

External Review of the Social Justice Studies Program

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Review Committee:

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Executive Summary

UVic's Strategic Vision is to be a "university that best integrates outstanding scholarship, engaged learning and real-life involvement to contribute to a better future for people and the planet." This bold vision materializes in a context of significant social challenges. We are witnessing a convergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, an economic downturn in its wake, the climate emergency, as well as global uprisings for racial justice and for Indigenous sovereignty. As the Self-Study document emphasizes, the thrust of SJS as an interdisciplinary field of teaching and research is to "guide students to develop a deeper understanding of the societal structures and practices that underpin current and past social injustices and the responsibilities and tools to actively work towards deconstructing the bases for those injustices." This aligns with the priority that UVic places on "social justice and equity" as one of its four "impact areas."

SJS explores questions of social justice and inequalities using an intersectional lens, emphasizing anti-racism, decolonization, disability justice, and human rights. The intersectional social justice education provided by SJS directly applies teaching, learning, and research within society, and raises awareness about equity-seeking groups as stakeholders within social life and social change. The program prepares students to work, research, and advocate towards a more socially just society which values equality, solidarity, and human rights, and recognizes the citizenship of each human being. With Equity, Diversity, Inclusivity, and Decolonization (EDID) becoming a growing field in the public and private sectors, there is also a burgeoning job market for those with expertise in SJS.

SJS has an engaged community of supportive faculty, students, as well as longstanding partners in Victoria's non-profit sector. These constituencies are fully committed to the growth of the program. However, because SJS has no appointed faculty members, no ongoing budget, and exists within the context of siloed Departments with little incentive to participate in interdisciplinary programs, the stability and sustainability of the program is in question. Many interviewees commented that directing and teaching in SJS were undercompensated "labours of love."

The program has recently been moved from the now disbanded Office of Interdisciplinary Academic Studies into the Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS). Even though the program is well-aligned with the Faculty's Strategic Framework, which specifically highlights both social justice and interdisciplinarity, FSS has to develop a vision for the program. We believe that SJS is in need of strategic investment and support from above.

While both the minor and diploma programs are well designed, their structures could be streamlined in order to make both more effective and less burdensome to administer.

Recommendations

1. The Associate Vice-President Academic Planning and the Provost should explore a model that would allow interested faculty members to teach a portion of their normal loads in interdisciplinary programs through cross-appointments of faculty members (e.g. 75% Sociology, 25% SJS). If UVic proceeds with a cluster hire of Black faculty members, at least two of these new positions should be cross-appointed with SJS and the unit should develop new courses focused on race and racism.
2. The Dean of FSS should incentivize Department Chairs to contribute to interdisciplinary teaching. The current model, in which faculty members individually negotiate with reluctant Chairs, results in most SJS courses being taught on overload. The Dean needs to instruct Chairs that interdisciplinary programs are a priority for FSS, and that everyone needs to work together to ensure their viability. Faculty members could negotiate their SJS teaching with the Dean/ADA, who would then compensate the Departments.
3. The recruitment of a new Director needs to be a priority for the ADA. Dr. Margo Matwychuk will be difficult to replace because of her knowledge of and commitment to the program, as well as her deep ties to Victoria's non-profit sector.
4. The Directorship must be advertised with additional course release of at least one course per academic year. This is justified because of the range of responsibilities of the Director (including, community partnership building) and because of the significant tasks arising out of the external review (a curriculum review, a redesigned website, rethinking the team-teaching model, a potential renaming of the program, exploration of online teaching...).
5. The ADA should work with the current Director and the newly-appointed Director to develop a vision and a set of priorities for the program.
6. To ensure that interdisciplinary programs are central to FSS and included in its strategic initiatives, the Program Directors should attend Chair meetings.
7. The required SJS 400A Seminar in Social Justice Studies should be offered more than once a year. When it is only scheduled once every academic year, this is a barrier to the completion of the minor and diploma programs.
8. Students reported that the program lacks visibility; many had learned about the minor late in their degrees. Enhancing the visibility of the program through a redesigned website (with student testimonials) and ensuring that the program participates in recruitment fairs will enable students to learn about SJS earlier in their degrees to allow more time for program planning.
9. As the main mechanism of promoting the program to prospective students, the SJS webpage needs a redesign. The current webpage is very basic. A redesigned webpage should aim to capture the dynamism of the program, by featuring current students and alumni. Student stories and a promotional video would help to convey the student enthusiasm that the ERT witnessed during our virtual site visit.
10. SJS should consider renaming the program Social Justice and Equity Studies as a way of better signaling to prospective students and employers the value-added nature of the minor and diploma.
11. There are possibilities for greater collaborations with Continuing Studies that could provide new sources of revenue for the program. Designating SJS 100 as "non-credit" would enable community members and mature students to be introduced to the program, improving both revenues and pathways into the Diploma program.
12. The team-teaching model for SJS 100 and SJS 200 needs to be rethought. While having instructors from different disciplines and fields co-teach these courses ensures a multidisciplinary lens, students reported that the courses can seem disjointed. SJS 200, with

three instructors each teaching what amounts to a “mini-course,” inhibits students from building a rapport with instructors. It can fall to the TA to ensure continuity. When it is already so difficult to secure instructors, the team-teaching model adds unnecessary complexity. A better pedagogical approach would be to redesign these courses as single-instructor interdisciplinary courses, with a greater use of guest lecturers and guest activists. FSS should provide additional compensation to instructors who would be charged with redesigning these courses.

13. While SJS 100 and 200 are both valuable courses, one focused on theories and the other on praxis, we wondered if it was necessary to have required courses at both the 100 and 200 levels. As part of a curriculum review, SJS should consider a more streamlined structure with a single introductory course, elective courses at the 200 and 300 level, with students coming back together for the required 400A seminar. This would ease the burden of staffing required courses.
14. SJS should consider eliminating the requirement of two elective (3 unit) courses from each of the “Theory and Methods” and “Substantive” lists. The ERT felt that there should either be a single list of electives, or else that electives could be grouped thematically (for example, Indigenous Knowledges, Global Issues,...) to help students navigate. SJS may also want to eliminate the requirement that no more than two (3 unit) courses be from a single department.
15. A well-designed online introductory course, perhaps developed in collaboration with Continuing Studies and with a grant from UVic’s Learning and Teaching Support and Innovation, could increase pathways into the minor and diploma programs and could be a source of additional revenue for SJS. While taught through the lens of feminist and gender studies, the University of Alberta’s online Introduction to Social Justice course has annual enrolments of more than 300 students.
16. Restoring the program’s small speakers’ budget will help SJS to maintain community connections. Guest lecturers who work in the non-profit sector should receive some compensation when they speak in an SJS course. The Program’s annual lecture and events foster FSS community-engagement.
17. Students enjoy the community-engagement provided by the SJS through the SJS 400B Practicum and through guest speakers in the Conversations with Activists series. They want more of these applied learning experiences and would benefit from additional, low intensity opportunities. SJS should encourage instructors to use site visits and community-based projects in the required and elective courses.
18. The community-engaged and work-integrated learning provided in the SJS 400B Practicum is extremely beneficial for students. Students and alumni of the program frequently obtain paid work in their practicum placements after graduation. The partnerships with non-profit and activist groups provide a deep site of community-engagement for FSS. Because the time commitment of 50 hours is significant, and because the number of community organizations who can host students in a small city like Victoria is limited, FSS should expect that enrollment in this course will remain small.
19. SJS students have successfully completed JCURAs on a wide-variety of research projects supervised by faculty from diverse disciplines. Given the centrality of social justice to the mission of the University, there should be one JCURA allocated yearly to an SJS student.
20. While the SJS minor and diploma programs are excellent preparation for many careers, including policy analyst, equity coordinator, and human rights advisor, students mentioned that they wanted more career advising built into the programs. SJS should work with UVic’s Cooperative Education and Career Centre to hold a careers event once every academic year. This event could

highlight the career relevant skills developed in the programs, with alumni speakers discussing their journeys into paid employment.

21. There are several potential advancement opportunities that could help to support the program and its students. The Dean should work with the Director to identify and approach potential donors to help fund the annual lecture, scholarships for SJS students, and to provide some support for community organizations who take on mentoring commitments with practicum students.
22. FSS should provide a dedicated shared office space for SJS sessional lecturers.