

**REPORT OF THE ACADEMIC PLANNING COMMITTEE
TO THE REGULAR October 2020 SENATE MEETING**

FOR DISCUSSION

**QUALITY ASSURANCE – CYCLICAL PROGRAM REVIEW
OF LAURENTIAN UNIVERSITY'S**

B.A. PROGRAM IN SOCIOLOGY / SOCIOLOGIE

FINAL ASSESSMENT REPORT & IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

In accordance with the Laurentian University's Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), the Final Assessment Report has been prepared to provide a synthesis of the external evaluation and Laurentian's response and action plan. This report identifies the significant strengths of the program, opportunities for program improvement and enhancement, and sets out and prioritizes the recommendations that have been selected for implementation.

The report includes an Implementation Plan that identifies who will be responsible for approving the recommendations set out in the Final Assessment Report; who will be responsible for providing any resources made necessary by those recommendations; any changes in organization, policy or governance that will be necessary to meet the recommendations; who will be responsible for acting on those recommendations; and timelines for acting on and monitoring the implementation of those recommendations.

Review committee: Lucia Tramonte (UNB; external reviewer); François Boudreau and Renée Corbeil (internal reviewers); Valérie Martin and Nalagiri Paramanathan (student representatives).

**SUMMARY OF THE CYCLICAL REVIEW
OF LAURENTIAN'S PROGRAM IN SOCIOLOGY**

NB: Excerpts from the self-study and the reviewers' report have been used verbatim or adapted.

A. Self study

The self-study points out that the Department offers a B.A. in Sociology and an M.A. in Applied Social Research. Since 2017, two new undergraduate programs, in Criminology and in Equity, Diversity and Human Rights, have been introduced.

The objectives and mission of the program are to develop the students' critical thinking and communication skills and provide them with appropriate tools for conducting research. These skills equip them for finding meaningful work or pursuing further studies upon graduating.

The Sociology program emphasizes the regional mandate of the University to educate students who can respond to the needs of the communities and groups, especially those located in northern and rural areas of Ontario. The program promotes social justice and provides tools to students to understand social inequality and appreciate diversity.

The self-study also stresses the significant reduction of the faculty complement since the last review in 2010/11. This reduction is due to five retirements, two transfers to other units, a resignation, and two deaths. Only three tenure-track professors (two of them indigenous) and a master lecturer were hired in the same period. Part-time faculty members teach a significant number of on-campus and on-line courses.

For the five years from 2013 to 2017, the number of program students for all programs, including the M.A., has been 123 – 100 – 91 – 101 – 125.

B. Report of the review committee and responses of the Chair of the Department and Dean of Arts

The report addresses three interconnected points:

- the construction of a core of courses to focus better the students' learning of the discipline and to connect all programs offered by the department of Sociology with the core of the discipline;
- the consequential rearrangement of course and their streaming, to optimize the existing resources and to improve the planning for staffing; and
- the achievement of complementary but different goals of learning the discipline as well as contributing to a broader social commitment, within and outside the University, at the regional, national, and international level.

The reviewers' report highlights the critical lack of resources; the members of the Department are working in "reaction mode", and this reflects on the general climate and working environment, where fatigue and isolation prevail. It is therefore suggested that the Department should suspend admissions to the Equity, Diversity, and Human Rights program, whose enrolment numbers are low so far, until the lack of personnel is addressed.

Further on, the reviewers ask: What are the core knowledge and skills that this undergraduate program must offer to preserve its disciplinary integrity, centered on the understanding of society, and to be applied in a variety of professional outlets?

According to the review committee, the program follows a "boutique approach" to course structure and offering, where each course produces a single offering of specific content, approach, and skills set. The boutique approach presents students with a horizontal landscape of content options from which to draw to customize their educational experience. This approach can invite students into the discipline with the appeal of full freedom and maximum variability, but it can also overstretch the discipline and loosen its core. Still, a few courses on research methods are the glue of a heterogeneous course calendar that lacks the necessary disciplinary coherence.

Currently, the only requirements for a Major in Sociology are SOCI 1015 – Understanding Society; SOCI 2016 – Thinking Sociologically; SOCI 2127 – Research Methods and Data Analysis; SOCI 3126 – Qualitative Methods; and STAT 2126 – Introduction to Statistics. This last course, offered by another department, may not entirely fulfil the needs of Sociology students.

The reviewers, therefore, suggest the introduction of a larger body of required courses that teach the foundations of the discipline, including sociological inquiry, modern and contemporary theories, methodology and research design. These foundational courses would then connect with smaller, level-specific sets of electives by using prerequisites to help students and instructors controlling the learning progression in content and skills' acquisition.

Following consultations with students, the reviewers addressed several concerns with the many online courses offered by the Department:

- Online courses are created as mirrors of in-class courses, without unique and specific design to optimize learning experience.
- Online courses are offered indiscriminately, whether or not the online experience is appropriate for the specific content and skill-set that students have to acquire.
- Students are not trained on how to learn online; somehow it is assumed that students can figure

out how to learn online when their entire learning experience in educational institutions has been face-to-face.

- Large size online courses make it impossible to offer and receive meaningful feedback.
- Plagiarism is a grave issue that pervades online courses more than face to face.

Students framed the proliferation of online courses more often as a failure of the system and a disappointing surprise in their learning experience than a creative and flexible learning tool. It was found out, too, the Criminology is largely offered online.

The courses available on campus and taught by faculty members and instructors are successful and well appreciated by the students. The reviewers gathered strong student endorsement for the research method courses. The students commended the engaging journeys in applied data analysis, mentored by faculty members to identify, analyze, and evaluate the quality of secondary data for their individual research projects. The department is gifted with outstanding faculty members, who are active and successful researchers. The current composition of the department, while needing additional faculty members, has great expertise in the area of applied research and substantive areas of sociological inquiry. This is an asset for the students who can directly benefit from such experience and expertise.

The report includes eight recommendations, incentives, proposals, and suggestions (**R**) which are listed below, along with the responses of the Chair of the unit (**U**) and Dean of Arts (**D**). This is followed by a table which suggests an order of priority and a timeline for implementation.

The Chair and Dean agree that recommendations **R4** and **R7** should not be pursued. ACAPLAN supports this position.

R1 We encourage the department and the administration to conduct an effective staffing exercise and recruitment plan by beginning with formal moments of regrouping, discussion and deliberation of a departmental vision and pedagogy of the discipline of sociology, followed by a revision of the structure and of the curricula of the current programs.

U1 The review team recognized that the department “has the willpower, the people, and the ability to assume (a) leading role” at Laurentian University. However, they noted that “(t)he department is at a real point of crisis for lack of sufficient faculty members to run its programs in person”. The first point of reviewers’ recommendation pertains to the under staffing of and the need for recruitment of new faculty. The department agrees and hopes that this is given top priority by the administration.

D1 I agree that the department is one of the top priorities in the Faculty of Arts for increased faculty complement and I will continue to make the case with upper administration that we create a position.

R2 We recommend simplifying the structure of the programs and to limit it to Honours, Major (and Double Majors), and Minor; AND

R3 We propose to abandon what we called and described as a “boutique” approach to course offering and course taking, and strengthen the undergraduate curriculum by expending the core of compulsory courses to incorporate a systematic teaching of theory, including Classical Sociological Theory and Contemporary Sociological theory. Linked to such core by prerequisites, we invite to organize a smaller number of electives in foundational sociological

areas, such as Political Sociology, Urban (Rural) Sociology, Cultural Sociology, Sociology of Health (and Illness), Sociology of Education, Sociology of the Family, etc. The names of compulsory and elective courses should refer explicitly to Sociology; AND

R4 We propose to move up to the 3000 and 4000 levels all the specialty or content-specific courses that are currently overabundant at the 2000 level; we hope that the various examples proposed in this document will illustrate our ideas and trigger an original and rigorous revision of the current course offering; AND

R5 We propose to use this new sociological core content and transfer it to the criminology programs (English and French) to strengthen and make explicit the connection between them and Sociology.

U2–5 The reviewers recommended restructuring of the program and suggested to make some core courses in theory and methods as mandatory and reorganize some elective courses. The Sociology department was already considering restructuring of the program and some courses offered by the department which is endorsed by the reviewers. In addition, their comments on moving specific elective courses from 2000 level to 3000 or 4000 level or merging two courses into one are beyond the scope of the Sociology department as they are cross-listed courses offered by other departments, such as Labour Studies, and Political Science. The department has formed a committee to initiate ‘architectural restructuring’ of its program. This committee will address points 2, 3, 4, and 5 of the recommendations.

D2–5 I support this initiative. I recommend that the Department also invite the program outcome specialist (Paisley Worthington) from the CAE to join in on some of these discussions. I am also willing to engage in parts of these discussions.

R6 We recommend that the department and the administration address students’ concerns about the serious problems that on-line courses present.

U6 The review committee expressed concern about current practice of offering many courses online, especially required courses, and discouraged the department to do so. The department agrees with it and seeks resources to increase in-class course offering.

D6 I agree that students who do not wish to take online classes should not have to. However reducing the number of online offerings does not actually solve that problem. Criminology however is a unique case where full time members are teaching some workload online and therefore I have asked the Department to indicate in advertising the program that students will likely have to take up to 6 credits of courses online if they enter this program.

R7 We suggest considering to suspend the offering of the Equity and Diversity programs (English and French) until the aforementioned changes are made, and the department gains new human resources.

U7 The reviewers suggested to suspend our Equity, Diversity, and Human Rights program until the department gains new human resources. This is the first year of this program and already 25 students are enrolled in it. The department faculty do not consider it wise to suspend this attractive program.

D7 I agree with the Department that this interdisciplinary program should continue to be able

to grow.

R8 We promote partnership with the Arts Library for the teaching and training in document retrieval and analysis, at all levels of the curriculum, in a common effort to value mutual expertise and to advocate for additional human resources.

U8 The library conducts several training programs which are attended by many of our students. Apart from this some faculty members invite library staff as guest lecturers in some of their courses. Moreover, the Faculty of Arts is moving in the direction of greater cooperation between departments to enhance the viability of smaller departments and development of new programs. There is an effort to develop three nodes of similar departments to work together under the umbrella of Social Sciences, Humanities, and Arts.

D8 Agreed.

Laurentian Quality Assurance Implementation Plan for Sociology

*Recommendations are listed in an approximate order of priority. **R1** seems to suggest that a new faculty member should be hired, but this can hardly be tied to any specific deadline. Until a return to on-campus classes, the implementation of **R6** will remain a moot point.*

Recommendation		Responsibility for leading follow-up	Proposed timeline
R2	We recommend simplifying the structure of the programs and to limit it to Honours, Major (and Double Majors), and Minor.	Departmental committee (already struck) to undertake the program's "architectural restructuring" [<i>sic</i> , reviewers' report]. Consultations with the CAE program outcome specialist	By late November or early December 2020 at the latest (followed by submission of "CELP" forms to the Council of Arts by late November or early December at the latest, so that changes can be approved for the 2021/22 academic year).
R3	We propose to abandon what we called and described as a "boutique" approach to course offering and course taking, and strengthen the undergraduate curriculum by expending the core of compulsory courses to incorporate a systematic teaching of theory, including Classical Sociological Theory and Contemporary Sociological theory. Linked to such core by prerequisites, we invite to organize a smaller number of electives in foundational sociological areas, such as Political Sociology, Urban (Rural) Sociology, Cultural Sociology, Sociology of Health (and Illness), Sociology of Education, Sociology of the Family, etc. The names of compulsory and elective courses should refer explicitly to Sociology.		
R5	We propose to use this new sociological core content and transfer it to the criminology programs (English and French) to strengthen and make explicit the connection between them and Sociology.		
R6	We recommend that the department and the administration address students' concerns about the serious problems that on-line courses present.	Department and Dean of Arts.	By May 2021.
R1	We encourage the department and the administration to conduct an effective staffing exercise and recruitment plan by beginning with formal moments of regrouping, discussion and deliberation of a departmental vision and pedagogy of the discipline of sociology, followed by a revision of the structure and of the curricula of the current programs.	Upper administration and Dean of Arts.	?
R8	We promote partnership with the Arts Library for the teaching and training in document retrieval and analysis, at all levels of the curriculum, in a common effort to value mutual expertise and to advocate for additional human resources.	Department and Desmarais librarians	By September 2020.

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R7	We suggest considering to suspend the offering of the Equity and Diversity programs (English and French) until the aforementioned changes are made, and the department gains new human resources.	Opposed by the Department and Dean.	–
R4	We propose to move up to the 3000 and 4000 levels all the specialty or content-specific courses that are currently overabundant at the 2000 level; we hope that the various examples proposed in the report will illustrate our ideas and trigger an original and rigorous revision of the current course offering.	Opposed by the Department and Dean.	–