

CARLETON UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON QUALITY ASSURANCE

Cyclical Review for the B.A. Honours, B.A. Combined Honours, B.A. General, MA and PhD programs in Sociology Executive Summary and Final Assessment

This Executive Summary and Final Assessment Report of the cyclical review of Carleton's graduate and undergraduate programs in Sociology are provided pursuant to articles 4.2.5-4.2.6 of the provincial Quality Assurance Framework and articles 5.1.9.23-24 and 5.1.9.26-27 of Carleton's Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The B.A. Honours, B.A. Combined Honours, B.A. General, MA and PhD in Sociology reside in Carleton University's Department of Sociology and Anthropology, a unit administered by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.

As a consequence of the review, the programs were categorised by the Carleton University Committee on Quality Assurance (CUCQA) as being of **good quality** (Carleton's IQAP 5.1.9.12).

The external reviewers' report, submitted to the Department on January 4th, 2016, offered a very positive assessment of the programs. Particularly noteworthy is the external reviewers' observation that the PhD program in Sociology 'is a *national treasure* not only because it is large and has produced a number of highly regarded sociologists over the years, but also because it is the preeminent training ground for sociologists in the distinctive Canadian sociological tradition epitomized by John Porter.' More generally, the reviewers indicated that their 'overarching conclusion is that the sociology programs at Carleton University are in excellent shape and faculty are committed to an ongoing process of self-examination and improvement.'

Within the context of this very positive assessment, the external report nonetheless makes a number of recommendations for the continuing enhancement of the programs. The large majority of the recommendations were accepted by the Department, as well as the Interim Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs in a response to the report of the external reviewers that was received by CUCQA on April 13th, 2016.

On September 14th, 2016, CUCQA received and approved the Department's Action Plan detailing how the recommendations will be addressed. The Action Plan was endorsed by the Interim Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs.

FINAL ASSESSMENT REPORT

Introduction

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The site visit, which took place on November 19th and 20th, 2015, was conducted by Professors Harley Dickinson, from the University of Saskatchewan, and Tom Langford, from the University of Calgary. The site visit involved formal meetings with: (1) the Assistant Vice-President (Academic), the Interim Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs; (2) a large group of sociology faculty (along with two adjunct professors and a contract instructor); (3) the chair and associate chair of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology; (4) a small group of undergraduate students; (5) a large group of MA and PhD students; (6) the staff who administer the sociology undergraduate and graduate programs; and (7) faculty members from Political Economy, Criminology, and Geography & Environmental Studies who described the collaborative relations between sociology and each of their units. The External Reviewers also toured the departmental facilities.

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This Final Assessment Report provides a summary of:

- Strengths of the programs
- Challenges faced by the programs
- Opportunities for program improvement and enhancement
- The Outcome of the Review
- The Action Plan

This report draws on eight documents

- The Self-study developed by the Department of Sociology and Anthropology (please see Carleton's IQAP 5.1.1-5.1.5) (Appendix A)
- The internal discussant's initial report to the Carleton University Committee on Quality Assurance (CUCQA) on the self-study submitted by the Department of Sociology and Anthropology (IQAP 5.1.9.1-5.1.9.3) (Appendix B).
- The Report of the External Review Committee (IQAP 5.1.9.9) (Appendix C).
- The response from the Department to the Report of the External Review Committee (IQAP 5.1.9.10) (Appendix D).
- The internal discussant's final recommendation report (IQAP 5.1.9.11) (Appendix E).

- Communication from CUCQA regarding the outcome of the external review (IQAP 5.1.9.13) (Appendix F).
- The Department's Action Plan (IQAP 5.1.9.13 & 5.1.9.14) (Appendix G)
- The acceptance by CUCQA of the Action Plan (Appendix H)

Appendix I contains brief biographies of the members of the Review Committee.

This Final Assessment Report contains the Action Plan (Appendix G) agreed to by the Department, the Interim Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs regarding the implementation of recommendations for program improvement and enhancement to have been advanced as a consequence of the cyclical program review process.

The Action Plan provides an account of who will be responsible for implementing the selected recommendations, as well as of the timelines for implementation and reporting.

Strengths of the programs

General

The External Reviewers' 'overarching conclusion is that sociology programs at Carleton University are in excellent shape and faculty are committed to an ongoing process of self-examination and improvement.'

Faculty

The Reviewers observed that 'the sociology faculty is highly committed to the quality of their programs and to the academic knowledge, values, skills and competencies acquired by their students.' They added that 'the sociology faculty at Carleton go to great lengths to make sure PhD students do not 'get lost in the shuffle' after they complete their required courses and start working on the less-structured elements of the program.' They were also 'impressed by many of Sociology's recent initiatives to support PhD students' timely progress through the program.'

Programs

The Reviewers were especially impressed with the graduate programs, in particular the PhD, which they consider 'a national treasure'. In their view, 'the excellence of Carleton University's PhD program in sociology is grounded on two primary factors: (1) the distinctive orientation of the program towards the Canadian sociological tradition that stresses interdisciplinarity, intersectional analyses of power and inequalities, and places sociological analyses in a political economy framework; and (2) the academic excellence of faculty members who serve as a recruiting draw for strong students.' The reviewers also expressed great enthusiasm for the new undergraduate concentration in Social Justice, to begin in 2017-18, and which is poised to 'become a hallmark of the department and ... contribute to the development of future academics and citizens who are engaged in progressive social change.'

Challenges faced by the programs

One of the main challenges for the Department as a whole and especially the PhD program, according to the Reviewers, 'is that a number of the senior scholars whose work has been synonymous with sociology at Carleton University over the past number of years will soon be retiring.' Therefore, from the Reviewers' perspective, 'it is imperative that, as faculty retirements roll out over the coming few years, Carleton University approves the hiring of a full complement of replacement junior professors.' More specifically, the Reviewers indicated 'that sociology should prioritize strengthening its unique PhD program in all of the hiring competitions in the coming years.'

In spite of their high praise for the PhD, the Reviewers also identified the need for action in five areas of the program: '(1) shortening the PhD time to completion; (2) ensuring theoretical breadth among PhD students; (3) ensuring fairness in the distribution of PhD supervisory loads; (4) improving the funding for PhD students; and (5) increasing teaching opportunities for PhD students.'

Regarding the BA programs, the Reviewers expressed some concerns about recent curricular changes. In particular, they noted that 'sociology majors will have the choice of taking either qualitative or quantitative methods courses and therefore are no longer required to take a social statistics course as part of their undergraduate education.' Thus they recommend that 'sociology closely monitor the impact of the planned curriculum changes to the methods course requirements.' They also warned that the creation of the new Social Justice concentration, albeit an exciting initiative, 'might put strains on other teaching and supervisory commitments of the faculty.' For this reason they recommend that, for the time being, 'the concentration in Social Justice be introduced with a cap on enrollment.' The Reviewers also noted some inconsistencies in the delivery of junior-level courses, many of which are taught by contract instructors.

In terms of broad curricular design, the Reviewers also pointed out that they 'encountered some skepticism about whether Learning Outcomes are the most appropriate means to assure the quality of academic programs such as sociology.' Consequently, they suggested various ways to develop Learning Outcomes that would be more appropriate for the discipline. They also recommended generating interdisciplinary Learning Outcomes.

Opportunities for program improvement and enhancement

As a result of the Review, CUCQA identified several areas for improvement. The number of these items should not detract from the very positive character of the External Reviewers' report.

General

1. The Department of Sociology and Anthropology should consider expanding the number of graduate student representatives who participate in and have voting rights at Department Board meetings;
2. The Department should consider incorporating additional Learning Outcomes (related to information literacy, media literacy, intercultural competence and social justice, and internationalization etc.) as part of the course offerings.

PhD Program

1. The Department should develop a multi-year hiring plan to help sustain the nationally recognized excellence of the PhD program in sociology;
2. The Department should implement strategies to shorten the median time-to-completion in the PhD program, enhance the experiences of PhD students, and promote equity in graduate supervision.

MA Programs

1. In order to improve MA recruitment, the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs should work with the Department to find ways to significantly improve funding offers to MA recruits;
2. The Department should clarify the implications of all funding offers made to graduate students, especially in relation to the payment of fees in the summer in relation to the size of any scholarship that might be paid in that term;
3. The Department should require all MA students to take SOCI 5809 (Logic of the Research Process) and SOCI 5005 (Recurring Debates in Social Thought), or indicate 'normally required' rather than 'strongly recommended.'

BA Programs

1. The Department should closely monitor the impact of the planned curriculum changes to the methods course requirements, which will allow Honours and General BA students to obtain their degrees without completing any courses in quantitative methods or social statistics;
2. The concentration in Social Justice should be introduced with a cap on enrollment until such time that (1) a full-time instructor can be hired to coordinate the experiential learning component of the concentration; and (2) additional units of TA funding are allocated to the Social Justice;
3. To improve the quality of the instruction and standardize the content of the two introductory sociology courses, the Department should hire two full-time, tenure-track instructors, one of which should be immediate.

The Outcome of the Review

As a consequence of this review, CUCQA categorized the undergraduate and graduate programs in Sociology as being of **good quality** (Carleton's IQAP 5.1.9.12).

The Action Plan

On April 4th, 2016, the Department provided CUCQA with a thorough response to the External Report, which addressed issues identified by the Committee. CUCQA noted that the Department agreed to take action on the vast majority of the recommendations and suggestions made by the External Reviewers. On September 14th, 2016, CUCQA received and approved the Department's Action Plan, which contains 1) details of the steps that the Department agreed to take in response to the external reviewers' concerns, 2) those responsible for undertaking these steps, 3) and timelines for completing these steps. The Action Plan was endorsed by the Interim Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs.

It is to be noted that Carleton's IQAP (5.4) provides for the monitoring of action plans: 'A report will be filed with Carleton's Office of Quality Assurance by the faculty dean and academic unit when the timeline is reached for the implementation of each element of the action plan. This report will be forwarded to CUCQA for its review. In consultation with the Provost, CUCQA may request additional action or reports from the faculty dean and/or the academic unit.'

In the case of Sociology's Action Plan, the majority of monitoring will be achieved by means of regular reports on the implementation of the plan, the first of which being expected on June 30th, 2017.

The Next Cyclical Review

The next cyclical review of the undergraduate and graduate programs in the Sociology will be conducted during the 2021-22 academic year.