October 20, 2014

TO: Brent Lindquist, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
FROM: Jen Dunn, Chair, Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work

RE: Chair’s Response to Graduate Program Review of SASW

Sociology MA Program

Strengths and Weaknesses:

The review team was unanimous in its assessment that MA students are happy with the program, which is well-aligned with faculty areas of specialization, that they are well-prepared for further study at the Ph.D. level (at other institutions), and that faculty and student areas of interest are consistent with funding opportunities in a very competitive external funding environment. They ranked faculty teaching and research highly and external funding as appropriate. However, they were concerned that the teaching load of faculty (3/3) was too high for both research productivity and, especially, grant-writing, and they noted that service to the profession also suffered as a result. They felt that the teaching load could create problems for recruitment and retention of faculty, and that the lack of a Ph.D. program meant that top students were going elsewhere. To add to the difficulties of recruiting good graduate students, stipends are comparatively low, as well as travel support. In sum, the combination of high teaching loads and lack of a Ph.D. inhibits research productivity, the seeking of external funding, and the ability to attract top students to the program. Further, the program is at capacity, time to degree is creeping up, and stipends are not competitive.

Recommendations:

The review team recommended that the University add the Ph.D. program in Sociology, which would lower teaching loads (both through the addition of new faculty and the ability of graduate students to teach lower-level courses), increase research productivity, and create more time and synergy for seeking external funding. They also recommended that the number and amount of TA stipends be increased and that program hours be reduced. Finally, they suggested that a graduate handbook and graduate student association be created, and that the Director of Graduate Studies be given a course release for recruitment purposes.
Response:

The Ph.D. cannot go forward with 9.5 tenured and tenure-track faculty. Based on feedback on the SASW strategic hiring plan that you provided the Associate Chair Brett Houk and me, as the university moves away from RCM, it will be necessary to present a strong case for new lines to Central Administration, and departments should find a unifying theme that helps to position them competitively for new lines should they become available.

Before proposing a Ph.D., development of the proposal will be preceded by conferences with the appropriate academic dean and the dean of the Graduate School, who will encourage or discourage continued development of the proposal on the basis of college and university priorities and recognized strengths in the department and college concerned. Should it be deemed necessary for outside authorities to evaluate the proposed new graduate degree program and its potential for future development, the dean of the Graduate School will coordinate such review (OP 36.04, 1b).

We will finish preparation of a graduate student handbook, currently in draft form.

We will encourage more students to join AKD (Alpha Kappa Delta, the International Sociology Honor Society), which serves as a graduate student association.

We will lower teaching loads for faculty; we have the Dean’s permission to utilize the funds in our instructional pool currently expended on a VAP in Sociology to hire an adjunct to maintain undergraduate and graduate SCH production. This will help the research profile of tenured and tenure-track faculty increase, along with the number of proposals for external funding. I recommend a 3-2 load across the faculty, with additional reductions for faculty who are highly research active, mentoring large numbers of graduate students, and/or in administrative positions (Graduate Director, Undergraduate Director, and Distance Director).

Although the review committee recommended lowering the degree requirements from 36 to 30 hours, students with assistantships must take 9 hours a semester to be eligible for funding and the Sociology MA does not wish to reduce graduate course offerings at this time, particularly since students in other degree programs also take our seminars.

Anthropology MA Program

Strengths and Weaknesses:

As with Sociology, the review team was unanimous in its assessment that MA students are happy with the program. They noted excellent student placement in CRM and teaching and an increase in enrollment. They ranked faculty teaching and research highly and external funding as appropriate. However, they were concerned that the
indirect teaching load of some faculty was much too high with service loads ranging from 2 to 13 theses and doctoral committees over the reporting period. As with Sociology, anthropology graduate students believed that stipends are comparatively low, as well as travel support—which is particularly important in Anthropology. In sum, the program is at capacity, time to degree is creeping up, and stipends are not competitive. Moreover, a lack of gender diversity in faculty was seen as problematic.

Recommendations:

The review team recommended that two new hires be made: one in archeology and one in biological anthropology, and that one of the new hires should identify as female. They recommended that outdated equipment be replaced. They also recommended that the number and amount of TA stipends be increased and that program hours be reduced, and that a CRM Certificate be considered. They also suggested that, in keeping with programs nation-wide, a reduction to three fields (dropping Linguistics) be considered.

Response:

Given that SASW has permission to replace Associate Professor Art Durband in the Fall of 2015, the search committee for that position will actively recruit a hire that will contribute to the unifying focus of "Indigenous America," which is the dominant research and teaching paradigm in the program.

We are implementing a shift from a four-field program (archaeology, cultural anthropology, linguistic anthropology and physical anthropology) to a three-field program, which will realign and consolidate the intersection of the cultural and linguistics subfields into ethnology, the branch of anthropology that explores cultural and linguistic diversity from a comparative perspective. This change will provide for further integration of subfields, enhancing the synergy among existing faculty. It will also provide a benefit to the graduate and undergraduate curricular structures through streamlining and consolidation. Changing the program to a three-field program will allow us to provide a concentration in ethnology through a process of combining course contents where appropriate and also eliminating redundancies where present. We also envision this shift to enhance our ability to recruit high quality graduate students with interests in regional ethnology of Native America.

At such time, SASW will prepare to advertise for an additional archeologist (new hire).

Discuss the possibility of a CRM Certificate and, if faculty agree, begin the process of preparing a proposal.

With an eventual increase in faculty who can mentor graduate students, we expect to see increases in research productivity and external funding proposals. Whether stipends can be increased remains to be seen and is probably not up to the department.
Although the review committee recommended lowering the degree requirements from 36 to 30 hours, students with assistantships must take 9 hours a semester to be eligible for funding and the Anthropology MA does not wish to reduce graduate course offerings at this time.