

# Insights on Undergraduate Social Science Programs Based on the Students of a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology Program

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**Abstract** - This study aimed to provide some insights that might help school administrators and faculty in developing or improving their respective Social Science degree programs to make them more attractive to student stakeholders. BA Sociology students have been asked to participate in a focus group discussion and two separate surveys in an effort to assess the BA Sociology program of the University of the Philippines Los Baños in terms of its curricular structure, course content, and methods of instruction. The findings of the study reflect the strengths and weaknesses of the undergraduate Sociology program from the perspective of its primary stakeholders. In general, BA Sociology was evaluated positively by students of the program. However, the results show that there is room for more improvement, especially when it comes to convincing the students that the courses which they are required to take are useful after graduation and in terms of classroom management in major Sociology courses. The findings also indicate that there is dissatisfaction among the primary stakeholders on the prescribed timetable of the BA Sociology curriculum as well as the existence of the program's three curricular options: thesis, practicum, and all-coursework. The study made salient the importance of several elements in managing an effective social science degree program that covers different aspects such as personnel (knowledgeable and hands-on academic advisers and faculty focused on the course they teach), classroom management (particularly an insistence to revert to the discussion- and lecture-type classes in teaching social science courses instead of the more supposedly-progressive methods of reporting, film-showing, and skits), and curriculum (such as sequence of courses and, more importantly, a revisiting of the courses to make them more responsive to the needs and interests of today's generation).

**Keywords:** Sociology, Curriculum, BA Sociology, Degree Program, Student Perceptions

## INTRODUCTION

The institution of the Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS) strand in the Department of Education's K-12 Educational Framework opens up the possibility of an increase in the enrolment numbers of Social Science-related degree programs. The increase in the number of students who might become more interested in the social sciences by virtue of an earlier and more focused socialization into the field is complemented by efforts to improve social science degree programs through the Commission on Higher Education's passage of Policies, Standards, and Guidelines (PSGs) for different social science-related courses like Sociology, Anthropology, and Psychology. This research was conducted with the intention of contributing to the improvement efforts of the social science degree programs. Though the focus of this paper will center primarily on undergraduate Sociology degree program offerings, some of the insights derived in the study, particularly on classroom

management, might also prove beneficial to other degree programs.

Sociology is one of the social science-related undergraduate degree programs offered in various parts of the country. As a traditionally western, and especially American-oriented discipline [1], it was initially instituted in the country alongside other social science disciplines through the American-founded University of the Philippines between 1915 and 1926 [2]. In the decades that followed, the number of Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) offering a degree in Sociology has increased. A brief review of BA Sociology degree offerings in the country would indicate that the undergraduate degree program is offered by 34 HEIs, 13 of which are offered in Luzon, 9 in Visayas, and the remaining 12 in Mindanao [3]. As of January 2018, Ateneo de Manila University is the latest HEI to offer an undergraduate degree in the discipline. Given the rise in the variety of degree offerings of HEIs necessarily leading to increased competition for enrollees, as well as the changing social

landscape of the country with which the program must stay responsive to, this study aimed to provide some insights that might help school administrators and faculty in developing or improving their respective Social Science degree programs to make them more attractive to student stakeholders.

This study has chosen the BA Sociology program offered by the Department of Social Sciences, College of Arts and Sciences, University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) as its subject. While the Sociology programs of these HEIs may have elements unique to their campus owing to factors such as the specialization of their faculty roster and research and academic thrusts of their respective schools, the core subject matter and the existence of the CHED PSGs [4] would ensure that these Sociology programs will still be predominantly similar. Hence, insights from UPLB's Sociology program may still be useful for other HEIs currently offering, or planning to offer, a similar program.

The BA Sociology program is one of the 29 undergraduate degree programs offered by UPLB [5]. It was established in 1975 with the goal of producing a pool of competent practitioners of Sociology who can serve as agents of social change and development using their background in the various substantive areas of the discipline. Over the years, the program had undergone in-house reviews and subsequent revisions, with the 2012 BA Sociology curricular revision latest one being currently implemented [6]. In the 2012 BA Sociology curriculum, students are required to undergo four years (or 8 semesters) of Sociological training under any of the three curricular options: the Thesis option (142 units) which requires an individual empirical research paper as the student's undergraduate thesis to cap off the student's baccalaureate training, the Practicum option (142 units) which requires students to undergo immersion in a Non-Government, Government, or Private Organization workplace setting as its final requirement, and the All-Coursework/Straight Course Option (148 units) which requires its students to enroll and pass six additional units of Sociological training in lieu of an undergraduate thesis or a practicum work. In all three options, the students of the program are required to pass 45 units of RGEF courses, 9 units of tool courses (or non-Sociology courses which are necessary to advance in the program. These come in the form of 3 units of Mathematics and 6 units of Statistics courses), 9 units of Foundation courses (or those which provide the students with background on other social sciences, particularly Economics, Political Science, and Anthropology, to make a more holistic social scientist), 9 units of elective courses (courses which

students are free to include in their curriculum as a means of branching out to other disciplines or further specializing in Sociology), and 64 units, or 76 units in the case of the All-coursework option, of Sociology courses.

In 2013, Nelson and Quintos [7] conducted a study on the perceptions of BA Sociology graduates on the undergraduate Sociology program. It was made salient that most graduates of the program initially chose to study Sociology because of personal interest in Sociology or its related disciplines such as Psychology and Political Science. It was also found in the study that graduates consider the program's capability to instill critical thinking as the main strength of BA Sociology while its inability to constantly combine theory and practice is considered as its main weakness. In this study, the researchers attempted to supplement Nelson and Quintos' original work by (1) providing qualitative data obtained from focus group discussion with students regarding various aspects of the BA Sociology program and (2) providing quantitative data that focuses specifically on the content, relevance, utility, and quality of instruction of courses included in the program instead of looking at the curriculum as a whole. This study serves to complement the aforementioned findings.

This article is divided into four parts. The first part involves the results of a survey which asked the students to identify and explain the specific courses in the curriculum which they consider to be the most useful and the less useful. The identification of the aforementioned would allow for the identification of the courses in the curriculum which needs to be rethought or even revised.

The second part of this article discusses the results of a quantitative survey conducted to the graduating BA Sociology students during the Academic Year 2014-2015. The questionnaire used for the survey was inspired by the original instrument utilized in the Nelson and Quintos (2013) study, with the addition of two new sections: a section that asks students about the possibility of pursuing further studies, and a section that asks respondents to numerically assess each of the required courses in the BA Sociology curriculum in terms of (a) quality of course content, (b) quality of course instruction, (c) applicability to Philippine reality, and (d) usefulness for student's future prospects. The data obtained from the latter section is utilized in this study.

The third part discusses the results of the focus group discussion conducted for the study. The discussion revolved around three major discussion

points: First, on perceptions of BA Sociology students on the undergraduate Sociology program in terms of (a) order of Sociology courses, (b) Revitalized General Education courses, (c) Free Elective courses, (d) major Sociology courses (operationalized here as 100-level courses in Sociology), and (e) the thesis, practicum and all-course work curricular options offered in the program; Second, on BA Sociology students' perceptions on the faculty in terms (a) composition, (b) allocation, and (c) duties and responsibilities; and third, on the perceptions of BA Sociology students regarding the teaching methods of faculty members in various Sociology courses.

Finally, the fourth part of this article is a synthesis of the results. Recommendations on what possible direction future improvements of BA Sociology can take are also identified. It must also be noted that the participants of the study are graduates of the BA Sociology curriculum prior to the 2012 curricular revision. This is because the 2012 curriculum did not have any graduates yet during the time of the study's implementation. Nevertheless, much of the old curriculum was retained in the 2012 curriculum. The 2012 revision only included seven new courses, four of which were borne from the restructuring of the research methods course and the theory course of the old curriculum into two courses each to allow for more time to discuss their long syllabi. The only unique additions to the 2012 revision is the inclusion of a 1-unit seminar course, a 1-unit special topics course, and a 3-unit course on social program evaluation. In total, the BA Sociology curriculum became a 142-unit course (148 units in the All-coursework/Straight-course option) in the 2012 revision from a 141-unit course (147 units in the All-coursework/Straight-course option). Hence, given huge similarity in the old and the 2012 BA Sociology curriculum, the results are still relevant to the purposes of the study.

## METHODS

The discussion of the methods and materials employed in this study will be divided into three of the four major parts of study:

For the first part of the study which inquired into the perceptions of students on the courses based on utility, the same students of the BA Sociology program who served as respondents in Nelson and Quintos' [7] study were asked about their perception on the most useful, and less useful courses which are included in the BA Sociology curriculum. They were also asked to provide a justification for their chosen answers. A total of 230 students from 2005 to 2011 were able to answer the

survey. The material used was the same survey instrument utilized in Nelson and Quintos' [7] study which was originally constructed by Dr. Nelson. In this instrument, the students were given two open-ended questions asking them to identify the courses they found to be the most useful and least useful. There was no limit to the number of courses they were allowed to identify. A follow-up question asking them to justify their answer was also provided.

For the second part of the study which inquired further into the perception of students on the courses based on (1) quality of course content, (2) quality of course instruction, (3) applicability to Philippine reality, and (4) perceived usefulness to student's future prospects. The researchers envision the possibility to applying the same survey instrument to succeeding batches of graduates in order to have a more comprehensive longitudinal data which can be used for future attempts to review the curriculum and its courses.

The respondents were asked to rate each of the courses included in the BA Sociology curriculum in a five-point numerical scale with 5 as the highest. They were asked to assess each course without any influence from their peers or the faculty. The graduating batch of A.Y. 2014-15, totaling 23 graduating BA Sociology students, were able to answer the survey. Given that some courses are not necessary to be taken by a student to complete the coursework requirements of the program, not all courses necessarily received 23 individual assessments.

For the third part of the study, which serves as a qualitative complement to the two previous quantitative parts, focus-group discussions were held to elicit richer insights from the degree program's student body regarding the program. The students who participated in the focus group discussion are comprised of select male and female BA Sociology majors who were classified as Seniors during the time of the study and those who are fresh graduates of the program (operationalized here as those who have graduated immediately the semester prior to the conduct of the study). Direct quotes from the participants are included in this report when deemed necessary. However, the identity of the participants was kept confidential. Participation in the activity was done with the informed consent of all participants.

## Perceptions on the Courses in the BA Sociology Program According to Students

A total of 28 courses in the curriculum were identified by at least one student as the most useful. It

is also worth noting that 6% of the respondents said that all courses are useful; 3 of them reasoned that all courses are applicable in real life. Out of all these courses, the theory (SOC 150) and methods (SOC 195) courses were identified as the most useful courses because they are the most applicable or useful in research – the career path that students are oriented from the start as the expected destination of BA Sociology graduates.

Meanwhile, almost a quarter of the student respondents (24%) said none of the courses are “*less useful*” with one saying that he learned a lot from every subject. Another noted that while none are less useful, some are “not enjoyable”. One other student said that none of the courses are less useful, “*except those taught by a certain teacher*” – indicative that the problem lies not with the course itself but more on its method of instruction. The researchers did not attempt to probe into the identity of the teacher which the student alluded to. The remaining 76% of the student respondents identified 23 courses which they considered as less useful than the other courses in the curriculum. Twenty-two of the courses identified were claimed as less useful by less than 5% of the student participants. Only AERS 160: Rural Sociology was identified by 22% of the student participants as less useful.

The students provided several explanations as to why this course was regarded as such. Most salient of these reasons are that (a) the students are not into agriculture, (b) the course is not relevant to their lives, (c) the discussions mostly revolved around the faculty’s own publications, (d) the course is not connected to the other courses in the curriculum – a claim that is surprising because it should be related as the counterpart to another major course: SOC 120: Urban Sociology, (e) it is “*overlapping with other courses*” – which makes the previous reason even more surprising due to the contradictory sentiment, and (f) the course is “not sociological” in approach. When students were asked to expound on the claim that the course is not sociological in approach, they claimed that the lessons in the course seem too detached from the lessons of the other major courses. Students claimed that the lessons are more grounded on lessons on agriculture, rather than Sociology. Finally, students opined that they are finding it difficult to understand the agriculture-based discussions especially when their own lived experiences in rural and agricultural settings are insufficient. This is probably because even though UPLB’s Sociology program has a Rural Sociology

course, most of its students are from urban areas and are not well immersed in the subject matter’s focus.

### **Numerical Assessment of the BA Sociology program by BA Sociology graduates**

This part of the article discusses the results of a survey given to the BA Sociology graduates during the Academic Year 2014-2015. There is no intent in this article to make a claim that the survey results obtained from the graduating batch of the aforementioned academic year will be generalizable for the other batches of Sociology majors. This merely attempts to paint a picture of the numerical assessment of some BA Sociology graduates regarding the program on four points of concern: (1) quality of course content, (2) quality of course instruction, (3) applicability to Philippine reality, and (4) perceived usefulness to student’s future prospects. Table 1 summarizes the results of the survey.

The most noticeable result of the survey is that all courses have been rated by the respondents as above average in all four criteria. Most courses have received a score of 4 on all four criteria. Another observation which can be gleaned from the data is that the lowest score received in the survey is 3.43 (AERS 160). This is in the criterion of quality of instruction, which, as a whole, seems to fare the worst among all four criteria. This observation is based on the fact that the range of scores in quality of content is 3.52 to 5.00, 3.90 to 5.00 for applicability to Philippine reality, 3.71 to 5.00 for perceived usefulness to student’s future prospects, and only 3.43 to 4.86 for quality of instruction. These results might corroborate with the sentiments of students from the qualitative data presented in the previous part of the article wherein student participants – who are coming from relatively similar batches as the respondents of this survey – expressed gripes in some of the teaching aspects of the BA Sociology program.

When the courses are compared per criterion, the data shows that the undergraduate thesis course is considered by the respondents to be the best when it comes to content, with SOC 200: Undergraduate Thesis garnering a perfect score of 5. This course is followed by SOC 200a: Practicum (4.83), SOC 150: Sociological Theories (4.81), SOC 195: Methods in Social Research (4.71), SOC 160: Social Change (4.70), SOC 140: Introduction to Demography, and SOC 10: General Principles of Sociology (4.57). It is worth noting that the core of the BA Sociology program, the theory and method courses, are both rated very highly in terms of content.

Table 1. Mean scores of courses under the BA Sociology curriculum as assessed by graduating BA Sociology Students of A.Y. 2014-2015.

Course Code and Title	Mean Score on Quality of Course Content	Mean Score on Quality of Course Instruction	Mean Score on Applicability to Philippine Reality	Mean Score on Usefulness for Student's Future Prospects
1. SOC 10: <i>General Principles of Sociology</i>	<b>4.57</b>	4.48	4.14	4.29
2. SOC 100: <i>Social Organization</i>	4.19	3.86	4.14	4.24
3. SOC 105: <i>Social Stratification</i>	3.95	3.76	4.19	3.86
4. SOC 107: <i>Gender Relations</i>	4.36	<b>4.57</b>	<b>4.57</b>	4.36
5. SOC 110: <i>Sociology of the Family</i>	4.33	3.86	4.29	3.95
6. SOC 112: <i>Sociology of Politics</i>	4.38	4.43	4.48	4.43
7. SOC 114: <i>Sociology of Economic Life</i>	4.19	3.81	4.10	4.14
8. SOC 115: <i>Social Gerontology</i>	4.36	4.09	4.36	4.00
9. SOC 116: <i>Sociology of Religion</i>	4.71	4.67	4.19	4.00
10. SOC 119: <i>Industrial Sociology</i>	3.80	3.67	4.00	3.89
11. SOC 120: <i>Urban Sociology</i>	3.57	3.48	3.90	4.19
12. AERS 160: <i>Rural Sociology</i>	3.52	3.43	4.05	3.76
13. SOC 129: <i>Race and Ethnic Relations</i>	4.25	3.62	4.13	3.88
14. SOC 130: <i>Social Psychology</i>	4.25	4.00	3.95	4.05
15. SOC 135: <i>Attitudes and Persuasion</i>	4.43	4.50	4.33	<b>4.83</b>
16. SOC 140: <i>Introduction to Demography</i>	<b>4.62</b>	4.48	<b>4.67</b>	4.52
17. HFDS 122: <i>Migration</i>	3.86	3.71	4.14	3.71
18. SOC 150: <i>Sociological Theories</i>	<b>4.81</b>	<b>4.86</b>	4.19	4.33
19. SOC 160: <i>Social Change</i>	<b>4.70</b>	<b>4.60</b>	<b>4.50</b>	4.30
20. SOC 165: <i>Sociology of Development</i>	3.92	3.50	4.00	4.25
21. SOC 170: <i>Social Problems</i>	4.12	3.65	4.47	4.12
22. SOC 175: <i>Sociology of Deviance</i>	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.75
23. SOC 180: <i>Collective Behavior</i>	4.48	4.29	4.05	4.05
24. SOC 195: <i>Methods in Social Research</i>	<b>4.71</b>	4.00	4.24	4.71
25. SOC 200: <i>Undergraduate Thesis</i>	<b>5.00</b>	<b>4.78</b>	<b>4.78</b>	<b>4.89</b>
26. SOC 200a: <i>Practicum</i>	<b>4.83</b>	<b>4.83</b>	<b>5.00</b>	<b>5.00</b>
27. BA SOCIOLOGY CURRICULUM	4.26	4.00	4.16	4.42

Another interesting observation pertains to the perfect score obtained by SOC 200 on the criteria of content. This is because the content of the course is wholly dependent on the student who is given the freedom to choose his or her thesis topic. This might imply that the basis of grading utilized by the students is on how meaningful the content is to their personal life, hence the perfect score of the course that allows them the freedom to dictate the content.

In terms of quality of instruction, SOC 150: Sociological Theories was rated the highest (4.86), followed by SOC 200a: Practicum (4.83), SOC 200: Undergraduate Thesis (4.78), SOC 160: Social Change (4.60), and SOC 107: Gender Relations (4.57). The high rating for SOC 200 and 200a might be because these courses require substantial one-on-one supervision between the faculty and the student and, as such, the capability of the faculty to mentor students becomes more salient to the respondents as compared to other courses wherein the faculty's attention is

forced to be distributed to a class populated usually by 25 to 40 students.

When it comes to applicability to the Philippine setting, SOC 200a: Practicum was rated the highest (a perfect 5.00), followed by SOC 200: Undergraduate Thesis (4.78), SOC 140: Introduction to Demography (4.67), SOC 107: Gender Relations (4.57), and SOC 160: Social Change (4.50). The lowest score obtained in this criterion was 3.90 (SOC 120: Urban Sociology) which is still considered above average. That the practicum course achieved a perfect score may be because the course situates the student in an actual workplace setting, making it the most hands-on and immersive out of all the courses in the curriculum which, in comparison, are more theoretical in design. It is quite surprising, however, that the lowest score was obtained by the Urban Sociology course despite the fact that most students are urbanites themselves, perhaps implying that the approach to the subject matter is not

effectively connecting Urban Sociology to an appreciation of Philippine urban reality.

Perhaps the most concerning result of this survey is on the criterion of perceived usefulness to the student's future prospects. Table 1 showed that aside from the two terminal courses: SOC 200: Undergraduate Thesis and 200a: Practicum, only SOC 135: Attitudes and Persuasion was given a rating above 4.50. In other words, while a handful of courses included in the curriculum are considered excellent when it comes to content, instruction, and applicability to the Philippine social reality, their perceived utility in the student's future career prospects are not regarded as highly. Instead, a course – SOC 135 – which is even not required for all students and is also a mix of the disciplines of Sociology and Psychology – is the only coursework considered to be highly useful while the rest of the core courses in the curriculum are not perceived to be very practical.

All in all, the BA Sociology curriculum has been evaluated by the student respondents as above average, with it scoring above 4 on all four criteria. This suggests that, at least as far as the batch 2015 BA Sociology graduates are concerned, the BA Sociology program is commendable, albeit there are still rooms for improvement especially in its capacity to convince the student that it is useful for their future prospects.

### **The BA Sociology Program from the Perceptions of Students – Results of Focus Group Discussion**

The findings discussed in this part of the article are obtained from the focus group discussion of the primary stakeholders of the BA Sociology program – the students.

#### *a. On the Ordering of the BA Sociology Curriculum*

During the first month of a student's enrolment into the BA Sociology program, they are provided a copy of the curriculum map and oriented about the curriculum as well as the sequence of courses to be taken, including its semester of offering (whether it is offered only on the first and/or second semester) and pre-requisites. In the case of the BA Sociology program, it is necessary for a student to have passed SOC 10: General Principles of Sociology during their first year in the program, after which, the student is eligible to enroll to most of the 100-level Sociology courses in the curriculum. It became salient in the discussion among students and graduates, however, that most participants are confused with the curriculum's structure. Some of them were under the impression that the courses listed per semester in the program's curriculum timetable should

be taken in the semester it is listed under. On the other hand, others deviated from the provided order of courses by the curriculum since they have been allowed to do so. While the curriculum map's timetable should ideally be followed, this has proven to be very difficult because of limited slots for enrolment into the courses per semester, leaving some students who failed to immediately reserve a slot to delay their enlistment into the course for a later time. This problem is made more problematic because many of the major courses in the curriculum are only offered once every academic year instead of being offered every semester.

The participants suggested that there should always be orientations regarding the curriculum and academic advisers knowledgeable about the curriculum in order to avoid such confusions. The participants also suggested that curriculum developers should be mindful of the implications of the ordering of the courses in the curriculum. Two of the major issues that the participants raised as problems in the curriculum structure are that,

- (1) students are finding it hard to appreciate the program during their freshman and sophomore years in the program, leading to students deciding to leave the program in favor of other degree offerings which are perceived to be more attractive; and
- (2) students sometimes find themselves ill-equipped for the demands of the course that they are taking because they have not yet taken a related course.

With regard to the first issue, the participants often blame the curriculum's structure as one of the reasons why there is a high number of BA Sociology students who shift away from the program after their first year. According to the participants, one of the reasons why their fellow students shift is because they do not find the degree meaningful even after a year of Sociological training. This is because they find the major courses in the curriculum which must be taken in their first year are very limited. Oftentimes, a first year Sociology student will only be able to take SOC 10: General Principles of Sociology and SOC 100: Formal Organizations. SOC 10 only provides a general outline of what Sociology as a discipline is, but is usually perceived to be incapable of establishing how distinct and important the program is as compared to other disciplines. SOC 100, on the other hand, tackles a subject matter that usually proves difficult for first year students to relate to given its emphasis on workplace interaction. The more easily-relatable courses such as

SOC 110: Sociology of the Family and SOC 130: Social Psychology, on the other hand, are put later than the students' first year curriculum. The participants suggest that curriculum developers should arrange the major courses in such a way that the courses offered every year level should be responsive to the students' growing social and academic maturity, with the more relatable courses (in the context of a person's daily life) being offered earlier in the curriculum before the more macro-level or complex courses such as SOC 120: Urban Sociology, SOC 180: Collective Behavior, and SOC 140: Introduction to Demography.

In the current set-up, SOC 110 and SOC 130, which the participants suggested to be offered during a BA Sociology student's second semester in the program, is still scheduled to be taken in the student's second year, second semester and fourth year, first semester respectively. While students may opt to take these courses earlier than prescribed, those who strictly adhere to the timetable prescribed in the curriculum would have to wait several years before they can take the aforementioned courses. Furthermore, the campus' Office of the University Registrar follows the prescribed timetable in determining which courses would be included in the student's set of recommended courses in UPLB's online registration program.

With regard to the second issue, the participants explained that the non-linear structure of the curriculum can lead them to enroll in courses which they feel they are not adequately prepared for. When the participants talked of the non-linear structure of the curriculum, they are pertaining to the fact that almost all 100-level Sociology major courses are open for students to enlist in right after passing the introductory SOC 10: General Principles of Sociology course. This means that most 100-level Sociology courses, even those arranged in the official curriculum map as supposedly to be taken during a student's fourth year in the program, may be taken by a first year student who has already passed SOC 10. While this kind of structure may be perceived as advantageous because it allows a Freshman student who has passed SOC 10 to immediately immerse himself or herself to the program further, the participants expressed the sentiment that they sometimes find themselves biting more than they can chew in some 100-level courses. For example, the participants explained that while courses like SOC 110: Sociology of the Family and SOC 130: Social Psychology can easily be taken and passed by freshmen students, other courses like SOC 116: Sociology of Religion, SOC 112: Sociology of Politics, and SOC 114: Sociology of Economic Life – all of which are

equally as accessible to freshman students who have passed SOC 10 just like SOC 110 and SOC 130-, are very difficult to comprehend and pass without a prior background in SOC 150: Sociological Theories because the lessons of SOC 150 often serve as valuable foundations for lessons in SOC 116, SOC 112, and SOC 114.

This issue is most notable when it comes to methods courses. In the current set-up, the methods course, SOC 195: Methods of Social Research, is to be taken at the latter part of the student's Sociological training. Specifically, it is expected in the curriculum to be taken during the student's third year, second semester at the earliest. By that time, the student would have taken several Sociology major courses which usually requires an individual or group empirical research paper as its major requirement. While the students are ideally given a basic introduction to social research methods during their SOC 10 class, these lessons are often rudimentary and do not explain the intricacies of various research methods. Therefore, after the student's SOC 10 course and prior to his or her research methods course, the student is left to conduct empirical studies with little skills and knowledge on how to properly conduct research. This sometimes serve as an impediment to the student's production of well-written and well-executed research papers. As one of the participants mentioned:

*"After I have learned the lessons in [SOC] 195, I felt disgusted with the papers that I have made before that. It was only then that I realized how much of a garbage the papers I made were. I have only realized how to write properly now that I am almost done with my degree."*

Given that SOC 10 will be offered during the first year, the participants suggested that the research methods course should be offered during the second year since the lessons from the course can be used in other Sociology major courses.

*b. On the General Education (GE) courses which are required in the curriculum*

During the time of this study, every UP student is required to enroll 45 units of Revitalized General Education Program (RGEP) courses in the various domains of knowledge including the social sciences and philosophy, arts and the humanities, and mathematics, science, and technology to turn them into well-rounded individuals. The objective of the RGEP, or simply GE, is to hone holistic students by ensuring

that they are able to apply GE courses in their various degrees. Through the GE courses, students should be able to see the interconnectedness of various fields and appreciate these fields as they learn to position themselves in the larger system.

The discussion leaned towards the Revitalized General Education Program's (RGEP) objectives. For some of the participants, the said objective is not met because those who are teaching GE courses fail to incorporate various fields in their discussion, aside from their very own. Instead of discussing the GE courses as interconnected with other disciplines, the GE courses become mere disciplinal courses detached from the students' own degree programs which the students are forced to take as well. One participant mentioned that if the faculty cannot make their discussions on GE courses holistic, then RGEP should just be abolished.

Some of the study's participants find GE courses unnecessary and they are having a hard time appreciating these courses. A few mentioned that they do not like some GE courses since the way it is being taught "*insults*" them. This sentiment often arose from participants who consider that the way by which the courses are taught are too basic or "childish" in approach. The perception of GE courses as childish is founded on the observation of some of the participants that GE courses often include teaching methods which they deem as more fitting for Elementary and High School students such as skits and games. Another criticism of the participants is that the GE course faculty who are supposed to be tasked to discuss the interconnectedness of the various disciplines have a poor appreciation of courses beyond their own specialization. According to one participant, the inability of the faculty to explain the interrelatedness of the disciplines makes them fail to appreciate why some RGEP courses are required for them to take. For the most part, the critique of the RGEP courses lies heavily on it being taught in a very rigid and technical manner. On the other hand, several courses are deemed relevant to their training. These courses include ENG 1: College English, ENG 2: College Writing in English, and SPCM 1: Speech Communication. This may primarily be because Sociology is a discipline that requires its students to consume, produce, and present a lot of articles in English.

Over-all, there was unanimity among the participants in the opinion that natural science courses are irrelevant GE courses for Sociology majors, although some participants disclaimed that this sentiment may be due to the way natural sciences

courses are delivered by professors that hinders them from appreciating it. The participants also agreed that the delivery of RGEP courses should be interdisciplinary, though they recognized the steep challenge of its feasibility. However, if the RGEP's objectives are impossible to meet, the participants suggested that either RGEP change its objectives or just be abolished to allot more time to specialized courses. It was also suggested that the RGEP should be assessed. Administrators should evaluate whether GE courses are still geared towards its initial function of honing holistic students.

*c. On the Elective Courses which the students are allowed to take*

Students of the 2012 BA Sociology curriculum are allowed to take 9 units of free electives as part of their program. Students prior to the institution of the 2012 curriculum, on the other hand, were allowed to take 21 units of electives, 9 units of which should be taken from the course-offerings of BA Sociology's home department. These home-grown electives come in the form of Sociology courses not included in the curriculum and Anthropology, Psychology, History, and Political Science courses. For the participants of the study, having elective courses is advantageous for Sociology students. However, its being advantageous relies heavily on the guidance of the academic adviser. The participants believe that the advisers should guide their advisees from freshman to senior year and instead of just during the initial submission of the plan of study. Advisers should be "*hands-on*" with their advisee's choice of courses, especially in the choice of elective courses.

The participants added that elective courses should be based on the student's future career paths; hence it should be taken strategically and not be wasted. For them, wasting electives is when students enroll in elective courses just because it is available, easy, or convenient for them to take. The participants believe that the intervention of advisers will lessen the chances of electives being wasted. This is especially important when some elective courses available to the students have a large proportion of overlapping content, and students run the risk of spending two elective slots for relatively redundant content. Furthermore, participants opined that some elective courses may look good in writing, but utility derived from the course is compromised because of the faculty's poor delivery of the course. Participants shared that some academic advisers, owing to their own experience as students of the same university, or based on feedback from older



and former advisees, would be able to help steer the students away from these “patapon” elective courses.

Two sides emerged in the issue of electives being taken strategically. For the first side, some participants believed that elective courses should serve as a “break” for Sociology students from being bombarded with Sociology courses. It provides them the opportunity to venture into other fields of interests while applying the lessons they have learned in Sociology in those fields. On the other side, some participants believe that elective courses should be limited to Sociology-related courses and it should act as the minor specialization of Sociology students since the degree does not have minor or cognate field. In the case of Sociology students, these “minor fields” are usually management, psychology, or education units which they use to help them gain an edge when applying as instructors after graduation. These “minor fields” are also perceived as a viable springboard for students who wish to take further studies outside of Sociology or as a second bachelor’s degree.

#### *d. Perceptions on the Sociology 100-level major courses*

Most courses are perceived by the participants as interesting and relevant; however, this relies heavily on the professor’s delivery of the subject matter. The following courses are perceived to be those that should be given more emphasis: SOC 100: Formal Organization, SOC 119: Industrial Sociology, SOC 150: Sociological Theories, SOC 160: Social Change, SOC 170: Social Problems, and SOC 195: Methods in Social Research because they are very relevant to the Philippines and to Sociology. For them, both the theory and research methods courses should be given more time to be taught, and would thus require more than one semester to cover all theories and methods related to the discipline.

Regarding the other courses mentioned, the participants explained that these courses should integrate basic courses like SOC 105: Social Stratification and SOC 110: Sociology of the Family. Courses like SOC 160: Social Change and SOC 100: Formal Organization are perceived as very relevant to Sociology majors since the lessons learned from these courses can be applied in other major courses. However, most courses are given less appreciation by several students. The reason for this lack of appreciation is not due to poor course content but because these courses are perceived to be not delivered well. For example, a participant complained that,

*“Yung [course withheld]! Hindi ko alam bat siya nag-eexist. Well, fine. Alam kong relevant siya, pero kasi sobrang nung tinake ko siya di ko magets kung bakit siya andiyan... basta nung tinake ko ang nalaman ko lang ay “Okay everything that is not rural is urban” eh [expletive deleted], sa [course withheld] ang turo is “everything that is not urban is rural” I mean yun lang ba talaga yung definition?”*

In the BA Sociology curriculum, a student is required to choose between SOC 170: Social Problems and SOC 175: Deviance as well as between SOC 160: Social Change and SOC 165: Sociology of Development. If the student fails their chosen course, they are required to retake that course before being conferred with the degree. For some respondents, BA Sociology’s home department should remove the element of choice it is difficult for students to have major courses which are offered only once every other year. This is because when SOC 160 is offered this academic year, the SOC 165 would be offered only on the next academic year, to be replaced again by SOC 160 on the succeeding academic year. Thus, if a student fails to pass one of these “seasonal courses”, it will be very disadvantageous for him or her since he or she needs to wait for the course to be offered again even if the student is already about to graduate. Although one of the participants claimed that she knew of a student who failed SOC 160 and was allowed to take SOC 165 as replacement, this was perceived by other participants as a very problematic case since it is inconsistent of the rule that one should retake the course he or she failed. Another issue mentioned is that alternative courses get in the way of the supposed uniform required major courses of students. On the other hand, one participant mentioned that having this style of course-offering is good since it provides Sociology majors more options to take. However, this argument was later withdrawn when the participant admitted that most of the time students only take what is offered or available instead of choosing based on their interests.

#### *e. On the Thesis, Practicum, and All-Coursework Curricular Options of the program*

The BA Sociology program offers three curricular options, namely: (a) thesis, (b) practicum, and (c) all-coursework/straight course options. Most of the study’s participants agreed that the all-coursework/straight course option is the program’s weakness. For some participants, the said option is lacking in terms of equipping the students with the necessary skills to

conduct research or the experience needed in working outside the university. According to one participant, the straight course option is an easy way out: *“hindi pantay-pantay yung difficulty niya; like yung straight course, easy way out. Kumbaga kung ico-compare mo sa hirap ng thesis, di-hamak na mas doble ang paghihirap nila [thesis option students].”*

On the other hand, according to another participant, having three options is the strength of the program. She explained that:

*“Yung mismong idea na tatlo yung option niya is the strength kasi marami kang pagpipilian. Kung balak mo maging researcher or pumasok sa academe, thesis. Pag balak mo mag-work, practicum. Pero kung balak mo mag law, pwede straight-course kasi di mo naman kailangan yung thesis or practicum dun.”*

For another participant, the weakness of the course is the very existence of curricular options. For him, Sociology majors should be equipped with the features of all three options. He explains that though they are going to be graduates of a “UP-brand of education”, others would still perceive them as less equipped since, unlike other schools’ programs that requires their students to have thesis and do practicum/On-the-job-training, UPLB BA Sociology students are only required to take one of the aforementioned challenges.

The participants suggested the following: first, merge thesis and practicum options – practicum should be scheduled during the junior year of the student, and practicum manuscripts should not be as *“heavily written”* as compared to thesis manuscripts; second, all the Sociology courses required in the straight course option such as SOC 115: Social Gerontology, SOC 107: Gender Relations, SOC 119: Industrial Sociology, and SOC 129: Race and Ethnic Relations should be required to all Sociology students. It must be noted that SOC 107 was already revised from being a Sociology elective to being a required course in the 2012 BA Sociology curriculum. SOC 115, 119, and 129 remains as Sociology elective courses, except for those in the All-coursework option.

*f. Perceptions of BA Sociology students and graduates on the faculty in terms of composition and allocation*

According to the study’s participants, the strength of the Sociology faculty is having three competent senior faculty members. However, this is also the weakness of the program since the number of senior

faculty members present in the department is very limited to keep the program running.

Some participants also perceive having a several new and young faculty members negatively. They explained that new and young faculty members lack mastery in the courses they are teaching and still needs training. Lack of mastery of the course is very problematic for them since it results in the faculty: (1) only reading what is in the textbook, and/or (2) having a hard time *“layman-izing”* or translating concepts and theories in a manner that is easier for students to digest. The participants suggested that the new and younger faculty members should be given lesser number of teaching units to help them focus with the courses they are teaching; focusing on fewer courses might help them increase their knowledge and mastery of the course.

The Sociology faculty’s mastery of the courses is relevant for the participants of the study. It is for this reason that they heavily criticize the system of having several faculty members teach a course over the years. The participants claimed that some major courses were taught by different faculty members for many semesters in the previous academic years. The faculty who teaches *“SOC xxx”* this semester might be tasked to teach a different course in the succeeding semesters and *“SOC xxx”* would once again be offered by a different faculty. It could be the case that students regard these courses lightly since the faculty members who are charged with the said courses are often new and are assumed to not have complete mastery over the course.

The participants suggested that each major course should be assigned to a specific faculty member in order for that faculty, especially the new and the young, to develop mastery over the course(s) assigned to him or her. Having the faculty members master the courses they are teaching might affect the attitudes of students positively on their perception of major courses.

*g. Perceptions of BA Sociology students and graduates on the faculty in terms of their duties and responsibilities*

Several duties and responsibilities of the faculty are enumerated by the participants of the study. First, they suggested that the faculty members charged with the teaching GE courses should deliver the course in a holistic manner. In the delivery of the said GE courses, the participants suggested that it must highlight the interconnectedness of Sociology with other fields and vice-versa. This will allow the non-Sociology majors taking the said courses to be equipped with an

understanding and a grasp of Sociology and, at the same time, these students will be able to relate these understandings in their various fields. By doing the aforementioned, the faculty and the department will be able to help in meeting the RGEP objectives.

The participants of the study perceive the mentoring or advising of Sociology majors as one of the most important duties and responsibilities of the Sociology faculty. In the set-up of the BA Sociology program, students are assigned to a faculty during their entry into the program. These faculty members serve as academic advisers tasked to help students in academic-related issues until the student graduates, shifts to another program or campus, or transfers to another academic adviser. They explained that the role of advisers is very crucial since they serve as the guiding light of Sociology majors as they proceed through the degree program. The participants mentioned several processes which students undergo that requires the guidance of advisers:

1. Accomplishing the plan of study. All students are required to plot their planned courses to enroll for the duration of their college education, including the RGEP and elective courses as well as the year and semester when these should be taken. It is important for advisers to guide their advisees in strategizing what courses to take for the next semesters until graduation in order to properly distribute the burden of courses to be taken in each of the semester;
2. Choosing of elective courses. Advisers should guide their advisees in choosing elective courses. It is to be obligatory for the part of the adviser to know the intended career paths of their advisees after graduation so they can effectively suggest elective courses that will be beneficial for the advisees' future goals;
3. Change of GE and Elective courses. It is necessary for the advisers to know the reasons behind their advisees' decision of changing any GE course or Elective course since the said decisions may reflect an intended career shift. On the other hand, students are also prone to changing GE or elective courses out of mere convenience and even more so advisers should serve as guidance; and finally,
4. Choosing of options. Part of being "hands-on" with students is understanding their academic capacities. It is necessary for advisers to have direct supervisions of their advisees in order to have an idea of what option (thesis, practicum or straight-course) he or she should suggest for each of his or her advisees.

Aside from guiding students in accomplishing necessary documents, the participants of the study stated that it is also important for advisers to monitor the academic standing of their advisees. By doing so, the adviser will at least have a slight idea of the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of his or her advisees. Also, by understanding the situation each of his or her advisees, the adviser may be able to devise strategies to effectively extend assistance, especially in helping the concerned student to cope up with his or her academic performance.

The participants gave several criticisms on the adviser-advisee system based on what they have experienced. One of the criticisms is that the advisers are not hands-on with their advisees. One of the participants cited her experience that the first time she met her adviser was during her Freshman year when she was obligated to accomplish her initial plan of study. However, she added that the next meeting with her adviser was during her senior year since it is necessary to consult her for potential adviser for thesis. Another criticism mentioned was the claim that several advisers only sign the paper works of their students and, in some instances, the advisers do not even read the documents they are signing.

The participants suggested that the adviser-advisee program should be strengthened since, based on the participants' observations and experiences, the process of advising is only evident during the first year of the student and during the senior year. They added that the advising that currently happens for Senior students are only for students in the thesis or practicum options since they are obligated to report to their respective advisers.

#### *h. Perceptions BA Sociology students and graduates on the faculty in terms of teaching methods*

Several teaching methods were enumerated by the participants of the study. For them, the effectiveness of various teaching methods depends on the course, the faculty-in-charge, and the number of students in the class. For large classes (which usually involves a student population of around 120 to 180), the participants agreed that the lecture style of teaching is the most efficient method of conveying lessons. On the other hand, other methods, particularly those that require student-student interactions should only be done in small classes.

In terms of the delivery of 100-level Sociology courses, the two-way discussion type of teaching method is highly appreciated. This method allows a teacher-student interaction by letting students converse

with the teacher about the lessons at the same time that the teacher is delivering her discussions in class. On the other hand, group reporting is frowned upon by the participants. This is because the students handling the topic to be reported may not be able to give a correct and comprehensive discussion of the course and these students may not be able to command the attention of the class. Should these student-reporters fail in their task, they will affect the whole class negatively. Furthermore, some students perceive teachers requiring group reporting of lessons in class as just being lazy in teaching the course. For the participants, reporting is only an acceptable method of conveying information in classes if they are required to share the results of their research or empirical papers.

Film showing was also mentioned as a method of teaching in class. Though several respondents perceive film showing as an effective method of teaching especially if the films chosen by the faculty-in-charge are highly related to the course, a few argued that it is a waste of time since the teacher could have just told them to watch it at home or outside class hours. A participant explained that film showings within class hours are only necessary if the faculty would ask for an in-class requirement that necessitates the film's application. However, if the faculty would only ask the students to watch without any follow-up activity, the participant suggests that the faculty can just suggest the film to the class so class hours will not be wasted.

According to the participants, they have experienced some 100-level courses wherein the faculty-in-charge would ask them to sing or perform in the class. Skits, singing, and dancing in class as methods of teaching are highly frowned upon by the study's participants. They explained that this method is "*very elementary*" and is not applicable especially in the supposed heavy discourses in major courses. On the other hand, some of the participants accepted that the said method is still effective even in the tertiary level although it should only serve as an ice-breaker and not as the main method of teaching.

### **Synthesis of the Findings and Recommendations**

The results of the study reflect the strengths and weaknesses of the undergraduate Sociology program of UPLB. In general, the program was evaluated positively by students of the BA Sociology program albeit there is room for more improvement, especially when it comes to convincing the students that the courses which they are required to take are useful after graduation. This reflected in the accounts of students during the focus group discussion and the ratings

garnered by the survey results of the study. However, the study also made salient several issues that need to be addressed for the improvement of the program.

There appears to be a need to reassess the kind of courses within the hundreds of Sociological subfields that should be offered to the students. What became salient in this study is that the students found a non-Sociology major – the Attitudes and Persuasion course which is more socio-psychological than purely sociological – as the most relevant to them. This may imply that the old subfields of Sociology included in the curriculum are no longer found to be as meaningful by today's students as they were found to be by the students of the previous generations. Indeed, from the author's own experience of dealing with students and addressing their curricular concerns, questions have been raised by the students on the possibility of having courses such as Sociology of Art, Sociology of Video Games, and Sociology of Mass Media and the Internet.

In terms of the Sociology curriculum, inconsistencies and/or ambiguities with the instructions on requisites of the General Education courses, elective courses, major courses, and curricular options was pointed out by the study's respondents. It is recommended that schools conduct a semestral or annual curriculum orientation be conducted to minimize confusions on curricular issues. Students also recommended notes on curricular timetables to take into consideration: (1) ensure that new students of the program would be exposed to the different topics of Sociology earlier, (2) allow students to be exposed to the major courses which are easier to digest first before the more difficult major courses, and (3) equip the students of the program earlier in their education with proper research training. Students also recommended the abolition of the curricular options and the construction of a curriculum that requires both a thesis and a practicum. It also became salient in the study that inclusion of free electives in a Sociology program is received positively, though participants are divided on how best to take advantage of these free electives. Schools who wish to develop a BA Sociology program are therefore advised to include free electives as well, but may want to be more decisive on how they want their students to take advantage of the limited free elective units.

In terms of faculty composition and allocation, the importance of having more senior faculty members was pointed out because of the expertise that they can lend to the program – this combined set of expertise is even enough to define the unique element of a school's BA Sociology program to distinguish it from the BA

Sociology program of other schools. Schools wishing to offer a BA Sociology program are also suggested that junior faculty members be given only a particular Sociology major course which they should master so they will be able to focus their efforts and not have a hard time teaching different major courses to undergraduate students. The quality of teaching, and therefore the faculty, seems to be a very important element in the program since what the students consider as good courses based on the numerical scores are often those which are taught well by teachers. Indeed, this is very important in Sociology due to the need to help the students in relating the very theoretical nature of Sociology with their personal lives and the problems they encounter therein.

On duties and responsibilities of faculty members, particularly the role of advisers, issues such as the advisers' lack of guidance to students who are in their sophomore and junior years was mentioned by the study's respondents. It is suggested that advisers should be "hands-on" with their respective advisees from freshman to senior year so they are able to monitor not just the academic performance of their advisees, but their social and emotional well-being as well which may also affect their academic standing. The attitude that college students are already adults and should be more independent, and consequently should not be given too much guidance, does not appear to work. In order to make sure that students will be able to maximize the advantage of the program in terms of course scheduling and choice of electives, the knowledge and attention of hands-on advisers are still necessary from the moment of their entry to the HEI to their graduation.

On teaching methods, a discussion-type of classroom management is most sought by students, particularly on Sociology major courses, followed by lecture-type of instruction. The loss of the ability to communicate ideas in a two-way manner is considered a huge disadvantage in Sociology courses. Given the nature of Sociology as a course, having a discourse or exchanges of ideas and opinions on issues can be seen as an application of Mills' *Sociological Imagination*, hence it is a well-sought method of instruction. Other teaching methods such as student reporting, skits, and film showings are frowned upon and are perceived as "lazy" and a "waste of time".

The BA Sociology program used as the focus of the study in this paper has been responsive to change in its history. Indeed, some of the issues raised by the students here have already been rectified in the 2012 curriculum, while other suggestions such as the

construction of a curriculum that requires both a thesis and a practicum has already been proposed for revision in 2015. It is the hope of this paper that the program would remain responsive to the concerns of its primary stakeholders, and that other schools who wish to develop their own undergraduate Sociology program will be able to avoid the students' perceived pitfalls that UPLB's BA Sociology program has encountered over the years.

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