

**EXTERNAL REVIEWER REPORT**

**Department of Sociology  
Sonoma State University**

**Submitted to:**

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**External Reviewer:**

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## I. The Review Process

This report represents my assessment of the Sociology Department at Sonoma State University (SSU). I aim to match the level of thoroughness and care demonstrated in the Program Review Self Study Report so that this report will be a *useful tool*, not only in the review process, but also for discussing meaningful change in the Sociology Department at SSU. In addition, this report advises on what I believe are essential resources needed to further support student success. Recommendations for possible improvement are based on my analysis of the materials provided by the university and department, as well as the information gathered through face-to-face meetings. Finally, this report is generally structured to follow the narrative flow and focus of the Program Review Self Study.

To conduct this independent assessment, I received the Program Self-Study Report and associated supplemental materials provided by SSU and the Department of Sociology. In addition, I conducted a one-day campus visit on April 14, 2014 to review the program. I was able to dialogue with staff, faculty, and students of the Department as well as representatives of the university administration.

## II. Overview

The Sociology Department has done an excellent job of coping with limited resources amidst growing majors. Faculty members take pride in providing a rigorous Sociological education based on the ideals of public sociology and research skills. From meetings with students who provided feedback to one-on-one interviews with administration, the Sociology faculty members are clearly dedicated scholars who care deeply about students.

In this overview, I will share some general observations in terms of two major strengths that position the Department of Sociology as leaders at SSU in terms research and community engagement.

First, Sociology professors provide students with multiple and meaningful research experiences. This requires intensive mentoring and help with writing/revising of proposals and papers. They are also active in their own research agendas – participating in policy efforts, editorial boards, and publishing books and journal articles. The Sociology professors at SSU are deeply involved in “real world” social issues and model a praxis of thoughtful analysis to improve the lives of others. The research expertise of

the faculty is also reflected in the overarching emphasis on research methods across the major. Sociology majors enjoy the best of the CSU ideal: the “teacher-scholar.”

Such “high impact” practices have impressive results. This year, Sociology students received the Provost’s Research Grants. Five students presented their research at the Pacific Sociological Association Meetings in Portland, Oregon. Previously, students presented at the California Sociological Association meetings and attended the American Sociological Association meetings. Each year, they participate in the undergraduate research conference sponsored by Santa Clara University. Several Sociology students are McNair Scholars. Of the six students that SSU sent to the CSU Undergraduate statewide competition, 3 were from Sociology. Finally, all Sociology majors take the “Senior Seminar” in which they conduct original research. Vice President Sundberg confirmed that Sociology students are frequently highly active and successful in the various local, regional, and nation research grants, programs, awards, and competitions.

Second, through out the discussions with students and faculty, there is a sense of “Sociological Practice” running through the curriculum. Professors are motivated to give students analytical and practical tools to become change agents, critical consumers of information, and to see themselves (and their future) through a sociological lens. Students who I met in during my campus visit were very much engaged in the region, thinking about careers, and discussing graduate school. I learned that each semester, there are approximately 35 students doing internships in the community in a variety of organizations. Sociology majors are engaged in “Sociological Practice” by bringing sociological analysis into the community and allowing the community or organizations guide sociological thinking. A number of the Sociology courses – whether core requirements or electives – encourage students to take Sociology to the streets, into the fields, neighborhoods, and media.

The history of the program, as explained in the self-study, is compelling because of the stellar sociologists who founded the major, the faculty members who built up other programs at SSU, and also for enduring structural conditions such as recession era faculty lay-offs at SSU. The Sociology major is quite popular. In April 2014, there were 460 Sociology majors. Yet, they only have five tenure-track fulltime faculty members. (In contrast, in 2008, there were eight tenure-track fulltime faculty members for only 291 majors.)

The current tenure-track fulltime faculty members do an amazing job of providing meaningful courses, excellent advising, and self-reflective assessments of the department. **It is very clear that they are in need of more resources to serve the**

impressive growth of the major, and also to provide faculty coverage for some gaps in the curriculum that are essential to delivering the major. Part of their success, up to this point, is the "strong collective sense of its mission and [because] faculty work together" (page 4).<sup>1</sup> I commend the department for its "can do" spirit and hope they receive the required resources to enrich and enhance their major.

In this report, I offer my reflections about the SSU Sociology major so that the department can do what it clearly does well: reflect and strategize to better use the resources they currently have and to plan for growth. I also recommend specific types of resources that the Sociology Department needs to accomplish these goals. Together, in this joint effort, I believe the Sociology Department will become an even stronger major.

### III. Evaluation of the Curriculum

#### *Overview*

The Sociology Department conducted an intensive review of its curriculum that focused on Learning and Curricular Goals, faculty specialties, a comparison of requirements across the CSU and other relevant programs, and the "Sociological Experience" requirement. The level of thoughtfulness and thoroughness in the Program Review Self-Study is to be commended; it provided me with an excellent foundation for the one-day visit with students, faculty, and administrators.

I concur that the Sociology Department offers solid array of core courses and a wide variety of substantive (elective) courses. A strong theme emerged during my campus visit; faculty and students explained that there are not enough instructors to "cover" the major a sustainable manner. Therefore, the Department is considering immediate and important changes to the major, which I will discuss below in more detail.

I was particularly impressed by the innovative and intensive methods sequence for Sociology majors. Students learn about methods (mostly qualitative) and then take a substantive methods seminar (e.g., one method paired with one sociological area of study) to more deeply engage with scientific exploration and scholarship. These two courses then prepare students for the Senior Seminar. The methods seminar is an academic "sweet spot" in that it drew on the faculty members' substantive area and methodological expertise. However, as it was explained in the Self-Study and during my campus visit, they will no longer require the methodology seminar. Faculty deeply

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the direct quotes used in this report are from the Program Review Self Study (Draft 4-8-14).

regretted that these courses could not be offered as regularly as they should. Students expressed dismay about not being able to take the research seminars in a regular, frequent rotation.

### Learning Goals / Curricular Objectives

The Sociology Department has six (6) Learning Goals for the major and nine (9) Curriculum Objectives. (They are found on pages 4 – 6 of the Self-Study Report.) The department evaluated these goals and objectives, deciding that they are still “relevant and useful” (page 6).

After reviewing the extensive list, I found there could be ways to streamline the objectives and goals – and as a result – make them more clear in terms of *where and how they are employed in the major*. My recommendations below could benefit the students and tenure-track faculty, as well as being an excellent way to socialize new lecturers who are teaching the class for the first time. (While they are not numbered in the Self-Report, I do so here for clarity.)

- The definition provided for the Curriculum Objective #1 “Intellectual Competence and Relevance” seems to be similar to the Learning Goal #1 “Sociological Imagination.”
- Combine Curriculum Objectives #4 and #5, “Bibliographic Search” and “Information Technologies.”
- The Curriculum Objective #3 “Written and Oral Presentation” adds on the idea that students must learn “evaluation of scholarly and professional materials in Sociology.” However, this may be related to Curriculum Objective #2 “Critical Comprehension.”
- I concur with the Department of Sociology that it is to fulfill the Learning Goal #4 “Methodological and Analytical Depth” without having a required quantitative methods course.
- Combine Learning Goal #6 “Social Justice” with Curriculum Objective #9 “Responsible Citizen.”
- Consider changing the word use of “citizen” in both LG #6 and OC #9. While I believe we as academics understand “citizen” as being a word that reflects “responsible member of the (campus or regional) community.” For some students, the word implies immigration status. I

was pleased to meet an undocumented student during my SSU classroom visit and others who expressed connections in the region's immigrant community. I recommend more inclusive language choice to frame the sense of responsibility and community.

- I agree with the Self-Study Report that the Learning Goal #2 "Coverage of Core Substantive Areas," should be revised (page 6). Such a broadly defined goal does not serve the students in terms of clarity.<sup>2</sup>

I provide the above suggestions because at some CSU's, WASC assessment projects have suggested that department to operationalize Program Student Learning Outcomes in 5-year plans. It might be useful for SSU to develop smaller set of meaningful, measurable PSLO's in order to better assess the program and to develop future goals.

Another issue that concerned me is that it is not clear where and how these goals and objectives are in use across the curriculum for the major. For example, should every course have an element of all the objectives? Only core courses? Some syllabi included in the Self-Study Report did not reflect all or most of these program-level objectives. (I should add that one course could probably not utilize all the curricular objectives.) Is it the case that by the end of a sociology major's career at SSU, she or he should have experience or knowledge in each area of learning goals and curricular objective? Can students count on them? Are faculty encouraged to include some of goals or objectives and not others? I recommend creating a curricular map that explains when these goals and objectives are employed.

The Program/Major goals and objectives could be explained in terms of which classes each are being "introduced," "reinforced," and "applied in an advanced manner" and do this across the major's curriculum (core and electives). Note, the syllabus-level course objectives and learning goals are currently not explicitly connected to the major's curricular objectives and learning goals. Mapping the goals and objectives will reflect the Sociology Department's current efforts. For example, core classes, such as Theory, now have departmental curricular standards. This is a good way to improve the consistency across instructors, especially given the high rates of adjunct faculty teaching.

#### **Current Faculty Specialties and Course Offerings**

The Department of Sociology makes a compelling case for an urgent need to increase tenure-track hires. This is a critical need to meet the pace of growth for the major and

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also to improve curriculum. Currently, the five tenure-track fulltime faculty teach 5 to 6 courses each. Four of the five the faculty members teach the core courses: Introduction to Sociology Theory (Professor Dean), Research Methods (Professor Stearn), Methods Seminar (Professors Dean, Katz, Milligan and Stearns), and Senior Seminar (Professors Dean, Katz, Milligan and Stearns). A new colleague will begin in the fall who, among other courses, will be teaching Research Methods (core). Professor Katz will be leaving at the end of Spring 2014 for another position; this was described as a "major loss" for the department by faculty, students, and all three administrators I met during my campus visit. While there is another faculty member joining the department in the fall, the extraordinary service and advising performed by Professor Katz cannot be matched by a new junior faculty member. It is also important to note that three faculty FERP members have a "combined contribution to teaching ... of less than one full-time faculty member" (page 8).

The department employs adjunct faculty to round out its elective courses, some GE courses, and a handful of core courses. During the academic year (2013-2014), 13 lecturers taught courses in the Department of Sociology. In my classroom visit, students mentioned by name adjunct faculty members Suzel Bozada-Deas and Heather Flynn as "amazing" and "life changing" instructors. Students explained that these adjuncts taught rigorous, exciting courses and that they also cared deeply about the students. However, the department is concerned with high numbers of courses taught by adjunct faculty. Adjunct faculty cannot provide consistency for the major and meet the demands for the intensive advising required of full-time tenure track faculty.

The Sociology Department requests 6 new hires so that they can have 11 fulltime tenure track faculty members. While the CSU, including SSU, have experienced budget challenges, there must be a commitment to meet the educational needs of the students. In the spirit of a new and improved budget climate, I encourage the Sociology Department to consider the ways in which they would like to grow, given their current faculty expertise and strengths. For example, the first three areas for hiring are: social welfare-policy, technology-environment, and globalization-immigration.

The "social welfare and policy" position is urgently needed because of Professor Katz's departure. The Sociology Department reports that "over 70% of Sociology majors intend to pursue careers in the social work or social services areas."

Due to a previous faculty's departure whose expertise was Sociology of Technology, the Sociology Department sorely needs a scholar to support this "central research area in the field and one especially linked to the social problems of the 21<sup>st</sup> century." As a leader in "sociological practice," having a professor whose expertise is in the areas of

Sociology of Technology and/or Sociology of the Environment would allow Sociology to more create meaningful, regional research and internships. Additionally, these are areas of Sociology that could result in productive interdisciplinary collaborations with other departments on campus.

The Sociology of Globalization and Immigration focuses on pressing issues for California and beyond. In my classroom visit, students expressed the need to better understand their own lived experiences in a Sociological way that is relevant to the research they conduct and the careers they wish to pursue. In particular, they wanted to take more advanced, critical race courses.

### **Major Requirements**

The Department of Sociology has undertaken impressive research to compare its major to other CSU campuses and other COPLAC colleges. In addition, they draw upon the American Sociological Association's guidelines for undergraduate majors. In many ways, the SSU Sociology major is very aligned with these comparative cases with a couple of exceptions: they did not have a quantitative requirement and they had required more qualitative methods. There are a number of action items listed in the Self Study that I address below.

### **Statistics**

Add a statistics requirement to the core curriculum. I commend the Sociology Department for conducting such thoughtful research about "gaps" in their core curriculum. I concur that the lack of a required quantitative methods is problematic and was pleased that the Sociology Department is taking great strides to address the issue. In addition, the hiring priorities listed for the next three hires seem to have an emphasis for someone who can teach quantitative methods.

Without quantitative methods, the major cannot fully deliver on one of its learning goals: to gain "Methodological and Analytic Depth." Students should have the tools to understand, deconstruct, and mount arguments in dialogue with scholarship that uses quantitative analysis.

While it is hard to do now with limited faculty resources, requiring majors to take Soc 301 "Statistics for Sociologists" will important. I would strongly discourage allowing students to take statistics from math or non-social science disciplines. Sociology majors must have access to relevant datasets and questionnaires, such as from the GSS (General Social Survey).



Until there are more faculty hires to support Soc 301, the School of Social Science could consider offering a course "Statistics for Social Sciences." This course would meet the needs of other majors and be designated as a GE to help students toward graduation. Additionally, it would be innovative to have such a course "count" for the diversity requirement if this class is taught with the appropriate curriculum and used a textbook such as Statistics for a Diverse Society, by Chava Frankfort-Nachmias and Anna Leon-Guerrero (Sage Press). The text aims to "help students learn statistics through real research examples related to the dynamic interplay of race, class, gender, and other social variables."

The Chair of Sociology reports that it is hard to retain professors who conduct quantitative research. The lack of smart classrooms and limited access to computer labs are some of the challenges for professors teaching Quantitative Methods. New hires for Quantitative Methods should be nurtured and given resources needed to do their job. During my visit, the Provost indicated support for a quantitative methods requirement; perhaps his office could help facilitate better access to classroom computer labs, allocation of resources, and related software. The department could help by socializing new faculty hires about utilizing teaching assistants for the use of these courses.<sup>3</sup>

Adding a social science statistics requirement gives students the important tools for professional careers and graduate school. Meeting with student during my campus visit made it apparent that many are hungry to learn more statistics because they are already working part or fulltime with organizations that produced grants using quantitative analysis. Adjunct lecturer Heather Flynn was mentioned by several students as having a "hard but fun" Senior Seminar that was based on quantitative methods and analysis. With the new hire in the fall and at least one lecturer, this new requirement is sure to better prepare students for upper-division Sociology electives and core courses, graduate school, and a competitive job market.

#### Lower-Division

I agree with the department's assessment: one or two more lower-division electives are needed. In particular, adding a lower-division "Introduction to Statistics in Sociology" will truly prepare students for the new statistics requirement, previously discussed. Students can "double dip" lower division Sociology courses designated as GE. It will reflect that SSU is becoming less a "transfer university" and is focused on admitting more freshman students. Those who begin their college career at SSU will be on par

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<sup>3</sup> Based on the syllabi submitted for the Program Review, I noted that some professors did not use undergraduate "teaching assistants" while others used 5 to 10 in a single class. The issue of undergraduate teaching assistants or their role in delivering the major was not discussed in this self-study, but the issue did emerge in my classroom visit.

with those Sociology students who transfer from local community colleges where, according to the students I spoke with, they are well-prepared to transfer to the Sociology major at SSU.

### Methods Seminar

As previously discussed, the "methods seminar" is a terrific course according to both students and faculty. Yet, because of the need to cover other core courses and due the impending requirement for statistics, this course is no longer required. I suggest reorganizing the concentrations and adding a "methods seminar" elective of in each concentration.

### Sociological Experience

I am thoroughly impressed with the courses designated to meet a requirement for the Sociological Experience. Its goal is to "provide students with opportunities to develop awareness of social issues and use sociological perspectives to engage with the community outside of the university" (page 12). The "Sociological Experiences" courses are offered regularly and the department makes a strong commitment to offer adequate seats for majors (between 185 and 199, depending on the academic year). The data demonstrate that students appreciate and value "The Sociological Experience" requirement.

The Sociological Experience requirement truly embodies the ideals of Public Sociology, which according to Michael Burawoy, "endeavors to bring sociology into dialogue with audiences beyond the academy, an open dialogue in which both sides deepen their understanding of public issues." This focus is part of the American Sociological Association section, Sociological Practice and Public Sociology (SPPS), which aims to "advance sociologically-informed research and practice, to further public discussion of sociological issues, and to promote the use of sociology to inform public policy." Thus, the constellation of courses offered demonstrate currency in the discipline and aligns well with these broader ASA goals.

I appreciate that the Sociological Experience is not just an internship class or a service learning requirement but is steeped in deep, critical thinking and in curriculum that carefully examines social issues and social problems, students engage in regional and local communities, and develop understanding of their role in society (via careers) as Sociologists after they graduate. The Sociological Experience truly reflects high impact pedagogy and inspires life long learners.

I concur that better communicating the message and goals for the Sociological Experience will increase this "crown jewel" of the Sociology major at SSU.

### Concentrations

I agree that the Sociology Department should no longer “require” students to take electives from three of the five concentrations. The suggestion of allowing students to choose electives is fine. However, I would encourage the Sociology Department to take a step further.

Previous to my campus visit, I read over the material for this review and noticed that current faculty expertise may not be adequately reflected in the course catalog with regard to electives. (Courses were likely still in existence long after the faculty member who taught it or even created it had left.) Then, during my campus visit, this idea was confirmed. Also, faculty discussed the effects on curriculum because of three former full-time faculty who have significantly reduced their time through the Faculty Early Retirement Program (FERP).

I recommend an exercise in “analytically coding” the courses currently “on the books” to better understand sociological themes that emerge and to examine possible (re)configurations of current concentrations.

These emerging themes will facilitate a discussion in the department and will help clarify important content areas for a Sociology major. (The assessment team in this department has demonstrated a strong analysis of disciplinary understanding in the report by referencing to the publications in our field by the American Sociological Association.) Are there Sociological themes missing that should be included and are the classes needed (or counted from another major) to round out that theme? For example, I noticed that there were no upper-division courses in the field of race or immigration. There are no upper-division courses on Inequality, which some Sociology majors require. As mentioned previously, students in my classroom visit expressed a strong desire to take courses in white privilege and critical race studies.

For the small group of fulltime tenure-track faculty, this streamline and clarifying of themes could be an exciting time to articulate a new departmental identity and direction in terms of relevancy in the community (e.g., sociological practice, critical race and immigration issues) and in national and international discourses (e.g., technology, bioethics, public policy).

#### IV. Resource Allocation

The Department of Sociology has conducted a self-study that includes examining the role of the Sociology minor, advising load and practice, analyzing cross-listed course, and the role of GE in the major. Each issue was examined with thoroughness. Once again, I commend the assessment team for taking seriously the program review and for choosing to address issues that explore maintaining the high standards for the major.

##### The Sociology Minor

The Sociology department has an important role in offering a minor to students as a way to enhance their liberal arts education. Because the department has a strong internship and career preparation curriculum, minors can take advantage of these strengths to further develop their post-graduation goals. I agree that continuing to offer the minor (48 minors in Spring 2014) is “beneficial to students and has a relatively small impact on department resources” (page 19).

##### Advising and the Student-Faculty Ratio

The Sociology Department presents clear data that, despite the enormously inequitable ratio of faculty to students, the Sociology majors utilize advising often and are very satisfied with the quality of advising they receive. Almost 70 percent of graduating seniors surveyed reported they sought advising at least once or more a semester. Sixty-two (62) percent indicate the advising experience is very effective. In particular, students reported satisfaction with the availability of faculty who offer encouragement and expert knowledge of careers and graduate school.

One of the compelling discussions in the Self-Study refers to the advisee to advisor ratio. Sociology has the highest in the School of Social Sciences. It is very clear – *just on the advising load alone* – that the Sociology Department needs more fulltime tenure track faculty. Five (5) professors advising 460 majors and 48 minors is indeed problematic and translates to a ratio of **101 students for each faculty**. (This assumes equally distributed advising loads and service to the department; it does not take into consideration possible unequal distributions among the faculty members.) The Chair of Sociology explained giving the department 6 new hires for a total of 11 fulltime tenure-track faculty members would result a more reasonable ratio of 42 students for each faculty member. The Self-Study focuses on the ratio, which is important, and does not address the underlying practice that shapes the enormous advising load.

My perspective is that of a CSU faculty member who comes from a university about the same size as SSU. My university (CSUSM) has a comprehensive advising center for general advising and educational planning. Admirably, the SSU Sociology faculty members coordinate with each other to provide the widest possible coverage of open

office hours for students and accommodates the *general advising* that must be done for all the majors. However, as a professor who does not do “general advising,” my office hours represent the time and space with which to work one-on-one (or in small groups) with students enrolled in my classes, help their comprehension on specific course material, give individualized feedback on learning, problem solve study skills challenges, and motivate them to succeed. Former students often return to office hours and seek mentoring, help with graduate school, feedback on job search efforts, etc. (This is a familiar role for all professors.) Depending on the flow of the semester and due dates, office hours are quite busy with this type of activity. I found it distressing to think of the human capital focused on professors advising students on all aspects of their entire educational journey, including GE requirements and transfer units at SSU. It also concerns me that there is not consistent and required training for “people soft” management of student data and changes made to their academic records.

The model of professors who do general and academic/faculty advising could be connected to the COPLAC model. At small liberal arts colleges, the faculty indeed have this general advising function. However, at the CSU, class size is increasing and there is a lack of resources in general for the university, college, and department. Therefore, this model does not translate well to the typical CSU program that has more than 500 majors and minors. The technical aspects and workload of advising and the assumption that professors have *student services professional expertise*, in my opinion, is simply not the purview of a CSU Sociology professor.<sup>4</sup> These extra advising duties are burdensome and distract professors from the more important work of advising with a focus on Sociological academic and professional development.

At the college level, the Dean indicates that there could be a newly hired Academic Advisor for the school of Social Sciences. This would be a welcome first step in reducing general advisory duties. A CSU campus should have a comprehensive academic advising center for majors as well as undeclared students.

#### Cross-Listed Courses

The Sociology Department has analyzed how they provide extensive support to other majors, and in return, receive support from other departments. In some cases, Sociology majors benefit from cross-listings. For example, Criminology and Criminal Justice Studies consistently allow Sociology students five seats in four courses; in contrast, Sociology consistently offers one course for five CCJS students. According to the Self-Study Report, CCJS is happy with this arrangement.

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<sup>4</sup> Article 20, “Workload,” of the CBA states that “advising students” is additional *professional* responsibilities as well as “mentoring” students (CFA/CSU MOU, pp. 71-72).

In the subsequent analysis presented in the self-study report, other majors that utilized Sociology courses have a relatively minor impact, except for Human Development. I agree that Sociology should consider *some type of restriction for HD majors*. Soc 300 Research Methods seems most impacted and is a requirement for Sociology majors. In Spring 2013, for example, 15 percent of students in the class were HD (18 HD and 95 Soc). I suggest a restriction with this required course and assess the impact on the major.

Given that Sociology allows students to "double dip" their GE courses with the majors, it seems that the large amount of GE courses Sociology currently offers is prudent and in the best interest of the students. However, I would caution in creating more GE designations. The GE courses also serve to attract new majors and limiting them is one way to control growth until more faculty are hired.

#### Impact Declaration

The Sociology Department has extensively discussed and debated whether to declare impactation. By the time I arrived at my campus visit, this issue seemed to have been decided. The Dean for the School of Social Sciences agrees that declaring impact will be beneficial to both the current students and will also encourage undeclared majors to work toward a more meaningful process of deciding their major. Also, many of the majors in the School of Social Sciences are impacted. The question at this point seems to be not if Sociology would declare impactation, but deciding on the criteria entry in the major.

I appreciate the thoughtfulness in which Sociology has considered the various criteria and the GPA analysis described in the report. They will begin the impactation paperwork with CSU in the fall, but criteria did not need to be finalized at that time. I agree that the criteria for impactation should be further deliberated and have these suggestions:

- I encourage the department to reach out to other Sociology or related departments in the CSU who have declared impactation. Find out about their criteria. Ask them how impactation affected their courses, workload, and diversity of students (broadly defined).
- Analyze the data from the time period when SSU Sociology declared impactation (2003-2009) to understand changes in the majors' social location and their rate to graduation.
- Obtain institutional data from the SSU School of Social Science majors who have declared impactation to assess the effects based on social justice

concerns and to begin a dialogue of “best practices” for declaring impactation for not only SSU but at other CSU’s.<sup>5</sup>

The Sociology Department has concerns about the social justice impact for declaring impactation. I believe these are real concerns and encourage the Sociology faculty members to continue to think through the ways in which criteria may affect diverse groups of students.

Among the options discussed, taking a Sociology course along with a reasonable GPA requirement may be a good start to address the impactation concerns. However, there are other ways to increase the diversity of majors, such as add another criteria option that would change the weight of GPA. For example, the Sociology department could privilege students who took courses and did well in areas related to Sociology (e.g., CCJS, Latino and Chicano Studies, Queer Studies) or in courses that had been designated as service learning.

The lingering question, as emphasized in the self-study is: Will declaring impactation prohibit certain groups of students’ access to the major? Given the rigor and seriousness in which the Sociology Department undertakes self-assessment, I encourage the faculty to find ways to “assess” the effects after impactation. I believe that having a built-in and on-going mechanism to evaluate student experiences (and exclusions) after impactation will inform department decisions about impactation. The data collected could also offer valuable ways to adjust criteria and inform other departments in the School of Social Sciences. This project may be especially motivating to faculty members who still feel uneasy about declaring impactation.

#### *Additional Considerations*

The Sociology Department is considering adopting the Gerontology program. I believe this could be a very strong positive addition to the major but I would advise the department to first evaluate the major’s five concentrations and take a hard look at what is possible, given the resources and direction of the department. I could easily imagine an “Aging and the Life Course” concentration; this is one of the more robust sections of the American Sociological Association and clearly a major policy and social justice concern. Important subfields to consider are ethno-gerontology (methodology), elderly Latinos, the Sociology of Alzheimers, and “death and dying.”

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<sup>5</sup> In a web search that I did for scholarship and policy papers on majors that declared impactation, I realized that there is a pressing need for thoughtful guidance on this issue.

The Sociology Department is considering an "Applied Sociology" concentration. I agree that adding more resources and courses to this area of concentration would be ideal to prepare students' post-graduation job searches. Yet, the overall identity of the major is already steeped with "Sociological Practice" activities and curriculum. The School of Social Sciences could be an organizing force for a program that could benefit and strengthen social science majors in general. As a point of comparison, "Career Readiness Initiative" was created by the Dean of College of Social Sciences, Arts, Behavioral and Social Sciences at CSUSM.

As mentioned in a previous section, I agree that adding lower division courses such as "Social Problems" and "Self and Society" to the major would help prepare the growing "native" students who begin and complete their undergraduate degrees at SSU. At some point, "Introduction to Statistics in Sociology," will also be useful to support the success of those taking the required Soc 301 (Statistics in Sociology). In reviewing the blue print for majors in the course catalog, it is unusual that a major is only required to take one Sociology course (Soc 201) in their first two years as a major. (Soc 263 Race and Ethnicity is an elective and could be used as a GE course.) Also, if the impaction criteria are to include "taking a Sociology course," then additional lower division courses allows students experience Sociology early on in their careers. I would caution, however, adding more courses without taking a laser-like focus on reorganizing the concentrations and assessing faculty resources.

### **Conclusion**

I will conclude with two smaller items that I reflect the integrity and rigorous approach to students learning. They may seem "minor" but speak volumes to the dedication of the Sociology professors at SSU.

One way that Sociology demonstrates passion for students' engagement is the creation and distribution of the excellent department newsletter. The Fall 2013 issues was 9 pages and packed with information and accolades. Several pages of the students' senior seminar research abstracts were included, along with service learning projects and field trips, some of which were funded by the Dean. Students who are graduating "with distinction" were profiled. Alumni news reflected students in MA and PhD programs. Faculty members' activities and updates were also included. Information about veteran's students advising and Sociology club were also featured. Newsletters and individual photographs of students engaged in research and service learning activities are displayed prominently on the department's hallway. This type of media, produced by the department, communicates to all the majors a strong, dynamic Sociology major.



Another indicator of the rigor of this department is that they administer a "graduation exit survey" from their seniors, which is conducted each semester. The Sociology Department considers this data collection as "part of an on-going self-assessment process." I commend the department for utilizing a *best practice* and the exit survey should be considered a model for other departments on campus.

Finally, I must repeat my appreciation of the outstanding self-study report and the well-organized supplemental materials, which made the review of the Sociology program at Sonoma State University an enjoyable experience. The staff, the faculty, and the campus representatives were all open and transparent in allowing me access to important information and responding to my inquiries. From my campus visit, it was clear that the Sociology faculty has an excellent reputation for academic rigor, leadership, and collegiality. Overall, the Sociology Department delivers a strong major, is current in the discipline, and prepares students for success in the work force and/or graduate careers.

## **Appendix A – Agenda of Campus Visit**

### **Schedule for Sociology External Review Visit Reviewer: Dr. Marisol Clark-Ibanez, CSU San Marcos SSU Contact: Sheila Katz Monday, April 14, 2014**

- 8:30am: Dr. Clark-Ibanez arrives on campus, Sheila to meet her at E. Cotati Rd. entrance.
- 8:45-9:15am meet with Dr. Sheila Katz
- 9:15am: meet with Dr. Cindy Stearns
- 9:45am: meet with Dr. Melinda Milligan
- 10:30am: Katz's Soci: 498: Senior Seminar class in Stevenson 2001 (Melinda to escort)
- 11am-noon: Lunch with Sheila and Melinda (Overlook)
- 12pm-1:45pm: Soci Dept Faculty meeting
- 2pm: meet with Dean John Wingard (Sheila to escort to Dean's office)
- 2:30: break
- 3pm: meet with Provost Andrew Rogerson (Sheila to escort to Academic Affairs)
- 3:30pm: meet with Associate VP Elaine Sundberg
- 4pm: meet with Dr. James Dean
- 4:30pm: meet with Dr. Peter Phillips
- 5pm: Closing conversation with Sheila