

# Sociology Strategic Plan Summer 2011

## I. Mission, Vision, and Values

**Mission:** The Sociology Department is a diverse, student centered learning community engaged in critical social inquiry dedicated to extending knowledge to enrich and enliven individual and public life.

**Vision:** We are dedicated to the production, critical examination, diffusion and application of social knowledge in its many forms. As teachers, we introduce our students to theories about the social world, help them to think critically about those theories while training them in research techniques with which those theories can be applied and tested.

**Values:** We value excellent teaching in the liberal arts tradition. We value excellent faculty devoted to teaching, to the production of nationally and internationally recognized scholarship, to engaged service in the department, college, university and community.

## II. The Department

As the most comprehensive of the social sciences sociology seeks to understand the ongoing human construction of the worlds we inhabit. Its affinity for the liberal arts tradition, we think, is obvious. By fostering what we sociologists like to call the “sociological imagination” (Mills 1961) we engage ourselves and our students with a multifaceted, interdisciplinary, critical consciousness of the complex and dynamic inter-relationships between individuals, groups, and socio-cultural structures and systems. We do this by drawing as freely as possible from across the disciplines in an effort to create knowledgeable, culturally literate, politically astute world citizens well-rounded by a liberal arts education.

The Department of Sociology at GVSU began to take on its current form in 2000 when it split from its former partners in the joint department of sociology, anthropology, and geography. Since that time we have evolved into a department with twenty full-time faculty and a relatively steady number of about 150 majors. Our faculty have attained local, national, and international recognition for scholarship, service, and teaching. Our students are active in the campus and local community.

In recent years we have had great success with graduate school placements. Our students have either been accepted to or gone on to enroll in graduate programs at Brandeis, The Ohio State University, the University of California at Davis and at Santa Barbara, and Arizona State University among others.

We have chosen “benchmark’ departments that share our goals and which are similar in that 1) regular faculty and not graduate assistants do the teaching, 2) they have structured their program in conjunction with the American Sociological Association

recommendations (see appendix for curricular and assessment reports) and 3) they reside in institutions that reward both teaching and scholarship. The programs we have chosen are:

Sonoma State University  
 San Francisco State University  
 California State University Chico  
 SUNY Geneseo

Each of these departments complies with American Sociological Association recommendations with regard to the major and its relation to liberal education but each does so in different ways. These variations, especially in curricular structure, illuminate creative possibilities for constructing appropriate objectives in relation to our goals.

The Sociology Department is currently a major contributor to the University-wide General Education program, the Honors College and interdisciplinary programs. Members of our department regularly teach two courses in Social Science Foundations, two World Perspectives Courses, and four courses in U.S. Diversity. The department teaches 17 theme courses ranging across 12 of the General Education Themes. In a typical semester about 75% of the sections we teach are designated General Education.

While we see our heavy commitment to general education and to other programs as wholly appropriate and even natural given the critical and multi-paradigmatic character of sociology it also presents significant challenges. We struggle to meet our teaching commitment and typically rely on five adjuncts and two visitors or affiliate faculty. Space is also at a premium as classrooms in which we teach our general education courses very often literally run out of seats. A lack of common space also limits the possibility for a department culture to emerge from the kind of informal interaction between students and faculty that marks a truly vital intellectual community.

### III. Strategic Goals and Objectives (Student, Program, and Faculty)

1. Goal- Student: The Department of Sociology will enhance learning and professional development for students.

1.1 Objective: Students will graduate with the capacity to articulate and exercise a Sociological Imagination.

1.1.1 Strategy: All courses, regardless of content area, reinforce critical analysis of social structures.

1.2 Objective: Students will graduate with disciplinary based writing and communication skills.

1.2.1 Strategy: All students will create a major portfolio.

1.2.2 Strategy: Students will communicate their knowledge through class presentations, participation in student scholarship day, and one-on-one with professors.

1.3 Objective: Students will graduate with disciplinary based qualitative and quantitative research skills.

1.3.1 Strategy: All students are required to complete one course in qualitative and one course in quantitative research methods.

1.3.2 Strategy: Major elective courses present opportunities for students to actively apply research skills.

1.4 Objective: Better prepare majors for life after graduation

1.4.1 Strategy: Continue excellent record of graduate school placements.

1.4.2 Strategy: Create effective advising guidelines for unconventional career paths.

1.4.3 Strategy: Increase major participation in Study Abroad.

1.4.4 Strategy: Increase percentage of graduates with second language proficiency.

1.5 Objective: Strengthen student advising.

1.5.1 Strategy: Encourage regular communication between advisers and advisees

1.5.2 Strategy: Hold regular advising events and informational gatherings

2. Goal- Program: The Department of Sociology will maintain a diverse, student centered learning community engaged in critical social inquiry.

2.1 Objective: Increase opportunities and engagement in international teaching, research, and study.

2.1.1 Strategy: Continue to work with the Padnos International Center to streamline processes for student transfer credit

2.1.2 Strategy: Encourage faculty to participate in exchange programs and foster new relationships

2.2 Objective: Foster an intellectual culture (faculty / student research, hosting meetings, Midwest Sociological Association [MSA] journal, speakers, etc.)

2.2.1 Strategy: House the MSA journal

2.2.2 Strategy: Host MSA meetings

2.2.3 Strategy: Intersectionality student reading group to compliment MSA meetings

2.2.4 Strategy: Invite speakers to campus for public events

2.2.5 Strategy: Support and encourage faculty mentoring of McNair Scholars, participation in Student Summer Scholars, and Student Scholarship Day

2.2.6 Strategy: Institute regular department level presentation of research (i.e. following sabbatical or publication, or as a “warm up” for professional meetings)

2.2.7 Strategy: maintain an active department writing circle.

2.3 Objective: Facilitate interaction among faculty and students, and gain physical space to create communal area.

2.3.1 Strategy: Support and encourage faculty mentoring of McNair Scholars, participation in Student Summer Scholars, and Student Scholarship Day

2.3.2 Strategy: Institute regular department level presentation of research (i.e. following sabbatical or publication, or as a “warm up” for professional meetings)

2.4 Objective: Get new hires to replace retiring faculty to reduce our dependence on adjuncts and to ensure we offer a range of courses to match or out perform our benchmark institutions.

2.4.1 Strategy: Hire replacement (Linda Rynbrandt) to coordinate ageing and adult life minor.

2.4.2 Strategy: Hire replacement (Richard Joannis) to engage with new LGBTQ minor.

2.4.3 Strategy: Hire in the area of Environmental Sociology

2.4.4 Strategy: Institutionalize regular offering - Education course

2.4.5 Strategy: Institutionalize regular offering - Sexuality course

2.4.6 Strategy: Institutionalize regular offering - Gender course

2.4.7 Strategy: Institutionalize regular offering - Nationalisms course

2.4.8 Strategy: Institutionalize regular offering - Theater / Performance course

2.4.9 Strategy: Institutionalize regular offering - Environmental course

2.5 Objective: Bring critical sociological reasoning to bear on issues of faculty governance.

2.5.1 Strategy: Award faculty for active participation on influential CLAS and University committees.

3. Goal- Faculty Development: The Department of Sociology will facilitate a devotion to teaching and to the production of nationally and internationally recognized scholarship.

3.1 Objective: Constructive and engaging mentoring and evaluation of teaching.

3.1.1 Strategy: Develop practices of regular teaching observation and feedback.

3.2 Objective: Promote and encourage faculty scholarship.

3.2.1 Strategy: Institute regular department level presentation of research (i.e. following sabbatical or publication, or as a “warm up” for professional meetings)

Strategy: maintain an active department writing circle.