

University Plan (UP) III: Department of Sociology
13 October 2008

SECTION 1: Looking Back

The Sociology Academic Plan II identified a number of action items the department would pursue during the plan period 2004-09. These action items were as follows:

1. Revise our curriculum to balance interdisciplinary and core sociology courses
2. Enhance our curricular commitment to SENR/ENR
3. Seek an adequate support budget
4. Consider whether the department should strengthen its offerings in the area of micro-sociology
5. Strengthen our ties with the state government through applied research (such as ties with WYSAC)
6. Implement an assessment plan for student learning
7. Strengthen our development efforts for student scholarships
8. Support courses and research that focus on issues of the West
9. Affirm through our replacement hires a commitment to a strong program in Sociology, as well as a commitment to interdisciplinary programs

The Sociology Department steadfastly pursued these action items and has addressed, fully or partially, all of them.

Action items 1-4

- We held two all-day retreats, one to revise our undergraduate curriculum and the other to revise our graduate curriculum. In both cases, we agreed to substantial curricular changes.
- We offered two courses related to ENR: A special topics course *Social Movements and the Environment* was offered at the 4000-level, and *Society, Environment, and Disaster* was offered at the 5000-level as a special topics seminar.
- This year the department received its first significant budgetary increase in a very long time. This should help alleviate our chronic shortage of funds.
- To strengthen our undergraduate curriculum, we redesigned our sophomore course in micro-sociology (*Human Interaction*), moved it to the 3000-level, and renamed it *Self & Society*. It has since been offered and quickly reached its maximum enrollment cap.

Action items 5-9

- We strengthened our ties with WYSAC in that two of our faculty members now play pivotal roles at this statistical analysis center: Professor Grandjean, a Sociology-Statistics professor, took over its directorship in 2004. This past year, Sociology Professor Patricia Taylor moved half of her line to the center.
- We designed and implemented an undergraduate course-embedded assessment plan.
- We awarded the first set of Flittie Scholarships to two of our top majors and also created the Wilbourne Excellence Fund for students and faculty projects.

- In regard to research issues related to the West, now retired Professor Blevins conducted research on the nutrition and health status of American Indians of the Wind River Indian Reservation.
- Our CPM request for a new faculty hire was recently approved, and we are now in the process of our first national search in over 16 years for a tenure-track faculty member.

SECTION II: Looking Forward

The department is committed to addressing the action items of its UP 3 plan with the same commitment it made to its last plan. Faculty members have agreed to be guided by the following Action Items:

SOC-1: Maintain an appropriate balance between offering our foundation and core undergraduate courses on a regular basis and offering courses in support of interdisciplinary programs; continue to support the latter within the constraints imposed by our loss of faculty lines

The revision of our curricula over the past few years builds strength into both our undergraduate and graduate programs. We are committed to reviewing our new curricula in an on-going manner during the period covered by UP 3 and making adjustments as needed.

But a major problem facing the department is offering the courses in our revised curriculum with the desired frequency. The number of Sociology faculty has shrunk both numerically and in interdisciplinary capacity. We have lost seven members of our faculty to retirement, administration, transfer of lines, and resignation in the last three years. To date, only one of these lost faculty lines has returned to us through the CPM process. Hence we have begun to struggle in terms of our ability to offer both our new core sociology curriculum and our interdisciplinary specialty courses that support other programs, such as Criminal Justice and International Studies (with whom we have a total of twelve cross-listed courses).

SOC-2: Increase the number of our undergraduate majors through proactive recruitment

We hope to increase our majors through several strategies. First, we plan to improve the department's website by reorganizing the division of labor within the department to keep the website updated and more appealing. Second, we plan to produce a new brochure to reflect our new curriculum. These brochures will then be distributed, upon request, to all prospective majors. Third, we plan to offer more sections of SOC 1000, the most common gateway to majoring in Sociology. Finally, the department is committed to having a student-faculty team at all campus outreach functions, such as Campus Pass events, Family Weekend, and Discovery Days. The department display board will be updated for use at these functions, and an interactive game is in the process of being developed in hopes of more effectively engaging prospective students at such events.

SOC-3: Implement our new undergraduate assessment plan and consider the possibility of developing SOC 4090 (Sociological Research) as a capstone course that would either supplement or serve as an alternative to our present course-embedded assessment plan

There has been some discussion of replacing or supplementing our current course-embedded assessment plan by making SOC 4090 a capstone course in which students acquire proficiency in the intersection of theory and methods by conducting independent research on a substantive topic.

Sociology students have demonstrated an impressive presence at the Undergraduate Research Day presentations in the last couple of years. This is another tool with which student learning can be assessed. This is consistent with Motif 4 of UP 3 namely, *Committing to Excellence through embedding assessment in UW's academic culture*.

SOC-4: Work diligently to build the Flittie Scholarship Fund and Chet Meeks Memorial Fund.

The department will work to ensure that the value of these funds increases during the period covered by UP-3. In terms of the Flittie Fund, we only need an additional \$2000 to reach the \$25,000 needed to acquire endowment status. Once it reaches endowment status, the fund becomes permanent with the ability to generate interest income to fund scholarships in perpetuity. Letters will be sent out to past donors that update them on the progress we are making in building this fund.

In regard to the Chet Meeks Fund, we are striving to reach the \$50,000 mark to obtain state-matching funds. We currently have reached the \$30,000 mark. It is a wonderful way to create a legacy for Chet Meeks, one of our top undergraduates who went on to earn a PhD and become a professor. He tragically died this past year at the age of 34 from cancer. His family and many friends have quickly built up the fund, and we are hopeful that we will reach the funding level necessary to get state-matching funds during the period covered by UP-3.

SOC-5: Strive to improve the quality of our graduate program and more effectively recruit graduate students.

We recently completed a revision of our graduate course offerings. We created four new 5000-level substantive courses (namely Deviance & Social Control, Comparative & Global Sociology, Societal Institutions, and Social Stratification & Inequality) that will replace existing courses dual-listed with upper level undergraduate courses. In this fashion, we are moving our graduate program in a direction that is more independent from our undergraduate program. We feel strongly that this will enhance the quality of the academic experience of students in our Master's program.

The graduate student links on our departmental website are in urgent need of improvement. We plan to restructure the process of how we manage our departmental website. Once this is accomplished and the weaknesses of the website are addressed, we plan to advertise our program more aggressively in hopes

of enlarging our pool of graduate applicants. We are hoping that our new Chet Meeks Memorial Fund will help us attract more applicants, since it is unusual for departments to have funds to provide graduate students with the opportunity to compete for monies to support their research endeavors during the summer.

Currently, the department has an allotment of five graduate assistantships that it uses to entice applicants to enroll in our program. These graduate assistantships are crucial to our recruitment efforts. They are also crucial to our undergraduate program because they assist us in our large sections of SOC 1000, as well as in our intensive WB and WC writing courses.

SOC-6: Develop an assessment tool for measuring graduate student learning

As the only public four-year university in the state, UW has a responsibility to provide access to higher education to its residents. Increasingly, graduate education is needed to secure middle-and-upper level positions in business, government, and non-profit organizations. We need to ensure that the students enrolled in our Master's program have the needed skills to compete successfully for these higher level positions.

We have outlined some general learning outcomes expected of our graduate students: knowledge of and ability to apply sociological theory and methods to substantive issues; capacity for independent, original research; and enhanced analytical, writing, and oral communication skills. We are now in the process of specifying the means by which we are going to assess whether our graduate students achieve these desired outcomes.

SOC-7: Strengthen our depth and expertise in quantitative methods and statistics by hiring a demographer

The Department has been approved to hire a demographer in the coming year. He/she will, in addition to teaching in some substantive areas, increase our capacity to offer our undergraduate and graduate methods courses, as well as our graduate course in social statistics. This is a serious concern for our department, given that we have lost the teaching resources of a couple of faculty members who routinely had offered statistics and/or methods—one of these faculty members retired, and the other one moved to a full-time administrative position.

SOC-8: Develop a new undergraduate course in Environmental Sociology to fulfill our curricula commitment to ENR/SENR

Sociology has periodically offered special topic courses in support of the ENR curriculum. The curricular relationship between the two programs will be further strengthened after our new hire is completed in the 2008 -9 academic year. If the new hire has expertise in the environment, s/he will develop a permanent course in Sociology of the Environment. Otherwise, it is expected that the new hire will teach courses taught by current faculty members, thereby freeing up one of those faculty members to develop a new permanent course in Environmental Sociology. In this fashion, our department will contribute to one of the six areas

of distinction recognized in the past two academic plans: Environment and Natural Resources.

SOC-9: Continue the Sociology Distinguished Speaker Series program and try to put it on firmer financial footing

The Sociology Distinguished Speaker Series is very young and has been successful in its short span of three years. It has been funded by the Sociology Department, with financial support from other programs. To ensure that it remains affordable and does not place too great of a financial burden on the department, we are considering shifting this speaker series to the spring semester and integrating the event into our end-of-the-year honors banquet for which we secure a speaker. An alternative option is to commit to setting aside an appropriate sum from summer school revenue to fund the speaker series.

SOC-10: Maintain/strengthen our contribution to the College's and UW's commitment to provide our students with a high quality liberal arts education. Vital components of a liberal arts education come from Sociology, which is one of the fundamental social sciences

Our revised undergraduate and graduate curriculum reflects our commitment to a strong liberal arts education and is in accord with one of the most important A & S UP 3 planning themes: *“Continue to emphasize the value of a liberal arts education.”*

Our faculty members will continue to develop and modify their teaching to enhance the development of the intellectual capacities of students through critical thinking and through a commitment to life-long learning, all of which are central to a strong liberal arts education.

Timeline for Implementation

<u>Action Item</u>	<u>Implementation timetable</u>		
	<u>Early</u>	<u>Middle</u>	<u>Late</u>
<u>SOC-1A</u>	X		
<u>SOC-2A</u>			X
<u>SOC-3A</u>	X		
<u>SOC-4A</u>		X	
<u>SOC-5A</u>		X	
<u>SOC-6A</u>	X		
<u>SOC-7A</u>	X		
<u>SOC-8A</u>	X		
<u>SOC-9A</u>	X		
<u>SOC-10-A</u>	X		