

History of the University of Texas at Austin Sociology Department

The department was founded in the mid-1920s, being split away from an interdisciplinary department that included Economics, among other disciplines. The founding chair of the department was Warner Gettys, who remained in that position for around 35 years, until he retired in 1958. Throughout his tenure, Gettys served as both chair and graduate advisor. The department offered an M.A. degree, probably from the time of its founding, and a Ph.D. program was started in the late 1940s.

During its pre-Ph.D. granting days, the department had several graduate students who received their doctorates at other institutions and became prominent sociologists. These include Kingsley Davis, who was one of the three or four most prominent American sociologists during the reign of functionalist theory and who later became a prominent demographer; William J. Goode, who for many years was the most prominent family sociologist in this country (and probably in the world); and Logan Wilson, who, in addition to being a prominent sociologist, served several years as the president of the University of Texas. C. Wright Mills took several courses in sociology but received his M.A. degree in Philosophy.

In 1957, a year before Warner Gettys' retirement, the department had seven faculty members, including Full Professors Gettys, Harry Moore, and Carl Rosenquist; Associate Professors Ivan Belknap (one of the first Ph.D. graduates of the department), Walter Firey, and Gideon Sjoberg, the latter two being rapidly rising young stars in the discipline. The seventh departmental member was Henry Bowman, who taught huge sections of his functional (practical) marriage and the family course but did not teach other undergraduate courses or participate in the graduate program.

The UT sociology department was at that time an obscure department in an obscure regional university. There were around 90 doctoral degree granting sociology departments in the United States and Canada at the time, all of which were ranked periodically by the American Council on Education, one such ranking occurring in 1957. The UT department was not in the top 50.

After Gettys retired, Harry Moore served as acting chair for one year, and then a new chair, Leonard Broom, was brought in with a mandate to develop the department into a major sociology department. (Broom had been chair of the sociology department at UCLA, editor of the *American Sociological Review*, and vice-president of the American Sociological Association.) At the same time, there was a major push to make the University of Texas (there was only one UT undergraduate campus at the time) a "university of the first class," a phrase from the founding charter of the university. Sociology was selected as one of the departments to be developed rapidly, probably as the result of the influence of Logan Wilson, who had just recently turned the presidency over to Harry Ransom.

Leonard Broom succeeded in doing what he was brought in to do, though his task was made easier by developments that occurred before he arrived. Firey and Sjoberg

were gaining national and international stature, and a new faculty member who arrived at the same time as Broom, Jack Gibbs, quickly became one of the most productive sociologists in the country. Also, a recent Ph.D. graduate of the department, Russell Middleton, who was on the faculty at Florida State, became one of the most, if not the most, productive sociologist in the country. For several years, Gibbs and Middleton published more articles in the two leading sociology journals, the *American Sociological Review* and the *American Journal of Sociology*, than anyone else. And, Leonard Broom recruited a few prominent or soon-to-be prominent sociologists to the department. The result was that in the 1965 ACE study, the UT sociology department was ranked 17th.

In the early 1960s, Leonard Broom and Jack Gibbs developed a plan for a population research center to be affiliated with the department. Neither was a demographer, though Gibbs had strong demographic interests. Nor was anyone else on campus a real demographer. Therefore, the sociology department recruited Harley Browning, a newly minted Ph.D. demographer from the University of California at Berkeley who had worked with Kingsley Davis, among others. Browning joined the department in 1962, and the Population Research Center came into being a year or so later, with Browning as the founding director. By the late 1960s, the sociology department started recruiting other demographers—such as Dudley Poston, Frank Bean, Parker Frisbie, and Omer Galle—and persons with demographic interests in other departments became affiliated with the PRC, which became an independent research center outside of the sociology department. It is now one of the top four or five demographic research centers in the country.

The story of the UT at Austin sociology department since its meteoric rise in stature early in the 1960s is largely one of growth and differentiation. Other departments that have rose to prominence very rapidly have often suffered declines in status a few years later, but the UT-Austin department has sustained and enhanced its status. According to recent reputational studies, the Ph.D. program is now 13th or 14th among the at least 120 or so doctoral degree granting sociology programs in the United States and Canada. It had around 17 or 18 faculty members in the mid-1960s; it now has around 45. In the 1960s, its main specialties, aside from demography, were social stratification, race relations, political sociology, complex organizations, and industrial sociology. It still has considerable strength in some of these specialties but has developed major emphases in the sociology of religion, the sociology of health and illness, gender, family, and aging and the life course, among other specialties. It is one of the most diverse departments in the country in terms of specialties and theoretical and methodological perspectives. It is also one of the largest departments, ranking at least third or fourth in number of faculty members.

In view of the fact that the UT at Austin sociology department has been one of the major producers of Ph.D.s in sociology in this country in recent decades, it is not surprising that it has produced several very prominent sociologists. The late 1970s and early 1980s was an especially good period for the production of soon-to-be eminent sociologists, including such persons as Marta Tienda and Sara McLanahan, both now at Princeton, and Scott South, of SUNY-Albany, one of the two or three most prolific

family sociologists in the country. Earlier graduates include Ken Land, now a distinguished professor at Duke University, who was to a large extent responsible for the popularization of causal modeling in sociology; Charles Tittle, an eminent criminologist; Larry Long, who has had a distinguished career at the U. S. Census Bureau; and Richard Rockwell, who has headed both the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research at the University of Michigan and the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research at the University of Connecticut. Later graduates are on the faculties of such universities as the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Illinois, Pennsylvania State University, Ohio State University, the University of Florida, and the University of California at Irvine, as well as a dozen or so of the leading universities in Latin America.

Unlike many departments in major research universities, the UT at Austin sociology department has retained a major emphasis on undergraduate teaching—an emphasis that dates back at least to the early 1960s.