

# Final Assessment Report

## Sociology (BA, MA, PhD)

### April 2014

---

#### **Review Process**

The review covers four undergraduate programs: the Bachelor of Arts (Honours, and Honours Co-op), and the three and four year general Bachelor's programs in Sociology, and two graduate programs: the Master's and the PhD in Sociology. The Department also took over the administration of the undergraduate programs in Legal Studies in 2009, and changed its name to the Department of Sociology and Legal Studies. Legal Studies will be reviewed separately in the near future, but in view of the close connections between the programs will be reviewed along with Sociology in future review cycles.

The self study was prepared by the Chair of the Department, with assistance from the Associate Chair for Undergraduate Studies in Sociology and the Associate Chair for Graduate Studies. The draft was discussed by the Undergraduate Committee, and circulated for review to the 19 faculty members (at the time) with primary teaching responsibility in Sociology (and to four retired faculty). The couple of faculty members in Legal Studies were not involved.

The external review was undertaken by Dr. Kelly Hannah-Moffatt, Professor, Vice-Dean Undergraduate at the University of Toronto at Mississauga, and Director of the Centre of Criminology and Sociolegal Studies and Dr. Rick Linden, Professor and Associate Dean, Research in the Faculty of Arts, University of Manitoba as well as Director of the Criminology Research Centre. The site visited occurred on October 7 and 8 2013. The internal reviewer was Dr. Monica Barra from the Department of Chemistry.

The previous undergraduate review of the undergraduate program (2006/7) resulted in four major recommendations. Two of these (regarding allowing non-Honours students to participate in co-op and to obtain specializations) are not within the Department's jurisdiction and could not be implemented. One (regarding the online program) was implemented, and one (the provision of research funding for Honour's essays) was already in place. Other recommendations (for curricular reform) were overtaken by events, namely the move of the Legal Studies program into the Department, which requires a more major curriculum review.

The previous graduate review (2007) made five recommendations:

- augment the core faculty (which at the time numbered only 13) (which has happened), and succession planning (still to be done);
- establish a fast track from the Master's to the PhD (done);
- review the program fields (still to be done);
- improve the socialization of students to the program (done: students now are assigned interim advisors on entry into the program, and regular student progress reports were instituted); and
- make the intermediate statistics course a requirement for Master's students (done).

The remaining two actions (succession planning and review of the fields) have not yet been undertaken, in view of the substantial and unexpected changes which occurred (two retirements, four new faculty from opportunity appointments, staff turnover, and the integration of Legal Studies into the Department). However, following the external review, the Department brought forward changes to the undergraduate curriculum, and further work is ongoing.

## **Characteristics of the Programs**

### **Academic Programs Offered**

The undergraduate BA in Sociology is offered in four formats (described above). There are also two specializations available:

- Crime and Deviance
- Business and Technology

The Master's program is offered in three formats:

- Course Work MA (8 courses)
- Research Report MA (6 courses and a major research paper)
- Thesis MA (4 courses and a thesis)

The sub-specialization in Community Research Methodology is in the process of being cancelled.

The PhD program currently offers four fields:

- Social Inequality
- Crime and Deviance
- Interpretive Sociology
- Work and Technology

The Department plans to update the fields, with the retirement of key faculty previously teaching in the Work and Technology field, and given a desire to redefine the Interpretive Sociology field. Five courses are required in the PhD program, beyond the Master's level, as well as a professional development seminar. On average about two students per year graduate with the PhD.

### **Program Objectives**

The department has four objectives cutting across all levels of study, as follows:

- To offer a comprehensive and high quality education in the full discipline of Sociology;
- To offer undergraduate courses which are as current, topical and engaging as possible;
- To maintain a departmental culture of high expectations and rewards for productivity (measured in terms of publications and research grants); and
- To provide graduate students with the mentorship and encouragement needed to succeed professionally, in particular so they acquire the writing, presentational, and practical knowledge required to be competitive.

The objective of the **Master's** program is to elevate the critical analysis skills of the students and their basic background knowledge of the discipline, particularly with regard to theory and methods. Students are expected to acquire the knowledge needed to undertake research on specialized topics at a superior level, which entails being able to grasp the often formidable complexity of social processes, problems, and institutions. Depending on the program chosen, students are being prepared for work in the public

or private sector, or for entry into a doctoral program. The objective of the **PhD** program is similar, but with higher expectations. The aim is for students to develop expertise and the professional skills and acumen to secure an academic position or other higher level position in the public or private sector.

### **Specific Learning Outcomes**

The self study provides a summary of the undergraduate learning objectives, and maps them to the curriculum and the UDLEs; similarly the graduate learning objectives are mapped to the GDLEs.

### **Significant strengths of program**

The program ranked seventh in Canada according the 2012 and 2013 QS rankings, even though faculty complement is modest relative to the higher-ranked departments.

### **Faculty**

At the time of writing the self study, the Department had 15 tenure stream faculty members (with a sixteenth scheduled to start in July 2013). In addition there are two faculty members in the AFIW, and two long-term adjunct/sessional faculty who play a major role in teaching, administration and supervision in the programs. This does not include the faculty members in Legal Studies who may (as the program evolves) also play a role in graduate teaching and supervision particularly in the Crime/Deviance field.

Faculty members have won various awards since 2006 (the Harrison-White book award from the Mathematical Sociology section of the ASA; John Porter Tradition of Excellence Book Award - two; Outstanding Service Award of the CSA; one former Canada Research Chair). Four faculty serve as Editors/Associate Editors of journals, and others serve on numerous editorial boards, and are section editors for journals or series editors for book/publication series. Faculty members received about \$450,000 a year in research grants since the last review, two-thirds of this from the Tri-Agency.

On average, faculty members publish about 1.3 articles per person per year, 0.6 book chapters, and make about 2 conference presentations/keynotes. They have collectively published 20 books over the 7 year period. The average supervisory load is 2 graduate students per faculty member, although there is considerable variance. Given the number of Honours students, the average number of Honours thesis supervisions is also 2 per faculty member per year on average.

### **Staff/Administration**

There are three staff who serve as the Administrative Assistants for the graduate program, the undergraduate program in Sociology, and the undergraduate program in Legal Studies, respectively.

### **Students**

#### Undergraduate

At the undergraduate level, there are approximately 200 majors in any given year (and given that majors are not declared until second year, this implies about 70 majors graduating per year). About half of these are in Honours. Nationally the number of Sociology majors has been declining, as new but related

disciplines have developed. There is a co-op version of the Honours program, which is modest in size. Sociology does an enormous amount of service teaching, with 5000 students enrolled in its courses per year, such that three quarters of the students in courses are not majors. Some of the service teaching is for Legal Studies, which has been growing, some is for cognate programs (e.g. in Applied Health Sciences, where there are some requirements for Sociology courses as well as a cross-appointed faculty member) and some is service more generally to the university.

For students in the General program, the entering averages are predominantly between 75% and 84%. For students in Honours, the median entering average is between 80% and 84%. Only 7% of the students are visa students, and 27% are male. Attrition and retention data were hard to read, since students can switch readily between closely related programs (Honours/Honours Co-op/General/Legal Studies).

The Co-op program is not large, but 95% of Sociology co-op students were evaluated as Good, Excellent or Outstanding by their employers. The top sectors for co-op employment over the period since the last review were public administration (29%), education services (25%), professional and technical services (13%) and amusement and recreational services (13%).

#### Graduate

The Master's program graduates on average 6 students per year, with a median time to completion of two years. About 15% of Master's students publish an article based on their research.

The Doctoral program has small numbers and hence the data on completion times are based on small samples. For those who graduated during the period, the completion times were around 6 years (cohort data) and even longer (flow-through data, recognizing the graduation of some students who had entered the program before the previous review). Of the seven who graduated since the last review, five published two or more articles or book chapters, and one co-authored an article and a book. Of these six, at the time of writing, two held faculty positions at universities, one was teaching on contract, and three held positions at research institutions. Since the self study was written, another four students graduated in 2013.

The self study did not include the usual data on student support. The Faculty of Arts provides guaranteed minimum funding for doctoral students for four years, usually a little above the university minimum requirement (currently just over \$21,000/year). No information was provided about Master's funding.

#### **Summary of programs' strengths and challenges**

##### Strengths

- The reviewers commented that this is a strong program in transition, operating strong and academically sound programs
- The reviewers commented that student and faculty culture is collegial, and new faculty are playing an active role in revitalizing the program
- There are opportunities for synergy as the Legal Studies program is integrated into the Department's strategic plan

##### Challenges

- There are additional likely retirements upcoming (although this also represents an opportunity)

- Gender balance – female-dominated discipline at the student level
- Large amounts of service teaching, and a declining trend for majors at the undergraduate level (although total majors are increasing in the Department, with the integration of Legal Studies)

### **Reviewers' Recommendations/Departmental response regarding program enhancements**

(paraphrased and abridged from both reports)

1. We recommend that the department conduct an off-site strategic planning exercise to clarify their plans for the future.  
*Response:* the Department agreed to start planning for such an event for fall 2014, using an outside location and a trained facilitator.
2. The department should conduct a thorough review of its undergraduate and graduate curricula. This review should entail:
  - a. Identification of core streams/clusters;
  - b. Rationalizing course offerings based on the core streams/clusters;
  - c. Focusing graduate programs on the core areas in which the department has the greatest strengths (consider possible differentiation);
  - d. Cancel the sub-specialization in Community Research Methodology (this supports the Department's intention); and
  - e. At both the undergraduate and graduate levels, the curriculum rationalization should clearly specify and articulate learning outcomes and degree level expectations.  
*Response:* work has begun on curriculum rationalization and will continue at the retreat. The Department agrees with (d) and will simply move ahead to implementation.
3. The undergraduate specializations should be reviewed (as above), and then more broadly publicized to encourage undergraduates to enroll.  
*Response:* The Department is indeed reviewing the specializations, however the need for additional publicity was based on the reviewers' misunderstanding of the process and is not thought to be necessary.
4. We recommend that the department's graduate fields be reviewed during the curriculum review, to ensure they reflect the department's current priorities and interests.  
*Response:* agreed.
5. We recommend that part of the curriculum rationalization process include the development of a logical progression of undergraduate courses with 3rd and 4th year courses having prerequisites, to ensure that students have sufficient preparation for their upper-level courses.  
*Response:* some changes have been made prior to the retreat, and more will be made following the retreat.
6. To address the issues arising from the heavy service teaching commitment, the department might consider offering sections of the first year course that are directed to students interested in social sciences and likely to major in sociology. This course could be taught and resourced differently (i.e., tutorials) and provide students with more substantive depth and writing. This would facilitate the early attraction of students into the Sociology major programs. A second strategy to increase the number of majors would be to increase the number of joint majors. In particular a joint major program with Legal Studies would build synergies within the department.  
*Response:* the Department agrees with both suggestions, and is working to implement them.
7. While recognizing the difficulties in obtaining placements, we encourage the department to keep working on the co-op program and to also consider other options such as unpaid placements or experiential learning courses in order to provide students with experience in the world of work.

*Response:* the Department will follow up on this later (note however that these are options primarily for the non-coop students).

8. While recognizing budgetary restraints, we recommend that Sociology continue to be given new faculty positions to replace retiring faculty and that these hires be consistent with the department's strategic plan.

*Response:* the Department agrees, but notes with concern that lack of suitable office space is a problem.

The Dean of Arts endorsed the Departmental response, and noted that future complement positions would be considered as part of the Department's strategic plan.

<b>Two-Year Plan: Action steps</b>	<b>Who is responsible?</b>	<b>Who will provide resources?</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
1. Hold a retreat in fall 2014	Chair	Department	2014
2. Review undergraduate program, identify core streams/clusters, rationalize the course offerings, and articulate learning outcomes	Associate Chair Undergraduate, Sociology	n/a	2014-15
3. Review graduate program, review fields, and articulate learning outcomes	Associate Chair Graduate	n/a	2014-15
4. Review undergraduate specializations (currently 3)	Associate Chair Undergraduate, Sociology	n/a	2014-15
5. Review graduate fields (currently 4)	Associate Chair Graduate	n/a	2014-15
6. As part of undergraduate curriculum review, develop appropriate prerequisites for 3 <sup>rd</sup> and 4 <sup>th</sup> year courses	Associate Chair Undergraduate, Sociology	n/a	2014-15
7. Consider offering an enhanced first year course for potential majors	Associate Chair Undergraduate, Sociology	Chair	2014
8. Continue supporting co-op program and also consider experiential learning opportunities and unpaid placements	Associate Chair Undergraduate, Sociology	n/a	2014-16
9. Replace retirements in ways consistent with the Department's strategic plan	Dean	Dean? Depends on plan	ongoing

n/a means not applicable

This report will go to Waterloo Senate Graduate and Research Council on May 12 2014, to Senate Undergraduate Council on May 13, and to Senate on June 16 2014.