

Akkreditierungsagentur für Studiengänge
im Bereich Gesundheit und Soziales
Accreditation Agency for Study Programs
in the Area of Health and Social Sciences



Assessment Report

**for the Application of
Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), Muscat, Oman,
College of Arts and Social Sciences (CASS),
Department of Sociology and Social Work (DSSW)
for the Accreditation of the Study Program
Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) in "Sociology"**

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Decision	July 25, 2017

¹ The expert listed in italics did not participate in the On-Site Visit.

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1 Introduction

The Accreditation Agency for Study Programs in Health and Social Sciences (AHPGS) is an interdisciplinary and multi-professional organization. Its mission is to evaluate Bachelor and Master programs in the fields of health and social sciences, as well as in related domains, such as medicine and healthcare. By implementing accreditation and recommendation procedures, AHPGS contributes to the improvement of the overall quality of teaching and learning. However, the higher education institutions also remain responsible for assuring quality.

Since 2004, AHPGS has been a member of the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA). In 2006, AHPGS joined the ENQA; in 2009, it became a member of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). Since 2012, AHPGS has been a member of the Network of Central and Eastern European Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA). Moreover, AHPGS has been listed in the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) since 2009.

The University states that Omani legislation allows for the University to be accredited by a foreign external organization such as the AHPGS.²

In carrying out accreditation procedures, the AHPGS follows the requirements of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). In the present case, the decision regarding the accreditation of the study program is carried out by the AHPGS Accreditation Commission based on the following accreditation criteria³:

1. Program aims and learning outcomes
2. Curriculum design
3. Human resources
4. Facilities and learning resources
5. Study process and student assessment
6. Program and quality management
7. Gender equality and equal opportunities

² AOQ Overall 1, with more information available at <http://www.educouncil.gov.om/en/page.php?scrollto=start&id=46>

³ Approved by the AHPGS Accreditation Commission

The external assessment procedure is carried out in the following four steps:

I. The University's application

The AHPGS verifies the sufficiency of the documents submitted by the University, namely the self-evaluation report and its corresponding annexes, which exist to fulfill the assessment spheres as well as the AHPGS standards. As a result, the AHPGS drafts a summary (see Sections 2.1-2.4), which is to be approved by the University and subsequently made available to the expert group, together with all other documentation.

II. Written review

The main documents are reviewed by the expert group assigned by the accreditation commission of AHPGS. This is done in order to verify the compliance of the study program with the applicable accreditation criteria valid in Oman. Consequently, the experts compose a short summary regarding the study programs.

III. On-site visit (peer-review)

The experts carry out an on-site visit at the University. During this visit, discussions are held with members of the University, which include University and department administration, degree program management, instructors and students. This provides the expert group with the opportunity to learn more about the study program and furnishes it with more in-depth details than written documents alone can provide. The experts' tasks during the on-site visit are to verify and evaluate the objectives of the program and its projected study results, structure, staff, material resources, course of studies and methods of assessment (selection of students, assessment of achievements, students' support etc.). The experts also assess the efficacy of the program's management (the program administration and external assurance of study quality).

Following the on-site visit, the expert group issues an expert report. This report is based on the results of the visit, the written review of the study programs, and the documents submitted by the University. The experts then submit their report to the University, which has an opportunity to state a response opinion.

Finally, the expert report, the University's response opinion (if applicable) and all other provided documents are submitted to the accreditation commission of AHPGS.

IV. The AHPGS accreditation decision

The accreditation commission of the AHPGS examines the documentation made available in the process of application, namely the University's self-evaluation report, its annexes, the summary comprised by the AHPGS, the expert report, as well as the University's response opinion. These documents represent the basis for the commission's decision regarding the recommendation for the accreditation of the study program, the accreditation of the study program with conditions, or the denial of accreditation of the study program.

2 Overview

2.1 Procedure-related documents

The Sultan Qaboos University of Oman delegated the task of accrediting its Bachelor of Arts study program "Sociology" to AHPGS.

The self-evaluation report for accreditation⁴ of the aforementioned study program (hereinafter the Self-Evaluation Report or SER) of the Sultan Qaboos University (hereinafter the University) was submitted to the Accreditation Agency for Study Programs in the Area of Health and Social Science (AHPGS e.V.) in electronic format on October 17, 2016.

On March 14, 2017, the AHPGS forwarded the open questions and explanatory notes (hereinafter OQ) pertaining to the Application for accreditation for the study programs to the University. On March 21, 2017, the University submitted the answers to the open questions and explanatory notes (hereinafter AOQ) to the AHPGS in electronic format.

This document presents AHPGS' summary of the Bachelor of Arts study program "Sociology". The program's first cohort was admitted in 1987.

The application documentation submitted by the Sultan Qaboos University follows the outline recommended by the AHPGS. Along with the application request towards accreditation of the Bachelor study program "Sociology," the following additional documents can be found in the application package (the documents submitted by the University are numbered in the following order for easier referencing):

Specific documents for the study program B.A. "Sociology":

Annex	Description
1	Teachers' CV's
2	Course Descriptions
3	B.A. Sociology Program Matrix
4	Course Template Example
5	Teachers' CV's Example
6	B.A. Sociology Internship Manual

⁴ In this instance, accreditation without the awarding of the official seal of the Accreditation Council of the Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Programs in Germany

7	B.A. Sociology Sample Degree Audit Report
8	Sample B.A. Sociology Transcript

Alongside the study-program-specific documents, the following documents pertain to all study programs submitted by the University for external evaluation by AHPGS:

Annex	Description
A	Undergraduate Academic Regulations
B	Acronyms
C	Congruence between University, College and Department
D	University - College - Department - Program Vision Mission Objectives
E	Postgraduate Academic Regulations
F	Disabilities Guide
G	Exam Instructions for Students with Disabilities
H	Program Accreditation Roadmap - SQU
I	Program Accreditation Roadmap - CASS
J	Internship Agreement (example)

The Summary, the Expert Report as well as the decision of the Accreditation Commission build the basis for the present Assessment Report.

2.2 Study program

2.2.1 Structural data

Figure 1: Structural Overview	
University	Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), Muscat, Oman
Faculty	College of Arts and Social Sciences (CASS)
Department	Department of Sociology and Social Work (DSSW)
Title of the study program	"Sociology"
Cooperation partners	- Ministry of Social Development - Ministry of Education - Ministry of Health - Ministry of Defense - NGOs and Civil Society Institutions
Degree awarded	Bachelor of Arts (B.A.)
Language of study	Arabic

Form(s) of studies	Full-time
Organizational structure	Sunday to Thursday, 08:00 to 18:00
Period of education	8 semesters (4 years) plus the prerequisite Foundation Program (1 year)
Credit Points (CP) according to the Credit Hour model	120 CP, with varying composition depending on students' selection of Pure or Major/Minor study options, plus Foundation Courses (in which no CP are earned)
Hours/CP	<p>Lectures and seminars: 1 contact hour per CP Laboratory work: 2 contact hours per CP⁵ Tutorials, studio work, field or work placements: 2 contact hours per CP Workshops and internships: Approximately 3 contact hours per CP (assessed and determined by Department)</p> <p>The following workload estimates were calculated assuming a range of 2-3 self-study hours per contact hour. Thus, this study program contains the equivalent of approximately 196-260 ECTS.⁶</p>
Workload	<p>Total: 5,865 – 7,800 hours (varies)</p> <p>Contact hours: 1,875 hours Self-study: 3,870 – 5,805 hours (varies) Internship: 120 hours</p>
CP for the final thesis	6 CP awarded through completion of two 3-credit research project courses
Launch date of the study program	Academic year 1987/1988
First accreditation	Program has not yet been accredited
Time of admission	Admission to the College: Each fall semester; Admission to the program: Each fall and spring semester
Number of available places on the program	Approximately 60-70 students; exact quota set annually by Department and College Boards
Number of enrolled students to date	1,164

⁵ When warranted by nature of the course material, the requirement for laboratory work may be raised to 3 or 4 credit hours per CP by the Head of Department (HoD) and Deanship of Admissions and Registration

⁶ The lower estimate, 196 ECTS, was calculated by dividing the lowest workload estimate (5,865 hours) by the highest normal number of workload hours required to earn an ECTS credit (30 hours). The higher estimate, 260 ECTS, was calculated by dividing the highest workload estimate (7,800 hours) by the lowest normal number of workload hours required to earn an ECTS credit (25 hours). It is likely that the most accurate value is close to the median of this range (about 230 ECTS credits).

Number of graduates to date	881
Number of dropouts to date	45
Admission requirements	<p>Being under 25 years old; holding Omani citizenship, or, under limited circumstances, being granted a scholarship as either</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A national of "brotherly and friendly countries,^{7 8}" which the University defines as being countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the Arab League, and certain Asian countries⁹; or - A non-Omani child of a University staff member. <p>Students' secondary grades (General Education Diploma, International Baccalaureate, or similar), as well as their performance in any postsecondary studies, if applicable, are used to allocate places in the cohort.</p>
Tuition fees	<p>Free for all Omani citizens;</p> <p>Non-Omani students pay nominal tuition fees (40 OMR per credit at College of Arts and Social Sciences);</p> <p>students are entitled to free meals and either accommodation (female students) or transportation (male students) to the University, if their families live within 100km of the University;</p> <p>SQU contributes in educating candidates from non-Omani faculty holding the title of Assistant Professor and higher and medical staff grade and higher and occupants of the special schedule and the teaching faculty at the Language Centre</p>

2.2.2 Qualification objectives and employment opportunities

The University provided a list of its intended educational objectives and linked learning outcomes for students in its Bachelor of Arts in Sociology study program; these are elucidated in Annex 3: B.A. Sociology Program Matrix. The respective objective-outcome categories are (1) the preparation of competent, efficient and high-capacity researchers, leading to honed scientific and practical problem-solving abilities; (2) the promotion of social communication skills, leading to social effectiveness in work and life; (3) the deepening of under-

⁷ SER B.A. "Sociology" p.10 §1.1.11 as well as Annex A: Undergraduate Academic Regulations p.4 §A1

⁸ Students may not transfer out of the Sociology program into the College of Medicine and Health Sciences if they were admitted on the basis of being "of brotherly and friendly countries" or non-Omani children of university staff. SQR Undergraduate Academic Regulations p.9 §A4-2.2.3

⁹ AOQ Overall 2

standing of the Omani society, leading to graduates' increased familiarity with their surroundings and culture; and (4) the utilization of creative problem solving, leading to the ability to effectively use critical reasoning and teamwork. Each of these four sets is linked to four courses within the Sociology program.

The University mentioned various potential employment opportunities for its Sociology graduates, including various Omani governmental ministries (such as those of Social Development, Health and Police and Armed Forces), other colleges and universities, NGOs, research organizations and self-employment.¹⁰ The University states that most of its graduates work as social researchers or social workers; some with media studies minors have found jobs as journalists or reporters.¹¹

Also prominent in the University's outlook on the labor market is the cited 2.2% growth rate of the Omani higher education sector juxtaposed with the fact that most public sector positions in the country are limited to Omani nationals.¹²

2.2.3 Modularization and exam system

The Sociology degree program utilizes a course-based system. In order to graduate, students are required to pass 43 courses. Of these¹³:

- 3 are required University courses;
- 3 are University electives;
- 6 are required courses through the College of Arts and Social Sciences (CASS);
- 1 is an elective course through CASS;
- 7 are required courses in a student's chosen minor field which are shared with students from other CASS departments;
- 1 is an elective course in a student's chosen minor field;
- 17 are required major courses in Sociology;
- 3 are elective major courses in Sociology; and
- 2 are required major courses in Sociology which constitute students' final thesis work.

¹⁰ SER B.A. "Sociology" p.25 §1.4.1

¹¹ AOQ B.A. „Sociology“ 6

¹² SER B.A. "Sociology" p.26 §1.4.2

¹³ Ibid., p.25 Table 8

Minor fields can be selected from the University departments of Mass Communication Studies, Tourism, History, Geography, Theater Studies and Archaeology.

Students should normally take between 15 and 18 credits per semester. As has become standard in credit-hour-based systems, various exceptions apply to students studying in summer semesters,¹⁴ students on academic probation,¹⁵ students who have earned at least a 3.0 GPA with a full course load for the two previous semesters¹⁶ and students who are expected to graduate within two semesters¹⁷.

Students are required to complete at least one internship (SOCY4120) with a time burden of at least 120 hours (4 hours twice weekly) in the seventh semester.

The University suggests that Sociology courses be taken in conjunction with other required courses according to the following study plan. (Courses from the Department of Sociology and Social Work also include their course numbers.)

Sem.	Course	Category	CP
1	Arabic Language	University Requirement	3
	Omani Contemporary Society	University Requirement	1
	Islamic Culture or Oman & Islamic Civility	University Requirement	2
	Scientific Thinking & Problem Solving	College Requirement	3
	<i>University elective</i>	University Elective	2
Semester 1 Total			11
2	Arabic Language Skills	College Requirement	3
	SOCY1100: Introduction to Sociology	Major Requirement	3

¹⁴ Summer semesters carry 8-credit maximums.

¹⁵ Students on Academic Probation (with a GPA under 2.00) are restricted to taking between 9 and 12 credits in fall and spring semesters and between 2 and 6 credits in summer semesters. Further detailed in §C5 of Annex A: Undergraduate Academic Regulations.

¹⁶ Students demonstrating academic prowess by carrying at least a 3.0 GPA for the two previous semesters while taking the maximum amount of credits in each semester are rewarded by being exempted from maximum credit limits as long as this condition applies to them. Furthermore, if a student achieved worse than 3.0 in a recent semester but still has a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or greater, they are also eligible to take as many credits as desired.

¹⁷ Students expected to graduate within two semesters (the summer semester should also be counted) have their maximum credit limits increased to 23 during fall and spring semesters and 9 during summer semesters.

¹⁸ SER B.A. "Sociology" p.28 Table 8

	<i>University elective</i>	University Elective	2
	<i>Introduction to a different field</i>	College Requirement	3
	<i>Introduction to a different field</i>	College Requirement	3
Semester 2 Total			14
3	Computer Skills	College Requirement	2
	Arab Language Skills II	College Requirement	3
	SOCY1210: History of Sociological Thought	Major Requirement	3
	SOCY1220: Sociology of Population	Major Requirement	3
	SOCY2110: Sociology of Family	Major Requirement	3
Semester 3 Total			14
4	SOCY2210: Economic Sociology	Major Requirement	3
	SOCY2220: Theories of Sociology	Major Requirement	3
	SOCY2230: Sociology of Development	Major Requirement	3
	<i>University elective</i>	University Elective	2
	<i>College elective</i>	College Elective	3
Semester 4 Total			14
5	SOCY3110: Applied Sociology	Major Requirement	3
	SOCY3120: Sociology of Organization	Major Requirement	3
	Social Psychology	Major Requirement	3
	<i>Major elective</i>	Major Elective	3
	<i>Minor course</i>	Minor Requirement	3
	<i>Minor course</i>	Minor Requirement	3
Semester 5 Total			18
6	SOCY2130: Rural & Urban Sociology	Major Requirement	3
	SOCY3210: Sociology of Change	Major Requirement	3
	SOCY3220: Social Research Methods	Major Requirement	3
	SOCY3230: Social Statistics	Major Requirement	2
	<i>Minor course</i>	Minor Requirement	3
	<i>Minor course</i>	Minor Requirement	3
Semester 6 Total			17
7	SOCY2120: Social Problems	Major Requirement	3
	SOCY4110: Design and Implementation of Social Research I (Thesis work)	Major Requirement	3
	SOCY4120: Fieldwork Training in the Spheres of Sociology (Internship)	Major Requirement	2
	<i>Major elective</i>	Major Elective	3
	<i>Minor course</i>	Minor Requirement	3
	<i>Minor course</i>	Minor Requirement	3
Semester 7 Total			17
8	SOCY4210: Sociological Texts in English	Major Requirement	3
	SOCY4211: Design and Implementation of Social Research II (Thesis work)	Major Requirement	3

	<i>Major elective</i>	Major Elective	3
	<i>Minor course</i>	Minor Requirement	3
	<i>Minor elective</i>	Minor Elective	3
Semester 8 Total			15
Total Required University CP			6
Total Elective University CP			6
Total Required College CP			17
Total Elective College CP			3
Total Required Minor CP			21
Total Elective Minor CP			3
Total Required Major CP			55
Total Elective Major CP			9
Total CP			120

The “Major Elective” slots in the above plan may be filled with the following courses:

Figure 3: Major Electives		
No.	Title	CP
SOCY2001	Methods of Social Welfare	3
SOCY2002	Industrial Sociology	3
SOCY2003	Sociology of Law	3
SOCY2004	Sociology of Work	3
SOCY2005	Sociology of the Media	3
SOCY2006	Sociology of Education	3
SOCY2007	Sociology of Medicine	3
SOCY2008	Social Anthropology	3
SOCY2009	Culture and Society	3
SOCY2010	Sociology of Environment	3
SOCY2011	Sociology of Language	3
SOCY2012	Sociology of Knowledge	3

The catalog of course descriptions (Annex 2) contains information about all aforementioned major courses and major electives pertaining to

- clerical information, name and course number;
- course level and the semester(s) in which it is offered;
- total number of credit hours, including information on how many of these are derived from lectures;
- required self-study hours for coursework;
- language of instruction;

- whether the course satisfies a degree requirement, a program elective or a general elective;
- the learning outcomes and goals of the course, and the skills that the course is intended to give to students; and
- how students are evaluated during and at the end of the course.

Program-specific module objectives in courses which are offered together with other programs at the University are generally upheld by the Department of Sociology and Social Work. Shared courses relevant to students pursuing the B.A. "Sociology" degree include Foundation Program courses, minor courses, University-required courses about Arabic and Omani culture, College-required courses in Arabic language, computer skills, critical thinking and as introductions, in the Department-required course SOCY2120 "Social Problems" (shared with B.A. Social Work students) as well as elective courses on various levels. All of these shared courses are designed to integrate into all thereto pertaining courses of study and to abide by the module objectives of same.¹⁹

According to the University, the obligatory courses offered in a wider domain (i.e. those through the University or College of Arts and Social Sciences) are, within the scope of the Sociology program, intended to either

- develop students' general abilities to function in and understand their society (including moral education, a development of appreciation for Islam and Islamic culture, and the fostering of creative and innovative academic styles);
- pique Sociology students' interest in peripheral fields for the purposes of choosing a minor and for helping students to understand their talents, abilities and aspirations; or
- otherwise develop students' communicative or functional skills in the arts.

In a general sense, the Sociology program is designed to move students through a first general and then specialized learning progression. Regarding the aforementioned educational objectives and linked learning outcomes, the University has designed the structure of the Sociology degree program as follows.

In the **first semester** of the degree program, students fulfill most of their general university requirements by taking classes in "Arabic Language" (3 CP), "Omani Contemporary Society" (1 CP) and either "Islamic Culture" or "Oman

¹⁹ SER B.A. "Sociology" pp.12-13 §1.2.2

& Islamic Civility” (3 CP). As a deep understanding of these themes is the broadest objective of the University, they are presented as a foundation for the rest of the degree program. Students also take a college-level course in “Scientific Thinking and Problem Solving”, which is supposed to introduce or reinforce the Scientific Method and improves students’ critical thinking abilities. Finally, students are expected to fulfill one of their three required University elective courses in the first semester.²⁰

In the **second semester**, students take their first major course, “Introduction to Sociology,” in which students become familiar with the background and study methods of Sociology, its connections with other sciences, and other general foundational concepts of their major. This course is accompanied by another Arabic language course and university elective, as well as two introductions into other specializations. These introduction courses are intended to give students a clear vision of which major and minor best fit their skills and aspirations.²¹

Thereafter, in the **third semester**, the majority of students’ time is spent in required major courses, namely “History of Sociological Thought,” “Sociology of Population” and “Sociology of Family.” Respectively, these are designed to equip students with knowledge about the development of sociology through history in various eras and nations, understanding and abilities of analyzing demographics on small and large scales (especially concerning Oman) and using these to solve problems, and sociological factors of kinship, marriage, Islamic families, and industrialized societies. Students also take courses designed to improve their Arabic skills and computer literacy.²²

In their **fourth semester**, students’ work in the field of Sociology concerns itself with society and progress. The course “Economic Sociology” explains economic phenomena in sociological terms and helps students understand the reasoning behind globalization, privatization, consumption and other important economic processes. In the course “Sociology of Development,” students learn about more specific issues of large-scale economic development and the sociological underpinning thereof. Students also begin their theoretical coursework in “Theories of Sociology,” in which the most important schools

²⁰ SER B.A. “Sociology” p.25, Table 8 and Annex 2: Course Descriptions pp.1-10.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

of thought are presented. Students also take one University and one College elective course in this semester.²³

In their **fifth semester**, students use the theoretical knowledge gained in Semester 4 in real-world applications in the course "Applied Sociology." Dialectics and public policy development are emphasized here. In the course "Sociology of Organization," students learn related theories and methods of management and bureaucracy in various contexts. Students also take a course in "Social Psychology" which emphasizes the link between individual and collective sociality and the important psychological bases that underpin much of sociology. Students also take one major elective and two courses in their chosen minor in this semester.²⁴

Next, in the **sixth semester**, students study the implications of sociology in terms of a different societal division, viz. that between rural and urban societies, and the various causes and effects thereof. This is supplemented with a course in "Social Research Methods," reinforcing knowledge of the Scientific Method and helping to prepare for the upcoming thesis work. Furthermore, an in-depth course in "Social Statistics" gives students the mathematical and technical capabilities necessary to analyze their own future findings and interpret or evaluate others' results. Students take a fourth major course in this semester: "Social Change," which aims to explain forms, theories, factors and implications of societal change in sociological terms. Students are also expected to complete two further minor courses in this semester.²⁵

In the **seventh semester**, students begin their thesis work in the form of the first of two courses in "Design and Implementation of Social Research," in which they are expected to apply the knowledge and theory they have acquired in the preceding three years and demonstrate a mastery of thereto pertaining concepts. Together with this, students complete a two-stage "Fieldwork Training" (an internship) intended to provide practical experience for the workplace; the first phase (1 week) is theoretically preparatory whereas the second stage (13 weeks) involves working in a social institution under specialist supervision, plus a subsequent academic evaluation (1 week). Students complete their internship at the same institution (no rotation).²⁶ The

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ AOQ B.A. "Sociology" 4

internship is governed and outlined by the “B.A. Sociology Internship Manual” (Annex 6). Students also complete a “Social Problems” course, which allows students to begin applying their knowledge and problem-solving skills practically to real-world issues. Students are also tasked with taking a major elective and two minor courses in this semester.

Finally, in the **eighth semester**, students complete their thesis work viz. the second “Design and Implementation of Social Research” course, finishing their demonstration of their ability to utilize their knowledge and capabilities for real-world applications. Students also take “Sociological Texts in English,” intended to acclimate them to dealing with texts and journal articles outside of the Arabic-language sphere – critical for future sociological researchers. In this semester, students finish acquiring their 120 credit points by taking one major elective, one minor elective, and one minor course.²⁷

Courses in the Sociology degree program as described by the University are didactically homogenous. All integrate lectures as their primary form of instruction, and all evaluate students using examinations, presentations and assignment(s). Instructors also integrate role play, portfolios, simulations, and electronic teaching into their courses.²⁸

Distance learning is not supported within the Sociology program; the sole method of teaching is on-campus instruction. According to the University, it uses online e-learning platforms such as Moodle to supplement its courses (and provides regular instruction about how to use them successfully), and its University Library provides students with both on- and off-campus access to its resources.

Throughout the degree program, most theoretical courses are accompanied by a “parallel applied course” to develop “research skills and competencies”²⁹; the internship course is broadly intended to systematically review the practical skills learned in such applied environments. Students’ practical competence in this manner is evaluated through a “professional logbook” by a collaborating “academic coordinator and a professional instructor.”³⁰ Prerequisite for the commencement of the internship are the acquisition of at least 60 CP and the passing of a “Methods of Social Research” course. Examples of institutions

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ SER B.A. “Sociology” p.18 §1.2.4

²⁹ SER B.A. “Sociology” p.19 §1.2.6 ¶1

³⁰ Ibid.

where past internships have been carried out include University research centers, the Ministries of Social Development, Education, Health and Defense, the Majlis Alsura (Omani parliament), the State Council and various NGOs, most of whom have special cooperation agreements with the University³¹.

Professional training of internship students is conducted by academic faculty, with roughly 10-15 students per staff member, as well as a workplace staff supervisor holding a Bachelor degree or higher with “extended experience in professional social research.”³² These officials coordinate on a regular basis to discuss students’ progress, weaknesses, and administrative issues.

The primary quality assurance method in the internship program is the selection and screening of internship instructors by both their organization and the University and through the signing of a quality assurance agreement between the College and the training agency (Annex J). Students are provided with thorough information pertaining to ethics, regulations, legal rights etc. of the profession relevant to the internship, and are placed in weekly one-to-one meetings with the professional instructors for the provision of “updates and feedback.”³³

The University states that its Sociology curricula are targeted at competency standards established by the American Sociological Association and the International Sociological Association, as well as at other standards established by the Universities of Chicago, Manchester and Ain Shams.³⁴ In addition to quality control of the course material, improving cultural diversity and transculturalism were supplied as justification thereof. Because their degree program meets these international standards, the University provides that students can easily succeed in international postgraduate studies.

According to the University, students are recommended to go abroad, provided that they meet certain conditions. Successful applicants can spend up to one complete academic year of full-time study at their chosen partner institution. Credits earned during exchanges do not affect students’ cumulative GPAs at the University, and in order to be counted in a student’s credit total, these must be approved by the University and have been passed with a grade

³¹ Annex J: Example for internship agreement

³² SER B.A. “Sociology” p.19 §1.2.6 ¶1

³³ SER B.A. “Sociology” p.20 §1.2.6 ¶4

³⁴ SER B.A. “Sociology” p.20 §1.2.8 ¶2

of C (2.0) or better. No B.A. "Social Work" students have yet done exchanges. To date, no B.A. Sociology student has gone on an exchange.

In general, the language of instruction in the B.A. "Sociology" program is Arabic. Instructors must however include important sociological terms and concepts in English to allow their students to better understand pertinent English academic texts. The course "Sociological Texts in English Language" is taught fully in English.

The majority of courses in the degree program are linked to studies and other research undertaken by faculty members in the concentration of Sociology.³⁵ The courses of "Social Research Methodology" and "Social Statistics" serve to equip students with their own research abilities which are then evaluated by means of the two-part thesis course ("Design and Implementation of Social Research"). Participation in research seminars, workshops and similar activities is actively encouraged by the University to help students hone their research skills, as is students' involvement in ongoing studies by faculty members.³⁶

Student skill and competency is the primary evaluative target of midterms and final course examinations. The evaluation component of each course consists of

- a final written exam, generally accounting for 40-60% of the final grade;
- a midterm exam, generally accounting for 20-25% of the final grade; and
- assignments of quizzes, tests, projects, presentations, homework assignments, case reports and classroom discussions, generally accounting for 25-30% of the final grade.

In a 15-week semester, midterm examinations are held in the 7th or 8th week. Final examinations are generally held in the 15th week. The duration of final exams cannot exceed three hours.

Missed midterm exams may be repeated or not at the discretion of the course instructor on a case-by-case basis. Students who miss formal final exams for "legitimate reasons"³⁷ may apply to the College Examination Committee for re-

³⁵ SER B.A. "Sociology" p.20 §1.2.7

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Legitimate reasons include hospitalization or "extreme ill health" and bereavement of an immediate relative (parents, siblings, spouse or child) no longer than 4 days before examination. Both require official supporting documents. (SER B.A. "Sociology" p.15)

examination. Students who fail an exam may not retake it; instead, they are allowed to repeat the course a maximum of two times, as well as to take an equivalent substitute course.³⁸ An exception, under which a student may re-sit a failed exam, is when a student has passed all degree requirements except for one in the final two semesters, and the Instructor and Department recommend a re-sit and believe that it will result in a passing grade. In this case, the maximum possible grade is “C” (2.0).

Students wishing to transfer programs within the University are to apply within their own degree program and are evaluated on that basis. Those wishing to transfer to the University from an external higher education institution (HEI) are governed by certain regulations.^{39 40}

After placing students’ previous eligible coursework under assessment and ascertaining that the work covered is equivalent in content or objectives to corresponding courses at the University, the University can grant students Transfer Credit, which counts toward degree CP requirements but is not itself graded. Should a student have amassed a significant amount of Transfer Credit, the University may designate him/her as being in Advanced Standing and thus able to commence the study program in a semester above the first.⁴¹

2.2.4 Admission requirements

According to §A1 of the Undergraduate Regulations, the broadest requirement for admission to the University is holding Omani citizenship; under limited circumstances, admission is possible through being granted a scholarship as either

³⁸ AOQ Overall 5

³⁹ Transfer applicants must be Omani citizens 25 years of age or younger; be transferring from a recognized HEI; provide a “No Objection” letter from their current HEI, if studying at a Government HEI, or from their sponsor, if receiving a scholarship; complete at least 60 credits of their degree program with a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.3 (3.5 for the College of Medicine and Health Sciences); have not dropped out of their previous study program more than one year prior; have passed all transferred courses with a “C” or better; and provide a certificate of completion for the Foundation Program or other evidence attesting thereto. Source: Annex A: Undergraduate Academic Regulations pp.10-12 §§A4.2-A5

⁴⁰ Transfer applicants will be ranked primarily by GPA and secondarily by GED percentage; be admitted to the College and not a specific major (the latter is dependent on students’ fulfillment of prerequisites for that major); and be granted up to 50% of the credits required for their selected degree program at the university. Source: Annex A: Undergraduate Academic Regulations pp.10-12 §§A4.2-A5

⁴¹ Annex A: Undergraduate Academic Regulations pp.11-12 §A5

- a national of a state party to the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (CCASG), aka the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC);⁴²
- a national of “brotherly and friendly countries”⁴³ (certain Asian nations⁴⁴); or
- a non-Omani child of a University staff member.

Additionally, all students must hold secondary grades (General Education Diploma, International Baccalaureate, or similar). Students’ performance in any postsecondary studies is also used to select students for places in the cohort.

Also required to begin studies in the B.A. “Sociology” program is the successful completion of the University’s Foundational Program (or similar program at another institution with proof thereof) and subsequent entrance examinations. Courses include Intensive English Language, Mathematics and IT. This is to ensure that objectives and outcomes are matching program requirements and study needs of students. Foundation program courses are taught by a special unit at the SQU. Credits earned within the Foundation Program do not count toward the 120 CP required for the B.A. “Social Work” degree.

Incoming and outgoing exchanges are also possible to/from the University for students in good academic standing (GPA ≥ 2.7) who have already completed at least 60 credits of their requisite degree programs. Those incoming to the University may take any courses in any department for which they meet the prerequisites.

The University, College and Department have non-discrimination policies for disabled students and have admitted students with visual, auditory or physical disabilities to the B.A. “Sociology” program in the past.⁴⁵

2.3 Study conditions and quality assurance

2.3.1 Human resources

In total, there are 12 full-time faculty members in the B.A. “Sociology” program,⁴⁶ including eleven assistant professors and one full professor⁴⁷ (Annex

⁴² AOQ Overall 2

⁴³ SQU Undergraduate Academic Regulations p.4 §A1

⁴⁴ AOQ Overall 2

⁴⁵ SER B.A. “Social Work” pp.19-20

⁴⁶ AOQ B.A. “Sociology” 8

⁴⁷ Ibid.

1: Short Teachers' CV's). Each of these is tasked with a general workload of 12 contact hours per week, for a total staff demand of 144 hours per week.⁴⁸

At full enrollment capacity of 300 students, the B.A. "Sociology" program has a faculty-to-student ratio of 1:25. In terms of teaching load, the ratio of weekly teaching hours to students is approximately 1:2.

According to the University, staffs are provided with opportunities to attend various scientific and educational workshops, and are rewarded materially for the publication of journal articles. Attendance of academic conferences and application for grants is also encouraged and assisted by the University. Staffs also are offered in-house opportunities for professional development through the Center for Staff Development, the Center for Education Technology and others.

Furthermore, within the B.A. "Sociology" program, there are four main supervisors/coordinators, namely⁴⁹

- the study coordinator, generally the Head of Department (HoD);
- the student registration and timetabling coordinator, a faculty member;
- the quality assurance and accreditation coordinator, a faculty member;
- and
- the field training supervisor, a non-faculty member.

2.3.2 Facilities

Within CASS and the Department, available facilities include

- classrooms of various size, accommodating between 15 and 50 students and featuring a whiteboard, overhead projector, LCD projector and computer; certain classrooms also contain TVs and DVD players;
- seminar rooms, including one in the Department and one in CASS;
- offices for the Head of Department and Coordinator; all professors share their offices with one other colleague; the extension of the CASS building is scheduled in the University's five year operational plan 2016-2020 in order to add more space to professors' offices;
- computer laboratories with academic software, totaling 7 around campus including 4 in the student dormitories (open from 8am until midnight); certified on-site IT support is available, as is campus-wide Wi-Fi access; and

⁴⁸ SER B.A. "Sociology" pp.39-40 §2.1.1

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.42 §2.2.1

- a specialized technology laboratory for students with special needs, featuring devices such as Braille printers, support software etc. which help visually impaired students.

Students have access to further University facilities including libraries, residences with gender-segregated sport facilities, accommodation for students with special needs, recreational facilities and a mosque. The largest lecture hall has a capacity of 5,000.

The University states that it has a non-discrimination policy for disabled students, as do the College and Department, and has adapted most of its facilities to be accessible to disabled students. The College also works to provide its course materials in Braille through the use of assistive technology.

In addition to University Deanships, offices of Public Relations and Information, Procurement, Legal Affairs, Administration Affairs, Personnel Affairs, Technical Affairs, Financial Affairs, Projects and Maintenance, Housing, University Print Shop and Planning and Statistics provide administrative university services and, when relevant, assist students.

The main University Library contains a total of 359,788 books, 40,356 periodicals and 1,323,847 theses,⁵⁰ as well as access to 37 databases, of which approximately 25 are relevant for the field of Social Work.⁵¹ It is reasonably accessible to students during semesters, and is open 24 hours during examination weeks.

CASS also maintains its own library, specialized in the Arts and Humanities and containing about 11,000 books categorized using the Library of Congress catalog.

In order to acquire new materials relating to Social Work, the Department forms a committee to examine purchase applications and either approve or deny them. These are then forwarded to college administrators for funding.⁵²

Each department does not have a specific budget; rather, they submit financial requests to their requisite College, which allocates funding at its discretion.

⁵⁰ These totals include both printed and electronic media. For more information, see Table 11, SER B.A. "Social Work" p.49

⁵¹ AOQ B.A. "Social Work" 11

⁵² AOQ B.A. "Social Work" 10

2.3.3 Quality assurance

The College has taken the following organizational steps to assure quality assurance within its programs.

- Establishment of a Quality Assurance and Accreditation Committee (QAAC);
- Establishment of a Quality Assurance and Accreditation unit which belongs to the Dean's assistant of Undergraduate Studies;
- Establishment of a Student-Department Liaison Committee;
- Extension of the CASS building in order to create a positive working environment;
- A training plan for e-learning course design to foster the deployment of e-learning in CASS;
- A common course portfolio template and online data warehouse for archiving documents; and
- Adoption of a Departmental Quality Assurance Action Plan which lists the department Periodic Activities to be done to assure adherence to quality standards.

Within CASS, the QAAC is responsible at the highest level for monitoring of all quality assurance and accreditation issues. QAAC's role is to advise and support departments to ensure congruence of quality and processes with the University's mission and strategies. From top to bottom, the oversight hierarchy for quality assurance is the QAAC, Deans, Assistant Deans for Undergraduate Studies, Rapporteurs, Officers, Heads of Department, Department Accreditation Members and the Department Quality Assurance and Accreditation Committee.

The B.A. "Sociology" program assures its quality by the following means:⁵³

- The program's accreditation committee confers with CASS' Quality Assurance unit for all quality assurance measures;
- Each course has a delegated coordinator who is responsible for ensuring that the major course objectives are congruent with the objectives of the program, department, college and University
- Assessment methods measure the objective achievement of all courses. These methods include course specification and reports, as well as surveys conducted on students, alumni and employees. These surveys have

⁵³ Ibid., p.33 §1.6.2

shown a general satisfaction with course difficulty, content, teaching methods, professional ethics, etc.

Course evaluation is done as a continuing process; one of the course instructors is duly nominated as a coordinator, with clearly defined duties and responsibilities.⁵⁴ Each course's file is inspected by an ad hoc group formed from the CASS Quality Assurance Committee for content, assessment methods and compliance with learning objectives. Final examinations are compiled by course coordinators from model question papers prepared by the respective instructors. At the end of each course, course coordinators unify and summarize the course reports, used to analyze course strengths and weaknesses. Student feedback is also taken into account through online surveys and through interviews with the Student-Department Liaison Committee.⁵⁵ This committee consists of the HoD, a Sociology faculty member, a Social Work faculty member, two Sociology students (male and female) and two Social Work students (male and female).⁵⁶

The Department Board, consisting of all faculty and training supervisors⁵⁷ is furnished with recommendations made from analyzed feedback from graduate students (variously employed), their employers, the Advisory Committee, student surveys, alumni surveys and supervisors for internships (field training). An action plan is then prepared by the Board.⁵⁸

For more information, refer to the University's Quality Assurance Roadmap (Annex H).

The University stated that the feasibility of its B.A. "Sociology" program is controlled chiefly by using student surveys and occasional course material reviews.⁵⁹

Student workload is evaluated by the Department at the end of each semester; students' cumulative GPAs are used as indicators of difficulty in terms of content and workload.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.35 §1.6.3

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ AOQ Overall 10

⁵⁷ The University stated in AOQ Overall 11 that it has instructed departments to also include students on Department Boards.

⁵⁸ SER B.A. "Sociology" p.35 §1.6.4

⁵⁹ AOQ Overall 7

According to statistics about student enrollment provided by the University,⁶⁰ a total of 1,164 students were enrolled into to B.A. "Sociology" program since academic year 1999/2000 with an average of 65 per year, varying from 22 to 112 students per year. 45 students dropped out. Students drop out because of mandatory (academic or disciplinary reasons) and optional (medical reasons and transfer to another program within SQU or to another university) reasons. To date, 881 students have graduated from the B.A. "Sociology" program.

Students under academic probation are monitored and assessed by a special committee, which reports its findings to the Department Board so that an action plan can be formulated. Students are assigned an academic advisor, who can provide tailored assistance to students as necessary. All students may register online but students under probation have to visit their advisor in order to register and to discuss the courses that should be taken (again). Furthermore, the University states that the appropriateness of students' workload is assessed through student course surveys and periodic reviews of course materials.⁶¹

According to the University, students are provided with a full orientation of departments in CASS and continuing, consistent support in the form of academic counseling. Promoting an open-door policy, heads of department and other College members can be approached outside of office hours if necessary. Other offices and programs provide various forms of student support, including the Language Center, the Center for Career Guidance and the hosting of Annual Career Days.

Students have constant access to an online portal through the Deanship of Admission and Registration which provides them with complete details of academic requirements, their academic performance and attained credit hours, attendance statistics and a full academic plan. This portal facilitates course selection, registration or deregistration, auditing of study plan and schedule, and the retrieval of information about grades and cumulative GPA. Information regarding counseling, faculty office hours etc. is also furnished. Students with

⁶⁰ AOQ B.A. "Sociology" 11

⁶¹ AOQ Overall 7

disabilities are informed of special procedures and compensation measures in documents pertaining to students with disabilities.⁶²

The University states that SQU applies an equal-opportunity policy, including the admission policy; male and female students are not segregated academically and enjoy the same rights, privileges and opportunities. According to the University, parents, foreign exchange students, students with an immigrant background, people from educationally deprived backgrounds and other traditionally discriminated groups are all afforded equality of opportunity.⁶³

Since 1997, the College has admitted increasing numbers of disabled students and has ensured their support through the establishment of a Special Needs Technology Laboratory, which furnishes disabled students with computers, Braille printers and other specialized devices for visually impaired students.

2.4 Information about the University

The Sultan Qaboos University, situated in the Al-Khodh neighborhood of the city of Muscat, was founded in 1986 with five Colleges (Medicine, Engineering, Agriculture, Education and Science) and grew in 1987, 1993, 2006 and 2008 with the respective additions of the Colleges of Arts and Social Sciences, Commerce and Economics, Law and Nursing. Until 2000, the Sultan Qaboos University was the only university in Oman and is today the only public university in Oman, besides five private universities.

At present there are 17,824 students at the University, of whom 9,359 (52.5%) are female and 8,465 (47.5%) are male. Of these students, 16,281 (91.3%) are enrolled in undergraduate study programs.

In total, the University offers 64 undergraduate degree programs, 62 Master programs and 34 doctorate programs. Since inception, the University has awarded 37,032 Bachelor degrees, 1,826 MDs, 4,241 Diplomas, 2,281 Master's degrees and 28 doctorate degrees.

Research is stated as being one of the core features of the University. It has established ten research centers in various scientific and humanities fields and holds three research chairs: the UNESCO Chair in Marine Biotechnology, the

⁶² Annex F: Guide to Students with Disabilities; Annex G: Instructions for the Participants in Supervising the Exams of Students with Disabilities and in Filling their Exam Answer Sheets

⁶³ AOQ Overall 17

Shell Chair in Carbonate Geosciences and the Chair in Nanotechnology for Water Desalination. Up to 2014, the University undertook 1,810 research projects with a total value of OMR 46m (USD \$119m; EUR €111m). Since 1995, the University has also marketed consulting services to various private and public sector organizations on 453 occasions with a budget of over OMR 17.6m (USD \$46m; EUR €43m). The number of University journal articles increased 185% between 2000 and 2013 up to 1,193 in the latter year, while journal articles saw an increase of 188% over the same time period, increasing to 728.

The University mechanizes research funds and leave, conference attendance, sabbatical leave, research awards and journal publication awards in order to incentivize its colleges to engage in research. Additionally, the College of Arts and Social Sciences publishes its own academic journal and hosts a biennial academic conference.

The College of Arts and Social Sciences (CASS) is the University's largest college, having been formed in 1987, one year after the founding of the main University. It contains eleven Bachelor programs, nine Master programs (including B.A. "Sociology") and three doctoral programs.

The Department of Sociology and Social Work was also established in 1987. Currently, there are 24 programs of study within the College of Arts and Social Sciences, of which 4 belong to the Department (B.A./M.A. Sociology/Social Work, respectively).

3 Expert Report

3.1 Preliminary remarks

The Accreditation Agency in Health and Social Sciences (hereinafter, the AHPGS) was commissioned by the decision of Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat, Oman (hereinafter also referred to as "the University") for the accreditation of the Bachelor study program "Sociology," which offers the degree Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) in "Sociology," as well as for the following study programs:

- the Master program "Sociology," which offers the degree Master of Arts (M.A.) in "Sociology";
- the Bachelor program "Social Work," which offers the degree Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) in "Social Work"; and
- the Master program "Social Work," which offers the degree Master of Arts (M.A.) in "Social Work."

The on-site visit of the Bachelor study program "Sociology," as well as the Bachelor program "Social Work" and the Master study programs "Sociology" and "Social Work," all of which are offered at the Department of Sociology and Social Work, College of Arts and Social Sciences, Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat, Oman, was carried out on April 10 and 11, 2017.

The documents submitted by the University, the feedback from the experts on these documents and the results of the discussions with the University representatives during the on-site visit serve as bases for the statements made in this expert report.

The following experts were appointed by the Accreditation Commission of the AHPGS for the evaluation of the aforementioned study program.

As representatives of higher education institutions and professional practice:

Prof. Petra Deger⁶⁴

Professor of Sociology, Heidelberg University of Education, Germany

Prof. Dr. Andreas Geiger

Former Rector and Professor of Sociology and Community Medicine,
Magdeburg-Stendal University of Applied Sciences, Germany

⁶⁴ Italicized experts did not take part in the On-Site Visit.

Dr. Rolf Heusser, MPH

Director, National Institute for Cancer Epidemiology and Registration, Zürich, Switzerland

Prof. Dr. Christine Meyer

Professor of Social Work, University of Vechta, Germany

Prof. Dr. Martina Ritter

Professor of Social Work and Social Management, Fulda University of Applied Sciences, Germany

Prof. Dr. Peter Schäfer

Professor of Family and Youth Welfare Law in the Context of Social Work, Niederrhein University of Applied Sciences, Mönchengladbach, Germany

As a student representative:

Mr. Alexander Bordan

Student, University of Bonn, Germany

The on-site visit of the experts was carried out in accordance with the *Criteria for the assessment and accreditation procedures of study programs at foreign higher education institutions*, which were developed by the AHPGS in close accordance both with the existing criteria and requirements valid in the Federal Republic of Germany and the "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area" (ESG), established by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). After the announcement of the accreditation decision, the expert report will be published as part of the final Assessment Report.

3.2 Basic information about the study program

The main objective of the Bachelor study program "Sociology" offered at the Department of Sociology and Social Work at the College of Arts and Social Sciences at the Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat, Oman, is to train students to become professionals capable of understanding and treating social phenomena, as well as foreseeing the needs of social life evolution and cultural problems generated in the context of socioeconomic change.

The study program consists of 43 courses and requires the obtainment of 120 credit points (CP) according to the credit hour system. One credit point is equal to either (a) one contact hour of lectures, (b) two contact hours of laboratory work, tutorials, studio work, field placements or work placements, or

(c) three contact hours of workshops or internships. Every contact hour requires an estimated 2-3 hours of self-study. The total workload of the program constitutes between 5,865 and 7,800 hours (depending on the number of self-study hours, which varies by student), of which 1,875 are contact hours, 120 are internship hours and between 3,870 and 5,805 are hours of self-study. The studies are concluded with a Bachelor thesis.

The admission requirements of the program include a secondary school certificate (General Education Diploma, International Baccalaureate or their equivalents). The program is open to Omani students, nationals of brotherly and friendly nations such as those in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the Arab League, and students of University employees. Tuition fees are not charged at the University and nearly all students receive free accommodation, meals and/or transportation to the University, depending on their gender and how far away they live. Before starting the Bachelor study program "Sociology," students must complete the one-year Foundational Program at the University. There are approximately 60-70 study places available annually in the program; admission takes place each fall semester. Upon completion of the study program, students are awarded the academic title "Bachelor of Arts in Sociology." The first cohort of students was admitted to the program in the academic year 1987/1988.

3.3 Expert Report

On February 13, 2017, the application documents of the University were made available to the expert group for written evaluation. The expert group assessed the Bachelor program "Sociology" based on the aforementioned *Criteria for the assessment and accreditation procedures of study programs at foreign higher education institutions*.

The on-site visit was carried out on April 10-11, 2017, according to the previously agreed-upon schedule. Representatives from AHPGS accompanied the expert group.

The expert group met on April 9, 2017 for preliminary talks in preparation for the on-site visit. They discussed the submitted application documents and the results of the written evaluation as well as raised questions. Furthermore, they prepared the plan of the on-site visit at the University.

In the course of the on-site visit, the experts conducted discussions with the University management, with representatives of the College of Arts and Social Sciences and the Department of Sociology and Social Work, and with the teaching staff of the Bachelor study program "Sociology," as well as with current students and alumni. Furthermore, they inspected the learning premises, including the library.

This expert report is structured in compliance with the accreditation criteria of the AHPGS, as approved by the Accreditation Commission of the AHPGS on September 30, 2015. The study program will be described and analyzed in a comprehensive manner below. The documents submitted by the University, the experts' feedback on the documents, the observations made during the on-site visit, and the results of discussions with the representatives of the University, the College of Arts and Social Sciences and the Department of Sociology and Social Work serve as the bases for the statements made in the expert report.

3.3.1 Program aims and their implementation

The study program pursues specific and clearly defined professional qualification objectives. These include the deepening of understanding of Omani society and culture and the utilization of creative problem solving and critical thinking. The students become equipped with knowledge, skills and techniques necessary to successfully work as a sociologist in various community facilities and to discover, describe and interpret the mechanisms that direct human social life. The students do not merely focus on analyzing social, economic, political and cultural changes in international and local societies and their effects on individuals and communities. They also deal with relationships and interaction between human beings and the details of daily life and structures of national and global institutions. The experts determine that the Bachelor study program "Sociology", meeting the requirements of an undergraduate program, has a broad approach towards Sociology. The experts point out that the program displays strengths in that it puts the idea of an applied Sociology into practice. The experts especially highlight the program's focus on preventive dimensions in the context of social change and its consequences.

During the on-site visit at the University, the experts were provided with more information regarding specific qualification objectives and how these prepare students for specific future employment capacities and situations. It became

obvious that the study program's qualification objectives have been developed in accordance with the overall strategy of the University - that is, to support the process of Omanization, meaning the retention of graduates in the Omani society and the encouragement of development of their social and cultural heritage.

The experts affirm that the graduates of the Bachelor study program "Sociology" are prepared to work in academic environments, NGOs, research organizations, self-employed capacities and, most often, in various Ministries of the Omani government, including those of Social Development, Health, and Police and Armed Forces. The University also offers a Master study program, "Sociology," through which graduates of the Bachelor program "Sociology" can further enhance their professional skills and credentials.

Students in the Bachelor study program "Sociology" must satisfy both the requirements of their degree program as well as those stipulated by the University and College. The latter, which include courses such as "Arabic Language," "Omani Contemporary Society," "Islamic Culture," "Scientific Thinking & Problem Solving," "Arabic Language Skills I and II" and "Computer Skills," augment students' specialized sociological knowledge with important general skills and awareness of their academic, technical and cultural environments. Thus, the experts confirm that the study program focuses on specific qualification objectives that cover both professional and interdisciplinary aspects and particularly refer to the domain of academic competences.

The University showed its strong commitment to the personal development and social responsibility of the students. Furthermore, it is also committed to the enhancement of independent thinking and a comprehensive awareness which enables the students to make informed and socially responsible choices in agreement with their academic, professional and life goals. By being qualified to identify and analyze social problems, potentially within the scope of a governmental institution, the experts point out the students' chance to plan social policies, procedures and their social consequences and, thus, to treat the particular needs of Omani society.

Overall, the experts had the impression of a significant and proportional study program during their on-site visit at the University. However, potential opportunities for improvement could be found by fostering international perspec-

tives, not only theoretically but also by encouraging staff and student exchanges and foreign language skills.

Overall, in sight of both the professional development objectives and the measures taken to encourage students' social awareness and citizenship which can be found within the structure of the Bachelor study program "Sociology," the experts consider the requirements of the criterion to be fulfilled.

3.3.2 Structure of the study program

All students in the Bachelor study program "Sociology" are required to complete 120 credit points (CP) of coursework after satisfying the admission requirements, including the completion of a Foundation Program (an uncredited basic cluster of courses for all undergraduate study programs which is intended to give students useful basic competences and skills for their studies).

The study program itself consists of University mandatory and elective courses, College mandatory and elective courses and Departmental or program-specific mandatory and elective courses. These courses, in the experts' opinion, sufficiently give students the theoretical knowledge and practice they need to enter into the professional field of Sociology. In earlier semesters, students are introduced to the field and learn about its history before entering into the study of modern issues from a sociological perspective, in courses entitled "Sociology of Family," "Economic Sociology," "Theories of Sociology," "Sociology of Development," "Applied Sociology," "Sociology of Organization," "Social Psychology," "Rural & Urban Sociology," "Sociology of Change," "Social Research Methods," "Social Statistics" and "Social Problems." Two additional courses comprise students' thesis work; one further course constitutes an internship at an external institution to gain practical skills. Finally, the course "Sociological Texts in English" enables students to understand international sociological texts and research. In the course of their studies, students supplement their specialized knowledge as well as their professional and methodological competences in Sociology with courses offering generic competences and knowledge, such as "Arabic Language Skills", "Computer Skills," "Scientific Thinking & Problem Solving," "Omani Contemporary Society" and "Islamic Culture/Oman & Islamic Civilization." These are additionally supplemented by University, College and Major Electives to create an individual study profile according to student interests.

Thus, the study program aims at providing students with specialized and interdisciplinary knowledge as well as professional, methodological and general competences. The content and the organization of the modules are consistent with the intended learning outcomes of the study program.

The Bachelor study program "Sociology" consists of 43 courses. Each course is completed within one semester. The course descriptions contain all necessary information, such as level/semester, credit hours, learning outcomes and examinations. The regular study period is eight semesters (four years). The University's calculation of student workload follows the Credit Hour System that focuses on lecture or contact hours per week. Following the University's calculation that a contact hour requires two self-study hours, the overall study program workload is estimated to be a minimum of 5,745 hours. The University's explanations of their credit hour system showed the equivalence of the program's 120 CP with a European Bachelor program; workload calculations are comparable. However, in order to ease the possibility of transfers into/out of Oman, as well as potential graduate studies at European universities, the experts suggest presenting the applied credit point system in ECTS units in order to more accurately reflect students' workload. The Bachelor certificate should be supplemented by a diploma supplement that contains the conversion to the European Credit Transfer System.

The program curriculum and its qualification objectives comply with the requirements of the higher education level. The sequence of courses provides students with a strong foundation in the history and theory of sociology before building thereon with specialized sociological topics, techniques and modern developments and concluding with a personal thesis project. In particular, the experts find that the course handbook reveals a coherent structure and a continuously increasing complexity of learning material and students' competence level, with a focus on specialization courses in the final stages of the education.

Not least through the talks with the very involved students, the experts concluded that the study program is student-centered and encourages students to take an active role in creating the education process. However, the experts support the students' wish to reduce classic teaching methods and tend toward interactive teaching and learning methods.

A major facet of the Department of Sociology and Social Work which is evident in the Bachelor program "Sociology" is the existence and maintenance of cooperation agreements with various institutions. These include organizations where students can carry out their field work (internships) under professional supervision, as well as organizations in which graduates of the program often work. The University's cooperation partners relevant to the Bachelor study program "Sociology" include NGOs, civil society institutions and the Omani government Ministries of Social Development, Education, Health and Defense.

From the experts' point of view, the requirements of the criterion are fulfilled.

3.3.3 Admission and Feasibility

In order to be admitted to the Sultan Qaboos University, students must hold a secondary school leaving certificate (including, for example, a General Education Diploma, an International Baccalaureate or an equivalent thereto). Approximately 60-70 students are admitted to the Bachelor study program "Sociology" each year (the exact quota is set annually by the Department and College Board). Enrollment into the program is contingent on students' completion of a Foundation Program, which provides students with basic skills in areas such as intensive English, mathematics and information technology. The experts understand that this requirement exists to mandate certain standards in the program and to provide students with skills which they will need later in their studies.

The program is open and free of tuition fees for all citizens of Oman, and is open with nominal tuition fees for citizens of "brotherly and friendly countries" (members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Arab League, and some Asian nations) and children of non-Omani University staff. The admission procedure and requirements are properly documented in the "Undergraduate Academic Regulations" and made publicly available.

The experts appreciate that the College of Arts and Social Sciences, although being the only college at Sultan Qaboos University to do so, admits disabled students to its programs. On site, the experts were impressed about how the College accommodates the special needs of disabled students, providing them with supportive technology and making sure that lectures take place in barrier-free rooms.

Additionally, all students receive free meals and either free accommodation at the University or free transportation to the University (depending on gender and students' homes' distance away from the University). The experts find the admission requirements, the lack of tuition fees and particularly the support provided to students in the form of housing, food and transportation to be outstanding.

The experts have determined that the University assesses the feasibility of its curriculum and its examinations. Course surveys are conducted on students every semester, and the feedback obtained from them is used to make improvements. Compared to European standards for examination systems, the experts determine a relatively high amount of exams to be passed during the study program as there is at least one midterm exam in every course plus a final examination at the end of the course/semester. However, students asked during the on-site visit said that they consider the workload, the amount of examinations and the examination cycle to be appropriate. The type as well as the timing of the different examinations is defined and communicated to the students transparently at the beginning of each course. Moreover, every student is assigned to an academic advisor at the beginning of their studies who verifies the student's choice of courses each semester and assists the student in exploring alternative paths to the degree if, for any reason, the normal pace of the degree is disrupted. Students with a cumulative Grade Point Average below 2.00 are placed on probation, which means that the student's course load is reduced to an individually manageable level until the academic difficulty is resolved. The student's difficulties and corrective measures are discussed with the academic advisor. In case of personal or health problems, the University provides a Student Counseling Center and a Health Clinic.

The experts conclude that students are provided with superb and intense academic and social support and guidance required for the accomplishment of the program-related assignments. Furthermore, they acknowledge the University's strong endeavors to ensure that all students successfully complete their studies. Thus, the feasibility of the study program is guaranteed, the amount of student workload is appropriate and, as a whole, the organization of the education process and the support given to the students ensure the successful implementation of the study program.

From the experts' point of view, the requirements of the criterion are fulfilled.

3.3.4 Examination system and transparency

The University uses a continuous assessment process to ensure the quality of education for its students and graduates. This is achieved by evaluating the performance of the student through a series of exams and tests that are scheduled during the academic semester in the faculties.

The experts have found that students must pass a relatively high number of exams to complete the program. Each course has a midterm and a final examination, resulting in a total of 86 exams for each student. These, and all other coursework, are graded using a letter grade and GPA (grade point average) scale. An A, or 4.0, is a perfect result; a D, or 1.0, is the minimum passing grade, and an F, or 0.0, denotes a failed course. Students' final GPA in each course is multiplied with the number of credit points (CP) of that course, and then all these products are added together and divided by the total number of attempted (passed or failed) credit points. The result is a Cumulative GPA (CGPA), which serves as students' primary indicator of performance. Students who miss or fail exams may retake them, repeat the course or take a different, equivalent course. Additional considerations are possible for provably ill or bereaving students. If students fail to meet courses' attendance requirements or fulfill other conditions, this is recorded on their transcripts. Conversely, if students are beset by illness or a death in the family, they may receive extensions to their coursework and resit their examinations. The evaluation and grading system is determined in the University's Undergraduate Academic Regulations.

Students are informed about each course's assignment requirements and the dates of exams at the beginning of each semester, and also have regular access to guidance offices in case problems or questions arise. The experts find that the University maintains a high degree of transparency within its examination system, and that this system is appropriately challenging and relevant for the determination of whether the envisaged qualification objectives have been met. The outstanding student support allows the students to cope with the amount of exams (see also Criterion 3).

In terms of compensation measures for students with disabilities and chronic illnesses, the University has a host of assistive devices which are made available to, for example, the visually impaired. With these devices, they can rec-

ord lectures, transcribe them to Braille to review for exams and perform similar tasks.

Strategic documents and handbooks containing information on administrative procedures and other University matters are distributed to students at the beginning of their studies. The University's Undergraduate Academic Regulations are available online on the website of the Deanship of Admission and Registration.

From the experts' point of view, the requirements of the criterion are fulfilled.

3.3.5 Teaching staff and material equipment

The teaching load in the Bachelor study program "Sociology" is managed by twelve faculty members. These include one full professor, one assistant professor also serving as the Head of Department (HoD) and ten other assistant professors. All of these faculty members hold a Ph.D. in their fields. As shown by the curricula vitae submitted by the University, the experts find that these faculty members have considerable firsthand experience in the field of Sociology. During the on-site visit, the experts judged the human resources of the Bachelor study program "Sociology" to be highly motivated and dedicated to their teaching tasks.

The experts also note that the faculty in the program are provided with considerable support and resources by the University in order to encourage scholarly engagement. The University bears the financial burden of its faculty members' organization of conferences and workshops on various levels, participation in conferences and scientific symposia, research projects, and leaves of absence for research. Grants and rewards for scientific publications are also made available to the faculty.

However, from the experts' point of view, the program would strongly benefit from one or two additional full professorships, especially considering the professional and academic background and the dedication of the faculty members that should be met by more opportunities for internal progression. Additionally, further full professors would enrich the development and implementation of the study program by plurality in opinions.

In summary, from the experts' point of view, the teaching staff of the program is appropriately qualified and experienced to provide students with theo-

retical knowledge and relevant research skills. They are also adequately compensated and rewarded to encourage continuous academic activity and engagement.

During the on-site visit, the experts had the chance to visit student and faculty premises used for the implementation of the Bachelor study program “Sociology” and were shown around the central library. The University has appropriate funding to provide the necessary learning resources and material equipment and to guarantee the sufficiency and accessibility of books, databases, electronic resources and periodical publications. Faculty members have the possibility to suggest book orders. The library carries out regular analyses of user behavior in order to adjust their inventory based on student needs.

To conclude, the B.A. study program “Sociology” has excellent facilities at its disposal for the teaching and learning requirements.

The experts thus consider this criterion as being fulfilled.

3.3.6 Quality assurance

Quality management processes at Sultan Qaboos University are under continuous monitoring and control coordinated by the Quality Assurance Office (QAO) at the university level and the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Committees (QAAC) at both the college and departmental levels. The QAAC regularly conducts surveys among students and teaching staff; it also advises and supports the departments to ensure congruence of quality and processes with the University’s mission and strategies. The University itself adopted a Strategic Plan 2016-2040 in order to meet the Omani national higher education strategy which focusses on training a highly-educated generation of academics, researchers and graduates to meet the needs of Oman in terms of specialized cadres in all disciplines. On the College level, this strategic plan is put into practice by Departmental Quality Assurance Action Plans, each of five year duration, which list periodic activities to be done to assure adherence to quality standards.

To monitor and develop the quality of the study program itself, each course has a delegated coordinator who is responsible for ensuring that the major course objectives are congruent with the objectives of the program, department, college and University. Assessment methods measure the objective achievement of all courses. These methods include course specification and

reports as well as surveys conducted on students, alumni and employees. Student feedback is also taken into account through the Student-Department Liaison Committee which consists of the Head of Department, a Sociology faculty member, a Social Work faculty member, two Sociology students (male and female) and two Social Work students (male and female). Student workload is evaluated by the Department at the end of each semester, using the students' Grade Point Averages as indicators of difficulty in terms of content and workload. Support is given by the Academic Advisors assigned to every student. The surveys have shown a general satisfaction with course difficulty, content, teaching methods, professional ethics, etc. At the end of each course, course coordinators unify and summarize the course reports, used to analyze course strengths and weaknesses. Each course's file is inspected by an ad hoc group formed from the CASS Quality Assurance Committee for content, assessment methods and compliance with learning objectives.

For continuous adjustments of the program according to developments in the society, on the labor market and in the scientific community, the Department of Sociology and Social Work established an Advisory Committee composed of academic staffs and external stakeholders from the labor market, and Joint Committees with main stakeholders from government sectors as forum to promote cooperation.

Finally, the Department Board, consisting of all faculty and training supervisors, is furnished with the findings and recommendations made from the analyzed feedback from the Advisory Committee, student surveys, alumni surveys and supervisors for internships (field training) and transfers them into an action plan.

From the experts' point of view, the University maintains a well-functioning quality assurance system which is implemented by all internal stakeholders and leads to quality improvement and program development plans.

Moreover, the experts find that the University carries out not only internal but also external quality assurance procedures on a cyclical basis. Besides accreditation for each of its programs, the College of Arts and Social Sciences itself went successfully through a process of institutional accreditation in 2016 which confirmed that the College's quality assurance system is based on well-defined processes, leaving no doubt that a quality culture is present at all levels of the College.

Overall, the experts' opinion of the program's quality assurance mechanisms is very positive. The experts got the impression of a strong commitment to quality management and quality assurance in higher education at the College. However, the expert group recommends that the College representatives keep the quality assurance system as lean as possible and focus not only on processes of quality assurance but also on quality enhancement, through further promotion of the quality culture in the College.

As such, the experts consider this criterion as being fulfilled.

3.3.7 Gender equality and equal opportunities

On site, the experts got the impression that the College of Arts and Social Sciences commits itself to provide an embracing environment for academic creativity and development, while respecting diversity and a multicultural understanding. The Sultan Qaboos University strives to uphold equal opportunity for all, including those in historically discriminated-against groups such as the disabled, immigrants, student parents, etc. Generally, the experts are impressed by the support that is given to students with particular living circumstances but also of the excellent study conditions as a whole. Sultan Qaboos University does not charge tuition fees for Omani students in undergraduate studies and provides either free accommodation on the campus (for female students and students whose families live beyond 100 kilometers from the campus) or free transportation for students who live within 100 kilometers of the University.

So far, the College of Arts and Social Sciences is the only college at the University which admits disabled students. To support students with special needs, the College launched a "Guide to Students with Disabilities". Especially students with visual and mobility impairment find facilities as classrooms and offices, bathrooms, prayer rooms and cafeterias provided with signs in Braille system and access ramps or elevators. The Assistive Technology Laboratory offers students with special needs the opportunity to use specialized electronic devices in order to fulfill their academic needs. On site, the students with special needs confirmed that their learning environment is conducive to their needs.

On site, the experts had the opportunity to speak to male and female students who are taught jointly at Sultan Qaboos University. Students with children reported that being able to leave their children at the University's Nursing and

Day Care Center greatly helped them to manage their studies. Overall, the experts observe that the University maintains an environment in which male and female students of all backgrounds have equal opportunities to achieve academic success.

Therefore, from the experts' point of view, the requirements of the criterion are fulfilled.

3.4 Summary

The experts' overall impression of the Sultan Qaboos University, the College of Arts and Social Sciences, the Department of Sociology and Social Work and the degree program Bachelor of Arts in "Sociology" is very positive. The University convincingly presents itself as a dynamic institution being able to react on national and international educational and social developments. The University's strengths include its qualified and dedicated instructors, its excellent infrastructure and study conditions, as well as its meticulously designed study programs and educational concepts that show a strong commitment to personal development and social responsibility of the students. The study program is tailored to educate social researchers who analyze and understand Omani national development, characterized by a fast-changing and young dynamic society, and contribute to a healthy social, cultural, political and economic development. Thereby and with the close cooperation with national and governmental bodies, the program's aims and the students' employability show promise.

Based on the information from written documents and the results of the on-site visit, the experts came to the conclusion that the study program Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) in "Sociology" offered at the Sultan Qaboos University, College of Arts and Social Sciences, fulfills the aforementioned accreditation criteria. Hence, the experts have decided to submit a recommendation to the Accreditation Commission of the AHPGS for a positive decision regarding the accreditation of the study program.

For the continuous development of the study program, the experts have outlined the following recommendations:

- The University should start to slightly work toward a process of internationalization which does not impede the mission of Omanization. Exchang-

es and mobility of staff and students as well as fostering English language skills should be encouraged and promoted.

- The applied credit point system should also be presented in ECTS units. The Bachelor certificate should be supplemented by a diploma supplement that contains the conversion to the European Credit Transfer System.
- The teaching staff should intensify interactive and vary teaching and learning methods.
- The Department of Sociology and Social Work should offer more opportunities for internal progression of the faculty members and benefit from one or two additional full professorships.
- The College of Arts and Social Sciences should keep the quality assurance system as lean as possible and focus not only on processes of quality assurance but also more explicitly on quality enhancement.

4 Decision of the accreditation commission

The decision of the Accreditation Commission of July 25, 2017

The resolution of the Accreditation Commission of the AHPGS is based on the University's application, as well as the expert review and the on-site visit covered in the expert report. Moreover, the Accreditation Commission takes into account the response opinion of the University regarding the study program.

The on-site visit of the University took place on April 10-11, 2017, according to the previously agreed-upon schedule.

The accreditation decision is based on the Accreditation Criteria developed by the AHPGS. The Accreditation Criteria are developed by the AHPGS in close accordance with the existing criteria and requirements valid in the Federal Republic of Germany and based on the "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area" (ESG), established by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

The regulated study period in the program "Sociology" is four years/eight semesters. The study program requires the obtainment of 120 credit points (CP) according to the University's credit hour system. The study program comprises 43 courses, covering mandatory and elective University courses, mandatory and elective College courses and mandatory and elective Departmental/Program-specific courses. The bachelor study program "Sociology" is completed with the awarding of the academic degree "Bachelor of Arts."

The Accreditation Commission of the AHPGS discussed the procedural documents and the vote of the expert group and the response opinion of the University regarding the expert report.

The University's response opinion shows that the University already took the experts' recommendations into consideration.

The Accreditation Commission of the AHPGS considers that all Accreditation Criteria are fulfilled and adopts the following decision:

The Bachelor study program "Sociology" is accredited for the duration of five years, until September 30, 2022.

For further development and enhancement of the study program, as well as of the University as a whole, the Accreditation Commission of the AHPGS supports the recommendations articulated in the expert report.