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TO: Dr. Neeraj Puro
FROM: Dr. Laura Backstrom, Chair and Associate Professor, Department of Sociology
DATE: July 17, 2026
RE: LETTER OF SUPPORT

I am writing to formally express my strong support for adding three Sociology courses as electives for the Public Health Minor and Certificate: SYO 3400 (Sociology of Health, Medicine & Illness), SYP 3740 (Sociology of Aging & Dying), and SYO 3410 (Sociology of Mental Health).

Sociology of Health, Medicine & Illness (SYO 3400) introduces the sociological perspective on the social determinants of health and illness, examining how race, gender, and class shape health outcomes and patients' and providers' experiences of the healthcare system.

Sociology of Aging & Dying (SYP 3740) examines how aging and dying are defined, experienced, and managed in contemporary society. Moving beyond purely biological understandings, the course explores how cultural values, social-psychological processes, demographic trends, and social institutions shape these stages of the life course.

Sociology of Mental Health (SYO 3410) introduces the scientific study of mental health from an interdisciplinary, sociologically focused perspective, examining how mental disorders are defined and treated, mental health stigma, the pharmaceutical industry, access to mental health services, and social inequalities in mental health.

All three courses are offered on a regular basis, including in an online modality, providing flexible access for students pursuing the Public Health Minor and Certificate.

I believe these additions will significantly strengthen the Public Health program with a sociological understanding of health, aging, and mental illness that complements the curriculum. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,

Laura Backstrom, Ph.D.

Chair & Associate Professor
Department of Sociology