

Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science in Sociology

Department of Anthropology and Sociology  
College of Arts and Sciences

2006 Review

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## **Background and Program History**

Sociology is offered at Western Carolina University as a Major leading to either a Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science, and as a Minor. The first reference to Sociology occurred in the 1928 Bulletin where a single course was offered to students. In 1950 Sociology became part of the Social Sciences Division<sup>1</sup>. Beginning in 1966 sociology was offered as a concentration within the Social Science Major. Within three years a new department was formed: Anthropology, Social Welfare, and Sociology. Shortly after the formation of this department sociology was offered as a bachelor's degree major. In 1972 the department was reconfigured as the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. These two social sciences would remain together until 1985 when anthropology became part of the new department of Earthsciences and Anthropology and sociology formed part of the department of Political Science, Public Affairs, and Sociology. The year 1998 would see the rejoining of these two social sciences in their current configuration as the Department of Anthropology and Sociology<sup>2</sup>.

## **Program Purpose and Mission**

Sociology, simply stated, is the study of the human society and human social interaction. As a social science sociology blends both scientific and humanistic perspectives. This can be seen in the breadth of sociological interests. Common applications of sociology are found in the study of urban and rural life, family relationships, social change, social class, the role of technology in human society, and health care and illness.

Sociology is one component of the Department and Anthropology and Sociology. The department's mission (combining both programs) supports the broader *mission* and *strategic vision* of Western Carolina University (see Appendices A and B). The faculty are dedicated to providing a learning environment conducive to the personal and intellectual growth of its students. The department is a resource for the region through its involvement in such activities as: the Institute for the Economy and the Future, cultural resource management, forensic consultancy, and sociological research.

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<sup>1</sup> The Division of Social Sciences consisted of Sociology, History, Economics, and Government.

<sup>2</sup> The department offers a program leading to a bachelor's degree in Sociology and in Anthropology. A Minor is offered in both programs as well. The department is also the administrative home for the Cherokee Studies program and two College of Arts and Sciences interdisciplinary minors (Race, Ethnic, and Gender Relations and Social Change).

Undergraduate degree programs in Sociology are offered at all the major institutions within the University of North Carolina System<sup>3</sup>. The program at WCU offers our students several benefits not always accessible at larger institutions within the system. Among these are:

- ❖ A faculty dedicated to undergraduate teaching;
- ❖ A faculty large enough to offer a diversity of course options but small enough to provide one-on-one interaction within and outside the classroom; and
- ❖ Faculty recognized for their scholarly activity. Our students directly benefit from this in the classroom through real life examples and through opportunities to work side by side with faculty in their research<sup>4</sup>.

### **Program Planning and Strategic Mission**

University guidelines provide for a periodic revision of the program's strategic vision. The last revision vision took place in 2003 (see Appendix C). A number of goals were identified to be achieved or at least acted upon within five years.

In the broader strategic plan of the university three strategic themes are identified: improvement of student learning, growth aligned with thematic programs, and regional outreach (see Appendix B). The program's strategic goals follow closely these themes. The sociology program has responded to these goals by changes in curriculum to meet student needs, encouraging and rewarding faculty to engage in pedagogical activities, and fostering an environment conducive to and acknowledging the value of applied research.

### **Program Curriculum and Instruction**

With the exception of courses taught jointly as graduate credit the curriculum is entirely undergraduate leading to either a Bachelor of Arts or a Bachelor of Science degree<sup>5</sup> (see Appendix D). Students graduating with a degree in sociology have multiple career tracks.

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<sup>3</sup> In addition to thirteen UNC institutions eighteen private colleges/universities also offer an undergraduate sociology degree.

<sup>4</sup> This dedication to undergraduates and the university focus on teaching as a central mission make it difficult for faculty to find time to conduct scholarly activity. This is especially troublesome for tenure track faculty, who juggle a high teaching load with the necessity of tenure requirements for scholarly activity.

<sup>5</sup> The difference in degrees is one of a language requirement. The B.A. requires two semesters of a foreign language and the B.S. does not. Students who choose the latter track are still responsible for the credit hours that the language requires. These hours are taken as additional general electives.

### **Identified Strategic Vision Goals**

To become fully integrated into the Liberal Studies program with first year experience and upper-level perspective courses

To increase the number of majors by 25%

To be among the top 10% of faculty in terms of teaching effectiveness

To increase retention rates by 10%

To strengthen applied scholarship

To improve assessment tools

These include post-graduate training in sociology (M.A. or Ph.D.) and other professional fields (law and medicine), and various non-academic fields of endeavor<sup>6</sup>. Our curriculum is designed with these outcomes in mind. The curriculum is purposefully kept uncomplicated. Following the introductory course students have only three additional required courses<sup>7</sup>. This has advantages. First it makes it possible for our students to complete their degree in four years with a normal course load. Second, our students can explore the variety of sociology courses offered and focus on those that most interest each student. Sociology is by its nature an interdisciplinary field of academic study. We expect and encourage our students to explore other fields<sup>8</sup>. Our curriculum requires students to have an area of concentration outside of sociology<sup>9</sup>. Often our majors choose an area of concentration that complements their sociological interest<sup>10</sup>.

An eight semester curriculum has been designed to graduate students in four years (see Appendix D). Students spend their freshman year fulfilling liberal studies requirements. They complete these in their sophomore year and enroll in the introductory sociology course (SOC 103) and a sociology elective. During their junior and senior years they focus on sociology

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<sup>6</sup> Recent alumni are pursuing graduate training at Western Carolina University, the University of Wyoming, Eastern Tennessee State University, and Clemson University.

<sup>7</sup> These three courses cover sociological theory (SOC 391), methods (SOC 385), and analysis (statistics) (SOC 386).

<sup>8</sup> The sociology program has fostered a cooperative arrangement with the psychology department where majors from both programs can take either SOC 386 or PSY 251 to satisfy requirements for either program.

<sup>9</sup> This can be satisfied by a second major, a minor, or a series of thematic courses.

<sup>10</sup> Minors frequently associated with sociology majors include: psychology, social work, and history.

electives and the remaining required courses (SOC 385, 386, and 391). The plan is flexible, though, and changes in course offerings are made to accommodate student needs and faculty availability to teach specific elective courses.

The program has made a substantial commitment to the liberal studies curriculum through course offerings in the first year seminar (SOC 190), (P1) social sciences (SOC 103 and 235) and Upper Level Perspectives categories (SOC 414). More than half of the student credit hours produced by sociology faculty satisfy liberal studies requirements (see Appendix E)<sup>11</sup>.

In 2005 the department, through an initiative of the Office of Program Assessment, revised its learning outcomes assessment document (see Appendix F). This year marks the beginning of implementation of the new assessment process. In consultation with the university assessment director the department (program) chose to undertake one of four identified goals each year until all have been covered. The assessment document will be periodically reviewed and changes made to meet changing program function and student needs. It is the purpose of our assessment procedure to provide feedback on the curriculum as it prepares our majors for their post-graduate life. The program faculty chose to examine Goal 4 (Professional Development) for academic year 2006-2007. The assessment method was altered to coincide with the program review. To explore this goal more broadly, in conjunction with the program review, an alumni survey was sent out to 513 sociology and anthropology alumni<sup>12</sup>. Fifty alumni responded. Of these 37 were sociology majors. The survey asked for responses to 19 questions. The results of this survey are presented in Appendix G. The responses to several questions involve student perceptions of the program curriculum as having a high quality:

- ❖ 89% felt that there were sufficient course offerings in sociology
- ❖ 60% felt that degree requirements were sufficient in depth
- ❖ 89% viewed the faculty as current in their fields

With few exceptions positive responses were never lower than 60%. Most telling, 68% would choose sociology as a major if they had their academic careers to do over.

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<sup>11</sup> For the past three academic years the percentage of student credit hours in liberal studies has varied from 60% to 51% of the total student credit hours (SCH). During this time the SCH for SOC 103 has declined by 4% while the SCH for SOC 235 has shown a 300% increase.

<sup>12</sup> Thirty one surveys were returned due to incorrect addresses. The functional total was 482 surveys sent, with 50 responses, a slightly higher than 10% return rate.

Additionally as each semester's classes are decided upon faculty input is elicited with regard to short term curricular adjustments needed to accommodate enrollment numbers.

From 2001-2004 the total number of course sections averaged 68<sup>13</sup>. Coinciding with the addition of new faculty<sup>14</sup> the number of sections increased by approximately 1/3<sup>rd</sup> (see Appendix H). Due to their popularity as required courses the program's liberal studies sections have maintained class sizes ranging from the mid 20s to the mid 40s<sup>15</sup>. The remaining courses (including the courses required of all majors) ranged in size from the high teens to as many as 40 students.

The number of sociology majors during the past five years has remained fairly constant averaging just under 50 (see Appendix I)<sup>16</sup>.

Traditionally students do not enter as freshman majors but often choose sociology after taking a liberal studies or other introductory course. The uncomplicated nature of the program curriculum lends itself to students who choose sociology late in their undergraduate career. These small incoming freshman numbers makes it difficult to track students four year completion and graduation and retention rates (see Appendix J). Still, cumulatively 59% of sociology majors finish with four years of starting at Western. Unfortunately the data do not indicate why particular students take more than four years to complete our curriculum (i.e., full time load, double major). Graduation rates of early choice majors range yearly from 25% to 100% with a cumulative graduation rate of 74%. Small numbers and a lack of explanation as to why students did not graduate make it impossible to properly interpret these percentages. Similarly 100% of freshman declared majors and new transfer students remain in the program for the four semester timeline. No data have been provided to indicate whether these values compare favorably with those of Western overall or with other disciplines across the campus.

## **Faculty Resources**

The sociology program currently is maintained by five full-time tenure track faculty. Additional courses are offered by part time faculty<sup>17</sup>. All regular faculty meet SACS standards

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<sup>13</sup> In the Fall semester of AY 2005-2006 one faculty member was on academic leave. For this AY only 50 sections of sociology courses were offered.

<sup>14</sup> Two tenure track sociologists were added to the sociology faculty; one in 2003 and one in 2005.

<sup>15</sup> The number of liberal studies course sections averaged 33% of the total sociology sections offered over the past five years.

<sup>16</sup> For the past six years the number of B.S. majors averaged 72% of all sociology majors.

by possessing a Ph.D. in Sociology as their terminal degree or in having an M.A. with the requisite 18 hours of graduate coursework in the program field<sup>18</sup>. Full time tenure track faculty ranks are divided unequally: with one full professor and four assistant professors giving the program a somewhat unbalanced mix of new and seasoned faculty (see Appendix K). Two assistant professors are in tenure track positions but not yet eligible for tenure<sup>19</sup>. Gender diversity is roughly even for full time faculty (three female and two male), although favoring females (see Appendix L). As for racial diversity, no faculty members are persons of color. During recent hirings every effort was made to consider gender equity and ethnic diversity.

As a strictly undergraduate department with no graduate teaching assistants, the sociology faculty are fully engaged at all levels of teaching duties from introductory and liberal studies courses to courses within each faculty member's scholarly specialization (see Appendix M). The same can be said of advising, with each tenured or tenure track faculty member carrying their proportional share of students. Comparing generated student credit hours (SCH) in any one semester for each faculty member is difficult in that teaching loads vary each semester and some faculty have reduced loads due to extra-program related activities<sup>20</sup>. On average the tenure track/tenured faculty individually account for 15% of the total SCH generated each semester<sup>21</sup>.

As a master's degree comprehensive university, teaching is a primary focus of the university and department. The program recognizes, however, that to be a good teacher a faculty member must also be current in her/his field. Western also emphasizes the importance of service to the university and especially the community and nation. Faculty being considered for promotion and/or tenure are evaluated in each of the three areas: teaching, scholarly activity, and service. The program recognizes that within each category faculty may be engaged in a wide range of expressions and that these change from year to year (see Appendix N). In the program's AFE/TPR document scholarly activity can mean anything from a traditional peer reviewed journal article to an applied research report. Each year all faculty are peer reviewed, not only in

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<sup>17</sup> Part time faculty, usually one each semester, offer courses meeting liberal studies requirements.

<sup>18</sup> With 100% of the fulltime faculty possessing a Ph.D. the program is above Western's total of 73%.

<sup>19</sup> One assistant professor is in the process of tenure and promotion evaluation. A second assistant professor was tenured previously and is in review for promotion to associate professor.

<sup>20</sup> Two program faculty have course reductions: one as director of the Women Studies Program, one as the chair of the university Liberal Studies Committee.

<sup>21</sup> In any given semester individual contributions will vary by courses taught both in number and course type. Liberal studies courses generate larger SCH than do upper division courses within the major.

their classroom performance, but also their performance in each of the three categories<sup>22</sup>. Since 1998 and the current departmental configuration no sociology faculty member in a tenure track position has been denied tenure.

Despite high teaching obligations the sociology faculty are able to engage in a variety of scholarly activities. During the past five years the sociology program faculty collectively participated in following scholarly activities: twenty-two presentations at professional conferences, five refereed publications, and eleven applied research projects. The program faculty also share their academic and scholarly knowledge base through a variety of service outlets from presentations to local community groups, presentations to national and statewide professional organizations, and membership on nonprofit agency boards.

Faculty are encouraged to improve their pedagogical skills. One indicator of this is participation in faculty learning communities<sup>23</sup>. During this and the past year 40% of the sociology faculty participated in one or more FLCs.

### **Student Quality**

The sociology program has seen a steady but substantial number of enrolled majors (see Appendix O). Compared with high demand programs sociology does not enjoy a high volume. As such, entrance requirements beyond those of the university are not used by the program to limit student numbers. In addition the program wishes to attract the broadest spectrum of students as majors. The absence of entrance requirements fulfills this goal.

Consistently, females outnumber males each year for the B.A. and B.S. degree candidates (see Appendix P)<sup>24</sup>. This is far greater than the campus ratio of approximately even gender representation<sup>25</sup>. Students of color are represented among sociology majors, especially for those

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<sup>22</sup> Student evaluations of teaching performance utilize a ranking scale of 1-5 with a rank of 5 being the highest. Program faculty consistently rank 4 or better in all categories measured by the student evaluations (anecdotal report by the Department Head).

<sup>23</sup> Faculty Learning Communities (FLC) are sponsored by the Coulter Faculty Center. They bring together faculty from across the campus to meet and discuss specific topics related to faculty instructional activities. For example, one FLC explores the role and use of technology in the classroom.

<sup>24</sup> For B.A. majors females outnumber males by more than two to one. For B.S. majors males have an 18% edge over females.

<sup>25</sup> Data from American Sociological Association show that a higher proportion of female to male undergraduate majors is common nationwide.

pursuing the B.S. degree where non-White majors represented 29% of all majors<sup>26</sup>. The campus averaged just under 10%<sup>27</sup>.

At the level of admission to Western sociology majors tend to be less “stellar” than their counterparts in other majors. Combined average SAT scores for both bachelor degrees range from 910 to 1220 with B.A. students having similar overall SAT scores to their B.S. counterparts. High school GPAs are similar ranging from 1.8 to 3.5 with the majority in the sub 3.0 range. During this same time frame the mean GPA of all incoming freshmen ranged between 3.25 and 3.3. The average overall SAT scores ranged from 1012 to 1027. In terms of both high school GPA and overall SAT scores our majors are both above and below the university averages during any given semester.

The majority of students do not come to Western with sociology in mind as a major. Instead students choose the major after taking a liberal studies or other introductory course. Few students have any conception of what sociology is prior to arriving at Western. Recruitment in terms of cost expenditure would not yield the results for which it is intended. The program does actively participate in on-campus open house activities where the program can be presented one-on-one with interested students. One recruitment tool that is used is the recently revamped program brochure (see Appendix Q). Full color pamphlets were designed for the program with funds provided by the college Dean. These are given to campus recruiters and to students requesting information about the program.

Because student-advisee ratios are low, advisors take an active interest in their advisee’s academic progress. The results of the alumni survey were positive but mixed on the topic of advising (see Appendix G). Respondents felt that faculty did a good job of advising with regard to course choices (71%) but not so well with regard to career choices (66%). Still, the program views advising as one of the best retention tools available. The department head usually sees one problem advisement case a year. Usually the difficulty is not with individual advising but with conflicting answers given by different academic units regarding student graduation requirements. In nearly every case the advisor and department head are able to find a way for the student to graduate on time.

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<sup>26</sup> This includes all students who did not indicate their ethnicity as “White.”

<sup>27</sup> Data from American Sociological Association show a nationwide trend of non-White bachelors degree majors of 33%.

As an undergraduate program sociology has made it a goal to involve students in scholarly activities beyond the classroom. Students are encouraged whenever possible to work with faculty on sociological research. Every academic year 5-7 students are engaged directly with faculty and their research. Depending on proximity to Western, several students each year attend regional and national sociology conferences. Our majors also participate in internships and in coop education. Recent examples include internships in the Jackson County Cooperative Extension, ARC of Haywood County, and East Tennessee Children's Hospital.

### **Administrative Resources**

The sociology program is one of two components in the larger Department of Anthropology and Sociology. Each program shares the same administrative structure. Given the department's size and absence of a graduate program the Department Head is the primary contact between the program and the College of Arts and Sciences and Office of the Provost<sup>28</sup>. The department head is appointed and serves no fixed term nor does the position rotate among the faculty.

The department has three standing committees<sup>29</sup>. Membership on these committees, where possible, is spread among the departmental faculty and is appointed annually. The department head also annually appoints faculty to individual duties within the department (i.e., taking minutes at departmental meetings). The department meets at least once each month for updates and to provide the department head with guidance on issues that impact the department's programs.

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<sup>28</sup> The department head is appointed and serves no set term. The department head is evaluated annually following guidelines established by the College of Arts and Sciences. At this time no formal procedure is in place to make use of student or alumni input in establishing departmental policy, academic or non-academic.

Western provides department heads with regular on-campus opportunities for continuing education in administration related issues. The college Dean and the Office of the Provost also support travel to attend academic leadership conferences and workshops off-campus.

<sup>29</sup> These are:

Technology (responsible for reviewing departmental needs and maintaining the department web page)

Tenure, Promotion, and Reappointment (consists of all tenured faculty and responsible for reviewing tenure, promotion and reappointment documents)

Assessment (responsible for administering the annual program assessment of student learning)

The sociology program meets as a committee of the whole meets at least once each semester to plan the coming semester's course schedule<sup>30</sup>. Other program meetings occur as needed to address program-specific issues (i.e., curriculum changes).

### **Program Resources**

The Sociology program is one of two components in the larger Department of Anthropology and Sociology. Each program equally shares the same budget structure<sup>31</sup>. Prior to academic year 2005-2006 the departmental budget was barely adequate to cover routine expenditures<sup>32</sup>. The past year saw a permanent increase of 47% in the departmental operating budget. This has eased issues of routine and to some extent extraordinary expenditures. However, with a 40% increase in the number of faculty (anthropology and sociology) since 2003 some of the budget increase covered increased needs brought on by increased faculty numbers<sup>33</sup>.

In 2003 McKee Hall, home to the sociology program, underwent a major reconstruction and remodeling. Classrooms were brought up-to-date with computer interface and LCD projector capability<sup>34</sup>. Faculty offices were modernized and each office was provided with new matching furniture. Each faculty member and the department administrative assistant was also provided with a new computer<sup>35</sup>. Western provides faculty with Windows-based office software. Few department faculty use specialized software, outside of SPSS which is provided via a university server. As a whole the program does not have major equipment needs outside of office and audio-visual equipment.

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<sup>30</sup> The senior sociologist serves as the de facto head of the sociology program and advises the Department Head on issues relating to the sociology program.

<sup>31</sup> When Cherokee Studies was administratively added to the department no provision was made for the added drain this program would have on the departmental budget. The Cherokee Studies program has been inconsistent in assisting in offsetting increased costs incurred by the department.

<sup>32</sup> Emergency repairs or faculty requests to purchase DVDs or software could not be accommodated without serious budget adjustments.

<sup>33</sup> One major expense, duplicating, is subsidized heavily by the university so that increased faculty use did not significantly jeopardize the department budget.

<sup>34</sup> Sociology is a heavy user of audio-visual media and the improved classrooms were definitely well received by the program faculty. Unfortunately a new classroom scheduling program has taken program faculty from their classrooms and placed them in substandard rooms in other buildings.

<sup>35</sup> Faculty computers are replaced on a rotating basis based on date of acquisition. As a result faculty always have up to date hardware and software. The department office also houses two laser printers accessible electronically from each faculty member's office

Library resources have been adequate: approximately \$12,000 per year is allocated for the combined department. This figure, however, has remained static for several years while books costs have risen<sup>36</sup>. Fortunately periodical subscriptions do not come from the departmental allocation<sup>37</sup>. The Hunter Library shares its electronic catalogue with Appalachian State University and the University of North Carolina at Asheville. One hundred and eighty four sociology periodicals are available for student and faculty use. The keyword “sociology” yielded 6932 non-periodical listings in this shared library resource<sup>38</sup>.

As for administrative staff, the small departmental size justifies only one administrative assistant. This staff member provides routine clerical support for program faculty and is the secretary for the department head. She is responsible for interaction with the Dean’s and other administrative staff, classroom scheduling, purchasing, and maintenance of the department budget. The department is provided with funding for several work study students, including one who assists the administrative assistant.

### **Program Concerns**

The Sociology program recognizes that there are areas that need improvement or continued action. Some of these are within program control. Additional upper level perspective courses are needed for the liberal studies program, currently only one sociology course fulfills this requirement. Faculty teaching loads are high when the tenure and promotion process dictates that scholarly activity be considered as significant. Juggling teaching demands with those of creating and maintaining a presence within the world of scholarly endeavor is problematic, especially for faculty working toward tenure. With recent additions to the program faculty office space has been taxed. Three faculty have been assigned to lesser space (smaller size and absence of windows) compared to that of the remainder of the faculty. Part-time faculty have no office space making it difficult for them to meet with students and to conduct scholarly activities of their own. Travel funds remain insufficient for most faculty to attend professional meetings without incurring a substantial unreimbursed cost. The library and departmental budgets have

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<sup>36</sup> Cherokee Studies also utilizes the department book purchase allocation. No provision for this added drain on departmental resources has been made by the library or the university.

<sup>37</sup> The periodical budget of \$10,000 covers subscriptions to 39 journals and periodicals.

<sup>38</sup> The alumni survey found that 66% felt that library holdings were adequate. It is not know if this refers only to Hunter Library or to the three library system.

been impacted by the Cherokee Studies program. When the Cherokee Studies program was administratively housed within the department no additional funds were provided to accommodate additional faculty needs. In addition the nature of the position of Cherokee Studies within the department is not clear. In many ways this program is parallel to that of the sociology and anthropology programs operating independently outside of the control of the department head.

The alumni survey, the first comprehensive contact with program alumni, points to the need for better communication with alumni. Open lines of communication with alumni would allow the program to better judge its effectiveness in preparing majors for real world occupations. This would also provide the program with up-to-date data regarding graduate school applications and progress.

Program faculty are concerned over the use of a new software-based classroom scheduling program. Prior to this academic year all classroom scheduling was performed by the department administrative assistant and the department head. All classes were held in McKee Hall. The Resource 25 software schedules classes in McKee and nearby buildings<sup>39</sup>. The concern here is that when McKee Hall was renovated faculty offices were placed next to program classrooms. This provided for better student faculty interaction. This also made communicating with majors easy through bulletin board announcements. Currently majors are sent from building to building as are faculty. As a result faculty have little time to talk with students between classes and majors have no home base.

## **Summary**

The sociology program at Western Carolina University is one component of the Department of Anthropology and Sociology. The program offers two undergraduate degrees and a minor in sociology. The number of faculty has increased over the past three years although the number of majors has remained constant. The degree requirements are kept uncomplicated so that students can take a variety of sociology courses. These courses span the breadth of the discipline.

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<sup>39</sup> Part of the concern with this software is its capricious assignment of classrooms, following no logical system.

The program faculty receive high marks for their quality of instruction. As an undergraduate program the faculty have a presence in all levels of instruction from freshmen liberal studies courses through specialized courses within the major. The faculty remain current in their field by conducting research and presenting that research in a variety of venues. It is common for the faculty to directly involve students in their scholarly activities.

The program continues to attract quality students, students who after graduation go on to a number of career paths from graduate school to occupations within the public and private sector. Sixty-five percent of our graduates, when asked, said they would do it over in choosing sociology.

The physical plant of McKee Hall was remodeled in 2003 updating both classroom and office space. Faculty are regularly given computer and software upgrades, maintaining currency in computing. The departmental budget is sufficient for the routine running of the program.