

PROGRAM REVIEW OUTCOME AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE ACADEMIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

Review Outcome: The Academic Planning Committee, as a result of this review process, finds the B.A., B.S. in Sociology to be in Good Standing.

The Academic Planning Committee recognizes that many of the efforts and activities that led to the development of the self-study report were accomplished during the time-period coinciding with the COVID-19 pandemic. The committee thanks the program for a comprehensive and critical self-study report that included input from multiple stakeholders.

The committee notes that the program's enrollment during the period covering the program review cycle declined significantly (from 282 in 2015 to 194 in 2021). The committee also notes that during this same period students minoring in Sociology increased (from 150 in 2015 to 254 in 2021). The committee commends the department faculty for efforts to increase diversity among its students. The percentage of undergraduate students from groups traditionally underrepresented in the discipline has increased (from 32.6 percent in fall 2015 to 45.0 percent in fall 2020), consistently above the University average during the period of review. The percentage of students identifying as women has decreased from 70.2 percent in fall 2015 to 62.9 percent in fall 2021. We commend the program for establishing a Student Ambassador Program to assist with recruitment and retention of students. The committee commends the Department for their expanded recruitment efforts that include outreach to high school students through alumni who teach sociology classes in local schools, recruiting efforts in introductory and general education courses, participation in recruitment events (e.g., open houses, Redbird Days, and Presidential, University Scholar days, and tours for local high school students of the department's laboratory facilities), and collaborations with Design Streak Studio and University Marketing Services to develop new marketing materials (brochures, posters, and videos).

The committee commends the program faculty for their efforts to support the success of their students. We commend the program on its ability to continue to limit enrollments in many of its courses, which is in keeping with recommendations from the American Sociological Association as well as the University's commitment to fostering a small-college atmosphere with large-university opportunities. The committee applauds their collaborative development of the Schroeder Hall Commons, a public space to include decorative items that reflect a broad and global diversity to foster a more inclusive environment for students, faculty, and staff. We commend the program faculty for the financial support to support the retention of current students, notably the new scholarship fund honoring Dr. Jelks. The committee commends the program for the creative and varied co-curricular options which provide multiple opportunities to participate in activities that allow students to learn from experts in the field and network with potential employers. These include an extensive internship program that provides opportunities for applied experiential learning and academic research within the discipline. Co-curricular opportunities have also been infused into courses offering students the chance to engage in civic and community projects (examples include collaborative projects with the Community Healthcare Center, Habitat 4 Humanity, YWCA of McLean County, and the McLean County Museum of History). We commend the program faculty for their support of the Sociology Club. The self-study report provides examples of some of the opportunities for student participation in research opportunities, including co-authored conference presentations and manuscripts. These varied opportunities help the program prepare students for employment and build a strong student community in the program.

The committee commends the faculty for their substantial work during the period of review to revise the curriculum to ensure that the content reflects changes within the discipline (guided by the 2017 American Sociological Association report "The Sociology Major in the Changing Landscape of Higher Education: Curriculum, Careers and Online Learning") and addresses potential structural barriers that may have impeded student progress through the program. We commend the program faculty for their participation in the American Sociological Association Curriculum Mapping Toolkit for Sociology Project which helped guide their review of the curriculum. This work resulted in a number of changes to the curriculum to realign the program with other benchmark programs. Changes included the development of a new course (SOC 200 Doing Sociology) to replace another course that represented a pinch point in the curriculum, removal of some course pre-requisites, and an overall reduction of required course hours (from 19 to 16). The committee also commends the program faculty for supporting a number of popular interdisciplinary minor programs (e.g., Food Studies, Latin American and Latino/a Studies, Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, and Water Sustainability). Furthermore, the program faculty are commended for inclusion of

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusiveness as core principles infused throughout the program curriculum. The committee further commends the program faculty for their support of and participation in institutional programs (e.g., General Education and AMALI).

The committee commends the program faculty on the development, implementation, and revision of their plan for the assessment of student learning outcomes. During the current review cycle, faculty have used the evidence gathered through the student learning outcomes assessment plan to inform program changes, and this includes the incorporation of rubrics as tools for assessing student coursework regarding the program's learning outcomes. We support the program faculty's plan to develop and implement a new exit survey as an indirect method of assessment. The information gathered through these measures has been used to make program changes, and several examples of these changes were specified.

The committee commends the faculty members of the program for their teaching, scholarly, and service contributions to the B.A., B.S. in Sociology. Faculty members are active researchers who publish peer-reviewed journals articles, and present at national and international interdisciplinary professional conferences. The program faculty regularly engage in professional development opportunities. Additionally, we recognize that faculty in the program have been actively involved in advising and supporting professional student organizations demonstrating their commitment to facilitate learning and educational experiences of our students outside the classroom.

Follow-up Report.

Aspirational Programs. The committee has included analyses of comparator and aspirational programs in the self-study report guidelines to provide faculty with opportunities to consider the niche their program has among its peers and to gather information for program planning. The committee would like the program to revisit the aspirational section of the self-study. In a subsequent follow-up report, the committee asks the faculty to address this section through an expanded analysis of aspirational programs, including nationwide, that could help to develop strategies for addressing priority initiatives faculty have identified for the next review. Studying aspirational programs might also help faculty with the exploration of alternate program delivery methods. Accordingly, the committee asks faculty to revisit their discussions of comparator and aspirational institutions and to summarize the findings of those discussions in a report submitted to the Office of the Provost by August 15, 2024.

Recommendations.

The Academic Planning Committee thanks faculty members of the B.A., B.S. in Sociology program for the opportunity to provide input regarding the program at Illinois State University through consideration of the self-study report submitted by faculty. The following committee recommendations to be addressed within the next regularly scheduled review cycle are provided in a spirit of collaboration with Sociology faculty members. In the next program review self-study report, tentatively due October 1, 2030, the committee asks the program to describe actions taken and results achieved for each recommendation.

Develop a plan for controlled enrollment growth. The committee notes that demand for the program remains strong but enrollments are below target levels. The committee acknowledges the work faculty have completed regarding their recruitment efforts and that this work has been successful in enrolling both first-time-in-college, external transfer as first and second majors in the program. Given the time and energy that must be devoted to such recruitment activities, the committee suggests that program faculty continue to identify external student populations for recruitment. We recommend that the program explore opportunities to use scholarships for recruitment in addition to retention of current students. The committee encourages the program to continue refining and implementing their plan for student recruitment, including strategies for increasing enrollment of students from racial and ethnic groups traditionally underrepresented in the program and discipline.

Continue to focus on diversity, inclusion, and equity. The committee recognizes the efforts that have resulted in the diversity of faculty and students within the program and encourages the program to continue to pursue its goals related to further developing an equitable, diverse, and inclusive environment that effectively supports students, faculty, and staff from diverse backgrounds. We encourage the program to continue refining and implementing their plans for recruiting students from groups who are traditionally underrepresented in the program and discipline. Furthermore, we encourage the program faculty to continue to examine ways to infuse diversity, equity, and inclusion into the curriculum.

Continue to focus on student success and retention. The committee recommends that the program faculty develop a plan for student success. The plan should be used to increase transparency and communication around “student success” by defining the program’s goals for, assessment of, and actions towards supporting students enrolled in the program. The plan may provide an overarching structure for other plans (e.g., retention, curriculum, alumni engagement). The committee recognizes substantial work by former and current faculty members to review and update the program and its curriculum. The committee recommends continued periodic review of the program structure and content to remain current with changes in the field and to maintain program retention and graduation rates. The committee recommends that the program continues monitoring student retention, particularly of students from traditionally underrepresented groups.

Continue to review and revise the curriculum. The committee recognizes work by faculty members to review and update the program and its curriculum. The committee recommends continued periodic review of the program structure including assessing the impact of recent revisions. We strongly suggest that the program continue to monitor the impact of the recent changes to the curriculum especially with respect to time-to-degree, curricular exceptions, and other student outcomes.

Continue implementing and refining the student learning outcomes assessment plan. The committee encourages faculty to continue their implementation of the student learning outcomes assessment plan for the program, to continue to utilize information gathered through plan implementation to make program revisions as necessary, and to document how that has been done. The committee encourages faculty to periodically evaluate the effectiveness of the plan in assessing student learning to identify any modifications to the plan faculty may deem necessary.

Continue the collaborative work with Milner Library. The committee recommends that the program work with the subject liaison librarian to examine and evaluate the library's journals and monograph collection to aid in both the selection and deselection process of these sources. Given recent journal cancellations and expected increases in distance and hybrid courses, we encourage the department and library to further collaborate to increase awareness of alternative access to resources, such as Interlibrary Loan and I-Share lending, among faculty and students. We also recommend that the program work with the subject liaison librarian to develop a tiered approach for information fluency learning outcomes for the department, align those outcomes to the curricula, and integrate those outcomes into the student learning outcomes assessment plan for the program.

Develop a plan for alumni tracking and engagement. The committee encourages the faculty to continue to refine their plan for tracking program alumni and use this system to enhance alumni networking and engagement. These activities may become even more important in the years ahead as the program’s alumni become more diverse. The program could benefit from increased involvement of its alumni, employers, and other external stakeholders in providing input regarding the program and in mentoring students and provide employment opportunities for program graduates.