The Department of Sociology is now in its “second cycle” of Academic Program Review. I am pleased and proud to report the “first cycle” (begun in 1995) has been very successful, and that by almost any indicator, we have reached or exceeded our objectives. We met our targeted faculty size while surpassing the expectations for the growth in undergraduate and graduate enrollment. The faculty has received more research grants and externally sponsored funding than we thought possible seven years ago, while our teaching effectiveness has remained excellent. Further, we have extensively sharpened the focus of our graduate program and infused new vitality into the undergraduate program. The “second cycle” allows us to pause, to put our activities and efforts into perspective, and to identify new and ambitious goals and objectives. I will begin with our accomplishments and then move on to consider our new goals. Where appropriate I will use both descriptive statistics and compare our Department with four sociology departments (Northeastern University, Florida State University, North Carolina State University, and Rutgers University) identified as peers by our self-study committee.

Since the last self-study, we have grown from 16 to 19 tenured or tenure-track faculty and we added two lecturer positions. We are smaller in faculty size than our peer sociology departments, which range from 22 tenure-track faculty at Northeastern to 34 at Rutgers, and this accentuates our phenomenal growth. In 1995, we had 145 sociology majors. Now we have 543, an increase of 274%, and a 26% increase over the 432 majors in 2002. Despite our smaller size, we exceed three out of four of our peer departments in number of sociology majors. Not surprisingly, our undergraduate credit hours grew from 19,025 in 2002 to 23,445 in 2004 (23%), which was larger than the increase in the College of Arts and Sciences as a whole. Noteworthy is that most of our credit hours come from upper division courses, which suggests that we have prospered in the “market-place” of elective courses.

On the graduate level, we have grown from 76 graduate students in 2002 to 89 in 2004, graduating 11 Ph.D. students and 31 M.A. students in the three years. During the 2002-2003 academic year, we graduated 5 doctoral and 10 master’s degree students. This was equal to or more than most of our peer departments. Our graduate student-to-faculty member ratio for 2003-2004 was 4.7; and that was much higher than our peer departments, which ranged from 2.1 to 2.7. Thus, a strong case can be made that we teach more undergraduates and graduate students than our peer departments. But this has not negatively impacted the quality of our instruction. Student evaluations reveal that on a five point scale from 1 (lowest) to 5 (the highest) over two thirds of all classes taught by sociology faculty were evaluated closest to the highest point (at or above 4.6). In the last three years, one of our colleagues won both the College of Arts and Science’s Outstanding Teacher of the Year Award and the Michael Harrington Distinguished Teaching Award presented by the Society for the Study of Social Problems. An indicator of the success of our faculty mentoring has been that graduate students in our department have published (either as single authors or as co-authors with faculty) in 16 different journals and have won best graduate student paper competitions at the Georgia Sociological Association and the Georgia Gerontological Association annual meetings.
While the self-study document reports interesting and valuable data on the quality of our undergraduate and graduate curriculum and the quality of students in our academic programs, I would like to comment on three major changes in our graduate program. As a direct consequence of our first self-study, we embarked on a process to identify specialty areas of concentration in developing our graduate program and faculty recruitment. Three emerged: (1) Family and Life Course; (2) Gender and Sexuality; and (3) Race and Urban. They have enabled us to extend our common core of required graduate courses in theory, methods, and statistics with a series of related specialty courses, and to provide a pool of faculty to serve on thesis and dissertation committees. Second, to increase the number of applicants and quality of graduate students, we have increased our graduate student stipends and assistantships from $7,500 for Ph.D. students and $3,600 for M.A. students in 1995 to between $9,000 and $13,000 for Ph.D. students in 2004. Our stipends are not as high as those offered to graduate students at either Florida State or North Carolina State (the only two peer departments that provided data on graduate stipends). However, they are a step in the right direction and together with our three concentrations have helped to raise our graduate admissions standards and attract well-prepared and committed graduate students. Finally, since many of our graduate students aspire to careers in higher education and college teaching, we now offer a systematic program to prepare graduate students for college-level teaching in sociology. Most of our doctoral students leave Georgia State University as experienced and successful teachers, having been carefully and thoroughly mentored in the art and craft of teaching and instruction.

I am especially proud of the quality of the faculty. Since January 2001, the faculty has published five books, 57 articles in professional journals, 32 chapters in edited volumes, and presented 194 papers at professional meetings. We have published in the most prestigious general journals in the discipline, as well as many of the top specialty journals. Similarly, faculty have regularly presented papers at the most important national sociology meetings, in addition to national or international meetings in family studies, gender studies, gerontology, psychology, and public health. Five professors have served on the editorial boards or as associate editors of sociology journals, and even more have participated as members of committees for national sociological associations. Seven years ago, external funding was limited to two or three faculty members. In the last three years, 10 faculty members received external research funding totaling more than $2.6 million, including grants from the National Institute on Aging, National Institute of Drug Abuse, and the National Institute of Mental Health. Faculty also are contributing to Georgia State University’s Gerontology Institute, Institute of Public Health, Women’s Studies Institute, and Center for Neighborhood and Metropolitan Studies. In addition, we are actively participating in the Provost’s special Area of Focus on The Urban South in Transition and Urban Health Research Partnership.

Seven years ago, “the first cycle” of Academic Program Review helped us to identify a mission and short-term goals for the Department of Sociology. Now in “the second cycle,” I strongly support our new short-term objective to be among the top 30 programs in at least one of our three specialty areas, and the long-term objective to be among the top 50 Ph.D.-granting Sociology Departments in the country. We have a high-quality faculty with a clear and coherent research, teaching, and service mission. The Self-Study Committee has done an outstanding job in identifying new goals for the Department. They include: enhancing our level of excellence in instruction and meeting the growing demands of our students; gaining greater recognition of our
high quality instruction and contributing to pedagogical advancement in our discipline; becoming one the best Ph.D. granting Sociology departments in our areas of specialization; increasing our visibility in regional, national, and international professional organizations; and expanding our service to the community. I expect that the 2004 Department of Sociology’s Academic Program Review Self-Study Report will enable us to build on our past accomplishments and provide a guide for the future.