

Final Assessment Report for the 2020-2021 Cyclical Program Review of Sociology

INTRODUCTION

In accordance with Laurier's Institutional Quality Assurance Procedures ([Policy 2.1](#)), this Final Assessment Report provides a summary of the review process for the Department of Sociology prepared by the Quality Assurance Office, along with an identification of strengths of the program(s) under review authored by the Dean of Arts and Dean of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies. All recommendations made by the external review committee are listed in order, followed by a summary of the department's response, and the relevant decanal responses. Recommendations not approved for implementation have been identified, and those that have been prioritized are listed in the Implementation Plan.

The Final Assessment Report is reviewed and approved by the Vice-Provost: Teaching and Learning and the Provost and Vice-President: Academic. Following completion of the Final Assessment Report, it is approved by the Program Review Sub-Committee and Senate Academic Planning Committee. Approval dates are listed at the end of this report. Final Assessment Reports are submitted to Senate as part of an annual report on cyclical reviews, and to the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance for information. Final Assessment Reports and Implementation Reports are posted on the public-facing page of the [Quality Assurance Office](#) website.

The Implementation Plan for the recommendations prioritized in the Final Assessment Report can be found at the end of this report. Units will submit their first Implementation Report two years following approval of the Final Assessment Report at Senate. The Implementation Report will include comments from the unit on actions taken toward the completion of recommendations, comments from the relevant Dean(s) related to the progress made, and comments from the Program Review Sub-Committee, which is responsible for approving the Implementation Report and deciding if further reports are required. The Senate Academic Planning Committee will also approve the Implementation Report.

SUMMARY OF REVIEW PROCESS

The Department of Sociology offers a BA and MA in Sociology, both of which were last reviewed in 2013-2014.

The Self-Study was authored by Dr. Jeffrey Aguinaldo, Chair of the Department of Sociology during the time that the Self-Study was being prepared, with input and feedback from the current Chair, Dr. Linda Quirke, and department faculty. In addition to the Self-Study (Volume I), the department also submitted a copy of faculty curricula vita (Volume II), a volume of course syllabi, and a list of proposed external reviewers (Volume III). A draft of the Self-Study was reviewed by the Quality Assurance Office, the Dean of Arts, and the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies prior to submission of the final version.

As per Laurier's IQAP, the external review committee for the review consisted of two external reviewers from outside the university, and one internal reviewer from Laurier but outside of the department. The review

committee was selected by the Program Review Sub-Committee on October 6, 2020, and a virtual external review was scheduled by the Quality Assurance Office for the week of January 25-29, 2021.

The review committee consisted of Dr. Milo Sweedler from the Department of Languages and Literatures at Wilfrid Laurier, Dr. Tracey Adams from the Department of Sociology at Western University, and Dr. Karen Stanbridge from the Department of Sociology at Memorial University. During the virtual external review, the review committee met with the following individuals and groups:

- Dr. Anthony Vannelli, Provost and Vice-President: Academic and Dr. Mary Wilson, Vice-Provost: Teaching and Learning
- Dr. Gavin Brockett, Interim Dean of the Faculty of Arts
- Dr. Douglas Deutschman, Associate Vice-President and Dean, Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, and Ms. Helen Paret, Senior Administrative Officer
- Dr. Linda Quirke, Chair of the Department of Sociology
- Full-time Faculty in the Department of Sociology
- Contract Teaching Faculty in the Department of Sociology
- Undergraduate students
- Dr. Dana Sawchuk, Undergraduate Advisor
- Ms. Sandra Dalpe, Senior Administrative Assistant
- Ms. Mary Scott, Associate Director: e-Learning and Ms. Susan Alisat, Manager, Instructional Design and e-Learning
- Ms. Erin Hodson, Indigenous Curriculum Specialist
- Mr. Matt Thomas, Acting Head of Collections and Acquisitions and Ms. Anne Kelly, Sociology Liaison Librarian

The review committee submitted their completed report on February 16, 2021. The executive summary from the report is provided below.

External Reviewers' Report Executive Summary

The Department of Sociology is a mid-sized department of 12 full-time, tenured or tenure-track faculty members. The department delivers academically robust undergraduate training in core areas of sociology, and in an impressive array of sociology courses, to about 400 majors, and approximately 4,000 course registrants, providing service to many other University programs. As Wilfrid Laurier converts from an undergraduate to a comprehensive model, however, the department is grappling with how to continue to deliver their undergraduate curricula (nearly half of which is taught by CTFs) and create innovative programs (including graduate offerings) with a shrinking cohort of full-time faculty that is already over-burdened with service responsibilities. In our view, to “just do more” is not feasible or sustainable; the department needs to consider

carefully how to restructure its programs and operations in ways that preserve their integrity and satisfy faculty members, but are more in line with other comparably-sized departments.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESPONSES

The External Reviewers' Report included five recommendations, which have been listed verbatim below, followed by a summary of the department's response, and the decanal response.

Recommendation #1: Reduce the number of undergraduate courses required for majors to a number more consistent with comparable departments, and **restrict the array of non-required undergraduate courses** to areas where existing faculty have expertise and in subject areas more central to department specializations in Social Inequality, Social Justice, Theory and Applied Research. With course reductions, scarce faculty resources can be redeployed to the graduate level, existing or emerging specializations, or even resources to enhance student writing, should that be prioritized by the department.

Unit Response: We are not sure that we want to reduce our required or elective courses, but we will explore and think more about taking up this recommendation in a way that makes sense for our programs. With our faculty complement now down to 11.5 full-time faculty members, and with fewer course stipends (currently 63 stipends, down from 80 or so at the beginning of the review period), we need to be thoughtful about which courses to offer. We take pride in our strong programming with respect to sociological theory and methods; our aim is to continue to strengthen and support our Applied Social Research Option/Specialization through high-quality research methods courses. We want to ensure that our own Laurier Sociology graduates have a strong basis in methods.

Our elective courses remain very popular with not only our majors, but with non-majors, many of them non-Arts students. Our courses are popular; we have the largest number of course registrations, compared to other Arts programs. In 2020 (winter, spring and fall terms), there were 5732 total undergraduate course registrations (full time + part time) in Sociology classes, more than any other Arts program. In addition to having the highest absolute number of undergraduate course registrations in Arts, Sociology courses are also the most likely to attract non-Arts students; 28% of registrants in 2020 Sociology courses were non-Arts students. While we are happy to foster sociological analysis through our courses to students in other faculties, we also recognize that non-Arts enrolments bring in considerable revenue to the Faculty of Arts. We are gratified that so many Laurier students enjoy taking Sociology classes, and we are proud to occupy a role as an Arts program which does a great deal of heavy lifting with respect to service teaching in the university. Sociology's broad appeal and popularity is evident, among both Arts students and students in other faculties.

We have begun conversations about deleting some of our courses that have not been taught in recent years; there are numerous courses on our books that have been created by faculty who have since retired. While in some cases, CTF members do have seniority points accrued in these courses that have not been offered recently. While we do not want to disregard CTF teaching experience in our various courses, we agree with the reviewers that faculty expertise should be a consideration in deciding how to shape our programming.

We have hired a third year summer student to conduct a review of relevant Sociology Departments in Ontario, to give us a clearer sense of how many credits or courses students need to complete, how many Sociology courses students in those programs need, how many of those courses are theory or methods, or 4th year seminar

courses. For instance, is it common for students to select among a suite of required (i.e. theory) courses, and only complete some, or is it typical for all students to take the same required courses? Knowing what other Sociology programs do, regarding required and elective Sociology courses students must complete, will give us a clearer sense of how our program compares to other Sociology programs in the province. Our admin, Sandra Dalpe will survey comparable departments at Laurier (i.e. other Arts programs, relevant programs in Brantford, such as Criminology), to gather information about how Sociology compares with other Laurier programs, in terms of the number of credits needed (out of 20.0) to complete an honours or combined honours degree, and the balance of required vs. elective courses that other programs require in their programs.

FOA Decanal Response: The Department has taken an important step by hiring a student to develop a map of similar programs in Ontario. This should shed light on the best path forward. I encourage the Department to put highest priority on its majors and to make their journey through the program as straight-forward as possible.

Recommendation #2: Outdated online courses must be updated. Learning outcomes in sociology depend on instructors using references and examples from students' everyday lives; subject matter becomes more difficult to grasp when cited sources are out of date and examples used to illustrate concepts are long passed. We understand that this is somewhat outside the purview of the department, but it must be undertaken through whatever means or offices are involved.

Unit Response: The department strongly agrees with this recommendation and welcomes the opportunity to work with the Faculty of Arts and e-Learning to facilitate implementation of this important and timely recommendation. We will consult with Mary Scott in e-Learning about actions available to us, with an eye to devising a schedule to revise multiple courses yearly. OC courses are generally taught by contract faculty, so updating these courses is a source of additional work for these faculty, if resources are put in place. While keeping these courses current is also an obvious benefit to students, it also facilitates a better experience for instructors, who do not have to work around broken links and mitigate outdate material. Instructors who teach OC courses have noted their desire to teach courses like SY281OC "Qualitative Research Methods", which were taught in years past, but would need to be revised (cost: \$20,000) in order to be offered again.

We have already made progress this year. The FOA funded a 10-hour (\$500) revision for SY321OC (Sociology of Medicine). Sociology then used \$3500 to fund 10-hour refreshes for seven courses. In fall 2020, Sociology used \$1000 of its Departmental funds to update another two courses:

- SY215OC (Sociology of Health and Illness)
- SY332OC (Sociology of Race and Ethnicity)

In winter 2021, we were able to use an additional \$2500 of our Departmental funding to complete 10-hour refreshes for the following courses:

- SY224OC - Sociology of Work
- SY241OC - Sociology of Crime: Structural Perspectives
- SY242OC - Sociology of Crime: Interpretive Perspectives
- SY307OC - Political Sociology
- SY215OC (additional work to bring it in line with a newly-released updated textbook)

While these 10-hour updates made in 2020-21 improve our courses, we note that using our own Departmental funding is unsustainable. Devoting funds from the Sociology Departmental budget was possible this year due to the anomalous pandemic working-from-home conditions. We agree wholeheartedly with the reviewers, that sustaining OC courses is not simply a Departmental matter. We are confident that the resources can be made available for much-needed course renewals. Notably, our online courses have particular appeal for non-majors. For instance, in the last 3 years, only 15% of students who enrolled in SY210OC “Social Inequality” (a course that has not been updated since 2011) are sociology majors. In other words, Sociology OC courses are popular with not only our majors, but are a popular choice for students across Arts, and the university. As such, the university should ensure that every effort is made to keep them current, as befits their stature and their broad appeal; we look forward to working with relevant units in the university to move forward with this recommendation.

FOA Decanal Response: The Department has done well to undertake updates to courses while making use of the limited resources available to them. Unfortunately, the very high cost associated with course development or redevelopment is an obstacle to more thorough revisions. The Dean of Arts will continue to work with Online Learning to be able to update additional courses.

Recommendation #3: The department should (re-)invest in establishing a graduate program in accordance with university priorities and directions. While department resources for graduate instruction and supervision may be limited (especially with many faculty members involved in other programs), *an interdisciplinary program, or an applied program* which could generate revenue, should overcome these limitations. The department should consider several different options for this program including (1) an interdisciplinary program with one or more cognate departments; (2) a graduate diploma or certificate program; (3) an applied research program or child/family specialization for professionals; (4) a modified, less resource intensive version of their current program.

Unit Response: As the reviewers note in their recommendation, resources are an important consideration here. Contingent on available resources, their suggestion of an interdisciplinary or applied program is promising. The Department wants to grow. Several of our faculty are active in the Cultural Analysis and Social Theory (CAST) MA program, and other faculty are active members of PhD or other graduate committees. We believe that there is an appetite in our Department to offer a graduate program, if increased resources were part of that endeavour. For instance, while the CAST program provides excellent programming with respect to theory, given the Sociology Department’s specialization in applied social research, an interdisciplinary graduate certificate in methods might be an appealing undertaking. We do note that we rely heavily on CTF to teach our undergraduate qualitative and quantitative required methods classes. Our impending retirements, without replacement hires, will further diminish our capacity to staff our undergraduate program. Currently, only four full-time faculty members teach research methods classes, and one is retiring in two years, so we recognize that an infusion of resources would facilitate new program creation. Our faculty do value graduate programming; Sociology could be a natural home for a graduate program in social research. Faculty in our Department would be able to build on our expertise in undergraduate teaching, to create new graduate courses. For instance, a new interdisciplinary graduate course in research ethics would have broad appeal to students, while our Social Policy Analysis course (created and taught by a CTF member) could easily be adapted to be included as an interdisciplinary graduate course – both examples would lend well to an applied graduate certificate or diploma in research methods. We will strike a sub-committee in the 2021-22 academic year to explore opportunities related to developing graduate programming in this area, and perhaps in collaboration with another program in Arts or elsewhere (i.e. Political Science, Economics, Psychology, Global Studies).

FOA Decanal Response: Departmental involvement in the CAST program has provided many Sociology faculty with the opportunity to engage with graduate students. Revival of the Sociology MA would be consistent with the University's efforts to strengthen its status as a "comprehensive" institution. However, as the reviewers note, such a program would need to take into account the areas of study that students see as most beneficial if enrollments are to be enough to justify the program. I encourage the Department to put together a proposal for the revival of the MA program that specifies a timeline and the necessary resources. This can then be discussed by the Dean of Arts and the Dean of Graduate Studies with the Vice-President: Academic.

FGPS Decanal Response: The department has identified several potential thematic pathways upon which to build a Masters – level graduate program. Possible courses are described, but a course-heavy program is likely not sustainable given recent experience, unless offerings at the undergraduate level are reduced. Perhaps fields of study could be defined, appropriate to faculty research expertise, to further and efficiently refine and target course development and learning outcomes. As the department recognizes, it will be important to carve out an MA program that is distinct from other Laurier graduate programs (e.g., CAST, MA in Social Justice and Community Engagement), and yet will offer programming and possibly research opportunities that are attractive to graduate students. Broad consultation by the sub-committee within Laurier, accompanied by an environmental scan of other Sociology MA programs across the province, will help to establish priorities and directions while also considering sustainability given resources.

Recommendation #4: The department should revisit its committee structure. We believe there are ways to reconstruct the administrative workload to lighten the load. Prioritizing committees as essential or *ad hoc* depending on expectations for the coming months, reducing the size of some committees and/or having reps vet work in advance to reduce the work of the entire committee or committees of the whole, and rotating faculty members in and out of committees and positions that demand the most work are some suggestions.

Unit Response: We agree with this recommendation. We recognize that with a smaller faculty complement, we need to change our previous patterns of service work that feature some colleagues carrying out a disproportionate burden of service/administration work. With additional impending retirements, it is incumbent upon us to ensure that we promote a culture of service in our Department, and a practice of individual faculty members take turns, and rotating in and out of "heavier" or "lighter" service work positions. We hope that fuller involvement with the various processes necessary for the Department to run well (i.e. how instructors are hired to teach our courses, how curriculum changes are made, etc.) will encourage faculty to become more engaged not only in the important activities of teaching and research, but in the essential service/committee tasks that support the Sociology Department.

One important point: while we do appreciate the reviewers' comments, we want to specify that for some committees, like PTAC, there is no easy way to "lighten the load". In particular, the collective agreement specifies required procedures for PTAC and as such, it is therefore not negotiable. Similarly, the Office of Research Services stipulates that to be on the Sociology Research Ethics Committee, faculty must conduct research with human participants, and have completed the Tri-Council Policy Statement 2 Course on Research Ethics. As such, only some faculty in our Department are eligible to serve on the Research Ethics Committee. As such, we do face some constraints in reconstructing our administrative workload.

We have begun to take steps to ensure that members of the Department perform service work in a more equitable way. PTAC is a particularly heavy service commitment, as this work continues to grow each year, with

fewer and fewer FT faculty in our Department, and greater numbers of CTF needed to teach our courses. We have created a document that specifies service work performed by committees in since 2014-15. Knowing which commitments require the heaviest workload, we are in a strong position to begin to have Departmental conversations with an eye to sharing the service workload more equitably. We are planning a retreat to review past patterns in service, and reconstruct our administrative service, to rotate faculty members in and out of positions.

A brief note on the roles of the Undergraduate Officer, and Chair, both crucial positions for the smooth running of a large Department, with over 400 majors. Given the wealth of knowledge that an experienced undergraduate officer accrues in this role, it would be advantageous for undergraduate officers to ideally remain in that role for more than 12 months at a time, if possible. While the current Chair may serve in that role until as late as June 2023, it makes sense for the Department to proactively plan for Chair succession in the future. Given the important role of undergraduate officer as both a support to the Chair, while also itself being ideal training for new Chairs, we see the benefits of having a fulsome discussion of best practices regarding the role of Sociology undergraduate officers in the years to come. As 2022-23 teaching preferences are due in October 2021, this fall is an ideal time for the Sociology Department to meet and plan who will be the next undergraduate officer in 2022, and the next Chair in 2023.

FOA Decanal Response: The Department is making good progress addressing this issue. Clearly, it is important that all members of the Department contribute to its management and operation in a collegial and productive manner in order for it to function well and for responsibilities to be distributed evenly. I encourage the Department to develop a clear plan for committee work and also a succession plan for the Chair and Undergraduate Advisor going forward. All members should be expected to assume these roles at the appropriate time in their career.

Recommendation #5: The department should investigate, in conjunction with contract faculty how they may be better included in department decision-making. The department has elected to minimize the administrative burden on contract faculty, since they are not paid for administration work, and this is reasonable and commendable. However, there should be mechanisms for consulting with contract faculty when decisions are made that impact the courses they teach, for example.

Unit Response: We agree with this recommendation. The Department recognizes the inherent tension between including CTF in departmental affairs more fully, while not burdening them with unpaid work. Nonetheless, there are limits to CTF participation. Having CTF participate in Curriculum decisions, for example, can create a conflict of interest, if decisions are being made about courses CTF teach, or if CTF might benefit from a course being taught. Nevertheless, the Department will explore ways to include and involve CTF in Department decision-making. For instance, with Curriculum decisions, CTF who have expertise in teaching specific courses could be consulted or included in relevant discussions. Experiences and opinions of CTF members who have expertise teaching specific courses would be helpful information for Curriculum committee members to know, in order to better understand how a course is taught, or other relevant information. FT committee members can pay more attention to consciously review agenda items ahead of time, to regarding topics where a CTF member has particular expertise, and could reasonably be invited to consult with CTF. CTF have expressed support for the university to compensate contract faculty (even an honorarium) for service work. CTF have suggested that Chairs in Arts could get together and ask the Dean of Arts for money to provide honorariums for CTF to participate more fully in Department decision-making; this would be regarded by contract faculty as a positive move toward inclusivity. For its part, the Sociology Department will explore

opportunities to feature the many ways that CTF members contribute to the Department, and include them more fully in Departmental decision-making. While we may be remiss at times when it comes to conveying it, the Department recognizes the important role played by our CTF colleagues; we value their expertise, experience and dedication in delivering Sociology courses. We have two longstanding CTF departmental reps who are very engaged and active in those roles, and they will be a first point of contact for us to reach out, with an eye to strategize and create ways for CTF to be more included in departmental matters. We are committed to continuing to work with CTF members, both long-serving faculty, and new CTF who are joining the Department, to explore opportunities for productive consultation and collaboration.

FOA Decanal Response: CTF are integral to the success of the Faculty of Arts and of the Department of Sociology. It is common for CTF representatives to serve on departmental councils, and their willingness to do so is highly valued. Apart from payment in return for their services, CTF colleagues seek validation and recognition for the expertise they bring to their departments. I encourage the Department to invite CTF participation in committees and important decision-making given their importance to the Sociology program. The Dean of Arts and the University are responsible for addressing CTF compensation in line with the Collective Agreement, and this is a topic that requires further consideration.

STRENGTHS OF THE PROGRAM(S)

Dean of the Faculty of Arts: As a long-standing Department, Sociology is very important to the Faculty of Arts. The Department of Sociology has the most Majors in Arts after Communication Studies and Political Science. It also teaches a very large number of students from outside the Faculty: clearly its courses are of interest to students beyond Arts. The Research Specialization clearly has been popular with students.

Dean of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies: Sociology faculty members are research active and participate in complementary graduate programs at Laurier. Opportunities exist to explore consolidating that strength within a re-imagining of a department-focused MA program.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT AND ENHANCEMENT

Dean of the Faculty of Arts: I am aware that the Department struggles with considerable internal conflict among its members, all of whom are extremely capable and have a great deal to offer. I encourage faculty members to take the time to work together constructively and to put the needs of the Department and its students first as they chart a course for the future. Faculty Relations certainly can provide support if it is helpful.

At the same time, the Department is going to have to be open to rethinking its curriculum as it looks to a future with fewer full-time faculty members. Working with the Dean to determine how to deploy limited resources in the years to come will be essential.

Dean of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies: Sociology has twelve research-active faculty members. Clearly, the reviewers have recommended that the department explore new sustainable pathways for a graduate program that is attractive to graduate students, and the department is open to this idea. As recognized, research and consultation will be required so that the graduate program is unique yet complementary to existing

related graduate programs at Laurier, while also sustainable given resources that are available. Development of this MA program would favourably align with the University's comprehensive model.

SIGNATURES

Dr. Mary Wilson

August 30, 2021



Dr. Anthony Vannelli

August 24, 2021



Approved by Program Review Sub-Committee:

October 20, 2021

Approved by Senate Academic Planning
Committee:

March 22, 2022

Submitted to Senate (for information):

April 11, 2022

Implementation Report Due Date:

April 11, 2024

RECOMMENDATIONS PRIORITIZED FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND ACTION PLAN

The following Implementation Plan was created by the Dean of Arts and Dean of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies as part of the Decanal Response.

Recommendation to be Implemented	Responsibility for Implementation	Responsibility for Resourcing (if applicable)	Anticipated Completion Date
<p>1) Reduce the number of undergraduate courses required for majors to a number more consistent with comparable departments, and restrict the array of non-required undergraduate courses to areas where existing faculty have expertise and in subject areas more central to department specializations in Social Inequality, Social Justice, Theory and Applied Research. With course reductions, scarce faculty resources can be redeployed to the graduate level, existing or emerging specializations, or even resources to enhance student writing, should that be prioritized by the department.</p>	<p>Department</p>		<p>April 2022</p>
<p>2) Outdated online courses must be updated. Learning outcomes in sociology depend on instructors using references and examples from students' everyday lives; subject matter becomes more difficult to grasp when cited sources are out of date and examples used to illustrate concepts are long passed. We understand that this is somewhat outside the purview of the department, but it must be undertaken through whatever means or offices are involved.</p>	<p>Department, in consultation with Dean of Arts and e-Learning</p>		<p>Ongoing</p>

<p>3) The department should (re-)invest in establishing a graduate program in accordance with university priorities and directions. While department resources for graduate instruction and supervision may be limited (especially with many faculty members involved in other programs), an interdisciplinary program, or an applied program which could generate revenue, should overcome these limitations. The department should consider several different options for this program including (1) an interdisciplinary program with one or more cognate departments; (2) a graduate diploma or certificate program; (3) an applied research program or child/family specialization for professionals; (4) a modified, less resource intensive version of their current program.</p>	<p>Department, in consultation with the Dean of Arts and the Dean of FGPS</p>		<p>June 2022</p>
<p>4) The department should revisit its committee structure. We believe there are ways to reconstruct the administrative workload to lighten the load. Prioritizing committees as essential or ad hoc depending on expectations for the coming months, reducing the size of some committees and/or having reps vet work in advance to reduce the work of the entire committee or committees of the whole, and rotating faculty members in and out of committees and positions that demand the most work are some suggestions.</p>	<p>Department</p>		<p>June 2022</p>
<p>5) The department should investigate, in conjunction with contract faculty how they may be better included in department decision-making. The department has elected to minimize the administrative burden on contract</p>	<p>Department, in consultation with Contract Teaching Faculty</p>		<p>Ongoing</p>

faculty, since they are not paid for administration work, and this is reasonable and commendable. However, there should be mechanisms for consulting with contract faculty when decisions are made that impact the courses they teach, for example.			
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