

**Student Outcomes Assessment Plan
Sociology Undergraduate Program
Spring 2008**

I. Departmental Philosophy of Student Outcomes Assessment

We have designed a student outcomes assessment (SOA) plan for the sociology undergraduate program to help us identify the strengths and limitations of our curriculum, pedagogies, and overall program. In our view, the current curriculum for the sociology major offers students a detailed and comprehensive introduction to core sociological concepts, theories, and methods. The standard grading system also provides a useful assessment of students' abilities to think sociologically and to master the content of the individual courses that comprise the major. However, we recognize that it is difficult to evaluate some skills and understandings only in terms of students' successful completion of specific courses. These include skills and understandings that enable students to think critically and comparatively, to engage in informed citizenship, to succeed in employment, and to live responsibly, regardless of whether they plan to pursue careers in sociology. We also recognize that the evaluation of student performance in specific courses does not allow us to gain a broader view of the understandings and competencies they develop as they progress through the major, particularly as they near graduation. In turn, we have designed and implemented a set of measures that allow us to assess students' attainment of general understandings and competencies which we define as essential for the sociology major.

Our SOA plan involves an annual procedure that relies on a two-pronged approach to gathering information from upper-division sociology majors. Each year the sociology faculty will organize this assessment and gather pertinent data from students. On a biennial basis the faculty will prepare a report summarizing this data, delineating key findings, and discussing their implications for the sociology program and curriculum.

During fall 2007, the sociology faculty met to discuss and refine the essential goals and competencies students should attain when graduating with a baccalaureate degree in sociology. Through the course of the semester, the faculty clarified and elaborated these outcomes and competencies, drawing on collegial discussions and an assessment guide developed by the American Sociological Association (see II. Outcomes and Competencies). The faculty also designed assignments and exam questions that will provide direct measures of students' achievement of core competencies as well as self-report survey that offers both direct and indirect measures. The specific measures that will be utilized for assessment are described in the third section of this report (see III. Method of Assessment).

II. Outcomes and Competencies

As noted above, we have modified our outcomes and competencies since the 2006 report based on data gathered during the past two academic years and through ongoing discussions about our major and curricular goals. Our current outcomes and competencies are:

Outcome 1: Develop a sociological perspective.

Competency 1.1 Understand sociological concepts and principles and apply them to explain specific examples of behavior and interaction.

Competency 1.2 Use a sociological lens to make sense of the world, one's identities, and one's actions.

Outcome 2: Understand the role of theory in sociology.

- Competency 2.1 Define theory and describe its importance in building sociological knowledge.
- Competency 2.2 Identify major sociological theories and compare and contrast their key concepts and assumptions.
- Competency 2.3 Apply sociological theories to explain social phenomena.

Outcome 3: Understand the nature and purpose of sociological methods.

- Competency 3.1 Identify basic methods used in building sociological knowledge.
- Competency 3.2 Design and evaluate a sociological research project.
- Competency 3.3 Describe and apply the principles of ethical practice as a sociologist.

Outcome 4: Engage in critical analysis.

- Competency 4.1 Analyze quantitative and qualitative data to test hypotheses or address research questions.
- Competency 4.2 Identify and evaluate an argument based on its thesis, assumptions and supporting evidence.
- Competency 4.3 Make a sociological argument supported by evidence.

Outcome 5: Increase student awareness and participation in sociology on campus.

- Competency 5.1 Connect students to the sociology club.
- Competency 5.2 Increase awareness about potential careers in sociology.
- Competency 5.3 Increase student exposure to faculty presentations and panels.
- Competency 5.4 Increase student involvement in advising and mentorship.

III. Method of Assessment

As noted earlier, we developed both direct and indirect measures to assess student attainment of the learning outcomes and competencies delineated in the previous section. The direct measures we will use to assess student outcomes include data gathered through a newly designed student survey and embedded class assignments and exam questions. The survey was constructed by the sociology faculty and is administered to students enrolled in Development of Social Theories (980:170g). We selected this course for the assessment because it is a required class for all

sociology majors and students take it toward the end of their undergraduate careers. Responses that students provided to the survey items will be scored and entered into a SPSS data file and then quantitatively analyzed by the sociology faculty.

The embedded measures include a paper assignment and midterm exam questions from several required and elective courses. When reviewing student papers and exam answers, graders use a 4-point rating scale of “inadequate” (lacks sufficient knowledge), “adequate” (sufficient but somewhat superficial), “good” (understands basic concepts), and “outstanding” (advanced performance). Each paper and exam will be evaluated by at least two graders.

Our indirect measures will include data gathered through a student survey that will be administered to students in the required social theories course. In addition, after the students complete their surveys, they will participate in a focus group interview facilitated by two members of the sociology faculty. The focus group interview will give students an opportunity to elaborate further upon their perceptions of and experiences in the sociology program. It will also enable faculty members to assess students’ perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the program.

IV. Method of evaluating and interpreting results

The information provided by the aforementioned assessment methods will be shared with the entire faculty. The information is discussed and any weaknesses in student competencies or satisfaction set in motion actions to improve future student outcomes. If weaknesses can be traced to particular courses, faculty teaching those courses are asked to examine their course content and recommend changes for improvement. If the weaknesses appear to be program wide or structural, all faculty are asked to devise ways to improve on those weaknesses. While faculty are responsible for suggesting changes, it is the responsibility of the department head to see the changes are fully implemented and incorporated into specific courses or the entire program, where necessary. After discussion with the faculty as a whole, the department will make necessary modifications where appropriate to course curriculum. A report will then be made to the relevant university officials (e.g. the University Student Outcomes Assessment Committee and the CBA Dean and Provost every subsequent mandated reporting period).