

**REPORT OF THE ACADEMIC PLANNING COMMITTEE  
TO THE REGULAR MAY 2017 SENATE**

**FOR INFORMATION**

**QUALITY ASSURANCE - CYCLICAL PROGRAM REVIEW OF LAURENTIAN  
UNIVERSITY'S  
MA in APPLIED SOCIAL RESEARCH  
FINAL ASSESSMENT REPORT & IMPLEMENTATION PLAN, MARCH 2017**

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.

**SUMMARY OF THE CYCLICAL PROGRAM REVIEW OF THE MA PROGRAM**

The MA program in Applied Social Research accepted its first students in September 1994. Applied social research as the focus of a masters' program has proven to be valuable for students who want to do applied community research, particularly in Northeastern Ontario. It also reflects the orientation and major preoccupations of all faculty members in the Department of Sociology who are involved in various community organizations and who do research for various public and quasi-public agencies in the region.

In the program, all students are required to complete the three compulsory courses - SOCI 5106E/F (Theory and Society), SOCI 5216E/F (Advanced Statistical Methods) and SOCI 5217E/F (Qualitative Inquiry). In addition, depending on whether students opt to take the thesis (Option I) or essay (Option II) route, they take 5 or 7 courses respectively.

The program is offered in both English and French languages. Students are admitted in one or the other of the English or French language sections. They nevertheless have the opportunity of taking courses in the language of their choice. The program has a (bilingual) coordinator who is responsible for recruitment and counselling of admitted students. While the program is the same in both languages, the actual elective courses offered every year tend to be different in English and French. This bilingual aspect of the program mirrors that of the other Masters' programs in the Social Sciences at Laurentian University.

In recent years, however, the program has struggled, primarily due to the decreasing number of full-time faculty available to support it. In 1999, five years after commencement of the program, there were 10 full-time faculty members in the department of Sociology, excluding Adjunct Professors, and all of them were associated with the MA program. Problems began surfacing after 2006 as some of the full-time faculty members retired, left the university or died. By 2013 there were only 5 active full-time members, 2 on the English side and 3 on the French side.

To save the program, many faculty members from other departments, and other universities, began to be included in it. For a variety of reasons, this strategy did not however serve the program well since the program's fate was dependent on an injection of more faculty who were actually involved in various community organizations and doing research for various public and quasi-public agencies in the region.

*On September 29, 2015, the University suspended enrollments to this program.*

Following three new hires in 2014 and 2015, the department now consists of seven full-time faculty members and while two of these currently teach in Barrie, in the fall of 2017, they will be transferred to Sudbury.

With the revitalization of the faculty complement, the program is now at a tipping point.

On March 19, 2016, the program submitted its self-study to the Office of Vice-President Academic and Provost of Laurentian University.

Part 1 of the self-study presented an overview of the program and then reviewed the program's self-perception of the faculty, physical resources, program regulations and courses, and outcomes. It concluded with an overall assessment of the program's strengths and weaknesses. There was also five appendices: A: Student Surveys; B: Library Resources; C: Student Progress Report; D: Syllabus and E: Course Evaluations. Part 2 of the self-study contained the curriculum vitae of the six core faculty in the program followed by the curriculum vitae of six non-core faculty associated with the program.<sup>1</sup>

On May 26, 2016, after reviewing the self-study, and Laurentian's IQAP process, the Review Team conducted a site visit. The two externals were Dr. Francis Lévesque, Director, Aboriginal Training and Program Development Unit, Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue and Dr. Dorothy Pawluch Department of Sociology, McMaster University. In addition, the team consisted of two Laurentian professors, Dr. Sara Burke from within the Faculty of Arts and Prof. Louis Durand from the Faculty of Management. Finally, there were two students in the program, Anick Morin, (English Section) and Melanie Tremblay, (French Section).

The site visit was thorough and included visits to the Department of Sociology facilities (offices, student rooms, classrooms, and meeting room, all in the Arts Building), the J.N. Desmarais Library, C-104 in the Classroom Building, and L-336 in the Parker Building.

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<sup>1</sup> One of these "non-core" sociologists is a Master Lecturer whose primary function is teaching.

Stakeholders consulted included senior members of the university administration (Dr. Robert Kerr, V.P. Academic & Provost, Dr. Elizabeth Dawes, Dean of Arts, and Dr. David Lesbarreres, Dean of Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research); faculty involved in the program (Dr. Pierrot Ross-Tremblay, Chair, Sociology/Sociologie, Dr. Lynne Gouliquer, Graduate Coordinator, Sociology/Sociologie as well as the following members of the Department :Dr. Simon Laflamme, Dr. Parveen Nangia, Dr. Anas Karzai and Dr. Rachid Bagaoui). The reviewers also talked to the Department's Administrative Assistant (Nancy St-Amour), three students and two librarians.)

The reviewer's report, dated June 7, 2016 was one of the best ACAPLAN ever received: thorough, well organized, well written, and thoughtful, so good that it could be used as a model for future reviewers.

In their report the reviewers noted that: "In our view, the Department of Sociology's MA in Applied Social Research is very much in alignment with Laurentian's mission and priorities. First, the program is offered in both English and French. With the latest round of hirings, two of the seven core faculty members that will make up the Department as of September 2017, are Indigenous persons; others have backgrounds and/or interests in Indigeneity and bring a keen awareness of Indigenous issues to their teaching. More generally, the program promotes itself as emphasizing a social justice approach, with social justice research defined as "research that promotes social equality and people's democratic right to participate in decisions that affect their own and other's well-being" (see: <https://laurentian.ca/program/sociology-ma>). Most of the faculty members have strong ties to community organizations and do research for various public and quasi-public agencies in the region. These connections inform the way they have designed the program, giving it its applied thrust, and have facilitated opportunities for students to involve themselves in projects that are directly relevant to the community. At the same time, those students who have interests in other regions or countries have the flexibility to pursue those interests. In addition, the reviewers noted:

- The program requirements and learning outcomes are appropriate and in alignment with graduate degree level expectations.
- Admission requirements are appropriately aligned with the learning outcomes established and consistent with the requirements of most MA programs in Sociology across the province.
- The curriculum reflects the current state of the discipline in the sense that it provides students with a rigorous grounding in social theory and sociological research methods, as well as exposure to a range of substantive areas reflective of faculty interests.
- Laurentian's MA in Applied Social Research is unique in that it has a particular focus. Most MA programs are more general and none that the reviewers know of specializes specifically in training students in applied research methods. In fashioning the requirements of the program, the Department has achieved a nice balance between offering a program that prepares students to move on to doctoral studies (which several students have done), while at the same time offering practical skills to those students for whom the MA is a terminal degree and who plan to seek employment after they graduate.
- While the graduate-level seminar in Research Design is no longer compulsory, [replaced by the course on Qualitative Inquiry] the seminar continues to be offered and can be picked up as an optional course by those students who want it. The Department concluded that "students will gain more by having to take Qualitative Inquiry than they will lose if they do not have to take the seminar in Research Design" (Departmental

Brief, Volume 1: 13). The reviewers were persuaded that the decision had been carefully thought through and that the rationale for the proposed change is ultimately sound.

- The program's modes of delivery are appropriate and effective. All courses are taught by core faculty in classroom settings where students are encouraged to engage in respectful and scholarly debate, supporting their positions with evidence.
- The Department assesses its students in a variety of ways that are both appropriate and effective.
- While the overall numbers of core faculty are relatively small, they are sufficient to support the MA program, though in the reviewers' view just barely.
- All core and non-core faculty are well qualified, holding PhDs in Sociology or, in one case, in a related discipline.
- Several faculty members, both core and non-core, have been recognized with teaching awards, outstanding scholar or research excellence awards and certificates of appreciation for service.
- Supervisors and/or others in the Department are extremely helpful when it comes to sorting out problems that arise.
- The Administrative assistant seems "extremely competent and efficient, and able to handle her responsibilities well." Amidst these encomiums, there were some concerns expressed about the program in the body of the report.
- There are occasional communication problems and confusion, particularly in regards to the non-compulsory courses that are available from year to year.
- Students pointed out that they sometimes found themselves registering for courses that were cancelled at the last minute and then had to scramble to find replacements. With so few options to choose from, they felt that too often they were settling for whatever they could get rather than taking courses that aligned with their interests.
- Students are not very aware of funding and award opportunities and encouraged to apply.
- Completion time is poor, exceeding the 2 years it is supposed to take to finish the program. For the 66 students who completed the program between 1994 and 2013, the mean time to completion was 41.02 months.
- Students choosing the "Essay Option" frequently take longer to complete their degree than is the norm elsewhere (which is one year).
- One area where the reviewers felt the alignment with the Strategic Mandate Agreement might be further strengthened relates to interdisciplinarity. While acknowledging that faculty allow students from other programs into their courses, "The Department may want to consider giving [its own] students the flexibility to take at least one of their non-compulsory courses outside of the Department."
- Students expressed a desire to have more professional development opportunities focusing on such skills as grantsmanship, how to publish, CV preparation, how to identify career opportunities outside of the academy, etc.
- While the technology available to students is adequate, there is room for improvement.
- The [French and English] students appear to be segregated from each other, not only as a result of the parallel tracks that have been created for them, but even physically in terms of the office space allotted to them in the Department.
- Outcome measures for student performance and achievement could be stronger.

Graduation rates and employment rates after graduation appear to be acceptable, though we would have liked to have seen more complete and consistent data.

In August 2016 the Department submitted its comments the report to the Dean who in turn added her own comments. In November 2016, the office of the Vice-President and Provost received a report from the Acting Dean of Graduate Studies who added her own comments to the Department's and Dean's in the form of a consolidated report reproduced in the following section.

**SUMMARY OF THE REVIEW TEAM'S RECOMMENDATIONS (R) THE DEPARTMENT'S (U) RESPONSES AS WELL AS THOSE OF THE ACTING DEAN OF ARTS (D) AND THE ACTING DEAN OF THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES (GS)**

- R1. Follow through on plans to create a Departmental Handbook that would be updated annually, clarifying in detail the many aspects of the program's functioning that students need to know about in order to orient themselves as they start (including specific course offerings available in any given year), and guide their progress through the program.**
- U1.** The Handbook is in progress. A draft should be ready for circulation soon. We have consulted handbooks from Laurentian, UNB and McMaster and will include charts as suggested. We will also promote in the handbook at least two meetings for graduate students.
- D1.** I welcome this initiative.
- GS1.** A student handbook is a very important resource for graduate students. At Graduate Council, graduate coordinators have been sharing their handbooks with each other so that there is consistency across the university and I encourage the Sociology program to look to other programs for their handbook structure. As a Faculty, we are also creating a graduate student handbook, which will be a resource for students.
- R2. Make scholarship/grant opportunities and grantsmanship more generally a bigger focus and find ways to support students in the development of their grant and proposal writing skills. Apart from the benefits that students and the University itself would derive from successes in these competitions, there is great value in developing transferable skills of this type, especially for a program that emphasizes applied social research.**
- U2.** We will be visiting undergraduate courses (e.g., both quantitative & qualitative methods, design course, 4th year courses) to talk about our MA program and speak to the specific issue of scholarship funding. Where appropriate, professors will be encouraged to add a grant/proposal writing assignment to such courses.
- D2.** I encourage the department to take advantage of the support offered by the Office of Research Services.

**GS2.** I also encourage the department to make use of the Graduate Studies Information Officer as a resource, [since their] primary role is to facilitate the scholarship application process for students. The Information Officer can meet with the program and Sociology MA students to identify the appropriate funding bodies for research conducted by students in this department. The Graduate Studies office has also organized workshops for students about applying for scholarships and the program should encourage students to attend these ongoing learning opportunities. Finally, grant and scholarship writing can be discussed in the methods course or other required courses.

**R3. Look for ways to streamline the program and make it more flexible, with greater choice for students both in terms of course offerings and paths to completion. In this regard we have made several suggestions, including allowing students to take at least one course outside of Sociology, considering a one-year MA (possibly connected with PAR opportunities) and looking for ways to realize greater efficiencies in the way the two streams (English and French) operate. The Department understands better than we do the needs of the students it is seeking to serve and knows what is both desirable and realistically possible. For this reason we are not insistent about any of these specific changes. We want simply to recommend that the Department keep its conversations going about how to make the program more responsive to students and, in particular, to attend to the issue of poor completion times.**

**U3.** We are in favour of one elective being permitted from outside the departmental course offerings for our MA students. The student will need to outline the course's relevance to their research and get their supervisor's and ma coordinator's approval.

With the creation of the handbook, which includes progress charts, and the implementation of meetings for our MA students, we envision that the completion times will improve. We are also in favour of students from either the French or the English stream taking courses in the other stream after consultation and with the approval of their supervisor.

**D3.** I fully support this approach. Students could draw upon relevant courses in Indigenous Relations (MIRE), History (HIST), Humanities (HUMA), Interdisciplinary Health (INDH) and Psychology (PSYC).

**GS3.** The Graduate Studies office and the Registrar have been working to make courses in other departments more accessible to students in various graduate programs. In addition to the programs identified above, relevant electives available to Sociology students could be in both the PhD in Rural and Northern Health and Human Studies, among other graduate programs.

**R4. Integrate students in a more meaningful way into the governance of the Department, consulting with them frequently and making them a part of the on-going discussions about the program's future. We have suggested that this process**

**could start with a discussion of what students would like to see in the Student Handbook that is being developed. Another suggestion is regular (once per year or even once per term) meetings between the Graduate Coordinator and students in both the English and French streams, the purpose of which would be to take stock of how things are going and to identify issues that need attention.**

- U4.** This is a good idea. Meetings will be planned (one per term) and in a general sense incorporated into the Handbook as well.
- D4.** I fully support this approach.
- GS4.** I encourage the Graduate Coordinator to meet with students before the beginning of each academic year (i.e., at the end of summer) to discuss their progress and to plan their courses for the upcoming year. Students are required to fill out an annual report, so this would be an ideal time to review the annual report (where they can evaluate their courses and satisfaction with the program) and identify in what areas the student would like further support.
- R5. Create more professional development opportunities for students.**
- U5.** We will encourage our students to present their research ideas (proposal) at the university level (graduate studies fair) and their final project at conferences or, if possible and appropriate, to community groups.
- D5.** Students should be encouraged to participate in ACFAS-Sudbury, Indigenous Education Week and Research Week as well as external events and conferences.
- GS5.** In some graduate programs, participation in Research Week is mandatory, plus this is a very student-friendly forum for presenting research where prizes are awarded. ACFAS-Sudbury is ideal for Francophone students; again prizes are awarded and there is also the opportunity for peer-reviewed conference proceedings. I would also encourage the department to offer less formal chances for students to present and discuss their research, such as brown bag department seminars.
- Faculty members should encourage their students to co-author or present with them at academic conferences. There are also several graduate students conferences where students can present in front of other graduate students and develop their CVs.
- R6. Look into ways to support the qualitative methods course that the Department is now proposing to introduce as a compulsory course with the necessary technological resources (software programs) that students need to develop their qualitative research skills.**
- U6.** This is an excellent idea. Maybe the administration could find out how Carleton university organized it so students can purchase a temporary Nvivo licence at a reasonable price through their bookstore.

- D6.** Any licencing arrangement that gives students access at a reasonable price is worth exploring.
- GS6.** Other graduate programs at Laurentian (i.e., Human Kinetics and Nursing) offer qualitative research courses. I encourage the program to communicate with the professors of these existing courses to possibly collaborate or share licensing of software programs.<sup>1</sup>
- R7. Look for ways to bridge the English and French sections of the program, encouraging more interaction, networking and a greater sense of cohesion and common identity among students.**
- U7.** All the above-mentioned student meetings could be combined as one and facilitated by a bilingual faculty member. We have a number including the MA coordinator. We will explore combining the computer rooms into one to encourage sharing. As a department, we work consciously on inclusivity whenever possible thus demonstrating the importance of working together to meet the tri-cultural goals of the university. We could also plan a welcome party at the beginning of each academic year where all graduate students get the chance to meet all faculty members. We would like to underscore the need to add to our complement of core faculty especially for the French stream.
- D7.** I fully support this approach. Interaction among cultural groups is essential for fulfilling the mandate of Laurentian University and will be of benefit to individual students from any background.
- D7.** I would encourage the program to have an orientation session for Sociology MA students during Welcome Week, which would complement the Graduate Studies orientation. This would be an opportunity for new graduate students to meet with upper year students to develop a stronger graduate student culture in the program and for all students to get to know each other. The program could also consider making thesis proposal and defense attendance mandatory for all students in the Master's program and as suggested above, including students in brown bag or informal research seminars. By being together and hearing about each other's research, a supportive environment will develop.
- R8. Develop a more rigorous record-keeping system with respect to the outcome measures used to assess program quality. (We would add here an on-going record of the titles of all completed theses and essays.) More complete data would make the preparation of the next self-study less onerous, but more importantly, would give the Department the basis for a more evidence-based approach to its discussions about how the program is doing and where there is room for improvement.**
- U8.** We have assembled an Excel sheet with the necessary columns to track the progress of our students. We have already added a column for thesis titles.
- D8.** I welcome this initiative.

**GS8:** A systematic approach to tracking student progress is important and as recommended by the reviewers, will facilitate future IQAP reviews.

### ACAPLAN'S RESPONSE

ACAPLAN endorses the recommendations of the Review Team but notes the following recommendations, or parts of recommendations have already been acted on:

- R3. Allow students to take at least one course outside of Sociology.** It is now a policy of the Faculty of Graduate Studies Department that any graduate student may take electives from another unit so long as their supervisor agrees.
- R4. Integrate students in a more meaningful way into the governance of the Department, consulting with them frequently and making them a part of the on-going discussions about the program's future.** The Graduate Coordinator has already met students in both the English and French streams to take stock of how things are going and to identify issues that need attention; in addition the two computer rooms have become one to encourage sharing.
- R6. The reviewers suggested a site-wide licence for NVivo.** The Sociology Department has supplied this software in its computer lab.

### LAURENTIAN QUALITY ASSURANCE IMPLEMENTATION PLAN FOR THE MA PROGRAM In APPLIED SOCIAL RESEARCH

Recommendation	Proposed Follow-up	Responsibility for Leading Follow-up	Timeline
<b>1. Create a Departmental Handbook</b>	i. Examine existing models both within the university and elsewhere. ii. Consult faculty and students about proposed contents iii. Keep current by mounting on Departmental website	Graduate Coordinator	June 30, 2017
<b>2. Make scholarship/grant opportunities and grantsmanship more generally a bigger focus and find ways to support students in the development of their grant and proposal writing</b>	i. Work with Graduate Studies office to explore options ii Inform undergraduates in upper level classes	Graduate Coordinator and faculty	September 30, 2017 and ongoing

<b>skills</b>			
<b>3. Streamline the program and make it more flexible, with greater choice for students both in terms of course offerings and paths to completion</b>	<p>i. Consider a one-year MA (possibly connected with opportunities for Participation Action Research)</p> <p>ii. Look for ways to realize greater efficiencies in the way the two streams (English and French) operate.</p>	Graduate Coordinator	December 30, 2017
<b>4. Create more professional development opportunities for students.</b>	<p>Encourage students:</p> <p>i. To present and discuss their research, such as brown bag department seminars.</p> <p>ii. To present their research ideas (proposal) at the university level (graduate studies fair) and their final project at conferences or, if possible and appropriate, to community groups.</p> <p>iii. To participate in ACFAS-Sudbury, Indigenous Education Week and Research Week as well as external events and conferences.</p> <p>iv. To co-author or present with faculty at academic conferences.</p>	Graduate Coordinator and faculty	September 30, 2017 and ongoing
<b>5. Support student attendance at graduate student conferences where students can present in front of</b>	<p>i. Provide sufficient registration and travel funds</p>	Dean of Graduate Studies	Ongoing

<b>other graduate students and develop their CVs.</b>			
<b>6. Look into ways to support the qualitative methods course that the Department is now proposing to introduce as a compulsory course with the necessary technological resources (software programs) that students need to develop their qualitative research skills.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Assess what the best fit for Laurentian would be if it acquired a site licence form NVivo</li> <li>ii. Determine other options than NVivo to support courses in qualitative methods</li> </ul>	Dean of Graduate Studies	May 30, 2017
<b>7. Look for ways to bridge the English and French sections of the program, encouraging more interaction, networking and a greater sense of cohesion and common identity among students.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Hold a welcome party at the beginning of each academic year where all graduate students get the chance to meet all faculty members</li> <li>ii. Hold a more formal orientation session for Sociology MA students during Welcome Week, which would complement the Graduate Studies orientation.</li> <li>iii. Consider making thesis proposal and defense attendance mandatory for all students in the Master's program</li> </ul>	Graduate Coordinator	September 30, 2017
<b>8. Develop a more rigorous record-keeping system with respect to the outcome measures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Use Google Drive to mount existing Excel sheet Excel sheet with the necessary columns to track the progress of</li> </ul>	Graduate Coordinator	September 2017

<p><b>used to assess program quality. (We would add here an on-going record of the titles of all completed theses and essays.)</b></p>	<p>our students. The spreadsheet would be read-only except for the Administrative Assistant and would be password protected with access restricted to faculty in the program.</p>		
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The Dean of Arts and the Dean of Graduate Studies shall be responsible for monitoring the implementation of the plan and the sustainability of the program. The details of progress made shall be presented in the Dean's Annual Report and filed with the Vice-President Academic and Provost. The executive Summary and the monitoring reports will be posted on Laurentian University's web site.

### **CONCLUSION**

The MA program in Sociology is approved to continue and upon acceptance of this report by Universities Council on Quality Assurance, the suspension on enrolments will be lifted. The program will then be reviewed in the fall of 2023.

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