

PROGRAM REVIEW REPORT TO BOARD OF REGENTS

*Due 30 days following receipt of the External and Internal Reviewers' Report.
This form is available electronically.*

This report is filed with the Board of Regents Office. All units/programs undergoing an accreditation review, nationally recognized review process or institutional program review need complete this form. The Dean or Department Head must approve this report and submit it to Academic Evaluation and Assessment for approval and submission to the Board of Regents.

Institution: **Northern State University**

Department or School: **History, Sociology, Political Science & Geography**

Program(s) Reviewed: **Sociology**

Date of Review: **AY 2015-2016; External Review: February 26th, 2016**

Please identify the program reviewers and any external accrediting body:

Dr. Cindy Aamlid, Associate Professor of Sociology, Southwest Minnesota State University, Marshall, MN

Items A & B should address the following issues: mission centrality, program quality, cost, program productivity, plans for the future, and assessment of progress.

A. Describe the strengths and weaknesses identified by the reviewers.

Strengths:

1. Faculty offers an impressive array of courses. They also provide innovative, and diverse, pedagogical approaches.
2. Many of the Sociology Program's course offerings are now on-line.
3. Faculty have kept up with changes in their discipline and instituted substantive curricular changes in both Criminal Justice and Human Services.
4. All faculty have research agendas and nearly all of the faculty are pursuing extensive and impressive publishing projects. This despite heavy teaching loads.
5. New hires, in both general sociology and criminal justice, have dramatically expanded the scope of our teaching and research areas.
6. Student satisfaction with the program is very high.

Weaknesses:

1. Lack of any expertise, among the faculty, in Human Services undermines the reach of the program. The Department needs to hire someone with a strong background in Social Work.
2. Heavy teaching loads detract faculty from recruitment work – the latter is very time-consuming.
3. Reduce the number of entry-level courses.
4. Lack of a social sciences research center reduces the ability of faculty and students to collaborate on research projects.
5. Department has failed to create a conflict resolution/mediation center – this was

recommended in the last program review.

B. Briefly summarize the review recommendations.

Summary of Recommendations:

1. Remove the Professional Sociology specialization from printed promotional materials.
 2. Consider a rotation of special topics courses that allow faculty to teach to their expertise.
 3. After the new curriculum changes are in place for several years, conduct a student focus group with majors to gather pertinent information.
 4. Staff Introduction to Sociology and Social Problems with tenure-track faculty. Use these courses to actively recruit new majors. One suggestion is to invite the sociology faculty to each section to be introduced and to share research interests and course offerings. Since one of the strengths is connection to faculty, this brief visit may draw more majors to the program.
 5. Conduct a survey of sociology majors to determine student needs and wants in the program.
 6. Consider shifting the duties of maintaining the program Facebook page to a work-study student in the department. Faculty could submit one article each month or semester to be posted.
 7. Consider hiring an MSW instructor to serve both the human services and gerontology specializations.
 8. Consider offering an additional section of SS 360 Traveling Classroom with an emphasis on human services and gerontology.
 9. Re-establish an advisory council of faculty, administrators, key community members, and students who can lead the gerontology program. The council could make recommendations of community collaborations, staffing, and generating student interest.
- C. Indicate the present and continuing actions to be taken by the college or department to address the issues raised by the review. What outcomes are anticipated as a result of these actions?

1. Remove the Professional Sociology specialization from printed promotional materials.
 - As program Marketing Director, Dr. Brownfield is planning on revising marketing materials and updating them in Summer 2016.
2. Consider a rotation of special topics courses that allow faculty to teach to their expertise.
 - With the proposed curriculum changes, each faculty member will have an opportunity to teach in their “areas of expertise” at least once per academic year.

3. After the new curriculum changes are in place for several years, conduct a student focus group with majors to gather pertinent information.
 - As of Spring 2016, Dr. Brownfield has absorbed the duties of program assessment director. She is open to the idea of conducting focus groups in year 3 (2019-2020) and year six (2022-2023) of the upcoming review period to assess how the new curriculum changes are working. Year three would allow for the evaluation of students completing requirements in the program at the junior, sophomore, and freshmen level; further, year six would allow for the same assessment with a new cohort of students; we could then share this information and discuss the program with graduates/alumni.
4. Staff Introduction to Sociology and Social Problems with tenure-track faculty. Use these courses to actively recruit new majors. One suggestion is to invite the sociology faculty to each section to be introduced and to share research interests and course offerings. Since one of the strengths is connection to faculty, this brief visit may draw more majors to the program.
 - Currently, tenure-track faculty do teach these courses, and tenure-track faculty will be teaching Introduction to Criminal Justice (CJUS 201) beginning Fall 2016; in fact, Dr. Waid-Lindberg, the criminologist on staff, will begin teaching a section of Introduction to Criminal Justice in Fall 2017, per the request and recommendation of the department chair and current dean. Since her hiring at NSU, she has taught solely at the upper-division level; this does a disservice to the majors focusing on criminal justice as she is not working with them early in their college careers.
5. Conduct a survey of sociology majors to determine student needs and wants in the program.
 - While this may be a good idea, questions have been raised by faculty as to whether students realize what they want in terms of directives out of their program. Drs. Brownfield, Stallings, and Waid-Lindberg have considered surveying agencies and programs that hire our graduates to better ascertain what they, as employers, would like to see in terms of a skill set from our graduates. This is something that we feel strongly about and would be quite happy to do.
6. Consider shifting the duties of maintaining the program Facebook page to a work-study student in the department.
 - While having a work-study student maintain the Facebook page would reduce the workload of Dr. Brownfield, the program Marketing Director, this is impractical in several ways:
 - i. The student workers are not sociology students and thus would not have the same kind of discernment in content creation or commenting on content that a trained sociologist would. While the student workers could feasibly be used to update the page with institutional or program events but content beyond that should be left in the hands of the sociology program faculty.

- ii. For social media to be effective, it must be both active and current. Relying solely on a work study student to update the page could essentially leave the Facebook page “dead” when he/she is unable to update the page.
 - iii. The reliance on a student worker could potentially be outside of their contract as work-study.
7. Consider hiring an MSW instructor to serve both the human services and gerontology specializations.
- This is currently what we have been doing in terms of staffing the social work-specific courses; unfortunately, the instructors with the MSW degree are unable or unwilling to teach gerontology-specific courses; further, we are unsure if we plan to keep the gerontology specialization. The Program Faculty realize the importance of hiring a full-time tenure track professor to oversee the Human Services Specialization in Sociology and will continue to urge the administration at NSU to fill this now vacant faculty line. The lack of expertise in Human Services among the existing faculty clearly undermines the ability of the Sociology Program to meet student requirements/demands.
8. Consider offering an additional section of SS 360 Traveling Classroom with an emphasis on human services and gerontology.
- The current SS 360: Traveling Classroom does incorporate elements of the human service specialization (i.e., programs for youth – Abbott House in Mitchell, SD and McCrossan’s Boys Ranch in Sioux Falls; parole board hearings; the state mental hospital in Yankton, SD). Dr. Waid-Lindberg plans to teach the course in Spring 2017 upon the retirement of Mr. Kosiak, and she will make a concerted effort to incorporate more human service-oriented programs as time during the week of travel permits.

Submitted by: M. J. Untch

Reviewed by: C. J. Mendley 5/13/2016
Department Head

Approved by: Alan J. Fure 5/22/17
Dean
 Director of Academic Evaluation and Assessment