

Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science in Sociology

Department of Anthropology and Sociology
College of Arts and Sciences

2014-2015 Review

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Executive Summary

To the point, Western Carolina University's sociology program:

- ❖ Is a solid program that has consistently received positive assessments from a variety of stakeholders, including current students and alumni, university program review committees, and disciplinary program reviewers.
- ❖ Reflects and supports the university and college missions and strategic visions, particularly in terms of engagement, by working closely with students to provide documented experiential learning opportunities, contributing to the university and regional communities, and producing socially aware, well-rounded citizens who appreciate diversity and have marketable post-graduation skills.
- ❖ Is an open admission program offering a rigorous yet flexible curriculum that caters to a variety of students, including women, trans students, racial and ethnic minorities, athletes, and transfer students, as well as students who wish to pursue dual degrees.
- ❖ Has respectable student enrollment, retention, and graduation rates for a program with a small but active faculty experiencing steadily increasing demands on time and resources.
- ❖ Has a progressively increasing enrollment largely due to increases in the major and minor as well as increasing demand through the Liberal Studies program. This demand warrants serious consideration of an additional full-time faculty member.
- ❖ Is a low profile, hard-working program that is making strides toward better advertising its strengths as an engaged university member and community partner.

Standard 1: The purpose of the program reflects and supports the mission and strategic vision of Western Carolina University and the mission of its School and/or College.

The sociology program faculty at Western Carolina University is dedicated to providing a learning environment conducive to the personal and intellectual growth of its students and is committed to the university focus on regional engagement, stewardship, and diversity. The program is a resource for the region through its involvement in such activities as sociological research, public sociology, and public service via engaged teaching and learning.

Undergraduate degree programs in sociology are offered at all the major institutions within the University of North Carolina System,¹ but the sociology program at WCU offers our students several benefits not always accessible at larger institutions within the system. Among these are:

- A faculty dedicated to teaching, which is viewed as the most important leg in the proverbial academic stool;
- 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;
- A faculty engaged in regional service; and
- A faculty committed to undergraduate scholarship. Our students directly benefit from this in the classroom through real life examples and through opportunities to work side by side with faculty on research.

The university's strategic plan, *2020 Vision: Focusing Our Future*, identifies several core values: excellence in scholarship, teaching and learning; collaboration with and respect for our communities; free and open interchange of ideas; responsible stewardship and organizational effectiveness; organizational and environmental sustainability; and cultural diversity and equal opportunity.² Similarly focused, the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) newly approved strategic plan (see Appendix A) emphasizes student-centered teaching and learning, engagement, and collaboration. The CAS strategic plan is largely a response to the university plan, outlining specific college initiatives for addressing each university strategic direction. In the near future, the Department of Anthropology and Sociology will complete a congruent mission statement and strategic plan that reflects the ways its program missions align with the university and college missions.

As a program, sociology is particularly responsive to institutional strategic directions 1, 2, and 3 as outlined in the university's 2020 strategic plan. We fulfill the educational needs of the state and region

¹ In addition to thirteen UNC institutions, eighteen private colleges/universities in North Carolina also offer an undergraduate sociology degree.

² See <http://www.wcu.edu/about-wcu/leadership/office-of-the-chancellor/wcu-2020-plan/index.asp> for more information about the university's strategic plan.

(strategic direction #1) by emphasizing student and faculty engagement. We value and reward faculty-led student mentoring, as demonstrated in our departmental collegial review document (see Appendix B), and faculty routinely promote and participate in cross-disciplinary and integrated learning experiences to demonstrate their importance and provide a model for students to emulate. The department and program cultures emphasize the importance of faculty-student mentoring and community outreach.

We enrich the total student experience (strategic direction #2) by deliberately and consciously preparing students to be educated citizens. Inside and outside of the classroom, students are expected to be socially aware and contribute to the vitality of the regional, national, and/or global communities. Majors are expected to participate in formal mentoring opportunities with program faculty and departmental club activities that focus on community engagement. Students are also encouraged to participate in campus and community leadership. Students are exposed to regional community leaders via departmental brown bags, classroom presentations, and field trips that promote and celebrate partnerships with the diverse institutions and cultures that surround WCU.

We enhance our community partnerships (strategic direction #3) by embracing our role as a community steward. As such, short and long-term formal partnerships have been established with numerous organizations in the region.³ Department faculty and students alike are expected to positively represent the larger university by maintaining open lines of communication with these organizations, with a special emphasis on conveying the ways in which members of the program may contribute to ongoing organizational development and/or revitalization.

Standard 2: The program engages in ongoing, systematic planning that is reflective of the university's strategic priorities.

The last review of WCU's sociology program took place during the 2006-2007 academic year, and that review influenced the program planning that has since taken place. In their post-site visit report, the three reviewers summarize their general impression of the program: "Overall, this program has succeeded in creating a strong and cohesive intellectual community for faculty and students. The curriculum is rigorous yet flexible, covering the foundations of the discipline while allowing faculty to teach in their areas of specialization. Faculty are dedicated to their students and institution. Resources are

³ Organizations have included but are not limited to: The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, the Stecoah community, the Cashiers community, the Wongnyi community in Kenya, Haywood County Council on Aging, The Community Table, Haywood County Department of Social Services, Jackson County Habitat for Humanity, Success-Oriented Achievement Realized (SOAR), Resources/Education/Assistance/Counseling/Housing (REACH) of Jackson and Macon counties, Vecinos Inc. Farmworker Health Program, and Act Like a Grrr!!.

adequate to meet instructional needs, though research support is very limited. The program faces some challenges in terms of its visibility within the college . . ." (see Appendix C).

Since the last sociology program review, much change has come to the university and the department in the form of several institutional initiatives. The Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), *Synthesis: A Pathway to Intentional Learning*, was a key component of WCU's re-accreditation with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). A university-wide update of the collegial review process for tenure, promotion, and reappointment reflecting the Boyer Model of Scholarship was implemented. Also, the university adopted the aforementioned *WCU 2020 Plan*, a comprehensive strategic vision statement and plan. Each of these initiatives recognizes the importance of community engagement for a regional comprehensive institution of higher education like WCU to be effective, and helped WCU earn the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching's community engagement classification. Needless to say, each of these initiatives filtered down to the department and program levels.

In an effort to ensure the continuation of program strengths documented by the previous program review as well as assess whether the program is aligned with the abovementioned university initiatives, the sociology program instituted a new assessment process in the spring of 2013 that used an electronic survey to gauge graduating students' perceptions of and satisfaction with the sociology program and faculty.⁴ The survey results continue to be collected each semester and so far indicate student opinion of the faculty and program is overwhelmingly positive (see Appendix D). Results for items assessing faculty performance reveal the vast majority of students "agree" or "strongly agree" that the sociology faculty was supportive, engaged, and interested in the success of students during their time at WCU and post-graduation. Students also felt the faculty was up-to-date in their fields, unbiased, and enthusiastic about teaching. Results for items assessing program curriculum and program community indicate most students view course offerings as sufficient and effective for producing valuable skills. Likewise, students were overwhelmingly in agreement that the department provided a positive environment for them. Students enthusiastically reported they would choose sociology as a major again, citing the strong impact the sociological perspective in general and the program in particular had on them. As data from this survey continue to emerge over coming semesters, the sociology faculty will continue to compile the findings and develop programmatic responses to further enhance student outcomes.

As indicated thus far by the results of the graduating senior exit survey, the continued strength and cohesion of the sociology program's intellectual community is a source of pride to the faculty and

⁴ This section of the exit survey includes 17 items using Likert scale response category options ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Additionally, students were asked to provide a response to the question, "If you had to do it all over again would you still choose sociology as a major? Why or why not?"

students alike.⁵ Due to their positive program experiences, currently enrolled major and minor students actively publicize the program to other students on campus. Likewise, the program community, along with the flexible yet rigorous curriculum, attracts students in entry level, Liberal Studies courses (i.e., SOC 103, 235, and 414) to the major and minor.⁶ Program faculty also strategically engage in additional means for increasing sociology majors and minors, including formally inviting students who have performed well in liberal studies courses to seek a major or minor in sociology, formally inviting current sociology minors to seek a major in sociology in place of the minor, formally inviting students from other campus programs with cooperative program agreements (for instance, psychology) to seek a second degree in sociology⁷, and getting involved in university initiatives (for instance, University Academic Experience or UAE) that spotlight the sociology program and introduce sociology professors to incoming freshman and transfer students.

Increasing student enrollment is viewed positively by the university, as is achievement of successful post-graduation outcomes. The program faculty actively recruits students to the sociology program in order to promote the university's strategic priorities related to engagement⁸ and to produce graduates with highly marketable skills and experiences.⁹ As a result of suggested areas of improvement outlined in the previous program review, the sociology program has made a concerted effort to focus on post-graduation outcomes such as identification of and application to appropriate job positions and graduate school programs. The link between what students are learning and how it will be put to use in the work world is often made in courses and advising sessions, and how to market major skills is frequently discussed. Informal assessment of student post-graduation activities is made via the sociology program's Facebook page and communications with program alumni.¹⁰

While program planning since the previous review has resulted in largely successful outcomes, the program would benefit from continued planning with regard to making known its achievements at the

⁵ See Standard 3 in this report for more information regarding the content knowledge and professional application question results of the graduating senior exit survey.

⁶ Because entry level, Liberal Studies courses expose many students to sociology as a discipline and the sociology program at WCU in particular, permanent program faculty teach these courses as much as possible.

⁷ The sociology and psychology programs have fostered a cooperative arrangement where majors from both programs can take research methods and data analysis (SOC 385 and 386 or PSY 271 and 272) in either the sociology or the psychology program to satisfy requirements for both programs. This decision was made based on a review that found these course offerings meet similar and rigorous standards held in both programs.

⁸ WCU's Vision Statement: To be a national model for student learning and engagement that embraces its responsibilities as a regionally engaged university.

⁹ Skills obtained by graduates of the sociology program at WCU reflect those most valued in new college hires as represented by results from recent job outlook surveys conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers: the ability to make decisions and solve problems, communicate verbally, obtain and process information, analyze quantitative data, and create and/or edit written reports. See <http://naceweb.org/about-us/press/skills-employers-value-in-new-hires.aspx?land-surv-lp-2-prsrel-05302014> for more information.

¹⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/wcusociologyprogram>

college, university, and regional levels. While the sociology program was identified as a "category 2" program with no additional action needed (i.e., a "successful program that should continue its current course") during the recent university program prioritization process, lack of visibility has impeded the program's ability to acquire resources and distinguish itself from other programs in the college and peer programs at other universities. Starting July 1, 2014, a sociology faculty member will become department head for the first time since the sociology and anthropology programs came together into a shared department in 1998. Hopefully, this will result in enhanced program representation and the start of a formal conversation regarding how to distinguish the sociology program from other programs at WCU as well as at other institutions.

Standard 3: The program provides and evaluates a high quality curriculum that emphasizes student learning as its primary purpose.

The sociology curriculum is exclusively focused on undergraduate education, leading to either a Bachelor of Arts or a Bachelor of Science degree, or a minor in sociology.¹¹¹² The program offers a curriculum that is reflective of current standards within the discipline. Specifically, students receive extensive theoretical and methodological training. Additionally, course work is attentive to the wide ranging and various career tracks of sociology students post-graduation. These include post-graduate training in sociology (M.A. or Ph.D.) or other professional degrees (such as law, social work, and counseling), alongside various non-academic and applied fields.¹³ Our curriculum is designed to encourage mastery of sociological content and the development of durable skills, with the explicit aim of providing students with wide-ranging and flexible expertise.

The core sociology major degree curriculum is purposefully streamlined. Following the introductory course, students have only three additional required courses: methods of social research (SOC 385), analysis of social data (SOC 386), and sociological theory (SOC 391). This design has distinct advantages. First, students with a full-time course load are able to complete their degree in four years (or less when enrolled in summer courses). Second, students may explore a variety of sociology courses in a range of substantive areas, which allows students to cultivate their interests. Third, our curriculum requires students to have a second academic program area outside of sociology that

¹¹ The difference in degrees is one of a language requirement. The B.A. requires six hours of a foreign language while 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.

¹² See the sociology program catalog description at <http://catalog.wcu.edu/index.php> for more information.

¹³ Recent alumni are pursuing graduate training at schools such as Colorado State University, University of Dayton, Duke University, University of Maryland, Auburn University, CUNY Hunter College, UNC-Chapel Hill, and Western Carolina University.

complements their interest areas in sociology.¹⁴ For example, students regularly complete dual degrees in sociology and psychology, international studies, education, criminal justice, or communication. Thus, the sociology curriculum encourages interdisciplinary study, not only to facilitate student learning but also to establish a solid foundation for post-graduate outcomes.

For incoming freshman, an eight-semester curriculum has been designed to graduate students in four years. Students spend their freshman year fulfilling liberal studies requirements, including the introductory to sociology (SOC 103) course. They complete these in their sophomore year and enroll in sociology elective courses. During their junior and senior years they focus on sociology electives and the remaining required courses (SOC 385, 386, and 391). The plan is flexible, though, and course offerings evolve to accommodate student interests and needs. For example, “Professional Issues” (SOC 460), which is now offered every year, provides students with focused training on how to translate their sociological expertise for post-graduate pursuits including resume writing and interviewing. A newly offered elective, “Public Sociology” (currently SOC 494) not only responds to larger shifts in the discipline but also to students’ interests in skill building in areas like digital media and blogging. All sociology courses are designed around specific learning objectives, which are transmitted via the course syllabi. Course design and learning objectives vary across the curriculum in order to generate varied skills and multifaceted opportunities for learning.

As part of the larger WCU Quality Enhancement Plan, *Synthesis: A Pathway to Intentional Learning*,¹⁵ all programs were encouraged to integrate an engagement component into their curriculum. To that end, sociology majors entering the university during or after the fall 2013 semester are required to complete an “Engaged Learning Experience” (ELE) (see Appendix E). Students may complete this requirement in one of three ways, including international study, an intensive internship, or a thorough undergraduate research project.¹⁶ All categories for completing the ELE involve a reflection and dissemination component and provide desirable and documented experience for post-graduate academic and occupational pursuits. Applicable electronic documentation of the product(s) for the ELE categories listed above must be submitted to the student's electronic briefcase, which is accessible to the department head in order to share with the department assessment committee for annual review.

¹⁴ This can be satisfied by a second degree, a minor, or a series of thematic courses compiled into a university-approved program. Majors are increasingly choosing to graduate with dual degree programs. Minors frequently associated with sociology majors include: psychology, social work, and anthropology.

¹⁵ See <http://www.wcu.edu/about-wcu/leadership/office-of-the-provost/ugstudies/qep/index.asp> for more information on the university QEP.

¹⁶ Students are encouraged to participate in international study opportunities. In recent years, students have traveled independently to countries such as Costa Rica, Ecuador, Uruguay, Spain, and Ethiopia. Past majors have also taken non-faculty-led trips to places such as the United Kingdom, Ghana, Bolivia, and South Africa. Faculty-led group trips have tended to be more popular with sociology majors. In particular, a 3 week summer group trip to Kenya, jointly led by faculty members in sociology and anthropology, has successfully been offered each year for the past five years.

In addition to course offerings designed for the major and minor, the program has made a substantial commitment to the university Liberal Studies curriculum through course offerings in the (P1) social sciences (SOC 103 and 235) and upper level perspectives (SOC 414) categories. More than half of the student credit hours produced by sociology faculty satisfy liberal studies requirements (see Appendix F).¹⁷ This is critical to meet the university's needs as enrollment grows and demand for liberal studies increases. Student interest in SOC 103 and 235 is significant, as indicated by maximum enrollment semester after semester, even as enrollment caps have been increased from 30 to 40 students per section. Importantly, these classes routinely attract new majors and minors who develop an interest in sociology while completing a course for liberal studies credit.

In an effort to ensure that core learning outcomes related to general, methodological, and theoretical areas of sociological knowledge are being met, the sociology program distributes an exit survey to all graduating majors each semester. For many years, a brief paper and pencil exit survey was used to assess student content knowledge. In the spring of 2013, the sociology program faculty collaborated in the total redesign of the exit survey, including a move to an electronic format, as well as rewriting all multiple choice questions on core sociological content. An open-ended question was also added to probe students' ability to translate their sociological training to a professional context.¹⁸ The online survey has been administered to majors graduating at the end of the spring 2013 (response rate = 71%), fall 2013 (response rate = 87%), and spring 2014 (response rate = 62%) semesters.¹⁹

The results of the content knowledge and professional application portions of the newest version of the exit survey have been overwhelmingly confirmatory over the three semester period (see Appendix D). Depending on the semester, 90-95% of the twenty content knowledge questions were answered correctly by a majority of the respondents. For each individual question, an average correct response rate was 82-84%, depending on the year. For the professional context questions, students most frequently noted their development of critical thinking skills, research and data analysis skills, communication (verbal and written) skills, the ability to see the macro-micro link, the ability to understand and interact with diverse groups of people, and an understanding of how to engage in strategies to enact social change.²⁰ This data suggests that the vast majority of students graduating with a degree in sociology have broad competence in the knowledge and skill set of the discipline. Going forward, the sociology faculty expects to use the findings from the exit survey in concert with the findings from the departmental

¹⁷ Since at least the 2006-2007 academic year, the percentage of student credit hours in liberal studies has varied from 55% to 62% of the total student credit hours (SCH).

¹⁸ "Imagine that post-graduation, a job interviewer asks, 'What have you learned and what skills have you gained by majoring in sociology?' How would you respond?"

¹⁹ While the response rate for the spring 2014 semester is acceptable, it is slightly lower than the previous semesters because the data was still being collected at the time this report was written.

²⁰ Note these responses support the previously mentioned skills NACE cited as most highly valued by employers.

assessment committee's annual review of sociology majors' ELE products to evaluate student learning outcomes and program effectiveness.

Standard 4: The program has sufficient faculty resources to meet its mission and goals.

The sociology program is currently maintained by five full-time tenure track faculty.²¹ Additional courses are offered by part-time faculty as monies allow and appropriately credentialed individuals are available.^{22,23} All permanent faculty members possess a Ph.D. in sociology as their terminal degree, thus meeting SACS standards. Full-time tenure track faculty members are spread across all ranks with one full professor, three associate professors, and one advanced assistant professor. The assistant professor will undergo tenure and promotion review during the 2014-2015 academic year.

The expertise represented by the five program faculty is quite broad, resulting in a well-rounded curriculum offering to students. The faculty possesses training and experience with the various level of sociological analysis (macro, meso, and micro) and is competent in the spectrum of sociological research methods as well as more theoretical and interpretive approaches. A wide range of substantive areas are also represented. Gender diversity is roughly even with three females and two males. As for racial diversity, regrettably no faculty members are persons of color, although faculty searches have always paid considerable attention to Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action standards.

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. The same can be said of advising, with each tenured or tenure track faculty member carrying their proportional share of advisees, which is roughly 20

²¹ One of the five full-time sociologists will begin a three year term as department head starting July 1, 2014. In order to address department head duties, that faculty member will have a reduced course load by three courses over the academic year. During the fall 2014 semester, no additional adjunct-led course is being offered to cover the one course reduction. Going forward, the program would greatly benefit from hiring an instructor with a year-long and renewable contract to cover this course loss and facilitate the continued recruitment of new majors and minors.

²² Part time faculty most often offer courses meeting liberal studies requirements, although occasionally a strong adjunct faculty may offer an elective major course. On average, one to two sections are offered by adjunct faculty per semester. When more sections are offered, it is has been due to a full-time sociology faculty member taking temporary leave (for instance, for family medical leave or scholarly development).

²³ Identifying and recruiting strong adjunct faculty has not always been easy because adjunct pay is quite low and the availability of monies for adjunct courses has often been determined on a last minute basis. The sociology program has never hired a one-year lecturer or instructor position, though the demand for liberal studies and major courses has been increasing. An instructor position would no doubt recruit more and stronger candidates to teach courses in the program, which would continue to positively affect incoming major and minor recruitment via the Liberal Studies program and allow the program to offer one or two additional upper level elective major options.

majors per full-time faculty member.²⁴²⁵ The official number of sociology majors during the past five years has increased, climbing from 54 majors in the fall of 2009 to 76 majors in the fall of 2013 (see Appendix F).²⁶ In the past, the ratio of tenure-track faculty with reported majors easily allowed faculty to spend significant time with advising duties and building rapport with the students. In recent years, the larger faculty to student ratio has made this relationship more demanding for faculty, although they continue to adhere to this valued program model.

Traditionally, students declare the sociology major or minor after taking a liberal studies or other introductory course and the streamlined curriculum lends itself to students who choose sociology late in their undergraduate career, particularly for the dual degree option. Sociology has nearly the same major enrollment as a percentage of total enrollment as our peer institutions within the UNC System (Appalachian State University and UNC-Wilmington) and North Carolina Central University. Compared to the same peer institutions, the sociology program is graduating roughly the same or higher percentage of students in spite of having a smaller faculty than the sociology programs at those institutions (see Appendix G).

Since the Fall 2009 semester, the total number of course sections averaged 16 per semester.²⁷ Coinciding with the loss of a tenure-track sociology faculty member at the end of the 2010-2011 academic year and the increase in liberal studies course enrollment caps during the spring 2013 semester, the number of sections has decreased (see Appendix F). Due to their popularity as required courses the program's liberal studies sections have maintained class sizes ranging from the mid 30s to 80 students²⁸. The remaining courses (including the courses required of all majors) ranged in size from the high twenties to as many as 45 students. While the increase in demand is positive, the increased number of students in upper level required and elective major courses taxes the faculty member capacity for individual attention to students and specific types of class interaction that are invaluable for the learning outcomes desired by the program.

²⁴ Sociology program faculty consistently rank high in all categories of teaching as measured by the student assessment of instruction survey, as well as all categories of advising as measured by department-generated, anonymous student advising feedback surveys.

²⁵ The unofficial major enrollment at the end of the spring 2014 semester was close to 100 majors, although the official number is less largely due to the timing in which students enter the major. Juniors and seniors who declare the major typically miss the fall census date, which is used to determine major enrollment for the year, resulting in a lower official count, but they are majors nonetheless in terms of teaching and advising load.

²⁶ For the past five years, students seeking the B.S. degree averaged 94% of all sociology majors.

²⁷ In the spring 2012 semester one full-time sociology faculty member was on maternity leave, which accounts for the dip in course section offerings. The subsequent increase in the number of sections offered the following fall 2013 semester reflects the course overload that same faculty member taught as compensation for a portion of that leave.

²⁸ The number of liberal studies course sections averaged 33% of the total sociology sections offered over the past five years.

As a master's level, regional comprehensive university, teaching is a primary focus of the university and the department. The program recognizes, however, that to be a good teacher a faculty member must also be current in her/his field. WCU also emphasizes the importance of service to the university and especially the community and nation. Faculty under consideration for tenure and/or promotion 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 B). In the department's collegial review document (DCRD), scholarly activity can mean anything from a traditional peer reviewed journal article to an applied research report, as long as the product undergoes peer review of some type. All faculty members undergo an annual faculty evaluation (AFE) of their performance in each of the three categories. Since 1998 and the current departmental configuration, no sociology faculty member in a tenure track position has been denied tenure.

By and large, the sociology faculty is composed of active scholars within a context that is not conducive to high scholarly production. They consistently participate in scholarly activity via presentations at professional conferences²⁹, refereed publications in traditional and non-traditional outlets, and applied research projects. The program faculty also shares 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.

Standard 5: The program attracts, retains, and graduates high quality students.

The sociology program has seen an increasing number of enrolled majors and minors and holds a solid ranking in terms of major and minor enrollment in the College of Arts & Sciences (see Appendix F).³⁰ Still, compared with some high demand programs on campus, sociology does not enjoy as high a volume. As such, entrance requirements beyond those of the university are not used by the program to limit student numbers. In addition, and in accordance with the disciplinary value on diversity and the recognition of the role structural inequality plays in academic success, the program wishes to attract the broadest spectrum of students as majors and minors. The absence of entrance requirements fulfills this goal.

²⁹ Low travel funds make it difficult to travel to more than one professional conference per year. Likewise, presentations and disciplinary service work at professional conferences require membership in the professional organizations sponsoring the conferences, which typically carries high fees. Currently, there are no funds available to cover professional membership fees, even though they are technically required to meet the scholarship and service job expectations of tenure-track faculty.

³⁰ According to the fall 2013 official undergraduate major and minor counts, the sociology major ranks 10th of 22 majors and the sociology minor ranks 4th of 32 minors in the college.

At the level of admission to WCU, sociology majors are both above and below the average in terms of high school GPA, composite ACT score, and overall SAT score (see Appendix F). On average, majors scored at about the national average for both the ACT and SAT.³¹ Likewise, majors earned an average high school GPA of 3.27 on a 4.0 scale. Compared to the 2013 undergraduate student profile at WCU, sociology majors scored slightly lower than average on these quality indicators.³²

For sociology majors who started at WCU as full-time, incoming freshman, the average time to declare the sociology major is 2.4 years, or during their junior year.³³ The average time in years from declaring the sociology degree to graduating with a sociology degree is 1.7 years, or roughly three semesters. For students who have completed all other degree requirements (i.e., liberal studies and a minor or second major degree), it is possible to complete the sociology major requirements in two semesters when enrolled full-time. While this is not ideal, it serves two valuable needs on campus. First, it makes it relatively easy for students to earn a second degree, which not only looks good for the university in terms of number of degrees earned, but also looks good for graduates on the market. Second, it provides an alternate path to degree completion for students who are unable to complete degree requirements in their current major but are motivated to earn their baccalaureate degree.³⁴

Females typically outnumber males as majors, although not by a large margin over the course of the last four years (see Appendix F).³⁵ Minority students are disproportionately represented among sociology majors, representing on average 34% of all majors over the last five years.³⁶ Student athletes are also disproportionately represented in the major, with an average of roughly 15% of sociology majors falling into this category in the last five years.³⁷

Over the last five years, roughly 44% of the majors have been represented by transfer students who were introduced to sociology at a previous institution. As transfer students comprise a steadily increasing proportion of incoming students at WCU, efforts toward on-campus student recruitment have

³¹ The average national ACT composite score is around a 20. On average, sociology majors scored a 19. The average national SAT overall score (on a 1600 scale) is around 1000. On average, sociology majors scored a 968.

³² 2013-14 WCU undergraduate average ACT = 22, SAT = 1028, and HS GPA = 3.55.

³³ This figure does not include transfer students or part-time students.

³⁴ For instance, students who are unable to pass required qualifying exams or meet high GPA requirements in other majors but are motivated to earn their baccalaureate degree may declare the sociology major and complete their degree in a short amount of time. Typically, these students speak with one of the sociology faculty before declaring the degree to assess the feasibility of completing the sociology major requirements. If a student's GPA raises red flags regarding his/her ability to complete the major, the sociology faculty will be up-front about the rigor of the major classes. However, the program does not turn away students.

³⁵ Data from American Sociological Association show that a higher proportion of female to male undergraduate majors is common nationwide.

³⁶ According to the most recent student body profile data, minority students comprise roughly 19% of the undergraduate student body (see <http://www.wcu.edu/WebFiles/IPE-StudentBodyProfile-Fall2013.pdf> for more details).

³⁷ As a point of comparison, during the 2013-14 academic year, there were 375 student athletes out of 8,448 undergraduate students; student athletes composed roughly 4% of the undergraduate student population.

been the program's focus in recent years, although program information is shared with campus recruiters for potential students requesting information about the program. The program actively participates in on-campus open house activities where the program is presented one-on-one with interested students. By and large, program recruitment is made by word of mouth between currently enrolled majors/minors and other students in their social networks or informal and formal invitations by program faculty.

In spite of an increasing faculty-advisee ratio, advisors continue to take an active interest in their advisee's academic progress. The sociology program faculty view advising as one of the best retention tools available.³⁸ As mentioned previously, the results of the aforementioned exit survey were positive on the topic of advising³⁹ and departmental surveys of advising indicate sociology majors are very satisfied with the advising they receive. As part of this advising, and due to its status 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 roughly 10 students are engaged directly with faculty and their research. Many students each year attend professional sociology conferences, often as presenters, or as presenters at the National Conference for Undergraduate Research or WCU's Undergraduate Expo. Our majors also participate in internships and in cooperative education. Recent examples include internships with Southwestern Community College, REACH of Macon County, the Jackson County Schools Bridge Program, and SOAR.⁴⁰ These extracurricular activities undoubtedly better prepare students for the types of work they personally want to pursue post-graduation as well as make them more marketable for positions in those areas.

Standard 6: The program has an administrative structure that facilitates achievement of program goals and objectives.

The sociology program is one of two programs 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 (CAS) and the Office of the Provost. The department head is selected through the process detailed in the departmental governance document (see Appendix B). The department

³⁸ We retain or graduate roughly 80% of our new program cohorts who stay at WCU, and this has been true over time. Because we are a flexible program, we tend to attract students later in their academic career and this is reflected in the 4 year data (see Appendix G for more information).

³⁹ 97% of students surveyed over the past three semesters agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "The faculty provided personal advising based on your specific career goals and personal interests."

⁴⁰ REACH (Resources, Education, Assistance, Counseling, Housing) is one of very few non-profit domestic violence and sexual assault agencies in the western region of the state. SOAR (Success Oriented, Achievement Realized) is high adventure program for preteens, teens, and adults with learning disabilities and/or ADHD.

faculty nominates a slate of candidates and provides qualitative feedback on each nominee to the dean of CAS who then appoints a department head to serve a three year term with the possibility of fulfilling one additional three year term. In the case that the department head is an external hire, their initial term is to be five years, with a possible three year renewal. The department head is evaluated primarily by the dean of the CAS, and secondarily by the university provost. Anonymous feedback on administrative duties is collected from department faculty via an electronic survey conducted by the Office of Institutional Planning & Effectiveness. In addition, the department collegial review committee evaluates the department head based on teaching, research, and service and that evaluation is shared with the dean of the college to help inform the dean's annual review.

Prior to July 1, 2014, all heads of the Department of Anthropology & Sociology have been anthropologists and there has been no formal director of the sociology program.⁴¹ Moreover, since the Women's Studies program was discontinued at the end of the 2012-2013 academic year after a rigorous university-level program prioritization process, the department has no program directors who are sociologists.⁴² While program directors receive no specific program level training, all institutional department heads attend a series of trainings and workshops sponsored by WCU throughout the year.⁴³ In addition, WCU has sponsored several leadership initiatives over the past two to four years, including the day-long Leadership Retreat, which is open to all faculty and staff until enrollment meets capacity, and the year-long Leadership Academy, for which enrollment is awarded via an application process reviewed by a committee of university stakeholders. The UNC system occasionally sponsors opportunities for general trainings and workshops as well.

The department has four standing committees: the committee on committees, the collegial review committee, the assessment committee, and the curriculum committee. The membership of the collegial review committee and committee on committees are established by election. Membership on the two other committees is annually appointed by the department head, and when possible, is spread among the departmental faculty. The department head also annually appoints faculty to individual ad hoc duties within the department as needed. The department meets at least twice each month for updates and to provide the department head with guidance on issues that impact the department's programs. The sociology program meets as a committee of the whole at least once each semester to plan the coming semester's course schedule. Other sociology program meetings occur as needed to address program-

⁴¹ On July 1, 2014, when the first sociologist becomes department head, she will effectively become the sociology program director.

⁴² The program director for the interdisciplinary Women's Studies program was located within the sociology program.

⁴³ Department head workshops are directed toward all department heads in Academic Affairs and Student Affairs and are attended by department heads at various levels of the university. Workshop topics typically are not focused on issues specific to academic programs.

specific issues (for instance, curriculum issues), and informal office meetings occur as student-specific issues arise.

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. Current students provide informal input through the Sociology Club and WCU's chapter of Alpha Kappa Delta, both of which are active student groups in the program and the department. Students also represent the department on the College of Arts and Sciences Student Advisory Board. Alumni provide informal feedback and updates by means of the program's Facebook page and individual communications with faculty. The sociology faculty pride themselves on the informal ties they maintain with program alumni.

Standard 7: The program has adequate resources to meet its goals and objectives.

The UNC system has been subject to significant budget reductions in recent years and this has been felt within the sociology program mainly in terms of issues related to faculty salaries. Limited university and college monies for non-tenure track faculty have resulted in variable coverage for program courses due to a need to create semester schedules without knowing whether funds for adjunct faculty will be available. Scheduled adjunct-led sociology courses that would have met capacity have been canceled on occasion because they were not given priority when funding was insufficient to cover need. A lack of formal program leadership undoubtedly contributed to this issue, as the sociology program did not have a spokesperson to effectively argue the need for course coverage on its behalf. In addition to issues related to non-tenure track faculty salary funding, the sociology faculty (like many other campus faculty) has experienced the strain of inert salaries since 2008 when the last sizeable raises were issued.⁴⁴ Of the three most recently hired tenure-track faculty in sociology, two left WCU in part for faculty positions that paid more competitive salaries.

In recent years class sizes have increased, partially due to the increased size of the overall student body, but also due to a steady increase in majors and minors. Larger classes not only increase the work load of each faculty member, they also strain faculty's ability to engage students - a primary goal of the sociology program. The increased faculty-student ratio threatens the faculty's ability to spend the significant time needed to meaningfully advise and build rapport with students. Moreover, a valued program goal of student participation in research is impaired by meager support for research and travel.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ In 2012-2013, a very small salary increase of 1.2 percent was allotted to all faculty in the UNC system.

⁴⁵ Internal funds available for research are extremely limited with only a handful of faculty, university wide, receiving some form of modest support. Department funds for travel are \$600 and have been at the same level for over 10 years. The Chancellors Office awards funds of up to \$1200 awarded competitively, this too has only been increased \$200 in the last decade.

Given the rising cost of travel, it is increasingly difficult for faculty to attend conferences to disseminate their work and build their professional networks, which is ultimately as important to student success as it is to faculty success. Likewise, there is limited internal funding available for sponsoring student research or student travel to conferences when they are presenting their research or research with a faculty advisor.⁴⁶

Another goal of the sociology program is to provide students with diverse learning experiences through engagement with a diversity of educators. While the program faculty encourages students to attend and participate in college and university sponsored events with external speakers, the sociology program has little to no funds for bringing in speakers other than visiting scholar funds, which are competitive, university-wide funds. In the past few years, the sociology program has sponsored only one external speaker, Ronnie Mwachia Mdawida, executive director of a non-profit organization focused on "improving the quality of life for Kenyans, by creating stronger, more sustainable communities through the means of volunteerism and unique community development initiatives".⁴⁷ Funding for this international scholar had to be pieced together across a variety of units on campus. Exposure to more speakers like Mr. Mwachia Mdawida would benefit our students and introduce campus to the student opportunities provided by the sociology program.

While issues related to salaries, workload, travel support, and visiting scholar support have raised challenges for the sociology program, space and campus-based teaching support have been good quality. The sociology program is based in the McKee Building and all tenure-line faculty have good sized offices with windows. Sociology classes are assigned to several buildings across campus, and all classrooms are equipped with up-to-date computers, media players, digital projectors, and digital overhead projectors. This technology is indispensable as faculty teaching styles emphasize increased use of technology in and outside of the classroom. Furthermore, the university's Coulter Faculty Commons supports faculty in their professional development as teachers and scholars and learners, including the use of technology and a variety of teaching strategies.

⁴⁶ See <http://www.wcu.edu/academics/departments-schools-colleges/the-honors-college/ugres/undergraduate-academic-project-grants-program.asp> for more information regarding undergraduate academic project grants. See <http://www.wcu.edu/about-wcu/leadership/office-of-the-provost/ugstudies/qep/faculty-staff/grants-and-support-for-qep-implementation/undergraduate-research-educational-stipends.asp> for more information regarding undergraduate research educational stipends.

⁴⁷ See <http://www.theronniefund.org/#> for more information about The Ronnie Fund. The sociology program has been working as a community partner with Mr. Mwachia Mdawida for the past five years to raise money for the education of Kenyan youth and to bring WCU students to Wongonyi Village and Nairobi, Kenya for international learning experiences.