Preparing for a Successful Program Review

(These handouts were prepared by Edward L. Kain, Kerry Strand, and Margaret Vitullo)

Criteria for Self-Study and Review

Recommendations from *The Sociology Major in the Changing Landscape of Higher Education* (2017)

**Recommendation 1:** Develop distinct mission statements, specific program goals, and measurable learning outcomes that are made public, especially to students.

**Recommendation 2:** Within the sociology major, include required and elective courses that incorporate essential sociological concepts and competencies, as exemplified in the Sociological Literacy Framework.

**Recommendation 3:** Include required courses in: introductory-level sociology, sociological theory, research methods, statistical analysis, substantive topic areas, and a capstone experience within the sociology major.

**Recommendation 4:** Integrate progressive learning structures within the curriculum via course prerequisites that systematically guide students to engage with increasingly advanced content and activities.

**Recommendation 5:** Provide multiple opportunities within the curriculum for students to engage in empirical inquiry that includes research design, data collection, and qualitative and quantitative analysis.

**Recommendation 6:** Underscore, at all levels of the curriculum, inequality and difference in local, national, and global contexts.

**Recommendation 7:** Provide curricular and co-curricular structures to help students gain knowledge and apply skills that support them in their post-baccalaureate careers.

**Recommendation 8:** Structure the curriculum to recognize explicitly the points of intellectual convergence and divergence between sociology and other fields of inquiry.

**Recommendation 9:** Incorporate multiple pedagogies across the curriculum, including those that support active learning within and beyond the classroom.

**Recommendation 10:** 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.

**Recommendation 11:** Support faculty engagement in disciplinary research, the scholarship of teaching and learning, pedagogical innovation, and relevant service.

**Recommendation 12:** Systematically assess program goals and student learning outcomes, choosing assessment tools that respond to institutional context and specific programmatic needs.
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American Association of American Colleges and Universities VALUE Rubrics

Preparing for a program review should include some analysis of the department’s formal and informal learning outcomes. The review process should also examine the department’s current assessment processes for its learning outcomes.

The skills and learning areas outlined in the AAC&U’s VALUE (Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education) can be a helpful jumping off point for identifying and articulating learning across the major. They are available here:  https://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics/integrative-learning

Intellectual and Practical Skills

- Inquiry and analysis
- Critical thinking
- Creative thinking
- Written communication
- Oral communication
- Reading
- Quantitative literacy
- Information literacy
- Teamwork
- Problem solving

Personal and Social Responsibility

- Civic engagement—local and global
- Intercultural knowledge and competence
- Ethical reasoning
- Foundations and skills for lifelong learning
- Global Learning

Integrative and Applied Learning

- Integrative Learning
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ASA Departmental Resources Group

Elements of Strong Graduate Programs

1. The curriculum should be explicit and clearly laid out with expectations for each level of graduate work including course requirements and recommendations, research and teaching expectations, and criteria for an acceptable thesis or dissertation topic and end product.

2. A graduate manual should be accessible to students and prospective students, preferably online. This should cover the institution’s requirements as well as the department’s expectations for graduate education, plus other information necessary to entering graduate students.

3. Research and teaching should be part of the program and expectations laid out for students. A teaching program patterned after Preparing Future Faculty (PPF) or one developed by the institution should be a part of the curriculum of PhD students. Time commitments for departmental research and teaching assistants should be explicit and monitored.

4. Time to degree expected should be reasonable and laid out clearly, and candidates’ progress monitored.

5. Goals for the percentage of students to be funded should be laid out along with possible sources for funding.

6. Truth in advertising should guide what prospective students are told about funding, requirements, time to graduation, and job prospects. In addition, only specialty areas for which the department has adequate staff should be advertised.

7. Regular advising should be a required part of each student’s experience. Early and continual feedback on student progress from student advisor or the graduate advisor should be required. Strongly recommend that the department, as a whole, do an annual review of progress of all students and communicate that assessment in writing to each student and adviser. Departments should consider developing systematic mentoring programs, including clear guidance as students reach the job market.

8. Expected skills to graduate should be explicitly stated and might include data analysis skills and teaching skills.

9. Job placement of graduates should be monitored and data maintained for assessment; this information should be made available to incoming and prospective students.

10. Percentage of students funded and sources of funding should be on record.

11. Diversity in the graduate student cohort should be a goal of program, including who is accepted, funded, retained, and graduated.
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Materials to give the reviewers

- department self-studies (current and any previous)
- the college catalog (on-line access is fine)
- copies of university guidelines for external reviews of programs/departments
- syllabi from the department
- all faculty vitae (adjuncts, too)
- course offerings and enrollments (past 3-5 years)
- number of majors and minors (past 5 to 7 years)
- department budgets
- library journal holdings and evaluation of the book collection. If your department has a library liaison, s/he may be able to prepare this for you.
- written statements of concerns from the department as a whole as well as from individual faculty
- the assessment plan for the department/program including how you assess student learning. It would be good to have several years of this plan, with the assessment results

In addition, the following may be useful:

- the department handbook  (If this is online, the web address is perfect; indeed, these days very few departments have a separate handbook—it has morphed into their webpage.)
- department meetings minutes
- results of alumnae surveys or other data about faculty, student, and alumni/a satisfaction with the program
- institution mission statements
- information on student clubs and honorary societies, including Lambda Alpha and Alpha Kappa Delta
- department bylaws and information on committee structure.
- other data collected for assessing student learning
- collective bargaining agreements

If this review includes graduate programs, you will also need to provide:

- documents that contain goals for the program (statement of purpose);
- who is training for what;
- program requirements;
- number of students;
- funding patterns;
- teaching assignments of graduate students and relevant evaluation information;
- placement/alumni data and other key contents.