

Internal Academic Review 2006-2007
Department of Sociology
Internal Academic Review Committee Report to Senate

The Internal Academic Review (IAR) of the Department of Sociology is now complete. The Internal Academic Review Committee (IARC) has taken into consideration all of the submissions related to the IAR of the Department of Sociology and respectfully submits the following report. The IARC Report to Senate is intended to supplement the findings of the attached Review Team Report and to provide a mechanism for the Head of the Department and the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science to jointly report on the progress in addressing the Review Team recommendations (please see the “Outcomes” section of this report).

Summary of the Internal Academic Review of the Department of Sociology

The Department of Sociology is to be applauded for its multiplicity of approaches to teaching and research, and its ability to create a stimulating and intellectually challenging environment for faculty members and students. The IARC encourages the Department of Sociology to continue its consistent improvement in the area of research and applauds the many faculty members who are recognized nationally and internationally.

The IARC compliments the Department of Sociology for its admirable leadership in creating an environment that supports equity and diversity, particularly in recruitment of faculty members and among the student population.

The IARC agrees with the Review Team report highlighting the need for a collective strategic planning session to address future directions, goals and ways to build a stronger community within the Department. Particular attention should be paid to determining resolutions that eliminate potential divisive environments within the Department. The IARC agrees with the recommendations of the Review Team that workable approaches and improved communications among the existing schismatic streams of curriculum will contribute to an environment that encourages interactions and learning opportunities for faculty members and students across sub-disciplinary boundaries and outside their areas of specialization.

The IARC agrees with the Review Team report recommendation that a thorough review of the governance mechanisms in the Department would be beneficial with a view to maintaining a balance of participation from faculty members, staff and students. While the IARC commends the Department of Sociology for its tradition of inclusiveness and support of students, the Committee would concur with the Review Team recommendation to assign one student representative to participate in each of the Departmental meetings and committees to speak on behalf of the larger student body.

The IARC acknowledges the Department's improved research profile and encourages the Department to continue to pursue this on a national and international level through enhanced internal communications across research areas and an emphasis on publishing in peer-reviewed venues, wherever these exist and as appropriate.

The IARC recognizes the Department of Sociology for its progress and strength in teaching and learning and fully supports the Department as it explores new ways to address the recommendations outlined in the Review Team Report.

Outcomes of the Internal Academic Review of the Department of Sociology

*Joint response submitted by the
Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science and the
Head of the Department of Sociology*

1. With the support of the Faculty of Arts and Science, members of the Department of Sociology held a collective, two day strategic assessment and planning session in June 2007, which was highly productive. Among the most important outcomes were the following:

a) Members of the Department reviewed in detail the reports and recommendations from both IAR and OCGS reviews. In a frank, animated discussion, the Department explored its strengths, perceived weaknesses, and untapped potential, with the goal of establishing future directions and goals.

b) Members of the Department agreed on an overall plan that prioritized future hiring needs. This plan addresses the Department's current research and teaching strengths,

explicitly draws together the Department's four areas of identified strength, and recognizes the need to introduce additional expertise to train students in qualitative research methods.

c) Members of the Department developed a number of strategies to ensure that current interactions among faculty and students from the four areas of identified strength are not only sustained but enhanced. These strategies, coupled with improved communication across core areas, are expected to build upon the existing synergies in the Department and foster a cohesive approach to future Departmental challenges.

2. In 2007-08, the Department of Sociology approved at its Departmental meeting a new constitution governing its internal departmental decision-making process. This document reduces the number of voting student members at the Departmental Meeting to bring the Department more in line with other departments in the Faculty of Arts and Science.

3. With the support of the Faculty of Arts and Science, the Department will expand its research profile in the area of information and communication technology in 2009, with recruitment of a Tier 2 Canada Research Chair linked to the SSHRC MCRI in surveillance studies.

Follow-up on these recommendations and issues will take place during the annual academic planning and budget process between the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science and the Vice-Principal (Academic).

Attachment:

Review Team Report

**Internal Academic Review
Queen's University
Department of Sociology**

14 March 2007

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Office of the
Vice-Principal (Academic)

Executive Summary

This is a diverse department engaged with a variety of approaches to the study of sociology. The academic community of the Department consists of very good scholars who individually may approach the discipline differently but as a unit provide students with an opportunity for a broad knowledge of the discipline. The Department appears to provide an intellectually rewarding environment for faculty and students and, in addition, it respects diversity and promotes equity. The committee agrees with external assessor Professor Brewer who stated that the Department "has made great strides since the last IAR."

General

The review team met twice after reading the Department's Self-Study report and before meeting with the external consultants. These preliminary meetings resulted in written summaries of the various sections and a review of those summaries. We met again after we received the consultants' reports. At least two committee members were present as observers during each of the external consultants' meetings with faculty and students after which our summaries were amended and updated. In addition, two members of the committee met with the Department Head and the Graduate Chair after the visit of the external consultants. Accordingly, our report is based upon the Self-Study provided by the Department, interviews and meetings, and the consultants' assessments. Because the external consultants presented two separate reports and because they do not always agree, the committee's report indicates with which external consultant we agree.

Curriculum: Graduate Academic Programme

The over-arching characteristic of the graduate programme is its focus upon four apparently distinct areas, ostensibly organised to fulfil the requirements of the Ontario Council of Graduate Studies (OCGS). However, the committee would like to remind the Department that these categorisations are largely for purposes of advertising the programme and they should not be allowed to "drive" the programme. In separate meetings with committee members, the Head of Department and the Graduate Chair explained the integrative aspects of the "core" areas; specifically, that faculty are often "members" of more than one of the groupings. However, we agree with both consultants that "artificial divisions can develop negatively to affect the sense of collective identity" (Brewer); and, although the "streams have served as important focal points in giving shape and form to the doctoral program ... they have also had a divisive impact particularly among faculty" (Carroll). There is always a danger that these divisions may become very apparent to the graduate students and thus adversely affect their abilities to cross boundaries and to be aware of (if not expert in) all areas of the discipline. The committee suggests that the Department consider Professor Brewer's recommendation

that graduate students “be required to take courses from at least two streams and that training and information sessions for graduates be taken from faculty spread across these divides.” Professor Carroll concurs: “If most of the doctoral coursework is also narrowly focused in one area, students are unlikely to acquire a sufficiently comprehensive knowledge of the discipline.” This point is extremely important given these students will be moving on to academic positions elsewhere. To be effective scholars they need to have not only depth in an area of concentration, but breadth so that they can become effective faculty members able to interact with students and faculty across sub-disciplinary boundaries.

The committee agrees with the consultants that SOCY 901 needs to be revised; the Department should make appropriate changes as quickly as possible. The Department should also ensure that students have the required undergraduate background to successfully complete the revised course (or courses) at a graduate level. We support Professor Carroll’s suggestion that one qualitative methods course and one quantitative methods course be required of all doctoral students; MA students should take one of the two courses. We also agree with Professor Brewer: “Most faculty [have] sufficient expertise in *doing* quantitative and qualitative research to be able to fill this gap in the graduate curriculum immediately.” In some instances, students expressed concern over a lack of graduate course offerings. Although the Department has expressed intent to add additional courses to its curriculum, this will add further strain to current resources. To alleviate this concern, it is suggested that students be encouraged to take one course from cognate Departments (e.g., Geography, History).

The Graduate Chair provided the committee with an impressive list of recent graduate student publications – an accomplishment that requires substantial mentorship on the part of faculty and for which the Department must be commended. Finally, it should be noted that graduate students expressed that faculty in the Department are approachable and the staff extremely helpful. There is strong evidence to suggest that the Department has established a collegial, supportive and nurturing environment for graduate students.

Curriculum: Undergraduate Academic Programme

The Department’s current curriculum and structure are appropriately designed to emphasize the department’s learning objectives. The undergraduate students confirmed their satisfaction with the programme during their meeting with the external consultants. The students appreciate their ability to select their programme specialization, the development of their critical skills, and their education in theory and methodology. Sociology students seem very satisfied with the quality of instruction (excellent); faculty are approachable and the students have representation on Departmental Committees. The students expressed satisfaction with teaching assistants and particularly with the role/function of the head TA. There was some concern that students should receive routine reminders about support services on campus (for stressed and struggling students).

Specific comments about courses tended to focus upon methodology and theory at the undergraduate level; thus the committee urges the Department to consider Professor

Carroll's suggestion that a third-year course in qualitative methods be introduced. The committee concurs with Professor Carroll's observation that the Department "has an excellent reputation as a center for theoretical work;" however, he also expressed concern that "both undergraduate and graduate students may not be receiving sufficient instruction in methodology." This concern was noted during the site visit and should be addressed. As mentioned above, the expertise is available amongst the faculty and thus can be addressed immediately. The committee also recommends that the four areas of research evident at the graduate level continue to offer undergraduate students diverse opportunities to explore the curriculum: these areas should allow and encourage diversity not division.

Equity

The Department has fostered equity and encouraged diversity in three areas: 1) faculty profile, 2) student profile, and 3) course content. Women make up 42% of the faculty; visible minorities make up 10%. Thus, the Department ranks higher than Queen's University with regard to the retention of female faculty and ranks on the same level as Queen's (and other Canadian universities) with regard to the retention of visible minorities. In addition, the Department displays a commendable determination to continue to hire well-qualified faculty from designated groups as evidenced by recent hires (4 of the past 5 are members of designated groups).

The percentages of female students both at the undergraduate and graduate level are clearly above Queen's average, with 80% (Sociology) versus 59% (Queen's) for undergraduates and 58% versus 46% for graduate students. No data are available for designated groups. In addition, a large number of undergraduate courses and some graduate courses address issues of gender, racial and ethnic inequality, and class. The committee agrees with Professor Brewer: "The Department is an excellent example of the University's commitment to equity and its policies, procedures and conduct are exemplary."

Resources

As the Department grows, it will require additional space, particularly for graduate students and TAs. Teaching assistants hold office hours for students; at present, space and privacy for such meetings is an issue that requires attention. During the site visit, administrative staff expressed concerns about space and the division of space, but on the whole, the situation seems adequate (particularly when compared with Queen's in general). The staff also expressed concerns about IT support that, as both consultants suggest, might be remedied by "sharing" with other Departments. The Department has asked for an IT person to be shared with Development Studies and, as Professor Carroll indicates, this is a "reasonable, and increasingly urgent, request." The committee supports Professor Brewer's observation that administrative staff are: "conscientious, dedicated and widely experienced."

Faculty

The Department has grown since the last IAR from 15.5 to 19 full-time faculty and the increase has been partially due to obtaining prestigious positions (i.e., CRC, QNS).

Faculty are well-balanced across the ranks from assistant to full professor. It is clear that the Department has strengthened its faculty complement. This has addressed some of the concerns raised in the previous IAR with respect to research capacity, graduate student supervision and scholarship. For instance, as a result of these new hires, research funding has improved substantially. However, for this Department to achieve national and international recognition, the committee supports the consultants' opinions that new faculty be hired. Professor Brewer recommends "two new investment posts be established in order to accelerate the expansion of research opportunities and graduate teaching and to help deconstruct the unfortunate development of fairly rigid boundaries between the streams." In particular, this is necessary to continue to grow and achieve excellence for the PhD program. He suggested that this might "help address the disillusion – indeed withdrawal – of quantitative sociologists from the collective life of the Department." The committee considers this a serious issue that has significant consequences for morale. As part of a vision for the future of the Department, the Committee recommends that faculty, and faculty alone, meet to discuss strategic planning and directions for the Department's future. We strongly agree with both consultants (see Carroll's comments under "Governance" and Brewer's comments under "Faculty") that the Department limit student representation at Department meetings and on the Graduate Committee. We also support Brewer's comment that: "students by definition are creatures of the moment; it is faculty that stay for the long haul, and long term planning is the responsibility of those who will be there to carry it out and be accountable for it" (p. 11).

Teaching and Learning

The four objectives of the teaching component are: to build, develop, and refine a sociological approach to understanding our world; to provide a comprehensive instructional experience; to inspire a passion for sociology; and to cultivate the unique awareness and insights that sociology offers for use in assessing the contemporary world. Seminars and special interest courses support the developing passion for sociology, by linking current research interests and highlighting the connection between scholarship and teaching, thus emphasizing the opportunities that exist within the field for those who are interested in further undertakings.

The courses offered by the department demonstrate the connection between sociology and its use in the contemporary world and also provide the means for students to develop their own sociological approaches. The consultants concurred about the excellent teaching and learning environment fostered by the Department; the review committee agrees.

Scholarship and Research

The research profile of the Department has improved dramatically since the last IAR. The CIT stream accounts for the largest number of external dollars in research funding but there are also many other faculty members who hold a substantial number of grants. The productivity in general in terms of both quality and quantity is good. Many faculty members are recognised nationally and internationally for their contributions to the discipline; the Department can boast a CRC, QNS appointments, QRC and, most

recently, a Killam Research Fellowship. The committee recognises the huge leap forward since the last IAR but also acknowledges a lack of integration in the department, which the consultants' reports identified. The Department should consider how and in what areas it sees itself moving forward, and how continued research advancement might situate the Department nationally and internationally. Professor Brewer commends the Department for its improvement while, at the same time, he encourages "the Department to raise the bar of its ambitions and to think of ways in which it can break through and compete at the next level" (p. 12). The committee concurs and suggests that the level of communication across the research areas be improved as the Department continues to develop its research potentials.

Service

The Sociology Department is operating at a service level that is commensurate with its size and is comparable to cognate department at Queen's. However, Brewer challenged this moderate sized department to extend themselves to be more active on national and international committees, expand lectures series, and foster visiting scholar exchanges in order to raise the profile of this moderate sized unit. This committee agrees that in order for this unit to move to the next level, individuals, and faculty as a whole need to "engage in a concerted campaign of community service" (Brewer, p. 14).

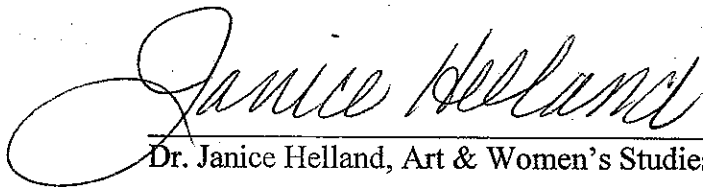
Summary of Recommendations

- The Department should develop a new undergraduate course in qualitative methods. SOYC 901 should be revised in light of the consultants' comments.
- The Department should improve communication across the four core areas for the benefit of both faculty and graduate students and should consider ways to improve integration of the four core areas. For example, graduate students could be required to take courses outside their main focus area, a colloquium series with students and faculty could be organized, and co-supervision of graduate students across core areas could be encouraged.
- The Department should be allocated funds to hire an Information Technology (IT) person who can maintain technology and computer software either for the Sociology Department alone or in conjunction with another department. This is becoming increasingly important in this technological age and will improve productivity for the entire Department.
- The Department should be allocated funds to increase its faculty complement by one additional full-time faculty member with expertise in more than one of the core areas.
- The Department should consider using the QNS competition as a means to secure a second additional faculty appointment.

- The Department should examine its space resources and attempt to provide its graduate students, particularly TAs, with additional office space.
- All faculty in the Department should participate in collective, strategic planning sessions to determine future directions and goals. An off-site retreat is recommended to foster dialogue and establish a coherent strategic plan.
- Faculty should observe the recommendations made by the external reviewers with regard to limiting the number of students participating in Department meetings and serving on Departmental committees. Student participation should be limited to student representatives who speak for the larger student body (both undergraduate and graduate students). Student numbers could be reduced or voting capacity restricted.
- The Department should offer a developed orientation programme at the graduate level, consisting of at least three to four sessions with students and faculty, as well as a formal mentoring programme with new and returning graduate students.
- The committee acknowledges the outstanding progress made in research productivity and quality since the last IAR and recommends that the Department continue their high level of research.

This report is respectfully submitted by:

Ms Susan Cahill, Art History, MA student
Dr. Geneviève Dumas, Mechanical & Materials Engineering
Mr. Erik Sloane, Economics, undergraduate student
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