An undergraduate degree program is characterized as imparting to students a coherent body of knowledge and skills, including an appropriate general education component, all at the collegiate level. An academic degree program is also characterized by a core set of faculty who participate in the program and whose credentials qualify those individuals to teach and/or direct this degree program per SACSCOC standards (See CS 3.7.1 and 3.4.11 at: http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/2012PrinciplesOfAccreditation.pdf).

The UPC evaluated the academic soundness of the degree program under review and its associated majors using the degree program’s QER self-study and in-person meetings when appropriate.

The UPC used the following criteria to assess the fundamental academic soundness of the academic degree program under review and its associated majors.

The degree program:

1. sets forth a coherent curriculum: Yes

2. identifies core faculty members who govern curricular decisions: Yes

3. identifies what resources are being used to support the program: Yes

4. has had enough enrollment in the past five years to meet BOG thresholds for degree production (30 per five-year period): Yes

5. is consistent with mission of the academic unit, the college, and the University: Yes

6. follows the rules established by the Board of Governors with regards to access and articulation (e.g., the common course pre-requisites are consistent with those approved by the BOG for similar programs; the program can be completed in 120 credit hours (unless given an exception); transfer students are given the same access to the program as native students; and an appropriate limited-access rationale has been presented if applicable.): Yes

Summary of major strengths and greatest challenges: Based on the materials listed above, the UPC observes the following about the undergraduate degree program

Major Strengths:
The Department of Sociology and the Center for Demography and Population Health, viewed both separately and together, have strong, productive faculty. The Sociology Department is 24th among public universities and 39th overall, providing students with an excellent foundation in theory, research, and exposure to a wide range of substantive topics and fields. They have a substantial presence in the university liberal studies program, with five E-Series courses. Over one third of the current faculty has won University-level teaching awards, including two who have been recognized as a University Distinguished Teacher. Over the past five years, 14 sociology students successfully completed honors theses. Three of those students were also awarded the FSU Bess Ward Thesis Award. Seventeen sociology undergraduates presented at FSU’s Undergraduate Research Symposium between 2012 and 2014, with a growing number over time.
Greatest Challenges:
One of the greatest challenges lies in the pressing need for more faculty. As the external review highlights, “the number of faculty is below the average of five peer programs, and well below those of five aspirational programs.” The program is down 8 faculty members from the 1990s, and 5 from 2006. Because of the loss of faculty, the major area of social psychology had to be discontinued. It is also likely that faculty have been less able to seek external funding due to their heavier teaching loads. With impending retirements, especially those of two named professors, the situation will become more critical. The formidable presence of this challenge underscores the strong faculty performance that has been needed to compensate for it.

UPC Recommendations (In particular, how can the academic degree program address the issues that the program raised in its QER?)

Per the QER and external review, there are many steps that the program and the university can take to further strengthen the Department of Sociology and the Center for Demography and Public Health. Among them were strategic hiring at all ranks, increasing grant activity, strategic planning, considering the direction and viability of the Masters of Applied Social Research, establishing a senior exit survey, and increasing efforts to engage alumni donors. CDPH recommendations include increasing grant activity, establishing memos of understanding with departments/ COSSPP to maintain the interdisciplinary faculty for the MSD program, and providing additional staff/ release time for the CDPH director.

We emphasize that, to the extent that University budget constraints permit, funding to Sociology and the Center should be increased to allow for hiring enough faculty to be on par with peer and aspirational programs. Funding must be secured in order to hire more faculty. This is a common problem among programs, but it is particularly acute with this program. We anticipate an increased student demand for the Department’s Introduction to Sociology course resulting from its recent inclusion as an option for meeting the new statewide General Education requirement, further intensifying the need for faculty. New faculty should include a mix of junior faculty, demographers, and scholars with established records of securing external grants. Additionally, assistance with grant writing is needed, possibly through support staff, writing workshops, and staff who review RFPs and match them to faculty member’s research interests.

Written follow-up of recommendations to be completed
_X_ at the next QER review
___ 2 years

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