

Social Sciences Program Review

In 07-08, faculty in the Social Sciences Division conducted Program Review in the following program areas: Anthropology, Child Development, Economics, Education, Ethnic Studies, Gentrain, Geography, History, Political Science, Psychology, Sociology, Women's Studies, Women's Programs, and the Re-Entry Multi-Cultural Center.

Support team members who participated in these reviews include John Anderson, Homer Bosserman, Kathleen Rozman, and Susan Steele.

Program Strengths and Support Team Commendations

The Program Review highlights the quality and commitment of the Division's faculty, both full-time and adjunct. Their dedication to their students and to MPC is commendable. We also note in this regard that all of the programs within the Division (with the exception of Child Development, due to external factors) have completed their course revisions, including student learning outcomes. In addition, most made a significant effort to ensure that their offerings and degree programs are appropriately aligned with four-year institutions to support student transfer.

Support Team members note the diversity of the various parts of Social Sciences Division. It includes disciplines at the core of the social sciences – anthropology, economics, history, political science, sociology. But, it also includes two interdisciplinary programs (Ethnic Studies and Women's Studies), as well as one vocational program (Child Development) and two programs (Gentrain and Women's Programs) that play a critical role in MPC's outreach to its community. The breadth of the Division greatly enriches MPC.

Finally, the Support Team was impressed with the care with which the Division reviewed its programmatic data and its responses to what the data indicate. This Program Review is a model on that score.

Challenges

A major challenge facing the Division has to do with retirements. Of the 13 full-time instructors in the Division in Spring 2008, two are retiring and will be replaced with new faculty in Fall 2008 and the retirements of four more are likely to take place in the next two years. One of the projected retirements is the division chair. So, the division will require new leadership at the same time it will be in the process of integrating new members.

Gentrain has historically accounted for roughly one-third of the Division's FTES. Recent developments threaten the program's ability to continue at this level. Some are curricular. Contemplated changes in the number of times a course can be repeated may

negatively impact enrollments. A second curricular issue has to do with a required revision in the status of the non-credit courses, from basic skills to older adult. Until and unless the revision is approved, Gentrain's course offerings are constrained. Third, once the revision is approved – and, assuming that the non-credit and credit courses will be offered concurrently – consideration will need to be given to how to meet the objectives of both in a single class. Another development has to do with staffing. Part of the program is dependent on the availability and commitment of adjunct faculty.

The renovation of the Social Sciences building in the summer of 2007 has provided a much improved physical environment for faculty and students. However, the division faces an immediate space shortage in Women's Programs and there is no room in the building for the expansion of the current programs or to accommodate the addition of other programs, should any kind of reorganization take place.

A number of Social Sciences programs have no full-time faculty assignments associated with them (Education and Geography are entirely dependent on adjunct faculty or faculty in other programs. The appointments of the faculty members in Child Development, Gentrain, and Women's Studies are split with other responsibilities.). In the absence of long-term, committed adjuncts or being able to depend on other campus faculty resources, such programs are regularly challenged to meet students' educational needs and keep the program alive and vibrant.

Goals

The Division wants to increase its enrollments.

- Some of the initiatives on this score do not necessarily involve additional faculty – i.e. expanding the size of some classes, offering weekend workshops or other condensed offerings for credit, improving student retention in divisional offerings, and reaching out to student sectors that are underrepresented in selected programs. In regard to the last, the support team notes the age distribution of enrollments. Gentrain enrolls students over the age of 50 almost exclusively, while other programs in the Division enroll students under the age of 50. This situation offers an opportunity for crossover growth.
- Others would likely require additional adjuncts in current programs– i.e. expanding course offerings at the Marina Education Center and at local high schools.
- Still others would require revitalizing programs. Geography has no full-time faculty and its long-time adjunct has retired. The division believes that geography offerings are essential and, thus, intends to find another semi-permanent adjunct to reinvigorate the curriculum and attract students. Education also has no full-time faculty; its single course – a prerequisite to the teaching credential program – is taught by a faculty member associated with another campus program.

The support team acknowledges the thought that the division has given to this effort.

The Division attends continuously to the quality of its offerings. Two initiatives are envisioned, all of which the support team encourages. First, the living room courses are in need of major revamping. The division is looking to improve their quality by adding an on-line writing portion or by replacing them with on-line offerings. Second, the division intends to explore the addition of a service learning component to some of its courses.

Finally, the program review provides a clear statement of the hiring priorities for the division. After the replacement hires, the division ranks a faculty position split between Women's Studies and History and another split between Gentrain and Philosophy. The first configuration would speak to two divisional needs (Women's Studies and History) simultaneously.

Support Team Recommendations

1. The program review notes that few of the courses in the division have prerequisites, although many have advisories about English proficiency. One consequence is the classes include among their enrollees students who may not be prepared to meet course demands. The Division seems to have been particularly pro-active in trying to improve the possibility that such students will succeed. The self-study notes that 'We have talked about doing both informal and formal assessments to assist students in determining whether they are ready to meet the demands of a course, and to alert instructors as to what assistance students may need...' We recommend that the Division take these next steps and integrate their efforts with other campus resources. With some additional effort, the Social Science Division could serve as a role model for student success. It seems entirely appropriate for the Social Sciences to do so.
2. The support team notes the desire of Women's Programs to have a presence in the planned Student Services and Campus Center complex. Many students rely on the services offered by Women's Programs (e.g. the textbook loan program, the emergency food pantry, and the professional clothing closet). Women's Programs' staff believe – and we concur – that access to these services would be facilitated by providing a satellite office in this complex. We recommend that Women's Programs be included in the planning and development of this new campus resource.
3. The support team recommends that the division develop a vision for the future of both geography and education at MPC and a plan for how this vision might be accomplished. The support team also finds the idea of building key programs with joint hires (e.g. women's studies/history and Gentrain/philosophy) to be worth pursuing.
4. The support team acknowledges the contributions of Gentrain to campus enrollments and to the College's connections with the community. We encourage a rapid resolution of the curricular issues currently confronting this program.

Overarching Issues

A number of the issues identified in the Division's self-study are not division-specific.

1. Most of the college's programs depend on our ability to find and keep good adjunct faculty. As in other program reviews completed this year, Social Sciences programs in the division comment on difficulties finding and keeping adjunct faculty. Most programs attribute at least part of this difficulty to MPC salaries and assert that they are not competitive. The College should study adjunct salaries and practices in regard to adjunct teaching loads at competing institutions. The College should make the results of this study public. Based on the results, the College should make appropriate adjustments.
2. Although MPC employs a large number of adjunct faculty, some over many years, the College has not afforded them office space. If they lack a campus office, office hours and meetings with students are difficult and, thus, students may lack the kind of accessibility to their instructors that they need. The College would be well-advised to consider how it might improve the situation.
3. As MPC positions itself for enrollment growth across the board, the desire to grow is not specific to Social Sciences programs. The support team emphasizes the need to support growth with a timely and professional institutional marketing plan.