

## ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW

### Summary of the Sociology Department's Initial Response to the Final Review Team Report January 2007

The external review team (Review Team) for the Sociology Department's Academic Program Review (APR) consisted of Professors Wally Goldfrank (University of California-Santa Cruz), Robert O'Brien (University of Oregon), Rogelio Saenz (Texas A&M University), and Christine Sierra (University of New Mexico, Department of Political Science). The team visited the department September 20-23, 2006. It submitted its External Review Final Report (Report) October 7, 2006. The department faculty met on December 4, 2006 to discuss the Report's findings.

The Sociology faculty are generally heartened by the Report's strongly positive assessment of the department. The Review Team described a strong program overall. Based on regional and national standards, the department is rapidly developing its undergraduate and graduate curricula, supporting the quality of its faculty, and taking steps to enhance its research capacities.

The Report makes recommendations in seven major areas. In what follows, each of these areas and its rationale is summarized, followed by the department's response. In the section of each discussion is a subsection titled Elements of an Action Plan referencing those aspects that the faculty regard as appropriate to consider in the final construction of an APR action plan for the department.

#### **Area of Recommendation I: Faculty Cluster Hiring**

In relation to the department's Future Strategic and Development Direction, the Report recommends that we embark on a specific plan for hiring new faculty. Departmental renewal, reconfiguration, and rise in regional/national stature would be enhanced, it states, by conducting target hires along several "clusters:" (1) a senior criminologist to attract more graduate students, generate more externally-funded research, provide more highly qualified graduate-student instructors for the undergraduate criminology courses, contribute to supporting the criminology major, and perhaps increase the applied options for M. A. students; (2) a Latino Studies hire, optimally, and consistent with a national trend, someone who can combine U.S. Latino and Latin American Studies; (3) a general social inequality line (race, class, gender, sexuality); (4) and two in medical sociology, one an expeditious senior hire, the other a junior appointment within a ten-year period. The Report recommends that the central administration approve a "forward funding" process and that the department commit internal resources in order to facilitate these hires.

#### *Department Discussion*

The faculty gave focus to each of the recommended cluster hires. An extensive discussion ensued regarding criminology. Some favored the proposal to initiate a senior criminology hire largely on the grounds presented by the Report and current graduate

students have expressed a desire for another senior criminologist. Questions arose, such as the fact that we are currently searching for a criminology lecturer, that we have needs in other areas, and, whether or not a hire would deliver the host of benefits envisioned in the Report.

A strong consensus emerged in favor of strengthening our profile in the areas of U.S. Latinos and Latin America. The suggestion to join the national trend of linking these two areas is not considered as important as looking toward developing both in the ways that are feasible given structural and budget contingencies. A candidate that integrates the two in their research and teaching would be well received, particularly if immigration and/or demography were involved.

A mixed discussion ensued on a general emphasis on social inequality. One position called for a search in social stratification, while another questioned the department's ability to compete nationally for a good stratification specialist. Some favored subsuming stratification, or inequalities, into Latino and Latin American Studies, or within our comparative/globalization area. One faculty member considered a general approach to inequalities too diffuse.

The discussion regarding medical sociology was enfolded in the discussion of an action plan as related to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation grant, noted below.

#### *Elements of a Faculty Hiring Action Plan*

The department faculty are not averse to the principle of cluster hires and we presume that our planning and/or recommendations can proceed under such a strategy. Our tendency is to frame projections in a ten year time-span, and to think strategically in terms of maximizing the return for its dollar investments. Should the College find it feasible to "forward fund" positions as recommended in a relatively more immediate manner, the department faculty would, of course, be happy to plan accordingly?

An important consideration is that, budget permitting; the department expects to undertake a faculty search this academic year. Moreover, in a quite recent development, one of our criminology assistant professors has accepted an offer at another university. He has taken a one-year leave of absence, and could possibly return to the department in 2008, or his departure may lead to a new line. In spite of the different opinions and positions expressed in the discussion of this recommendation, the department faculty are united in its willingness to take up the question of strategic faculty hiring as part of its annual request for replacing vacancies.

Regarding the medical sociology recommendation, it is significant that the Robert Wood Johnson grant to establish the Center for Health Policy at UNM has come in. The Report flagged the grant, but the Review Team may not have understood the level of resources that it means for the department, including funds for a senior faculty line, and perhaps another appointment to be held jointly with a department from Health Sciences. The department is clearly slated for a major bolstering of its medical sociology program, and it will keep this focus as it sets out its strategic planning.

### **Area of Recommendation II: Facilitating Accelerated Change**

To grow in stature at an accelerated rate, the Review Team recommends allowing increasingly important roles for its younger faculty, and more specifically, having the senior associate professors and less senior full professors assist by engaging in some combination of (1) administrative service, (2) reinvigorated research programs that include external grant-and-fellowship-seeking, and (3) increased teaching or community service.

#### *Faculty Discussion*

With respect to recommendation #1, the department has a system in place for its members to provide administrative service. Regarding recommendation #3, the faculty were unsure of the department pressuring the faculty to do research when a solution lies in the area of teaching. The discussion thus centered primarily on the third suggestion, adjusting the teaching levels of senior faculty, which was in turn enfolded in aspects of an action plan.

#### *Elements of an Action Plan Regarding Accelerated Change*

Consensus calls for the department to return to the question of rendering its standard 2-2 teaching load more flexible. One possible alternative is for the faculty member to negotiate a 4-0 teaching load, providing a whole semester in a given year for research. This option would need to be limited, however, for example, available to one faculty member per semester. A more systematic option in individual cases is to provide for an increase in teaching to substitute for the expectation of research and publication for purposes of the department's work-load statement and post-tenure review. This could well involve teaching Soc. 101, an issue which is related to another Review Team recommendation regarding the curriculum, addressed below. However, it is stressed that any proposed changes in our existing teaching load would have to be brought back to the table for renewed faculty discussion, and approval if they are to be effected.

### **Area of Recommendation III: Curriculum**

The Review Team made two undergraduate curricular recommendations. One concern Soc. 101. As 101 is important for recruiting sociology majors, department should consider having faculty teach large sections of 101 (400-700 enrollments) and institute a system of graduate discussion sections for them, perhaps coordinated with the Freshman Learning Program, and/or to serve an evening/weekend clientele. Second, the Report cites the lack of "variety and innovation" in the sociology curriculum compared to other programs in the country, and recommends that its reinvigoration begin by encouraging faculty and graduate students to design new courses in areas of interest to the current generation of students.

#### *Faculty Discussion*

First, and quite importantly, it does not seem practical to institute a graduate discussion system for 101 at this time. Even if the Office of Graduate Studies were to furnish the required additional resources for it, we do not have enough graduate students to go around in consideration of other teaching and graduate needs. Nor is the faculty entirely

convinced of its usefulness in courses of such high enrollments. The path of curriculum innovation was discussed at the last faculty retreat in fall 2006, partly in response to student requests for more course variety. The Review Team may have missed the fact that there has been considerable curriculum innovation of late, including the offering of a social psychology course and new courses that were added to the criminology major and which enrolled in quite high numbers.

#### *Elements of an Action Plan on the Curriculum*

In addressing Soc. 101, we will seek to develop a plan whereby regular faculty will teach it more often. This option is tied into the proposal of increasing faculty teaching in lieu of research, discussed in Area II, and also to the fact that the department is being called upon by the vice-president for academic affairs to develop a plan for conducting 101 learning outcomes assessment. In addition, the department will institute a preceptorship in which graduate students are given special tutoring in teaching 101 by particular faculty. This can be accomplished in a pro-seminar format made as a requirement for all first year Ph.D. students.

The faculty recognize the need for more work in the area of curriculum design. The department will continue to encourage faculty and graduate students to teach new courses. Several issues arise that must be taken into account in any final action plan. One concerns the need to meet sociology, criminology, and social welfare requirements without over-extending instructors. Another is that of incentives for faculty who will need to increase their preparation time and/or course loads. Finally is the issue of the availability of classrooms. The shortage in space that currently exists on campus may inhibit the department's ability to develop new courses if the plan results in course increments.

#### **Area of Recommendation IV:**

##### **Qualitative Research Methods Training and Sequence**

The Review Team followed up on a suggestion it heard during its visit that the department regularly offer a qualitative methods sequence (2 courses) at the graduate level, and perhaps make it required along with the quantitative methods seminars.

#### *Faculty Discussion*

The site Review Team appear not realizing how regularly the department offers graduate qualitative methods seminar. Two faculty offer different kinds of qualitative methods roughly every other year, and one faculty member at least introduces qualitative methods in Soc. 580 Methods of Social Research.

#### *Elements of an Action Plan on the Methods Program*

The faculty has long supported qualitative training for graduate students, and intends to continue offering such courses on a frequent basis. The consensus, though, is that an explicit qualitative requirement is not necessary.

#### **Area of Recommendation V: Graduate Student Teaching Load**

The Review Team judged the teaching load for graduate students too large, noting it not unusual for a student to teach two courses per semester while taking course credits and/or working on comprehensive exams and dissertations. It thought it “clear” that this delays the completion of their programs.

#### *Faculty Discussion*

In current practice, graduate students move from being supported by assistantships (GA’s) to teaching as they move through the program, and most student teaching is paid for from the College’s part-time budget. A difference of opinion exists on the suggestion that graduate students teach too much, one feeling that loads are unfair while another sees no hard evidence that the current amount of teaching impedes degree progress, and there may be no correlation between teaching versus other kinds of support and time to degree.

#### *Elements of an Action Plan for Graduate Student Teaching*

Much of the situation is out of the department’s control. Teaching funds provided by the administration are such an important part of the financial aide package that we can offer graduate students. From the department’s interests, without graduate instructors it would be impossible to offer the range of courses our majors and minors require. One option is to offer less money (in the aggregate) to students who are ineligible to teach so that advanced students get GA’s, although it must be noted that some PhD students still taking classes ask to teach two courses rather than having only one plus a 10-hour GA because of the autonomy and time-management advantages of being in charge of a course. A preferable solution is an infusion of funds for additional assistantship slots. In another possibility, faculty could generate research assistantships through external grants, although it is not clear that working on someone else’s research project pulls a student away from his/her dissertation any less than does teaching. The Graduate Committee can explore a fellowship grants program built from internal and external sources. If the net effect is to reduce graduate student teaching, however, the department would need to resort to increases in hiring part-time instructors, a plan that has its own issues.

#### **Area of Recommendation VI: Low Level of Minority Graduate Students**

In context of New Mexico’s ethnic demography and the significant ratio of minority undergraduate majors, the Review Team was “startled” by a perceived absent representation of under-represented groups in the graduate program, the more given the widespread prominence given to diversity by UNM faculty and administration. It urged a minority recruitment plan to include outreach to its undergraduate majors, other state institutions, and adjacent states, and going for a grant to provide for fellowships. It also encouraged the central administration to make more money available for competitive fellowship and assistantship offers.

#### *Faculty Discussion*

The Review Team over-stated the problem somewhat. The chair of the Graduate Committee reports that of 40 students currently in the program, 6 are Hispanic and 1 is Native American. Apart from that, 3 are "other American non-white" (Indian, Iranian and Lebanese), and 5 are international (3 from China, 1 from Mexico, and 1 from Bangladesh). This leaves 25 "assimilated American white" and some 40% other than white. Excluding the international students, the percentage non-white is 28.6,

comparable to the 25% figure the Report cites for undergraduates, and 15% with respect to Hispanics only. Nevertheless, the need for greater diversity among our graduate student ranks is recognized, as noted in our self-study, particularly greater representation from Hispanic-American and Native American populations.

#### *Elements of an Action Plan for Minority Graduate Recruitment*

(1) The just received Robert Wood Johnson grant will provide resources for the department's Graduate Committee to initiate a minority student recruitment program for Latino and Native American students interested in health policy studies. (2) In practice we already give extra attention to minority applicants. The real issue is the low level of minority applications. We shall consider ways of generating more applications from minorities. For example, the Graduate Committee can conduct a search of possible private and public sources of funding for fellowships to be used for minority recruitment. We can also undertake particular outreach to UNM sociology and criminology majors.

#### **Area of Recommendation VII: Extraordinarily Low Compensation of Adjunct Faculty**

Noting the department's heavy reliance on adjunct faculty, the Review Team feels they are paid at an extremely low rate, less than graduate students, and no health benefits. It calls on the administration to raise their salary levels.

#### *Faculty Discussion of Adjunct Faculty Compensation*

The department faculty as a whole empathize with the issue of part-time salaries. They also recognize that even if salaries were adjusted upward for part-time instructors in the department, it would not improve matters appreciably, would not address the question of benefits, and would certainly be insufficient to take care of the root structural issue— the contingent budget that is used to pay adjunct instructors. The department notes that members of its faculty have been and continue to be heavily involved in the collective effort to have the University and the State of New Mexico comprehensively and fundamentally address the issue, including participation on the Association of American University Professor's Contingent Faculty Committee.

#### **Implications for the Department's Goals and Future Direction**

It is important to note that the Review Team's major recommendations for academic development were based largely on the areas of concern that the department had already raised in its APR self-study. The department summarized the major issues in the Unit's Future Direction section of the self-study. That statement first called for building on the department's faculty and curriculum strengths; second, stressed the need to address three areas of concern— sociology majors, course offerings, and graduate student diversity— by striving to increase the number of sociology majors, diversifying our undergraduate curriculum, reviewing our graduate student requirements, and reconsidering the teaching that graduate students do in the department. The Review Team's report addressed each of these, as well as others raised in the body of the self-study, in its own way. In short, the Review Team sanctioned the department's goals and vision for future direction.