Graduate Program Review
Texas Tech University

Program Reviewed: Sociology, Anthropology and Social Work (concentration on Sociology)

Onsite Review Dates: March 11-12, 2014

Name of Reviewers
Internal:
Please include name, title, and Department
Click here to enter text.

External:
Please include name, title, and Department
Laszlo Kulcsar, Professor of Sociology, Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Social Work, Kansas State University

I. Academic Unit Description and Strategic Plan
Please evaluate the following:

**Vision, Mission and Goals**
- Excellent
- Very Good
- Appropriate
- Needs Improvement

**Strategic Plan**
- Excellent
- Very Good
- Appropriate
- Needs Improvement

Please elaborate if you have identified any items in this section as Excellent.

Click here to enter text.
Please elaborate if you identified any items in this section as Needs Improvement. Provide recommendations in the area of Strategic Planning.
Click here to enter text.

Other comments (optional)
The mission statement has a list of goals built on the liberal arts tradition, but the vision suffers form the problem of having three separate programs in one department while at the same time requiring the department to develop a unified vision. This problem is impossible to solve, and the key element is to let each program develop a vision for itself, and use the department as an umbrella organization for fostering these. In fact, certain administrative components (T&P, hiring decisions) already require some separation, and the language of the current document clearly points to this direction.

The strategic priorities include unique and promising elements (such as the pedagogy course), however, priorities #2 and #3 are very similar and quite general, and may be combined. There is significant emphasis on race and diversity, which is important for recruiting and retaining minority students, and there is also some potential in linking this to the criminology emphasis. Priority #4 is another example for the differences across the three programs, probably leaving the language vague is the right decision, particularly if this is going to be part of the T&P discussion. Finally, I was surprised to see no language on external grants in priority #5 (more on this later).

II. Program Curriculum
Please evaluate the following:

Alignment of program with stated program and institutional goals and purposes
☐ Excellent
☐ Very Good
☐ Appropriate
☐ Needs Improvement
☐ N/A

Curriculum development coordination and delivery
☐ Excellent
☐ Very Good
☐ Appropriate
☐ Needs Improvement
☐ N/A

Program learning outcomes assessment
Program curriculum compared to peer programs

- Excellent
- Very Good
- Appropriate
- Needs Improvement
- N/A

Please elaborate if you have identified any items in this section as Excellent.
Click here to enter text.

Please elaborate if you identified any items in this section as Needs Improvement. Provide recommendations in the area of Program Curriculum.
Click here to enter text.

Other comments (optional)
The sociology MA now requires 36 hours, instead of 30 hours which seems to be the standard for peer institutions. Cutting it back would result in some SCH drop but it could help students not on assistantships (with a positive impact on degree completion time). It could also free up student time for research and writing theses, which on the long run may result in better job or degree placements, or possibly students taking additional classes for skill development (which then may not even mean SCH drop for the university).

The collection of graduate classes is well aligned with the self declared strengths of the program, however careful balancing is needed to offer the necessary classes with the current size of the faculty. Clustering classes along themes may help creating a balanced curriculum for the 5-6 focus areas. For example, criminology and race could be one cluster, family and medical sociology another cluster and so on. This could be a useful preparation for setting up the curriculum of the future doctoral program along potential preliminary exam areas too. Having graduate students for only two years, especially if in the first year they have to take the required methods and theory classes leaves little room for a variety of electives, thus creative grouping could help students planning their coursework in a structured way.
fashion and mitigate the conflicts of class scheduling. It is important to note that this should be done in a way which promotes an equal division of labor among faculty.

III. Faculty Productivity

*Please evaluate the following:*

**Qualifications**
- Excellent
- Very Good
- Appropriate
- Needs Improvement
- N/A

**Publications**
- Excellent
- Very Good
- Appropriate
- Needs Improvement
- N/A

**Teaching Load**
- Excellent
- Very Good
- Appropriate
- Needs Improvement
- N/A

**External Grants**
- Excellent
- Very Good
- Appropriate
- Needs Improvement
Please elaborate if you have identified any items in this section as Excellent.
Click here to enter text.

Please elaborate if you identified any items in this section as Needs Improvement. Provide recommendations in the area of Faculty Productivity.
I marked the teaching load as "needs improvement" because it is one of the biggest constraints for future development. The way it currently works is that faculty assigns most time to teaching, and whatever is left goes to publications (the main measure for T&P decisions), with not much time allocation for anything else, particularly for grant writing. (This is one area where a doctoral program could help, as doctoral students could teach independent sections of undergraduate courses.) A strong grant application takes as much time to write as an article. If the university moves toward a research emphasis direction, there has to be ways to ease the teaching load to motivate
faculty to work on grants. At the same time, mechanisms should be in place to reward successful grants applications (overhead trickle back, faculty development accounts, course release etc.). It is also important to have a support infrastructure for grant writing, especially for developing the budget, which tends to take almost as much effort as writing the substantive part of the application.

**Other comments (optional)**
The sociology faculty is well qualified for the task, and overall productivity is on the mark. The 3+3 teaching load and the lack of a doctoral program (i.e. students who are expected to publish before receiving their degrees, leading to student/faculty co-authored articles) puts a limit on productivity, but based on current constraints, faculty is doing a good job publishing. Service to the profession seems to be the victim of low priority, although faculty is active in local outreach.

**IV. Students and Graduates**

_Please evaluate the following:_

**Time to degree**
- Excellent
- Very Good
- Appropriate
- Needs Improvement
- N/A

**Retention**
- Excellent
- Very Good
- Appropriate
- Needs Improvement
- N/A

**Graduate rates**
- Excellent
- Very Good
- Appropriate
Enrollment
☐ Excellent
☐ Very Good
☐ Appropriate
☐ Needs Improvement
☐ N/A

Demographics
☐ Excellent
☐ Very Good
☐ Appropriate
☐ Needs Improvement
☐ N/A

Number of degrees conferred annually
☐ Excellent
☐ Very Good
☐ Appropriate
☐ Needs Improvement
☐ N/A

Support Services
☐ Excellent
☐ Very Good
☐ Appropriate
☐ Needs Improvement
☐ N/A
Job Placement
☐ Excellent
☐ Very Good
☐ Appropriate
☐ Needs Improvement
☐ N/A

Student/ Faculty Ratio
☐ Excellent
☐ Very Good
☐ Appropriate
☐ Needs Improvement
☐ N/A

Please elaborate if you have identified any items in this section as Excellent.
Click here to enter text.

Please elaborate if you identified any items in this section as Needs Improvement. Provide recommendations in the area of Students and Graduates.
Additional university funding for graduate students is absolutely necessary. This not only helps students finishing their degree in two years, but also frees up their time to develop additional skills which in turn helps post-degree placement. Given how low graduate stipends are, and how much assistantships are really about the tuition waiver as the big ticket item, this should be manageable for TTU administration, especially for a program of this size. The positive consequences of appropriate funding for GTAs reach far beyond helping individual students. GTAs could work in undergraduate classes (making it possible to increase enrollment and recapture the tuition lost by the waivers), and could also free up faculty time which then could be turned into grant writing or other development. Nickel and diming a graduate program, especially those in social sciences that are actually very cheap compared to other fields, could only lead to stagnation. In the context of TTU's efforts to increase overall graduate enrollment, the current funding situation is the biggest obstacle to achieve this goal.

Other comments (optional)
The time to degree should be as close to 2 as possible. It is likely higher because of the number of unfunded students who are taking loans or working other jobs to support themselves. As long as the extra time does not exceed one semester this is manageable, but once the number gets above 2.5 for a prolonged period, the issue needs to be
addressed. Also, there is neither a graduate handbook nor a graduate student organization. The program would greatly benefit from both.

V. Facilities and Resources

*Please evaluate the following:*

**Facilities**
- Excellent
- Very Good
- Appropriate
- Needs Improvement
- N/A

**Facility Support Resources**
- Excellent
- Very Good
- Appropriate
- Needs Improvement
- N/A

**Financial Resources**
- Excellent
- Very Good
- Appropriate
- Needs Improvement
- N/A

**Staff Resources**
- Excellent
- Very Good
- Appropriate
- Needs Improvement
Please elaborate if you have identified any items in this section as Excellent.
Click here to enter text.

Please elaborate if you identified any items in this section as Needs Improvement. Provide recommendations in the area of Facilities and Resources.
I marked financial and staff resources as need to be improved to make the point that if the goal is an increase in graduate enrollment and there are opportunities to establish a doctoral program, the current resources are obviously inadequate. A strong graduate program relies on multiple channels of support, which also gives flexibility to administration in resource scarce times. Dedicated support should be given to the graduate director so that his/her time could also be spent on recruitment and development of the program. If increased external funding is an important mean for success, an accountant may be needed to deal with grant administration. Travel support for faculty and students, monetary reward for student awards, money for equipment and training etc. are just a few ways how relatively small amounts could make a big difference. Establishing a doctoral program also comes with investment up front, but this investment pays very quickly in multiple ways (publications, faculty retention, grant support, student transition from MA to PhD etc.).

Other comments (optional)
Click here to enter text.

VI. Overall Ranking

Overall Ranking
- Excellent
- Very Good
- Appropriate
- Needs Improvement

Please provide summative conclusions based on the overall review.
Conclusions:
- The sociology graduate program suffers from two, mildly overlapping, structural constraints: (1) being an MA only program, and (2) facing general resource scarcity.

- The faculty does its best in a challenging environment over which they have little control. Their mentoring efforts were widely praised among the students, and faculty is regularly listed as the main strength of the program. Without misusing the labels on this form, I can safely say that based on the resources faculty has, they have been doing an excellent job training and mentoring TTU students.

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- The faculty has diverse interests, but these are concentrated in distinguishable clusters of strength. This is an excellent foundation for further development, allowing the focused growth of the program. These clusters also work well for a future doctoral program which would need to be organized along a few distinctive strengths to maximize enrollment and university resources.

- Having an MA only graduate program is challenging for student recruitment as well as for faculty recruitment and retention. Graduate students are in the program for a relatively short time, allowing only a few opportunities for faculty to work with them on grants, publications etc. A setup like this fundamentally differs from a graduate program with both MA and PhD degrees, which differences cut across almost every aspect of the program. The administrative uncertainty which has been revolving around the implementation of a future doctoral program is detrimental to faculty morale and considerably hinders the strategic development of the program.

- The 3+3 teaching load is more similar to an undergraduate only program. This is sustainable, but it comes with faculty recruitment and retention problems, and leaves very little room for growth. This indicates a tradeoff between credit hour (tuition) production and bringing in external grants, which now is tilting toward the former. The 3+3 teaching load effectively cuts the time for grant writing, and while it brings in tuition money, a graduate program at a research university cannot rely solely on tuition as the primary source of revenues (even if that is the most important comparative measure of success for central administration).

- The lack resources is a significant constraint for reasonable daily operation, let alone for future growth. While only a few social science programs enjoy sufficient funding in the U.S., there are different degrees of scarcities across the nation. Sociology programs are generally cheap and offer good return on any investment. The program is at its maximum capacity based on the available resources and the number of students and faculty. Any further growth would need to be triggered by additional resources.

- A specific part of the resource problem is that the number of student assistantships is inadequate. This has repercussions across several crucial components of the graduate program. Students need to supplement their income to take classes, which increases degree completion time and leaves less attention to their academic work. It also hinders recruitment: an MA only program is a recruitment handicap in itself (especially that it tends to lose the best students whose final goal is a PhD), but when coupled with little if any student support, it becomes a significant obstacle on career planning.

Please provide summative recommendations based on the overall review.

Recommendations:

- Address the two structural constraints: (1) Provide administrative support for the establishment of a PhD program in sociology. That is the only reasonable mechanism to grow the sociology graduate program in a comprehensive way along several indicators. (2) Provide additional funds to address at least the most fundamental issues of student assistantships and basic faculty support.

- Strengthen the existing structure of the graduate program: (1) Consider cutting the MA credit hour requirement from 36 to 30 hours. (2) Provide dedicated support (summer salary or course release or both) to the graduate director who should develop a graduate handbook. (3) Support the establishment of a graduate student organization.
- Provide infrastructure and administrative support for faculty research: (1) Implement mechanisms to help grant writing and grant management activities. Proper faculty motivation via personal development accounts from overhead trickle down is a must. (2) Develop ways to ease the 3+3 teaching load in certain cases determined by the program. Let the program develop flexible alternatives that suit current faculty development considerations while keeping research and teaching productivity at the level required by the university.