and Planning Exercise: consideration should be given to:
- increased course content related to gerontology and disability;
- revision of the practicum course and/or program structure to decrease the instructor’s work load;
- development of capacity within the Department to offer core courses without reliance on other Departments;
- development of a 100-level course to cover foundational work, facilitate recruitment of SMF students, and increase visibility of the program across UW.

Response: a) The Department will consider increased course content in a number of topic areas, including the recommended areas of gerontology and disability.

b) SMF recognizes the value of reviewing the management and coordination involved in administering the practicum course. The Department also understands the importance of reviewing the structure and requirements of the practicum course in order to determine the best way to deal with high (and increasing) numbers of Honours students for the long-term. SMF will also explore the possibility of having a non-faculty person handle the placement of students in practicum sites.

c) SMF is aware of the importance of core or required SMF courses being taught by full-time members of the SMF Department. Over the past number of years, the Department has been mindful of the value of consistency in the delivery of its courses. Consequently, the Department has offset the small number of full-time members by hiring regular sessionals to teach courses. SMF is committed to dealing with this particular recommendation over the next seven years.

d) SMF is mindful of the value of developing 100-level courses for the purposes of recruitment to the program and for establishing foundational courses for the program. It recognizes that the development of such a course(s) would help to increase the visibility of SMF at UW. The Department is committed to considering such a course(s) that, as the reviewers suggest, “covers both family and sexuality within the context of the relational focus of the program.”

3. Develop promotional materials based on the revised program.

Response: SMF agrees that it is critically important that it develops adequate promotional materials. The Department will explore this in collaboration with the Registrar’s office at St. Jerome’s University and, indeed, have already begun conversations about this need.

SMF is committed to developing promotional materials for the current program within one year. Subsequently, the Department will ensure that new materials are developed to reflect the results of the visioning and strategic planning process discussed above.

4. Consider developing a link with a UW Department that has faculty members who are more senior and do research in similar areas.

Response: SMF acknowledges the concerns raised by the External Review Team related to the fact that the Department has only two full-time faculty members, both of whom are “relatively new PhDs and are still establishing their research programs,” and that it might benefit the current full-time faculty members to have relationships with more senior faculty members who can support and mentor them with regard to their research programs and career trajectories.

SMF has already developed a number of important links and relationships with faculty members, programs and Faculties at UW. For example, four faculty members have adjunct status with the Faculty of
Applied Health Sciences. As well, relationships have been developed with the Departments of History and Women’s Studies, and are being explored with a variety of other programs and Departments such as Peace and Conflict Studies, Sociology and Legal Studies, Knowledge and Integration, Psychology, and the School of Pharmacy. The Department is committed to continuing to develop such links over the course of the next review period.

5. A high school mathematics course could be made a requirement for admission in response to the heightened difficulties that SMF students have with statistics.

Response: SMF recognizes the difficulties that its students have been having with the required statistics course. Within the coming year, the Department will investigate a partnership with the St. Jerome’s University library that will make SPSS available to SMF students in the SJU library.

SMF agrees that students seeking an SMF degree should be required to demonstrate that they have completed an appropriate high school mathematics course in order to be successful in SMF’s required statistics course.

6. Student Concerns to be Addressed: The handbook begun by students to guide students through the various programs, options, and years needs to be completed jointly by faculty members and students.

The workshops clarifying fourth-year options need to be continued but they should gradually be handed over to either Honours students or administrative staff members.

Response: The student handbook is being completed at present, and will be available to students in the coming year. The Department intends to train SMF student ambassadors to mentor incoming SMF students. An administrative staff member has been designated as an advisor to SMF students. SMF will invite this individual to take more responsibility for clarifying expectations for upper-year students.

7. SMF should refrain from exploring the development of a graduate program until research productivity and administrative support for the program is sufficiently strong to do so.

Response: SMF agrees with the External Review Team that, while the Department is enthusiastic about the possibility of a graduate program, this is something for a future review period, not for the next seven years. SMF will be mindful of a possible graduate program as it engages in the visioning and strategic planning process. The Department will monitor the possibilities for moving forward toward a graduate program in an appropriate manner.

The reviewers also made five recommendations to the administration:

1. That a senior faculty member be hired who would Chair the Department, thereby allowing the two new junior faculty members to concentrate on developing research agendas.

Response: This recommendation is in agreement with the hiring commitment identified in the St Jerome’s University Academic Priorities’ document.

2. That the software program, SPSS, be made available in at least one lab which is accessible to SMF students.

Response: See response to recommendation 5 above.
3. That the staff position for counseling students be continued.

*Response:* See response to recommendation 6 above.

4. That a staff person be assigned to support the practicum course.

*Response:* See response to recommendation 2 above.

5. That support and assistance be provided to the SMF faculty members to engage in a visioning and strategic planning exercise.

*Response:* The Department would ask for assistance from the Centre for Teaching Excellence in the visioning process.

The reviewers hope that their recommendations contribute to developing a stronger program.

The Sexuality, Marriage, and Family Studies Department acknowledges that this review process has been very useful, especially as the Department considers what it means to enhance and grow the program.