

# LWSO CURRICULUM REVIEW PUBLIC REPORT

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## Executive Summary

Law and Society was motivated to undertake its Curriculum Review as a means of taking stock of the program, its strengths and weaknesses, and to plot our direction for the next five years. This is important as the program has not undergone a formal review. The curriculum mapping data indicate that the program is successfully meeting its program learning outcomes. The data also highlight two areas for improvement in delivery of quantitative analysis and methodological training.

We used a simple handwritten curriculum mapping tool. This suited the small size of our program, and also allowed all of our core faculty to complete the mapping process as a collaborative exercise in which we discussed the process and its outcomes. Additional data was provided by a student survey distributed to 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year LWSO students. The data was subsequently digitized by Laurent Wall in Sociology. Additional analysis was provided by Patti Dyjur and Nahum Arguera at the Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning.

The Law and Society Curriculum Review Lead is Ted McCoy. The team consisted of our entire core faculty, including Lyndsay Campbell, Ian Brodie, Maureen Hiebert, and Chloë Atkins.

## Program Context

Law and Society is the study of how legal and social systems are interconnected, how people experience the law, and how law is woven into communities. The program offers students opportunities to consider and compare legal systems in North America and internationally. The program is not a pre-law program, but rather introduces students to political, historical, philosophical, and sociological concepts related to the law. Students engage with different sources of law and sociolegal policy including statutes, the decisions of courts, public policy, governmental debates, and analytical research. This interdisciplinary approach gives students a strong base of critical and theoretical skill as well as a broad appreciation of sociolegal movements. It prepares students to question their beliefs and seek out, analyze, and write about complex legal and social concepts and issues.

The largest legal studies program in Canada is at Carleton University with 1500 majors. York University offers a similar program to 1000 majors. At 334 majors the University of Calgary is the third largest Law and Society program in the country.

The Law and Society Program originated in the Faculty of Communications and Culture. In 2010 the program was folded into the Faculty of Arts, and in 2013 was moved from

Interdisciplinary Studies to its current departmental home in Sociology. Law and Society has benefited greatly from the departmental support of the Sociology department. It has provided stability and a greater sense of permanence for the program.

In Fall 2016 the program will have 334 majors and 36 minors. Our total enrolment in all LWSO courses 2015/16 was 2242 students.

Law and Society currently has the equivalent of 1.75 full-time faculty. The Program uses sessional faculty to meet teaching requirements not covered by full-time faculty.

### **Program Structure Overview**

The Law and Society Program offers a B.A. that features the same core LWSO courses for all majors. This provides every student with the same foundation. These 7 courses (8 with the occasional addition of a special topics 400-level course) comprise the core of the program and address several of the Program Learning Outcomes detailed above.

The 200-level courses provide a foundation of legal knowledge and sociolegal thinking. Critical thinking, written skills, and oral communication are further developed in 300 and 400-level courses. 400-level courses also further develop students' ability to think in sociolegal terms and critically apply the foundational material. The 500-level seminar offers both advanced instruction and the opportunity for students to exercise critical thinking, research methods, as well as written and oral communication at the highest undergraduate level.

Due to the limited number of LWSO courses, the degree also includes courses in other departments as core degree requirements. These fall into three categories – focus courses, context courses, and methods requirements. Focus and context courses allow students to broaden and customize their degree and also contribute to the goal of interdisciplinarity.

Much of Law and Society's course capacity is dedicated to servicing our own majors. The exception to this is Law and Society 201 (Introduction to Law and Society), which serves as an option course to a variety of other programs. For example, in the Fall 2015 section of LWSO 201 there were 230 enrolled students. 75 students were declared LWSO majors. Blocks from other majors included 15 students in POLI, 13 students in SOCI, 11 in ECON, and 10 in PSYC.

### **Program Details**

To complete a B.A. in Law and Society, students must successfully complete a minimum of 54 units (9.0 full-course equivalents) in the Field of Law and Society while fulfilling the following requirements:

**1. Core Courses:** 24 units (4.0 full-course equivalents) including:

(a) Law and Society 201, 203, 335, 337, 413, 415, 591;

(b) One of Political Science 343 or Philosophy 425 or Sociology 429.

**2. Courses with a focus on Law and Society:** 15 units (2.5 full-course equivalents), selected from the list of Courses with a Focus on Law and Society within the Field of Law and Society.

**3. Context Courses:** 6 units (1.0 full-course equivalent) selected from the list of Context Courses within the Field of Law and Society. (*Improve and rationalize*)

**4. Research Methods Requirement:** 3 units (0.5 full-course equivalent) from Communication and Media Studies 313, Geography 340, History 300, Sociology 313, Political Science 399 or Psychology 312. (*revise this list. Remove the incorrect courses*)

Students may also enrol in the LWSO honours program which has the same degree requirements as the B.A. with the addition of SOCI 400 and the completion of an honours thesis under the supervision of a faculty member.

### **Course Structures**

200-level LWSO courses are structured as lectures. There are no tutorials in this program. LWSO 201 and 203 are primarily survey courses with introductory opportunities for writing and analysis assignments. Assessments at this level are mostly through exams.

300-level LWSO courses are also structured as lectures, but begin to include more opportunity for discussion, collaborative and experiential learning. Assessments include writing and analysis assignments as well as exams.

In the 400-level LWSO courses, students are expected to more fully collaborate on group projects centred around legal and theoretical analysis of course texts.

In LWSO 591, students are offered a “capstone” experience that provides opportunity to apply the multiple skills and methods offered by the LWSO degree. Students engage in original research, collaborative discussion, independent study of advanced texts, and analytical writing exercises.

The LWSO Honours Program offers an opportunity for advanced undergraduate students to complete a sustained and independent research project under the supervision of a faculty member. In some instances, students will choose supervisors who are appointed to other departments.

### **Alignment with University of Calgary’s Academic Plan**

The Law and Society Program is aligned with the *Eyes High* academic plan. The Curriculum Mapping data and other sources have helped to illustrate this alignment. The two academic priorities that best reflect Law and Society are *Interdisciplinarity*, *Teaching and Research Integration*. The later might be best identified as a goal for future improvement.

The nature of sociolegal studies is to approach law from interdisciplinary perspectives, and this approach runs throughout the current curriculum. Teaching and research integration is a strength and also an opportunity for growth. NSSE data indicates that students rarely or never discussed faculty research with faculty members or worked on activities other than course work with a faculty member. As the Law and Society program does not have graduate students, faculty might look to undergraduate students to engage in their own research more regularly – both in classroom settings but also beyond the setting of formal course work.

Another area with opportunity for growth is *Connection with Community*. In addition to the existing curriculum that stresses this theme as the major component of study, our

students seek to carry this training into the larger community. Students repeatedly indicated a desire to apply learning in Law and Society with volunteer and work opportunities in the community relating to sociolegal issues. Although the evidence is anecdotal, it is also clear that students already seek these opportunities but do so without the presence of formal relationships between the Law and Society Program and the community. This can be improved. For example, our students are engaged in volunteer work with The E. Fry Society, the Calgary Poverty Reduction Initiative, CUPS, and Legal Aid in the Faculty of Law.

In short, Law and Society students are already independently engaged and interested in community activism. These undergraduate students are a vast resource that should be more directly coordinated to reach out to different projects and organizations connected to social justice and community building.

Our program aligns with several of the specific goals of the University of Calgary *Academic Plan*.

**Goal 1: Attract, develop and retain talented students.**

- Law and Society admits many of the best and brightest students (e.g. high admission grade/GPA standards)
- Law and Society graduates some of the brightest students (e.g. Silver Medallion winner in 2016)

**Goal 9: Distinguish the University of Calgary learning experience**

- Law and Society has seen increasing interest in its Co-Op and Honours programs over the past three years.
- The Honours Program in particular provides opportunities for student research and collaboration with faculty.
- Law and Society student research has been recognized by internal and external awards, including PURE Awards and CIHR research funding for our undergraduate students.

**Goal 12: Enable interdisciplinary academic programs and research**

- Law and Society is one of the university's most successful interdisciplinary programs. This is reflected in the current curriculum, but also the interdisciplinary research that is integrated with teaching in the program. Our faculty is drawn from backgrounds including history, law, political science, and philosophy.

## Program Learning Outcomes

The LWSO Program Learning Outcomes (hereafter PLOs) were written in consultation with the other faculty members of the program. This is the first time that PLOs have been defined for the LWSO Program.

Upon completion of the Law and Society B.A., students should demonstrate:

1. **Interdisciplinarity.** Ability to engage with multiple disciplinary approaches to legal questions and apply these perspectives to both academic and non-academic settings.
2. **Sociolegal Thinking.** Familiarity with the field of sociolegal studies and connected academic and theoretical debates as a basis for critical thinking skills.
3. **Legal Knowledge.** Knowledge of law, legal phenomena, legal institutions from perspectives outside the discipline of law, with a focus on the relationship between law and social structure.
4. **Critical thinking.** Ability to challenge and overturn accepted thinking in legal theory and practice.
5. **Research Methods.** Knowledge of qualitative legal and academic research methods, with a focus on applied knowledge.
6. **Written communication.** Ability to communicate effectively in writing to make and sustain persuasive arguments based on a critical assessment of evidence.
7. **Oral Communication.** Ability to communicate effectively in oral presentation or academic debate with peers.

## GUIDING QUESTIONS

The Guiding Questions were developed in consultation with the Law and Society faculty members. They served to guide the process of this review and are employed below to structure the analysis of the Mapping Data and other data sources.

### **Law and Society Guiding Questions**

1. What are the core strengths of the program?
2. How well are program-level learning outcomes addressed in specific courses within the programs?
3. Does the content of 200 and 300 level courses prepare students for upper level required courses?
4. Are there gaps or redundancies in the program? Is there a misalignment between courses?
5. How current is the program? Are we preparing graduates for traditional and/or emerging roles?



## ACTION PLAN

Recommendations – Program Level				
Recommendation	Action Item	Timeline to Implement.	Lead Responsibility	Evaluation
Evaluate the current list of LWSO <b>required and context</b> courses taught by other programs.	Eliminate LWSO calendar listing for courses that no longer exist or no longer feature content relevant to the LWSO program.	1 year	Program Coordinator,	
	Move calendar changes through Undergraduate Studies Committee for submission to CARC	2 years	Undergraduate Curriculum Committee	Calendar submission Complete?

Recommendations – Program Level				
Recommendation	Action Item	Timeline for Implement.	Lead Responsibility	Evaluation
Create a <b>LWSO methods</b> course in Law and Society.	1. Apply for a <i>Teaching and Learning Grant</i> for curriculum development.	Year 1 Fall 2016	Program Coordinator	
	2. Engage with Taylor Institute Course Design Studio to work through creation of the new course course.	Fall 2016	Program Coordinator	
	3. Bring course to Law and Society Faculty, Undergraduate Studies	Fall 2016	Director of Undergraduate Studies, Sociology	

	Committee, and Department		Director of Undergraduate Studies, Sociology	
	4. Make submission to CARC for course approval			
	1. Teaching LWSO methods course.	Year 2 Fall 2017	Program Coordinator	
	2. Evaluate course success and the impact of the course.	Winter 2018	Undergraduate Studies Committee	

<b>Recommendations – Program Level</b>				
<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action Item</b>	<b>Timeline to Implement</b>	<b>Lead Responsibility</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
Evaluate required LWSO courses for learning outcomes associated with oral communication.	1. Introduce this item in follow-up to the Curriculum Review for all core LWSO faculty.  2. Communicate objective to all incoming LWSO sessional instructors.	1 year	Program Coordinator	

<b>Recommendations – Program Level</b>				
<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action Item</b>	<b>Timeline to Implement</b>	<b>Lead Responsibility</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
Create two internally administered Law and Society awards. One for an outstanding student, and a second for outstanding undergraduate research.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Create Terms of Reference for each award and submit to the Undergraduate Studies Committee</li> <li>2. Bring awards to Department</li> </ol>	1 year	Program Coordinator	

<b>Recommendations – Program Level</b>				
<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action Item</b>	<b>Timeline to Implement</b>	<b>Lead Responsibility</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
Conduct a review of all Law and Society promotional literature and websites.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Evaluate program outcomes against current curriculum.</li> <li>2. Rewrite promotional material or edit to remove inaccurate or misleading information.</li> </ol>	2 years	Program Coordinator / Undergraduate Studies Committee.	