



**TO:** Jennifer Summit, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

**FROM:** Alvin N. Alvarez, Dean of the College of Health & Social Sciences

**DATE:** April 27, 2018

**RE:** Department of Sociology's Seventh-Cycle Undergraduate Program Review:  
Dean's Response

The external reviewers for the seventh-cycle review of the sociology's undergraduate program provide both complimentary comments as well as helpful recommendations for this program's improvement. The external reviewers note that "*Sociology's curriculum is rigorous and represents important trends in the discipline. Students have access to in-depth training in research methods and theory, and are well prepared for a competitive job market or graduate school.*" They also write "*The faculty remains committed to the liberal arts education that has been the Department's tradition, including its focus on individualized mentorship, and education of students in writing, communication, and research skills. It is also clear that the Sociology faculty is at the forefront of our discipline in their research on sexualities, transnational sociology, immigration, health, and inequalities.*" I share the positive sentiments and observations made by the external reviewers, and I also appreciate the attention to detail in the reports that have been produced as part of this seventh-cycle review.

The recommendations that the external reviewers offered for programmatic improvement of sociology's undergraduate program fall in the following categories:

1. Delivering the Curriculum and Advising Post-Impaction
2. Integrating Sociology and the Sexuality Studies MA
3. Resources
4. Faculty Support

**Dean's Recommendation:**

Regarding recommendations about delivering the curriculum and advising post-impaction, one suggestion the reviewers offer is to raise the enrollment caps in some of the courses to allow increased student access to the sociology major. I agree with this as long as a) it can be done without creating bottlenecks in other courses in the major (e.g., those that require computer labs, GVAR classes, etc.), b) it does not create inequitable workloads for faculty and c) the pedagogical quality and integrity of the courses are not compromised. The external reviewers also suggested that lecturers be permitted to teach GVAR sections. I agree with this recommendation so long as the lecturers receive the requisite training and possess the appropriate skills to teach GVAR for sociology. It is common for lecturers to teach GVAR courses throughout various academic units in the college. I agree wholeheartedly that tenured

and tenure-track faculty members rotate teaching core courses in sociology. This is important for a few different reasons: (a) it creates equitable teaching assignments across the faculty; and (b) departmental cross-training creates depth and breadth in terms of those faculty capable of teaching core courses and have coverage at times of sabbatical leaves, retirements, etc.; in terms of support of faculty to prepare to teach core courses I am hesitant to offer assigned time to these individuals and would recommend that preparations for teaching these courses be treated like course preparations in other instances. Concerning the unit value of courses, I leave it up to the department about whether or not courses are 3 or 4 units. However, I do believe that this merits attention from the department in light of the workload implications it has for students as well as the logistical and scheduling challenges this presents for the college, particularly in light of the standardization of time-blocks. For students to master core concepts, I advise the sociology department to consider scaffolding course content so concepts are covered in a highly structured and planned way. Regarding advising and assigned time, I am not in support of offering faculty course buyouts to do advising given financial considerations and the fact that it is standard practice within the College to regard advising as a normative part of faculty's service and teaching responsibilities. Nevertheless, I appreciate the external reviewers' creativity in providing a number of advising-related recommendations and this type of creativity is consistent with my goal to examine faculty and peer advising more systemically throughout the College and its respective departments. Also, the external reviewers suggest that sociology be permitted to hire tenure-track faculty members. Although tenure-track hires are a priority for sociology, such requests will be contingent on a number of factors including but not limited to (a) availability of funding; and (b) alignment with department, college, university, and community priorities (i.e., enrollment demand, curricular need, workforce demands, etc.).

The external reviewers recommend that sociology and sexuality studies become integrated and I would like to refine my response to this integration by making a distinction between a) pedagogical or curricular integration and b) organizational or operational integration. With respect to the pedagogical perspective, there has been a long history at SFSU of defining sexuality studies as an interdisciplinary program that draws upon multiple disciplinary lenses (e.g., art, literature, education, classics, history, philosophy, etc.) in addition to those of the social sciences. I believe that this interdisciplinary focus benefits our students and must be preserved and maintained and that sexuality studies not be constrained to a pedagogical or curricular stance that rests solely on the social sciences in general or sociology in particular. I strongly urge that sexuality studies become as interdisciplinary as possible – as is the case with sexuality studies both nationally and internationally -- while at the same time respecting the fact that a number of sociology department faculty teach sexuality studies courses and that sociology has served as an administrative home for the sexuality studies program. In order for sexuality studies to achieve this, I would strongly encourage the department to develop and maintain long-term partnerships with academic units outside of sociology that may contribute faculty expertise to an interdisciplinary perspective on sexuality and to re-examine how their curriculum may be redesigned in order to broaden its interdisciplinary reach. Indeed, there are a number of programs within the College who have done this successfully such as Criminal Justice and a consultation may be helpful. Moreover, it may be helpful for the department to create an interdisciplinary committee – involving multiple units and potential stakeholders from across campus – to reexamine the pedagogy of sexuality studies. In any case, to the extent that the external reviewers' recommendations are intended to or result in a diminishment of this interdisciplinary focus, then I would like to be explicit in stating that I would find this to be highly problematic. In contrast, I fully support the operational and organizational integration of the units as intended by the university-wide reorganization that was instituted in 2011. To that end, I

would strongly encourage the department to seek out opportunities that encourage shared governance and full and bi-directional participation by all faculty across both units. To the extent possible and where pedagogical expertise allows, I would strongly encourage faculty across both programs to teach in multiple areas, particularly in light of the recent retirements in the department and the loss of faculty in sociology. The creation of by-laws may also help to clarify and codify expectations as suggested by the reviewers. In short, I believe that it is critical to identify further opportunities for operational and organizational integration that optimize faculty resources and expertise, while also retaining the pedagogical and curricular integrity of sexuality studies as an interdisciplinary program.

The external reviewers made recommendations about resources. Specifically, they recommended hiring new tenure-track faculty members in pairs, and that faculty members be assigned to single occupancy offices. Regarding hiring more tenure-track faculty members, that will be dependent on a number of factors mentioned above. Another recommendation was to assign faculty to single-occupancy, private office space. Quite frankly, space is extraordinarily tight throughout the college and at the university more broadly. All faculty offices are shared within the HSS building with the exception of unit heads and due to issues of both limited space and equity it is not likely that faculty members will be afforded such office space for the foreseeable future.

Finally, the external reviewers made specific recommendations about providing faculty support. The issue of helping post-tenured faculty members renew their research agendas was raised along with a recommendation that this issue be addressed. I agree with this recommendation and I strongly suggest that the sociology faculty – either individually or as a group – work with CHSS’ assistant dean of faculty development and scholarship for assistance with enhancing their professional achievement and growth. The comment “*And the University should strive to find ways to formally recognize the greater amount of mentoring often provided to students by faculty of color*” is broadly known in the academy and deserves serious attention and resolution for workload equity to be addressed. The Service Task Force will work on making recommendations to the dean and department chairs in the coming academic year about how to address this disparity. Finally the external reviewers call attention to challenges surrounding attracting international faculty regarding immigration processes and housing. These are significant issues. I agree that we could partner with local organizations to assist in these processes as well as to continue to work in concert with SF State’s Office of International Programs, which has some processes in place to help with immigration procedures. The university is in the process of increasing its housing capacity for students, faculty, and staff and groundbreaking for a mixed-used construction project will commence during the summer of 2018.

The external reviewers’ seventh-cycle review for the sociology undergraduate program is thought provoking. There are many instances in the self-study as well as in the external reviewers’ report that point out the many assets that sociology possesses. This review also highlights areas in which sociology can develop into an even better program particularly in terms maintaining a pedagogical and operational balance with sexuality studies. Ultimately, the outcome has been positive and I look forward to sociology’s continued success in strengthening its major and serving our students.