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# MEMORANDUM

APRIL 21, 2020

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**TO:** BONNIE IRWIN, CHANCELLOR  
EMMELINE DE PILLIS, DEAN DESIGNEE  
MATTHEW PLATZ, VCAA DESIGNEE  
MARINA KARIDES, CHAIR OF SOCIOLOGY

**FROM:**  SERI LUANGPHINITH, ACREDITATION LIAISON OFFICER

**SUBJECT:** REVIEW OF THE 2019-2020 SOCIOLOGY PROGRAM SELF STUDY

**CC:** ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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This memorandum constitutes the evaluation of the document submitted April 20, 2020 as evidence of program rigor, integrity, and quality of instruction and operations in the Sociology Department, College of Arts and Sciences, University of Hawai'i at Hilo.

The Chair and the Department are to be commended for putting together this document given that preparations were only undertaken this academic year after fifteen years of non-compliance. The ALO recognizes the huge undertaking made by the current chair, Dr. Marina Karides, in collecting vast amounts of data, analyzing the data vis-à-vis the University's larger mission and vision, and marshalling the production of a narrative by synthesizing a wide gamut of ideas and feedback. The willingness of the Department to submit this self-study this academic year ensures that there is evidence of on-going program review, a major accreditation requirement by WSCUC; this submission served as a catalyst for the resurrection of a timeline of review for all degree programs going forward. ***This in the very least is the most important contribution this self-study offers.***

That being said, the self-study reflects the ongoing challenge of developing programmatic assessment in individual departments. The data or "evidence" that would support claims of rigor and quality is missing and much of it due to a lack of a sustained culture of academic assessment. As this is a primary concern for WSCUC compliance, the ALO will devote this review to observations and recommendations regarding student learning assessment as they have been and are being currently conducted in the Program.

## I. 2005-2006 Self-Study

The WSCUC Commission in 2004 noted "efforts to implement assessment initiatives have not yet reached the level of campus-wide engagement. Many faculty still resist the assessment initiatives and much work remains to be done . . . . In all cases, the University must maintain its momentum so that faculty will understand that the ultimate purpose of assessment is to improve teaching and learning. Assessment and cultures of evidence are tools to that end."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ralph A. Wolff to Rose Y. Tseng, WSCUC Action Letter, June 25, 2004 (Reaffirming Accreditation to 2014), <https://hilo.hawaii.edu/uuh/accreditation/WASCreports/WSCUCactionletterjune252004.php>.

Sociology, in the year following, submitted their Self-Study and it appears that some effort at developing the basis for programmatic assessment had been undertaken. The program noted in its opening pages: "Our program, both in theoretical and practical dimensions, stresses student learning through critical thinking, research, sociological knowledge, observation and writing. [ . . . ] Our department relies on progressive assessments of learning culminating in senior seminars that all majors are required to take."<sup>2</sup> The self-study also indicates that SLOs for both the major and the minor were "developed in accordance with guidelines set by the American Sociological Association."<sup>3</sup>

To measure these outcomes, a survey of alumni was given to alumni who graduated between 1990 and 2005 (*n* = 59), which reported the following:

The overwhelming majority of alumni responding say that their sociology training prepared them somewhat or very much for the job they wanted (94.9%), for a wide range of careers (93.2%), for graduate school (87.5%), and to make a positive impact in their community (98.3%). In terms of specific skills, similar percentages say their training improved their skills somewhat or very much in a wide range of specific areas that could be seen as adding up to critical thinking. These include, for example, writing effectively (100%), recognizing biases (94.7%), communicating orally (96.5%), interpreting different types of data (94.7%), thinking analytically and logically (98.2%), gathering information to make an argument based on evidence (94.7%), and choosing between alternative courses of action based on evidence (94.7%).<sup>4</sup>

While assessment (in this case indirect assessment) was used as evidence, there was no evidence of direct assessment. Also missing were the actual list of student outcomes as well as any plan for future direct assessment.

This was pointed out by the external reviewer, Dr. Judith Little, on pages 19, and 24-25 of her report.<sup>5</sup> The Department, in turn, concurred with the recommendations of Dr. Little to script SLOs for the University Catalog and course syllabi and to develop a more direct approach to measuring student success through two possible means: assessing papers from the senior seminars and a "standardized test in critical thinking skills, developed with the support of an NSF grant that is available from Tennessee Tech University. Such an assessment would be far more consistent with the broader spectrum of analysis and styles of thinking that we, as a Department, want to inculcate in our students."<sup>6</sup>

## II. 2019-2020 Self-Study

As of the current date, progress has been made in terms of direct assessment of student learning among other "priorities" for Program Review, such as "the collection of data and findings about the meaning of the degree, the quality of learning, core competencies, standards of student performance, retention, graduation, and overall student success," identified by WSCUC as essential components of quality assurance and improvement.<sup>7</sup> The current self-study does a forthright job in presenting an array of quantitative data, noted in Appendix H of the 2019-2020 Self Study, including numbers of majors, minors, and graduates per fiscal year over the past ten years, SSH to FTE, and distribution of FTE to major versus GE.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Sara Millman et al., Department of Sociology, University of Hawaii at Hilo, Self Evaluation Report, December 2008, 1.

<sup>3</sup> Sara Millman et al., Department of Sociology, University of Hawaii at Hilo, Self Evaluation Report, December 2008, 3.

<sup>4</sup> Sara Millman et al., Department of Sociology, University of Hawaii at Hilo, Self Evaluation Report, December 2008, 11.

<sup>5</sup> Judith K. Little, External Program Review, Department of Sociology, University of Hawai'i at Hilo, May 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Departmental Response to the Report of the External Reviewer, date unknown, 1.

<sup>7</sup> WSCUC, 2013 Handbook of Accreditation (revised 2018), <https://www.wscuc.org/resources/handbook-accreditation-2013/part-iii-wasc-quality-assurance/institutional-report/components-institutional-report/6-quality-assurance-and-improvement-program-review-assessment-use-data-and-evidence>.

<sup>8</sup> Appendix A and H, Department of Sociology Self-Evaluation in Fulfillment of the Policy and Guidelines for Academic Program Review, Spring 2020.

However, what remains unclear is how all of this data should intersect with student learning; this can perhaps be explained by the lack of sustained annual programmatic assessment since the Self-Study only lists the core competency assessments that began university-wide in 2012-2013. Since the inception of that initiative at UH Hilo, Sociology has participated in three out of the six years this has been in effect. And while there is assessment data for Written Communication (AY 2013-2014), Quantitative Reasoning (AY 2014-2015), and Oral Communication (AY 2017-2018), there is not much more narrative on how this data will be used to “close the loop” and how follow-up assessment will be planned to see if the actions taken in response to this data.<sup>9</sup> The assessment data is also not cited in conjunction with the other quantitative data that is included in the Self-Study.

It is understandable that as Sociology’s Self-Study is the first to be submitted in this time of flux with the new Program Review Guidelines having been just recently revised with stronger language connecting assessment with quantitative student data, the synthesis of all of these necessary components may prove challenging. **Thus the recommendation of the ALO is to accept the Self-Study as written with strong recommendations for the program’s next review, which should take place in AY 2025-2026.**

### III. Recommendations

Based on the observations above, the ALO offers the following recommendations:

#### A. Develop programmatic assessment based on revised SLOs

Sociology submitted into Kualii last fall a new set of SLOs that will replace the vague narrative about student learning currently in the 2019-2020 catalog. If approved, the following will be posted in the 2020-2021 Catalog.<sup>10</sup>

#### Concepts and Theory

- Explain core concepts in sociology and identify major theoretical frameworks.
- Identify perspectives of the processes and structures that cause or perpetuate social inequalities.
- Describe how intersecting systems of social categorization – such as gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, indigeneity, and social class – are related to experiences, identity, and social inequality.
- Recognize mechanisms of social change including social movements, economic shifts, and political upheaval.
- Identify and differentiate micro, meso, and macro structures, including intimate patterns of interaction, organizations, and institutions.
- Understand and explain how structures and patterns of interaction and social systems affect people in their everyday lived experiences.

#### Research Skills

- Describe how social research helps us develop an understanding of society.
- Develop applied skills in quantitative and qualitative methods, including collecting, interpreting, and reporting data.
- Identify scholarly sociological literature and develop a literature review on a sociological subject.
- Develop skills in presenting independent research including in the classroom or at appropriate professional venues such as sociology conferences and symposia.

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<sup>9</sup> WSCUC Institutional Accreditation, Core Competency & Programmatic Assessment—Indicators, B.A. Sociology, <https://hilo.hawaii.edu/blog/accreditation/b-a-sociology-ieee/>.

<sup>10</sup> UH Hilo Catalog 2019-2020, Sociology, <https://hilo.hawaii.edu/catalog/sociology>.

The next urgent step that is needed is to develop descriptors for these SLOs and measurements (i.e. rubrics or tests) that can be used to weigh student skills on artifacts such as written papers or oral presentations. It is also recommended to utilize already existing lower-stakes writing (such as short answer essays) and multiple choice tests which can be quantified to see how many students can “explain how structures and patterns of interaction and social systems affect people in their everyday lived experiences” or “correctly identify major theoretical frameworks” respectively.

B. Plan for a sustainable, annual “culture” of assessment

Rather than scrambling to undertake assessment for the sake of program review, the ALO recommends identifying one upper and one lower division course per year based on the four-year map and the curriculum matrix; these course can also double up for core competency assessment and other institution-wide initiatives, such as the WI and Diversity assessments that are underway for the current Spring term. Using one set of student artifacts for multiple measurements would make the exercise efficient, especially if all faculty participated to evenly distribute the scoring. This would encourage faculty to align their definitions of what is “minimally competent” work. This will hopefully spur a collective effort to bring this data into consideration as the faculty work towards simultaneously weighing enrollment and retention, fiscal efficacy, and future possibilities given the changes that are happening to higher education.

The Department should again consider undertaking focus groups and surveys to gauge student perceptions of their learning—indirect assessment can also be used to partially satisfy requirements for assessment.

The Department must plan on “closing the loop” on assessment data—the main goal for doing direct assessment is to ensure the quality of learning and to follow-up on any problems students may be encountering. For example, the data from 2013-2014 indicates many students were struggling with Line of Reasoning in their policy analyses which were evaluated for Written Communication; for that year, students in this particular upper division course averaged 1.7 on a 4-point scale.<sup>11</sup> Best practice mean redeploying the assessment to see if the department’s actions in response to this finding led to improved scores in this area.

Finally, the ALO requests that further quantitative data apart from what is currently posted by the UH Hilo IRO be made available for all future Program Reviews.<sup>12</sup> It is surprising to find that regular time-to-completion rates are only calculated for the institutional levels by System IRO—unless Departments are analyzed, intervention and resource allocation along with any attempts to evaluate efficacy of such initiatives are muddled at best.<sup>13</sup>

The ALO again wishes to recognize the exceptional work that went into this Self-Study, which represents the first beginning steps in realizing WSCUC’s ideal of evidence-based learning improvement in the face of the escalating momentum of public accountability.<sup>14</sup> The ALO looks forward to their continued efforts and would encourage the chair and faculty to seek out WSCUC training in assessment and program review.

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<sup>11</sup> WSCUC Institutional Accreditation, Core Competency & Programmatic Assessment—Indicators, B.A. Sociology, <https://hilo.hawaii.edu/blog/accreditation/b-a-sociology-ieee/>.

<sup>12</sup> UH Hilo Institutional Research Office, Program Review: Appendix C Quantitative Data, accessed April 27, 2020, <https://hilo.hawaii.edu/uhh/iro/UHHiloProgramReview.php>.

<sup>13</sup> Institutional Research and Analysis Office, Graduation and Retention Rate Summary, accessed April 27, 2020, [https://www.hawaii.edu/institutionalresearch/gradRatesSummaryReport.action?IRO\\_INSTITUTION=HIL&drillThruLevel=&agglelevel=null&reportId=SDSTT01&campusContext=null&drillId=null&VALUE=null&exportType=&drillValue=null&drillTarget=null](https://www.hawaii.edu/institutionalresearch/gradRatesSummaryReport.action?IRO_INSTITUTION=HIL&drillThruLevel=&agglelevel=null&reportId=SDSTT01&campusContext=null&drillId=null&VALUE=null&exportType=&drillValue=null&drillTarget=null)

<sup>14</sup> WSCUC, The Changing Context of Accreditation, <https://www.wscuc.org/resources/handbook-accreditation-2013/part-i-2013-handbook-and-wasc-accreditation/changing-context-accreditation>.

