



Memorandum of Understanding

This MOU has been read and approved by:

Department Chair: Nielan Barnes Date: 3/7/2025
Nielan Barnes

Dean, College of Liberal Arts : Deborah Thien Date: 3/7/2025
Deborah Thien

Interim Vice Provost Academic Programs: Pei-Fang Hung Date: 3/7/2025
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**Program Review Summary
Memorandum of Understanding**

Department of Sociology
College of Liberal Arts
January 2025

This document serves as a summary of the Program Review findings and a Memorandum of Understanding outlining the consensus reached by the Department of Sociology, the College of Liberal Arts, and the Division of Academic Affairs, based on the recently conducted program review with a Self-study received in June 2023. Drs. Michel Estefan (University of California San Diego) and Berna Torr (California State University, Fullerton) completed the external review in October 2024. This MOU describes the goals to be achieved and the actions to be undertaken by all parties to this MOU during the next program review cycle. Progress toward goals is to be addressed in an annual report.

The Department of Sociology offers a BA degree in Sociology and a minor in Sociology. During this review cycle, the Department discontinued its MA in Sociology after being suspended for several years. The BA degree is 41 units, with a 27-unit core. The previous MOU from 2016 recommended: 1. The department will explore ways to increase first-time freshman graduation rates (partially met); 2. The department will update its curriculum map, develop a multi-year assessment plan that includes general education assessment, and report progress, findings and changes according to the biennial assessment schedule (in progress); 3. The department will develop a plan to mentor new faculty (not met); 4. The department will continue to work on revising its constitution (not met); 5. The department will work with the college to locate sufficient classroom space to schedule all its courses, including labs and large lecture courses, with the goal of maximizing seats available and shorten time to degree (in progress). 6. The program will provide a biennial update on progress made towards the actions agreed to in this MOU, to be submitted in conjunction with its biennial assessment report and leading to the next self-study to be submitted in June 2021 (partially met).

The department currently has 22 tenured and tenure-track faculty, including 10 full professors, 7 associate professors, and 5 assistant professors (1 new assistant professor was hired in spring 2023), and employs approximately 30 part-time lecturer faculty each semester.

Resources reviewed and used for the report:

1. Self-study June 2023
2. External reviewer report (visit conducted on October 24 and 25, 2024)



3. MOU 2016
4. Department of Sociology website

Strengths were identified in the reports:

1. When looking at persistence and graduation rates for first time, first-year (FTFY) and transfer students from 2016-2022 based on URM, gender, Pell eligibility and First-Gen status, **equity gaps** have been rather small, and while there is some fluctuation, these gaps are trending toward closing. It is also worth noting that prior to the pandemic, in many cases the gaps are reversed (e.g. historically marginalized students do better). Given the long-term impact of the pandemic, it is necessary that the department continue to monitor equity gaps in student persistence and graduation rates.
2. The **average time to degree for transfer students** has decreased from 2.4 years in 2015-2016 to 2.1 years over the past two years with available data (2020-2021 and 2021-2022). Similarly, the average number of units earned by transfer students at graduation has generally declined. In 2015-2016, transfer students earned an average of 129.3 units at graduation; by 2021-2022, this number had decreased to 126.6 units.
3. The department has undergone a **curriculum revamping** to highlight the centrality of understanding global systems of oppression and the promotion of social justice. Moreover, an attempt to reshape core subject areas to reflect the importance of empowerment of historically marginalized social groups and to promote community building which was supported by student satisfaction of the program
4. **High Impact Practices (HIPs):** The Sociology Department and Faculty are highly engaged in offering HIPs to students including Sociology Honors Program, Internships (in Sociology and the College), Study Abroad Courses, and involvement in community-based learning experiences.
5. **Diversity of Student Body and Faculty:** The department has successfully attracted and retained a diverse student body post-pandemic. Faculty diversity also enhances students' sense of belonging within the department. Faculty have also participated in an extensive number of professional development workshops related to DEIA.
6. **Facility:** The department has been proactive in securing and optimizing resources, including utilizing Student Excellence Funds (SEF) to support various infrastructure improvements. These enhanced spaces contribute to both faculty and student satisfaction by providing accessible, comfortable environments that foster collaboration and community building

Concerns were noted in the reports:

1. The first-time, first-year (FTFY) student graduation rates fluctuated during the review period. The 4-year graduation rate peaked at 39.1% for the fall 2013 cohort but declined



to a low of 5.9% for the fall 2017 cohort. This was followed by a rebound to 29.6% for fall 2018 and a subsequent drop to 2.1% for the fall 2019 cohort. The 6-year graduation rate for FTFY students reached a high of 51.4% for the fall 2015 cohort but fell to 11.8% for the fall 2017 cohort. For those who graduate, the average time to graduation is 5.1 years.

Although the department describes itself as a “discovery” major, the average number of units completed at graduation has declined from a high of 130.4 in 2014-2015 to a low of 124.5 in 2021-2022, indicating that students are likely not taking courses that do not apply to their major. The pandemic likely impacted time-to-graduation rates in recent years, while major migration may explain the low and variable 4- and 6-year graduation rates. Regardless, the department must continue efforts to improve graduation rates for FTFY students.

2. Prior to the pandemic, the department consistently had a two-year graduation rate of over 60% for transfer students. Post-pandemic there was a notable drop (44.4% and 39.9% for the 2019 and 2020 cohorts, respectively) in the two-year graduation rates.

Opportunities for Development were noted in the reports:

1. The number of FTES generated by majors has increased (from 50.55% to 60.85%) whereas the number of FTES generated by non-majors has decreased (from 49.24 to 39.15.7%). Overall, the total number of enrollments (811 as of fall 2022) peaked just before the pandemic and have yet to catch up to previous numbers. [Note: In Fall 2024 and Spring 2025, total enrollment has increased to approximately 850 majors and minors. The data from these semesters fall within the next review period.]
2. The Department has noted trends in their high DFW courses. Both SOC 270 and SOC 356 are major-specific courses that require quantitative, analytical, and writing skills. SOC 356 Classical Theory (mentioned above) and SOC 460 Poverty and Public Policy, which is a GE writing intensive course. The Department also attributes recent declines in student performance to online teaching during and after COVID. The department is working to lower DFW rates by increasing tutoring resources (via The Learning Center) for these courses. Additionally, SOC 449 and SOC 463 most likely have higher and/or fluctuating DFW rates due to differences in faculty instructional and grading practices or other additional factors external to students.
3. The Department makes extensive use of existing computer laboratories located across the campus for their research methods courses. Several software statistical packages are available for student use that prepare them for jobs after graduation. They also routinely use specialized facilities such as active learning classrooms (ALCs). Over the past few years, Departmental demand for access to ALCs has generally increased but campus-wide availability of ALCs remains limited. The Department would benefit from more access to computer labs and ALCs.



4. The department does not yet have a comprehensive strategic plan but has engaged in various forms of periodic strategic planning around hiring tenure-track faculty, curriculum development and/or re-structuring, and program assessment, among other topics. Both strategic planning and assessment are underway but not yet fully implemented. They are essential components for building shared governance and enhancing leadership development within the faculty
5. There are currently three faculty advisors, each receiving 3 units of assigned time for their advising hours. Students have expressed a need for greater consistency and accessibility in academic advising, particularly regarding guidance on course selection and navigating departmental processes.

Recommendations:

It is therefore agreed that the Department of Sociology will collaborate with the College of Liberal Arts and Division of Academic Affairs to:

1. Continue implementation of its assessment plan in order to complete annual assessments using direct and indirect methods and report on closing the loop activities to illustrate that continuous learning outcome data are used to inform decision making. Provide an annual update (due June 1) on progress made towards MOU actions to the CLA dean, the Vice Provost for Academic Programs, and the Coordinators of Program Review and Assessment. Your review cycle will be from 2022-2029. A comprehensive self-study will be due June 2029 for a 2029-2030 Academic Year review process.
2. Analyze reduction in 4-year graduation rates for FTFY students and 2-year graduation rates for transfer students. Develop and implement a plan to improve graduation rates with a goal of meeting CSULB benchmarks.
3. Analyze recent declines in FTES and determine implications for the Department. Determine if strategies should be implemented to increase major and/or non-major FTES.
4. Analyze recent efforts to lower DFW rates by increasing tutoring resources (via The Learning Center) for high DFW courses, then close the loop accordingly. Address high DFW rates that are a result of faculty instructional and grading practices.
5. Collaborate with the College and Academic Affairs to allocate more access to computer labs and ALCs.
6. Engage in strategic planning for the Department to address issues related to this MOU and external review, as well as engaging in curriculum development and/or re-structuring, program assessment, and equitable distribution of dept-level service roles, among other topics. Establishing transparent decision-making processes and open communication channels will be crucial steps in building trust and fostering a stronger sense of community and shared governance within the department.



7. To build a culture of distributed leadership that supports professional development and leadership transition, the department should consider implementing a mentorship program in which senior faculty can offer guidance to newer members on navigating service roles and developing their leadership capacities.
8. Strengthening the advising system through improved training, support, and responsiveness will help meet student expectations and reduce disparities in advising quality. It is recommended that the department work with the college to implement a comprehensive training program for faculty advisors, emphasizing consistent communication, culturally responsive advising, and knowledge of campus resources.
9. While the department is commended for creating a Canvas page to enhance student communication and engagement, it is encouraged to continue maintaining this platform as an effective means of sharing academic opportunities and resources with students.

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*DocuSign signature page on file.