Progress Report

M.A. Sociology

College of Liberal Arts

November 2009

MARSHALL UNIVERSITY

Date: __11/1/2009_____

Program: __ MA in Sociology_____ _____
Degree and Title

Date of Last Review: __November 2008_____

Recommendation

Marshall University is obligated to recommend continuance or discontinuance of a program and to provide a brief rationale for the recommendation.

Recommendation
__Code (#):

1. Continuation of the program at the current level of activity; or

2. Continuation of the program at a reduced level of activity or with **corrective action**: Corrective action will apply to programs that have deficiencies that the program itself can address and correct. **Progress report due by November 1 next academic year;** or

3. Continuation of the program with identification of the program for **resource development:** Resource development will apply to already viable programs that require additional resources from the Administration to help achieve their full potential. This designation is considered an investment in a viable program as opposed to addressing issues of a weak program. **Progress report due by November 1 next academic year**; or

4. Development of a cooperative program with another institution, or sharing of courses, facilities, faculty, and the like; or

5. Discontinuation of the program

Rationale for Recommendation: (Deans, please submit the rationale as a separate document. Beyond the College level, any office that disagrees with the previous recommendation must submit a separate rationale and append it to this document with appropriate signature.)

___1_____	__Anders Linde-Laursen and Fred Roth_____	__11/1/2009_____
Recommendation:	Signature of person preparing the report:	Date:
___1_____	__Anders Linde-Laursen_____	__11/1/2009_____
Recommendation:	Signature of Program Chair:	Date:
___1_____	__David J. Pittenger_____	__11/1/2009_____
Recommendation:	Signature of Academic Dean:	Date:
_____	___N/A_____	_____
Recommendation:	Signature of Chair, Academic Planning Committee: (Baccalaureate pgms only)	Date:
___*1*____	___Eldon R. Larsen_____	__1/22/2010_____
Recommendation:	Signature of President, Faculty Senate/ Chair, Graduate Council:	Date:
_____	_____	_____
Recommendation:	Signature of the Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs:	Date:
_____	_____	_____
Recommendation:	Signature of the President:	Date:
_____	_____	_____
Recommendation:	Signature of Chair, Board of Governors:	Date:

The program review of the MA in Sociology, submitted in November 2008, resulted in a call for **continuation of the program with corrective action**. Comments from the dean, the review committee and the provost differ somewhat, but concerns are expressed in regards to:

- student enrollment
- declining GRE scores among enrolling students
- a declining number of graduates
- some criticism in exit interviews with graduating students
- a need for curriculum revisions, and
- the need for developing an assessment plan.

The dean specifically requested that the progress report must demonstrate that the department has begun in earnest to address these issues. In this progress report we will, therefore, chronicle developments and steps that have been taken since last November and the results that have been achieved and can be expected.

As it was noted in the program review, the department has over the past five years both experienced significant turnover in faculty and suffered from a lack of academic and administrative leadership. Consequently, a systematic review or development of the department's graduate curricula was lacking. In the program review report, the department recognized this problem and indicated that the hiring of a new chair and a full roster of faculty from fall 2008 was hoped to significantly and positively affect the situation. As the dean commented, this weakness could indeed be a significant strength as this newly hired faculty potentially would bring new and current perspectives that could be utilized to rejuvenate the program. As it can be discerned below such strengths are already now starting to be noticeable as the program was at what we imagine to be a historic low-point while the program review report was authored. While we are continuing to work with fine-tuning both the configuration and leadership of the graduate program, now under the directorship of Associate Professor Markus Hadler, we recognize that more work has to be done. However, we argue that we are in earnest addressing the program's weaknesses and have already made very noteworthy improvements.

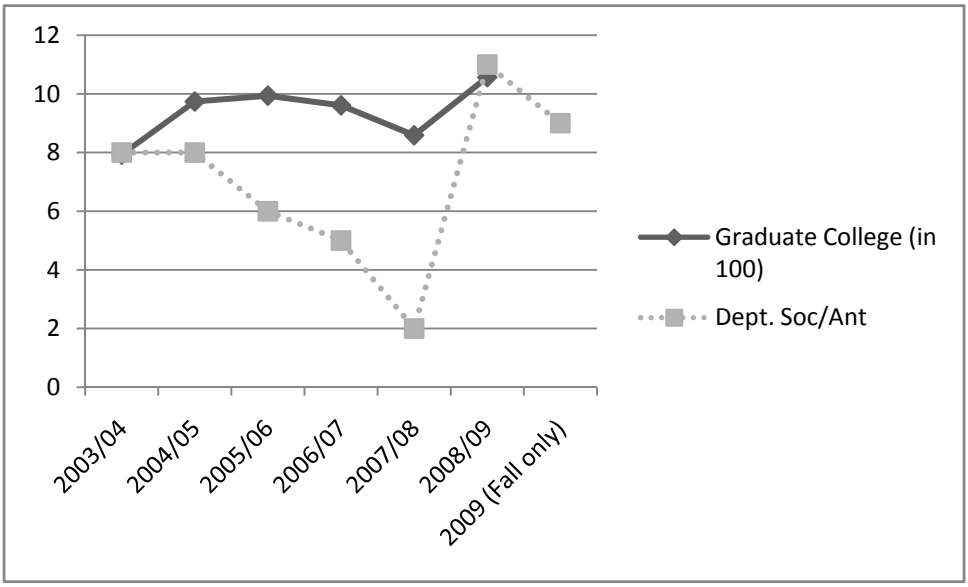
Student enrollment

The enrollment of only two new MA students in the last academic year included in the program review period (2007/2008) should and did raise concerns both within and outside the department. However, the declining trend in enrollment numbers had already been noticed internally and efforts had been undertaken to correct this development. While our resources for active recruiting are very limited, we have taken steps to be present at a number of on-campus recruitment fairs and try to contact prospecting students off-campus. We have, for instance, mailed a letter and informational material to advisors/chairs in all undergraduate programs in sociology and anthropology in West Virginia and adjoining states. As our mailing list improves, we hope to reach all such programs in the Appalachian region (metro region) as well as a good number of programs beyond that geographical scope. We also placed an advertisement for the MA in the program for last spring's Appalachian Studies Association Conference. In the years ahead, we will continue these recruitment efforts. Doing so we hope to take more advantage of centralized resources in the Graduate College and other offices of the university, and we will

take advantage of the changes we have made and will make to our curriculum, which should make it both significantly better and easier to understand and, thus, more attractive to prospecting students.

As it can be seen from the below figure, our efforts seem already to have had a positive effect. While the overall number of enrolling graduate students at Marshall differs some over the period, the number of sociology MA students enrolling dipped but has then gone up again and very significantly. In 2008/09 eleven new students started in our program and another nine new students were enrolling in classes in fall 2009; thus, we are well past the historic low-point of two students admitted for the 2007/2008 academic year.

Figure 1: Enrollment during the 5 year review period (2003/04-2007/08) and current numbers



Actual Numbers:

	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009 (Fall only)
Graduate College (in 100)	793	974	994	961	859	1057	
Dept. Soc/Ant	8	8	6	5	2	11	9

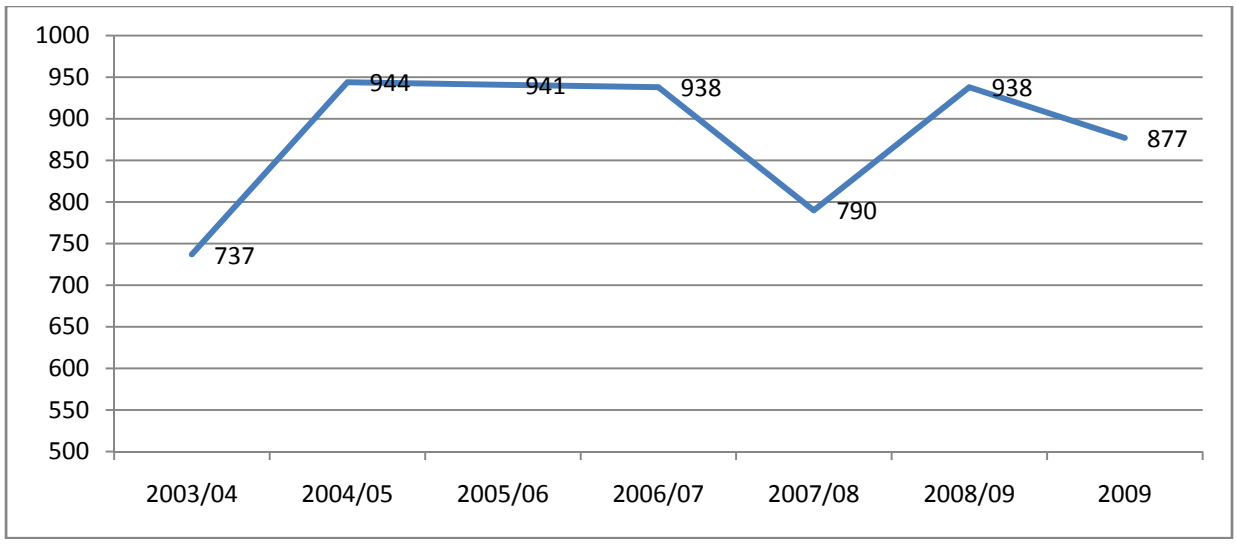
Information from class enrollments and the Graduate College.

Declining GRE scores among enrolling students

The Graduate College at Marshall University has no minimum GRE requirement for applying/admitted students. According to the dean of the Graduate College, Dr. Donna Spindel,[1] the average score for students admitted to the MA in sociology is about the same as the average score for all admitted students to the Graduate College.

The overall GRE score for admitted sociology students during the entire review period was 870 with lower scores in 2003/04 and 2007/08; please see figure 2. The average values of the 2008/09 cohort and of our new admissions for 2009/10 are above the average of the review period and well above the low points of 2003/04 and 2007/08. Thus, while we naturally would like to admit very good students, we feel that a concern in regards to the value of admitted graduate students' GRE score would best be addressed in a discussion encompassing the entire college.

Figure 2: GRE scores during the five year review period (2003/04-2007/08) and current scores.



Whether a discussion of GRE scores will be undertaken in the Graduate College we do not know. However, we have of course discussed this issue internally and considered what we can do to improve the situation for our particular program. We have decided to address this issue by amending our admission policy. This policy will be changed and students with a very low GRE score (650 and below) may in the future only be admitted provisionally (please see addendum: Proposal for new graduate catalog text for sociology). Such provisionally admitted students will be admitted fully if their performance in classes is satisfactory (GPA of 3.0 and above as specified by the policy of the Graduate College).

[1] Email conversation between Dr. Markus Hadler and Dr. Donna Spindel (9/30/2009)

A declining number of graduates

Naturally, the current number of graduating students depends mostly on enrollment numbers in the past. The numbers of graduates with an MA in sociology the last years are: 3 in 2008, 1 in 2009, and 4 pending for December 2009. As discussed above, the program experienced declining enrollment throughout the five year review period (2003/04-2007/08); however, this trend was reversed from 2008-2009. Given that the minimum time an admitted graduate student takes to complete all requirements and apply for graduations is about two years, we can expect in the years ahead an increasing number to graduate as the students enrolled in 2008 and 2009 finalize their studies.

Some criticism in exit interviews with graduating students

In the program review report, we included some comments from interviews with graduating students:

> Nine graduating students were interviewed in 2007 and four in 2008. The overall evaluation of the Sociology MA program received the score of 4.33 in 2007 and 3.75 in 2008; the small number of respondents makes it difficult to gauge whether this decline is significant – however, we have already undertaken measures to improve the program and will continue to do so.
> The students evaluated the quality of instruction in the program with the mean of 4.33 and 4, in respective years. However, a desire to have more 600 level courses was expressed (3.33 and 3; we are already addressing this problem). The evaluation of facilities, ex. classrooms, computer usage, etc., was a mean of 3.55 and 3.5. The overwhelming majority of graduates plan to use their degree in their work, scores are 4.56 and 4.25, and in their life, means are 4.89 and 4.75. (Quote from page 13, 5 year review report on MA Sociology, November 2008)

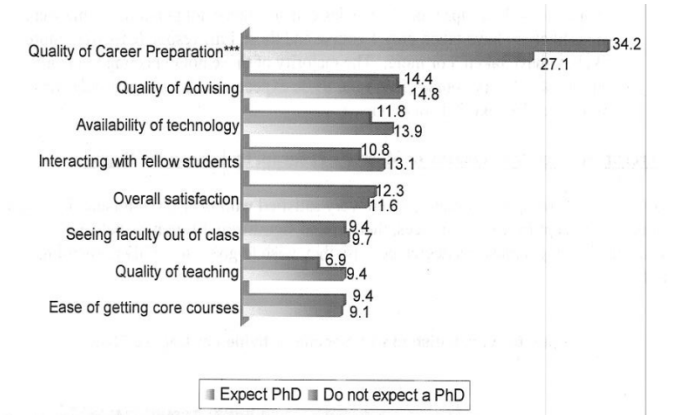
At least two issues are central to these comments. First, there is noticeable discontent with the facilities of the department. In this, we are of course mostly dependent on the resources allocated from the university; however, we have some limited ways to address the issue and have done so. We have assigned a suite of offices on the fifth floor in Smith Hall to be used for seminar classes and for the use of our MA students, adjuncts and undergraduate majors. While the facility is limited, we see a lot of interest among our students and it seems we have successfully provided our graduate students an environment where they can meet and talk, use provided computers, etc. As we develop this resource, we expect it to become a tremendous asset for our graduate program.

Second, a desire for more 600 level classes was expressed. Given that almost the entire classroom curriculum for the MA in sociology until 2008 was provided in 500 level classes this is understandable. 500 level classes are taught simultaneously with 400 level classes and as the number of graduate students ordinarily is lower than the number of undergraduates, the MA students reasonably expressed a desire for some courses designed entirely for their level.

We have over the last year used considerable time and resources addressing this critical issue. To fortify the quality of instruction and to be in compliance with the policy of the Graduate College, that at least half a graduating student's credit hours must be from 600 level classes, we introduced last academic year a new core curriculum for the MA consisting of: *SOC 600 Classical Sociological Theory, SOC 601 Contemporary Sociological Theory, SOC 605 Qualitative Research Methods & Analysis,* and *SOC 606 Quantitative Research Methods & Analysis*.

Through our contacts with the American Sociological Association's Task Force on MA Programs we additionally identified a specific need for more professional preparation of graduate students. The task force has identified "lack of career preparation" as the main concern of MA students in sociology nationwide (see figure 3). Realizing the lack of a vehicle for the systematic professional preparation for our students, we in fall 2010 are adding to the 600 level core of the MA program *SOC 609 Professional Development*. This course will focus on career development and skills needed to achieve success as a professional sociologist. We are convinced that this course will be a great asset to our program. With this course, we now have a core for the MA consisting of five courses which, with the thesis or problem report credits, ensure that we are in compliance with the policy of the Graduate College and that we provide our students the desired 600 level instruction.

Figure 3. Dissatisfaction with Specific Activities by Degree Plans



Source: ASA Research Development Department, *What Can I Do With a Master's Degree in Sociology?* 2009

A need for curriculum revisions

Besides addressing the need for developing the new 600 level core classes for the MA program, we have had lengthy discussions on how to restructure the requirements and topically refocus our instruction. As a point of departure, we compared our offerings with the sections of the American Sociological Association. Considering the top 50% of the American Sociological Association Sections in terms of membership, we are able to offer courses related to 22 out of these 24 topical areas of interest. To our satisfaction, we thus can argue that we offer a comprehensive sociology curriculum.

Additionally, we have identified ways to satisfy those among our students who want to focus on anthropology and at the same time use the resources of the department better. This fall we have, with the support of the dean of the Graduate College, forwarded curriculum work for the addition of a graduate Area of Emphasis in anthropology, which will allow students in our MA program to take 12 credits of course work in anthropology classes and have that mentioned on their diploma. Simultaneously, we have created a graduate Minor in anthropology of six credits (2 classes) to satisfy students in other programs who want to take advantage of our offerings. While we realize that these additions will serve a limited number of students, we are delighted in taking full advantage on the graduate level of the academic composition of our department.

In the context of these additions, we have this fall also forwarded curriculum work for a better organization of our graduate anthropology courses in agreement with changes made last year on the undergraduate level and we have proposed to add an independent study in anthropology at the 600 level. The reorganization of courses offered follows a schedule of course numbers that highlights the four fields of the discipline as well as leaves space for traditional disciplinary foci as regional (Appalachia) and area studies; at the same time, the schedule creates a simple and strong structure that easily can be employed in years ahead to categorize and number new courses.

As we expect the discontinuation of Dr Elena Ermolaeva's service to the department from summer 2010, we have likewise taken this as an opportunity to review our course offerings and the distribution of specializations among current faculty. We have forwarded to the dean and provost a request to hire a new colleague who can partake in the development of our offerings especially in the field of sex and gender; however, the request additionally identifies an interest in developing student research in Appalachia as a search criterion. The department has earlier played a central role in Appalachian Studies and we see this search as an opportunity to start to rebuild this position which we imagine will be a great asset to our graduate program and students.

From our discussions on curriculum over the past year, we have recently developed a new catalog description of the MA in sociology that will update the existing requirements. The Sociology Master of Arts degree currently requires the completion of 32 hours of coursework plus thesis hours for the Thesis Option. The requirement for the Non-Thesis Option is the completion of 36 hours of coursework only. We are changing the course requirements for the Thesis Option to 33 hours since we offer only 3 credit hour courses. The new curriculum is structured around a set of core requirements that provide a strong foundation in sociological theory, research methods, and professional development. All students have to take these core courses (discussed above) and additionally have to enroll in courses from various disciplinary foci. To guarantee breadth in their education, they have to take courses from more than one focus. To guarantee depth, students have to take more courses in one particular focus, declare a minor, or opt for the Area of Emphasis in anthropology. For a detailed description of the new MA program, please review the addendum: Proposal for new graduate catalog text for sociology.

As requested and as discussed above, we have in earnest started and accomplished quite a lot in the area of curriculum development. We see the achieved results both as the creation of a new MA program that will attract a growing number of graduate students and as the creation of a

robust structure that in the future can be adjusted and amended to include more and exciting options.

The need for developing an assessment plan

As our discussions of our curricula over the last year became more focused, a discussion of what to assess and how to do it became possible. However, it also soon became evident that a solid foundation for such a discussion was needed if it was to be fruitful. After discussions between the department chair, the director of the Office of Assessment & Program Review and the dean, the chair proposed and the COLA dean approved that one of the members of the department's undergraduate curriculum committee would be granted a one class reassigned time in fall 2009 to work with the development of such a solid foundation.

Since late spring the selected faculty member, Associate Professor Fred Roth, has worked with gathering and organizing information as well as developing a proposal for the department's assessment plans. As a first logical step, Fred Roth in his work focused on the development of an Assessment Plan for the undergraduate BA program; this was also requested from the five year review process last year and is complicated by the two different majors in the program, each with its separate curriculum. After being discussed in several department meetings and revisions made, the faculty approved in a meeting on September 25 a comprehensive sketch for such an assessment plan for our undergraduate program.

When work with the undergraduate assessment plan was well under way and we had a reasonable understanding of assessment procedures, Fred Roth started to discuss with the director of graduate programs how to approach a similar plan for our MA; this work will continue over the coming months and it is our expectation that we will have the first assessment activities in agreement with our new plan executed in spring 2010.

The resulting assessment instrument will revolve around four goals for the students in our graduate program:

A. To acquire increased breadth and depth of substantive and theoretical sociological knowledge and to critically reflect on the obtained knowledge.

B. To acquire quantitative and qualitative research skills, including research design, data collection, analysis/interpretation, and application, and to be able to demonstrate skills in at least one of these research paradigms in the form of a public presentation.

C. To equip students with the ability to convey sociological concepts and knowledge and to be able to demonstrate this ability by teaching an undergraduate sample class.

D. To acquire an awareness of career and educational opportunities available with a Master's degree in sociology.

While developing the assessment instrument, we will largely focus on the core classes, which all students must pass on their way towards the MA degree. The described goal A will be linked with the theory courses and electives, goal B with the research methods courses, and goals C and D with the new course on professional development. Additionally, all goals are also reinforced in electives. In the revised graduate curriculum, students must develop a portfolio. All the portfolios will be reviewed and evaluated by the departmental faculty to determine whether or not the department is meeting its objectives. In addition, we will continue to employ instruments that have been used in the past such as the graduate survey focusing on the perceived quality of our department and qualitative interviews and feedback during the spring assessment day.

List of addenda

2008-2009 Graduate catalog
2009- 2010 Graduate catalog
Copy of proposals for a new graduate Area of Emphasis and Minor in anthropology
Proposal for new graduate catalog text for sociology