

SUBJECT REVIEW REPORT

**DEPARTMENT OF
SOCIOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY**



FACULTY OF ARTS
UNIVERSITY OF SRI JAYWARDENEPURA

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1. Purposes and Aims of the Subject Review Process

The subject review process introduced by the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Directors and the University Grants Commission has been designed to evaluate the quality of education within a specific subject or discipline, for both undergraduate and postgraduate programs in a university. It specifically focuses on the quality of the student learning experience and student achievement.

Higher education is a 'public good' and plays a crucial role in the economic and social development in Sri Lanka. As public institutions delivering this public good, the universities in Sri Lanka have a responsibility to maintain and improve upon the high standards and the quality of higher education.

This report presents the findings of a review of the quality of education provided by the Department of Sociology and Anthropology of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka (USJ). The review was conducted at the Department from 9th to 11th of January 2006 adhering to the guidelines provided in the *Quality Assurance Handbook for Sri Lankan Universities*, published by the CVCD and University Grants Commission in July 2002. The review process was based on the Self Evaluation Report (SER) submitted by the Department of Sociology for the subjects of Sociology, Anthropology and Criminology and Criminal Justice and supported by the information gathered from the three-day site visit to the department.

The SER has been prepared under following headings:

1. Overview
2. Students and Staff facilities
3. Curriculum design, content and review
4. Teaching, learning and assessment methods
5. Quality of students, student progress and achievement
6. Student feedback
7. Postgraduate studies
8. Peer observation
9. Skills development
10. Academic Guidance, and
11. Employability

In the review process, attention was focused on the following eight aspects as emphasized the *Quality Assurance Handbook*:

1. Curriculum design, content and review.
2. Teaching learning and assessment methods.

3. Quality of students including student progress and achievements.
4. Extent and use of student feedback, qualitative and quantitative.
5. Postgraduate studies.
6. Peer observation.
7. Skills development, and
8. Academic guidance and counselling.

The evaluation of eight aspects was supplemented by the information gathered at the,

- discussions held with the Dean, Head of department, academic staff and undergraduate students representing different years and postgraduate students
- observation of department facilities (lecture rooms, laboratory, staff rooms, office space etc.) and other facilities of the faculty and the university
- observation of teaching sessions
- Reviewing of documents available at the department, such as examination papers, marking schemes, answer scripts, minutes of departmental meetings, Sociology and Anthropology Society magazines.

Each of the eight aspects was judged as good, satisfactory, or unsatisfactory paying attention to the strengths, good practices and weaknesses found in each area. Taking into consideration the judgments given to the eight aspects, an overall judgment was given as confidence or limited confidence or no confidence.

2. Brief History of the University and the Department

The University of Sri Jayewardenepura has its roots in the historic Maligakande Vidyodaya Pirivena founded in 1873 as a centre of learning for Buddhist monks by the Ven. Hikkaduwe Sri Sumangala Maha Thero. From the inception up to the year 1959, it functioned as an internationally recognized centre for oriental studies under the guidance of learned venerable monks like Baddegama Sri Piyaratana and Welivitiye Sri Soratha. In 1959, the Vidyodaya Pirivena became the Vidyodaya University of Ceylon. The main goal of establishing the new university was to promote the education in national languages and culture. Accordingly, the new University commenced its academic activities with five faculties, namely, Buddhist Studies, Philosophy, Languages, Arts, Ayurveda and Science. The Vidyodaya University became the Vidyodaya Campus of the University of Ceylon in 1972. In 1978, it was renamed as the University of Sri

Jayewardenepura after Sri Jayewardenepura-Kotte was made the administrative capital of the country.

The University of Sri Jayewardenepura (USJP) is one of the major national universities of Sri Lanka. It is located just outside the limits of the Colombo Municipality. The Five Faculties that comprises the main academic body of the University are:

Faculty of Arts
Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce
Faculty of Medical Sciences
Faculty of Applied Sciences
Faculty of Graduate Studies

The Faculty of Arts is one of the largest faculties in the University of Sri Jayewardenepura. Under the academic and administrative guidance of the Dean of the faculty, it has developed into nine academic departments covering 23 fields of study.

The disciplines of Sociology and Anthropology at University of Sri Jayewardenepura has their origins in Anthropology taught in the Faculty of Arts as far back as in 1960. It was during the period 1964-65 that the Department of Sociology and Anthropology was formerly established. In 1985, another discipline, Criminology was added to the department as a major sub-discipline. Today, the Department of Sociology and Anthropology has evolved into a major department of study in the Faculty of Arts offering three special degree programmes at Bachelor's level, i.e., Sociology, Anthropology and Criminology and Social Justice. It also provides an opportunity for the students who are reading for the general degree to offer in any one or two disciplines offered by the department as major subjects. The Department also conducts several programmes at postgraduate level in all three disciplines ranging from postgraduate diplomas, to M.A., M. Phil and Ph D. The teaching faculty consists of academics with postgraduate qualifications such as MA, M Phil and PhDs, with specializations in varied subject areas.

3. Aims and Learning Outcomes

The Sociology, Anthropology and Criminology programmes of study at USJP is designed to achieve the following aims:

- Provide a thorough knowledge of theories and concepts of the subjects to students following the general and special degree programmes.

- Educate students about Sri Lankan society, its structure, organisation, function and conflicts.
- Provision of comparative knowledge of society and culture in other societies.
- Provide students with applied knowledge with reference to social, community and national development, policy planning, social work and welfare, family counselling and other areas of applied research.
- Provide opportunities for students to gain a sociological understanding of a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-cultural heterogeneous society such as Sri Lanka.
- Develop a research environment in the department for students and staff.
- Develop students' intellectual qualities such as rational and critical thinking, creativity, logical organisation of knowledge, and other transferable skills.
- Bring about a change in attitudes and personality of students and thereby enhancing students' commitment to democracy in a multi-cultural society as law-abiding and productive citizens.
- Improve and enhance employability of students.

On the completion of the study programme, the students will have the following learning outcomes:

- Ability to seek knowledge of sociology, anthropology and criminology theories, concepts, methods and their application.
- Analytical skills in sociology with rational and critical perspectives.
- Personality qualities such as positive thinking and attitude, commitment to hard work, ethnic and gender sensitivity, and development and community orientation.
- Independent research ability and enhanced quality of research and publications.

4. Observations and Overall Judgment

Overall judgment was based on the following eight components

4.1 Curriculum Design, Content and Review

The curriculum comprises three study programmes, namely, Sociology, Anthropology and Criminology and Criminal Justice. Each of these programmes commence from broad, general, elementary course units and expand on to intermediate level in the second and third years and to advanced course units in the fourth year. Irrespective of the level of the programme, i.e., general or special, all students offer the same course units. Each course unit carries 3 credits.

A student following the Bachelor of Arts Special Degree programme requires collecting 120 credits in four academic years. Each study programme mentioned above offers 26 course units and special degree candidates are required to select 22 to 24 course units (66 to 72 credits) which accounts for 55 to 60 per cent of the total credit value of the programme. The remaining 16 to 18 course units accounting for 40 to 45 per cent of the total credit value of the programme have to be offered either from the other study programs of the department or from other departments of the faculty. To complete the degree programme on time a student must offer five (5) course units in every semester.

The degree programmes have been designed with the objective of imparting subject-specific knowledge and transferable skills to students while allowing for a subject-wise broad-based degree.

The course unit entitled 'Independent Research' offered in the fourth year allow students to adopt innovative approaches and acquire research skills. In addition, the inclusion of an assignment to each course unit, contributes to the development of independence, critical thinking and learning in students.

The Anthropology and Criminology study programmes offered by the department are not only popular among the students, but also the strengths of the department in academic terms. The development of these two programmes in association with the Sociology programme will lay the foundation for a particular identity as well as expansion of the department in the future vis-à-vis the sociology programs in other Sri Lankan universities.

The involvement of the staff of the department as well as students in the three study programmes has an effect of cross-fertilization, and such interconnections improve the coherence and comprehensiveness of the sociology curriculum of the department. For example, students specializing in Criminology often select important course units from Sociology and Anthropology as second major or subsidiary subjects.

Each study programme has been designed to provide theoretical and methodological training, practical application and development of transferable

skills. The discussions with members of the staff revealed that the graduates produced by the department hardly find any difficulty in securing employment. However, it must be mentioned that the freedom of choice in selecting course units is limited as each study program has a limited number of course units.

The opportunity provided to students to select course units from other departments and study programs in the faculty contributes to broaden the horizon of knowledge of students, and improve on the multidisciplinary nature and interdepartmental harmony of the faculty. If the opportunity could be expanded to include study programs in the other faculties, the prevailing interfaculty differences could be reduced to a considerable extent.

The fact that the study programs do not make a distinction between general and special degree students in the first three years, contribute towards the integrity of student community and lessening of tensions among students. This also allows students who may find difficult to follow the special degree programs to switch over to the general degree program at the end of the third year and vice versa.

However, the merger of general and special degree programmes in the first three years may have some unfavourable effects on the special degree programme as the degree of sophistication and depth of a special degree programme is somewhat being sacrificed in order to the maintain the similarity of the two programmes. Due to this amalgamation, the number of students offering popular course units amounts to several hundreds. This may also hinder the application of proper teaching methods and individual attention on students.

The fact that each study program does not identify its core or compulsory courses or pathways (Student Handbook: 40-42) may lead to an inadvertent omission of important course units by the students.

The course units taught at the department are backed by research and publications of the academic staff. The staff members have developed specialties in their respective disciplines of teaching at least at the Master's level. However, only a few have PhDs in their respective disciplines and others need to acquire further academic qualifications.

The present general degree programme of the Faculty allows for a double major system where students could select ten course units from two different study programmes of the department. Students could also select 10 other course units from a single study programme of another department to follow a three-major system degree programme. Although such a selection is logically possible, the review team could not observe such practices within the review period. The possibility for such a selection, however, could result in a deviation from the concepts underlying the course unit system and, as a result, the system would not be different from conventional general degree programme.

Curriculum Review and Revision:

The course unit system practiced in the Faculty of Arts was introduced in 2000. The syllabi of the course units are periodically reviewed and revised taking into account of the needs of the country and the new developments in the disciplines. The most recent review of syllabi has taken place in 2003. The Criminology and Criminal Justice programme has been revised recently with the assistance of the Simon Fraser University of Canada. The revisions taken place in the Criminology study programme has introduced Forensic Anthropology obtaining the services of the experts outside the university. In addition, a lecturer with a background in Zoology has been recruited to the programme with a view to enhancing its content, quality and teaching. As the present staff members of the Criminology programme does not have a PhD in them, outside experts are used as visiting lecturers and examiners particularly in postgraduate work.

Student ideas and suggestions are taken into account in revision of the syllabi by way of discussions that are conducted periodically.

It is the view of the review team that the curriculum design, content and review of the department can be judged as good.

4.2 Teaching, Learning and Assessment Methods

The members of the probationary teaching staff of the department undergo a programme of training in teaching, learning and assessment methods conducted by the university's Staff Development Programme, which is compulsory and a requirement for confirmation. However, in addition to this requirement, very few of the staff has had the opportunity of attending such courses of training, locally or internationally.

The methods used in teaching are limited to traditional lecture mode and reading out notes to students was noted at the delivery of most lectures. Some classes were extremely large and students find it difficult to secure a place inside the classroom. The use of audiovisual aids was non-existent but the fact is they are not available in the department. It is strongly suggested that if members of the academic staff are advised to use modern technologies in teaching they should be provided with necessary equipment. The department has only two working computers, which are mainly used for administrative purposes, one OHP, and access to one multimedia projector, which is being shared with other departments in the faculty. The use of handouts is also restricted because of the large class size and not having facilities to make copies of handouts.

In the delivery of certain course units, the review team observed group work and group presentations, which are adopted as coping strategies to overcome the problem of large class size, which could be viewed as desirable methods. In such large classes examination and conduct of individual assignments are

grandeur tasks, which is beyond the capacity of the individual lecturer concerned, unless supported by additional staff, which is also lacking in the department. The service of temporary staff is not available in the department. The current student – teacher ratio of the department, (which is about 83 to 1 or 18 teachers for 1500 students) exceeds in many times the required ratio of 18 students to one teacher. Due to the inadequacy of classrooms and staff, the large classes are not divided into smaller groups for tutorial discussions, which is being adopted as a strategy to overcome the class size problems in many universities. The problems faced by the department loom large in the poor infrastructure facilities, which are however, are beyond control of the department.

Setting of examination papers and marking of answer scripts are subject to a second opinion and moderation. The release of examination results is centralized in the faculty, and has not been changed much from what it was before the introduction of the course unit system. Even mid-semester examination marks are not released by the department, but sent to the faculty. However, the faculty would not release results until it receives the results of all the study programs of the faculty. This practice may be a problem for certain study programs when results were submitted to the faculty much earlier than others were, but could not get them released in time. The ideal would have been releasing of results by the by the department with subsequent or concurrent submission of such results to the central office in the faculty.

In the evaluation of course units, the department adopts two systems. In one system, the end-semester examination carries 60 per cent of the total marks while assignments and tutorials accounting for the remaining 40. In the second system, 80 per cent of the total marks are given to the end-semester examination and the remaining 20 percent is allocated for the assignments and tutorials. As it was revealed the 80 - 20 system is applied to course units attended by large number of students where marking of tutorials and assignments become difficult. Thus in such instances, independent work of students is given less recognition. This is evident in large piles of assignments dumped in office rooms of the lecturers, which were not even taken back by the students due to the insignificance attached to them. The ideal situation would be to recognize the innovative and independent work of the student, and ease out the workload in the final examination.

In the fourth year of the special degree, six credits or two course units of three credits each are allocated to independent research of the student. The credit value of the Independent Research should be increased as it runs through two semesters. However, this is the stipulated amount of credits allocated for independent research in all study programs of the university.

It is the view of the review team that the teaching, learning and assessment methods of the department can be judged as good.

4.3 Quality of Students, Progress and Achievement:

Sociology, Anthropology and Criminology are among the most popular subjects in the Faculty of Arts. However, the department has adopted a number of measures to maintain and improve the quality of their students. First, students are admitted to the special degree programmes on merit and their performance at the interview. Once recruited, their progress is continuously monitored by the application of various methods such as attendance marking, tutorials and assignments, presentations, mid-semester examinations, end-semester examinations, library research projects, field work, independent research work and close supervision.

As shown in the self-evaluation report, many students have secured higher grades in the first year examination in Sociology. For example, nearly 88 per cent of the students have scored 'A' grade for the course unit 'Social Organizations'. Likewise, in the Criminology and Criminal Justice programme, too, many students have attained 'A' or 'B' grades for the course units in their first year. In both of these degree programmes students in the second, third and fourth years, too, have shown higher level of achievement. At the same time, in the Criminology degree programme also students have been able to achieve a high level.

Students are encouraged to achieve higher standards by offering prizes and scholarships by the department for best students. The fact that students do not find any problem in securing employment after graduation is an indication of the level of their achievement.

It was revealed that a student following the special degree programme can opt for the general degree programme at the end of the second year. Similarly, students may transfer from BA (General) to BA (Special) degree programme at the end of their third year. These possibilities show the extent of flexibility of the degree programmes.

Although it was said that the students do not face difficulties in finding employment the department does not maintain a database of their graduates. Further, it was noted that the department does not maintain a record of their output. It is suggested that the department should pay attention to construct a database of their graduates.

It is the view of the review team that the quality of students, student progress and achievements of the department can be judged as good.

4.4 Extent and Use of Student Feedback

The department has adopted several measures to obtain student feedback. The self-evaluation report contains a copy of students' feedback questionnaire of a

quantitative nature. However, it was noted that this questionnaire has been administered only to a limited extent. Yet, it was observed that another questionnaire had been in use for sometime and students have responded to that questionnaire.

It was observed that the methods of qualitative nature are in use to obtain student feedback. The members of the academic staff are in constant contact with students to obtain a feedback on various aspects of students' life, particularly the study programme.

It is the view of the review team that the extent and use of student feedback of the department can be judged as satisfactory.

4.5 Postgraduate Studies

The Department conducts a number of postgraduate programmes in all three disciplines ranging from postgraduate diplomas to the Ph D degree.

Postgraduate diplomas in each discipline are mainly meant to provide the students with a theoretical knowledge in the respective disciplines to enable them to proceed to higher degrees such as MA, M Phil and Ph D.

All senior members of the academic staff are engaged in the supervision of postgraduate programmes and, in the case of Criminology and Criminal Justice, the services and the expertise of the persons outside the university are obtained.

In general, students are satisfied with the programme as far as the quality and the standards are concerned. However, they are of the view that the seminar programme especially the one that is conducted in the second year should be related to the candidate's research work. According to them, apart from the initial seminar devoted to discuss the research proposal and the methodology to be adopted the other three seminars are not directly related to their research work. These seminars are time-consuming and it is sometimes difficult to find time to complete the thesis work, they say. However, the very purpose of directing students to conduct a seminar which has no direct relationship to one's thesis work is to broaden the student's perceptions and avoid narrowness

As far as postgraduate supervision and guidance are concerned, a satisfactory situation could be observed. However, there is an avoidable communication gap between the postgraduate students and the Faculty of Graduate Studies. For example, the Faculty of Graduate Studies has published document entitled 'Postgraduate Prospectus', but many students are unaware of it.

The review team is of the view that the postgraduate programme conducted by the department in all three-subject areas is at a satisfactory level.

4.6 Peer Observation

It has been mentioned in the Self-evaluation report prepared by the department that the teaching programme of the department is peer observed. As it says, “each member of the staff is paired with another member of the staff to observe teaching activities. ... Each should discuss with the other what s/he has observed.” However, in spite of the fact that the department has made arrangements to appoint members of the academic staff as peers, at the observation of teaching sessions the practice was not in use. It was transpired at the discussions with the members of the staff that the peer observation is still a difficult concept to practice due to various factors.

The review team understands the difficulties involved in the adoption of peer observation, but is of the view that a beginning must be made and an awareness programme on the advantages of this practice must be conducted.

The review team is of the view that the practice of peer observation is not at a satisfactory level.

4.7 Skills Development

All three disciplines have emphasized the importance of skills development of their graduates. Accordingly, attempts have been made to improve the subject specific and generic skills of the students through various ways. For example, in the case of Sociology the department has paid attention to develop the skills of their students in areas of social work, family counselling, social welfare and community development, which in demand in a country like Sri Lanka. In addition to Sociology, in the disciplines of Anthropology and Criminology and Criminal Justice special attention have been paid to develop research skills of their students as these disciplines are of practical and empirical value. All students following special degree programmes are required to submit a dissertation based on guided independent research.

However, it must be brought to notice that the sheer numbers of students attending the classes prevent the specific attention needed by the students. At the same time, the facilities needed to improve IT and language (English) skills must be expanded. Special attention must be paid to the students request for conducting lectures in the medium of English. They were of the view that, to a certain extent, a compulsion must come from the authorities in this connection.

However, as far as the interest shown and attempts made by the department skills development is at a satisfactory level.

4.8 Academic Guidance and Counselling

Although the department does not have a organized system of academic counseling, all the academic members of the department seem to have engaged in advising students at various stages of their university life.

Some members of the academic staff are student counselors in the counseling programme of the Faculty of Arts while some others are involved as wardens and sub-wardens of university hostels, which involve a heavy component of counseling work in the absence of a system of adequate qualified counselors. Some of the lecturers have followed formal education in counseling while almost all of the others are trained in the relevant fields, basically sociology, anthropology and psychology, which provide them with a working knowledge for counseling work.

Counseling in the department also involves educational and carrier guidance. The faculty in the department usually engages in guiding and counseling the students with regard to these matters on one to one basis and also is personally involved in finding employment for the students who complete their degrees through various contacts they have established.

Although all these efforts are highly commendable, it would be better to establish a formal system of educational guidance within the department, advising on the selection of course units, the department expectations and standards, etc. on a group basis to make sure that every one is equally informed on the matters relevant. Having the hours of counseling included in the individual timetable for each member would be convenient for both the faculty and the students in managing their time without disrupting daily routine and academic work even though the possibility of deviating from the routine exists as the necessity arises.

The review team is of the view that the Academic Guidance and Counselling is at a satisfactory level.

4.9 Overall Judgment - Suspended

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the observations made during the study visit by the review team, the eight aspects were judged as follows:

Aspect	Judgment
Curriculum design, content and review	Good
Teaching learning and assessment methods	Good
Quality of students including student progress and achievements	Good
Extent and use of student feedback, qualitative and quantitative	Satisfactory
Postgraduate studies	Satisfactory
Peer observation	Unsatisfactory
Skills development	Satisfactory
Academic guidance and counseling	Satisfactory

- As far as curricula is concerned the review team is of the view that it is much better if the opportunities could be provided for students to include the modules offered by the other faculties so that the content of the degree could be enhanced.
- The merger of general and special degree programmes in the first three years may have some unfavourable effects on the special degree programme as the degree of sophistication and depth of a special degree programme is somewhat being sacrificed in order to the maintain the similarity of the two programmes. It is advisable to look for alternative approaches to enhance the quality of the Special degree programmes.
- The fact that each study program does not identify its core or compulsory courses or pathways may lead to an omission of important course units by the students. Course pathways must be introduced.
- Only a limited number of the members of the academic staff have PhDs in their respective disciplines. Others should be encouraged to acquire further academic qualifications.
- The members of the probationary teaching staff of the department undergo a programme of training in teaching, learning and assessment methods conducted by the university's Staff Development Programme. However, in addition to this requirement, very few of the staff has had the opportunity of attending such courses of training, locally or internationally. They should be encouraged to acquire such training.

- It is strongly suggested that if members of the academic staff are advised to use modern technologies in teaching they should be provided with necessary equipment.
- It is suggested that the department should pay attention to construct a database of their graduates.
- The review team understands the difficulties involved in the adoption of peer observation, but is of the view that a beginning must be made and an awareness programme on the advantages of this practice must be conducted.
- Special attention must be paid to the students request for conducting lectures in the medium of English.
- It would be advisable to establish a formal system of educational guidance within the department.