

**Analysis of the Self-Study Document
Prepared by the Department of Sociology
for the Purpose of Program Review
Matthew S. Platz
Professor of Chemistry
May 11, 2020**

I. Introductory remarks

On April 21, 2020 Chancellor Irwin tasked me (henceforth referred to as “the author”) to participate in the Program Review (PR) of the Department of Sociology. This document is the author’s response to the charge.

The Program Review process has recently changed as described in the letter of Professor Luangphinit, the UH Hilo Academic Liaison Officer (ALO) to WASC, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. The PR process no longer culminates in a Memorandum of Understanding signed by the faculty, the Dean and the VCAA. In the new paradigm, the VCAA designee (the author), along with a UH Hilo Dean, serve as *internal* general reviewers of the self-study document, prepared by the Department Chair. The author is one of four reviewers, along with the Dean, the ALO and an *external* subject expert. Thus, this review will not dwell on matters involving accreditation nor matters that require an expert knowledge of the discipline of sociology. Those concerns are best left to the content experts. Rather, the author’s perspective will be that of a faculty member with a broad view of UH Hilo. It is expected that the self-study document and the four reviews will inform decisions to be made by UH Hilo Central Administration. Sociology is the first program to undergo PR under the new guidelines (<https://hilo.hawaii.edu/blog/accreditation/about/program-reviews/>).

The last Sociology PR was conducted in 2006. Two years later came the great recession which led to cutbacks in state funding that were never restored. After UH Hilo enrollments peaked in 2012, they dropped steadily for 7 years. In recent years tuition was frozen even though costs increased. These factors surely reduced the ability of UH Hilo to act on the recommendations made in 2006.

The Department Chair, Professor Karides, is to be commended for writing a comprehensive and authoritative document. The love of her discipline and pride in her program shines through the self-study. The case is made for investment in the program, which will ultimately be considered by Central Administration from a global university perspective, one that is cognizant of the present external environment.

The landscape of higher education in the nation is challenging to say the least. UH Hilo began the current fiscal year with steadily declining revenues. On May 11, 2020, the UH System Office of Institutional Research and Analysis reports that UH Hilo enrollments for fall 2020 are down 14.3% (298 students) from the same time as last year (105 days before the first day of instruction). (<https://www.hawaii.edu/institutionalresearch/openingEnrollment.action>)

If that trend holds it would mean a loss of over \$3M in revenue to UH Hilo depending on the mix of resident and non-resident student attrition. Governor Ige has remarked that the State will see a revenue shortfall of \$1.5B which will trigger a reduction of state spending to maintain a balanced budget, as required by the Hawai'i Constitution. There is talk of furloughs and pay cuts. A sharp contraction of the university (hopefully a temporarily one) is expected during academic year 2020-2021. Thus, any new investment must require little to no new resources. In this particular case the author believes this is possible in the academic year 2022-23.

This review will identify chronic problems endemic to the institution, problems that have been exacerbated by the current crisis. In the interest of full disclosure, it must be stated that these problems existed when the author was VCAA and were not solved on his watch. It is easier to admire a problem than to solve it.¹

II. Department SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) Analysis

The SWOT analysis presented will make use of data taken from either the UH System or UH Hilo IRO. Care must be taken to not overinterpret this data because of the small size of many if not most UH Hilo units. A single faculty member going on sabbatical, the arrival or departure of a single faculty member, the arrival or departure of a single grant (e.g. EPSCoR, ADVANCE) leads to large swings in various year to year ratios. Service of a single faculty member as Division Chair (Sociology before 2017, History 2017-present) dramatically impacts both the numerator and the denominator of the SSH/dollar ratio. A single full-time teacher with a relatively small or large salary can make comparisons between departments problematic. Finally, the addition of a single tenure track faculty member to a small unit can change the appearance of that unit from greatly under-resourced to greatly over-resourced.

It is also important to note that UH Hilo undergraduate headcount was 3362 on September 29, 2014 but declined to 2815 on the same date in 2019, a decline of 16% (547 students). (<https://www.hawaii.edu/institutionalresearch/openingEnrollmentSemester>). It is reasonable then to expect, therefore, campus-wide declines in average class sizes and SSH counts if the number of courses offered remained constant. Nationally, enrollments in colleges and universities increased following the great recession and have been in decline particularly in the Humanities and Social Sciences. The enrollment challenge is not unique to UH Hilo, it is a national phenomenon.

The author concludes that the small size of UH Hilo units, and the large fluctuations associated with the actions of a single faculty member, increases the difficulty of making data driven decisions relative to larger institutions.

- **Strengths**

The three (of five) faculty (temporary plus permanent) vita that were made available to the author on laulima, indicate doctoral degrees from respected universities, solid publication rates and service to the campus including suicide prevention, Black History Month and the Community of Hei.

Service to the profession is detailed in the self-study document:

In supporting its majors, the Department of Sociology and the scholarly orientation of its faculty has facilitated professional conferences to occur on campus, such as the aforementioned Hawai'i Sociological Association. Sociology faculty have also served the organization as President, Vice-President, and in local coordination of its annual conference... Another symposium coordinated by the Department of Sociology has been the Gender, Fashion and Globalization Student Conference which occurred in 2015, 2017, and 2019. This conference includes presentations by students who have researched the production history of a garment, and also invites an expert from the community in fashion or garment production to speak as keynote. The event has had attendance by the public. One faculty member was a board member and then Vice President of a significant professional organization that shares a Departmental focus on applied sociology – the Association for Applied and Clinical Sociology. Another has served on the book review committee for a major award of the Society for Social Problems. These professional service endeavors indicate that the faculty of the Sociology Department are well-respected for their abilities and service to the larger professional community.

The Department enjoyed a surge in the number of graduates in May 2018. Ironically this depressed the majors count in subsequent years. Sociology had an admirable number of Native Hawaiian graduates in May 2018, as well. The curriculum has undergone extensive revision and is now quite locally aligned. The major now has, for example, a new Indigenous and Island Sociology option.

Sociology course offerings support many degree programs in addition to Sociology. Prominent examples are Administration of Justice and Political Science, Gender and Women's Studies, Drama, Japanese Studies and Nursing. Sociology contributes to the Pacific Island Studies and Indigenous Public Health Certificate.

UH Hilo and Hawai'i Community College (HawCC) have created a “two plus two” program. This provides an efficient pathway for HawCC students and aids UH Hilo enrollments.

Sociology faculty have successfully competed for a plethora of internal grants. The internal grants provided funds for research that have helped improve UH Hilo's retention of students, identified pathways for formerly incarcerated women in higher education, and gauged response to natural disasters in Hawai'i. Seed grant funds have been used to employ UH Hilo students to work on faculty research projects and to present their findings at a regular session at the American Sociological Association with a graduate research assistant to the project.

The Department chair is the PI of a large NSF ADVANCE grant. The RTRF funds that accompany the ADVANCE grant contribute to the campus research enterprise. There is a net cost saving every time faculty receive a “course buy-out” and are replaced by a lecturer. The net cost savings resulted in extra dollars for some part of Academic Affairs.

- **Weaknesses**

As shown in Appendix B and in Table 1 all disciplines in the Division of Social Sciences lost majors and taught fewer SSH in fall 2019 than fall 2014, with the notable exception of Geography and Environmental Sciences. In percentage terms the decline in Sociology majors is about the same as Anthropology, History and Political Science. Ironically, the recent surge in the number of graduates in May 2018 led to a drop in Sociology majors in subsequent semesters.

The decline in Sociology SSH is less than that experienced by Anthropology, History, Political Science and Psychology.

Table 1. Percent change in First Major and SSH between Fall 2014 and Fall 2019

	Anthropology	Geog & ES	History	PoliSci (excl AJ)	Psychology	Sociology
Majors	-34%	+ 13%	-34%	-15%	-26%	-33%
SSH	-37%	+ 20%	-23%	-23%	-32%	-12%

In Fall 2019, Sociology offered about the same number of courses (not including “99” courses, internship courses, practicums, seminar and senior thesis courses) as the other departments except Psychology, which has more than twice as many majors as any other discipline in the division. If Sociology adds a tenure track faculty member the number of courses to be offered will not change, according to the self-study document. What will change will be the percent of SSH taught by permanent faculty.

The average class size in Anthropology, Geography and Environmental Science, Psychology and Sociology decreased between 2014 and 2019 and stayed about the same in History and Political Science. This data set includes seminar and senior thesis courses. The author remains puzzled by the “fact” that Geography and Environmental Sciences SSH increased but average class size decreased, and suspects there must be inconsistencies in definitions of the data.

As stated in the self-study document:
An arena in which the Department of Sociology faculty members seems to show limited participation is in faculty governance. For example, in recent years our faculty are not represented in faculty congress committees or the Chancellor’s Diversity Committee. In addition, we do not serve in any official capacity in the University of Hawai’i Professional Assembly (UHPA) or the College of Arts and Sciences Faculty Senate. This may be due to the fact that many of us are stretched thin or that we prefer service work in which we have a more direct connection with our students or intellectual community. However, given the kind of expertise sociologists hold of the structure and organization of institutions, department members should be taking a more active role.

The self-study document indicated that not all Sociology faculty participated in the recent Hawaii Sociological Association Conference, and in Sociology related events funded by internal grants.

The failure to submit vita by two senior faculty implies that the chair received little support for the Program Review from some of her colleagues.

- **Opportunities**

The author was involved in the crafting of the successful EPSCoR Track I proposal, currently serves as Hilo PI of the grant and has attended recent public forums with the UH System. There is a consensus developing that the renewal proposal should focus on “Data” and should request *multiple* UH Hilo faculty lines. It is the author’ opinion that the new data hires should focus on applied disciplines, specifically in the nexus between social science and public health. The author believes that “Data for Social Sciences” and “Data for Health Sciences” courses would be popular with students and help our students develop important skills. Sociology would be an appropriate home for one of the multiple new hires in social science.

The salary of these EPSCoR hires would be paid by the grant of up to four years, beginning as early as fall 2022 and would therefore not require any institutional resources until the current crisis has hopefully passed.

The author is intrigued by the following statement in the self-study document.

As sociologists we recognize the importance of data collection, but we also hold a very clear vision of the challenging socio-economic environment globally, in Hawai’i, and for indigenous communities, even before the current health and economic crisis which will require a sociological imagination like never before.

The author hopes that Central Administration learns more about this “imagination” and that includes suggestions for how all UH Hilo stakeholders can put aside parochial concerns during the present crisis. Perhaps the crisis can lead to an appreciation of our interdependence and foster a sense of common destiny.

- **Threats**

Sociology faces the same threats faced by every part of UH Hilo in the current crisis environment. As a small unit it feels these threats quite acutely. The one unique threat to Sociology is its dependence on an “Emergency Instructor²” to deliver its core curriculum. Emergency Instructors have a fixed term and cannot always be easily renewed given state policies and practices. If the Emergency Instructor is not renewed it would jeopardize the timely graduation of Sociology majors.

The Sociology Department is small and the program would be damaged, and perhaps unable to graduate its majors in a timely manner, if it were to suffer a single faculty departure.

III. Response to Specific Charge Questions

Cost per SSH, is this realistic? Are there ways to be more fiscally efficient given that they are asking for additional hires? Is the historic cost of SSH sustainable over the long term? Does the program provide pragmatic insight into how it will continue to operate going forward in a climate of what declining enrollments and resources?

Relative to Anthropology, Geography, History and Political Science, Sociology probably has the most favorable SSH per dollar ratio since it has smallest number of tenure track faculty members and relies to a greater extent on lower cost individuals to do the teaching. Thanks to the ADVANCE grant, Sociology has more faculty course buy-outs. The course buy-outs save more salary than the cost of a replacement lecturer. The dollar difference subsidizes some part of Academic Affairs.

The sustainability of all small units at UH Hilo is an open question at this time, given the current crisis.

Program Review has not previously asked units how they would respond pragmatically to declining resources and revenues. The present self-study, like all of its predecessors, ignores this question. Instituting this mindset into the culture of UH Hilo and into PR will certainly be a challenge.

How well do they compare to other units across the university in setting priorities (course scheduling, course assignments, etc.) as resources become scarcer?

Sociology appears to be doing well compared to Anthropology, Geography, History and Political Science. These 5 units offer a comparable number of courses and have comparable average course enrollments, but Sociology has better recent graduation rates.

Is there truthfulness in the reporting of resource needs? Does the objective data support their priorities?

The author found the self-study to be truthful. Sociology will struggle to offer its present curriculum if the Emergency Instructor position is not replaced by a permanent full-time staff member. The author believes that this would also be true for Anthropology, Geography, History and Political Science if they were reduced to four permanent faculty and an Emergency Hire Instructor.

Do they position themselves well for a future that will probably include declining state funding and tuition revenue?

In the opinion of the author, Sociology appears to be neither better nor worse prepared than other units in planning for a present and future with declining revenues. In the opinion of the author, small units like Sociology will be less able to survive downsizing than large programs if UH Hilo sees significant revenue declines.

How do their priorities align with serving the maximum number of students possible?

Sociology is a small unit and will never resemble majors like Psychology, Kinesiology, Marine Science, Biology and Communications at UH Hilo, or peer institutions in terms of impacting large numbers of students. It will never resemble a “service” department such as Mathematics in terms of impacting large numbers of students. Its natural comparison group is Anthropology, Geography, History, and Political Science. Within this social science subset, Sociology’s numbers appear robust.

What new initiatives can be undertaken with the minimal investment?

As discussed earlier, Sociology can recruit a permanent faculty member specializing in “data” as part of the next EPSCoR grant.

IV. Recommendations

- UH Hilo has many small programs. This confounds data analyses because absolute values and ratios (e.g SSH/dollar) can experience large annual changes due to the arrival or departure of a single grant, or the circumstances of a single faculty member (for example service as division chair, sabbatical, promotion, or resignation). Care must be taken in analyzing UH Hilo data and the new Director of UH Hilo IRO should take a fresh look at what data is truly worth warehousing and analyzing.
- The UH Hilo IRO should be charged with validating the numbers presented in the self-study document, as opposed to a particular reviewer.
- The charge letter to the department chair, external, disciplinary expert reviewer and dean should be modified to align with the charge letter sent to the author in April 2020.
- If permitted by State Law, and in light of the current lockdown of the State of Hawaii until May 31 at the earliest, UH Hilo should suspend the requirement for searches for new and continuing emergency hires, until the current crisis is mitigated.
- The terminology around “temporary Instructor” and “emergency hire Instructor” is confusing and needs to be resolved.
- Compensation for teaching internship, seminar, practicum and senior thesis classes needs to be clear and consistently applied across campus. UHPA must be part of the discussion.
- UH Hilo IRO should develop a mechanism for tracking counts of only *compensated* courses.
- UH Hilo should participate in the renewal of the NSF Track I EPSCoR grant and should ask for multiple faculty hires in the general area of Data Science. One of these faculty should be housed in Sociology, and s/he should be expected to create and teach (with others) a series of new courses “Data Science for Social Scientists” leading to a certificate.
- The four junior faculty hired to date through the EPSCoR program should be encouraged to demonstrate their University service by working closely with the UH Hilo Institutional Research Office. Their work is expected to involve, but not be limited to advising the IRO as to what data to collect and to writing code to analyze and visualize the data.
- The IRO should provide internships to Data Science students
- The VCAA and every Dean should publish the metrics to be used and process to be followed to prioritize new faculty hires.
- Every Dean and/or Division Chair should publish the principles they will follow to disburse funds generated by salary savings, related to externally funded course buy outs, and to report to the faculty on the use of these funds.
- UH Hilo should resume the annual reporting of the sources and disbursement of RTRF.

V. Concluding Remarks

Sociology is doing many things well. Their graduation rates, number of Native Hawaiian graduates, alignment to the needs of the local community, internal and external funding and service to the profession are all quite admirable.

There are many UH Hilo units about the size of Sociology with similar numbers of course offerings and average class sizes. All of these programs appear to the author as likely to be very negatively impacted by the anticipated large loss of revenue to UH Hilo in Fiscal Year 2021.

VI. References

1. Paraphrased from Barack Obama as related by Samantha Power in “The Education of an Idealist”
2. The self-study document used the term “temporary Instructor” based on external guidance. The author thinks this terminology is redundant and notes that it was not used when he served as VCAA

List of Appendices

Appendix A. April 21,2020 letter from Chancellor Irwin

Appendix B. Selected Social Science data obtained from the UH Hilo IRO.



April 21, 2020

Matt Platz
Professor, Chemistry

Dear Matt:

My thanks to you for volunteering to serve in lieu of the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs. As you know, the whole point of Program Review is “a natural nexus and point of integration for 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.”

As the VCAA, your responsibility is to gauge the operation of the program in the larger context of the whole institution, and given the challenges of funding all units across the board, the question for the VCAA has always been how to balance the needs of the individual program with that of the larger collective good.

Here are some questions to consider:

- Cost per SSH, is this realistic? Are there ways to be more fiscally efficient given that they are asking for additional hires? Is the historic cost of SSH sustainable over the long term? Does the program provide pragmatic insight into how it will continue to operate going forward in a climate of declining enrollments and resources?
- How well do they compare to other units across the university in setting priorities (course scheduling, course assignments, etc.) as resources become scarcer?
- Is there truthfulness in the reporting of resource needs? Does the objective data support their priorities?
- Do they position themselves well for a future that will probably include declining state funding and tuition revenue?
- How do their priorities align with serving the maximum number of students possible?
- What new initiatives can be undertaken with the minimal investment?

200 W. Kāwili St.
Hilo, Hawai'i 96720-4091
Telephone: (808) 932-7348
Fax: (808) 932-7338
hilo.hawaii.edu

An Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Institution

Matt Platz
April 21, 2020
Page 2

Since this review may require additional information, this memo authorizes contact with Mason Kuo in the Budget Office and Kelli Okumura in IRO.

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact Seri Luangphinth, the ALO, who can provide more guidance in terms of compliance with WSCUC standards for Program Review.

Sincerely,



Bonnie D. Irwin
Chancellor

Appendix B. Selected data provided by UH Hilo IRO

all data obtained from the UH Hilo IRO. UG Courses only.																		
Unit	Anthropology			Geography + ES			History			PS -AJ			Psychology			Sociology		
	FA14	FA19	Change	FA14	FA19	Change	FA14	FA19	Change	FA14	FA19	Change	FA14	FA19	Change	FA14	FA19	Change
# Majors (UG, Primary major)	53	35	-18	112	97	-15	47	31	-16	53	45	-8	299	222	-77	87	58	-29
SSH (UG Only)	1692	1068	-624	894	1080	186	978	753	-225	1116	855	-261	3087	2113	-974	1234	1080	-154
Ave Class Size (F2F Only)	22.0	20.69	-1.3	25.24	18.37	-6.87	17.71	18.67	0.96	19.05	18.64	-0.41	26.79	23.04	-3.75	23.11	19.93	-3.18
% SH Taught by faculty	57.14%	90.90%	33.76%	52.63%	50.00%	-2.63%	93.33%	76.92%	-16.41%	90.00%	88.89%	-1.11%	46.51%	89.66%	43.15%	76.92%	53.33%	-23.59%
# UG Classes offered (Count of CRNs)	25	17	-8	21	20	-1	18	14	-4	19	15	-4	35	28	-7	19	20	1
minus "99" courses		15			16			12			13			28			15	
CRN Count (minus "99" seminar& internships) SSH/Course																		
		71.2			67.5			37.75			57			75.6			72	