MEMORANDUM

TO: Isaac W. Eberstein  
Chair, Department of Sociology

FROM: Nancy Marcus  
Dean, The Graduate School


As a standard part of our program review process, the Graduate Policy Committee makes a set of recommendations regarding each program it reviews. In addition to its recommendation that the program in Sociology be continued, it made a number of other recommendations. You will find a list of those recommendations enclosed. I encourage you to share these recommendations with your program's faculty.

The GPC requests that you prepare an action plan for responding to and implementing these recommendations. This plan should be as specific as possible under the given circumstances and should include a time table for implementation. This plan should be sent to James Beck by April 6, 2015.

In two years the GPC will request that you provide a follow-up report describing how your program has implemented the plan you devised to respond to the recommendations.

If you have any questions regarding the review process, I will be happy to discuss the issues with you.

NM/jb  
Enclosure

cc: David Rasmussen  
Lee Stepina
Graduate Policy Committee Recommendations

Sociology

November 17, 2014

1. The Department of Sociology should prepare a strategic plan to guide the unit over the next decade. In the self-study, the department acknowledges that a planning effort was not pursued after the last university review in 2007. Developed by the faculty in the unit under the guidance of the Chair this plan should identify enrollment, teaching, contract/grant and research goals, and articulate a hiring strategy for the unit. It would also allow the current faculty to work together with knowledge and forethought, especially in light of the pending retirements of senior faculty.

2. To the extent that it is consistent with the mission and priorities of the College of Social Sciences and Public Policy and the University, the subcommittee recommends that additional faculty lines be granted to the Department of Sociology. The department’s faculty expressed significant concerns about having too few faculty members, and the subcommittee shares those concerns. The current complement of 17 tenure track faculty as of August 2014 is down from 22 in 2006 and 25 in the mid-1990s, despite maintaining overall PhD program enrollments. Given that faculty members are collectively responsible for the department’s research mission and graduate program, such declines in faculty numbers will make it increasingly difficult to maintain the current high level of quality in the education and mentoring of graduate students in Sociology. In addition, to maintain the high ranking nationally, there is a need for signature senior hires, especially in the Eminent Scholar position.

3. We recommend that the Sociology faculty assess the issue of a “mismatch” between graduate student interests in the Inequalities & Social Justice area and the number of faculty that teach and undertake research in this area and determine whether adjustments can be made that are consistent with the goals of the department, which might include adjusting admission decisions to take into account desired areas of study or adjusting hiring priorities to augment study areas with fewer faculty relative to student demand. This problem, if it persists, could quickly result in longer “time to degree” issues for students as well as advising overloads for faculty in these high demand areas.

4. We recommend that the faculty discuss the potential impact, both current and future, of this heavy reliance on DL teaching for funding the graduate program, and attempt to identify any alternative options. Doctoral students currently teach a high load of distance learning (DL) classes for undergraduates which in turn supports stipends for graduate students. At present, this appears to be a very creative and workable solution as designed by the department chair. However, doctoral students might benefit from less teaching and more time for research, including the possibility of non-duty assistantships or fellowships that would enable them to give more effort to their dissertation research. Moreover, a greater concern is that the DL classes may not be a viable long-term solution, especially if state wide resources for undergraduate teaching on-line become limited or restricted.

5. The subcommittee recommendation is that the MASR and PhD programs should be continued.