I. Introduction

A. Site Visit

The site visit occurred from July 23-25, 2014 and was conducted on the university’s beautiful new campus in Kapolei. UHWO is a public, four-year, comprehensive baccalaureate degree-granting institution founded in 1976 as a two-year upper division only institution and is organized into five academic divisions: business administration, education, humanities, public administration, and social sciences. The reviewer, who is a member of the American Sociological Association’s Department Resources Group (DRG) which is a network of consultants on teaching, curriculum issues, and program review, met with the vice chancellor for academic affairs, division chair, faculty, library and information technology staff, and visited the library. Most of the interviews were one-on-one and usually lasted from 30-90 minutes. Unfortunately students and some faculty, administrators, and staff were unavailable during the site visit due to the summer recess, vacations, or previous commitments.

B. Material Reviewed

The division sent the reviewer a number of documents before the site visit including the division’s program review internal report, division’s assessment summary for academic year 2013-2014, faculty curriculum vitae, selected course syllabi, a report from the university library regarding the division’s library print and Ebook collections, electronic resources, and information literacy services, and a report from the information technology department regarding services and resources available to faculty and students. The reviewer accessed an online copy of the university’s general catalog for the academic year 2014-2015 and reviewed material sent to him by faculty who were unable to meet on campus during the site visit.
C. Goals/Purposes of the Visit

The primary purpose of my visit to UHWO was to review the division of social sciences’ curriculum and faculty needs, to collect data through direct interviews and discussions with faculty, administrators, and staff, to analyze and evaluate division resources (not including the budget), and strengths of the division, and to make recommendations for future directions.

II. Description of the Division

A. Faculty

In the spring of 2013, the time at which the social sciences program review internal report was compiled, the division consisted of 15 full-time faculty members (12 tenure-track positions and 3 full-time non-tenure line faculty members). Of these 15 faculty members 2 were in anthropology, 2 were in early childhood education, 1 was in economics, 2 were in political science, 5 were in psychology, and 3 were in sociology. In addition to these faculty members the division was served by the equivalent of 6 full-time adjunct faculty members. During the current review period (academic year 2008-2009 through academic year 2012-2013) the division’s faculty produced 2 books, 5 book chapters, 15 peer reviewed journal articles, 23 conference presentations, and were awarded 7 grants/fellowships. Several of the division’s faculty worked on the Honouliuli Internment and Prisoner of War Camp Research Project. A book about this project was recently published by the University of Hawaii Press and the National Park Service is currently considering the site for a National Historic Site designation. Faculty in the division served on 21 administrative committees, 32 standing committees, 5 system committees, wrote 21 institutional reports, advised 500 students, and made 34 presentations to community groups.

B. Degrees, Concentrations, and Certificates

The division of social sciences offers a bachelor of arts in social sciences. Concentrations are offered in anthropology, early childhood education, economics, political science, psychology, and sociology. A bachelor of arts in social sciences - applied track (BASS), a distance learning degree, is offered (primarily online) to students on the islands other than Oahu. The division also offers certificates in substance abuse and addiction studies, applied forensic anthropology, democratic principles and social justice, and interdisciplinary environmental studies. Three of these certificates (substance abuse and addiction studies, applied forensic anthropology, and interdisciplinary environmental studies) are workforce related and can be completed along with another academic program or separately. However, a very strong argument can be made that all of the division’s programs are workforce related. Recent national studies have found that students who have a strong grounding in the liberal arts, such as provided by the division’s programs, are marketable or even more marketable than majors in non-social science programs.

C. Program Enrollments, Course Evaluations, and Assessment and Learning Outcomes

As noted in the program review internal report, while UHWO enrollments have been increasing dramatically, the rate of enrollment growth within the division’s programs has varied (for a complete picture of the variations in enrollment data see Table 5 on page 14 of the social sciences internal report). The psychology concentration has experienced steady growth (much more than the other concentrations) during the review period. Psychology’s student semester hours completed (SSH) and
full-time equivalent (FTE) numbers jumped exponentially from spring 2012 to fall 2012 (enrollment for spring 2012 was 205 students and for fall 2012 it was 259 students, SSH completed in spring 2012 was 1718 and in fall 2012 it was 2269, and FTE students in spring 2012 was 114.5 and in fall 2012 it was 151.3). The psychology concentration by far offers the most lower-division level classes among the social sciences.

Course evaluation data (see Table 20 on page 26 of the social sciences internal report) revealed that students value division faculty and rate them highly on a variety of measures. For the item measuring the overall effectiveness of instructor the mean score was 4.41 (based on a scale from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest)) for the division faculty as a whole. The mean score for the item measuring whether students gained understanding of principles was 4.4. It is clear from these data and those discussed in Table 20 of the internal report that faculty are performing very admirably in the classroom and online.

Regarding assessment and learning outcomes, the division completed its first assessment cycle in the academic year 2011-2012 based on the university’s learning outcomes adopted in the academic year 2006-2007. A review of course syllabi indicated that the division and the concentrations’ learning outcomes are aligned with the 5 institutional learning outcomes: effective communication, cultural awareness, critical thinking, disciplinary knowledge, and community engagement. The division assessment plan worked as it should have and identified areas where students were performing well and in areas where they were not performing well (see the internal report for more details). For example, psychology students displayed more problems with writing and critical thinking. Political Science students displayed more problems with critical thinking. The oral communication assessment indicated that students across the division’s concentrations speak well. Initially there were some concerns about rubric reliability which apparently were partially resolved by the division. Concentrations originally developed their own writing rubrics which proved problematic. Changes were made to the rubrics that provided a common standard which facilitated the gathering of comparable data across disciplines. The division’s concentrations implemented curriculum changes in their programs to address the weaknesses identified through the assessment process and thus closed the assessment loop. Further attention to these changes is needed to determine whether they have improved student learning in those areas deemed weak.

While not covered in the current social sciences program review internal report, an additional updated report on assessment activities for the academic year 2013-2014 was provided to the reviewer. This report summarized course level assessment reporting forms which were eventually compiled into concentration level reports that discussed recommendations for changes to improve student learning. For example, anthropology faculty will provide students with more information and feedback on the mechanics of writing, while political science faculty will use the writing rubric in class as an instructional aid. These recommendations are in the process of being implemented and will be evaluated in the fall of 2014.
D. Library and Information Technology Resources

The library print collection at UHWO numbers 30,000. The social sciences account for more than one-third (11,670) of the collection. Of the 86,000 electronic books in the collection, 29,974 are in the social sciences. One-fourth of the library budget is devoted to the social sciences. The library subscribes to over 60 electronic research databases. An intra-system library loan in Hawaii became operative last summer. The librarians assessed the social sciences print collection as adequate and the electronic collection as very good. Students from the division regularly use the library for class projects. The librarians are well aware that the library lacks certain databases that faculty and students need for their research and class projects. They recommend that faculty requests for databases be prioritized and submitted to them. The librarians also recommend that faculty suggest books for purchase.

All of the classrooms on campus are equipped with a computer and internet access, an overhead projector, and screen. Students have access to a computer lab with 40 workstations. Information Technology also provides support for Laulima which is the course management and collaboration system used for teaching and projects. Information technology staff noted that faculty in the social sciences use a lot of technology in their classes in comparison to faculty from other divisions.

III. Faculty Concerns

A. Curriculum

Faculty had the following concerns about the division curriculum: 1) faculty from all concentrations need to share more in teaching writing intensive courses, 2) there is a lack of commitment to writing across the disciplines, 3) more oversight is needed regarding the quality of online courses, 4) there needs to be a balance between the number of face-to-face and online courses taught within the division and among its faculty, 5) as long as the division offers an interdisciplinary degree in the social sciences students should have exposure to both qualitative and quantitative research methods, 6) lack of consistency and academic rigor across senior projects (there should be an original research component in all senior projects), 7) psychology students do not have the option to do an internship instead of a senior project, 8) some courses are too specialized for undergraduates, 9) phase out BASS and support online delivery of the concentrations, 10) develop plans to move to majors/departments where feasible, 11) early childhood education should be moved to the division of education, 12) economics should remain in the social sciences, 13) the division is seriously understaffed and additional full-time tenure lines are needed so courses can be offered on a timely basis to serve the needs of students, and 14) the university should consider creating an interdisciplinary division that would house innovative programs/concentrations like sustainable community food systems.

B. Collegiality

The issues discussed in this section of the external review deal with a very serious problem in the division, one that needs immediate attention and action. There is a growing lack of collegiality among faculty. This issue has always been there, beneath the surface for years, but within the last 10 years or so it has escalated. As one faculty member stated, “People cannot separate the personal from
the professional in making decisions about the program.” This might be one reason why another faculty member stated, “The division has never really acted as a division or in an interdisciplinary fashion.” Based on these comments it should not be surprising that faculty perceive that there are factions in the division that often operate out of a defensive mentality to protect their concentrations or turf. In some ways, an interdisciplinary major is fraught with these potential issues. The atmosphere within the division has been described by faculty as tense, dysfunctional, conflict ridden, nasty, not civil, and anxiety ridden. New ideas and change are often met with resistance. Morale among the faculty is very low, thus some of them have become disengaged. There appears to be no shared vision and as one faculty member stated, “No one wants to talk to one another.” Some of the anxiety expressed by faculty may have its source from outside of the division. One faculty member stated, “Administrators are too concerned with ‘butts and seats’ numbers and money instead of academic achievement and growth.” Faculty commented on the lack of communication and transparency with the administration and the frequent rate of turnover in the administration.

IV. Strengths and Weaknesses of the Division

A. Strengths

The following are strengths within the division: 1) faculty and the vice chancellor for academic affairs were all in agreement that faculty take teaching seriously and that they are devoted to providing students with a quality education, students are well-prepared and well-mentored by division faculty, 2) faculty are active in service work within the university, professional associations, and the local community, and 3) most faculty are engaged in scholarship and are publishing and pursuing active research agendas.

B. Weaknesses

The following are weaknesses or areas that need to be improved or strengthened: 1) the division is seriously understaffed and additional faculty lines are needed especially in psychology and economics, 2) more discussion and planning are needed regarding the future direction of the division. The division is much more than just a provider of general education courses; it provides a base for further professional development. Several of the concentrations (psychology, sociology, anthropology, and political science) have enough students to warrant a move to majors, 3) the division needs to address the variety of issues mentioned in the section on faculty concerns regarding the curriculum and bring some sort of resolution to them, 4) communication between administrators and faculty needs improvement, and 5) the issue of collegiality among division members needs to be seriously addressed.

V. Recommendations for the Division

The following are recommendations for the division: 1) add new faculty lines that will enable the division to meet its teaching demands and to facilitate the move to majors, 2) address the various curriculum issues mentioned by faculty and come to some resolution of each of them, 3) the division should be more attentive to following-up on certain issues discussed in the internal report such as making sure students are taking the required statistics course, appropriate course sequencing, that
grade distributions are analyzed and discussed yearly, and that program changes made as a result of the assessment process be evaluated and appropriately linked to the campus strategic plan, 4) that the division and the university investigate the possibility of acquiring software to be used with online classes that locks the terminal’s screen preventing academic dishonesty such as cheating on examinations and plagiarism, 5) that the division consider adopting an assessment strategy currently being used in one of the division’s statistics course for other courses (possibly methods and theory) (see “Measuring Student Learning in Social Statistics: A Pretest-Posttest Study of Knowledge Gain” by Michael Delucchi, Teaching Sociology, 2014, 42(3), 231-239), 5) take steps to improve communication and transparency between administrators and faculty. The administration should respect delegated lines of authority and avoid interfering in the division’s decision making process (i.e., avoid favoring an individual faculty member’s interests over those of the division), 6) seriously address the lack of collegiality in the division. An intervention may be warranted due to the severity of the situation. I don’t know if even an intervention would be effective. Faculty members, at the very least, need to be civil with each other. This can begin at the individual level with each member reflecting on how they can improve their interpersonal relationships. The people within the division do not have to be friends with each other, but they do need to learn how to work with each other. I sincerely believe that if a sense of civility returns to the division then possibly the business of the division can be conducted in a more professional manner, 7) the division should have their own full-time secretary or administrative assistant, and 8) the administration needs to become better informed on the workforce development skills that the division provides its graduates. Such knowledge would enable the administration to do a better job of representing the social sciences at the University of Hawaii system level and with the state legislature.

VI. Conclusion

Although there are some serious issues that need immediate attention, especially the acquisition of additional faculty lines, decisions about moving to majors for some of the concentrations, and improvements in collegiality, the division is functioning adequately. It would function more smoothly if these issues are quickly resolved. Several of these issues (additional faculty lines and moving to majors) are related to the “growing pains” UHWO is experiencing as a result of becoming a four-year institution, moving to a new, modern campus, and the uncertainty of system wide politics and directives. All of these issues aside, the division is successfully meeting the needs of its students to the best of its ability with the limited resources available to it. Faculty members are dedicated to providing students with a quality education.