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TO: Gary Sandefur, Dean
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FROM: Doug Maynard, Chair
SUBJECT: Assessment in the Department of Sociology

We assess our undergraduate major in sociology every five years by focusing on student learning in sociology courses, the sociology program overall, academic advising in sociology, and undergraduate student research. We also we also investigate recruitment into and progress through the Sociology major. Our most recent report was completed just last year (2008), and is a 15-page document with a number of findings that help us in improving the educational experience for our undergraduates. This document was shared with the faculty and discussed at a faculty meeting in the fall semester 2008.

The 2008 study demonstrates that the Sociology program has maintained its high quality and made significant improvements. Based on a survey we did, graduating seniors appear to be very positive and often glowing in their evaluations of the overall program, course offerings and teaching quality. They are also for the most part extremely appreciative of their experience with undergraduate advising, much more so than in previous assessments. Increased contact with the Undergraduate Advisor and her staff has likely contributed to increased satisfaction. In the 2003 assessment, we had learned that access to and the quality of advising were of particular concerns and we were glad to learn that efforts in the Department, the College and the University to provide increased advising resources paid off.

With respect to specific program objectives, we found considerable stability or improvement over the past 10 years (i.e. comparing with 1998 and 2003). Students continue to recognize substantial contributions to understanding how society works and understanding connections between individuals and society; nearly as much is gained in key skills such as critical thinking, understanding the conduct of social research, and independence; and lesser contributions are perceived to more specific skills – writing, statistical analysis, computing and speaking. Our undergraduate curriculum committee is investigating whether we can make improvements in these areas and we are anticipating a report by the end of the semester.

A major goal for the Sociology program is to provide as many undergraduates as possible some element of research experience. Opportunities include the Concentration in Analysis and Research (CAR) program– in which students take advanced methods and statistics courses and complete a research internship and capstone course; senior theses; independent research projects; working on faculty projects; etc. We learned in our 2008 assessment that students would actually like *more* research opportunities, and we are emphasizing this matter with our teaching faculty. One concrete step we have taken is to offer a course on statistics more frequently (twice a year) because its once-a-year appearance in the timetable was impeding progress through CAR.