This year a review of the dissertation process was undertaken in 2014 by the Sociology Executive Committee. The Committee established that students who complete the doctorate in Sociology should meet the following learning goals in the course of completing the doctoral dissertation:

1. Students will have examined and assessed the existing literature in relevant areas of sociology so as to identify a research topic. An appropriate research topic is one that will add to the available knowledge or improve our ways of understanding the social world.
2. Students will have identified and explored the available research literature concerning their topic in order to be able to assess what contribution their research will make to that literature.
3. Students will have conducted original research or extensively reviewed and re-considered existing research on their topic.
4. Students will write up the results of their research in the form of a doctoral dissertation that reviews the existing literature and explicates the contribution that their research has made.
5. Students will have defended their dissertation research procedures and results before a committee of supervisors and before interested members of the public.

After reviewing how these goals are and are not currently being met, the Executive Committee concluded that it was, on the whole, not satisfied with the level of advisement that students were receiving. In light of an increasingly competitive job market in Sociology, the Committee felt that it could enhance the quality and marketability of our students’ dissertations by promoting the involvement of a greater diversity of faculty. This would encourage the inclusion of faculty with particular areas of expertise, such knowledge of languages or methodological skills, as well as allowing a wider variety of faculty to participate in the dissertation process.

In order to address this issue the Executive Committee changed the format of the dissertation committees by adding an additional member to be appointed by the Executive Officer in consultation with the student’s committee chair. This policy was instituted on an experimental basis in Fall 2013. The effectiveness of the new format will be assessed by a student faculty committee, chaired by Deputy Executive Officer Mary Clare Lennon, which will report back to the Executive Committee in September 2015.