

# Sociology - BA/BS

## 2017 - 2018 Assessment Plan

Currently status is: Report Accepted

### I. ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2016 - 2017

#### Mission Statement

The mission of the Department of Sociology for its undergraduate majors includes the following objectives: to enable them to understand, demonstrate, and apply sociological knowledge, approaches, principles, and statistical reasoning skills to the study of humans and groups and to develop depth and breadth in sociological knowledge and theories. The sociology program has a number of nationally recognized specialties to offer undergraduates and to serve the needs of a diverse population. Our program is tailored to emphasize training in Social Stratification and Inequality; Population and Health; and Social Psychology. The mission for the Department of Sociology for its undergraduate majors remains the same for the BA and the BS degrees as the major requirements are the same for both degrees, with only general education requirements varying. The BS degree contains a greater concentration on math and science, central skills necessary to become a professional sociologist. It is important to monitor the students and to continuously check on their performance. Although sociology is a very broad field we employ some metrics that are usable by faculty who represent various facets of the field.

#### Goal 1.

Content of the Discipline: Sociology majors should have basic knowledge of the components of sociological theories and substantive areas of the discipline upon completion of the degree.

#### Curriculum

Successful completion of required 300 level Sociology courses and substantive specialty courses numbered 300 or above.

#### Learning Outcome 1.

Sociology majors completing the required SOCY 303 capstone course will demonstrate they understand the general sociological perspective and the uses of sociological theory, can apply critical reasoning skills to evaluating theoretical explanations, and can identify uses and limitations of major sociological research methods in evaluating theories. Majors will evidence these ability to apply these skills to the study of social issues of broad impact and interest beyond the discipline.

#### Measures and Criteria

Success in this goal is indicated by the level of student performance in SOCY 303 courses required of all future sociology majors. At least 70% of students should demonstrate abilities in all three areas: theoretical understanding, critical reasoning and methodological assessment.

As we move to new required theory and integrative methods courses, rubrics will be refined and the emphases of each course will be stressed in metrics for assessments focused in those specific courses.

#### Methods

One required 303 course will be chosen at random (preferably in the Fall Semester). A qualitative evaluation a random sampling of 10-20 course research project papers will be separately graded by the instructor classifying papers as (a) demonstrating adequate understanding of core sociological theories and perspectives, (b) applying critical reasoning to theoretical explanations and (c) evaluating of methodologies underlying the evaluation of theories, using categories of (1=poor, 2=adequate, 3=good, 4=excellent). Success will be indicated by over 70 percent of papers scoring good or better. Instructors of the selected course will prepare a summary of assessment findings for the Chair and Undergraduate Program Director, who will evaluate results and share with the faculty during curriculum discussions.

The undergraduate director and undergraduate committee will recommend refined rubrics over time which should be possible through the standardized use of these required 303 courses rather than a randomly sampled 300-level course as in the past.

## **Results**

Assessment of learning outcome 1 was done through evaluation of final project papers and presentations for all students in the course covering all three criteria. Theoretical: 80% of papers received a score of good or excellent. Critical Reasoning: 100% received a score of good or excellent. Methodological: 60% received a score of good or excellent. No student received a less than adequate score.

## **Use of Results**

There is intense ongoing faculty scrutiny of the new SOCY 303 course, these results will be shared with all faculty and the undergraduate director for further study. The methodological deficiencies reflected in this assessment have already been shared with faculty and resulted in several revisions of the undergraduate major requirements. First, already approved, we will no longer accept statistical requirements from outside the department, since students with a lack of statistical training in social and behavioral science context were those having methodological problems in 303. Second, not yet implemented, the faculty has moved to propose changing 303 to a purely methodological course rather than trying to achieve all capstone experiences in this one class. This proposal would then add a 500-level practicum experience, effectively dividing the methodological training and practicum across two courses. Other elective requirements would be changed to accommodate this change without increasing the total credit hours of the major. If these proposed changes are made the assessment plan will be adjusted accordingly.

## **Learning Outcome 2.**

Sociology majors completing advanced substantive courses (500-level) will demonstrate they (1) understand the major sociological theories in a specific substantive area of specialization, (2) can critically evaluate competing theories in the field, and (3) can identify and critique major methodological approaches within the specialty area. Examples of substantive areas are Social Inequality, Social Psychology, Sociology of the Family, and Sociology of Medicine and Health.

## **Measures and Criteria**

Success in this goal is indicated by the level of performance in advance specialty area courses. At least 75% of students should demonstrate an understanding of the state of knowledge and theories in the substantive area of the discipline, be able to critically evaluate major theories in the field and have knowledge of the principle methods used to evaluate theoretical explanations in the specialty area.

## **Methods**

One elective 500-level substantive course will be chose at random. Evaluation methods in the course will be as described for SOCY 303 courses except that all metrics will emphasize more detailed and specialized understanding of theories within the specific area of specialization. Questions for qualitative or quantitative assessment of theoretical understanding for advanced substantive specialization will include an emphasis on critical comparason of competing theories in the field and the ability to apply the theories to social issues of broad interest and impact beyond the discipline.

## **Results**

SOCY 507 Sociology of Social Control was randomly chosen for this evaluation of Learning Outcome 2. All 21 students were included in the assessment. Five other students who did not complete the course are not included. A combination of three tests were used to assess performance in the course. In test 1 only 50% achieved a good (i.e., B) or better score on theoretical and substantive outcomes. In test 2 the score rose to 87%. Overall the class scored a 76% B or higher grade average.

## **Use of Results**

Student performance in the randomly collected course met our assessment plan criteria. Results will be shared with faculty and the undergraduate director. Last assessment year we observed that this criteria is more difficult to meet with a heavily methodological class chosen at random. In discussing results this year it has been observed that results seem to be significantly better in these highly specialized courses when the class size is smaller (e.g. 25 or less) than when they are expanded (e.g. 48-50) to accommodate demand.

## **Goal 2.**

Methods and Tools used in the Discipline: Sociology Majors will demonstrate proficiency in the use of basic statistical reasoning skills, and the ability to use and interpret elementary statistics.

## **Curriculum**

Successful completion of SOCY 220, Elementary Statistics for Sociologists, or a comparable elementary statistics

course approved by the Department.

### **Learning Outcome 1.**

Sociology majors will demonstrate an understanding and ability to use the following statistical tools: 1. The distinction between descriptive and inferential statistics; 2. Levels of measurement, ratios and rates; 3. Various measures of central tendency and statistical variability used to describe distributions; 4. Hypothesis testing, sampling and inference from sample estimates for a population; 5. Simple bivariate modeling techniques such as correlation and regression..

#### **Measures and Criteria**

Success in this goal is indicated by the level of performance of the class in the aggregate. At least 70% of students should demonstrate an understanding and ability to use each of the tools in Learning Outcome 1.

#### **Methods**

One randomly selected, required, 220 course will be selected to evaluate the five key learning outcome concepts identified. Questions selected for assessment will be similar to GRE Exam preparation questions regarding these five concepts. Instructors will be allowed to embed these questions within a graded exam or administer a supplemental non-graded exam in class or on-line. No more than one evaluation question will be altered each year to preserve the continuity of assessment over time. A one page anonymous summary of examination outcomes for the five items will be provided by the instructor to the Chair and the Undergraduate Program Director and will be shared with the faculty during curricular discussion.

#### **Results**

Using standardized examination items for all five concepts the percentages of the class achieving competency were: Descriptive Statistics 77%, Levels of Measurement 85%, Central Tendency and Variation 85%, Hypothesis Testing and Sampling 54%, Correlation and Regression 69%. Once again, performance is below expectations for two items (although within rounding error for one of those items). As noted in the past, this course selects for those students having difficulty who do not substitute a statistics course from outside the department. Overall, nonetheless, an average performance across items was above expectations.

#### **Use of Results**

As noted in the past assessment, faculty have already discussed the problems that may be indicated in these results and moved to correct those in both changing program requirements and the methodological sequence of courses in the department. These changes have not yet taken effect but should begin to be reflected in the next assessment year. Results will again be shared with faculty and the undergraduate director.

### **Learning Outcome 2.**

Students should demonstrate that they can apply elementary statistical tools and research methods to the analysis of basic sociological questions.

#### **Measures and Criteria**

Success in this goal is indicated by the level of performance of the class in the aggregate. At least 70% of students should demonstrate the ability to identify and use the correct statistical approach when given a simple sociological question and sufficient information about the nature of the data.

#### **Methods**

This goal will be assessed for the randomly selected 303 course using the selection of appropriate analytical methods for substantively framed analytical problems as an outcome measure.

#### **Results**

This assessment criteria is now somewhat redundant since methodological competence has been integrated into the assessment of the SOCY 303 "capstone" analytical experience under goal 1. As reported there, competency in this area was rated lowest among the three criteria at only 60%.

#### **Use of Results**

The results of this assessment will be shared with faculty and the undergraduate program director for discussion. As noted elsewhere, changes already made to strengthen the methodological core training in the department have not yet been reflected in these assessment results. Changes in coursework and program requirements have been approved but appear in the bulletin (i.e., take effect) in the coming year. Since these changes will take several years to fully implement, we will monitor the trend in changes with an eye toward those students under the new program requirements.

### **Goal 3.**

Integrative Career Preparation: Graduating seniors should have completed a broad integrated course of study within the department which evidences confidence in their preparation to apply learned skills in career pursuits or continued academic study.

#### **Curriculum**

Graduating sociology majors in their final semesters of advanced 500-level substantive coursework.

##### **Learning Outcome 1.**

Graduating sociology majors should evidence an integrated preparation for career pursuits and self assess their career preparation as adequate for career plans at the point of graduation.

##### **Measures and Criteria**

Success in this goal is indicated by the faculty assessment of the Chair or Undergraduate Program Director and self-assessment of graduating sociology majors that they are adequately prepared for career pursuits by their cumulative curricular experiences in the discipline. At least 70 percent of graduating students should be judged as adequately prepared for career pursuits by both the faculty and their own self-assessment.

##### **Methods**

Early in the spring semester, the Chair or Undergraduate Program Director will either hold a focus group with 10-12 randomly selected graduating sociology majors or conduct an on-line survey of graduating seniors. The assessment will use a semi-structured format to discuss (a) career plans, (b) skills acquired that best prepare them for career plans, (c) skills they may be lacking in, (c) courses most and least helpful in quantitative methods and substantive areas, (d) an overall judgement of career preparation, and (e) suggestions for specific curricular improvement. At the conclusion of the focus group discussion the faculty coordinator and students themselves will rate their career preparation as (1) poor, (2) adequate to good, and (3) excellent. Results will be directly acted upon by the chair when necessary, shared with individual faculty as appropriate, and shared with the undergraduate program committee and/or general faculty (as appropriate) during curricular discussions.

##### **Results**

This group has generally been smaller than originally planned. This year eight students attended and questions were asked of the AKD honor society inductees as well as seniors. All students felt the program had achieved its goals and were more inclined to offer praise for specific courses and instructors which benefited their training than to criticize others. Pleasing to the faculty, those courses receiving high marks were generally more rigorous courses with demanding instructors. Students also praised courses with more intensive field specific content related to their planned careers. Because seniors and AKD members were self-selected to higher achieving students it is no surprise they all felt, and were all judged, to be adequately prepared.

##### **Use of Results**

As noted last year, self-selection in this component of assessment is problematic. However, we have continued to interview graduating students because the feedback has been nonetheless helpful. These results have already been shared with faculty and the undergraduate program director. Hearing the emphasis students placed on field-specific substantive courses reinforces our recent program revisions to make just such changes in undergraduate course offerings. And, hearing students praise more demanding courses encourages the faculty to raise the level of courses where possible. We have attempted various more quantitative metrics for this outcome but simply letting the students evaluate their own experience has proved useful and will continue as part of the assessment plan despite its more open-ended format.

It is unlikely we could achieve our full objective of assessing their preparedness for career engagement without a significant university effort to track graduating students for the first several years post-graduation.

## **II. FUTURE ASSESSMENT PLAN FOR 2017 - 2018**

### **Mission Statement**

The mission of the Department of Sociology for its undergraduate majors includes the following objectives: to

enable them to understand, demonstrate, and apply sociological knowledge, approaches, principles, and statistical reasoning skills to the study of humans and groups and to develop depth and breadth in sociological knowledge and theories. The sociology program has a number of nationally recognized specialties to offer undergraduates and to serve the needs of a diverse population. Our program is tailored to emphasize training in Social Stratification and Inequality; Population and Health; and Social Psychology. The mission for the Department of Sociology for its undergraduate majors remains the same for the BA and the BS degrees as the major requirements are the same for both degrees, with only general education requirements varying. The BS degree contains a greater concentration on math and science, central skills necessary to become a professional sociologist. It is important to monitor the students and to continuously check on their performance. Although sociology is a very broad field we employ some metrics that are usable by faculty who represent various facets of the field.

### **Goal 1.**

Content of the Discipline: Sociology majors should have basic knowledge of the components of sociological theories and substantive areas of the discipline upon completion of the degree.

### **Curriculum**

Successful completion of required 300 level Sociology courses and substantive specialty courses numbered 300 or above.

#### **Learning Outcome 1.**

Sociology majors completing the required SOCY 303 capstone course will demonstrate they understand the general sociological perspective and the uses of sociological theory, can apply critical reasoning skills to evaluating theoretical explanations, and can identify uses and limitations of major sociological research methods in evaluating theories. Majors will evidence these ability to apply these skills to the study of social issues of broad impact and interest beyond the discipline.

#### **Measures and Criteria**

Success in this goal is indicated by the level of student performance in SOCY 303 courses required of all future sociology majors. At least 70% of students should demonstrate abilities in all three areas: theoretical understanding, critical reasoning and methodological assessment.

As we move to new required theory and integrative methods courses, rubrics will be refined and the emphases of each course will be stressed in metrics for assessments focused in those specific courses.

#### **Methods**

One required 303 course will be chosen at random (preferably in the Fall Semester). A qualitative evaluation a random sampling of 10-20 course research project papers will be separately graded by the instructor classifying papers as (a) demonstrating adequate understanding of core sociological theories and perspectives, (b) applying critical reasoning to theoretical explanations and (c) evaluating of methodologies underlying the evaluation of theories, using categories of (1=poor, 2=adequate, 3=good, 4=excellent). Success will be indicated by over 70 percent of papers scoring good or better. Instructors of the selected course will prepare a summary of assessment findings for the Chair and Undergraduate Program Director, who will evaluate results and share with the faculty during curriculum discussions.

Course papers in 303 are guided, but independently conducted full research projects or proposals with a full literature review, theoretical proposition or problem formulation, an explication of appropriate research methodology, data collection and analysis, including either final or pilot research results. The course is intended to serve as a 'capstone' integration of theoretical, methodological and substantive training from prior coursework in the major. (note: based on prior assessment the objectives of this course are being split into two components in the future. However, for the coming assessment year those changes will not yet have been implemented).

The undergraduate director and undergraduate committee will recommend refined rubrics over time which should be possible through the standardized use of these required 303 courses rather than a randomly sampled 300-level course as in the past.

#### **Learning Outcome 2.**

Sociology majors completing advanced substantive courses (500-level) will demonstrate they (1) understand the major sociological theories in a specific substantive area of specialization, (2) can critically evaluate competing theories in the field, and (3) can identify and critique major methodological approaches within the specialty area. Examples of substantive areas are Social Inequality, Social Psychology, Sociology of the Family, and Sociology of Medicine and Health.

### **Measures and Criteria**

Success in this goal is indicated by the level of performance in advance specialty area courses. At least 75% of students should demonstrate, on tests and assignments, an understanding of the state of knowledge and theories in the substantive area of the discipline, be able to critically evaluate major theories in the field and have knowledge of the principle methods used to evaluate theoretical explanations in the specialty area.

### **Methods**

One elective 500-level substantive course will be chose at random. Evaluation methods in the course will be as described for SOCY 303 courses except that all metrics will emphasize more detailed and specialized understanding of theories within the specific area of specialization. Questions for qualitative or quantitative assessment of theoretical understanding for advanced substantive specialization will include an emphasis on critical comparason of competing theories in the field and the ability to apply the theories to social issues of broad interest and impact beyond the discipline.

## **Goal 2.**

Methods and Tools used in the Discipline: Sociology Majors will demonstrate proficiency in the use of basic statistical reasoning skills, and the ability to use and interpret elementary statistics.

### **Curriculum**

Successful completion of SOCY 220, Elementary Statistics for Sociologists, or a comparable elementary statistics course approved by the Department.

### **Learning Outcome 1.**

Sociology majors will demonstrate an understanding and ability to use the following statistical tools: 1. The distinction between descriptive and inferential statistics; 2. Levels of measurement, ratios and rates; 3. Various measures of central tendency and statistical variability used to describe distributions; 4. Hypothesis testing, sampling and inference from sample estimates for a population; 5. Simple bivariate modeling techniques such as correlation and regression..

### **Measures and Criteria**

Success in this goal is indicated by the level of performance of the class in the aggregate. At least 70% of students should demonstrate an understanding and ability to use each of the tools in Learning Outcome 1. These more defined measures are also to be interpreted in context of evaluation of methodological skills under Goal 1 Learning Outcome 1 - the evaluation of the ability to use this knowledge in an active research context.

### **Methods**

One randomly selected, required, 220 course will be selected to evaluate the five key learning outcome concepts identified. Questions selected for assessment will be similar to GRE Exam preparation questions regarding these five concepts. Instructors will be allowed to embed these questions within a graded exam or administer a supplemental non-graded exam in class or on-line. No more than one evaluation question will be altered each year to preserve the continuity of assessment over time. A one page anonymous summary of examination outcomes for the five items will be provided by the instructor to the Chair and the Undergraduate Program Director and will be shared with the faculty during curricular discussion.