

Final Assessment Report

Sociology

Graduate and Undergraduate Programs (reviewed 2015/16)

A. Summary

1. The Department's Self Study was considered and approved by the Academic Review Committee of Senate on December 2, 2015.
2. The Review Committee consisted of two external reviewers: Patrizia Albanese (Ryerson University), Wallace Clement (Carleton University) and an internal reviewer, Danny Samson (Brock University).
3. The site visit occurred on March 20-22, 2016.
4. The Reviewers' Report was received on April 11, 2016.
5. The Department's response was received on May 18, 2016.
6. The revised Department's Response was received on June 30, 2016.
7. The Senate Undergraduate Program Committee response was received on May 5, 2016.
8. The Senate Graduate Studies Committee response was received on April 30, 2016.
9. The Dean of Social Sciences response from Tom Dunk was received on June 2, 2016.
10. The Dean of Graduate Studies response from Mike Plyley was received on May 23, 2016.

The academic programs offered by the Department of Sociology which were examined as part of the review were:

BA in Sociology
MA in Critical Sociology

This review was conducted under the terms and conditions of the IQAP approved by Senate on June 6, 2011.

The reviewers assigned both programs an outcome category of "Good Quality".

Outcome Categories:

Excellent Quality	Good Quality	Good Quality with Concerns	Non-Viable
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B. Strengths of the Program

The reviewers identified the following strengths:

1. **Strong Leadership:** both the BA and MA programs seemed to have benefitted tremendously from years of having strong, engaged, collaborative, and proactive leaders in the positions of Chair and Graduate Director. Despite challenges experienced by budget and staffing cuts, and fluctuating enrolments, it was clear that the Chair and Graduate director have worked collaboratively and proactively to make changes to meet the challenges head on.
2. **Nationally Renowned Faculty/Researchers with a Specific Focus in Critical Sociology:** The department was well known in Canadian Sociology for the work of its senior faculty members, leaders in their fields in the broader area of Critical Sociology (Labour Studies, Women's studies, Political Economy)... The department and program have a history of solid methodological and theoretical foundations that lie at the core of our discipline Building on this core, it is also establishing a strong reputation, particularly among its mid-career faculty, in the areas of community-engaged, social justice and equity studies, and is proving to be a leader in cutting-edge research in the emerging area of Critical Animal Studies.
3. **Internationally Renowned CRCs** - In line with Brock University's Strategic Objective 1A. (Enhance the University's Reputation) and 3A, 3B and 3C (Fostering Excellence in Research, Scholarship and Creativity), the undergraduate and graduate programs housed in this department benefit tremendously from the work of two established and internationally respected scholars who hold prestigious positions as Canada Research Chairs.
4. **Inter- and Transdisciplinary, University-Level and Community-based Engagement of Program Faculty** - In line with Brock's Strategic Objective 5A and 5B (developing inter-, multi- and trans-disciplinarily), many members of this department engage in and are committed to doing interdisciplinary research.
5. **Wide range of program options for students** (for recruitment, retention, completion) - In line with Brock's Strategic Objective 2A (attracting—and retaining—high-quality students), the undergraduate and graduate students in this department have access to a range of program options...
6. **Innovative and Unique Learning Opportunities:** In line with Brock's Strategic Objective 2B (Innovative and Relevant Pedagogy), and the SMA's commitment to community-engaged, out-of-class/service and career-relevant learning, this department offers **SOCI 2F60 Foundations for Community Engagement** (currently not counted as a program credit for Sociology program students), and will be offering (after 2016-2017) a Co-op option in their MA in Critical Sociology. ... The department is also unique in their offering an area of concentration or minor in Critical Animal Studies.

C. Opportunities for Improvement and Enhancement

It should be noted that the Dean of Social Sciences declared a conflict of interest "because the Department of Sociology is also my academic home unit" in the introduction to the Faculty Dean response to the recommendations.

Recommendation 1

Strike two sub-committees: one for core Theory and another for core Methodologies to report to the department as whole. The theory committee should review its current offerings with a total of one full credit required. Is that sufficient? The methodologies committee is to consider adding an offering SOCI 3PXX Qualitative Sociological Methods II and changing the requirements for Honours and Pass students to at least three from SOCI 3P11, 3P12, 3P02 and 3PXX for Honours and at least two from that list for Pass.

In its response, the Department stated:

This recommendation is welcomed and was carefully considered by the department. Faculty members agreed that it did not make sense to strike two subcommittees to review the theory and methods requirements, but rather that the matter should be considered by the department's curriculum committee. Faculty members teaching in and/or with a special interest in theory and methods will be invited to attend any curriculum meetings on the subject. The curriculum committee will make recommendations to the departmental committee.

The Faculty Dean stated:

The issue of how much theory and methods is necessary for an undergraduate program seems to be a perennial discussion within sociology departments. The current arrangement is partially a response to the previous program review that contained suggestions about the amount and sequencing of theory and methods courses. I agree with the Department that rather than forming two additional sub-committees, this recommendation should be considered by the Department's curriculum committee. My own opinion on this matter is to agree with the reviewer's comments regarding changes to the theory and methods offerings. Reliance upon "a variety of elective courses" to provide "theoretical breadth" is a very ad hoc approach to ensuring students acquire the necessary knowledge and skills in theory. Elective courses are just that and thus there is no guarantee students will take them. There is no guarantee that any specific instructor will organize a given elective course with the same level or breadth of theoretical content. I also appreciate the reviewer's comments about providing an option for students to decide on whether they wish more quantitative or qualitative methods training. Nonetheless, I look forward to the recommendations that come forward from the Department's curriculum committee.

The Senate Undergraduate Program Committee stated:

The first recommendation in Section 7, encapsulates the comments on pages 13 and 15 [of the Reviewer Report]. The first question is whether additional theory courses, other than SOCI 2P00 + 3P00 or SOCI 2P00+ 3P01, are desirable. UPC notes that Sociology majors are required to take two SOCI credits numbered 2(alpha)00 to 2(alpha)99 in year two and two SOCI credits numbered 3(alpha)00 to 3(alpha)99 in year 3 and that additional theory requirements can be accommodated within these current core requirements without decreasing the number of elective credits. It is not clear if the recommended additional theory component could be fulfilled by existing courses or whether a new course or courses are being suggested by the reviewers.

The second part of recommendation 1 is to introduce a SOCI 3PXX Qualitative Data Analysis II course. UPC's interpretation of the recommendation is that in Year 3, students would take SOCI 3P00 or 3P01 and one and one-half credits from SOCI 3P02, 3P11, 3P12 and 3PXX. This would not change the total number of core requirements in the program or decrease the total number of electives in the program.

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers the recommendation to strike 2 sub-committees to examine core Theory and core Methodologies to be not accepted. However, the Department agrees that the issue raised by the reviewers regarding theory and method curriculum should be considered by the Department Curriculum Committee with a view to providing clear directions to students such that a balance between theory and methods content is present in the program.

The Committee encourages the Department to undertake an ongoing process of curriculum review and revision, utilizing the curriculum map which was prepared for the cyclical review.

Implementation Plan (1st Priority)	
Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department
Responsible for implementation:	Department
Timeline:	Dean of Social Sciences to report by the end of academic year 2016/17

Recommendation 2

For the Graduate Methods requirement, have the Graduate Committee consider recasting SOCI 5P02 to reflect more of the logic of the research process approach toward developing proposals for Master's theses and Research Papers, especially in light of the suggested methodologies requirements above.

In its response, the Department stated:

This recommendation is very useful in helping Sociology think through ways to improve student experiences of the MACS program. Discussion on this recommendation hinged on several points. First, the department sought to clarify the roles and functions of SOCI 5P02 and SOCI 5N00 (the non-credit graduate seminar). Would recasting 5P02 as a logic of the research process course require a reworking or an intensification of the requirements of 5N00? Would the model used in Social Justice and Equity Studies be one worth exploring for MACS? Second, faculty members discussed whether a logic of the research process course could be more explicitly experimented with in the fall of 2016 as [name withheld] is teaching it for a second time and previously taught a course similar to the one proposed in recommendation #2. Third, there was discussion about whether it would be fruitful to explore a full year research process course.

This recommendation will be considered by the MACS graduate program committee in the fall of 2016 and their recommendation will be brought to the department as a whole.

The Faculty Dean stated:

I agree with the recommendation and with the Department's response.

The Dean of Graduate Studies stated:

The Dean FGS supports this recommendation. Re-development of SOCI 5P02 in the manner suggested would ensure that all students got the same support for thesis/MRP development.

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers this recommendation to be accepted and in the process of implementation.

Implementation Plan (1st Priority)

Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department
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Timeline:	Dean of Social Sciences to report by the end of academic year 2016/17

Recommendation 3

Faculty replacement. As the current complement of 17.75 reduces, consider the following priorities in hiring: the broad areas of gender, sexuality, work and labour within a political economy perspective; the capacity to teach theory; the capacity to teach qualitative methodologies. In all appointments the hiring of Indigenous scholars should be prioritized where possible.

In its response, the Department stated:

This recommendation is a welcomed commentary regarding future planning. We concur that the areas of gender, sexuality, and the political economy of work and labour are priority areas for replacement given upcoming retirements. The areas of theory and qualitative methods are not, however, areas of immediate need.... Faculty members concur and have long supported the prioritization of Indigenous scholars, particularly in light of the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The Faculty Dean stated:

I agree with the Departmental response to this recommendation in terms of the areas of need with regard to succession planning at this point in time given the known pending retirements. As this plays out over the next eight years (until the next review), however, the Department will need to be cognizant of developments in sociology, society, and the university. The "traditional" areas of emphases within the Department may not have the significance within the discipline or society at large in the future that they do currently. It also needs to watch application and enrolment patterns carefully. There are many variables to consider in explanations for recent declines in both but of course program and course offerings must be included.

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers this recommendation to be not accepted as it lies outside of the Committee's jurisdiction. ARC expects that the Department will proceed through normal channels of advocacy for faculty replacement.

Implementation Plan

Recommendation not accepted.

Recommendation 4

The department as a whole should reconsider its identity as Critical Sociology by expanding to Critical and Engaged or some similar broadening to reflect the activist and engaged way in which the program undertakes critical sociology. This includes recasting the Community Engagement Course which should be opened to Sociology majors for program credit and consideration of offering a similar course at the third year specifically for Sociology majors.

In its response, the Department stated:

Faculty members will consider further the recommendation to rename our programs, cognizant of the fact that the name "critical" is not currently associated with our undergraduate program name. We will revisit our calendar entries and webpages to ensure that our language is consistent with a positive message about activist and social engagement.

Faculty members enthusiastically agreed to grant program specific credit to Sociology majors to SOCI 2F60 and will do so for the fall 2016 calendar submission.

Faculty members agreed to ask the curriculum committee to explore what a third year community engagement course might look like and how it might fit with the curriculum as a whole, particularly in light of recommendation #1.

The Faculty Dean stated:

There are actually two recommendations here and I agree with both of them. I am disappointed that the Department rejected the recommendation to expand its identity beyond "critical sociology." In their report the reviewers refer to "a new generation of activist minded students" as well as the benefit of having the department's identity better reflect the curriculum. The Department is rightfully proud of its reputation and identity but there is the danger that as the world changes and newer generations articulate and represent social concerns and issues in different ways, the meanings of terms evolve in ways that cannot be controlled and words that were once understood as progressive and exciting may become interpreted as stale or irrelevant. Language is a key element of how social reality is constructed whether or not any of us like this and evolving to meet the challenges this poses is important. So I hope the department will give this recommendation a second consideration. If the application and enrolment trends of the last couple of years continue this will become more pressing.

I also absolutely agree with the second recommendation regarding Sociology 2F60 and a possible third-year community engagement course. I am pleased the Department will take up these recommendations.

For ARC I must also add, however, that although resource issues are beyond its purview, there are resource-implications for experiential learning courses that are not yet fully appreciated across the university. An additional course focused on community

engagement will require support to build and maintain the community relationships that are required for both of these courses to succeed.

The Dean of Graduate Studies stated:

Not in the purview of the Dean, FGS, especially as seen only in terms of a follow up recommendation to Recommendation #1 - see Department Response to this recommendation, but perhaps worth discussion in terms of the graduate program also.

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers this recommendation to be in two parts.

- a. The Committee considers the recommendation that the Department “reconsider its identity by expanding its focus to Critical and Engaged” to be accepted.

Implementation Plan (2nd Priority)	
Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department
Responsible for implementation:	Department
Timeline:	Dean of Social Sciences to report by the end of academic year 2017/18

- b. The Committee considers the recommendation on “recasting the Community Engagement Course” (SOCL 2F60) to be accepted and in the process of implementation.

Implementation Plan (1st Priority)	
Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department
Responsible for implementation:	Department
Timeline:	Dean of Social Sciences to report by the end of academic year 2016/17

Recommendation 5

Support the development of the Critical (and Engaged) Criminology initiative on the model of a double-major with Sociology. Consider some modifications to the course offerings which would enrich the Criminology content to include a half course at the first year, two credits at the second year, two credits at the third year and 1.5 credits at the fourth year for a total of 5.0 criminology credits. Consider including some psychology electives within the offerings.

In its response, the Department stated:

This degree proposal is still in the development stages, although the reviewers requested and were given copies of the statement of intent that was passed in May 2015. The department appreciates this initial feedback and will consider it in developing the new degree proposal. The subcommittee working on the new degree discussed these recommendations and its initial response is that a year 1 course would not be practical in that SOCI 1F90 is a full year course and is, in the proposed degree structure, foundational to second year Critical Criminology courses. It will consider the effect on electives of having additional required courses at various year levels. The committee will also consider whether there are courses in other programs that might be complimentary. This new degree proposal will be subject to external examination by specialists in the field of criminology and thus will undergo a significant review process independent of this external review.

The Faculty Dean stated:

As noted in the Department response, the full degree proposal is in development. I agree with the department's response. I encourage the Department to look at Psychology courses as electives within the offerings. In fact, I encourage the Department to look across other programs in the Faculty of Social Sciences (Political Science and Child and Youth Studies in particular) for other courses that could add valuable content to the program and enhance interest from students. I appreciate that the Department wishes to maintain a focus on "critical" criminology. The Department does not, however, hold a monopoly on courses that involve "critical" analysis.

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers this recommendation to be advice to the Department as it prepares the proposal for the new Critical Criminology degree program. ARC believes the Department is best-positioned to determine how to incorporate this advice in developing the new program.

Implementation Plan

No further action required.

Recommendation 6

We recommend the University increase the teaching opportunities for Post-doctoral fellows. Brock is fortunate to have attracted five current post-docs in Sociology. It is a mutual benefit. Key to their career prospects is to teach in their areas of expertise and enhance their experience for the job market. It is also a significant opportunity for Brock to inject fresh perspectives into its teaching, especially in Sociology where there have been few new appointments. This may involve making this possibility a priority in collective bargaining. PDFs is a sign of scholarly maturity for the university and their presence should be encouraged and supported.

In its response, the Department stated:

The department appreciates this recommendation and agrees that more institutional attention needs to be brought to post-doctoral fellows. While this recommendation is outside of departmental scope, the department has asked the Chair to consult with relevant stakeholders in the coming month as collective bargaining negotiations are underway with CUPE, the union representing contract instructors.

The Faculty Dean stated:

I agree with this recommendation and the Departmental response. The Deans and Provost have discussed this as well. This will, of course, ultimately be determined through the collective agreement bargaining process with the relevant employee groups.

The Dean of Graduate Studies stated:

While the Dean, FGS supports the intent of this recommendation, it must be acknowledged that faculty workload, and workload assignments, are not in the purview of the Dean, FGS.

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers this recommendation to be not accepted. The Committee acknowledges the intent of the recommendation, however this issue lies outside of the Committee's jurisdiction and is a matter of labour relations between the University and its various labour groups.

Implementation Plan

Recommendation not accepted.

Recommendation 7

We recommend that Brock University consider reducing the number of committee members on MA theses from 3 to 2; and consider allowing a course-work only option MA, as a default for a select number of students identified by the Graduate program Director as being able to benefit from that limited option.

In its response, the Department stated:

The department supports the reduction of the number of members on an MA committee as this would free up faculty for other supervision work. However, this is outside the department's scope and thus we leave this to the Graduate Program Director and MACS program committee to negotiate with the Faculty of Graduate Studies over the next year.

The recommendation that the department pursue a coursework only MA is worthy of consideration. Departmental discussion about the proposal was positive in tone, but there are numerous questions that require investigation before pursuing such an option. These include questions related to how many courses would be required to be mounted, if the coursework stream students would receive funding comparable to MRP and thesis students, and how this might fit with the new co-op option. This recommendation will be carefully considered by the Graduate Program Director and the MACS program committee in the fall term.

The Faculty Dean stated:

There are two recommendations here. With regard to the number of supervisors for MA theses, the recommendation would free up faculty for more supervisions. As noted, this falls under the purview of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and will need to be taken up there. One cautionary note: we need to be careful that students are not "pigeon-holed" into too narrow a set of relationships with faculty. I have heard complaints from graduate students in other programs (to be clear, not the Department of Sociology) that they feel totally dominated by the power of the supervisor and fear for their future if that relationship does not work out. The extent to which such fears are justified may be a subject for discussion but given that perception is experienced as reality, we need to consider how to mitigate such concerns. One aspect of this is to ensure students are able and/or encouraged to build relationships with more than one or two faculty members. The thesis committee typically comprises the faculty members with whom students will have the closest relationships and upon whom they rely for letters of reference and other forms of academic and career support for their future.

I support the recommendation that the Department "consider" a course-work MA and I am glad that the Department is prepared to do so. As the Department response points out, there are a number of questions about the viability of the proposal. It is our understanding that course-work-only MA students do not receive funding. Of course, the resource implications of such a program for the Department would also need to be carefully considered.

The Dean of Graduate Studies stated:

The Dean, FGS does not support this recommendation at this time. The FGS will follow up with a survey of the Deans of Graduate Studies across the Province to ascertain the approach(es) being used for MA thesis committees, and once the survey has been completed, FGS will make a recommendation to the Senate Committee for Graduate Studies if a change from 3 to 2 members is warranted.

The Senate Graduate Studies Committee stated:

Faculty Handbook III B 9.1 (i) stipulates that "A thesis supervisory committee must at minimum comprise three members, the graduate supervisor and two additional faculty members." Therefore, it would not be possible to reduce the number of committee members from 3 to 2 as recommended.

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers this recommendation to be in two parts.

- a. The Committee considers the recommendation to reduce "the number of Committee members on MA theses from 3 to 2" to be not accepted at this time as it is not in line with existing University regulations. However, the Department may wish to review the results of the survey which was suggested by the Dean of Graduate Studies, "to ascertain the approach(es) being used for MA thesis committees" across the province.

Implementation Plan

Recommendation not accepted.

- b. The Committee considers the recommendation to "consider a course-work only option MA" to be accepted in principle and understands that the idea is under review by the Department. The Committee believes the Department is best-positioned to determine strategies to move forward with this issue.

Implementation Plan (2nd Priority)
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Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department
Responsible for implementation:	Department
Timeline:	Dean of Social Sciences to report by the end of academic year 2017/18

D. Summary of Recommendations:

First Priority:

Recommendations 1, 2, 4b)

Second Priority:

Recommendations 4a), 7b)

Not accepted:

Recommendations 3, 6

Not requiring further action:

Recommendations 5, 7a)