



Sociology
**Final Assessment Report &
Implementation Plan**
May 2023

Faculty / Affiliated University College	Faculty of Social Science	
Degrees Offered	B.A.	
Date of Last Review	2014-2015	
Modules Reviewed	Honours Specialization in Sociology Specialization in Sociology Major in Sociology Minor in Sociology Major in Criminology Minor in Criminology	
External Reviewers	Dr. Cameron Campbell, Division of Social Science Hong Kong University of Science and Technology	Dr. Lesley Wood, Department of Sociology York University
Internal Reviewers	Dr. Chris Sherrin, Associate Dean Western Law	Katarina Huellemann, PhD candidate Psychology
Date of Site Visit	February 7, 8 & 9, 2023	
Date Review Report Received	February 28, 2023	
Date Program/Faculty Response Received	Program: March 21, 2023 Faculty: March 28, 2023	
Evaluation	Good Quality	
Approval Dates	SUPR-U: May 24, 2023 ACA: May 31, 2023 Senate (for information): June 9, 2023	
Year of Next Review	2030-2031	
Progress Report	June 2026	

Overview of Western’s Cyclical Review Assessment Reporting Process

In accordance with Western’s Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), the Final Assessment Report (FAR) provides a summary of the cyclical review, internal responses, and assessment and evaluation of the Sociology Program delivered by the Faculty of Social Sciences.

This FAR considers the following documents:

- the program’s self-study brief;
- the external reviewers’ report;
- the response from the Program; and
- the response from the Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences.

This FAR identifies the strengths of the program and opportunities for program enhancement and improvement, and details the recommendations of the external reviewers – noting those recommendations to be prioritized for implementation.

The Implementation Plan details the recommendations from the FAR that have been selected for implementation, identifies who is responsible for approving and acting on the recommendations, specifies any action or follow-up that is required, and defines the timeline for completion.

The FAR (including Implementation Plan) is sent for approval through the Senate Undergraduate Program Review Committee (SUPR-U) and ACA, then for information to Senate and to the Ontario Universities’ Council on Quality Assurance. Subsequently, it is publicly accessible on Western’s IQAP website. The FAR is the only document from the undergraduate cyclical review process that is made public; all other documents are confidential to the Program, Faculty of Social Sciences, and SUPR-U.

Executive Summary

With unique strengths in social inequality, population dynamics, and quantitative methods, research and teaching in the program is focused on four key areas of sociology: 1) Health and the Life Course; 2) Power and Justice; 3) Social Demography and Migration; and 4) Work and the Economy. In 2021-2022, total enrolment in the six sociology and criminology modules was at 936.

The self-study process was informed by focused discussions about program improvements at departmental meetings in 2020 and 2021, dedicated retreats in the spring of 2021 and 2022, and a survey of current students and recent graduates in July-August 2022.

The external reviewers shared a positive assessment of the Sociology Program indicating that “*the department leadership has provided excellent support rebuilding the*

program over the past decade.” The reviewers offer five recommendations for further enhancement.

Strengths and Innovative Features Identified by the Program

- Members of the program have strong connections with the federal government, the federal civil service, and community social service organizations.
- Creation of an EDI-D committee that advises teaching as well as other aspects of program work.
 - o A number of researchers in the department play key roles on advancing EDI-D as well as investigating inequalities more broadly.
- Incorporation of policy and community engaged learning into the program.
- Training in quantitative and demographic methods.
- Courses that highlight new tools and methods that contemporary sociologists often use.
 - o Courses give students the ability to master these methods/skills to use them in the workforce or in their research (e.g., Mapping Inequality 4421A/B, Visualizing Data 4461F/G, Introduction to Big Data 3302A/B).
- Robust set of course offerings related to the theme of Power and Justice that distinguishes the program from others in Southern Ontario.
- All summer courses are online – offering flexibility to students who may leave London in the summer.
- An orientation for part-time and new full-time faculty teaching in the department in August prior to fall teaching.
- Principal themes emerging from a survey of current students and recent graduates were:
 - o Interesting course content;
 - o Course variety with many options of interest;
 - o Engaging instructors – willingness to support students;
 - o Program flexibility – ability to fulfill the program requirements while focusing on courses they liked; and
 - o Research and writing opportunities.

Concerns and Areas of Improvement Identified and Discussed by the Program

- Government and community links can be better leveraged
- Can do more to conduct exit surveys of program students with support from the Faculty and University.
- Foresee a need for a dedicated lab space to support hands-on learning courses at the 4000 level.
- Principal themes emerging from a survey of current students and recent graduates were:
 - o Limited range of courses in criminology modules;

- More community engaged learning, research and hands on learning opportunities;
- Issues with registration in criminology courses;
- Required statistics, methods and theory courses; and
- Some students reported looking for more of a sense of community.

Review Process

As part of the external review, the review committee, comprising two external reviewers, one internal reviewer and a student reviewer, were provided with Volume I and II of the self-study brief in advance of the scheduled review and then met virtually over three days with the:

- Vice-Provost of Academic Programs
- Associate Vice-Provost (Academic Planning, Policy and Faculty Relations)
- Director of Academic Quality and Enhancement
- Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences
- Associate Dean Undergraduate Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences
- Department Chair, Department of Sociology
- Undergraduate Chair, Department of Sociology
- Teaching and Learning Librarian
- Administrative Staff
- Program Faculty
- Program Students

Following the virtual site visit, the external reviewers submitted a comprehensive report of their findings which was sent to the Program and Dean for review and response. Formative documents, including Volumes I and II of the Self-Study, the External Report, and the Program and Decanal responses form the basis of this Final Assessment Report (FAR) of the Sociology Program. The FAR is collated and submitted to SUPR-U by the Internal Reviewer with the support of the Office of Academic Quality and Enhancement.

Summative Assessment – External Reviewers’ Report

External reviewers shared that *“Overall, this is an effective and visionary program. It is aligned with the best practices of the discipline and has a clear sense of its strengths and weaknesses.”*

Strengths of the Program

- The department has one of the largest concentrations of sociology faculty conducting quantitative research in demography, stratification, and quantitatively in Canada.

- Organizing the program around four areas of strength is innovative and will help students to identify possible careers, and present sociology as an applied discipline which responds to real world social problems.
- A high proportion of courses are taught by full-time regular faculty, especially the 3rd and 4th year courses.
- The expanded range of courses at the 3rd and 4th year levels will allow for more research-integrated teaching, smaller classes, will offer opportunities for student application of knowledge and skills, and the more specialized topics will be likely to attract students.
- Program strengths in quantitative and demographic methodology will support the University's goal of supporting the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.
- The Program's quantitative methods, taught through Big Data, Data Visualization and Mapping, offer students skills that are highly valued by employers and/or will prepare them for graduate studies.
- The range of electives on topics related to demography, family, life course and migration align with the strengths of faculty members and provide students with opportunities to participate in faculty research projects and related experiential learning.

Areas of Concern or Prospective Improvement

- Commit to communicating the vision to students, advisors and other programs about the gradual phasing out of the Major and Minor in Criminology. This may help ease the transition.
- Consider re-establishing lab/tutorial sessions for second year methodology courses.
- Relevant faculty relationships with the Federal Government, Statistics Canada, and international agencies could be leveraged even more, in order to support student pathways to employment.
- As part of their feedback, students expressed a need/interest to:
 - access computer labs for the methods courses;
 - have seating in classrooms that can comfortably accommodate plus sized students;
 - schedule classes so that fewer are held in the evening; and
 - improve communication with students, with particular attention to student engagement and information flow.

Summary of the Reviewers’ Recommendations and Program/Faculty Responses

The following are the reviewers’ recommendations in the order listed by the external reviewers. Recommendations requiring implementation have been marked with an asterisk (*).

Reviewers’ Recommendation	Program/Faculty Response
<p>Recommendation #1* Begin to phase out the Criminology Major and Minor, beginning with the former.</p>	<p>Program: The program will begin phasing out the Criminology Major and Minor in the next academic year by undertaking the following actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In coordination with the undergraduate committee, present the proposal to the department and seek a supermajority vote on a plan to eliminate the Major and Minor in Criminology; • Create a plan to communicate this to undergraduates; and • Develop a sustainable transition of the modules into the department’s broader area of Power and Justice. <p>Faculty: The Dean’s office will facilitate proposals submitted to EPC to SOC or ACA as appropriate. Movement away from formal pathways is supported since it does not align with faculty strength; the Department is expected to monitor enrolments and student interest in specific high enrolment courses as this change is undertaken.</p>
<p>Recommendation #2* The department should engage in marketing and outreach to communicate to prospective and incoming students the value of the concentrations, most importantly Power and Justice, and receive whatever support it needs for this effort.</p>	<p>Program: In collaboration with the Faculty of Social Sciences Communications officer, and the Department’s administrator who manages the department’s web site and social media, the program will communicate to students the value of Power and Justice and the other three departmental areas of strength. In addition, the program will also collaborate with: 1) the undergraduate committee to actively promote the department’s concentrations and professional/academic pathways available to students, and 2) faculty members who teach introductory courses to promote the four areas in the 1000 level courses and streams/bundles of courses currently listed on the web site.</p> <p>Faculty: The Communications Officer will revise relevant web pages and develop promotional materials accordingly; also, the Dean’s Office will ensure that the Recruitment Officer is aware of these changes.</p>

<p>Recommendation #3* Introduce tutorial sessions in the large required 2nd year methodological courses. Ideally, these would be conducted in computer labs. If resources allow, the program may consider engaging dedicated teaching assistants on a full-time basis with multi-year appointments to lead these tutorials, rather than relying on graduate students.</p>	<p>Program: During the next academic year, the Undergraduate Committee will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • meet with faculty members teaching “core” methods courses to discuss what should be included in the courses and an approach to offer a more consistent experience across professors and modes of delivery. • assess the feasibility of offering hands-on labs that use computers to advance the learning of statistics and qualitative methods and software. <p>The Graduate and Undergraduate Committees will assess the feasibility of labs that can accommodate the size of the program’s undergraduate classes and strategies for TAs to offer such labs under supervision of those teaching the courses.</p> <p>Faculty: The Dean’s Office will support the Department in implementing this idea.</p>
<p>Recommendation #4* Improve engagement and information flow with current students. This includes improving dissemination of information about new policies and solicitation of feedback, encouraging students to identify with the program, understand its goals, and recognize the value of the training they are receiving. This may require going beyond emailed announcements and sharing of information with student representatives.</p>	<p>Program: The program will enhance student engagement and information flow with current students by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • planning more formalized engagement through the undergraduate committee. • conducting surveys in the 1000 level courses with the aim of identifying students’ needs and interests and promote the department’s four areas of concentration. • continuing to build the program’s social media presence and consider an undergraduate focused newsletter. <p>Faculty: The Dean’s Office will support the Department in implementing this idea.</p>
<p>Recommendation #5* The program should explore ways for more systematic collection of data on student outcomes, including internships and other placements during the program, and employment and progression to postgraduate studies after graduation. If such data can be extracted from existing university databases, it should be downloaded and reviewed regularly. If such data are not routinely available, the program may consider collecting data on its own, pending improvement in the collection and dissemination of such data by the university or the province.</p>	<p>Program: The department will work with the Registrar’s Office, IPB, and Advancement to gather information of current and former students. In addition, an “exit” survey will be circulated to students taking the 4000 level courses at the end of the winter term each year. This will be instituted as Central administration has not always provided consistent, timely, or accurate data to the department which has hampered effective program monitoring. The purpose of this exit survey will be to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • track outcomes as well as gather ongoing student contact information so that the program can remain in touch with alumni; • track the progress of graduates’ career progression; and • send graduation cards as a means of also staying in touch for future outcomes. <p>Faculty: The Faculty will work with all Departments to make suggestions to IPB and relevant University units regarding data helpful for program monitoring and development.</p>

Implementation Plan

The Implementation Plan provides a summary of the recommendations that require action and/or follow-up. In each case, the Program Chair, and the Dean of the Faculty is responsible for enacting and monitoring the actions noted in Implementation Plan.

Recommendation	Proposed Action and Follow-up	Responsibility	Timeline
<p>Recommendation #1: Phase out the Criminology Major and Minor modules.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present a proposal to the department and seek a supermajority vote. • Develop a communication plan aimed at undergraduate students. • Develop a sustainable transition of the modules into the department’s broader area of Power and Justice. • Monitor enrolments and student interest in specific high enrolment courses as this change is undertaken. 	<p>Undergrad Chair Department Chair Associate Dean</p>	<p>By September 2024</p>
<p>Recommendation #2: Conduct marketing and outreach initiatives to communicate to prospective and incoming students the value of the concentrations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise the department’s web site and social media to focus on the program concentrations. • Develop promotional initiatives focusing on concentrations and professional/academic pathways available to students. • Encourage faculty members who teach introductory courses to promote the four areas. 	<p>Communications Officer Administrative Officer Undergrad Chair Undergrad Committee</p>	<p>By September 2024</p>
<p>Recommendation #3: Introduce tutorial sessions, preferably conducted in computer labs, in the large required 2nd year methodological courses.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assemble faculty members teaching “core” methods courses to discuss what should be included in the courses and an approach to offer a more consistent experience across professors and modes of delivery. • Assess the feasibility of offering hands-on labs with the use of specialized computers. • Assess strategies for TAs to offer such labs under supervision of those teaching the courses. 	<p>Undergrad Chair Undergrad Committee</p>	<p>By September 2024</p>

<p>Recommendation #4: Improve engagement and information flow with current students to ensure their awareness of new policies, solicit feedback; help them better identify with the program, understand its goals, and recognize the value of the training they are receiving.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan more formalized engagement through the undergraduate committee. • Survey students taking 1000 level courses to identify their needs and interests and to promote the four areas of concentration. • Continue to build social media presence and consider an undergraduate focused newsletter. 	<p>Undergrad Chair Undergrad Committee Communications Officer</p>	<p>By September 2024</p>
<p>Recommendation #5: Explore ways for more systematic collection of data on student outcomes, including internships and other placements during the program, and employment and progression to postgraduate studies after graduation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaise with the Registrar’s Office, IPB, and Advancement to gather more regular information on current and former students. • Conduct exit surveys of students who completed the 4000 level courses at the end of each year. 	<p>Undergrad Chair Department Chair Associate Dean</p>	<p>By April 2024</p>