

## **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 M.A., M.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 commends the program faculty for their recruitment efforts that have resulted in strong and steady enrollments over the period of review. Overall, total number of enrolled students during the period have increased (from 15 in 2015 to 22 in 2021). The committee commends the department faculty for efforts to increase the diversity among its students and to continue to promote inclusiveness. The percentage of graduate students from groups traditionally underrepresented in the discipline has increased (from 16.7 percent in fall 2015 to 22.7 percent in fall 2021). Similarly, the percentage of students identifying as either women or non-binary/not disclosed has increased from 55.5 percent in fall 2015 to 68.2 percent in fall 2021. We commend the program for eliminating the GRE admissions requirements to lower barriers to prospective students and to increase diversity within their applicant pools. The committee commends the work faculty have completed regarding their recruitment efforts (e.g., direct networking with sociology faculty at regional institutions with undergraduate sociology degree programs, presenting to advanced Illinois State sociology majors, developing new promotional videos, brochures, flyers and posters, engaging with prospective students via phone and email [especially international students], and developing program identity around clusters of faculty expertise).

The committee commends the program faculty for their efforts to support the success of their graduate students. Students who are assigned graduate assistantships all participate in an orientation led by the Graduate Coordinator (in addition to an orientation by the Graduate School). Students who are awarded graduate assistantships are provided with office space within the department. The program faculty have developed and implemented a Writing Mentor Workshop program to provide training for graduate students mentoring other students in disciplinary-specific writing. We commend the program on its ability to continue to limit enrollments in many of its courses, which is in keeping with the University's commitment to fostering a small-college atmosphere with large-university opportunities. The program faculty strive to create a sense of belonging through activities like hosting a start of the year open house and inviting students to attend the departmental brown bag series in which internal and external speakers present their research. We further commend the department for their financial support of students participating in study abroad (in locations that have included Guatemala, Ukraine, Botswana, Peru, Costa Rica, and many more), research trips and professional conferences (e.g., the Scott Elliott Award). The committee also commends the program faculty for identifying and supporting civic engagement opportunities that further support the program's student learning outcomes.

The committee commends the faculty for their work, during the period of review, in revising the curriculum to provide access to prospective students and remove potential obstacles to success for current students. This work included the creation of several graduate level 400-level courses (which correspond with existing undergraduate 300-level courses), the removal of the GRE admissions requirement, revisions to the pre-requisite structure of the curriculum, and expanding the scope of graduate course options (e.g., counting WGS 490 Feminist Theories and Methodological Issues and other courses in cognate disciplines toward the required 9 hours of 400-level sociology). We commend the program for ongoing discussions of further revisions to continue to address potential barriers (including reducing the number of core required hours to allow for more elective courses, exploring the potential of non-thesis capstone options, and potentially retooling the curriculum to shift towards more of an applied focus).

The committee commends the faculty members for their teaching, scholarly, and service contributions to the M.A., M.S. in Sociology. Faculty members are active researchers who author books, book chapters, 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 description of the planning for implementation of the actions identified. 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 May 15, 2024.

## **Recommendations.**

The Academic Planning Committee thanks faculty members of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology for the opportunity to provide input regarding the M.A., M.S. in Sociology 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 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 management.** The committee acknowledges the work faculty have completed regarding their recruitment efforts and that this work has been successful in reversing a declining trend in size of incoming student cohorts. 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. The committee encourages the program to continue refining and implementing their plan for student recruitment, including in the plan strategies for increasing enrollment by 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 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 continue monitoring student retention, particularly of students from traditionally underrepresented groups. Furthermore, we recommend that the program faculty continue to seek additional financial opportunities to support the students in the program (e.g., scholarships and assistantships linked to grant funding).

**Continue to review and revise the curriculum.** The committee recognizes substantial work by faculty members to review and update the program and its curriculum. We support the program faculty’s analysis and planning of reforms to address issues related to student time-to-degree. The committee recommends continued periodic review of the program structure including assessing the impact of revisions that are implemented (e.g., what has been the impact of removing the prerequisite for social theory and statistics on students who enroll in the program?). We suggest that the program explore the potential of developing an undergraduate accelerated sequence designed to facilitate Illinois State sociology majors to pursue continuing their graduate studies in the program.

**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 during the next program review cycle, 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.

**Continue to monitor and revise your 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.