

## **FINAL ASSESSMENT REPORT**

### **Institutional Quality Assurance Program (IQAP) Review**

#### **SOCIOLOGY PROGRAM**

##### **(Undergraduate and Graduate)**

**Date of Review: March 6 – 7, 2023**

*In accordance with the University Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), this final assessment report provides a synthesis of the external evaluation and the internal response, and assessments of the undergraduate and graduate program delivered by the Sociology program. This report identifies the significant strengths of the program, together with opportunities for program improvement and enhancement, and it sets out and prioritizes the recommendations that have been selected for implementation.*

*The report includes an Implementation Plan that identifies who will be responsible for approving the recommendations set out in the Final Assessment Report; who will be responsible for providing any resources entailed by those recommendations; any changes in organization, policy or governance that will be necessary to meet the recommendations and who will be responsible for acting on those recommendations; and timelines for acting on and monitoring the implementation of those recommendations.*

#### **Executive Summary of the Review**

In accordance with the Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), the Faculty of Social Sciences submitted a self-study in December 2022 to the Vice-Provost (Teaching and Learning) and Vice-Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies to initiate the cyclical program review of the Sociology undergraduate and graduate program. The approved self-study presented program descriptions, learning outcomes, and analyses of data provided by the Office of Institutional Research and Analysis.

Two arm's length external reviewers and one internal reviewer were endorsed by the Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences and selected by the Vice-Provost (Teaching and Learning) and Vice-Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies. The review team reviewed the self-study documentation and then conducted a virtual site visit on March 6 – 7, 2023. The visit included interviews with the Vice-Provost (Teaching and Learning), Associate Dean of School of Graduate Studies, Deputy Provost, Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Chair of the Department of Sociology, Associate Deans of Undergrad and Grad studies, and meetings with groups of current students, full-time faculty, and support staff.

The Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, and the Chair of the Department of Sociology submitted responses to the Reviewers' Report. The initial response was prepared by the program in April 2023 and finalized by the Dean in July 2023. Specific recommendations were discussed, and clarifications and corrections were presented. Follow-up actions and timelines were included.

## **Strengths**

The review team noted that the Sociology Department has a strong graduate program. Relatively small in size, our program offers strong mentorship to MA and PhD students, resulting in well trained graduates who are known to make contributions to knowledge.

The review team noted that our undergraduate program is healthy, having rebounded from its previous lower enrollments. A focused effort on improving the undergraduate course offerings to make them more appealing to students, as well as partnerships with Social Psychology and the My Own McMaster program in the Centre for Continuing Education, means that our students have a wide range of options.

The reviewers also acknowledged the steady leadership of the Sociology Department's Executive Team and our excellent staff, who have gone above and beyond during the difficult years of the pandemic, remote work, and a shift to online learning. We greatly appreciate that this work has been acknowledged by the reviewers, who report that this leadership was appreciated by students at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

## **Areas for Improvement**

The review team notes several areas for improvement, each of which is aligned with the current priorities of the Sociology Department. These include improved communications with students, staff, and faculty, as well as maintaining connections with our graduates. The equitable distribution of work is another priority that has important implications for faculty productivity, a collegial workplace, and a sense of fairness among all colleagues. In terms of the undergraduate curriculum, the reviewers suggest we consider the balance of online and in-person course offerings, a topic which we have already raised for discussion at our May 2023 retreat.

The review team also recommends that we consider the number of undergraduate programs offered and specialization in the graduate program. It may be that our programs have been spread too thin, and we will discuss the possibility of having fewer options that will concentrate our focus. Finally, funding of graduate students is a key priority that is exacerbated by the much larger size of our undergraduate program relative to our graduate enrollments. We will consider what our options are within the constraints of the corridor funding model, and we will give deep consideration to TA supports for undergraduate courses—also an item for discussion at our upcoming retreat. Consistent with reviewer recommendations, we have already begun to offer conference funding to our graduate students for the 2023 conference season.

## Implementation Plan

### Summary of the Reviewers' Recommendations with the Department's and Dean's Responses

Recommendation	Proposed Follow-Up	Responsibility for Leading Follow-Up	Timeline for Addressing Recommendation
<b>Improving and increasing communication with students, staff, and faculty.</b>	UG committee members hold advising office hours.	Undergraduate Chair will review responsibilities for UG committee.	Summer 2023
	Increase faculty understanding of program options.	UG Admin will craft one-page overview of programs for faculty to reference.	Summer 2023
	Revise course names and descriptions.	Undergraduate Chair will lead this process.	
	Invest in connections with Student Society.	Already underway, the UG Admin works with the ADM and UG Chair to work with Student Society.	May-Oct 2023
	Incorporate more discussion of career pathways in to ProSem course.	Already underway, the Graduate Chair will lead this process.	Ongoing
	Improve communication of news and announcements into departmental communications/social media.	Communications committee.	Ongoing
			September 2023

<p><b>Continue to work on an equitable distribution of labour and a participatory departmental culture.</b></p>	<p>Discuss commitments to community and culture at retreat.</p> <p>Run a collaborative exercise on the principles, considerations, and constraints that we should keep in mind when assigning work.</p> <p>Consider work distribution process; make effort to assign work once per year, rather than continuously over the academic year.</p>	<p>Department Chair</p> <p>Department Chair and Executive Committee</p> <p>Department Chair has requested list of service commitments across university from FSS; Exec Committee will incorporate into committee assignments</p>	<p>May 5</p> <p>May 5 – exercise June – implementation of best practices</p> <p>June 2023</p>
<p><b>Considering the balance of online versus in-person offerings and work to promote a stronger departmental culture.</b></p>	<p>Beginning at the retreat, we will hold ongoing discussions about the role of online courses in our curriculum and how they are distributed across instructors.</p> <p>Develop core hours for faculty and student office time.</p> <p>Hold enjoyable, in-person events.</p>	<p>Undergraduate Chair and UG Committee</p> <p>Department Chair and Academic Department Manager</p> <p>Communications Committee, ADM, Department Chair</p>	<p>May 5 – discussion Sept/Oct- proposals for changes</p> <p>After timetabling for courses each year.</p> <p>At May 5 retreat, ADM will lead calendaring process that will set stage for events.</p>

<p><b>Consider the number of undergraduate programs offered and specialization in the graduate program.</b></p>	<p>Review the UG programs and consider reducing options.</p> <p>Consider creating a capstone experience for Specialist students.</p> <p>Review the Grad stream in Soc Psych and consider eliminating.</p>	<p>UG: Undergraduate Chair and UG committee</p> <p>UG: Undergraduate Chair and UG committee</p> <p>Grad: Graduate Chair and Grad committee</p>	<p>2023-2024 academic year, with decisions to be implemented Oct 2024.</p> <p>Sept/Oct 2023 – develop proposal for capstone experience</p> <p>2023-2024 academic year, with decisions to be implemented as they are made.</p>
<p><b>Work to increase program assessment and ongoing relations with alumni.</b></p>	<p>Work with FSS and MacPherson to enhance alumni contacts and set benchmarks for program assessment.</p> <p>Work with FSS Manager of Recruitment and Marketing on exit survey.</p> <p>Submit a request to IRA to resume exit surveys, incorporate NSSE and CGPSS data for future self-study reports.</p> <p>Enhance social media presence, hire work-study student</p>	<p>Department Chair and ADM</p> <p>Department Chair and ADM</p> <p>Department Chair and ADM</p> <p>ADM and Communications committee</p>	<p>Summer 2023</p> <p>Pilot underway</p> <p>Summer 2023</p> <p>September 2023</p>
<p><b>Work with the faculty and university on graduate student support, and consider the right</b></p>	<p>We are moving toward caps newly announced by Assoc Dean Grad.</p>	<p>Graduate Chair and Grad Admissions committee</p>	<p>Ongoing; next Admissions season Jan 2024</p>

<b>balance in terms of the size of the graduate program.</b>	<p>A review of graduate funding levels is underway at the University and FSS levels.</p> <p>Initiate conference funding program for graduate students.</p>	<p>Graduate Chair and Department Chair will continue working with FSS Assoc Dean Grad.</p> <p>Graduate Chair, Grad Admin and ADM</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Initiated April 2023.</p>
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### **Dean's Response, Faculty of Social Sciences:**

An IQAP review team consisting of external members Dr. Howard Ramos, Western University and Dr. Xiaobei, Carleton University, and internal member, Dr. Chandrima Chakraborty (McMaster English and Cultural Studies) conducted a review in March 2023 of both the undergraduate and graduate programs of the Department of Sociology. I thank the reviewers for their thorough and thoughtful review of Sociology's educational programs. The insights and recommendations provided by the review will be valuable to the Department and the Faculty as we work to improve the programs in the coming years. Herein I provide my response to the report and the department's response to it.

The reviewers' expressed disappointment that the review was conducted on-line rather than in person, noting that it was harder to gain an appreciation for the department culture and spaces. I appreciate the point about benefits of in-person interactions in this context. Each format brings advantages and disadvantages, and we weight competing factors in each case when deciding how to conduct a review. We have conducted a number of on-line reviews in recent years in which reviewers felt they were able to elicit the information needed to make informed judgements. Any future online reviews will incorporate their suggestions for improving their effectiveness.

They also expressed that undergraduate and graduate programs should be reviewed separately rather than together. Although they are not always done jointly, again we have done this a number of times and reviewers have never previously expressed this concern. While it can imply less depth of review for each program, it offers the advantage of being able to consider recommendations that incorporate interactions across programs offered through the same department (e.g., aligning course and curriculum designs that align with TAs available). Again, future joint reviews of both programs will incorporate their suggestions for improving the effectiveness of the review.

Like the department, I am gratified by the overall very positive assessment of both the undergraduate and graduate programs. The department has worked hard in recent years to improve the structure and design of the programs and the students' experience. As is to be expected, the review identified specific areas for enhancement in the coming years. A number of the recommendations, in a sense, bear on the broader operation and life of the department, such as continuing to work on an equitable distribution of labour in the department and a participatory departmental culture. As such, they do not call for specific program changes.

The department has offered a detailed and robust response outlining how it will act on each recommendation. Work has already begun in a number of areas. I offer additional comment on a few that require resources of action by the Dean's Office.

**Graduate Student Support.** The university, increased the minimum funding floor for in-time PhD students, funded by each Faculty, effective September 1, 2023. The Faculty of Social Sciences has developed a revised approach to funding graduate students that can provide this additional support in a flexible way that can also accommodate future changes to the funding floor. Separately, the Faculty created a research-related teaching release program tied to obtaining external research funding that requires faculty to use some of those resources to support graduate students through research

assistantships. Finally on this note, Sociology is among the departments that have managed TA and Scholarship funding particularly well in recent years.

Relations with Alumni. The university recently re-organized Alumni Relations to strengthen alumni support through each Faculty. This additional, Faculty-specific alumni support will enhance the department's ability to engage with alumni.

Department Culture. The department has worked hard in recent years to build a stronger, more collegial culture that will invite greater engagement by faculty, staff and students. This includes an explicit, equity-oriented process for allocating administrative and service responsibilities, a better integration of graduate admissions decisions and the distribution of supervisory responsibilities, and improved communication. As the reviewers note, there is more work to be done, but it is also important to note valuable work done in this respect in recent years.

#### **Quality Assurance Committee Recommendation:**

McMaster's Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) reviewed the above documentation at the June 19, 2024, meeting. The committee recommends that the **Sociology** undergraduate and graduate program should follow the regular course of action with an 18-month progress report and subsequent full external cyclical review to be conducted no later than eight years after the start of the last review.