

Lehman College-CUNY
Department of Sociology
Program Review 2023-2024
Site Visit: March 22rd, 2024

Program Review Team:

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We were requested by Sociology Department Chair, Professor Susan Dumais to provide an Academic Program Review of the Department of Sociology at Lehman College-CUNY. Prior to our site visit, we reviewed the Department’s Self-Study Report and the appended documents. The outcome of this review is based on the Department of Sociology Self Study Report and meetings with many stakeholder groups and individuals.

Site Visit Description

During our time at Lehman College, we had the opportunity to meet with diverse constituencies. We met with Provost Jorge Silva-Puras and Associate Provost Karin Beck, Dean Pamela Mills, the full-time instructional faculty, adjunct and graduate teaching instructional faculty, administrative assistant Miriam Medina, and undergraduate students. The day was very busy. We were able to get a lot of information from these department stakeholders. It is important to incorporate the views of the Dean, Associate Provost, and Provost in figuring out how to ameliorate the challenges for the department, especially concerning the structural/physical challenges. The faculty mentioned the support Dean Pamela Mills continues to extend to the department. We are glad that our meetings also included adjunct faculty and administrative staff as they are often implementing these larger structural changes and may view them from a different vantage point.

Our schedule is reproduced below.

Schedule for Sociology Site Visit, March 22, 2024

9:15 - 9:40 Tour of Carman offices and classrooms

9:40 - 9:55 Meet with Miriam Medina (B-65 Carman Hall)

10:00 - 10:50 Meet with sociology faculty (Shuster 336)

11:00 - 11:45 Meet with Provost Jorge Silva-Puras and Associate Provost Karin Beck on Zoom (Shuster 336)

Lunch with some sociology faculty members (Shuster 336)

1:00 - 1:50 Meeting with sociology majors in Duffy Lounge (Carman Hall): Chanell Cuevas, Aurermis Reyes, Abram Rodriguez, Tyler Stewart.

2:00 - 2:45 Meeting with Dean Pamela Mills (Science Hall)

3:00 - 3:45 Meeting with part-time faculty and Graduate Teaching Fellow in Duffy Lounge (Carman Hall): Elise Brown, Albert Garcia, Frank Mercogliano

3:50 - 4:30 Wrap-up/debriefing with sociology faculty (B-83 Carman, Multimedia Center)

The day's schedule was well-organized. We felt welcomed by all we met. We felt that the meetings were open and honest, presenting a realistic assessment of the strengths and challenges that this department faces.

College and Department Background

Lehman College-CUNY is an institution classified as a Hispanic serving institution with 48% of undergraduates identifying as Hispanic, 32% as Black, non-Hispanic, 8.7% as White, non-Hispanic, 7.5% as Asian/Pacific Islanders and under 1% as Native Americans. Half of Lehman's undergraduates are from households earning less than \$30,000 a year, and 52% are first-generation college students.

The Department of Sociology has 16 full-time faculty members (13 tenured/tenure track and three lecturers), one of whom serves half-time as a sociology major adviser, about 13 adjunct instructors and one graduate teaching fellow, and one full time office assistant.

There are 351 actively enrolled majors down from an impressively high number of 697 enrolled Sociology majors pre-COVID (Self-Study Report 2023-2024).

The Sociology Department's unique approach to the field emphasizes real world application of concepts concerning issues of social justice, diversity, inequality, and draws from Urban Studies, among other topics. Across the full range of courses and discussions with faculty and students, it became clear that students participate in discussions and debate within the classroom, they share ideas and experiences with their classmates, and they are asked to draw from a diversity of perspectives as they sharpen their understanding of complex social patterns and phenomenon. They do research projects with faculty mentorship.

The curriculum for the B.A. in Sociology is quite rigorous, and it includes the recommended core/required courses for the major as outlined in the American Sociological Association (ASA)'s publication, *The Sociology Major in the Changing Landscape of Higher Education* (Pike, et al. 2017). Course offerings provide students with the background and experience needed to form an understanding of society and human interaction, preparing them for a variety of career opportunities after graduation. In addition, the program also serves the university's social sciences tradition by contributing to the General Education curriculum.

COVID disruptions have changed much in the landscape of higher education, and Lehman College, like most higher educational institutions, is struggling to balance the changes from this period that benefit students with those that may be hurting their educational progress. By all accounts, post-COVID is a difficult period for institutions because of the fast changing values in higher education across America that are accompanied by budget cuts that reflect new priorities and by the uncertain futures of many academic disciplines particularly in the social and behavioral sciences. As a result, faculty are now required to do more with less. Nevertheless, we are struck by the deep commitment, caring, and thoughtfulness of the members of the Department of Sociology at Lehman College in providing a quality educational experience for their students.

This report summarizes our observations, evaluates the overall quality of the program offerings, and presents our conclusions and recommendations regarding the challenges and opportunities facing the program.

Summary Assessment

The faculty in the Department of Sociology at Lehman College are excellent researchers and deeply committed instructors. They recognize and embrace their mission of serving a diverse and economically-challenged student body. They have an excellent, caring administrator and adviser. The Provost and Dean recognize these strengths, as do the undergraduate students in the department. The department faces challenges that are typical of many institutions that are trying to balance between the disruptions that COVID caused and the recognition that we as educators need to be flexible in serving our students. These challenges may be more acute for the Sociology Department at Lehman, though, because their students' needs may be greater than those of more economically-advantaged students and because resources may be scarcer than they are at wealthier institutions.

The faculty and administration recognize that the Department's overarching goal may not be to get bigger, but to get stronger; that is attracting majors may be given lower priority than strengthening their program for existing students. With this in mind we recommend that the department (1) allocates more space for faculty offices and faculty and student gatherings; (2) strengthens their administrative capability in order to better be able manage bureaucratic difficulties and to better guide and advise a variety of students; (3) when possible, hire new faculty with interests in Latino/a/x communities, race/ethnicity, or immigration; (4) better meet the diverse needs of their students through adding some Honors Program components to their curriculum, continuing to develop interdisciplinary courses, minors and programs, and enhancing tutoring for statistics and writing; (5) explore flexible internship and experiential learning options for their students; and (6) create more

opportunities for faculty professional development, student awareness of resources, faculty-faculty and faculty-student interactions. In the remainder of the report, we provide the context for these recommendations and some specific suggestions.

Strengths

Friendliness and collegiality among the faculty and students of the program were apparent to the review team. Faculty spoke about caring for one another and discussing with each other when challenges arise in their teaching, scholarship, or service. Additionally, they were complimentary of the accomplishments of their colleagues, and were strongly supportive of each other.

The spirit of collaboration and support among tenure-track faculty is very strong, and recent faculty hires have been productive and have invigorated the department. There is a shared commitment to the collective good, and there is respect for theoretical and methodological diversity. The faculty commented on the positive influence of the chairperson in building and supporting colleagues, and faculty who have been in the department the longest commended the unity within the department in tackling and resolving issues.

The department research profile is excellent and matches the productivity of many high-profile, R1 universities. Faculty are publishing books and articles with prestigious academic publishers and in high-impact journals. Tenured and tenure-track faculty have active research agendas, and junior faculty are well-known in their fields already.

Since the last program review, the department has been successful in undertaking a serious effort in program assessment; most importantly, the faculty have made changes in the curriculum based on extensive data collection and analysis. One notable and positive change since the last self-study was the addition of a half-time dedicated adviser for students. Faculty and students have reported that this position has greatly improved students' abilities to navigate the many challenges of college, and could perhaps be built upon.

2016 Self Study recommendations

- Hire a full-time student advisor
- Add full-time faculty
- Reassign faculty time to establish an internship director
- Establish a capstone course once more faculty are added
- Add a college lab technician
- Add a college office assistant

Accomplishments include

- Department gained 3 tenure-track faculty members
- Doctoral lecturer was designated as the sociology major advisor (Alyssa Lyons).

Challenges

However, as many issues are solved, other challenges arise. As of 2023, the Sociology Department had 351 actively enrolled majors, and 260 majors who were not actively enrolled. This number reflects a decline from a high of 697 majors in fall of 2019 just prior to the COVID pandemic.

Since last Department Evaluation in 2016, COVID has led to challenges like

- A declining number of transfers and an increasing number of freshmen
- An increase in demand for online courses
- Great variation in course modalities
 - Between 2017 and 2020 the Department offered 70% in-person classes.
 - In 2017, it was 82%.
 - In 2020-2021, courses were completely online [COVID]
 - In Fall 2020, 74% of courses were online synchronous and asynchronous, with 7 hybrid classes
 - In 2022, the goal set by administration is 70% in-person and 30% hybrid or on-line
 - Currently, 56% are in-person/hybrid
- Students continue to prefer online courses.
- Preferences for online instruction are in tension with the administration's desire to increase in person instruction to about 70%.

COVID has eroded some of the traditional fabrics that hold the department together. There is now a need for rebuilding and reconsidering many avenues in response to post-COVID student needs. The most significant changes impacting American tertiary institutions are that academic departments currently are experiencing low community college transfers, enrollment has fallen dramatically during the pandemic, and departments need to explore other audiences for their majors, especially now that many more students have grown accustomed to studying online, and the demand for flexible scheduling is growing.

Outstanding challenges from the last review include

- A lack of space- for offices, classrooms, and research
- Research support is limited, and more support is needed at the administrative level.

Several challenges that faced the department in 2016 remain. There is a lack of space (for offices, classrooms, and research), with some faculty members located in a different building (Speech and Theater) than the Sociology Department (Carman Hall). The ratio of the number of majors to full-time faculty remains higher than most Sociology departments (Self Study Report 2023-2024). Students have less engagement with faculty for advisement due to lack of space and privacy. Faculty also report having difficulty finding support for their research and navigating the bureaucracy that is necessary to get the support that exists.

Recommendations

In this section, we highlight some larger categories in which our recommendations fall and then list some possibilities for specific changes.

Provision of Space for Department Faculty Offices and Communal Space for Events

Building community after COVID has been very difficult for everyone. Community can be fostered best through in-person interactions. In order for people to have these in-person interactions at Lehman College, they need comfortable spaces in which to do their work and have some privacy, and have events and socialize. Faculty who feel comfortable working in their offices will be at the College more often, and thus more available to students and their colleagues. In addition, if comfortable spaces in the department can be created for events and for students to gather, they may also be encouraged to spend their time in the department. This will help to build community, and the social and cultural capital that are useful for student integration into college and for their eventual retention, graduation, and success.

- Ideally, provide single offices for full-time faculty, advisers, and the department administrative staff, and shared offices for part-time teaching instructors
- Provide dedicated space for talks and seminars, with scheduling controlled by the department.
- Be sure to continue to provide social space for undergraduate students, like a lounge.
- Ensure adequate classroom, particularly lab, space and support for classroom technology.

Support from Upper Administration

In conversation with faculty, it became apparent that upper administration very much values the work that the Sociology Department does. However, there is a need for more transparent support from members of the upper administration. Communication around

department needs, the value of the work faculty does, and the value of the program in the college and beyond are not always timely and/or clear.

This is perhaps most acute around issues of funding. Faculty remain unsure of sources of college and university funding for research and travel, and procedures and deadlines concerning obtaining that funding. Faculty may be dissuaded from promoting their high quality research at professional association meetings and other venues. One way to be sure that the reputation of Lehman College is promoted is to make it as easy as possible for faculty to be able to present their research.

Another difficulty faculty mentioned was support for researching and writing books. They are not allowed to use start-up funds (that were drawn from tax-levied funds) for this purpose, and many faculty members' research is designed to be published in manuscripts. If start-up funds could use non-tax-levied support then perhaps faculty would be able to better develop these manuscripts. The CUNY Research Foundation may be able to manage these funds more efficiently.

Faculty could benefit from more grant-writing and pre-award support and a faster IRB process.

- Communicate funding deadlines clearly and accessibly to faculty.
- Invite the Dean to faculty meetings once a year for enhanced communication.
- Invite administration from the grants office and IRB to Q&A sessions with faculty, or, if possible, to provide brief presentations.
- Provide non-tax-levied funds for start-up funds for faculty who intend to write books that may be managed through the CUNY Research Foundation.

More Administrative Support in the Department

The department administrator is committed and caring. She is popular with both faculty and students. It is clear that they rely on her. It is important to keep someone in this role who faculty and students can rely on and who is clearly committed to them. Hiring a well-compensated administrator to replace her is crucial for the smooth running of the department, and ideally this could be done prior to her retiring so that the person might be trained well. It is also essential that this important person is well-supported. A part-time office assistant could be hired to support this role.

Other administrative support could come in a number of forms. One possibility is to designate and support a co-chair who could be a necessary conduit between concerns of faculty, especially junior faculty, and administration. Individual faculty members pursuing research support or even travel for conferences may be low on administrative priority but if

junior faculty concerns are routed through with additional department support, it might not be as challenging.

Another possibility is to hire another half-time faculty member to further support advising and coordinate internships and other experiential learning opportunities for students. The addition of a faculty member with 50% of their workload dedicated to advising has allowed the department to directly support re-admitted, prospective, and current students. Students report very much appreciating this. The current adviser, though, is overwhelmed with students' needs and realizes much more could be done. This includes matching students with research experiences on and off campus, coordinating internships both within the Sociology Department and across other programs on campus, and providing graduate school advising for professional programs (Self-Study Report 2023-2024).

- Hire a part-time office assistant for further administrative support.
- Create a co-chair position, if feasible.
- Add another half-time faculty adviser.

New Faculty Hires

There appears to be little pressure to quickly increase the number of majors or faculty in the department, as the department is concentrating on providing a higher quality of experience to its majors rather than prioritizing bringing in more. We do note, though, that the department has a much higher faculty to student ratio than most other Sociology Departments. If the administration were to grant new hires for Sociology, they would certainly strengthen the student experience. Because of the demographics of Lehman College, as a Hispanic-Serving Institution, future faculty hires could prioritize researchers with interests in race/ethnicity, immigration, and/or Latino/a/x communities.

- Hire new faculty with research interests in Latino/a/x communities, race/ethnicity, and/or immigration.

Create Honors Options, Interdisciplinary Courses and Minors, and Other Supplementary Supports within the Major

Honors programs are often helpful means to prepare students for further academic work in graduate school and beyond. Undergraduate students we met with at Lehman reported that they were not confident about their academic skills, and they were unsure of how they compared to graduates of other institutions. This led to some hesitance in applying to graduate schools. We believe this is not because they aren't getting these skills in their classes, but because students may not have the cultural capital to help them translate their skills into selective graduate school applications.

There are challenges to creating an Honors Program within the Sociology Major, but steps might be made to begin this work. One approach to an Honors Program is to create a separate Honors major and curriculum. This requires much time and some resources. It is also not clear how many students might enroll in such a program initially.

A second option is to add an Honors supplement to core methods and theory courses. This second option may require the least resources and may be a way to test out those assignments that might best engage and prepare Honors students. It may be possible to create a small pilot cohort of Honors students who take advantage of supplementary options for each of the required courses. Having a pass-fail or low- or no-credit seminar for these students might be a way to check in with them and provide them with some of the research, academic, or other supports they might need to continue on to graduate schools. It appears that an Honors Seminar is already on the books, but perhaps it could be conceived as a low-stakes, skills-building seminar. This might serve as a pilot for a more comprehensive capstone course in the future.

Recommended courses for supplementary Honors work (especially for those who are graduate school bound) might include Sociology 300 (The Sociological Imagination), Sociology 301 (Methods of Social Research), Sociology 302 (Sociological Theory), Sociology 303 (Advanced Methods of Social Research), and/or Sociology 345 (Quantitative Analysis of Sociological Data).

While Honors courses might be aimed toward those high-achieving students who desire graduate school, students suggested that other supports might also enhance their academic experience. Students mentioned that they would benefit from tutoring in statistics and writing support. If the Department was able to capitalize on graduate teaching assistants from other CUNY schools, these graduate teaching assistants might be able to serve student needs well in these roles.

The Department has developed several successful interdisciplinary minors. These are often the product of specific faculty interests and expertise that overlap with those of faculty in other departments and programs. We encourage faculty to continue to develop (and be incentivized to develop) these when faculty expertise can be combined to create strong courses, minors, or other programs. Incentives might include funding or release time.

- Add supplementary Honors materials to required courses for students looking to prepare for graduate school.
- Develop a low-stakes seminar (no- or low-credit) for students who opt to take Honors supplements to help them build the cultural capital they might need to

apply to graduate school and to aid with the application process. An additional faculty adviser might be able to run such a seminar. This could serve as a foundation for a capstone course.

- Take advantage of graduate teaching assistant support where available to provide statistics tutoring and writing support.
- Incentivize faculty to further develop strong interdisciplinary courses, minors, and other programs.

Create and Expand Internship and Other Experiential Learning Options

Internship programs within departments often require a lot of time and planning initially. To run internship courses, faculty must be identified to lead them, and these courses need to maintain regular enrollments to allow students to plan to take them. However, internship courses can be low-enrolled, and it may be harder to find faculty members to run them regularly. The Lehman Sociology Department might start more modestly, though, by building up relationships with the CUNY Inclusive Economy Center. With additional faculty advising time, stronger relationships could be built with this Center and students could be better made aware of opportunities within this Center. Additionally, a faculty adviser could help students get course credits for internships through a department independent study style course that they could advise. An internship advisor could guide undergraduate Sociology majors in articulating how their internship experiences provide skills that are attractive to potential employers. An internship course or independent study might also require that they visit the career service offices so that they become aware of some of the resources that CUNY has to offer them. An internship course or independent study might also add some guidance for students to think about how to link the curriculum to their futures.

A summer elective internship course might be another way to involve students in internships that might allow faculty and students more flexibility in planning and running them. This could be run online asynchronously.

Faculty have incorporated research projects that draw on experiential learning into their individual classes, and this should continue to be encouraged. Faculty are also interested in developing study abroad courses. This requires much coordination with the College and is an ambitious goal. We encourage faculty to work with Lehman Study Abroad Office to develop these where feasible.

- Discuss the department's ideal internship program and identify barriers to securing internships.

- Strengthen coordination with CIE and career services with the goal of broadening the range of internships available and making it possible for students with limitations to meaningfully participate in these experiential learning opportunities.
- The Sociology Department should discuss building connections with community organizations that offer valuable internship opportunities.
 - Some possible contacts that were mentioned
 - The university neighborhood housing program incorporated
 - The Bronx neighborhood housing service
 - Greater Harlem Housing Development
 - New York City Housing Authority
 - Rangel Housing Authorities
- Create an independent study style course so students can get department credit for existing internships.
- For internship courses, require that students visit Lehman's career center to learn about resources and provide guidance on how to translate the value of skills learned in internships to future employers.
- Offer a summer elective internship course.
- Discuss possibilities for study abroad courses with Lehman's Study Abroad Office.

Enrich Community for Students, and Part-time and Full-time Faculty

The department's full-time faculty, adjunct faculty, and students seem very collegial. Students report that really like their professors and feel that they care about them. Adjunct faculty say they have good relations with the permanent faculty. One thing common to the constituencies, though, is that they desire more opportunities to get to know one another and each other's research.

For students, these desires seem most acute, and they are also specific to their needs. While some of these needs might be met with an additional adviser, others could be accomplished with events. Students want more opportunities to get information about resources on campus they could use, including tutoring, internships, career opportunities, resources for transfer students, and networking. They say they often were not aware of the many clubs and campus activities at Lehman.

Part-time faculty also desire more opportunities to learn about their colleagues' research and to socialize.

Full-time faculty express the desire for workshops or retreats that might focus on assessment, book-writing, writing grants, and other topics. Faculty who write books might benefit from workshops with faculty experts outside of Lehman to improve manuscripts

before publication. They also suggest that part-time faculty members be compensated for their time at professional development opportunities, like curriculum building and department strengthening events.

Resources for regular colloquia with in-house and outside speakers of interest to faculty and students would be a way to build department camaraderie, increase the visibility of Lehman's Department, and provide social and cultural capital for Lehman students.

- Support, publicize, or organize information fairs or events to help undergraduate students learn about university resources.
- Support and encourage a Sociology Club for students to build relationships with each other and with faculty through joint events.
- Resources could be used to support workshops on a variety of professional development topics for faculty like grant-writing or book-writing support.
- Faculty could use resources to plan colloquia with in-house and outside speakers that would draw undergraduate students, as well.
- Workshops designed to improve curricula and pedagogy within the department should provide support for part-time faculty to participate.
- Social events or events that focus on faculty research would benefit part-time faculty who feel less integrated.