

**California State University, Fullerton Program Performance Review: Department
of Sociology External Review Report (Spring 2022)**

**To: Dean Sheryl Fontaine, College of the Humanities and Social Sciences
Associate Dean Jessica Stern
Sociology Department Chair Berna Torr**

Re: External Review of the CSUF Department of Sociology

March 15, 2022

Dear Dean Fontaine,

We are pleased to present our assessment of the Sociology Department at California State University, Fullerton (CSUF). This external review report is based on meetings held over two days with the Sociology Department faculty, staff, students, and college administration, which included a tour of the department offices and classroom spaces. The report is also based on information from the Sociology Department Program Review: Self-Study (2013-2020) and additional information that was graciously provided during the visit by the Department Chair, Vice-Chair, and Chair of the External Review Committee.

Since the last department external review in 2013, the department has made remarkable strides. It grew in majors and GE students, redesigned advising and implemented new programs that helped increase the graduation rates of a very diverse population of undergraduates. They also hired several new and promoted existing tenure-track faculty who exemplify the teacher-scholar model. The Department improved the integration of part-time faculty and had greater stability in staff than previously. These accomplishments position Sociology among the top units in the College of the Humanities and Social Sciences. In our report, we summarize insights gained from the meetings held with various stakeholders and from the documents supplied by the department to highlight major accomplishments and identify areas for improvement to support long-term success.

Program and Curricular Quality

The Sociology department offers a) a stateside BA with concentrations in Health and Social Welfare, Social Inequalities, and Sociology of Deviance and Crime, b) a fully online Bachelor of Arts degree through extended education, c) a Master of Arts degree, and d) a minor for non-majors.

Undergraduate Program: The department's primary mission is to provide students with skills and methods to study social behavior from a sociological perspective and develop a critical, ethical, and inclusive understanding of social life. The department also provides courses that fulfill requirements for GE categories D.1, D.3, and E. The program student learning outcomes for the BA and MA programs align with the institutional learning outcomes and reflect central components in the discipline. The number of majors has increased by 23% since the previous review to 944 (headcount). The department has been leading the way in the college and university in terms of first-year student retention, transfer student retention, degree completion, and has been featured as an exemplary model of advising, implementing programs like Transfer Learning Community, tutoring, and peer mentoring programs. The rapid growth of the major reflects that the curriculum strongly resonates with students. It keeps pace with current trends in the discipline and in student interests. In addition, the curriculum provides high-impact practices like student research and service-learning opportunities.

Graduate Program: The graduate program enrollment has been stable and the slight decline in enrollment reflects the national decline in graduate enrollment over the past 5 years and likely compounded by the pandemic, which has affected enrollment across degree programs. The graduation rates for graduate students have increased since the previous review, with 58% of students graduating in three years and 74% graduating in 4 years, which is a significant increase. The Master's program emphasizes mentorship, rigorous research methods, and theory, and provides students the opportunity to develop their teaching skills as well as research skills. Students participate in a teaching symposium that has created a strong pipeline for careers in community colleges. Several recent Master's program graduates have also continued in notable doctoral sociology programs.

Courses: The department has been doing an excellent job of offering a wide variety of courses that align with the mission of the department (discipline of sociology), college and university, and the interests of students. Currently, the demand for sociology classes is high. The department has tried to meet the demand by a) increasing enrollment caps to class size (except for the writing-intensive course) and b) offering more courses online. However,

choices on course modality have not been driven by pedagogical concerns. For example, research methods classes are being taught online instead of in-person to mostly balance demand and room capacity constraints. Also, some in-person classes are routinely over-enrolled to meet student demand despite course classification guidelines. Classes with computer lab work are typically over-enrolled to make use of all the seats physically available in packed classrooms.

Advising: The sociology department offers robust advising and student support for undergraduate majors. Academic advising and support consist of online and in-person support, with both drop-in visits and scheduled appointments. Four tenured/tenure-track faculty serve as advisors who provide 5 hours of weekly advising (in person and online) and 2-3 hours of time in addition to this following up with the majors (and administration of the advising website).

Faculty currently receive 3 units of reassigned time for each faculty member, but the funds for the advising reassigned time come from the department budget and not from the college or university. Graduate advising is mainly completed by the graduate advisor. Although the total number of students is smaller in the graduate program, the advising needs of graduate students can be heavier because they have different needs compared to undergraduate students. The department has implemented a faculty-mentor program for the graduate students where faculty are randomly paired with an incoming graduate student, which alleviates some of the workload for the graduate advisor, but the faculty mentoring graduate students are not compensated with reassigned time.

Human Resources and Facilities

Full-Time and Part-Time Faculty: Since the previous review, the department has hired 7 new faculty and had a better retention rate of existing faculty, including promoting 11 to Associate and to Full, contributing to a current total of 17 tenured/tenure-track faculty. Seventy-four percent of courses are taught by part-time faculty and the current tenure density is about 8% higher (at 60.7%) compared to the previous review. The number of part-time faculty has also grown over the years and their integration into the programming and department community has improved. For instance, part-time faculty serve in important leadership roles as Advisor and Coordinator of Sociology Online Degree Completion Program (ODCP), Faculty Advisor to the Sociology Honor Society and Sociology Club, and an Internship Coordinator.

Staff: The front office staff consists of 1 Administrative Support Coordinator, and 1 Administrative Support Assistant to service the needs of over 944 undergraduate and on

average about 30 graduate students. In addition, the front office staff supports the faculty needs and the needs in student advising. Currently, the department is short one Administrative Support Coordinator and Student Assistants, so the two staff members are doing additional work until additional support staff is hired. The department has lost a senior staff person, and we heard from multiple sources that this has caused a great strain on the front office staff and had a negative impact on the ability to support students.

Facilities: The department has the following dedicated spaces in College Park: staff front offices and cubicles where the department chair office is located, individual offices for tenured and tenure track faculty and shared offices for part-time faculty, an advising lab, graduate lab, graduate assistant office, department supply space, and staff/faculty common area.

Recommendations

Faculty and Research: To meet curricular needs and advising/mentoring responsibility we *recommend hiring two additional tenure track faculty*. Current service demands and mentoring demands can make it difficult for faculty to conduct their research and seek out external funding opportunities. This has been aggravated by the pandemic. We recommend that *the college provide additional course releases and summer support specifically for faculty research*. COVID research funding recovery would be helpful to support research, as would assistance by sponsored offices in the college and university with research grants, including systems to get feedback and administrative support with grant applications. We recommend *additional course releases for faculty advisors and Graduate Student Assistants to support advising*. The department should be commended for integrating the part-time faculty well into their programming and should support some additional community-building events for the part-time faculty.

Staff: The department staff currently supports the department advising efforts by helping to direct students to the appropriate resources. This advising support has created a considerable additional workload for the staff, who are also responsible for the overall daily functioning and support of faculty and students in the department. We recommend *adding a staff line to offset immediate needs*. The turnover of staff is also concerning for the department. Overall, *we also urge HR to consider the importance of offering competitive salaries, and more flexible work schedules beyond 1 telecommuting day per week on limited days*. Telecommuting is a low/no-cost way to improve job satisfaction and morale among staff and increase retention. We commend existing efforts by staff and *recommend continued efforts to cross-train and document procedures for planned and unanticipated transitions*. In addition, because of the growth of the undergraduate major, *we recommend the addition of*

at least one full-time student services support professional who can provide dedicated administrative support and leadership in academic advising. The person in this position could lighten the advising burden for faculty and front office staff and provide academic advising in collaboration with the department.

Classroom Space: The increased demand for courses and the limited classroom space requires attention, collaboration, and support from the college. The solution needs to be multi-pronged. To support high-quality instructional delivery and the increased demand for classes by students *we recommend additional dedicated classrooms for the department in College Park, Humanities and Social Sciences, and/or Gordon Hall*. An ideal would be a dedicated additional classroom in College Park to support student engagement with the department due to proximity. To support high-quality instructional delivery, *we also recommend the reduction of class sizes to fit the mode of instruction based on course classification designations*. To support high-quality instructional delivery and increased demand for classes, *we recommend test piloting additional in-person classes on Fridays to ease the demand for space*. This will require significant support from the college as changes to class schedules on days that are not “popular” might seem under-enrolled when first implemented.

Graduate Program: Additional resources may be needed to support the graduate program recruitment and retention. This may mean splitting graduate advising responsibilities across more than one current graduate advisor as well as offering course releases for advisors. We also *recommend that the college reinstate and pay for graduate assistants* for the department to support graduate student recruitment, retention, and degree progress. Graduate assistantships support the student learning outcomes of the graduate program, engage graduate students into the university, and ensure their success. Currently, the department is making little asks to support the graduate program and overall does not get much financial support from the college in this area. Finally, to support faculty mentors and advisors, *we recommend creating an online graduate Canvas page to facilitate orientation to and communication about the program*.

Online program revenue: The current online BA program generates significant revenue for the department. *We recommend that the department work with the appropriate administrators to re-negotiate a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that better reflects the needs of the department*. Renegotiating this contract should be a priority for the college and the division of academic affairs. *We recommend that the college prioritize the sociology department in the renegotiations* over new programs being developed or renegotiated because the department has a record of success and growth in this area. The support from

the administration would help the department leverage this online program to benefit the continued success of the department in this area.

Summary

We thank you for the opportunity to review the Sociology Department's remarkable progress in implementing their goals and strategies. During this external review, we reflected carefully on the alignment of these goals with accomplishments to identify ways to further support the department's growth and success. We appreciated the opportunity to interact with the faculty, staff, graduate and undergraduate students and were greatly impressed by their commitment to the department's mission to support a diverse student body and teacher-scholar faculty. We hope the recommendations offered in this report will be taken into account by the university to offer support for the long-term success of the CSUF Sociology department.

Sincerely,

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