

**Department of Sociology, San Francisco State University**

**External Review Report**  
7th Cycle Program Review

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## **1.0 Overview of program** (based on self-study and campus visit)

The Department of Sociology and Sexuality Studies at San Francisco State, which is situated within the College of Health and Social Sciences (HSS), offers an undergraduate sociology major and minor and, since 2012, houses the Sexuality Studies interdisciplinary MA. Sociology and Sexuality Studies operate independently in terms of degree offerings and hiring, but there is cross-pollination in that Sociology faculty often teach, mentor and serve as administrators in Sexuality Studies. 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. The Department has responded well to significant structural changes: (1) The restructuring of colleges and homing of Sociology into HSS, (2) the declaration of impaction during a state-wide economic crisis, and (3) the movement of Sexuality Studies into Sociology. The Department is at an important moment in conceptualizing its programmatic functioning—it is relaxing impaction with the goal of growing majors and working through how it will accommodate those majors, and it is reflecting on both its identity and program functioning now that it houses an interdisciplinary MA. We see that the Sociology Department at SF State is an excellent place for Sexuality Studies because of its stated commitment to and expertise in mixed methods research, social justice, inequalities, intersectionality, and interdisciplinary scholarship.

The Department has substantively responded through programmatic changes to nearly all of the recommendations from the previous external review in 2004. It has done so in a time of tremendous structural change as noted above. The Department has undertaken a strong curricular review process, producing: (1) A compelling and substantive mission statement and programmatic teaching objectives, (2) a relaxing of core course sequencing requirements for

theory and introduction to research methods, (3) a new undergraduate curriculum committee, and (4) new yearly faculty retreats where Sociology and Sexuality Studies faculty reflect on curricular mapping, teaching the core, programmatic identity, and aligning teaching objectives throughout the curriculum. All of these are concrete responses to the 2004 program review recommendations.

The Department has 12 tenure line faculty with a projection of 3 leaving in the near future. Their most recent faculty hires offer an excellent fit with the Department's mission, area needs (given imminent retirements), trends in the discipline, and student interests in sociology. Most faculty have strong research and publishing agenda and exhibit their commitment to community-engagement through scholarship and teaching. Their mission statement's claim of being a social justice-oriented department is demonstrated in the faculty's teaching and research.

The Department is clear on where programmatic change is needed. 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.

## **2.0 Program Quality**

### **2.1 Program Planning**

The Department faces a number of programmatic challenges, some which are unique to the Department and others shaped by administrative changes. There is a climate of uncertainty as the Department thinks through how to respond to the increase in majors (with the loosening impact) and a new budgeting climate that will reward higher FTES. The Department is making every effort to respond to administrative mandates to assess

curriculum, eliminate bottlenecks, increase graduation rates, and grow the major post-impaction. They are doing so while also respecting their longer-term departmental culture of prioritizing effective teaching and mentorship. They operate in a climate where policies are new and untested, or in the process of being revised, and where the benchmarks by which programmatic performance will be evaluated remain somewhat unarticulated. They do not always seem to have all of the information to respond effectively; clearer lines of communication between administration and the Department will help the Department as it embarks on programmatic changes. Below we discuss some of the programmatic themes that arose in this review.

*Addressing impaction and growing the major.* The department is in the early stages of exploring the best methods for easing impaction and growing their majors. They declared impaction in 2013 out of a concern over managing a large number of majors (projected at 700 for the following year). The declaration of impaction decreased majors to 253 (Spring 2016), which was below their ideal major load of 350, and this decrease in majors did not improve graduation rates. The decrease in enrollments is shared by the university, which is a larger structural issue at SF State. Faculty articulate the following concerns about a large major: (1) The high student to faculty ratio, which inhibits mentoring and classroom learning, (2) not being able to offer enough sections of core courses, (3) resisting the general trend toward factory like conditions in delivering a sociology BA, and (4) acquiring majors from other impacted departments but who may not be invested in sociology. These concerns warrant consideration given the Department's commitment to teaching.

The Department recognizes the need to increase its majors by relaxing impaction; its approach to planning post-impaction is cautious, wanting to see how scheduling, graduation rates, and course offerings pan out as enrollments increase. With a new budgetary model that

rewards FTES, it is in the interest of Sociology faculty to grow their enrollments in order to secure economic support. This is an important moment where the Department can request support to increase enrollments and to meet advising and assessment mandates.

*Distribution of TT faculty in teaching core courses:* The Department is having in-depth discussions about the curriculum, which brings to light how course assignments are accomplished. One concern is that select TT faculty tend to repeatedly teach the core while others teach special topics courses, or courses in their research area. The inequitable distribution of TT faculty in teaching core course has several problems: (1) Core courses tend to require intensive teaching (2) core courses are four credit hour courses (all others are three) (3) teaching in one's area allows reflection and progress on faculty research, and (4) teaching in one's area allows an easier integration of research into teaching, which is increasingly an expectation of the CSU. The structural outcome of this inequitable distribution of TT faculty across the core presents workload issues for some faculty over time.

*Program restructuring for the Sociology and Sexuality Studies Department.* The merging of Sociology with Sexuality Studies has, for the most part, worked well for both. Sociology faculty spoke of wanting this MA program, enjoying teaching in the program and working with graduate students, and they saw Sexuality Studies as a fit with Sociology. Many Sociology faculty have sexuality as an area of research and teaching expertise, and other Sociology faculty have methodological and theoretical training to contribute. Nonetheless, for some, the relationship between the programs raises issues regarding the Department's identity. There remains confusion, and double speak, when addressing the functioning of these sometimes united and sometimes distinct programs. Sociology faculty work in and for the Sexuality Studies program but Sexuality Studies faculty do not work in nor teach for Sociology. Both programs are united in that they share staff, office space, and a chair. They become distinct in

their curricular decisions, hiring, self-study, and in this external review. A key issue is that the Sexuality Studies MA is supported by the resources of the Sociology Department, with little involvement of Sexuality Studies faculty in the teaching and administrative work of Sociology.

## 2.2 Student Learning and Achievement

The Department consists of a group of tenure track faculty who are dedicated and knowledgeable teachers, and who view mentorship and advising as an important component of their work at SF State. Both administration and faculty recognize that successful teaching, particularly writing, is a point of pride for the Department. Their decision to declare impaction was shaped by their commitment to effective mentorship, teaching writing, and smaller class sizes. The Department is reflecting on how to teach the skills throughout the curriculum. Their shared teaching goals reflect what they want sociology students to master in a sociology degree. Their work on the mission and goals has allowed them to reflect on how all courses can share teaching goals. For example, the curriculum committee is looking at the specific kinds of communication skills (goal 5) they want students to harness and where and how students can acquire them throughout the curriculum. Five learning goals is a reasonable number, and they are concrete enough to be assessed as outcomes of student learning in future studies. They are also in line with the Department's mission statement.

## 2.3 The Curriculum

The Department has an outstanding curriculum. The program's two-tiered methodological core course requirements, which allow students general training in sociological research and then upper division specialized training in either quantitative or qualitative methods, reflects the seriousness with which the department treats its undergraduate sociological training. Additionally, the two-pronged theoretical directions (classical or contemporary theories) that students can choose between allows students to mold

their academic paths in preparation for job training or graduate school. The Department's two directed substantive areas—global inequalities and inequalities within the US—reflect the strengths of not only sociological scholarly contribution but that of the program's faculty. The curriculum consists of high impact practices, including the writing-intensive GWAR, the commitment to encouraging a cohort model for students as they move through required curriculum, the offering of capstone seminars, and their proposed emphasis to follow writing and skill building across the curriculum.

The Department is conducting a thorough examination of its major, by meeting, discussing, analyzing, and changing the curriculum. They have already addressed some curricular issues and they are on the right track for thinking through how to unite the curriculum into a more holistic learning experience for students. This is excellent work. They have held a department retreat to discuss curriculum. They wrote a mission statement and teaching goals; they are revising the two tracks in the program; they are aligning each course's teaching goals, exploring what it means to teach writing and communication skills across the curriculum, and they are pinpointing what types of writing and communication skills they want students to acquire. They have relaxed some sequencing requirements in order to improve time to graduation—students can now take their theory course concurrently with their first methods course. They will revisit their capstone courses (students either do an internship or they work with faculty on research) to solidify across the capstones what students get out of this senior seminar experience. It is evident from their curriculum that sociology faculty are knowledgeable about teaching students, and remain committed to students becoming critical thinkers and strong writers. Finally, their curriculum strongly reflects their mission.

## 2.4 Faculty

The strong reputation and excellence of the Sociology Department arise from the many strengths of its faculty. Every member of the faculty with whom we spoke demonstrated serious interest in and commitment to student learning. The range of student evaluation scores received by the faculty is consistently at the high end of the scale. We observed a required methods course taught by a Dr. Jen Reck, a longterm lecturer, and we were impressed with her pedagogical creativity and skill, and her capacity to work with students on substantive methodological issues. Dr. Reck was the recipient of the 2017 Distinguished Faculty Award in recognition of her teaching.

The members of the tenured and tenure track faculty are teacher/ scholars whose active research programs regularly result in peer-reviewed journal articles and academic press books, which both revitalize their teaching and garner national recognition for the department. Junior faculty felt the department provided an environment that was stimulating and supportive. Given the relatively small size of the faculty, they span a broad spectrum of methodologies and specializations.

The faculty has shown resilience and good faith through a period of extraordinary institutional and departmental change. They have responded to these changes with creativity, a remarkable willingness to support each other and their students, and with a capability that maintains the quality of the program during demanding times.

Based upon its majors to faculty ratio, which is higher than the national average for the discipline (Self-study, p.11), the Sociology Department is stretched thin. It has 12 full-time tenured or tenure track faculty members. Professor Clay Dumont will retire in May 2018, bringing the number down to 11. Dr. Dumont regularly taught the core GWAR writing course (SOC 300) and the core course in classical theory (SOC 370). A second retirement of a senior

member of the Sociology faculty is expected to follow in 2018/19. Additionally, a member of the Sexuality Studies faculty, Assistant Professor Darius Bost will leave SF State for a position elsewhere at the end of the year. A reduction in Sexuality Studies faculty has implications for Sociology because Sociology faculty may be called upon to teach more in Sexuality, drawing resources away from delivery of the Sociology curriculum.

Hires made by the department since the last external review have considerably strengthened an already distinguished faculty. Drs. Francisco-Menchavez and Ramirez, hired in 2016, added to the department in multiple ways. Both work in the area of transnational sociology and immigration, complex and vital fields in Sociology and that are of particular interest for SF State students. Dr. Ramirez combines archival research with in-depth interviews to chronicle, across multiple generations, the lives of United States citizens of Mexican descent who were banished to Mexico in the 1930s. Dr. Francisco-Menchavez researches the family lives of Filipino domestic workers in New York and San Francisco, using a cutting-edge sociological method, participatory action research, where researchers work closely with community members to shape research strategies. Dr. Francisco-Menchavez's expertise in working with communities enables her to bridge the gap many students perceive exists between lived experience and academic instruction and to prepare them for careers in community-based organizations, local governments, and human service agencies.

Dr. Ramirez and Dr. Francisco-Menchavez strengthened the curriculum in important areas, including global studies broadly, and the specific areas of Mexican and Filipino migration, family, and sexualities. Their appointments to the faculty diversified the faculty's methodological approaches, and enhanced the Department's capacity to mentor significant populations of SF State students. Drs. Francisco-Menchavez and Ramirez are mentors to undergraduate and graduate students.

Three important appointments, made in 2007, preceded these hires. Dr. Alexis Martinez is a medical sociologist who uses community-based research to study marginalized populations; she has secured considerable outside funding, has published widely, and has been promoted to Associate Professor. Dr. Clare Sears' 2015 book, *Arresting Dress: Cross-Dressing, Law and Fascination in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco*, was published by Duke University Press, the leading press in Sexuality Studies. Dr. Sears has been promoted to Associate Professor. In 2016-17, with the support of Teagle funding, Dr. Martinez and Dr. Sears led the department's efforts to analyze and revise its curriculum.

Allen LeBlanc was also hired in 2007 as a Full Professor with a 1/1 course load through the Health Equity Initiative, with the expectation that he would raise external research funds, and in which he has been successful. His courses have been covered by grants for the past five years. Dr. LeBlanc serves as Interim Director of the Health Equity Institute and he consistently contributes to departmental administration by chairing the RTP committee.

Notably, in faculty appointments made in 2007 and 2016, untenured faculty members have been hired as pairs who conduct distinct but complementary research. We commend this strategy, which not only yields more from the costs of a national search, but also provides the support of a peer for assistant professors. The benefits of this approach and the need for it are amplified when hires follow many years in which there was no hiring, and when new hires are from communities that are under-represented in academia.

The department has a record of successfully advancing assistant professors to tenure. It appears that the university and department clearly define and communicate tenure requirements, that those criteria are fair, and that an appropriate range of scholarship is rewarded. The department strives to protect assistant professors from the most demanding service obligations. That said, faculty of color, women, and LGBTQ faculty are often called

upon to provide extraordinary amounts of mentoring, and to serve on college and university committees where their standpoint is needed. Mentoring and service is often informal, difficult to document, and is therefore invisible in the review and promotion process. We encourage the university to find ways to recognize this labor, and to provide ample mentoring resources for students via student services.

While assistant professors in the department have succeeded in reaching tenure, we had some concerns that support for faculty may fall off too sharply after tenure, resulting in members of the faculty lagging in their advancement to full professor. The current chair and the one who preceded her were appointed to chair as associate professors. This represents a very significant service burden at a relatively early career stage. The Self-Study indicates commitment to establish a formal mentoring program for assistant professors, which will pair them with more advanced colleagues. Care should be taken not to assign already overburdened associate professors to this task. We recommend that serious thought be given to building support structures to ensure that associate professors do not become stalled. Possibilities such as trans-disciplinary writing groups and workshops on post-tenure career strategies should be considered. This should also be a priority for the Assistant Dean of Faculty Development/Scholarship.

## 2.5 Resources

The Department has one main office, which is used by the chair, staff, AOC, Assistant AOC, and student assistants. It has two student resource rooms (one small room with two computers for Sexuality Studies graduate students), and one “smart” classroom. The classroom is fully utilized for Sociology course instruction during the core teaching hours and is put to use at off hours for evening courses and early-morning courses, faculty meetings and departmental events such as orientations. Courses that cannot be scheduled in the single

classroom, including those requiring computer laboratories are scheduled by the university. The department has begun offering online and hybrid courses.

An enduring resource issue is the lack of individual office space. The department is using its limited office space with extreme efficiency. For example, the department employs graduate writing tutors, who contribute to the crucial work of improving student writing. Writing tutors meet students in a “closet” space that also houses appliances and stores office supplies. With the exception of the chair, faculty share offices with one and sometimes two others. The 2004 program review recommended that Sociology create individual office spaces for full-time faculty. Some departments at SF State are able to provide individual offices for their tenured and tenure track faculty. The uneven distribution of resources across campus places Sociology faculty at a disadvantage in the RTP process.

At best academic offices are places where faculty may conduct the full range of their duties, including instructional preparation, student advising, writing, and holding meetings with colleagues. When members of the faculty share offices, the function of the office as a place to meet students takes precedence. This is particularly the case in a major such as Sociology that serves so many students. As a result, office mates have been encouraged to schedule office hours on alternate days and to come to campus only on those days. This practice leads to several unfortunate outcomes including a loss of collegiality and collaboration, rigidity in teaching schedules, and the necessity for faculty to use home offices as their principal places of work. The continuing problem of shared office space should not be indefinitely ignored.

The department is staffed by one full-time Academic Office Coordinator and one part-time Administrative Support Coordinator. The part-time Administrative Support Coordinator

resigned at the time that the review was conducted. A replacement for this part-time position should be hired.

## 2.6 The Program's Conclusions, Plans, and Goals

The Self-Study articulated three main goals. Curriculum revision is its primary goal, which is evidence of the collective commitment to student learning. We discuss the Department's curriculum revision above but note that the curriculum committee (Drs. Sears, Carrington, Francisco-Menchavez and Reck) will enable the department to rethink the ways in which learning objectives are achieved across the curriculum and will help it to identify the most important directions for future hires. The Department's second goal is to "deepen the relationship between Sociology and Sexuality Studies" (Self-Study, p. 24). The department identified potential synergies in the coordination of instruction and in the many dimensions of faculty development, which we endorse. The Department's third goal is to formalize its assessment process. Universities nationwide are engaged in the difficult task of developing sustainable and effective assessment methodologies. The Department has accomplished important groundwork for assessment through its curriculum mapping and faculty discussions of curriculum. We recognize the value of this less formal work and support the Department's efforts to develop assessment into a sustainable process. Lastly, the Department plans to work with the CHSS to establish an alumni association as part of a broader effort to raise external funds. We support the goal, while noting that serious fund-raising takes substantial time and that there will be limits to the energy a department chair can devote to fund-raising.

## 3.0 Commendations of Strengths and Achievements

The Department's strength is its curriculum, which is solidly grounded in Sociology while also including some of its cutting edge manifestations. Its methods sequencing is

exceptional and offers student research specialization in either qualitative or quantitative sociology. Additionally, students are able to focus on either contemporary or classical sociological theory at the undergraduate level. This sequencing not only prepares students well for designing and conducting sociological research but it constitutes substantive training in theory and research methods for graduate school or employment. The Department is also rethinking the two areas of sociological specialization to move the program away from the false divide between US social inequalities versus global inequalities. We do not recommend that the department go the direction of concentrations; their programmatic changes seek to facilitate student access to core courses and area courses and concentrations often have the opposite affect. The Department should think through two areas of emphasis that reflect the department's research and teaching, and through which students will have a framework to study sociology.

The Department's curricular mapping, including aligning core courses around shared teaching goals is very strong. It solidifies the learning that the Department wants to foster across the curriculum. This is a high impact practice.

The faculty is the foundation of the Department's strength. Recent hires ensure that SF State will continue its prestigious position among other sociology departments. The faculty maintain dynamic research and publishing records within cutting edge areas of sociology. The Department's new hires not only reflect its tradition of global sociology but also bring this research in conversation with contemporary areas of sociological research. Faculty research and teaching fits with the Bay Area, disrupting the divide between university and community.

The identity work they are doing around how to conceptualize the Sexuality Studies MA within a Sociology Department is particularly valuable. Given the Department's stated mission of being an interdisciplinary program that draws from the study of inequalities,

intersectionality and social justice, this Sociology Department is the ideal place for Sexuality Studies. There is much to be gained from this cross-pollination, which has already been set in motion.

Finally the department's commitment to teaching and mentoring as well as its general collegiality is exceptional. Repeatedly we heard from faculty that they felt supported by their colleagues that the department was a place where they could do innovative research and thinking, and that their teaching and mentorship was recognized and encouraged. The Department communicates this accessibility, openness, and intellectual freedom to their students so that their students can realize themselves as critical and innovative scholars.

#### **4.0 Recommendations and Strategies for Program Improvement**

##### *Delivering the curriculum and advising post-impaction*

Delivering the major's core courses is the Department's strength but it also presents a serious challenge. For somewhat distinct but related reasons each of these courses has been capped at relatively small enrollment. Certain methods courses may require students to use computers in class and may be restricted by the size of labs. Other methods classes may not have this restriction. The writing course introduces students to the skill of academic writing in a sociological context, and requires multiple draft assignments with extensive faculty feedback. We recognize that the large numbers of majors has made it impossible to provide sufficient sections of these courses taught by the tenured, tenure track and long-term adjunct faculty. We cannot provide a single solution to this dilemma but offer suggestions.

- In order for large numbers of students to progress through the major, Sociology must offer multiple sections of these courses each semester. The curriculum committee can explore which core courses (except GVAR) might be taught with higher enrollment caps.

- Be open to lecturers teaching some GVAR sections.
- We were concerned that assignment to teach these essential courses may not be evenly distributed across the faculty. As courses that are at the core of the discipline it can be expected that all tenured, tenure track and long term adjunct faculty would be able to teach at least one of these courses with some regularity. Assignment to teach in the core could rotate as a regular part of every faculty member's courseload. Perhaps faculty development support could be given to faculty for whom this would be a new teaching assignment. We recommend that the faculty discuss the issue of equitable workload in a faculty meeting/retreat with the goal of developing a set of principles regarding the teaching of core courses.
- Core courses currently carry more units, (4 as opposed to 3) and therefore meet more hours than other parts of the curriculum. The demands of teaching in the core would be reduced by making them all worth 3 units.
- The department has been engaging in important reflection on its curriculum. One of the insights that has emerged from these discussions is that skills may be introduced in the core but they cannot be mastered there. To the extent that it is possible in larger classes, the teaching of writing should continue in courses throughout the curriculum.
- To address advising burdens, have three TT faculty work as undergraduate advisors in exchange for course releases. This advising system would be in lieu of the alphabet system of faculty advising. TT faculty would rotate in and out of these elected 2-year advisor terms.
- The Department may wish to hire a graduate student to assist the faculty by conducting a portion of the "major check" advising. FERPA trained graduate students could conduct first level advising, much of which is routine, so that faculty time spent

meeting with students could be devoted to teaching and mentoring.

- With hires, the Department should seek to hire in a specialty area of sociology but advertise and interview candidates based on their ability to teach in the core.

### *Integrating Sociology and the Sexuality Studies MA*

We feel it is important to address the relationship between the two components of the department because decisions made in one program (Sociology or Sexuality Studies) will often have implications for resources, climate, culture and the capacity to deliver the curriculum in the other. The success of their programs is intertwined.

- The Self-Study notes that “Since this merger, the programs have continued to operate independently with regards to degree offerings and hiring of faculty” (Self-Study p. 3). We encourage the faculty to continue to work to become integrated into one unit. The Sexuality Studies program has developed with a social science foundation. We encourage the faculty to explore the ways in which they define the field of Sexuality Studies and to build the program on a broad social science foundation that recognizes the ways in which sexualities intersect with race, gender, class and other dimensions of social structure.
- As the department works to establish by-laws it should specifically address the relationship of Sociology and Sexuality Studies. We recommend that by-laws be developed that facilitate a decision-making process that enables the entire Sociology Department including the Sexuality Studies master’s program to function as a unit.
- Teaching in both programs could be a shared responsibility. Sexuality Studies faculty should prepare to be cycled in to teach core courses in Sociology, and Sociology faculty should be freed up to teach graduate seminars in research, theory and sexuality area courses.

- Both programs could share curriculum development—having both Sexuality faculty serve on an undergraduate curriculum committee and Sociology faculty serve on a new graduate curriculum committee.
- Faculty hires into Sexuality Studies should be aware that they will be called upon to teach within Sociology.
- Future self-studies and external reviews should be conducted on the functioning of the whole Department of Sociology and Sexuality Studies.

### *Resources*

We believe that growth in the number of majors should be encouraged and supported with sufficient resources. The most pressing of those needs is the hiring of tenure track faculty. With the loss of 2 members of the faculty (Professor Dumont and Assistant Professor Bost) the faculty must make 2 hires just to maintain its current size. Additional retirements can be anticipated soon. We encourage the University to continue to hire junior faculty as pairs. We do not have recommendations regarding the area of specialization for the search. We believe that can best be determined by the faculty.

We reiterate the strong recommendation from the Academic Program Review Committee Report of 2004, which stated “the APRC strongly recommends that assignment of individual offices be a top priority for both the Department and the College.” When space becomes available on campus, the need for additional office space in Sociology should be addressed. If no new space will open in the foreseeable future, the University should consider the possibility of renovations. This is an issue with consequences for faculty productivity and equity.

### *Faculty support*

The department plans to develop a formal mentoring program for incoming faculty. We support this initiative but also believe that attention must be given to the support needed by associate professors post-tenure. We do not think it is ideal for associate professors to be asked to chair. The University should develop resources to help newly tenured faculty balance the greater responsibilities that will fall to them post-tenure and to help them renew their research programs. Resources should be provided to the Office of Research so that faculty at all levels can find sufficient support for proposal-writing. And the University should strive to find ways to formally recognize the greater amount of mentoring often provided to students by faculty of color.

As a final consideration, and in order to attract and retain the best faculty, the University must do what it can to provide support for the range of challenges faculty face. Two issues which present serious challenges for SF State faculty are immigration and housing. The University can at a minimum assist faculty with connections to local organizations, which may help them navigate these issues.