

Department of Sociology
2015-2016 Yearly Assessment Report
College of Arts and Sciences (CAS)

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Mission Statement:

In the Department of Sociology, students learn to apply sociological frameworks to their everyday lives and to "real world" social problems. They will critically examine social patterns and inequalities and will develop sociological perspectives to become engaged participants in this globalized world. Our program equips students with the tools to challenge interlocking systems of oppression and privilege and build just societies as advocates, policymakers, activists, and scholars.

Has this statement been revised in the last few years?

Yes. March 2016

Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs)

1. Sociology majors should be able to analyze critically social practices, structures, and inequalities, such that the student will be able to:
 - a. Define, give examples of, and use meaningfully at least six of the following: culture; status; role; norms; deviance; social structure; social class; social mobility; social change; socialization; stratification; institutions; race; social class; ethnic group; gender.
 - b. Identify both macrosociological and microsociological aspects of social life, and discuss examples of these from at least one substantive area of sociology; and describe at least two "intersections" of structural inequalities.
 - c. Describe inequalities at the regional, international, and/or global levels of analysis.

2. Sociology majors should be able to discuss, differentiate, and apply major sociological theories, frameworks and traditions, such that the student will be able to:
 - a. Describe, compare, and contrast basic theoretical orientations, such as functionalism, conflict theories, and interactionism.
 - b. Describe and apply some basic theories or theoretical orientations in at least one area of social reality.

3. Sociology majors should be able to formulate, conduct, and communicate independent social research, such that the student will be able to:
 - a. *Describe, compare, and contrast basic methodological approaches for gathering sociological data, including both quantitative and qualitative methods.*

- b. Design, implement, and convey data findings in writing for a research study in an area of choice and explain why various decisions were made, including sampling, variables, measures, methods of data collection, and data analysis.
 - c. Use computerized and online databases to find published sociological research and critically assess a published research report in an area of choice.
4. Sociology majors should be able to connect sociological analysis to practical social action, such that the student will be able to:
 - a. Explain the implications for practical action of sociological theory and research in an area of choice.
 - b. Develop a sociologically informed action plan in an area of choice.
 - c. Conduct at least twenty-five hours of service or activist work in an area of choice, and explain what they have experienced from a sociological framework.

Have these PLOs been revised in the last few years?

Yes, March 2016.

Brief Summary of Most Recent Assessment Plan

For Spring 2016, the department of Sociology focused on Learning Outcomes 3a & 3b. We chose these two outcomes based upon the findings from our AY 2014-2015 Assessment Report. We found a significant discrepancy between student achievement of learning outcomes 3a and 3b for Methods as compared to Capstone and Honors.

Academic Program Review

Date of most recent Academic Program Review External Reviewer Visit: April 17-19 2013

Date of most recent Action Plan Meeting: 9/20/2014 with faculty & 10/3/2014 with Deans and AVP McGuire

Brief Summary of the most recent Action Plan:

The Sociology Department was given an overall rating of VERY GOOD to EXCELLENT. The reviewers did provide several suggestions to help the department fully move into the “excellent” category. These recommendations fell into four main areas: curriculum, advising, over-extended faculty commitments, and governance & faculty structure. With regards to curriculum, since that seems most relevant here our action plan was:

RESEARCH METHODS

Re “Statistics For Social Sciences” being available for SOC students: We agreed with the reviewers on this item.

- ACTION: SOC will ask Dean’s Office to open current “Statistics For Social Sciences” to all Social Science majors, or to initiate a separate section of “Statistics For Social Sciences” for SOC students to make sure content for our students offers technical info *grounded in social sciences*. **We discussed this in our meeting with the Deans. At this time, no change has been made to allow Sociology students to take the Statistics for Social Sciences course. It is still limited to BAIS students.**

Re “Logic of Inquiry” + “Doing Research” sequence, to take place of Writing + Methods sequence:

- We disagreed with the reviewers on this item. The change is prohibited by staffing constraints, and their recommended “Logic of Inquiry” outcomes are now being met in “Intro,” “Methods,” and current “Writing” courses, and their recommended outcomes for “Doing Research” are already built into “Methods,” “Capstone” and “Thesis”.
- ACTION: **None.**

The reviewers raised concerns about “Writing for Sociology” staffing and instruction, and we agree that this course needs more oversight from SOC.

- ACTION: SOC department or Teaching Committee will meet with and review syllabi of all new “Writing for Sociology” instructors. **As we have had returning instructors in this area, this has not been an issue. Sociology will continue to partner with Rhet and Comp and provide more oversight on Writing in Soc. Course.**

The reviewers recommended that Methods not be taught by rotating faculty: We agree, and in fact since Prof. Noriko Milman has been here we have stopped that rotation.

- ACTION: **Change already implemented.** We are currently relying on Prof Noriko Milman to comply with this recommendation, and would need to re-visit compliance without her support.

INEQUALITIES REQUIREMENT

The reviewers recommended that we eliminate the choice between US and Global Inequalities as a core requirement for majors, and limit the requirement to Global (with US becoming an elective). We agreed with this recommendation.

- ACTION: Change requirement to make Global Inequalities SOC’s only Inequalities requirement, submitting change to Curriculum Committee. No change will be made to prerequisite (Intro to Soc). **Completed**
- ACTION: Create new 4-faculty rotation since course will need to be offered each semester (and potentially multiple sections). To accommodate need to offer course regularly, we anticipate possible need for new faculty line. **In process, just hired new faculty to assist with rotation.**
- ACTION: Limit non-SOC enrollment to 5 seats. **Holding off until to ensure that enrollment minimums are met.**
- ACTION: Convert US Inequalities to Elective and submit to Curriculum Committee for USF Core E and CD status. **Completed**

EMPHASES

Re: recommendation that we eliminate Emphases in the major: We don’t agree with the reviewers’ assessment of the value of the Emphases, although we do agree that they need to be tightened and clarified.

- ACTION: SOC committee (Nikki, Cecilia, Kim) will streamline and revise the Emphases and submit them in new form to the Curriculum Committee. **Completed**

HONORS

Reviewers recommended that we require all students to take the Capstone course and treat Honors as a stand-alone program. The Honors Thesis this year is turning out to be robust, so we are not inclined to make changes at this time.

- ACTION: Since at faculty urging, several students are currently undertaking 2-semester theses (Directed Studies in the fall, Honors Workshop in the spring), we will take steps to develop guidelines for future students interested doing so. **Completed**
- ACTION: We will discuss the possibility of turning the Honors designation into a standing separate from the thesis (with thesis writing as one criterion for the designation but not the only one). **In process of creating an Honors Concentration for Sociology students.**

Reviewers recommended that the College authorize the Honors Thesis Workshop to run with considerably fewer than 12 students. We agree with this recommendation, as the number of students interested in writing theses fluctuates from year to year.

- ACTION: SOC will request that the Deans Office authorize courses of 7 or above for the Honors seminar. **Completed**

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS COURSE

This need is being addressed by Prof. Raeburn's Youth Activism course, and other faculty may be developing social movement courses in the future.

- ACTION: **No immediate action required.**

MCAT PREPARATION

We haven't seen any impact from this change that would necessitate a change in our curriculum. These students can take Intro to Sociology.

- ACTION: **Met with Scott Ziehm and Kimberly Lottes from School of Nursing to discuss options for nursing students. SON faculty is not interested in creating a separate Intro to Soc class for their students because they want them to have a full liberal arts experience and exposure to students from other disciplines. They will however, at our urging, explore the possibility of shifting the Intro to Soc requirement from senior year to sophomore year, as well as explore the option of opening up the nursing requirement to include other Sociology courses that fulfill CORE E requirements.**

HIRING IN QUANTITATIVE METHODS

- We welcome this recommendation if given a faculty line to do so.

Methods

What did you do with regard to assessment of your program/department in 2015-2016?

We assessed program learning outcome 3a & 3b. Given the findings of last year's assessment, we were particularly interested in learning more about outcomes 3a and 3b.

What were your questions?

Addressing PLO #3a. Can Soc students describe, compare, and contrast basic methodological approaches for gathering sociological data, including both quantitative and qualitative methods?

Addressing PLO #3b. Can Soc students design, implement, and convey data findings in writing for a research study in an area of choice and explain why various decisions were made, including sampling, variables, measures, methods of data collection, and data analysis?

How are these questions related to your most recent Academic Program Review and/or Action Plan?

As our program reviewers did not provide feedback on our program learning outcomes, I'm not sure that our assessment plan directly addresses issues raised in our program review.

What PLOs are these questions related to?

#3a and 3b

What direct (most important) and/or indirect methods did you employ?

- a. Class Tests: Students completed an in-class midterm and final exam. The exams consisted of multiple choice, true/false, and short-answer questions based on material discussed in class and on weekly homework assignments. Related to PLO 3a, students differentiated between quantitative and qualitative methods, demonstrated understanding of differences in the ways and types of data collected for each method, and delineated some strengths and weaknesses of each research method.
- b. Class Presentations: Students shared the findings featured in their research papers, as well as received and gave classmates input. This assessment was used in conjunction with PLO 3b.
- c. Research Projects Reports: Students wrote a research paper based on their analysis of empirical data. They had a choice of writing a: a) quantitative paper based on a secondary analysis of data found in the General Social Survey (GSS) or b) qualitative paper based on original ethnographic fieldnotes and interview data. The research paper, particularly the Dataset (quantitative paper) or Setting & Methods (qualitative paper) section, was the basis for assessment of PLO 3b.

Some Possible Indirect Methods (*briefly describe*):

Students completed both mid-semester and end-of-semester course evaluations, and briefly reflected on something new they learned about sociological research methods and how they might use this new knowledge outside of our classrooms setting. These indirect methods were used to gauge student progress on PLOs, but not as a form of assessment.

Results

What were the direct data results?

Using the above methods, results indicate that:

All 18 students were proficient in describing, comparing, and contrasting basic methodological approaches for gathering sociological data, including both quantitative and qualitative methods. Specifically, 1 student demonstrated average achievement, 11 demonstrated good achievement, and 6 demonstrated very good achievement of PLO 3a.

All 18 students were also proficient at designing, implementing, and conveying data findings in writing for a research study in an area of choice and explaining why various decisions were made, including sampling, variables, measures, methods of data collection, and data analysis. Out of 18 total students, 6 demonstrated good achievement and 12 demonstrated very good achievement of PLO 3b.

What were the indirect results?

NA

What surprised you?

We were somewhat surprised that all students demonstrated proficiency for PLO 3a. Some students' questions/concerns at the end of the semester regarding quantitative research papers often required review of previous material, especially because we focused on qualitative methods for the entire second-half of the course.

What aligned with your expectations?

We expected strong student results for PLO 3b. They collected and analyzed data as part of their weekly homework assignments. The work for their research papers was deliberately scaffolded throughout the entire semester, so students made progress and received feedback well before the final draft was due.

What do you understand these results to mean?

Students have met/exceeded department standards for PLOs 3a and 3b. These results are in large part a product of the assessment methods employed.

What are the implications of the data?

Students are prepared for their Senior Thesis or Capstone class. Consider modifying the assessment methods/tools. For example, reflecting on what surprised us, it might be useful to formally re-assess students' knowledge of quantitative methods at the end of the semester in order to gauge what they've retained.

1. Closing the Loop

What might you do as a result of these assessment results? What curricular or programmatic changes might you implement?

Possible Closing(s) of the Loop(s) (pick ≥ 1 and *briefly describe*):

- a. Design measurement tools more aptly suited for the task: The Assessment Committee is currently designing a standardized assessment tool that will be used across Research Methods classes. It will specifically address PLO 3a and consist of multiple choice questions in which students apply the knowledge they've gained. Instructors would administer the assessment at the beginning and end of the course in order to track student progress.
- b. Other: The Assessment Committee recognizes that PLOs 3a and 3b should not be limited to the Research Methods course. We'd like to recommend a wider, pedagogical change in which all faculty more thoroughly highlight sociological research method(s) in our substantive classes. For example, this could mean identifying and discussing the research methods used by USF sociology faculty and the scholars we assign. Another possibility: Have students conduct original research by collecting/analyzing their own data in the substantive course (several instructors already do this). Our goal is to better ensure learning continuity throughout the sociology program.

Have you or will you submit any course or program change proposals as a result of these results?

We will not submit any course or program changes as a result of these results.