

**Department of Sociology
University of Wisconsin---Madison**

**Plan for the Assessment of the Graduate Program
Spring 1998**

Introduction

For more than two decades the Department of Sociology has been rated by our peers as the best graduate training program in the nation. The latest rankings reaffirmed that collective opinion. Given that unusually high global evaluation, it does not seem wise for the Department to spend considerable resources on further evaluation. This does not mean that the program cannot be helped by serious scrutiny, or that we intend to allow this opportunity to pass without considering possibilities. It does mean that we will try to keep down the costs of such evaluation, in both time and money.

Program Objectives

The core objectives of our graduate program are as follows:

- 1. *Research training.*** The primary objective of our graduate program is quite straightforward; we seek to provide as many graduate students as possible with the skills and knowledge that will allow them to do social research of the highest quality, and to inspire them to seek that quality as they pursue those careers.
- 2. *Market position.*** Regardless of overall market demand for Ph.D. sociologists, we wish to continue to train our students well enough that they are among the most respected, and thus "demanded" in the profession. This would include training in teaching and related skills relevant to at least part of the market.
- 3. *Humane environment.*** We wish to do our training within a social environment that is humane and supportive to the degree possible given our other objectives.
- 4. *Recruitment of top candidates.*** We believe that we have something special to offer in the way of training and want to be sure that our methods of attracting the best students to our program are effective.

Methods of Evaluation

We plan to use a variety of indicators of program performance. Some of the indicators discussed below fit neatly into categories provided in the Dean's memo; additional indicators are also provided. Some of these data have already been collected, while other data will require new expenditures faculty and administrative time.

- 1. *External reviews.*** The rankings of graduate programs noted above provide feedback

of national reputation.

2. Review theses and dissertations. A faculty committee will sample from the past few years to monitor quality.

3. Local exams. We also expect to review performance on written comprehensive examinations.

4. National exams. We will examine long-term trends in the performances of entering cohorts on the GRE exams as a means for evaluating our ability to attract the best students.

5. Placement. We will do an assessment of our students' success compared to that of students from other high ranking programs in getting the best jobs available on the market.

6. Publications. Are our students publishing while they are in the program and after they leave? What kinds of journals are accepting their work?

7. Success in the program. We will examine long-term trends in rates of attrition and time to degree. Ideally, we will be able to compare these trends to those of other social departments on campus or to other comparably ranked sociology departments.

8. Support. We want to assess how well we do compared to high-ranking competitors in providing economic support for our graduate students.