**Department/Program Review Summary**

**2014-15**

**Department:** Sociology and Geography (SOC/GEO)

**Date of Review:** March 20, 2015

**Review Team Members and Titles:**

Lori Zakel, Associate Provost

Dawn Allen, Assistant Professor, Hospitality Management/Culinary Arts

Shep Anderson, Professor/Chair, Operations Technology

Chad Atkinson, Research Analyst, Research Analytics & Reporting

Peter Bolmida, Coordinator of Transfer Services, New Student Enrollment Center

Bernice Brown, Professor, Developmental Language Arts

Jared Cutler, Assistant Provost of Accreditation and Assessment

Sheranita Hemphill, Professor, Dental Health Sciences

Rukhi Jan, Senior Academic Advisor, Academic Advising

Heidi McGrew, Division Assessment Coordinator, Liberal Arts, Communication and

 Social Sciences

Chrissann Ruehle, Assistant Professor, Management/Marketing

Rena Shuchat, Dean, Health Sciences

Sarah Twill, Professor and Chair of Social Work, Wright State University

**Department Members Present:**

Shari Rethman, Dean, Liberal Arts, Communication and Social Sciences

Dona Fletcher, Professor/Chair, Sociology and Geography

Faculty:

Dorie Farrell

Sean Frost

Dawn Hall

Jacqueline Housel

Dana Johnson

Mo Khani

Jennifer McDermott

Kathy Rowell

Amaha Sellassie

COMMENDATIONS:

* The department produced an outstanding self-study for the Program Review, and can be justifiably proud of the work that was done. The self-study was a collaborative effort within the department, and the level of full-time faculty engagement in its preparation is truly praiseworthy, as was the involvement of external individuals to get an outside perspective in the preparation of the self-study. All in all, this was an excellent demonstration of how the self-study was meant to be developed.
* Within the last couple of years there was a transition in the department from having a Sociology emphasis area within the Liberal Arts degree to having a bona fide Sociology stand-alone degree. As part of the transition, the department should be commended for its work in developing appropriate, relevant program outcomes. Many departments would not have done so until directed to do so, and the department’s self-motivation in this respect is laudable.
* The departments work with the “flipped classroom” model is very, very impressive. Making the effort to try this new approach was impressive enough, but the department went a step farther and gathered comparative data to demonstrate the efficacy of that approach. This data-based approach to decision-making is superb, and is demonstrative of a department that strives to improve student learning, but in ways that are based on good evidence and assessment practice.
* The department’s work with the “flipped classroom” model is only one of many ways that it embraces innovative approaches to increasing student learning outcomes. Service Learning is common in the department, as is faculty involvement with globalization and international education initiatives at the College. The department’s support of the Honors program is outstanding. All in all, this is a department that is willing to step outside of its comfort zone and try different approaches to broaden the horizons of its students.
* The department has a peerless commitment to assessment. The pre- and post-test assessment work that the department has done is highly commendable, and represents a considerable investment of time and work in the service of its students. Few department on campus have taken this kind of approach, and it demonstrates a rare understanding of research design.
* The department’s work with articulation agreements is also highly commendable. As a department whose program majors for the most part are going on to a four-year institution, these articulation agreements are crucial to the success of its graduates. The department has excellent connections with similar departments at area universities, and this is of immeasurable benefit to students.
* There are few things the institution could do that would have more direct impact on making college more affordable than the use of Open Educational Resources to replace expensive textbooks. The department is making a very brave move in the direction of using OERs to reduce costs for students, in the face of criticism from and opposition by its textbook publisher representatives. Hopefully the department will persist in this direction, and within the next several terms students will benefit financially by paying less for their course materials.
* In preparation for the self-study, the department’s outreach to stakeholders revealed their consideration for - and dedication to - serving those who depend on them, and their interest in getting feedback from those who rely on them. It is evident that the department cares about meeting its stakeholder’s needs.
* The CASI lab is a remarkable resource for students – extracurricular activities reinforce what is learned in the classroom, resources are provided that enable students to master course content, and students work with real data doing real research – it is a truly valuable vehicle for moving learning from the abstract and theoretical to the practical and concrete.
* The department has been proactive in offering its GIS courses to other programs – several other programs now rely on these courses to support their curricula.
* The department has stated a goal for increasing use of the eSyllabus tool. The college is currently working to increase faculty use of this tool, and it has great potential for ensuring that syllabi shared in Sinclair classrooms are appropriate. This is highly commendable.
* The department provided a wealth of documentation in the Appendix supporting its self-study narrative – this was an extremely well-documented self-study.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION:

* The department is strongly encouraged to expand its work with the “flipped classroom” model. The department has gathered compelling data demonstrating that this approach increases student success rates considerably, and the Review Team recommends that all SOC 1101 sections adopt this approach and continuously monitor the impact on course success rates. Since standardized activities are being developed as part of the “flipped classroom” effort, this presents an excellent opportunity for the collection of standardized data across all sections of SOC 1101 – the department should design these activities with the goal of collection and analysis of assessment data across different sections of the course.
* Similarly, the Review Team strongly encourages the department to continue development of Open Educational Resources, and document in its Annual Update submissions the savings to student that are achieved. This is important work, and should be a priority in the department’s improvement efforts.
* The Review Team was strongly impressed with the pre-post assessment approach, and with the department’s plans to expand this approach in the modules of its “flipped classroom” work. The department is encouraged to continue in this direction.
* This department is doing so many impressive things – these should be shared with other departments so that they can following this department’s example. Presentations through the CTL and at Fall Professional Development Day should be used to spread the word about the good work that is being done.
* The expansion of the “flipped classroom”, the introduction of the OER materials, and other initiatives that the department has underway will require continued monitoring of data. The department may want to consider inviting a representative from Research, Analytics, and Reporting (RAR) to come demonstrate some of the new SAS Visual Analytics reports that allow more rapid access to data. The Performance Based Funding tool in particular would be of value to the department in monitoring the impact of its initiatives on course success rates.
* The emphasis on completion, along with the current budget challenges that Sinclair faces, combine to create an urgent need for all departments to carefully examine their curriculum and reduce course offerings where appropriate. Many departments have courses that may be in some measure beneficial for students, but are ultimately superfluous to students’ ability to complete their programs, and in some cases may involve content that they will encounter subsequent to transferring to four year institutions. In some cases a lack of transferability may render the course less useful in the long run for student completion. It may be that superfluous courses are spreading our students across too many sections and negatively impacting average class size and instructional costs. The department is asked to prepare an analysis in the next year of all of the courses it offers, and rank them in terms of most essential to least essential in terms of importance to helping students complete - and particularly in terms of transferability. Special attention should be given to electives in this analysis, determining which would be the most beneficial to the most students and which might be deactivated with minimal impact.
* The challenges associated with encouraging students to complete programs prior to transfer were noted during the meeting with the Review Team – the department is encouraged to consider ways to increase the number of students who complete prior to transfer. It may be that restructuring the sequence of courses in the curriculum and judicious use of prerequisites may have some impact in this regard. Discussions with four-year institutions should be part of this effort. Analysis of students who came close to completing, examination of courses they completed and those they didn’t, and perhaps surveys of students who transferred before completing may yield suggestions of how completion could be increased. Also, reverse transfer may increase the number of completers for the department, although it is acknowledged that there are challenges to encouraging students to transfer credits back to Sinclair after moving on to a four-year institution.
* The challenges of tracking students who leave the program and transfer to four-year institutions were noted – the department is encouraged to work with RAR to obtain National Student Clearinghouse Data to get better information regarding transfer outcomes for its students.
* The Review Team was very impressed by the “flipped classroom” data that was shared during the meeting with the department in tabular form – and would have liked to have seen more data shared in a similar format in the self-study. The department is encouraged to share more data in a similar manner in future Annual Update and Program Review submissions, utilizing tables and graphs with clear labels and accompanying contextual information.
* The department has a well-written mission statement, but the Review Team felt that perhaps it should be expanded to include more distinct mission and vision statements for each of the three components of the department. The Review Team suggests one overall mission statement for the department that highlights the connections and commonalities between the three component areas, but embedded within it a distinct section with a specific mission statement for each.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF DEPARTMENT’S PROGRESS AND GOALS:

Few departments are as willing to step out of its comfort zone as this one is – the pre/post assessment approach, the thoughtful and data-driven incorporation of the “flipped classroom’ model, the exploration of OERS, the CASI lab, the commitment to Service Learning and Honors education – all of these are indications of a department that is willing to embrace innovation to help more of its students succeed, even when that innovation requires a substantial commitment of initial work and changing long-standing practices and approaches. During the meeting with the Review Team the department noted that some of these changes have required faculty to step away from familiar practices and embrace ones that were initially unfamiliar and uncomfortable, and that took them out of their element. The department has been undaunted and committed in its approach to innovation in the service of its students, and sets an example that many other departments would do well to follow. It is a department that is unafraid to move in new directions.

It is also a department that clearly takes assessment seriously – the pre/post assessment work is unique to this department, and represents a substantial investment of time, effort, and commitment. Because social science research is a large part of Sociology, there is a considerable amount of expertise that positions the department for the use of data to improve its students’ outcomes.

The department’s ability to collaboratively develop such an excellent self-study is indicative of a spirit of teamwork and united purpose. The department could not accomplish what it does without a clear ability to work together, although it is apparent that the department also benefits from a diversity viewpoints that no doubt expand the breadth of its discussions. It is a department comprised of dedicated, innovative individuals who are highly engaged with its students.

INSTITUTIONAL OR RESOURCE BARRIERS TO THE DEPARMTENT’S ABILITY TO ACCOMPLISH ITS GOALS, IF ANY:

* First and foremost, like all other departments at Sinclair, and indeed all of higher education, the department is operating in a substantially changed landscape. Performance Based Funding has changed the environment of higher education at the state, but is just one of many national trends that may fundamentally change higher education practice and the assumptions behind them. Consequently, the college as a whole and the individual departments within it face a time of change and transition, and will need to be thoughtful in responding to these changes.
* There was a considerable amount of discussion in the meeting with the Review Team regarding the challenges surrounding involvement of Adjunct Faculty in activities such as development of Program Review self-studies. The institution overall must grapple with the issue of how to involve adjunct faculty in its processes and ensure that their voices are heard, without putting pressure on them to do work that is uncompensated or that violates federal mandates for part-time employees.
* The department received a recommendation to review its curriculum and determine which courses might be candidates for elimination – every department on campus should be doing the same. The completion agenda and budget pressures will require all departments to be more lean and focused in their course curricula.
* The department noted challenges in marketing, but put a unique spin on the discussion, stating that in additional to externally marketing its offerings it was having a difficult time with internal marketing regarding how its courses might support other departments. Sinclair may be well served to consider how cross-departmental information exchange could be facilitated. This will be imperative as departments begin pruning their curriculum – departments will need to be aware of how course deactivations may impact other departments, and must be empowered to communicate to other departments how their remaining course offerings might take the place of eliminated courses in other departments.
* The length of the Program Review self-study template was discussed by the Review Team subsequent to the meeting with the department – is there an opportunity to streamline both the Program Review and Annual Update templates? How can they be reduced in size without a commensurate reduction in scope? Are there ways that departments can be held accountable for monitoring completion and course success, progress on goals and recommendations from the most recent Program Review, and regular assessment of all General Education and program outcomes without templates that have become somewhat onerous to complete?