EXTERNAL REVIEW OF THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

X COLLEGE

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Introduction

This report provides recommendations and observations based upon our discussions with faculty, students, administrators and staff at X College during a campus visit on Thursday and Friday, 21 and 22 February, 2019 as well as our review of documents provided by the department.

Before our visit we reviewed the 2018-2019 Periodic Program Review (PPR) self-study for the Sociology Program, course syllabi, faculty vitae, X College catalog, and the previous external program reviewers’ report (Berheide and Little 2015). The material sent to us in advance was well prepared and carefully organized.

After an opening session with the Dean of the School of Arts & Sciences, Dr. Susan Jones, we met with Sharon Jedda, Chair of the Department of Sociology and continued our conversation with her over dinner, where we were joined by Professors Martinez, Smythe, and Veeraswami. The next day we had a campus tour with interim chair Hernandez, followed by a meeting with Provost Johnson, Vice Provost McNichols, and the Director of Assessment, John Doe. We had individual faculty interviews with Professors Jedda, Martinez, Smythe, and Veeraswami. In addition, we conducted an interview with Erik Vandergaard, who serves in the role of Administrative Assistant to the Department of Sociology.

We met with a set of sociology majors during their Sociological Theory (SOC 300) class. This was followed by lunch with the Director of Women and Gender Studies, Professor Cruise and Professor DeMartini who has an appointment in both Sociology and Women and Gender Studies.

At the end of our campus visit we met with the full department to share an initial set of our impressions and answer questions. This was followed by an exit meeting with the Vice Provost, Dean, and Director of Assessment. The second day was completed with dinner with Professors Jedda, Stone, and DeMartini.

During our visit, faculty, staff, and students were very generous with their time. Their insights during interviews were extremely helpful as we wrote this report. We want to thank everyone for being so welcoming and for having such a well-organized schedule for us while we were on campus.

The central purpose of this review is to use evidence from the documents provided and our campus visit to review strengths in the Department of Sociology and comment upon areas which will benefit from strengthening. In this report we directly address a set of questions provided by the College and the Department. The goal is to make the sociology program the strongest it can be in serving the students at X College.

This review has three sections. First, we give an overview of the department, focusing upon strengths as well as areas that need attentions. We return to these issues throughout the body of the report. Next, we address a set of questions provided in “SOCIOLOGY 2018-19:

3 All names used in this document, other than the two reviewers, are fictitious.
Questions for Periodic Program Review external reviewers.”

Third, in a separate section we address the questions that focus particularly on issues of assessment.

*Organization of this report:* The remainder of the report is organized around two documents. In addition to addressing the questions provided by the College and the Department in the aforementioned document, we use a set of national guidelines for the undergraduate sociology major (Pike *et al.* 2017) developed by a series of Task Forces of the American Sociological Association (hereafter ASA). We use these guidelines to help answer the questions we have been given, and to provide recommendations for strengthening the program.

To aid in clarity, throughout this document, *questions from the College and Department are reprinted here in bold italics.* Recommendations that are in lower-case bold type and are in quotations are drawn directly from the report from the ASA: *The Sociology Major in the Changing Landscape of Higher Education* (2017). *RECOMMENDATIONS WHICH ARE PRINTED IN BOLD PRINT UPPER CASE LETTERS ARE OUR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PROGRAM AT X COLLEGE.*

**Part I: Introduction--Sociology at X College**

The Department of Sociology at X College is very strong. The written materials provided in advance of our visit as well as our interviews and observations on campus reinforced the strengths as well as the weaknesses that were noted in the SWOT analysis in Appendix A of the 2018-2019 Periodic Program Review document. In addition, we noted several other strengths.

**Strengths**

The strengths that particularly stood out from the written documentation and during our visit were:

**Faculty in Sociology are strong teachers who care deeply about their students.** This was evident in a variety of ways. They regularly visit with each other about teaching strategies. Over dinner the first night, for example, conversation automatically turned to students and how to support them. Our one-on-one interviews contained rich descriptions of ways in which the faculty are dedicated to giving students the skills and knowledge they need for success after completing their degree at X College.

**The Department of Sociology has developed a very strong curriculum that serves General Education at X College as well as majors in Sociology.** Syllabi and course offerings illustrate the breadth and depth of offerings for students. As noted in the PPR document, a

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4 It is relatively common for campuses to have a program review policy that includes a series of questions that need to be explicitly addressed in the written report. That was the case on this campus. As a result, in the final report we combined the campus questions with the national guidelines for the undergraduate major from the ASA. In addition to a set of questions that we needed to specifically address, the campus policy indicates that the final report must have a separate section explicitly related to assessment.
significant proportion (44%) of their courses support requirements in General Education. In addition, the department has worked with both Criminal Justice and Social Work to develop course-sharing that helps students double major with those programs. The department has also done an excellent job of meeting the needs of late-declaring majors and transfer students. Required courses are offered each semester allowing students to have more flexibility in completing the major. In the Sociological Theory class when we asked about strengths of the department, the first response was that there was “a lot of variation in what you can take, and it is also flexible for non-traditional students.” Another student said there were “a lot of online course offerings that were available” in sociology.

Multiple faculty members can and do teach each of the required courses in the sociology major. This is a strength that makes the department stand out. Many sociology programs have multiple faculty teaching the introductory course, but it is not unusual for a department to have only one person who regularly teaches some of the other requirements, such as theory or research methods. It is laudable that multiple faculty members have the expertise to teach each of the core courses in sociology at X College, and that is put into action with multiple people rotating these courses in their teaching schedules.

The level of collegiality in the department is truly impressive. This was mentioned by everyone with whom we visited. Junior faculty feel a great deal of support and mentoring from their colleagues. Sociology faculty talked about how they like and respect each other; they celebrate each other’s accomplishments and have created a work setting that matches the College goal “to be a great college at which to work”.

This department works. This is true in multiple senses of that verb. Faculty members work hard and embody the teacher/scholar model. They are productive as scholars, are excellent teachers (as noted above) and make significant contributions to the College community and beyond. In talking about department strengths, one student said that “professors were proud of their research and were very interesting when they talked about it in classes.” What they do also works—for students and for faculty. The curriculum is effective in attaining student learning outcomes.

They are proactive in addressing needed changes in the program. The previous strength is true, at least in part, because the Department of Sociology is very proactive in thinking about changes in the program that can make it more effective. They have developed a solid assessment plan which they use to improve what they do. When they recently moved to offering large sections of the Introductory Sociology course, for example, they carefully thought about what types of changes would be needed in course assignments to continue to attain their student learning outcomes for the course.

Their strength is recognized by students, administrators and other colleagues. This reflects a strength of the institution itself. Administrators not only recognize the strengths of the department, but are explicit about the fact that supporting faculty is central to their approach to their jobs. Students appreciate the dedication of the faculty to their education. Colleagues recognize the contributions of sociology to the institution.
Areas that Need Attention

The areas that need attention were mentioned in the SWOT analysis as well as in the main body of the PPR document (Jones 2018). These were reinforced during our on-campus interviews and meetings.

Students often have many competing demands, including family and work responsibilities. Faculty are aware of this and are eager for suggestions about how to accommodate these demands. As we mentioned above, faculty are proactive about their curriculum, yet they acknowledge the changing needs of the student body, particularly as faculty contribute to public higher education in an era of reduced state financial support.

Among students coming to the program, the level of preparation in basic skills—critical thinking, quantitative ability, and writing skills, has declined over time. This can lead to great diversity in skill level within the same classroom.

The major in sociology does not have a capstone course. While the department has a very strong curriculum, one weakness is the lack of a required capstone course. Faculty are well aware of this and have devoted a lot of discussion to the issues involved. The Advanced Social Research Methods course (SOC 414) was identified as meeting the goals of a capstone and it was piloted as a capstone course in the Spring of 2018.

The skills and competencies that sociology majors develop need to be more explicitly linked to their post-X College careers. The major prepares students well for graduate and professional school as well as jobs, but faculty suggested that students may not be aware of how to market these skills to employers. More attention should be focused upon guidance in career planning.

Faculty members in the Department of Sociology are engaging in significant service. One of the “threats” that was identified in the SWOT analysis involved the “disconnect between service expectations and evaluation criteria” (2018-2019 PPR, p. 47). As there is a push for more online programs, and as faculty respond to the need to re-evaluate pedagogical practices given the concerns noted above about the changing skills of the current student body, faculty need to be protected from the “service creep”, as more faculty at many campuses are currently being asked to do more with less. This runs the risk of creating problems within the department which would jeopardize the clear and important strengths of the Sociology program at X College.

The SWOT analysis and our on-campus interviews also identified several opportunities, including increased collaboration with other departments and the potential of more community building among students.

Resources

When talking about strengths and weaknesses, it is also useful to talk about resources. One of the recommendations from the ASA relates to this: Support faculty engagement in disciplinary research, the scholarship of teaching and learning, pedagogical innovation, and relevant service.
During our one-on-one campus interviews, faculty in the Department of Sociology indicated that they received support for their professional goals. They talked about the collegiality of their department and the fact that they celebrate each other’s accomplishments. Further, they noted the institutional recognition of their work as illustrated by recent nomination for three Chancellor’s Awards. Furthermore, two of those nominations have been accepted and sent forward to the next level by the campus. This is remarkable given the time and energy it takes to compile and submit comprehensive nomination files. Two campus-supported nominations for Chancellor’s Awards in one department is highly impressive and clearly signals that exemplary work is being done by faculty in the Department, and that work is being recognized as being exemplary by the campus.

Part II: Questions To Be Addressed

As noted, this section of our report is organized around the questions provided by X College and the Department of Sociology (reprinted in bold italic print) and national guidelines for the undergraduate sociology major from the American Sociological Association (reprinted in bold print). Any recommendations that we make are PRESENTED IN CAPITALIZED BOLD PRINT.

Curriculum

1. Please comment specifically on the currency of the program’s curriculum.

   - Does the curriculum represent contemporary knowledge in the discipline?
   - Are developments in the discipline within the last decade, whether theoretical or methodological, reflected in the curriculum?
   - Are current controversies within the discipline incorporated?

In addition to a solid base of required (core) courses that are essential to the discipline, the elective courses that are offered within the program demonstrate both a solid sense of the foundational topics of the discipline (such as “Sociology of Families”, “Work and Organizations”, “Sociology of Religion”, “Health Medicine and Society”, “Sociology of Law”, “Urban Sociology”, “Deviant Behavior”, and “Sociology of Lifecourse”) along with courses that reflect recent transitions in the discipline (such as “Sociology of Food”, “Sociology Goes to the Movies”, “Digital Sociology and Online Communities”, “Sociology of Men and Masculinities”, “Sociology of Human Rights”, “Development and Globalization”, and “Popular Culture”).

These are not comprehensive lists of the total course offerings, but are intended to identify a few courses that fit within more “traditional” topic areas that sociologists have addressed, along with ones that represent more recent transformations in the field. In addition, we noted that, within the course descriptions and in conversations with faculty, the more traditional offerings still reflect contemporary treatments of those areas. It is
clear that the offerings are contemporary and reflect a strong engagement with the current debates within the discipline of sociology.

The new Social Research Methods Minor is a very contemporary addition to the program offerings under the Department of Sociology. This minor allows students to become credentialed and skilled in a variety of research methods, thus giving them robust skills that can be applied in multiple different career options.

The options to double major (in Sociology and Criminal Justice and in Sociology and Social Work) provide students with a solid foundation in skill sets gained through the Sociology degree such as critical thinking, research methods, oral and written expression, in addition to credentials that are associated with a more specific career path (in either Criminal Justice or Social Work). The dual major options are thus designed to facilitate the credentialing of students in as robust a manner as possible, thus contributing to their success post-graduation from X College.

Lastly, the Sociology/Public Administration (BA/MPA or BS/MPA) Combined Degree option provides students with solid undergraduate and graduate credentials in a field with wide career applications. As more students are finding that they need to pursue a Master’s or other advanced degree in order to be competitive in the current job market, this degree option not only recognizes that need, but contains important coursework so that students obtain a solid depth and wide breadth in Public Administration with a robust grounding in the fundamentals of Sociology.

2. Does the curriculum adequately reflect the breadth and depth of the discipline? If not, what is/are the missing components or gaps in the curriculum?

Does the department’s/program’s faculty expertise as it currently exists adequately cover the breadth and depth of the curriculum?

What areas of expertise are most in need of strengthening?

Several of the national guidelines from the ASA are related to these questions. The second ASA recommendation suggests that “Within the sociology major, include required and elective courses that incorporate essential sociological concepts and competencies, as exemplified in the Sociological Literacy Framework.”

While the Sociological Literacy Framework (SLF) itself is a relatively new approach, it is based upon a review of a century of work within the discipline; the content included is familiar to anyone who knows the discipline of sociology. Resulting from the Measuring College Learning Project, organized by the Social Science Research Council and funded by the Gates Foundation and the Teagle Foundation, the SLF includes both concepts and competencies. (Ferguson 2016; Ferguson and Carbonaro 2016)

The concepts include “the sociological eye, social structure, socialization, stratification, and social reproduction and social change”. Competencies in the SLF are “identify and apply
sociological theories to understand social phenomena, critically evaluate explanations of human behavior and social phenomena, apply scientific principles to understand the social world, evaluate the quality of social scientific data, rigorously analyze social scientific data, and use sociological knowledge to inform policy debates and promote public understanding.” (Pike et al.: 23). Details on the SLF can be found in Ferguson 2016; Ferguson and Carbonaro 2016; and Pike et al. 2017. Other reflections on the core of sociology can be found in Ballantine, et al. 2016.

A review of sociology syllabi and the stated goals and student learning outcomes of the department illustrate that the Department of Sociology at X College aims to teach all of these concepts and competencies. This leads to our first recommendation.

RECOMMENDATION 1: THE DEPARTMENT SHOULD CONSIDER DOING A CURRICULUM MAP, WHERE THE CONCEPTS AND COMPETENCIES OF THE SOCIOCICAL LITERACY FRAMEWORK ARE MAPPED TO ALL OF THE COURSES IN THE SOCIOLOGY CURRICULUM.

This recommendation should not take a large amount of time. The department is very familiar with curriculum mapping and has done an excellent job of using it to map their student learning outcomes to the courses in the curriculum as part of their assessment plan.

Indeed, if the department chose this as the main agenda item for one of their regular department meetings, it would be quite easy to complete in one sitting. This would allow the department both to see how well they already do this, and to identify if there are any gaps which need to be filled. Alternatively, each individual could map the courses s/he teaches and these could be collated.

Susan Ferguson and Stephen Sweet have developed a curriculum mapping tool for the SLF that allows you to enter data about your curriculum on an Excel spreadsheet. (Ferguson and Sweet 2017). Their article on the tool includes the following information: “The curriculum map is generated by entering data into Excel worksheets. Access to these Excel worksheets is be (sic) arranged by contacting Stephen Sweet at ssweet@ithaca.edu. Our team will provide the Excel worksheets to any department that requests them. Provision of the Excel worksheets is not contingent on agreement to participate in a study on curriculum design. However, our research team will ask departments to consider voluntarily sharing their worksheets when they are completed. Susan Ferguson at fergusos@grinnell.edu can also be contacted for guidance on any aspects of the application of the tool or questions concerning the research project.”

It is not the case that this material needs to be in every course, though we are quite certain that because of the strength of the department, significant aspects of the SLF will be found across the curriculum in sociology. Because students enter the major late and can take a wide range of courses on their path to completing the sociology degree at X College, the main question to
address is “Will all of our majors have repeated exposure to all aspects of the SLF, no matter what set of courses they ultimately complete for their major?”

The next curriculum guideline from the ASA is **Include required courses in:** introductory-level sociology, sociological theory, research methods, statistical analysis, substantive topic areas, and a capstone experience within the sociology major."

The Sociology curriculum at X College requires majors to take four core courses that reflect these national recommendations: SOC 100 Introduction to Sociology, SOC 200 Social Statistics, SOC 300 Sociological Theory, and SOC 310 Methods of Sociological Research. In addition, majors need to take one of four courses at X College: Social Problems (SOC 210), Social Psychology (SOC 220), Social Institutions (SOC 230), or Social Inequalities (SOC 240).

*Introductory-level sociology.* Students are introduced to the student learning outcomes of the major in the first course. If they transferred from elsewhere, however, coverage may have varied from what is offered at X College.

*Sociological Theory.* As noted at the outset, all majors are required to take a course in Sociological Theory (SOC 300). We visited this class while on campus and gave students a mini-survey. When asked if “In the context of your Sociology courses, how many of you have: written a paper in which you compared or contrasted multiple theoretical traditions?”, 18 of the 22 students raised their hands.

*Research Methods and Statistical Analysis.* Students in the sociology major are required to take a course in each of these areas. SOC 200 (Social Statistics) is a pre-requisite to taking the Methods of Sociological Research course (SOC 310).

To provide some context for the requirements at X College, a 2007 study found that 81.8% of a national sample required one research methods course, typically combined with a requirement for a separate statistics course. Only 18.2% required two courses. In those cases, some of the time one course was qualitative and one was quantitative, and in other cases one of the courses (often titled something like “Data Analysis”) replaced a statistics requirement. (Kain 2008:40). Again, using a national sample, Sweet *et al.* (2014:292) found that 22% of sociology programs require a statistics course that is offered in the department, 20% require a statistics course offered outside of the department, and 25% include statistics training in a second required methods course within the department. The more recent data from Sweet *et al.* show that the proportion of programs requiring two semesters of research methods has grown significantly reaching 46%. This same study found that the requirement for a separate statistics course had also increased dramatically since 2007.

Further context is provided in Appendix A where we present information about sociology majors at a set of peer and aspirant schools for X College.

*A Capstone Experience within the Sociology Major.* As noted in the opening section of this report, the major in sociology at X College does not include a capstone course. Requiring a research capstone is consistent with an emphasis upon increasing the number of “high impact” experiences at X College. The AACU (2018) identifies a number of “high impact” educational
experiences, including such things as capstone courses, first-year experiences, internships, research, study away, and writing-intensive courses. Capstones are encouraged by the AACU, and indeed have been a suggested course in all three editions of the ASA’s national recommendations for the sociology major. Thus, our next recommendation.

RECOMMENDATION 2: THE DEPARTMENT SHOULD SERIOUSLY CONSIDER MOVING ITS REWORKING OF SOC 414 (ADVANCED SOCIAL RESEARCH METHODS) FROM A PILOT EXPERIMENT TO A REQUIREMENT FOR ALL MAJORS. THIS DISCUSSION MIGHT CONSIDER DIFFERENT CAPSTONE OPTIONS DEPENDING UPON A STUDENT’S PATHWAY AT X COLLEGE. CAPPING THE COURSE AT A SMALLER SIZE WILL BE NECESSARY IF ALL STUDENTS ARE DOING INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH PROJECTS.

This matches the pattern found in many capstone courses across the country. The Sweet et al. research found that 34% of sociology capstones require a research project, with 21% providing a review of the field, 12% requiring an internship or fieldwork, 8% each consisting of a “seminar on topical concerns” or a senior thesis, 4% focusing upon “life/career” planning, and 3% offering the option of either research or fieldwork. (2014:293)

Teaching a capstone course where each student does a major research project culminating with a paper is very labor intensive, and thus we strongly recommend capping such a course at 12 to 15 students.

Eventually, the department might consider having different capstone options depending upon a student’s pathway at X College. Students planning on graduate school would definitely take a research-based capstone. Those thinking about work in a non-profit or for-profit setting might instead have an internship that serves as their capstone experience. If the internship is a capstone, however, it must produce a significant written product that can be used to assess how well the program prepared the students and how well they achieved their student learning outcomes in their internships. An internship capstone such as this might include assignments and coursework that help students identify the skills that they attained through their sociology major that will be marketable in a non-profit or for-profit setting.

It is fine to have variation in the structure and content of different sections of the capstone course. What needs to stay consistent are the student learning outcomes for the course, no matter who is teaching it and across topics. Faculty who teach the capstone, in conversation with all department colleagues, should develop a shared set of student learning outcomes for this course (as with all courses). It may be that all courses at the 400-level share a common set of outcomes, or there may be specific outcomes for this course that are consistent with goals for 400-level courses. We will return to this topic in the final section of the report, which focuses upon assessment.
Substantive topic areas. The course listings at X College do a good job of covering a wide range of topic areas within sociology. As noted in the PPR document, the 200-level courses cover major content areas within sociology (inequality, institutions, social problems, and social psychology) and upper-division courses cover many specialized topic areas.

A course in demography is one of the few major gaps in course offerings. Demography is a topic area with one of the higher %’s of questions on the sociology subject exam in the GRE and it is also an area of significant coverage in the MCAT®. Indeed, a number of institutions list it as a suggested course for students in health careers.

The sixth national recommendation from the ASA suggests that departments should “Underscore, at all levels of the curriculum, inequality and difference in local, national, and global contexts.” Examination of course syllabi illustrates that inequality and difference are covered in a wide range of courses across the curriculum. Indeed during our very brief visit to the Sociological Theory course, there was coverage of inequality in terms of social class, and a contrast between the United States and the welfare state structure of Finland and other Scandinavian countries.

As with our recommendation on mapping the Sociological Literacy Framework, we suggest the same for the coverage of inequality and difference in the curriculum.

RECOMMENDATION 3: THE DEPARTMENT SHOULD CONSIDER DEVELOPING A CURRICULUM MAP TO DOCUMENT THE WAYS IN WHICH INEQUALITY AND DIFFERENCE ARE EXAMINED IN THE LOCAL, NATIONAL, AND GLOBAL CONTEXTS.

As with the first recommendation, this should not be a time-consuming activity. Courses could be listed in a column to the left of the chart, and types of inequality and difference (age, race, class, gender, ability, sexuality) could be listed across the top. At each intersection of a sociology course and a type of difference/inequality, faculty members could indicate if they include coverage at the local, national, and/or global level.

Faculty expertise in the department covers a wide range of topic areas within sociology. As noted in the first section of this report, it is impressive that multiple faculty are able to teach each of the required core courses in the curriculum. There are no major gaps in the expertise of the faculty in sociology.

3. Is the level of presentation (reading materials, approaches to student evaluation) appropriate to the level of courses? Specifically,

- Are upper-level courses sufficiently advanced to differentiate them from introductory or survey courses?
• Does the department/program provide appropriate opportunity for hands-on experience? (e.g., labs or other activities).

Three of the national recommendations (4, 5, and 9) from the ASA directly relate to these questions: “Integrate progressive learning structures within the curriculum via course prerequisites that systematically guide students to engage with increasingly advanced content and activities.”; “Provide multiple opportunities within the curriculum for students to engage in empirical inquiry that includes research design, data collection, and qualitative and quantitative analysis.”; and “Incorporate multiple pedagogies across the curriculum, including those that support active learning within and beyond the classroom.”

There is a clear difference between the type of work expected in mid-level courses when compared to Introductory Sociology. The range of student learning outcomes are all introduced in the introductory course, then expanded and built upon in content courses at higher levels. Similarly, the quantitative work that is done in statistics and methods (SOC 200 and SOC 310) is considerably more sophisticated than that in both SOC 100 and the 200-level courses.

Multiple opportunities for majors to engage in empirical inquiry are built into the required courses for the major, moving from simple statistical analysis being introduced in SOC 100, then more sophisticated quantitative skills built in SOC 200 and 310. Students, faculty, and administrators also mentioned the interdisciplinary social research minor, which also helps to build empirical skills.

Examination of syllabi indicates a range of pedagogical techniques. This was also reflected in answers students gave to questions in the mini-survey we conducted in the Theory class. When asked “In the context of your Sociology courses, how many of you have: Had a course that involved a significant amount of class discussion?”, 21 of the 22 students (95%) raised their hands. The number (and percent) of students raising their hands to each of the following are indicated below:

Done research within a class? 9.5 (one student gave an equivocal movement with her hand) (43%)
Made a class presentation on materials that other class members have not read? 15 (68%)
Written a research paper of a significant length—say 15 pages or longer? 6 (27%)
Written a paper in which you compared or contrasted multiple theoretical traditions? 18 (82%)

Three students also indicated they had volunteered in a community setting in the context of a sociology course.

Collaborative research between faculty and students is a high impact practice that holds great potential. It is time consuming for faculty, and (except during the summer and winter sessions) individual collaborations in the form of independent studies do not “count” in the faculty teaching load. Creative ways of having groups of students do research in the context of a class are one direction to pursue, leading to our next recommendation.
RECOMMENDATION 4: THE DEPARTMENT SHOULD CONSIDER WAYS OF INVOLVING SOCIOLOGY STUDENTS IN RESEARCH AIMED AT COLLECTING DATA ABOUT ALUMNI AND POST IT ON THE DEPARTMENTAL WEB PAGE. WITH PERMISSION FROM THOSE ALUMNI, THEY COULD INCLUDE CONTACT INFORMATION SO THAT CURRENT STUDENTS CAN NETWORK WITH GRADUATES WHO MAJORED IN SOCIOLOGY.

In addition to increasing the number of students who do a significant research project within the context of a class, this recommendation addresses a concern raised during our visit that the department should expand its focus upon how the sociology major provides students with competencies that are useful when they enter the job market. Either in the context of the current research methods course, or in a separate course designed for this project, students could develop surveys that collect data from alumni of the program. Not only would students build their skills in survey design, data collection, data analysis, and report writing, but they would provide the department with valuable data that could be used in assessment and planning. An added benefit is that this project will encourage linkages between current students and X College Sociology alumni.

If this course is deemed as beneficial, it could be offered on a regular basis. In subsequent years the survey could have a different focus. One year could involve an alumni survey, the next a survey of current majors, the next a survey of people taking Sociology as general education courses, etc. Another possibility is to collect the same types of data from alumni for other departments/majors on campus. Each year around half a dozen programs undergo their Periodic Program Review. In the year preceding these reviews, Sociology students could interview department chairs who will be conducting PPR’s to determine what types of information they would like to gather about alumni. The class could be divided into teams with each set developing a survey for a different department that will have external reviewers visiting campus in the following year. The end product of their research would be both written and oral reports presented to the relevant campus departments.

Questions on the alumni survey could ask for self-report data on how well alumni felt the program equipped them with the stated student learning outcomes for the program. These could be one set of measures used in assessment of the curriculum in the Department of Sociology (and for other departments if the course is continued in subsequent years.)

One question on the alumni survey could ask if the graduates would be willing to have their e-mail address as well as their job title listed on the department web page to facilitate networking with current students. The department could then develop a section of the web page listing alumni who represent a broad range of occupations, careers, and experiences. The bulletin board outside the department is an excellent start on this type of
information—having photographs of alumni who are in various types of careers or in graduate school. The web page based on data from the surveys recommended here would be much more complete and have a variety of benefits.

The Alumni survey could also ask respondents if they would be willing to work with current students in internships at their place of employment. This could help expand internship opportunities for Sociology majors at X College.

In addition, the section of the department webpage could be used in introductory sociology courses to point to ways in which the major leads to careers, thus focusing upon the beginning of a map of the student’s pathway to graduation.

Recommendation 4, suggesting that sociology students collect data from department alumni, leads directly to recommendations that relate to recruiting majors and to linking the major to the job market after graduation.

**RECOMMENDATION 5: INFORMATION ABOUT THE OCCUPATIONS OF PROGRAM ALUMNI SHOULD BE BUILT INTO COURSES THROUGHOUT THE CURRICULUM.**

On the first day of class, using data from the alumni survey, all introductory courses in sociology can briefly introduce students to the types of careers available with the major. Three interrelated questions for the first day of any class typically include “What is this course about?”, “What will I learn in this class?”, and “Why should I take this class?” If a section of the department webpage includes information collected from alumni about their current jobs/careers, this page can be highlighted on the first day as part of answering these three questions.

In the research methods courses, the list of alumni with their jobs could be projected, and examples of how they used skills from the methods courses could be highlighted. (Indeed, a question on the alumni survey might ask something like “Have you used skills/information from your sociology courses in your job? If so, please provide examples of how these skills and information were used in your job.”)

The alumni section of the department webpage could be explored more systematically in a number of classes throughout the curriculum, and students might each link with alumni who agreed to have their contact information posted for current students.

The capstone courses/senior seminars could again remind students about this section of the department webpage, and students might be encouraged to contact Career Services to move forward in their job search.
RECOMMENDATION 6: DATA FROM THE ALUMNI SURVEY SHOULD BE SHARED WITH ADMISSIONS, THE OFFICE OF CAREER SERVICES, AS WELL AS RELEVANT ADMINISTRATORS.

Not only may sharing these data have the potential of increasing the network of people who might steer students toward a major in sociology, but it will also increase the visibility of the program on and off campus.

A meeting with Admissions might be productive. At Southwestern University, for example, Admission recruiters started using the Sociology and Anthropology department webpage as an example to prospective students illustrating how a degree from the institution helped prepare them for jobs and careers.

4. Is the sequencing of courses in the major appropriate as a means of fostering mastery of the discipline by students?

Nationwide, one of the most challenging tasks for departments of sociology is the sequencing of courses. Compared to other majors, students tend to declare the sociology major relatively later in their undergraduate careers (McKinney et al. 2004; Pike et al. 2017). Students seldom start college with the plan to be a sociology major. In a setting like X College, this problem is compounded by the large proportion of majors who are transfer students.

As noted in the opening section of this report, the Department of Sociology has done an excellent job of consciously meeting the needs of late-declaring majors and transfer students. The required courses are offered every semester.

Introductory Sociology is a pre-requisite to all other courses in the department. This is a standard pattern nationwide. Since the last PPR the department has required that students take the statistics course before taking Sociological Research Methods. Once the required capstone is in place (Recommendation 2), we also recommend the following:

RECOMMENDATION 7: SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY AND METHODS OF SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH SHOULD BOTH BE PREREQUISITES FOR THE REQUIRED CAPSTONE COURSE.

We are fully aware that the combination of a large number of transfer students and relatively late declaration of the major may make this a challenge for some students. Many departments that require statistics as a pre-requisite to Research Methods make exceptions and allow students to take those two concurrently. It may be possible to allow students to take both Theory and the Capstone at the same time. If, however, the Capstone is truly a capstone to the
major, the other required courses will have student learning outcomes that are necessary for successful completion of the Capstone.

During the discussions about the capstone, a central question that must be revisited is “What do we want our students to have at the end of the major?” With that question answered two further things are facilitated. First, products produced in the capstone can be used for a significant proportion of the assessment process (as will be discussed in the last section of this document). Second, you can move backward through the curriculum and design/redesign/reinforce ways in which those student learning outcomes are built cumulatively throughout the curriculum. One example of a cumulative curriculum based upon research skills can be found in Kain, 2002.

The department has done an excellent job of introducing the student learning outcomes in the introductory course. One good example is the cross-tabulation exercise where students analyze the relationship between two variables. Courses between that introduction and the capstone reinforce and expand the students’ skills and knowledge related to the four major student learning outcomes of the major. Sequencing within those intermediate courses is particularly challenging since students may take them in very different sequences. Having a required capstone, however, establishes a clear beginning (SOC 100), middle (other required courses for the major, with statistics before research methods) and end (the Capstone course) to the student’s pathway through the major.

5. Is the curriculum compounded by too many courses, courses that are rarely taught, or courses that are too narrow and specialized?

Our assessment of the course offerings is based on our reading of the PPR, meetings with faculty, and discussions with students. As noted in the PPR, in a prior external review, it was recommended that the department eliminate courses that are rarely taught. By the time of our visit, this was a recommendation that had been completed by the department. In addition, students expressed an appreciation for the breadth of courses offered by faculty in the department. Faculty, too, appear to be appreciative of the fact that they are able to teach courses that are clearly contemporary and/or related to their expertise.

Furthermore, the range of courses offered allows the Sociology Department to contribute to general education, dual major and dual degree programs, the new minor in research methods, among other crucial contributions to the broader educational goals of the campus. We did not identify any particular courses that appear to be too narrow or specialized.

Are there opportunities within the curriculum for streamlining the number of courses in the department’s program’s inventory?

In line with the previous question, we would not advise that the department further streamline the number of courses offered. In fact, they have been able to offer several
online courses and, as mentioned above, contribute substantially to innovative opportunities for students.

What is the impact of “service” courses for other majors on this department’s/program’s total effort?

We note that the impact of general education courses is fairly substantial in terms of the broader total effort of the department. We would not recommend modifying this, as the General Education program at X College clearly has several areas that are a natural fit for contributions from sociologists.

6. In your judgement, how well does the curriculum for this major integrate with X College’s General Education program? Please be specific in identifying points of contact between General Education and this major that seem to be mutually reinforcing.

If stronger linkages need to be developed between the goals of General Education and this major, what aspects of the curriculum would you suggest need to be changed to improve integration of General Education and this major? Included in this should be an evaluation of the progression of skill-building in writing, critical thinking, and where appropriate mathematics and public speaking from General Education through the major courses.

One of the ASA’s recommendations (#8) is relevant to this set of questions. “Structure the curriculum to recognize explicitly the points of intellectual convergence and divergence between sociology and other fields of inquiry.”

As noted in the first section of this report, a major strength of the program in Sociology is its contribution to the General Education Program at X College. Course sharing with Criminal Justice and Social Work are two good examples of how the curriculum highlights some points of intellectual convergence and divergence between sociology and other disciplines.

The department may want to explore cross-listed courses in other areas, particular Women’s and Gender Studies. Conversations during our lunch with two faculty in that program indicated their interest in cross-listing more courses with sociology.

One particular way in which the curriculum points to intellectual convergence between sociology and other disciplines is the fact that Introductory Sociology helps prepare students for attending medical school. Since 2015 the MCAT® has a new section focusing upon social science material, 30% of which is basic sociology. One of the many contributions the department makes to the General Education program is the coverage of this material in SOC 100. Indeed the webpage presenting a Pre-Med Guide at the website for X College lists SOC 100 as a
course during the second year in the “Sample X College Pre-Medicine Four-Year Academic Plan”.

Because so many different faculty members teach Introduction to Sociology, and because it is offered both online and in the classroom, we have the following recommendation.

RECOMMENDATION 8:  AS PART OF THE STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR SOC 100, THE DEPARTMENT SHOULD VERIFY THAT IT COVERS MATERIAL NEEDED FOR THE MCAT® AS WELL AS MATERIAL FROM THE SLF IN BOTH CLASSROOM AND ONLINE VERSIONS OF THE COURSE.

Examination of syllabi and one-on-one interviews with faculty suggest that the concepts and skills needed for the social science section of the MCAT® are covered in SOC 100. No systematic assessment of this, however, has been undertaken. On a regular basis this should be examined to make certain that it is the case.

More information about the section of the MCAT® that includes sociological content can be obtained from the Association of American Medical Colleges, as well as from the ASA. ASA resources can be accessed at:  http://www.asanet.org/teaching-learning/department-leaders/mcat-and-sociology

The ASA resources include a webinar on the MCAT and sociology, as well as a series of helpful articles in Footnotes (Kain 2012; Borland 2015; Hernandez 2016). These can be used to prepare a handout for everyone teaching introductory sociology, as well as material for pre-medical students.

Associate Faculty Qualifications and Responsibilities

7. Please comment in detail on the qualifications of any full-time and adjunct (associate) faculty utilized by this program. Specifically,

- Are educational qualifications of associate faculty sufficient and appropriate?
- Are associate faculty teaching too much of the curriculum?
- Are associate faculty used appropriately in terms of course assignments?
- Are associate faculty adequately included and integrated into the academic life of the department/program?
- Are associate faculty adequately monitored, supervised, trained, and evaluated?
The educational qualifications for associate faculty are both sufficient and appropriate. Both of the current associate faculty members have PhD’s in sociology. The associate faculty teach online courses or at the (name of different location) campus. Given the two recent tenure-track hires in the department, it appears that the department relies very minimally on associate faculty for covering the necessary courses. All faculty who contribute to the department have impressive academic qualifications. As mentioned above, it appears that there are opportunities for faculty to teach courses in their areas of expertise. In addition, also as mentioned above, we find it commendable that there are several faculty members who can each teach the core required courses.

**Student Advising**

8. Please comment on the organization and delivery of academic advisement services by this department/program. Specifically,

- Are students receiving the quantity and quality of academic advising that they require?
- What improvements in the department’s/program’s delivery of academic advisement would you recommend?

Advising of undergraduates and linkages to careers and life after college are two of the central topics covered in the new edition of the American Sociological Association’s guidelines for the major in sociology. Indeed, two of the recommendations (#7 and #10) address this topic: “Provide curricular and co-curricular structures to help students gain knowledge and apply skills that support them in their post-baccalaureate careers.” and “Develop and maintain advising and mentoring processes that support students' decision making in achieving their educational goals, engage students in career planning, and offer guidance on further study in sociology and related fields.” This leads to our next two recommendations.

**RECOMMENDATION 9:** THE DEPARTMENT CAN EXPLORE A VARIETY OF STRATEGIES FOR PROVIDING STUDENTS WITH MORE INFORMATION ABOUT FUTURE CAREER PATHS. A SOCIOLOGY STUDENT ORGANIZATION CAN BE VERY HELPFUL IN ORGANIZING AND DOING THIS WORK.

**RECOMMENDATION 10:** USE RESOURCES FROM THE ASA TO HELP ILLUSTRATE CAREERS AND RECRUIT MAJORS.
The ASA has a set of resources for undergraduates, including information about starting a sociology club, recruiting majors and helping them learn about careers with an undergraduate major. These can be found at: http://www.asanet.org/teaching-learning/undergraduate-student-resources

ASA resources specifically aimed at careers for undergraduates can be found at: http://www.asanet.org/career-center/careers-sociology

This link includes resources directly from the ASA, including a booklet entitled 21st Century Careers for A Degree in Sociology. While visiting X College we saw copies of this available in the department office—an excellent idea. Other resources available from the ASA include a three-page brochure that is useful for recruiting majors, Sociology-A 21st Century Major; a Footnotes article from March/April 2016 entitled “Preparing for a 21st Century Job Hunt”; and a report entitled “What are they Doing with a Bachelor’s Degree in Sociology?” It also has more general career links to the Bureau of Labor Statistics Employment Projections, Bureau of Labor Statistics Career Outlook, USA Jobs Pathways Program, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study, Idealist, Indeed, and LinkedIn.

The department has been successful in having a relatively steady number of majors. Nonetheless, attention to recruitment of majors should never lag. Late last year (November 14, 2018) the ASA sponsored a webinar on attracting sociology majors. It was led by Professor Dan Chambliss, Professor of Sociology at Hamilton College, and Teresa Ciabattari of the Academic and Professional Affairs Program at the ASA. This can be accessed at https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_Ew-9j72-Qn-vWcEEy0CEcQ

Among the highlights of this webinar, Chambliss repeats the idea that students do not tend to come to college planning on a sociology major. You must answer the question “What do you DO with a sociology major?” He suggests that you have to create pathways to the major. He argues that when students look at a course schedule for the next semester, they need to see “one next great course”. That means it is the teacher they’ve loved, or the topic in which they are interested, and it is offered at the time they want it.

The department has an AKD chapter, and that is excellent. The department might also consider having a sociology student organization. Our experience is that student interest in such an organization varies from year to year. To be successful a few dedicated students are necessary to organize and plan events, such as alumni panels, a session devoted to internships, and another event on applying to graduate programs.

It may make sense to pair up with other departments or the campus Career Center in planning some of these events. This leads to our next recommendation:

RECOMMENDATION 11: FACULTY IN THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY SHOULD EXPLORE WAYS TO DEVELOP PARTNERSHIPS WITH OTHER OFFICES ON CAMPUS. THEY SHOULD CREATE LINKAGES WITH THE
A challenge of academic life is the pressure to do more and more things, pulling a faculty member in many different directions. It is important to remember that a number of colleagues across campus can help support you as you work with students on their pathways through the years at X College.

A key set of linkages to maintain and expand are with the department library liaison. Library staff can support the program in developing student skills. Ideally this linkage can start with Introductory Sociology and continue all the way through helping students with their capstone research projects and during the assessment of capstone materials.

Faculty in sociology should go through their courses systematically with a focus upon how library staff can collaborate with them to help build student skills, particularly in information literacy. (Kain et al., 2008) The Association of College and Research Libraries of the American Library Association has an excellent set of materials related to information literacy for students in anthropology and sociology (ACRL 2008).

Colleagues in Career Services can build upon what sociology faculty do in the classroom to help students find internships as well as jobs when they leave X College. Given the importance of focusing upon jobs and careers, encouraging majors to be involved in internships is one place to explore in more depth in Sociology. The 2018 Teaching Sociology article by Ciabattari et al. on “Linking Sociology Majors to Labor Market Success” is a good resource related to this topic.

Part III: Assessment and the Department of Sociology

Please comment on the plans, procedures, and accomplishments to date in relation to the assessment of this department’s/program’s specific student learning outcomes. Specifically,

- Are the department’s/program’s established student learning outcomes relevant and sufficient for this discipline?
- Are the criteria and measures (methods, instruments) that the department/program uses to assess student learning outcomes rigorous, reliable, valid, and informative?
- Does the department/program employ both direct assessments (not course grades) and indirect measures (student satisfaction)?
- Has the department/program been sufficiently productive in terms of pursuing meaningful assessment of student learning outcomes?
• What evidence do you find of specific incidences in which this department/program has made use of assessment data in improving their programs?

• What would you recommend as the major ways to improve assessments in this department/program?

Issues of assessment are central to the national guidelines from the American Sociological Association. Indeed the first and last of their dozen recommendations are:

“Develop distinct mission statements, specific program goals, and measurable learning outcomes that are made public, especially to students.” and

“Systematically assess program goals and student learning outcomes, choosing assessment tools that respond to institutional context and specific programmatic needs.”

The Department of Sociology’s core SLOs (“apply sociological theories to understand social phenomena, explain how culture and social structure shape individual experiences and opportunities, rigorously analyze social science data, and effectively communicate sociological concepts and empirical findings”) as well as three further SLOs that were in effect during the 2014-2017 assessment cycle (“identify the causes and consequences of various forms of inequality, produce written work that effectively integrates sociological concepts or theories with empirical findings, and demonstrate mastery of ethical standards governing research with human subjects”) are both relevant and sufficient. The core four SLO’s parallel the Sociological Literacy Framework noted earlier in this document.

The department Student Learning Outcomes are clearly listed on the department webpage and are included in almost all syllabi. Our interviews, however, indicated that faculty are uncertain that students understand the meaning of the broadly stated outcomes. This leads to our next recommendation.

RECOMMENDATION 12: IN ADDITION TO ALL SYLLABI (INCLUDING THOSE FOR ONLINE COURSES) LISTING THE DEPARTMENT SLO’S, FACULTY SHOULD CONSIDER MORE DETAILED STATEMENTS ABOUT WHAT STUDENTS WILL BE ABLE TO DO BY THE END OF EACH COURSE.

A useful format for this is to include a list after the SLO’s that says something like “By the end of this course, you should be able to:”. Not only does this clarify the SLO’s for students, but throughout the curriculum it continually reminds them of the types of competencies they are developing that can be used when interviewing for jobs at the end of their undergraduate career or applying for admission to graduate and professional schools.

An example of this reflects Recommendation 8. Syllabi for SOC 100 could include in the list “By the end of this course, you should be able to demonstrate your familiarity with the
sociological material covered in the ‘Psychological, Social, and Biological Foundations of Behavior’ section of the MCAT® exam. **Note: If you are a pre-med student, you will find it useful to keep your textbook to prepare for the MCAT®.”**

The methods and measures used to assess the department SLO’s are excellent. The department uses a variety of direct measures. In the previous assessment framework (Table 13 in the department PPR report, assessment framework 2014-2017) their measures included multiple-choice and essay questions on exams, final papers, and course presentations. The Curriculum Map developed by the department (Appendix B in the PPR report—Sociology Program Curriculum Map) illustrates how SLO’s are introduced, developed, and mastered throughout the curriculum. The current assessment plan, outlined in Appendix J of the self-study, also uses multiple measures. The department uses rubrics which are applied to anonymized student work outside of the class/grading process.

The Department has devoted serious attention to developing their assessment plan, measuring student learning outcomes throughout the curriculum, and using this information to strengthen the program. They remain somewhat unsatisfied with student writing skills at the end of the major and this has reinforced their desire to institute a capstone for the major. Indeed, piloting the capstone in the past two semesters illustrates a specific example of how they have used assessment data to strengthen the program.

Developing an assessment program that measures the extent to which student learning outcomes are attained is a long, iterative, process. This is illustrated by the movement at X College from cross-sectional assessment to a focus upon summative assessment. As the department continues to strengthen their assessment of SLO’s in Sociology, the ASA has a document that they may find helpful—*Creating an Effective Assessment Plan for the Sociology Major* by the ASA Task Force on Assessing the Undergraduate Sociology Major. (Lowry et al. 2005) The establishment of a required capstone provides an opportunity for rethinking summative assessment measures of SLO’s in Sociology.

**RECOMMENDATION 13: THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY SHOULD BEGIN TO USE MATERIALS FROM THE CAPSTONE AND CONTINUE USING MATERIAL FROM OTHER REQUIRED COURSES TO ASSESS THEIR STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR THE MAJOR.**

Programs often see assessment as an onerous task that is imposed from outside. When it is done in a proactive manner, however, it can be rewarding to see how well students are doing, and a very helpful tool for modifying the curriculum or specific course activities if students are not achieving the desired outcomes.
It is excellent that the department has an annual retreat. This is a perfect place to step back and look at assessment results for ways they can be used to make modifications in the program.

Far too many programs make assessment more difficult than it needs to be. In the following four sub-recommendations, we suggest a few guidelines that are helpful as you continue your assessment program.

**RECOMMENDATION 13A: FIRST, THERE IS NO NEED TO CREATE NEW TOOLS FOR ASSESSING STUDENT LEARNING.**

This is a recommendation that the department already follows, and we want to reinforce that it should continue. Each faculty member is regularly assessing students using quizzes, tests, papers and other assignments. Under the current assessment plan, student work from courses is made anonymous, and then rubrics are applied to assess how well class members are attaining each of the stated student learning outcomes. Rather than being used to evaluate individual students, however, these materials are direct measures used to evaluate the success of the program in attaining student learning outcomes.

In a few cases, it may be useful/necessary for everyone to use the same questions on a test in multiple sections of a class (as is currently done when assessing outcomes for the introductory courses, for example).

**RECOMMENDATION 13B: SECOND, CONSIDER STARTING WITH STUDENT WORK THAT IS PRODUCED NEAR THE END OF THE MAJOR.**

A good place to start assessment is with some of the student work produced in the capstone course. Making this a requirement for all majors offers a perfect opportunity for summative assessment of the major. If a course is truly a capstone to the major, then it should yield papers/assignments that illustrate how students have used the various tools, content, theories, and skills from all of their required courses.

In the capstone on many campuses, all students develop a research question, collect and analyze data, then write a final paper on the project. They also give short presentations on their research, typically the length allowed at a professional meeting. Students who do this can be encouraged to submit their papers to regional and national professional meetings.

As is done in the current assessment plan, each year evaluate a subset of student learning outcomes using the final papers and presentations from the capstone. This can add to the summative assessment of the program. All faculty members could attend the
capstone presentation event. One year you might evaluate two of the “By the end of this course you should be able to:” statements that expand upon the student learning outcomes. For example, you might assess (on a scale from 1 to 5): “Did the student clearly articulate a research question?” as well as “Did the student have a clear presentation of their research, including an introduction, body, and conclusion?” (Each number is linked with a description, such as 1 = completely failed to state a research question, to 5 = clearly and articulately stated an interesting and measurable research question.) Each of these assessment items also includes a narrative section where faculty members elaborate on their assessment of how well the student achieved each outcome. If you find that a significant proportion of the students failed at one of the outcomes, then as a department you can ask yourselves where in the curriculum you teach that skill/knowledge/theory, etc. You can then strategize about how you could teach it better, and perhaps teach it in multiple places.

A good example using this type of summative assessment from the capstone to address a failure comes from the home campus of one of the reviewers (Kain). Using the final papers from the capstone we discovered that students were completely unable to write literature reviews. They seemed to understand the research and developed good research questions based on the published literature, but they did not write good literature reviews. (The reviews read more like annotated bibliographies—“Researcher 1 found a, b, and c. Researcher 2 found f and g. Researcher 3 discovered a and f.”) When we had our annual retreat, we returned to this weakness in the program and asked ourselves “Where do we teach our students to write literature reviews?” The answer was “Nowhere”! In three different required courses (methods, theory, and capstone) we built in assignments that systematically taught students how to structure and write a literature review. When we assessed this student learning outcome several years later, all of the students’ literature reviews were stronger, and some were very well done.

This leads to our next piece of advice/sub-recommendation:

RECOMMENDATION 13C: DON’T TRY TO ASSESS TOO MANY THINGS EACH YEAR; DO NOT ASSESS THE SAME THING IN SUCCESSIVE YEARS.

It appears that this practice is already in place, but we wanted to reinforce it. A significant mistake that many programs make when putting together an assessment program is trying to assess every student learning outcome each year. In addition to being far too time consuming, this makes no sense. The purpose of assessment is to see how well the program is doing, use feedback from the assessment to modify the program, then see if the changes were successful in increasing student learning.

Let’s use the example under 13B, students not being able to write a literature review. The students at the example campus typically take Methods in the second year,
Theory in the third year, and the Capstone in the fourth year. After we assessed this student learning outcome and found that students were not successful, we made changes in all three of those required courses by adding assignments specifically designed to develop skills related to writing a literature review. We did not assess this outcome again until four years later. We’d made changes in the curriculum, tweaked them slightly the second year, then gave a cohort of students time to move through all of the required sequence before measuring the outcome again. Only then would we know if the changes had been more successful in helping our majors achieve that student learning outcome.

**RECOMMENDATION 13D: FINALLY, ANY ASSESSMENT PROGRAM SHOULD HAVE MULTIPLE MEASURES.**

Again, the Department of Sociology at X College does an excellent job of this, as noted above. We simply want to reinforce this practice. In addition to direct measures from the required courses for the major, you will also want to assess student learning outcomes related to general education. When doing this, you may find it helpful to consult the ASA publication on *Sociology and General Education* (Keith et al. 2007). It is fine to have some self-report measures taken directly from course evaluations. Items like “How well do you think this course made you aware of career opportunities that are available in sociology?” would be perfectly appropriate. Self-report data, however, should never be the only types of measures used is assessment.

One clear measure of the success of a program is to look at what graduates do after completing their degrees. Throughout our interviews at X College, people said they felt the program did well on this (particularly for graduate school), but that there was a lack of data. Involving students in collecting data on alumni as suggested in Recommendation 4 can provide some of these data.

**Concluding Comments**

We hope that these reflections and recommendations are helpful to the Department of Sociology at X College. The report has been developed in the spirit of strengthening an already excellent program.

The first step in using this document will be for all members of the program to read this report. Next, all of the faculty should meet to celebrate their strengths, and then talk about how well each recommendation may help strengthen the program, as well as the feasibility of implementation of the recommendations.

Addressing all of the recommendations will involve a lot of work on the part of faculty and staff at the University. While it may seem daunting at first, when conceptualized as a process that is spread over a number of years it becomes much more
manageable. As noted in the opening section of this report, the Department of Sociology at X College works. They have regular meetings and annual retreats which provide a good space for working through these recommendations. None of our recommendations suggest a radical shift in how they already approach providing a strong major for their students.

Work on several of the recommendations (4 and 9) can be done by student workers, volunteers, or majors interested in helping the program. Indeed, the likelihood of success of these endeavors will be higher if students are involved in the process. Finally, some of the recommendations are interrelated. Once data are collected from alumni (Recommendation 4), then implementing the next two recommendations (sharing them across campus and in courses) is relatively straightforward.

Hopefully discussion of and reflection upon this report will help a strong and coherent program become even stronger in the future, with a renewed sense of identity and purpose as they help students at X College develop their sociological imaginations.

REFERENCES


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APPENDIX A: SOCIOLOGY AT PEER AND ASPIRANT INSTITUTIONS

We have done a brief analysis of both the “Peer” and “Aspirant” institutions, based on a list that was provided to us by the Director of Assessment during our visit. Our primary goal was to assess the commonalities between institutions in terms of curriculum (course offerings, including breadth and depth of courses, along with required courses), faculty, and student body.

These data were generated by using a very limited process of examining Peer and Aspirant Institutions’ web sites. As a result, they should be interpreted with care. Some of the data are quite robust—requirements for the major, including required courses, and student body size, for example. In contrast, faculty size needs to be interpreted with particular care. Some institutions (Georgia College and State University, Monmouth University, and Slippery Rock, for example) house sociology within a broader department/program so identifying sociology faculty can be challenging. The websites do not provide information about number of majors, faculty teaching loads, or research and service expectations. Without this type of context, the number of faculty is very difficult to interpret.

Given these caveats, some take-aways from the analysis of the Peer and Aspirant Institutions are the following: Most require an introductory course. Most require a statistics course; sometimes it is integrated into a second required methods course, and sometimes it is part of the general education requirements. Most require a theory course. Most require at least one methods class. Most require a capstone/senior seminar course. Most emphasize the connections between a degree in Sociology and potential career options on their Department web pages. Many emphasize the relationship between Sociology as a discipline and social justice issues, as well as the relationship between Sociology as a discipline and globalization. Both are contemporary aspects of the discipline of Sociology as many departments are emphasizing the current need for students to understand social inequalities and justice/injustice, as well as the increasing impact of global dynamics on social systems.

Below we have included more detailed information on both the Peer and Aspirant Institutions (based on availability of such information). [Please note that this list has been truncated so that it cannot be used to identify the institution for whom this report was created.]

Peer Institutions:

**Lewis University**, Romeoville, IL       Undergraduate enrollment: 4,506

Three full-time faculty members.

Required courses:  SOCI-10000 Principles of Sociology, SOCI-20700 Sociological Theory, SOCI-29000 Diversity and Social Justice, SOCI-29600 Research Methods, SOCI-49700 Senior Research Seminar
Monmouth University, West Long Branch, NJ  Undergraduate Enrollment: 4,706

The Sociology Major at Monmouth University is housed within the Department of Political Science and Sociology. At Monmouth, the Sociology thesis course is an elective course. It is not clear how many full-time faculty members contribute to the Sociology Major at Monmouth University (as faculty and staff are listed on the website as being associated with the Department of Political Science and Sociology).


Radford University, Radford, VA  Undergraduate Enrollment: 7,926

The Sociology Department at Radford University has at least eight full-time faculty members (most tenure track or tenured).

Required courses:  SOCY 110 Introduction to Sociology, SOCY 250 Social Inequality, SOCY 360 Sociological Theory, SOCY 365 Society and the Individual, SOCY 380 Introduction to Social Research Methods, SOCY 480 Survey Research Methods, SOCY 497 Senior Seminar in Sociology.

Salisbury University, Salisbury, MD  Undergraduate Enrollment: 7,782

The Sociology Department at Salisbury University has four full-time permanent faculty, one lecturer, one visiting assistant professor (for a total of six full-time faculty). There is a 200-level course entitled “living in a globalized world”. Salisbury emphasizes the connection between Sociology and a current globalized economy. Required courses (all courses are 4 credits): Two theory courses, one methods course, and “Senior Experience”.

Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania, Slippery Rock, PA  Undergraduate Enrollment: 7,538 students

Sociology is somewhat unconventional at Slippery Rock as it is offered under “Interdisciplinary Programs” (Interdisciplinary Program (BS)-Concentration in Sociology). All “core courses” have choices (no specific required courses), and “experiential learning” is required (40 hours, approved by academic advising). The nature of this program makes it difficult to see how many full-time faculty contribute to this major.

SUNY College at Plattsburgh  Undergraduate Enrollment: 5,351

Sociology has seven full-time faculty, one of whom is a lecturer.
Required courses for the major: (3 credits each) SOC 101 - Introduction to Sociology, SOC 300 - Research Methods I, SOC 301 - Research Methods II: Quantitative or SOC 302 - Research Methods II: Qualitative, SOC 340 - Sociological Theory, SOC 491 - Sociology Seminar plus a one course each in global dynamics, inequality, and institutions.

Aspirant Institutions:

Georgia College & State University Undergraduate Enrollment: 5,987
Sociology is housed in the Department of Government and Sociology, which has 25 full-time faculty and staff. The department has 11 different majors, minors, programs, and degrees.

Required courses for the major (3 credits each): Statistics is required as part of the general education requirements. In addition, required courses for the major are SOC 3442 Research Methods, SOC 3446 Social Stratification, SOC 3450 Hist & Cntmpry Social Thought, SOC 3501 Advanced Research Methods. Additional courses in Sociology (SOCI) at the 3000-4000 level (3 courses), SOC 4920 Senior Seminar on Sociology.

The College of New Jersey Undergraduate Enrollment: 6,955
Sociology in a joint sociology/anthropology department. There are seven full-time sociology faculty and eight adjunct or visiting faculty members in sociology.

Required courses for the major: Majors must take a statistics course to fulfill their math requirement in general education. In addition, they must take OC101 – Introduction to Sociology, SOC301 – Development of Socio-Cultural Theory, SOC302 – Quantitative Research Methods and SOC499 – Senior Seminar in Sociology.

Ramapo College of New Jersey Undergraduate Enrollment: 5,618
Sociology has six faculty members.

Required courses for the major: SOCI 101 Introduction to Sociology, SOCI 304 - Globalization and Society, SOCI 307 - Social Research With Computers, SOCI 308 - Social Statistics With Computers. SOCI 332 - Social Theory, SOCI 335 - Public Sociologies, SOCI 317 - Sociology Of Community: Fieldwork (Senior Year), and

SOCI 410 - Capstone Project In Sociology. In addition, students must choose a concentration in either Public Sociology or Criminology.
Truman State University Undergraduate Enrollment: 5,898

Sociology is housed in a joint Sociology, Anthropology and Justice Systems Department. It has eight faculty, one of whom is a Lecturer.

There is only a joint SOAN Major. Required courses for the major: SOAN 130 New Majors Seminar, 360 or 361 Sociological or Anthropological Theory, SOAN 380 Research Design, SOAN 381 Data Analysis and Reporting, SOAN 490 Senior Seminar I, and SOAN 491 Senior Seminar II.

Univ. of Wisconsin La Crosse Undergraduate Enrollment: 9,655

Sociology is housed in Sociology and Criminal Justice, which has 12 faculty members. There is only a major in sociology, and criminal justice in only a minor.

Required courses for the major (3 credits each): SOC 110 Introduction to Sociology, SOC 200 Foundations of Sociological Analysis I, SOC 250 Methods of Social Research I I, SOC 350 Methods of Social Research II, SOC 390 Sociological Theory. In addition, students must take one of the following: SOC 405 Quantitative Social Research Seminar, SOC 410 Sociology Honors Project, or SOC 416 Qualitative Explorations.

Univ. of Wisconsin Eau Claire Undergraduate Enrollment: 10,022

Sociology has eight faculty plus a visiting research scholar.

Required courses for the major: The major requires the following 3-credit courses:

SOC 101 Introduction to Sociology, SOC 328 Sociological Data Analysis, SOC 330 Sociological Theory, SOC 332 Sociological Research Methods, SOC 490 Sociology Capstone.

Marist College Undergraduate Enrollment: 6,474

There is only a sociology minor available, and it is part of the Social Work department.

Ithaca College Undergraduate enrollment: 6,059

Sociology has 12 Faculty (2 of whom are lecturers)

Required courses: Intro, Theory, Quantitative Methods and Qualitative Methods (3 credits each) in addition to 1 100-level course, 2 200-level courses, and 3 courses each at the 300 and 400 levels for a total of 42 credit hours.